

The Failure of the Family

address to a *Quadrant* magazine dinner
held on 22 August 2001, in Sydney

The Family and the Basic Wage

The family in Australia once enjoyed a privileged place at law and in social and economic policy. Nothing epitomised this more than the 1907 landmark judgment of Henry Bournes Higgins, President of the newly established Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, in the *Harvester* case¹. As you know, the case established the basic wage, defined as a wage sufficient to support a working man, his dependent wife and three children “in frugal comfort.”² Higgins set the rate initially at two pounds and two shillings for a six day week.

I appreciate that mentioning the name of Higgins in this august company is perhaps a little like invoking the authority of the devil in church, although *Quadrant* has always counted among its supporters a goodly number of social conservatives who support the traditional family. Many things have been said of him, particularly in the 1980s, and not all of it has been friendly.³ I do not want give the impression that I support everything he did and said over his long and often controversial public career, but I think it is worth reflecting for a moment on the social arrangements that were put in place around the time of Federation to support the family, and how things have changed since. My concern is much less with economic theory than with practical living conditions (although Higgins’ system lasted for seventy years through a depression and two world wars), but even more with the social consequences for the family of this set of social arrangements.

The *Harvester* case is usually referred to as one of the key elements in the development of the raft of benevolent laws and social legislation - the “New Protection” as it was called - which Australian governments began to put in place in the wake of the economic crash of the 1890s. These laws were intended to minimise social conflict, especially conflict between labour and capital (thus the compulsory arbitration of industrial disputes before Higgins’s court); to ensure a decent standard of living for workers and their families; and more broadly through the system of tariffs and economic protection, to encourage local industry and to maintain Australia’s independence.

Higgins’ *Harvester* judgment linked wages to human need, not to profits or productivity. As historian John Hirst has remarked, it represented “an Australian act of defiance against the dictates of the market and an assertion that the country was to remain a true new world.”⁴ It was also one of many measures in support of a great social experiment, keenly watched in Europe at the time, to build a peaceful, egalitarian and democratic society without revolution or violent upheaval.⁵ By and large that experiment was a tremendous success, and it is perhaps a function of that very success that over the last thirty years we have dispensed with most of the structures put in place to attain it, not just in the area of tariffs or industrial relations, but also in relation to the family.

Harvester placed the welfare of the family at the centre of social and economic policy from the beginnings of Federation. In a new nation concerned to minimise the divisions between rich and poor and to lay a solid basis for social stability this made perfect sense. As I will discuss in a moment, over the last thirty years an enormous amount of empirical work has been done on the relationship between marriage breakdown and family dysfunction, and the rise of the different social pathologies that pose such problems today for all of us, but especially for law enforcement agencies and health and welfare workers. One of the many things this research makes clear is that

1. *Ex parte H. V. McKay*, 1-2 *Commonwealth Arbitration Reports* (1905-08).

2. One of the many criticisms levelled at the basic wage was that in setting it Higgins ignored workers with no children, workers with more than three children, and women - with or without dependent children.

3. For a good summary of the attack launched on Higgins in the 1980s (and the system he created), see Paul Kelly *The End of Certainty* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney: 1992). Chapter 6.

4. John Hirst *The Sentimental Nation* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne: 2000). 288.

5. Geoffrey Blainey *A Shorter History of Australia* (William Heinemann, Melbourne: 1994). 140-42.

if you want to preserve social stability or to prevent it being slowly eroded, it makes good sense to buttress the stability of the family.

While this fact was not as well documented in 1907 as it is today, there was certainly hard-evidence along these lines available to Higgins in forming his judgment, and we know he used it.⁶ In particular he drew on Seebohm Rowntree's study of poverty in York in 1898 which challenged the then-prevalent view that the poor were responsible for their own poverty by demonstrating that the more important factor in that city at that time for most of the poor was low wages.⁷

To his credit, Higgins took the point. There can be no genuine social stability on a basis of poverty, even less so on the basis of impoverished families. Rowntree's standard family was a worker with a dependent wife and three children, and so the basic wage and what demographer Peter McDonald calls "the male breadwinner model of the family" became the foundation of all policies effecting family life in Australia.⁸

