

Values Again

Winter 2005 Commentary

Protected by Common Law Copyright

This may be copied for personal use only.

*William P. Wilson, M. D.
Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry
Duke University Medical Center
Durham, N. C.*

*Director, Institute of Christian Growth
Box 2357 Burlington, N. C.
27216-2347*

A recent article in *Business Week* stated that the government of Singapore is encouraging people to have more children. It was only a few years ago that the same government was asking people to limit the number of children in a family to two. The population replacement rate is 3.6 children per family so all of a sudden the population controllers have now found to their dismay that there is a declining population. As a result there are looming labor shortages and of course declining tax incomes. Singapore is not the only country in the world that has a declining population. Sweden, Germany, France, Italy, Korea, Chinese Malaysia, and Japan already have negative growth. China of course has had negative growth for a long time because of their policy of allowing only one child to a family. I did learn they have changed their policy and now allow two. Even so, they have a different problem. They have a shortage of females. With selective abortion, males are preferred so people choose to not have daughters. As for us it is certain that the US has already seen a decline, even adjusting for immigration. Our current rate is 1.6 children per family in contrast to the baby boom years (1950's and 60's) when the rate was 2.2. What is the problem?

First abortion is a major factor. The 1,600,000 abortions done in our country each year certainly contribute to the decrease in the number of children that enter the population pool. The number of abortions in other countries is staggering. When you realize that the average Russian woman has three to five abortions in their lifetime you can understand that the number is enormous. There is no way to count the number of

abortions done in China and Japan. Then too, a minor part of the decline is that one in ten marriages are infertile; but this has always been true. (It is not all due to infertility in women since men are equally infertile.) Lastly, there is the problem of infant mortality. Even though it has been significantly reduced it still makes its contribution.

In Europe and in America a major part of the problem is that women have to work or are being encouraged to have careers and forgo childbearing. Now a-days they are waiting until the late 20's and early 30's to marry. Also they are living together and not having children to see if the trial marriage is going to work. It does not, since the divorce rate of couples that live together before marriage is about 75%. Therefore, the birth rate for middle and upper class women is quite low. When they do have children they are doing so later in life and only have one or two children. The reason lies in the fact that women find it difficult to have a public job and care for a home and nurture children. Although it has been observed that men have contributed more in childcare and homemaking, it is usually not enough, especially if the man has a job that requires long hours.

The decline in birthrate creates a problem for governments. With a population that is rapidly aging, the costs of medical care, retirement income, and decreasing tax revenues, it will be impossible to finance the social programs that the public demands. This is why the government is trying to find a way to deal with the anticipated Medicare and Social Security shortfall. The deadline is not too far off, but our congressional leaders pay only lip service to the problem that exists. They try to explain it away. It is possible that they do not know how to deal with it, so like the ostrich they are sticking their head in the sand. I am sure that when they finally get around to dealing with it there will be only one answer. The populace will have to make sacrifices. Congress is afraid to ask us to make those sacrifices. They do not want to face the public reaction to the bitter pill they will have to swallow. One other problem that they seem not to understand is that the goose has quit laying golden eggs. The end of prosperity as we have known it is over. Our national debt and the enormous difference in the cost of our imports over exports are harbingers of economic tough times ahead. It will be impossible for our grandchildren to live as affluently as we presently do.

What does this have to do with the declining birthrate? Not too much. The drive to affluence has certainly contributed, but the main reason that we do not have children is the culture we live in. Our culture has ceased to value children. We have become so self centered that we do not want the responsibility of living our lives for someone else. Sexual satisfaction is all we want. People know that conceiving children is the easy part, but rearing them and socializing them is the hard part, and we are not willing to devote ourselves to do the job.

Some years ago on an Easter Sunday I heard a sermon about relationships that was indelibly engraved in my mind. The preacher who gave the message had a terrible marriage. His wife hated the ministry and refused to take part in his church life. Even so he understood relationships in a way that the best scientific minds have not been able to fathom. He did not say this, but he apparently knew that we are all born with a **radical need** for love. We need it from our parents, from our siblings, from our mates, from our friends, and from God.

