

Federal Minister Franz-Josef Wuermeling on the Indispensability of Mothers (Excerpt from a Speech on Mother's Day, 1959)

Abstract

The Christian-Democratic Federal Minister of Family Affairs, Franz-Josef Wuermeling, advocated a conservative-romantic conception of women and families, which saw “misfortune” in the dual burden of family and job and viewed the “mother’s vocation” as a woman’s primary task. In his mind, given the negative influences of modern media on the upbringing of the next generation, that task was even more important than ever.

Source

The dual burden on our housewives and mothers in the family and on the job is not a “progressive solution,” but a misfortune forced upon us. That becomes clear if we consider how religious and social education occurs in the home under the mother’s helping hand, which is also so fundamentally important for our context. After all, it is the mothers who are the first to establish in us humans the faith in God and the knowledge that [having] a solid religious element in all our struggling and striving is the real purpose and goal of our life. For the sake of the mother, the infant already learns to be good and to become independent, to control itself, and to acquire skills. The deep experience of tenderness, encouragement, and care, as only the mother is able to give, teaches us from a young age to feel affection and love and return it.

But the loving devotion of the mother, in its constancy and depth, is and remains decisive also for the development of the older child and youth. A mother’s love and care carries the young person over the pitfalls of the educational path and the crises of puberty, provides him with a good example, conveys exemplars and guiding values, awakens and strengthens the powers of temperament and conscience, accompanies him with understanding and forgiving sympathy on the path through life, on the quest for his own place to stand, for uplifting interests, ideas, and ideals.

The mother’s vocation is therefore – also with a view toward a shared European future – a primary task and more important than any gainful employment. The mother’s vocation is a calling of immeasurable scope, reverberating in the present and the future. As soon as the mother is missing or can no longer fulfill her place in the family and in the upbringing of the children, dangerous repercussions for the spirit and disposition of the next generation become unavoidable. This is truly no exaggeration, when we see that the hidden and kindly allies who once supported the upbringing within the family from the outside are hardly still as effective today: grandparents, neighbors, tradition, good customs, and a public opinion that is friendly to families and young people. Instead, a host of powers hostile to our families have arisen, and they compete in a fateful way with the family’s education and clearly work against it: the so-called “secret educators and insinulators,” such as film, radio, television, magazines, and advertising. To be sure, these technocratic powers can also offer the young generation an abundance of useful and beneficial stimuli and exceedingly valuable, expanded educational opportunities. However, with us and everywhere in Europe, one can see that these positive opportunities are utilized far less, whereas the bad possibilities are exploited to the uppermost limit of danger. More of what is good and valuable and less of what is worthless and bad would truly be preferable for all of us!

And so the mother at home, especially since the father is largely not at home, is so much more important than before. A mother at home often takes the place of all television sets, cars, radio-phonographs, and trips abroad, which are all too often paid for by having her time stolen from the children.

Europe, too, cannot live only from the car, the television screen, and technical progress – which may well be used with good sense and reason; Europe will live from what the maternal heart has deposited in terms of love, care, devotion, and sacrifice into the souls of our growing Europeans. A Europe merely of motors and machines has no internal foundation, but a Europe of strong mothers ready to sacrifice will endure, because ethical values rank higher and endure longer than all technology, which must be in the service of moral values.

Source: F.J. Wuermeling, *Familie – Gabe und Aufgabe*. Cologne: Luthe Verlag, 1963, pp. 73 f; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann, ed., *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation. Deutsche Geschichte 1955–1970*. Göttingen, 1988, pp. 492–93.

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