Feminism, the Market and Family

By the time the basic wage was abolished in 1973 Australia had become a very different place and new pressures on the family were emerging. In 1960, Australia became one of the first countries in the world to grant approval for the general distribution and use of the pill. The freedom this gave women to defer marriage and childbirth, limit the number of children and pursue a career coalesced with the rise of feminism to change the pattern of family life, not least in making the "traditional" family of male breadwinner and dependent partner and children a minority lifestyle today (less than 35 percent of families with children under 15 in 2000⁹). This is not to suggest, of course, that the traditional family (man, woman and children) has become a minority lifestyle choice. On the contrary, couples with children under 15 constituted a little over 79 percent of all families with children under 15 in 2000, although in 1990 the figure was over 85 percent. Over the same period single parent families headed by the mother rose from 13 percent to almost 19 percent.¹⁰

Feminism also coalesced with changes in how we thought about the economy. As it became more and more difficult for families to maintain their standard of living on one income, feminism came to the rescue by sending wives out to work. This offset the disappearance of a family wage and enabled families to maintain and often improve their standard of living, at least initially, although for many poorer families today even two incomes are not enough and parents find they have to seek a "third income" in the form of additional part-time work at nights or on the weekend to make ends meet.

The way feminism helped offset the consequences of market reform on families and helped make those reforms possible by reinforcing the radical individualism of market ideology has led American sociologist Philip Selznick to only half-jokingly claim that in the 1970s and 80s feminism saved capitalism.¹¹ If the one income family had remained the norm in that period, market reforms would not have been able to go as far and as fast as they did, for fear that plummeting living standards would bring about a real social crisis. It is an interesting claim.

Now I am not saying that the collapse of the family was the consequence of some sort of unholy alliance or conspiracy between feminists and radical free-marketeters. But there is no doubt that in its day-to-day operations the market is interested in individuals only as workers with certain sets of skills, and not as people who may have families or who are performing work that might be inefficient, even costly but important to the wider common good. The market is blind to these considerations. It is the role of society and government to flag these considerations as important and to make them register in the economic realm – the old basic wage is an example.

Contrary to some people's expectations, the Church is not an enemy of the market. Pope John Paul II stated the Church's approach very clearly in his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*. It

6. There were many influences on Higgins, and the suggestion has even been made that Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891) was one of them. See Kelly 8.

7. B. Seebohm Rowntree *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (Macmillan, London: 1903).

8. Peter McDonald "Institutional Support for Australian Families." Paper delivered in the Centenary of Federation Seminar Series, Parliament House Canberra, 4 October 2000.

9. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends* 2001. 34.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Remarks made in answering questions after delivering the third Richard Krygier Lecture (published under the title "The Communitarian Journey" in *Quadrant* 43:1-2 [January-February 1999]) in late 1998.

is not a simple matter of saying that a free market economy is always and everywhere good. A great deal depends on what we mean in talking about a free market economy. If we mean “an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of businesses, the market, private property, and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as human creativity in the economic sector,” then the Church supports the free market. But if we mean “a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it *at the service of human freedom in its totality*, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is religious and ethical,” then the Church opposes it.¹²

The relationship between economics and culture is complex and there is no doubt that each powerfully influences the other in different ways in differing circumstances. The operation of the free market should be circumscribed by a legal order *and* by the interests of the common good, an important part of which is the strength and stability of the family. It has often been said that the market relies on qualities that can only be described as moral qualities if it is to operate successfully: qualities such as truthfulness, honesty, conscientiousness, industriousness, self-discipline. We should not take it for granted that by and large business can be conducted in this country without the crippling levels of corruption endemic to other places in the world. This doesn't just happen. It is only made possible by deep moral values underlying the operation of the market.

When the free market begins to undermine the institutions which inculcate the values upon which it depends, it begins to undermine itself. If for no other reason, this is why champions of the free market should be concerned about the effects of the market on families – which is for most us the primary source of the values and standards by which we learn to live our lives. The problem comes about when the market is given pre-eminence over culture and the common good. One indication of this problem is the emphasis that is currently placed on treating most important activities in our society as if they were businesses, or denying their economic significance altogether. The work of a housewife appears nowhere on any financial balance sheet. No wonder women can murmur “I'm only a housewife.” Hospitals have become the health industry, and patients have become clients. Universities and schools have become the education industry and students and their parents have become consumers.

