

## **The family is the school of love, and parents are the teachers**

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*Family illustration by Alexander Hunter for The Washington Times*

The family has stood for millennia as the center of social, psychological and intellectual, spiritual and moral development of children; the place where children learn the core virtues, principles and values that are necessary if they are to develop and lead happy, healthy and productive lives.

Throughout the ages, the world's great religions – Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, indigenous traditions, and many others – have affirmed the family, and its basis in marriage between a man and a woman.

At the same time, we note that sociological and anthropological research reveals consistent evidence of traditional marriage, family and parenting, in virtually all civilizations.

While a variety of alternative visions of the family have been advocated and practiced over many years, few have taken root; these include Plato's ideas on family, Marx and Engels' views, and other utopians and idealists. Such efforts to restructure the family have often led to unhappy consequences.

While the family is pivotal to the building of healthy, stable and prosperous societies, it is often taken for granted. As a consequence, all the heavy lifting being done by families, and especially parents, becomes invisible to many, and, in the process, the social capital that families create is unappreciated, lost or squandered. In its wake comes crime, alienation, moral confusion, and a variety of socially unbeneficial behaviors and practices. Lose our families, and society may lose its soul.

We live at a time when the family is facing enormous challenges, linked to a wide range of factors, including poverty, divorce, distant, absent or abusive fathers, a grossly over-sexualized and promiscuous popular culture, selfish individualism, and moral relativism. Even those who strongly advocate for and believe in traditional family values are often disheartened by widespread failures found in many, if not most families. Indeed, fatherless families, divorce, alienated children, and failed relationships often appear to be the “new normal.”

And yet, despite the unflattering empirical reality of so many of our families, we also must ponder the alternatives. But the alternatives aren't very attractive, and are only likely to make things worse. Therefore, rather than abandoning the family, we must work to strengthen the family, rooting out

corruption and recognizing it's unique value as an irreplaceable social asset. The well-being of our children depends on our efforts.

Research shows that children need committed, attentive, caring parents; ideally two committed partners, a husband and wife, who are ready to work at loving each other and, as importantly, loving their children. Children need to bond with their parents, as a foundation for their own healthy relationships throughout the life cycle. Children need to experience secure, loving attachment to their parents. Parents, in turn, are called to love and respect each other, and to dedicate themselves to making sure their children know they are loved and affirmed beyond all measure.

Good families require good marriages and good parenting skills. Of course, we recognize that in many respects we all fall short of the ideal. As fathers and mothers, as husbands and wives, we have often fallen short of our own aspirations. All around us we see many troubling social trends, including high rates of divorce, low fertility rates, sexual normlessness, infidelity, fatherlessness, and rampant promiscuity.

Can a civilization prosper when its family foundation is crumbling? Can a society that forsakes age-old traditions of marriage, family and parenting thrive, or even survive? It is unlikely.

We are living at a time of crisis for liberal, individualistic, democratic societies. Freedom has often given license to moral relativism. We slide down the slippery slope, while continually reaching out for the hand brake, but to no avail. How long can this continue?

Family is the root of society, and the basis for the intergenerational transmission of language, culture, ethnic identity, moral worldview, religion, and our basic virtues and dispositions. Let us not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Rather let us strengthen marriage and family.

Our affirmation is not presented with spite, accusation or moral arrogance. After all, we can all admit that we have fallen short of the ideals we honor. There is too much divorce; too much domestic violence; too much in-group chauvinism, ethnocentrism, and tribalism. These vices and corruptions of the ideal are not, however, the necessary consequences of traditional marriage and family. Therefore, let us work to strengthen families, to support and mentor married couples, and single-parents as well. Our children need for all of us to be dedicated and loving parents.

Faith-based organizations—churches, temples, mosques, synagogues—must lead the way in strengthening marriage, family and parenting. It is an essential part of each of our spiritual traditions and sacred texts.

The family is the school of love and peace.