

## 9 THE QUALIFYING FUNCTION OF THE FAMILY

In Lutheranism, the family forms the starting point of all social development, since, in Luther's view, it represents the earliest form of social life, having been established in Paradise, and was confirmed and re-ordered after the Fall, from which, either directly or indirectly, all other forms of social life are thought to proceed. For Luther the family is also the starting point of all economic conditions of management and service. The family is also the germ and precursor of the Church, since the religious fellowship within the home forms the real bond of unity within the family, and church-life is first established by the house-father through family prayers and instruction in the catechism. Finally, the family is the archetype of all social organizations, since it presents the original picture of those relations of authority and reverence which arise out of the natural organization. Thus Lutheran social philosophy is permeated through and through with the spirit and ethos of the family, understood in a monogamous patriarchal sense.<sup>63</sup>

If the Lutheran idea of the family as the "basic cell of society" is thought of as an explanation of the structure of the family, and if it is meant to convey the idea that the family is the germ from which the whole of society springs forth, then the Reformational philosophy of the family must question the correctness of such a term. If it means that all other social relationships develop out of the family, which is thought of as the primeval relationship out of which all the other social spheres have grown, then such a view of the family in effect absolutizes it. And we must reject it because it denies the peculiar nature of the other relationships and deprives their structures of the normative principles which are anchored in the Creator's world order. Normative structural principles are not the product of historical cultural differentiation, even if they do have to be positivised within history. A norm cannot be rendered a subject by the historical process.

It is, however, consistent for us to maintain that the foundational function of the family lies in the biological law-sphere. The family is built upon consanguinity as the inner relationship between parents and children is grounded upon a blood relationship.

While the individuality of the family is founded in the biological law-sphere, its normative structure cannot be explained in such purely biological terms. Such an explanation is common amongst modern naturalistic humanists who try to deduce all the normative law-spheres from their natural substratum. But such reductionism in the sociology of the family no less than in

the sociology of marriage opposes the great scriptural conception of the sovereignty of the law-spheres.

Neither should we seek to define the family in terms of historical development. In this regard Dooyeweerd points out:

We admit that the separation of the innerstructure of a family from the organized communities with an undifferentiated inner destination, presupposes the differentiating process, in the development of civilization. This differentiating process, however, concerns only the *positive forms of actual transitory societal relationships*. Their inner structural principles cannot be a product of this historical process, because structural differentiation presupposes the constant validity of these principles.

Even when on a lower cultural level a natural family relationship is enkaptically bound in a primitive undifferentiated organized community like the sib or the domestic (economic) community, its inner structural principle is the same as that of a modern family that has been emancipated from this enkaptic interlacement... .

The denial of a typical leading and qualifying function in the natural immediate family relationship is identical with the denial of its entire typical structural principle, established by the order of creation.

The natural community between a couple of parents and their children under age is not a relationship with an undifferentiated inner destination. If it were, it would disappear in the advance of the differentiating process in historical development. It would then be a rudiment of a former historical phase. But this view is refuted by the facts.

Holy Scripture throws a quite different light on the natural communal bond of the family in its most typical narrow sense, even though it does not give us a theoretical analysis of its typical inner structure. It presents the family as a typical normative bond of love, based upon the natural ties of blood between parents and their immediate off-spring. This is a reflection of the bond of love between the Heavenly Father and his human children, unbreakably bound to the tie between Christ and his Church (Gen. 2:24; Proverbs 3:12; Psalm 103:13; Luke 15).<sup>64</sup>

He then defines the family as follows:

According to its inner structure of individuality, the natural immediate family is thus an institutional moral community of love between parents and their children under age, structurally based upon biological ties of blood relationship.

The bond of love between parents and children in the family is of a typical moral character, it cannot be reduced to an instinctive feeling of sympathy. Much rather it is a communal relation implying mutual duties and moral responsibility of a specific character.<sup>65</sup>

The moral norm of love which thus qualifies a family must not be reduced to a mere emotional affection or impulse as happens in Romantic views of the family. Love of parents for their children has an analogy in the psychical emotive life, but it is morally and psychically qualified.

Again, the *internal* end or purpose of the family must be distinguished from its *external* end. The former lies exclusively in love, whereas the latter signifies, for example, that the family may serve to raise citizens, help to populate Heaven or Hell, and advance economic and cultural life.