It is not just a matter of fashionable jargon. These changes of language are accompanied by substantial structural changes in these areas to make education and health conform to the structures of a commercial enterprise. Schools and hospitals form part of the common good, and obviously it is important that they are run effectively and within budget constraints approved or tolerated by the community to meet the needs for which they were created. To subject the personal and indeed spiritual dimensions of education and health-care to ruthless cost-cutting, simple economic criteria, indicates an unhealthy economic priority over other important elements in human well-being.

Another example is our present unwillingness or inability to address the corrosive effects of the market in the areas of entertainment, advertising and pornography. As the popularity of rap-singer Eminem shows, there are enormous markets in different forms of entertainment which are offensive, degrading, violent or obscene. Any attempt to place restrictions on the open-slatheer approach of the entertainment and advertising industries is greeted with outraged cries in defence of supposed artistic freedom, when in fact what is really at stake is profits. Genuine artistic merit is hardly ever a criterion. Is anyone prepared to examine the social consequences of increasingly pornographic entertainment or are we content to let the situation degenerate? Or are there no adverse social consequences from this type of conditioning?

The relentless glamorisation of consumption and materialism in contemporary advertising, and the repetitive endorsement of promiscuous sex, drug taking, violence and a generally disenchanting view of the world that comes from the music, films and video clips targeted at teenagers, serve as powerful and overwhelmingly negative counter-influences to the influence of parents, and their attempts to impart to their children values that will enhance their lives and the possibility of happiness. These are powerful forces working against the values upon which societies such as ours depend, and against the institutions which support these values, such as religion and the family.

12. *Centesimus Annus* (1991) §42. Emphasis added.

It is only when we become a little bit like Marxists and insist that if only we can get the economics right everything else will look after itself that the blindness of the market becomes a problem. Only then do we get the situation we have in our society at the moment where the family is treated as something belonging strictly to the private sphere of life, as “a private life-style choice” with no consequences for social life more generally; and as something for which employers do not need to take responsibility.

One example is what some commentators have described as the disappearance of the eight-hour day; the greater and greater demands made on workers to put in longer hours, often driven by the implied threat or the fear that they might lose their job if they resist. This sort of thing is not always good for workers – at whatever level of responsibility, although some love it – and it is certainly not good for families or for children waiting for their parents to come home.

Other examples are the damaging effects of unemployment, and the squeezing of ordinary wage and salary earners, the decline in prosperity and numbers of the middle class, in contrast to the hyper-salaries of top executives. To the extent these things feed into family breakdown and the de-socialization of children (and they do), they are not good for the market either in the longer term, although the longer term is another one the market’s blind spots.

Becoming Risk-averse

There is no doubt that economics is important and that it influences social and cultural attitudes, especially when it is given pre-eminence. We hear a lot of talk about risk-taking and the need to be flexible, open to change, willing to re-make oneself at a moment’s notice to take advantage of new opportunities. Young people especially have been conditioned to “live with risk,” but they do so, not as the fearless entrepreneurial heroes of free-market propaganda, but defensively and in a situation of more or less constant anxiety.

The irony is that for all the rhetoric of risk-taking, many or most people structure and live their lives to be risk-averse. To minimise the risk of unemployment, the individual worker must maximise his utility to the market. To this end, his focus is on acquiring the skills, experience and reputation that make him “saleable.” At the same time, he needs “to accumulate savings or wealth as a personal safety net.”¹³ He also appreciates the importance of maintaining flexibility to respond to opportunities. In a context such as this, why would anyone make the sort of unconditional commitment to another person that marriage requires or devote oneself to the raising of children?

As Peter McDonald observes, there are people “who believe that the public world of the market economy and the private world of the family are separate worlds: that an individual can be highly competitive, individualistic and risk-averse in the market, but then, just hours afterwards, be self-sacrificing, altruistic and risk-accepting in the family.” Perhaps this logic made sense when it was mainly men who worked, and women with children mainly stayed home. But as we know this is no longer the case. The young woman of today, conditioned by the rhetoric of risk, ensures that she can support herself, “and given the high probability of divorce, will be careful not to put herself at the risk of dependency upon a man,” even if she marries him.¹⁴

These sorts of risk-averse behaviours are reinforced in other powerful ways. Double incomes provide couples with protection against job losses. Banks routinely require two incomes for a mortgage. Children at school, both boys and girls, are socialised in a way that emphasises accumulating skills, making money, attaining success as an individual: all necessary, of course, but which unbalanced by other values, emphasise their roles as workers and consumers, not as potential future parents and spouses.

