

We
must
preserve
the
family
or we
will
perish.

— Alan Keyes

In Focus

Phyllis Kilbourn

This issue of Barnabas is very special to me. We have our first WEC writer, besides myself, contributing! Mary Ellen and Dale Schreiber have a real heart concern for exploited children and are actively supporting and praying for *Rainbows of Hope*. In this issue Mary Ellen shares from her heart some of her teaching and learning experiences at the Bible school in Zuenoula, Ivory Coast.

A most vital part of her presentation is the warning not to take for granted that we are teaching or working with healthy families. If we embrace this assumption, we may not recognize many dysfunctional families in our churches. Such families cannot provide spiritual nurture for their own families let alone reaching out to the hurting children in their communities. Prevention is a giant-sized key in any program with exploited children. Getting the family healthy is certainly the starting point. Or, as Mary Ellen states it, "... seeing families transformed so that the terrible flow of hurt children can be stopped."

We first need to evaluate the curriculums used in our churches and Bible colleges. Do we have a holistic training plan for addressing family needs and issues? Are courses included that prepare couples for marriage and guide parents in the various phases of healthy family living? Do they provide special help for training and nurturing children—both physically and spiritually? Are the courses required for both men and women? Do you have

adequate resource and training materials?

If such a curriculum is in place, conduct an ongoing evaluation of your program to be sure you are targeting real needs. If you do not have a curriculum addressing home and family needs, make this an urgent priority.

I would also encourage you to find a way to determine the "state of health" of families within your sphere of ministry. Mary Ellen gives some suggestions, which will help you define their needs and the type of help required.

A second vital warning Mary offers is to be sure you understand the cultural implications of marriage and child rearing in your setting. How many times I have sat in overseas Bible school classes only to hear a Western approach utilized. As Mary Ellen points out, "Western cultural notions can often hinder effective teaching in other cultures." This is crucial if we are imposing our Western interpretations of home and family on a culture having their own. (Of course all must be biblically based.)

It may be helpful to sit down and write out what you understand about the cultural norms of home and family life in your culture. Then check your understandings with the pastor and other church leaders. From these leaders you can also detect what is culturally appropriate in offering help and training. Such an exercise could well point out the necessity of writing a

culturally relevant curriculum addressing critical home and family issues that fit your culture.

Mary Ellen will share in a future issue on teaching children in the home. Please join with her in sharing your ministry to children or families with your co-workers. In fact, if you don't volunteer you are likely to be nabbed! Any feedback from Mary Ellen's article will be included in the next issue of Barnabas.

My intention is for this paper to be a forum for sharing ideas and ministry. This issue is the first to reach that goal!

We will soon be starting the second year. What topics would you like addressed? What would you like to share? I need to hear from you!

The Charter for the Children

The Church of Scotland, following the idea of the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom, developed a Charter for the Children in the Church to promote the interests of children. The Charter is displayed on church notice boards and used in study and discussion groups. The text of the Children's Charter reads as follows:

1. Children are equal partners with adults in the life of the church.
2. The full diet of Christian worship is for children as well as adults.
3. Learning is for the whole Church, adults and children.
4. Fellowship is for all—each belonging meaningfully to the rest.
5. Service is for children to give, as well as adults.
6. The call to evangelism comes to all God's people of whatever age.
7. The Holy Spirit speaks powerfully through children as well as adults.
8. The discovery and development of gifts in children and adults is a key function of the Church.
9. As a church community we must learn to do only those things in separate age groups which we cannot in all conscience do together.
10. The concept of "the Priesthood of all Believers" includes children.

David G. Hamilton (1991). *Too young to matter? A study guide for congregations on central issues in the Christian nurture of children and teenagers*. Edinburgh, Scotland; The Department of Education of the Church of Scotland.

Save the family!

Mary Schreiber

Teaching is one of the greatest learning experiences. I began last year to teach a course on the Christian family at a Bible Institute in West Africa. I was eager to impart all my information to help the pastors-in-training and their wives establish strong Christian families.

I was stopped dead in my tracks after handing out an assignment asking them to describe their marriages. Were they experiencing happy, fulfilled marriages? I was saddened to read paper after paper describing disappointment and dysfunction. These families needed help if they were to pass on help to others to whom they ministered.

Is this a picture of many families in our training institutes. What will happen to the children raised in those families? How will these leaders be able to touch the many hurting families and children who will surround them where they minister? I realized the enormity of the task, not just in my tiny corner of the world but worldwide, of seeing families transformed so that the terrible flow of hurt children can be stopped.

Where can we begin this transforming process? As I taught the course on the Christian family, I realized the power for transformation that existed in my classroom. Before the end of the course nearly all of the dysfunctional situations had been at least improved through teaching and prayer and the wise counsel of our director and his wife. The classrooms of our institutions are a starting point for transformed families.

How many institutions for Biblical studies have a class geared to help families? It is often assumed that Christian couples attending Bible school must be "OK." The first step to offering help to families attending our institutions is to eradicate the assumption that families/couples in preparation for ministry don't need help themselves.

The next step is to determine what type of help they need. These felt needs must be established first. Ask for a written testimonial from each student or distribute some type of confidential survey. Teaching and prayer can be based on the revealed needs. I found this invaluable tool not only opened

the door for teaching my class but guided me in praying for their needs. It added greatly to my cultural knowledge and resulted in transformed families. Several students later sought me out, and we prayed together throughout the course concerning these problems. This method of survey should be repeated at the end of the course as well.