Looking back over my previous writing, I find I have not mentioned that intimate relationships require us to psychospiritually install the other person in our mind. This is what God meant when he said we are to become one. Because our minds are supernatural and God is supernatural we can install ourselves in one another and God can install himself in us. When we are conceived, our parents install us in their love. We live our lives with them and they for us. The child's best interests and welfare is put above our own.

The preacher reminded us that this is the beginning of love for us. As we grow up we decrease our installation in our parents and separate from them and become individuals in our own right. At the same time we prepare to install our mate by falling in love. The preacher called this process of falling in love and dying to self when marrying being reborn. To marry, some part of us has to die to become one with our mate. When children come we are again reborn, for again some part of us has to die to install each of them. Our friends are only partly installed. We do not live our lives for them. Then finally at some age, either before or after our marriage, we are reborn into God's love.

This requires us to forget ourselves and live our lives for Him. Our love for God should take precedence over all other loves.

From the foregoing you can see that in a self centered society people are less capable of intimate love. Our culture is now one of self-satisfaction. The motto of the sixties, "If it feels good do it" is so much a part of our culture that we do not even have to remind ourselves of it. The philosophy of humanism is a religion of self. You can be like God, we are told, and your desires determine the relationships that you have. Out of this come sexual promiscuity, divorce, alcohol and drug addiction, greed and all that is derived from it. Humanism is the religion of the intellectual community and of the liberal establishment. It is not surprising that they are often amoral and authoritarian.

Who are the primary proponents of humanism? The answer is the intellectual community. These are the teachers and professors in the educational establishment. All one has to do to corroborate this is to read the policy statements of the NEA, read the publications of the Heritage Foundation, or especially the publications of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, and you will have all the evidence you need.

How does their teaching affect real Christians? It is obvious that religious persons who are not spiritual are no different from secularists. They have the same divorce rate, the same incidence of adultery, and with the exception of their church attendance, they are no different from their secular peers. They are basically humanists in Christian clothes. Their church is their social club.

What is the thing that sets real Christians apart? The answer is that they can live in obedience to God's commandments and ordinances and can love one another as he has loved them. They are able to resolve conflict because they are selfless. The result of this conflict resolution is that they do not have a high divorce rate, they do not commit adultery, and they do not become alcoholics or drug addicts. They are hard workers and they are persons of integrity. Of greatest importance is the fact that the Holy Spirit dwells in them so they are able to live a righteous life. Part of this righteous life is that they obey God's commandments. One of which is to be fruitful and multiply.

Some years ago when our psychiatry residency program at Duke had thirty out of sixty men and women that were Christians, I asked the director of residency training

why he had taken so many. He said, "Why not? They work hard, are intelligent, they are reliable, they do not get into sexual troubles, I do not have to go bail them out of jail, and they are obedient. They are such a contrast to the others we have that I will take all I can get." Interestingly all these men and women years later have been good family persons and have two or more children.

The desirability of having a Christian marriage was exemplified in a patient who came to me with a chief complaint that she had a bad marriage. She had been married 25 years to a man with whom she communicated quite well. He had been faithful and was an excellent provider so that they had two cars and a nice ten-room house in an affluent neighborhood. Their three sons graduated from college and successfully established themselves in their vocations and society. She was an active member of a church where she had been on the governing body, led a Bible study, had been president of the women's group in the church, and was involved in charitable work in the community. She and her husband rarely argued and really enjoyed one another's company.

When she had finished telling me her story I said to her, "Lady, you don't have a bad marriage. It sounds pretty good to me. Why are you really here?"

"Dr. Wilson, I heard a tape of yours and in it you said that if you want a Christian marriage, you have to be a Christian. When you described what a real Christian is I realized that I am not a Christian. All these years I thought I was, but I now know I am not. After I realized it, I went to my pastor and said, 'Pastor, I'm not a Christian!'"