Despite this, young people do not leave school and their own experience of family life hostile to family formation. McDonald refers to surveys which show that in their early twenties Australians express a desire to marry and have at least two children. But by their early thirties “a high proportion are not married and their achieved fertility is considerably below an average of two children.” McDonald’s explanation is that in the intervening years “they learn about the market first hand. They learn to be risk averse. They experience a system that does not value or reward those who have children. Indeed, it very obviously penalises those who have children, particularly women.” And this is not just confined to the university-educated or to the professional classes.

13. McDonald.

14. Ibid.

“Between 1986 and 1996, the fall in fertility was greater for women without qualifications than for those with a university degree.”¹⁵

It need not be this way, and saying this does not mean looking back nostalgically to the days of the basic wage. Other countries have been perhaps more successful at striking a balance between economic necessities and supporting the family. France is sometimes sniffed at for persisting with subsidies for industry and farmers and protection of various kinds for important social institutions, and the impression is often given that as a consequence it is one of the economic sick-men of Europe. So I was surprised to read on the weekend that according to no less an authority than the OECD itself France is at present showing “robust economic growth” and “vigorous” job creation.¹⁶

Michael Gove, the author of this article, a Eurosceptic editor at the *Times*, went on to draw a connection between the way the French have worked to preserve the traditional breadwinner role for men and the way the English have undermined this role through radical market reforms. By protecting industry and agriculture, the position of “the middle-aged, semi-skilled male worker” has also been protected.” In France, such workers are more likely to have a steady income with which to provide for their family and “more likely to be engaged in the type of labour that maintains [their] dignity and prestige in the eyes of others.” That is, he is less likely to be employed “flipping hamburgers [or] wearing a security guard’s uniform.”¹⁷

In both cases, an economic price has to be paid, and despite the costs of preserving family stability, France is apparently not the basket case that some would have us believe.¹⁸ In fact, in terms of family breakdown and the social disruption that follows from it, it may well be England that is the basket case. Gove claims that because French men are not as frequently engaged in work that is demeaning to them as men, they are less likely to abandon their family commitments and less likely to be dumped by their wives. He supports this with the claim that while in 1960 the British divorce rate was lower than that in France, today it is now 35 percent higher. In 1998, births out of wedlock in the EU as a whole was at 26 percent, but in Britain it was almost 38 percent.¹⁹ Social pathology also has its costs, and both economically and socially they are much higher than the cost of encouraging and “privileging” the family.

The Benefits of Marriage and Family

Family life is never easy. The demands of work and paying off the house are often a source or pressure, and those families which have the additional burden of caring for someone with chronic illness or disability often suffer real hardship in keeping things together. Looking after children at whatever age is a serious commitment and can never be done without sacrifice. Doing this successfully usually requires parents to be serious about looking after each other as well.

Sticking to the commitment of marriage and children regularly requires real heroism. But like all good things, the more you put into family life the greater the rewards. In fact, it might be more accurate to say that the more individuals put into their families, the greater the rewards for all of us. Over thirty years of empirical work in the social sciences make it clear just how great these rewards are.²⁰

Married-couple families have the lowest poverty rates among all family types, while divorce and single-parenthood is one of the greatest causes of child poverty. Many single parents do a

15. Ibid.

16. Cited in Michael Gove “Why Chauvinism Works for the French,” *Spectator*, 11 August 2001.

17. Ibid.

18. The OECD *Economic Survey of France* (July 2000) says the French economy is growing rapidly with “low inflation and growth that [is] richer in jobs.” Growth is expected to remain strong throughout 2001 and to hold steady at around 3.5 percent. Unemployment is higher than in the UK, but it is now below 9 percent and will continue to fall. The OECD *Economic Survey of the United Kingdom* (June 2000) observes that productivity in Britain is “lower than in other large OECD countries,” and growth is around 2.5 percent. Exports are slowing (in contrast to France), and there is a danger of the economy overheating, despite low stable inflation and falling unemployment .

19. Gove.

20. In what follows I am draw on a superb summary of research findings (complete with full bibliography) prepared by Professor Paul C. Vitz of New York University, one of the leading scholars in this field, published in *Defending the Family: A Sourcebook*, Catholic Social Sciences Press, Steubenville, Ohio: 1998) 1-23. It is available online at the Catholic Educators Resource Center (www.catholiceducation.org)

great job, but it is obviously difficult for one parent to do everything that two parents can do. American studies also suggest that being married is more important to a person's health than factors such as age, education or income. Rates of mortality and illness are lower among married people, and although they report experiencing more stressful events than the unmarried, married people also have less depression and anxiety. The social support of family networks obviously plays a role in this, but the quality of the marriage is also important. A troubled marriage can reduce or even reverse the positive impact of marriage on individual well-being.