Western cultural notions can often hinder effective teaching in other cultures. "Families experiencing difficulties are responsible to seek help for themselves; that's not my business" would be my Western approach. In some cultures intervention, done in politeness and kindness, is welcomed and can be a very helpful tool.

Culture and marriage

The culture of the people in the part of Africa where we teach deeply affects the marriage relationship and the quality of family life. In this culture communication between husband and wife is not encouraged. It's not manly to disclose the

Often this leads to very early sexual relations on the streets.

One day a student from my class was running by beating her child. I asked her why she was beating her child so furiously. She said, "because he doesn't fight." Not long after I observed that her training had been very effective: he was now kicking and beating the other children. I suggested to her that perhaps there was another way of thinking. She was my top student scholastically, but she only knew the ways of her non-Christian culture in spite of quite extensive Bible knowledge.

It is interesting to note that this lady had a totally dysfunctional marriage relationship. Unhappiness and lack of involvement by the father in the child's life spilled over in abuse on the child which may later result in the child seeking refuge on the street.

Another culturally acceptable idea, but biblically unacceptable, is lying if the situation demands it. I have heard top Christian families in the church

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secrets of your heart to your wife. In fact, it's very dangerous, because it is believed that she is not to be trusted. To whom, then, do you talk? You talk to your best friend. Men talk to men and women to women. To be seen sitting talking to your wife is a shame. You will be thought of as a weak-willed individual and not to be respected.

But this particular cultural *moré* does not line up with Biblical principles. God brought Eve to Adam to be his friend and to communicate with him. God did not bring another male friend to Adam. The story of Adam and Eve may be well known to Bible school students but often they have not heard how to apply it to their family situations. The yearning for this type of close relationship and friendship in marriage is often in the heart of the couple. Lack of teaching or courage to apply the principle cause both members of the relationship to suffer. The children also suffer. Lack of communication between the couple results in poor communication with the children. Children then seek satisfying relationships outside the home.

lying to their children to coerce them into obedience. "If you come with me I'll give you some candy." The candy is never given. Dishonesty is taught. This pattern becomes a way of life that affects not only the child but later the whole nation and the church. Corruption begins at home.

Children are gifts from the Lord

If not looked at from a biblical perspective, the whole view of the child and his role in the family and society leads to child abuse. If a child is viewed simply as another hand to work in the fields or wash clothes; a name that carries on an inheritance or a body to be put on the streets to earn money; an offspring to show off sexual virility or an insurance in old age, how they are treated as a child will not be the most important thing. A relationship is necessary. If a child is handicapped, sickly, ugly or unintelligent, his or her worth is diminished. The biblical principle that a child is a gift needing proper care needs to be instilled—even into Bible institute students.

Teaching and training these biblical principles is the key to producing a healthier society with healthier children. The Bible institute is one place where we need to begin this teaching in a serious way to both wives and husbands.

I have noticed that our main focus in this training is diverted toward the mothers. Bible conferences, women's camps and women's church

We can picture this situation in a classroom setting by selecting several students and tying "the couple" back to back, then tying them to others who represent their families. When the couple makes a decision to cling to one another, they are turned face to face, and the ties to family are cut—by the couple. It is explained that this doesn't mean their relationships are cut off with the family but changed.

Putting these principles into practice, requires serious prayer and lots of courage on the part of those living in these cultures. The courage that says "I am different and I will not conform" is necessary for the principles to work (Romans 12:1–2).

groups teach concerning marriage relationships and child education. The mother goes home enthusiastic and ready to put what she learned into practice only to find that, not being the head of the house, she is not able to pass on the information. The result is no change. Frustration and discouragement set in: "This teaching cannot work for us." These courses both in the Bible institute and in the church need to be required courses for both men and women.

The next step, putting these principles into practice, requires serious prayer and lots of courage on the part of those living in these cultures. The courage that says "I am different and I will not conform" is necessary for the principles to work (Romans 12:1–2).

"My husband is courageous enough to sit by my cooking hut and talk to me. He knows it is right and doesn't care what others think." They are a happy couple that radiate the love and joy of the Lord. They are not Bible school students but students of the Word.

Leaving mother and father

One last transforming teaching releases many couples into a deeper, more fulfilling marriage when applied. Genesis 2:24, demands that the couple leave father and mother and cling to each other. This concept is very difficult for couples in some cultures to apply. Where we work culture demands the individual to cling to his or her family—mentally, spiritually and emotionally. In times of crisis like sickness, funeral, or financial needs, often the first one to be consulted will be the respective family rather than the spouse. This action can result in a great deal of conflict.

A Bible institute situation is an ideal place to not only teach these concepts in the classroom but put them into practice in everyday life. The father needs to be encouraged and taught how to begin family times of meditation and devotion. Time needs to be given in the program to make this a habit.

When I began preparing the course on the family, I went to the school's library to assess the resources available to my students. I found virtually nothing. The school has very little money allotted for library books. Books in French are expensive, consequently, theological books come first. I bought four or five good books on the family and loaned them out to the class. The interest those books kindled in the lives of my students more than paid for what they were worth. Bible Institutes need funds they can use to meet the needs of their families.

God gives us a way of healing for nations, families and children. It comes as a result of teaching applied biblical truths about God's views of marriage and family and watering these truths with prayer. We must begin where we are in our homes, churches and teaching institutes. I am very excited about being part of this transformation process.

Resources

One of the latest books on family from an African perspective is *A Biblical Approach to Marriage and Family in Africa*. Published in Kenya in 1994 by the Theological Advisory Group the book is available from TAG at Scott Theological College, PO Box 49, Machakos, Kenya.