"He said, 'What do you mean you are not a Christian? You have been on the governing body of the church. You have been a Bible teacher. You have been president of the church women. And you have been an exemplary wife and mother. Don't tell me you are not a Christian.' He did not believe me."

"I then went to my Bible study and confessed to them too that I was not a Christian and they said the same thing to me that the pastor said. Dr, Wilson, do you think I am a Christian?"

"Tell me, have you ever made Jesus the Lord of your life?" I said.

"No I haven't," she quietly said.

“Then you’re not. Would you like to know Him?”

“That is why I came here.”

So we made the transaction and she made Jesus the Lord of her life as tears flowed.

Later when she was leaving I walked into the outer office where she was talking to my secretary. I said to her, “You know, it is a shame that you had to pay \$135.00 to come to know the Lord.”

“It was worth a million,” was her reply.

At Christmas I got a card from her saying, “I now have a Christian marriage! Thanks.”

It is a fact that God gave us guidelines to establish Christian marriages. The first is that the couple should both be Christians. The second is that there should be love and order. Marriages that are contracted because of an illegitimate pregnancy, to escape a terrible home situation, in desperation, on an impulse, because parents or friends think a couple is made for each other, or after a very short courtship do not do well. Most of them do not last more than a few years if that long. The ideal courtship is one to two years. Marriages following lengthy courtships without break ups have a very high success rate. Why is this so? The answer is that they get to know one another and install themselves in one another. They communicate their interests, their hopes and plans for the future, their desires for children and their social recreational interests. They identify their friends and develop mutual friendships. They identify the vices and virtues, perfections and imperfections, and assets and liabilities of each other and in love accept them. Order is the rule in a real Christian marriage.

The second principle of a Christian marriage is that the couple communicates well. In the 4th chapter of Ephesians Paul gives an outline for good communication. Anger management is necessary in a marriage, but communicating in an assertive manner is the best way to manage it. Assertive communication is not expressive or repressive instead it is confessional. In this communication lifestyle one does not use accusative statements that begin with you, instead it uses confessional statements that begin with I. A mnemonic to describe these statements is:

When (something is said or done)

I think or feel (anger, or resentment, hurt, fear or negative thoughts, etc.)

I'd like (an action to resolve the problem)

A third principle of Christian marriage relates to the roles of the two spouses. There has been a blurring of roles in the last forty years. The Bible is very explicit in what the roles should be in a marriage (Gen. 4.16-17). Although some of their roles are not well described, a man's role is to be the provider and the wife the homemaker. Some years ago I read an article in Ebony Magazine written by a child psychiatrist at Howard University. She believed that the women's liberation movement was destroying the black race. She stated that their desire to get women out of the home and into the workplace resulted in the deterioration of marriage, their family structure and thus in the distortion of the personalities of their children. The end result of this deterioration in her mind was the destruction of the race. She made it clear that the role of the husband was to be the protector of the family, the provider and a disciplinarian of the children with love and kindness. His wife was to be a homemaker, child socializer, and disciplinarian with love and kindness. These are traditional roles that are biblically prescribed. She spoke truths in her article, for 25 years later the incidence of AIDS, the murder rate among young black males, the crime rate, and gang warfare has resulted in the murder and imprisonment of thousands of young black males. Walter Williams, the economist, and Bill Cosby, the entertainer, have also focused on the deterioration of the family as one of the causes of the problems blacks face.

Impartation of values is another of the areas that the Bible is explicit about. Deuteronomy 6:6, 7 is very emphatic. "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. **Impress them on your children.** Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up," and in verse nine it says, "Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." God did not mince any words in his instructions. He is just as emphatic today. Yet our society has tried to keep any reference to God's laws from public display. Certainly we have not followed His orders. I do not know of a house where the Ten Commandments are on display except my own. One of my patients once told me

though that the only religion she was exposed to was the Ten Commandments that were posted above her bed. We have them posted in our den, but did not have them there when our children were growing up. I have to be honest, I wish I had known then what I know now.

