

Family, Child-Rearing, and the Role of Women (December 3, 1961)

Abstract

Using forceful language, Franz-Josef Wuermeling (CDU), Federal Minister of Family and Youth Affairs, describes what he perceives as the threat to the family posed by the growing number of working mothers and the declining birthrate. He argues for the traditional ideal of women as housewives and mothers.

Source

Today's Family and its Child-Rearing Powers

When we look at the situation of our families and our youth in today's world, a typical "trend of the times" becomes apparent, one that we must perceive as a challenge to our Christian worldview and educational goals: today's man is no longer readily willing and able to recognize and reverently acknowledge the whole of the world as a divine creation and order. He has become aware of his powers of reason to an extent never experienced before, and he places them above all else. He already shoots the arrows of his curiosity not only into the earthly realm to explore "what holds our world together at its core"; these days he also ventures much farther into the expanses of the universe, into outer space.

[...]

Nothing Can Replace the Family

May we, must we, in this strange and perilous situation, put our hopes in the family? I say yes! Because the family is the first and most original institution that can establish faith in God and knowledge of the true meaning and aim of our lives as a firm, religious element of all our struggles and aspirations. It is precisely in the community of the family that all those qualities that each individual needs to live together with others, even in larger communities, can be best and most effectively developed: self-responsibility and devotion to our fellow man, adaptability and consideration. As a holistic living community, the family can best create a hierarchy of values between the individual and society, and link personal freedom with social initiative, responsibility, and a sense of security.

[...]

In modern industrial society, the family—which previously was not only a community of life but also of production and economically largely self-sufficient—has largely developed into a consumer collective. Especially during children's formative years, the family usually has to rely on a single income—that of the [male] breadwinner—which derives from employment. More than three-quarters of all employed people—most of whom still have no notable property today—work for outside companies, spatially separated from the family, in a dependent position.

They work there for what is in principle a performance-related wage, which is the same for everyone with the same performance, regardless of how many family members have to live on it.

From these wages a father usually has to pay for every loaf of bread and every gram of butter in cash the same number of times as there are members of his family. Thus, his income is practically divided by the number of people in his family. This is why, today, families with children are economically the weakest.

Complicating the situation is the increasing length of vocational training, which, moreover, increasingly involves a separation from the family household, thus further limiting the possibilities for adolescent children to contribute financially to supporting the family. Extending compulsory schooling to ninth and perhaps even tenth grade and expanding the continuing education track will increase this economic burden even more.

This and a number of other factors have generally caused the economic burden on families with children to increase considerably, for reasons beyond the control of individual families. Consequently, having children has led to social declassification, a relegation to totally different social strata. This development has now led to consequences that are of great significance for the matter at hand. It has forced families into taking two emergency exits, which, while tending to alleviate the effects of the economic pressure and social declassification, serve to weaken the family's child-rearing powers at a decisive point. The family has responded to the economic constraints, first, by having the housewife and mother take up gainful employment, and second, by limiting the number of children.

Gainful Employment of the Mother is Not a Solution

It is not a "solution" to have our housewives and mothers work outside the home; it is a forced evil. We must always keep in mind how the spiritual, personality-forming, so-called "second birth" of the child, especially in the first years of its life, decisively takes place under the helping hand of the mother in the parental home. The profound experience of tenderness, encouragement, and care—as only mothers can give—teaches the toddler how to feel affection and love and to return it. The child needs the loving and loved person of the mother, someone to turn to as it grows into a world in which everything is initially new and unfamiliar. For the sake of the mother, the child learns self-control, learns to acquire skills, to be good, and to become independent.

The loving devotion of the mother, in its constancy and depth, is and remains just as important for development in older children and adolescents. A mother's love and care help a young person make it over the challenges of education and through the crises of puberty; it sets a good example, offers guiding principles and value standards. Her love accompanies her child with understanding and forgiving sympathy along the path of life, in the child's search for a place in life and for fundamental interests, ideas, ideals. It awakens and reinforces the powers of the mind and the conscience and provides the first basis for faith in God and for knowledge of the true meaning of life as a basic foundation of support for all further development.

For these reasons, motherhood is a woman's main occupation and far more important than any gainful employment. The maternal occupation is a calling of immense significance, with a continuing effect on the present and future of our people.

[...]

Source: Franz-Josef Wuermeling, "Die Familie von heute und ihre Erziehungskraft," in *Bulletin* (Press and Information Office of the Federal Government), no. 238, December 21, 1961, pp. 2241–43, and no. 239, December 22, 1961, pp. 2249–51.

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