

## 5 THE NORMATIVE STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLE OF THE FAMILY

What, then, is the normative structural principle of the family? What makes a family different from any other creation ordinance?

The family, in the immediate sense of parents and their children, is distinguished from all other social relationships by its own definite individuality structure. It is biologically founded in the sexual union of man and wife and the natural begetting or procreation of offspring. The natural derivation and consanguinity of children with their parents is the necessary structural foundation upon which the nuclear family is built. This "structure of existence" cannot be denied by any theory. The typical communal tie between parents and children is genetic; it is based upon a blood relationship of the most immediate kind. In *The Divine Imperative* Emil Brunner describes this structure of existence as follows:

Every human being is irrevocably the child of one man and of one woman, every father, with this woman, and every mother, with this man is, irrevocably, the father and mother of this child. By this I do not mean the mere biological fact that every living creature has arisen out of an ovum fertilized by semen, but I mean something which does not take place outside of the human sphere, namely, that a subject, an "existent" (*Dasein*) ... is united with two other subjects in this unparalleled and unique manner, and not only that this is so, but that this "subject" *knows* it. The unique element in this human relation is this: that my existence, not my physical existence, my existence as an object, but my human existence-is thus bound up with two other existences. I, as a child, owe my life to these two persons. And I, as father or as mother, with this woman or with this man, have taken part in the divine miracle of creation. Not a body but a real person (subject), a human being, now stands there along side of me as that which has come into being as the result of being united with this woman. Were this being simply an object, once the thing was done we could dissolve partnership and each go our separate way. But since this being is a subject, just as I am a subject, that is, since this process is beyond all mere causality and objectivity, since I, the father, as well as the mother and child, know irrevocably that this fact is

irrevocable, then we three persons are bound together in a way in which no other three persons have ever been bound together, in an unparalleled and indissoluble relation... This does not mean that we could not drift away from each other, but it does mean that should we-separate we would still remain bound to one another because of our knowledge of this indestructible fact which lies as the basis of our existence. This trinity of being we call the structure of existence. It is clear that this is not merely a biological fact, for - if, for instance, we think of it from the child's point of view, if the parents separate, the child feels the bottom has fallen out of his existence.<sup>40</sup>