What are values? They are things that make a favorable difference in our lives. Most of us call our beliefs values, but God's laws and ordinances have the greatest value. They are absolute. Having made us, and knowing what our beliefs do in shaping our lives, He gave us the commandments and ordinances in the Bible to direct our lives. They will make a favorable difference in our lives if we obey them. Let us take the law "Thou shall not commit adultery" and see what happens if we disobey it. If we commit adultery we will have the emotion of shame and feel guilty. We will lie about it if we are confronted, and this will also make us ashamed. Then if we are caught *in delecto flagrante* our wives or husbands will be hurt, the hurt will turn into anger and we will no longer be trusted. We have betrayed the relationship that we had with them and they will sometimes feel that they may have caused our dereliction. The greatest loss is that of trust. Most spouses that have been betrayed can never trust again. Its effect on a marriage is such that when it occurs, 75% of the marriages end in divorce. Divorce is very traumatic. If, however, the spouses are faithful to one another they maintain their trust, and in most instances can have an excellent sexual relationship. Years ago *Redbook* did a study on the sexual lives of American women and found that those who had the best sexual adjustments were highly religious women. Living by biblical values results in happiness. Living by the world's values results in much unhappiness.

It is also possible that adulterous relationships can result in contracting venereal disease and infection of the other spouse. I do not know of anything in a marriage that is as traumatic.

Discipline is the means by which values are transmitted. Discipline has two dimensions. First there is the impartation of rules of behavior, and second their enforcement. I have already touched on one biblical value, but there are myriads of others that touch every aspect of our lives.

One value that causes people the most trouble in our society is related to the management of money. The Bible is emphatic that we should owe no one. It also encourages us to take care of widows, orphans and the poor. This means we have to share our economic blessings with others, especially those who are in need. Today we have a society deeply in debt. Most persons have credit cards that are maxed out or have massive debts associated with them. They pay exorbitant interest rates that deprive them of any luxuries. The Bible not only says “owe no one” (Romans 13:8 ESV), but it also exhorts its readers to not charge usurious interest rates. Interestingly, Muslims will not pay interest on borrowed money. We are also to be frugal. John Wesley said his followers were to make all they can, save all they can and give all they can. This is a summary of the biblical position on money. We can do this if we obey the commandment to not covet. If we covet we will come to worship money.

The seriousness of the money problem was illustrated by one of my patients who had a credit card debt of \$60,000. It is not at all uncommon for me to see patients who have debts of 15,000 to 20,000 dollars. Most of this is on multiple credit cards that are “maxed out.” Others have debts for autos, boats, four wheelers and other luxuries. None of them have savings.

Another area that has little value is in the area of respect for the law. All one has to do is to get on the freeway and you can see hundreds of lawbreakers. Each day as I commute to work everyone passes me if I drive at the speed limit. The only persons I pass are cars broken down on the side of the highway. I have noticed that certain trucks obey the law. Trucks belonging to Schneider, to J. B. Hunt, to UPS and a few other truck lines usually seem to be driving at the speed limit. They also stay in designated lanes if they are so indicated. They do not cut you off or merge recklessly. Others do not obey the law and, therefore, are the cause of most of the fatal accidents that occur on our highways.

Cheating is rampant in our society. Not only does it occur in our high schools, but also in colleges and graduate schools. In science we read of faked data and plagiarism. There is cheating in business. Some years ago my son bought an emerald ring for his wife. He bought it from a local respected business. A year later he went to have it appraised for insurance purposes and found that he had been sold two pieces of glass with green plastic between them. No one knows how many people this man had cheated in the same way. When the businessman was confronted my son did get his money back, but it was very disillusioning to me since this businessman's son was one of my best friends before his untimely death. I can go on and on about the disobedience to the law that exists in our society, but I am sure you are aware of it. I am sure that parents' attitudes about cheating, lying and law abiding have a profound influence on their children's values in this area.