46 percent of present marriages in Australia are likely to end in divorce.²¹ The health impact on both parents and children is significant, with rates of mortality and illness much higher than in families which stick together. Single mothers are four times as likely as married mothers to be the victims of violence – including violence inflicted on them by their own children. The rate of suicide among the divorced or never-married is higher in Australia than among the married, following a similar pattern overseas.²²

Children of divorced families are more prone to poor results at school and to depression and low self-esteem. American psychologists report that children of broken homes are over-represented among patients at mental health centres. One of the most important recent studies of the effects of divorce on children reported that 90 percent of children react to divorce with strong feelings of fear, anxiety and abandonment. The children seemed to conclude that if their parents could walk away from each other they could walk away from them too.

The old slogan that divorce is better for both parents and children than staying in an unhappy marriage no longer has any credibility. The evidence now makes it clear that separation is only a benefit in cases of actual physical violence. In most other cases it is better for the well-being of everyone concerned - mother, father and children - to stick at it.²³

Another old slogan – that to ensure that marriages work it is best for people to live together first – has also been debunked by reality, with divorce being roughly twice as likely for people who cohabitated before marriage compared to those who did not.²⁴ Cohabitation before marriage has increased from 23 percent of couples in 1979 to 69 percent of couples in 1999.²⁵ My fear is that we are setting ourselves up for a vicious circle where family breakdown is perpetuated by the reinforcement and extension of behaviours which make it all the more likely.

Family Breakdown and Social Pollution

It is important to keep in mind that in talking about the benefits of family formation and family preservation we are not just talking about the happiness of the individual – although obviously this is important. Real social benefits flow from successful family life. It helps build up and maintain social networks, leads people to become involved with their local communities, makes those communities safer, and ensures that children grow into confident, competent adults willing to make a contribution to the common good. We used to take these things for granted. Few us here tonight would be under the illusion that we can continue to do so.

Among the consequences of high rates of family failure are: large increases in psychiatric problems, both among children and single parents; large increases in physical health problems of many kinds; much higher risks of serious child abuse, including death; large rises in learning problems for children; an increase in negative attitudes about the self and others among the young; a much higher likelihood of using drugs and sexual promiscuity; and a very large proportion of criminal behaviour.²⁶

21. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Marriages and Divorces Australia* 1999. 5. The greatest growth in the rate of divorce occurred before 1986 – increasing from 14 percent in the mid-seventies to 35 percent (see McDonald).

22. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Suicides Australia* 1921-98. 25. This also holds among younger people (25-39 year olds); see Australian Bureau of Statistics *Deaths Australia* 1999. 63-64.

23. In case readers think there might be less in this proposition for women than for children and men, Australian figures suggest that among younger women those who are divorced have the highest overall death rate, registering a death rate from cancer alone at 66 percent higher than the total female cancer death rate. See Australian Bureau of Statistics *Deaths Australia* 64.

24. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Marriages and Divorces* 53.

25. *Ibid.* 52.

26. *Vitz* 268.

Without criticising any individual or making judgments about people's situations or experiences, we have to accept that divorce on the one hand and births out of wedlock – what we used to call illegitimacy²⁷ – are becoming major predictors for a range of personal pathologies, and for criminality. Both come with high costs for society. Social policy should be directed to addressing the underlying causes and, where possible, to reversing these trends. The breakdown of the family is the cause of many of our problems, and if we want to fix them we will have to bite the bullet and commit to supporting the family over and above other ways of life that people may choose for themselves.

We have to move to what I would call a preferential option of the family in social policy, law and our economic arrangements. There are many things this might comprise, including a re-examination of no-fault divorce. A few years ago, Barry Maley at the Centre for Independent Studies suggested re-introducing fault as an element in determining the custody of children and property settlements, and I think this is worth considering. I do not see why marriage should be the only contract people can walk away from without penalty. This is one of the reasons why there is so much bitterness attending the decisions of the Family Court. In any case, divorce should certainly be made harder and slower to get.