The peculiar individuality structure of the family influences all relationships within it. The love between members of the family is not the same as the love which is expressed to persons outside of the family group. Again, love within the family itself cannot be regarded in an abstract fashion. Love is indeed love within the family; but it is simplistic to speak in general about love without indicating whether one is speaking about the love of a father for his child, the love of a wife for her husband, or the love of children for their parents. Each one has a qualification and nuance of its own which must not be disregarded by the Christian sociologist.

The love between members of a family becomes apparent in the recognition by each member of the family of his or her position in the family structure. The love of parents for their children is not the love of equals; that is friendship. God has given to parents the right to command their children, and He has laid down that children must obey their parents for the Lord's sake. It is essential for the true happiness and well-being of the family that children do

in fact obey their parents in all things lawful. As Paul teaches: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right," that is in accordance with God's method of ordering human relationships. More than mere grudging obedience is required by God's law for the family. The biblical requirement is to "honor" one's parents. This means that children show their parents respect as well as love and obedience. "The voice of parents is as the voice of God," Shakespeare wrote, "for to children they are heaven's lieutenants."

The coherence between the qualifying or pilot and foundational functions of the family relationship characterizes in fact the structure of authority which typifies the immediate family. Authority is present in every internal social relationship, e.g., ecclesiastical authority, the authority of the state, of the employer in a firm. In each relationship, this structure of authority is of a different nature, since its qualifying or foundational functions, or both, are different. Applied to the family this means that the bearers of authority in a family must exercise such authority with love, and those required to obey must also be motivated by love.

The structural principle of the family is expressed in all the great law-spheres of God's creation. Thus the family functions in the juridical sphere with its own peculiar internal juridical relations. Within the family parents have a God-given right to exercise discipline over their children, and children have a duty to obey. These legal relationships have the full character of law and are not derived from the state, as humanists suppose. Dooyeweerd says of this penal character of family law:

The competence to punish is not a monopoly of the state. The inner character of this competence is, however, completely dependent upon the nature of the relationship in which it occurs. There is consequently no reason to deny a penal character to the parental disciplinary competence. Nevertheless, a competence to punish is bound to certain conditions. Real punishment presupposes legal authority and subordination. It can consequently only occur in communal, not in intercommunal or interindividual relationships... .

In keeping with the inner structural law of the family in its narrowest sense, parental discipline has an exclusively pedagogical character bound to the special guidance of parental love. The exercise of this disciplinary competence ought to be accommodated to the stage of development of the children.<sup>66</sup>

As applied to adults the Fifth Commandment means that they will care for their own parents in their old age as well as support their own children. In heathen societies such as the former Belgian Congo, it used to be the custom to abandon one's parents when they could no longer support themselves. The writer remembers cases of Africans driving their old grandmothers out to die in the jungle, where they would be eaten by the wild beasts. Our Lord took the scribes and the Pharisees to task for breaking the commandment to "honor" one's parents by excusing people from care of parents if they had made a contribution to the Temple taxes. Christ himself was not only subject to His parents as a child, but also accepted His responsibility as a man. One of the last acts from the cross was to turn over to His disciple, John, the care of His own beloved mother. To Mary He said, "Woman, behold thy son," and to John, "Behold thy mother" (John 19:26). And from that hour John took her to his own home. One of the most pernicious developments in modern society is the tendency of people to shift their responsibilities for their aged parents to the government. Instead of looking after their folks in their old age, they are putting them away in state-operated old people's homes.

Another deplorable trend is the attempt of apostate humanists to claim that children belong to the state rather than to the parents. But as we have seen, the authority of parents over their children is not derived from the state, as apostate humanists suppose, but comes naturally to them from Almighty God.

Just as the state has the right to make laws governing people's political relationships, so every family must have the right to frame its own peculiar set of laws and rules if it is not to collapse into anarchy. Within the family, parents have a right to exercise discipline, and children have the duty to obey. God's Word plainly teaches that if parents spare the rod by refusing to punish their children when they are naughty, then they will have only themselves to blame if their children become juvenile delinquents. Modern psychiatrists have found that it is only in homes where such discipline is in fact exercised that the children feel any real security. A love which does not show any concern for the child's moral development and welfare by correcting the child when it does wrong is not true love at all. Parents who love their children will seek the moral and spiritual welfare of their children just as much as their physical well-being.

In her article, "Emotional Security and Discipline," in *The Encyclopedia of Child Care and Guidance*, Aline B. Auerbach, Coordinator of Leadership Training and Parent Group Work, Child Study Association of America, says:

There seems little doubt that by and large children are benefiting by greater freedom, more varied and more creative activities, and the free flow of parental sympathy and affection that the newer attitude has encouraged.

