The Marriage Problem

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August 1976

The modern American family, caught in the middle of a continuous complexity of social changes, is undergoing intense scrutiny, re-evaluation and change.

More specifically, marriage as an institution is undergoing review, criticism, and revision. An increasing number of questions are being raised by social scientists, religious and civic leaders, and by the ordinary person on the street concerning both marriage and the family; such questions as: Is the American family obsolete? Is progressive monogamy an alternate pattern? Is "group marriage" a possible alternative?

Are the institutions of marriage and the family undergoing a moral crisis or are they merely flowing in the rapids of historical social change and progress? In other words, are we faced with serious problems to do with moral issues within marriage and the family or are marriage and the family merely experiencing inevitable struggle in the revolutionary process toward the future? Perhaps it is both. In any case, it is obvious that the church and the clergy are faced with defining what the problems are within marriage and the family; it is their responsibility to deal with the moral questions of any problems to do with marriage and the raising of children.

That there is an increasing divorce rate, change in social roles, difficulty in sexual relations, infidelity, and neglect of children is an indication that a remedy to marriage and family problems is much in need. However, the difficulty lies not just in realizing that a remedy is needed but in discovering the cause of marital and family discord.

The Problem

In determining sources for the problems within marriage and the family, one is up against a complex matrix of interrelated components:

- Industrial and technological progress: nuclear energy, automation, automobiles, television, etc.

- Social developments: urbanization, mobility, nuclear families, individualism, communes and communities, etc.

- Changes in religious beliefs: secularization, radical theologies, etc.

- Educational developments: socialization in public school systems, increased amount of knowledge, etc.

- Ideological and political developments: humanitarianism, Marxism-Leninism, etc.

- Changes in moral standards: changing values and attitudes, prostitution, contraceptives, permissiveness, abortion, cohabitation, etc.

Also, a group of 18 of the best-known family experts agreed on eight significant changes in the American family within their professional lifetimes to be:
1. increasing divorce rates;
2. diffusion of birth control and/or decline in family size;
3. decline in authority of husbands and fathers;
4. increased sexual intercourse apart from marriage;
5. increase in the number of wives working for pay;
6. increasing individualism and freedom of family members;

7. increasing transfer of protective functions from family to state;
8. decline of religious behavior in marriage and family.

The discovery of these changes is an important factor in determining problems and in seeking solutions. However, even here we see that family experts have dealt with probable symptoms and that there is still a need to seek the causes of how the above changes affect the problems, if at all.

In the March 1976 Psychology Today, Joanne and Lew Koch point out in their article "A Consumer's Guide to Therapy for Couples" that marriage counselors today still hear the same marital complaints as those 10 to 15 years ago. It is interesting to note how such complaints as lack of communication, unfulfilled emotional needs, problems with children, sexual problems, infidelity, finances, in-laws, alcoholism, and physical abuse are, to the Kochs, not necessarily a product of the changing times. I think it is important to realize that although changes in our society affect marriage and families it would be unfair to assume that these changes are necessarily the cause. Nor are they an effect of some nebulous "spiritual" cause either.

It is obvious to me, at least, that the difficulty in dealing with problems of marriage and the family lies in determining a focal point from which a cause can be clearly seen. In my estimation, this focal point exists and stems from the individual's lack of self-awareness and self-consciousness. In a very interesting and impressive article on "Marital Discord" found in the January 14, 1970 issue of the New York State Journal of Medicine, a study of 600 couples applying for divorce showed that it was some aspect of their "interpersonal relationship" that was at the source of their marital conflict. Further investigation showed that this interpersonal conflict was a concealment of the individual's dissatisfaction with himself. The article states that the individual brings his own problems to the marriage. Most of the problems manifested themselves in forms of neurotic dependency.

The Role of the Clergy

The Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Health reported that 42 percent of those who seek help seek it for reasons to do with personal anxieties and tensions in their marriages. No doubt, when confronted with problems in marriage relationships, the clergy face individuals suffering from emotional breakdown and often mental illness. Is the clergy's traditional pastoral-theological educational background sufficient to handle the increased complexity of the problems found in marital and family relationships?

What a couple gains from pastoral counseling has been "biblical answers" to their problems as opposed to reality-based advice or "solutions." The clergy is now beginning to admit that it cannot solve marital problems through general pastoral counseling. Instead, in attempting to be responsive and responsible to the needs of the couples and families in their congregations, ministers are upgrading and expanding their professional abilities by pursuing studies and training in psychology and sociology such as clinical psychiatry, psychotherapy, transactional analysis, child psychology, social-psychology, etc. Such studies also offer training in sensitivity and encounter group processes.

This shift in seeking solutions from a biblical basis to a psychological-sociological framework presents an interesting question concerning the causes for problems in marriage and the family. Again, do problems have their source in a sociological context or on a deeper personal level? As I mentioned before, I feel that the problems stem from the individual and any attempt to develop solutions must begin with individual self-actualization. In our advanced technological culture, the theology and value system of the Christian church offer us only one ingredient in the realm of possible solutions.

The Unification Church Solution

From studying the principles of the Unification Church, I have come to understand that within its teachings lies a hope for the solution to many marital and familial problems facing our society today. I say this because the Divine Principle not only includes the concept of the family unit as its very basis but offers a unique restorative process for both the individuals in the marriage.

However, even within the restorative process for married couples within the Unification Church there needs to be a deeper understanding of the psychological and sociological aspects of the relationship. The whole foundation and purpose of human life must be determined, clarified, and understood. Man must know his purpose, have direction and will. Only then can we attempt to come to a true solution to the problems that beset us within marriage and the family.