Another area of value in our society where we hold values is in education. Growing up my family expected me to get as much education as I could. Neither of my parents came from highly educated families. My mother was a college graduate and my father had gone for two years, but in their minds there was no doubt that my brother and I were going to college. They wanted the best education for us that we could get. On top of that they were willing to sacrifice for us to get it. It was for this end that we were encouraged to take a classical education track in high school. I had four years of Latin and as much math as they taught. Although I took only biology in high school I did take chemistry and physics in prep school. This made an enormous difference in my getting into Duke University when I applied to colleges. I loved going to school. I am sure that my parents' attitude was responsible for me getting a BS and MD and my brother getting a BA, MA and PhD. My brother did it at great odds. Having severe dyslexia as a child, he overcame that handicap to get his degrees. If parents do not promote educational values, and pour themselves into their children's educational efforts, their children will not value education. We must also value good health. In our time medicine has much to offer in preventative medicine. We have the foodstuffs to eat good diets. There are

vaccines to prevent polio, smallpox, measles, whooping cough, rubella, typhoid, paratyphoid, tetanus, pneumonia, and flu. Parents should see to it that children not only get their shots, but also understand the need for them. They must also help their children understand that using tobacco products and drugs such as marijuana, heroin and cocaine are not only illegal, but also detrimental to their health. Having healthcare insurance is also a must. If children are not taught the desirability of subscribing to a good plan they may neglect it and not have the resources to handle large unexpected medical and hospital bills.

All of us need a faith. We are hardwired to need one. In a recent book entitled, *Why God Won't Go Away*, the authors present good evidence that our brains have circuits that only religious activities will light up. They are not specifically wired for the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but they do light up with prayer or meditation. Therefore everyone has a religion. Even an atheist, or a psychoanalyst, or a communist has a religion. For the atheist the idea that there is no God is a religion, for the psychoanalyst Freud is his god, for the communist the state is god. Then there is Allah, Buddha, Shiva, or Brahman, or any number of other lesser gods that are worshiped. The worst god to have is ourselves. Humanism teaches us that we can be our own god and make our own rules to live by. Since sin lives in our human nature we will live by it. The wages of sin are death. It is no wonder that our society is decaying and so many people are dying of AIDS, other infectious diseases, trauma and murder.

Sadly, there is a tendency for people to believe that religion will suffice. They are quite willing to go to church; be nice, sweet and kind; and believe that such behavior will bring them eternal rewards. Not so! Jesus said you have to be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven. There is no other ticket to entry. So if anyone tells you that being religious is enough, disabuse them of that notion.

Today I had a conversation with a theologically educated man about our motivations as Christians. We both were convinced that our job was to be in the world witnessing with life and lip to the lost. We have to have a witness in the kind of lives we live as well as a story of what God has done in our lives – how He changed us, how He solved problems, how He met our needs and how He is

absolutely trustworthy. Our God is a god of love and He will be a real dependable father to us if we only install him in our lives. Two generations of our society have been lost to the church because the messengers were not sent out. They could not hear the message and therefore they are lost.

Our job as Christian parents is to help our children develop their own saving faith. Once they reach 15 years they are no longer under the umbrella of our faith. They have to develop their own. God has no grandchildren. My grandson reminded my daughter-in-law that she was wrong when she told him that he had a strong faith from early in his childhood. He told her that he had her faith, but had recently developed his own. It is not often the privilege of a parent to lead their children to Christ. Someone else has to do it. God will send them if we pray and ask him to do it.

In conclusion, I have not discussed the entire subject of values. But I have tried to demonstrate how it is imperative that we obey God's directive to be fruitful and multiply as I noted earlier in this essay. It is easy to rear children, but it is a difficult job to rear children of worth. That is what a godly child is!