In many instances, however, children who were allowed great freedom to express their wishes and feelings seemed uneasy and restless, often whiny and annoying, as if daring the adults around them to take a stand. Not only did their parents find this behavior difficult to take, but the children, too, seemed unhappy about what they were doing. The cartoon in which nursery-school children ask each other, "Do we have to do what we want?" expressed a situation that frequently developed further into something like, "We don't like it when we always do just what we want. Tell us how far we can safely go."

So parents came face to face with the central dilemma: the old type of rigid control was bad and dangerous; on the other hand, lack of discipline didn't work out well either. What, then, do children need in order to attain the security and confidence and peace we so much want them to have?

Years of research in child development and actual observations of children indicate that these are the essentials for building a child's security: (1) close relationships that give him love and affection and from which he gains support and comfort and a feeling of his own worth; (2) freedom to develop his mental and physical capacities as he gradually grows towards independence and confidence; and, (3) sympathetic guidance, through discipline that both helps him to develop his own control and protects him against those outside experiences and inner impulses that may be too much for him to handle by himself<sup>87</sup>

While the family thus has full internal sphere sovereignty in the proper conduct of its internal law, morality, economics, etc., it also has external juridical, economic, and ecclesiastical relations since it is interwoven with other relationships such as church or state or industry. Naturally, these other relationships are competent to lay down positive rules for the external juridical, ecclesiastical, and economic functions of the family. The state may require that children obtain the consent of their parents if they wish to marry while still minors under twenty-one or eighteen. Again, the state may intervene to protect the rights of children in cases where they have been neglected by their parents. If parents refuse to carry out their parental duties toward their children as required by God's law, and if they abuse the authority

which God has given them over their children, then the government may properly take away their children and find homes where they will be properly brought up. Thus God's law not only expects children to honor and obey their parents, but it also teaches that children have their rights and that "fathers are not to provoke their children to the point of rebellion" (Eph. 6:4). In one sense all children in the world are on loan to their parents, since they belong ultimately to the Good Shepherd, who has a special place in His great heart for His little lambs. Of people who hurt such little ones Christ uttered one of His sternest warnings: "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones" (Luke 17:2).

As the spirit of apostasy spreads throughout the land, so we may expect more parents to maltreat and neglect their children, just as we may expect children in turn to disobey their parents. In fact, one of the signs of the Last Days is described by Paul in these sombre words:

In the last days, perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away (II Tim. 3:1-4).

The family also functions in the aesthetic law-sphere. There is harmony in a family if mutual love exists between parents and children, and parents exercise their authority in love, and children respond by honoring their parents in an affectionate manner. The disruption of this harmony by sin causes family life to lose its charm.

The management of a family household has an internal typical economic function; the manner in which it is financed is essentially different from the financing of a business. The family is not an economic unit as such, so that it is not governed by the profit motive. Yet there is a relationship between the financial soundness of a family and its happiness and peace.

Dr. Leslie J. Tizard, Chairman of the Birmingham Marriage Guidance Council, writes in his *Guide to Marriage*:

The love of money has made a hash of plenty of marriages ... the blundering mismanagement of money has spoiled more marriages than the love of it. When one

listens to the stories of marriages that have gone awry, it comes up again and again with monotonous regularity. I don't say it is always a prime cause of disagreement, though it sometimes is, but it turns up everlastingly as an important side-issue or aggravation.<sup>68</sup>

The family also functions in the social law-sphere. Yet the social fellowship between its members is different from that occurring between equals and strangers. It is more intimate and is qualified by mutual love rather than mere politeness. However, such trust and love do not obviate the respect and honor that children owe their parents.

The family functions in its own peculiar manner in the lingual sphere. Its language and forms of expression have a character which is inappropriate in other forms of society. And the language of the family may not clash with its character as a relationship of love, nor may it violate the normative authority of the family. A typical breach of this sphere occurs whenever a child curses its parents. In taking the Pharisees to task over this, "God commanded saying, He that curseth his father and mother, let him die the death" (Matt. 15:4; Exod. 20:12). Thus God's law, confirmed by Christ, actually exacts the death penalty for cursing one's parents. While the coming of Christ has annulled this particular penalty, we are still to refrain from cursing our parents for Christ's sake. Children must never be permitted to speak disrespectfully to their parents. At the same time, parents must be deserving of their children's respect.