Divorce involving children damages the social environment. In the past, corporations were made to pay for the damage they caused the environment through special taxes, and one suggestion that has been made is that a divorce tax should be paid by couples who have children and separate to help defray the costs divorce forces society to pay. Whatever of this, I am strongly in favour of measures to make marriage and family financially attractive.

Parents who stick together and raise children well are doing all of us an enormous service. They should be rewarded for this, not penalized. Until the mid-1970s, families received tax deductions for a dependent spouse and children. This has been replaced by what is meant to be a more tightly targeted system of welfare payments. The result, however, is that for an average wage-earner with a dependent spouse and three children, post-tax wages plus welfare have fallen by one quarter between 1950 and the early 1980s. A single income couple with two children on \$30,000 a year receives a little under \$4,400 in welfare; but a couple on \$30,000 *each* with two children using childcare receives almost \$8,600 in welfare!²⁸

This sort of bias against the family should be replaced with measures based on the rationale that healthy, well-adjusted children are the most important social investment for both the state and the community. We might link old-age pensions to the number of children a couple has, or consider a 1 percent reduction in the rate of tax that married people pay for each year they stay married and for each child they have under the age of 18. And one idea that is yet to be properly explored, although it is often mentioned, is income splitting for families on one income.

There will be costs involved in implementing these sorts of proposals. Some or all of it might be offset by a decline in the spending required at the moment to pick up the pieces from family breakdown. But even if the cost is not offset, we should consider it as an investment in the health and stability of our society and so well worth paying. In any case, we should start debating these sort of ideas, in part as a way of gauging to what extent our opinion leaders and policy makers understand or accept the importance of strong families to social well-being and the evidence supporting it.

Religion and the Family

There is one more thing that remains to be said, and that concerns the role of religion in helping family life. I have mentioned the benefits that marriage and strong families bring to parents and children. On all these indicators – health, life-satisfaction, educational success, avoidance of drugs, crime, sexual promiscuity – the benefits are even greater where the family has some sort of serious religious or spiritual orientation (measured in regular worship or participation). The state can and should put measures in place which favour the family and support it, but it is intrinsically

27. In Australia, illegitimacy accounted for over 29 percent of all live births in 1999, compared to 20 percent in 1989 (Australian Bureau of Statistics *Australian Social Trends* 35). After falling from a very low base for most of the twentieth century, ex-nuptial births began to rise in the 1960s and reached 10 percent in 1972. Thereafter they have increased exponentially. See Lucy Sullivan *et al*, *State of the Nation 1999*, Centre of Independent Studies, Sydney: 1999. 20.

28. *Courier Mail* 22 August 2001.

incapable of reversing present social trends and pathologies by itself. The primary initiative in turning things around lies with religion.²⁹

Paul Vitz says that the “single-parent, divorced, broken or non-traditional family can be best understood as the secular family: the logical and necessary outcome of secularisation.” Secularism is the philosophy of the isolated individual living in a world without transcendence. It is a world where a crisis of meaning is inescapable, and with it, a crisis of the family. “As long as the dominant world view is modern secularism, there is little reason for any individual to choose even the restraints of marriage, much less the obligations and duties of parenthood.” For this reason, marriage and birth rates will continue to fall in the West for the foreseeable future.³⁰

The weakness of the family is now at the point where it is beginning to undermine the strength of the state. The state needs children just as much as any couple living in a village in India. The only difference is that the Indian villagers understand this, and we don't. In a secular world such as ours it is very easy to assume that the state will take care of you, and to concentrate on your own pleasures rather than the common good. But as falling fertility rates in the West make very clear, we need to start re-thinking this attitude if we want enough people around when we are old to care for us, pay taxes to support us, and if necessary, go to war to defend us.

If we are concerned about the future prosperity and stability of our society, we should begin taking the failure of the family seriously. And if we seriously want to improve the situation for family life in our society, we will not only need to support it through policy measures. We will also need to get religion. The strong family is the religious family. True and effective love of one's children requires sacrifice, making a gift of oneself to others, and it is this sacrificial love that maximises the chance of an encounter with the transcendent. We may not realise it yet, but the great and now rather dated experiment in radical secularism is ending. It has failed, and the failure of the family is one of the most important manifestations of this. It is time for a radical change of outlook for all of us, and we need it to come soon – for our own good and for the good of the Australian achievement.

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29. Vitz 269-72.

30. Ibid. 272-73.