

CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE HOME¹

THIS meeting is, I understand, not a religious service in the sense that there is no collection, but I should like to begin my talk with one thing that is usually associated with the beginning of sermons, a text, only I have not taken my text from the Gospels; I am happy to have been able to take it from Her Majesty the Queen's wonderful broadcast on Passion Sunday :—

' It is on the strength of our spiritual life that the right rebuilding of our national life depends. In these last tragic years many have found in religion the source and mainspring of the courage and selflessness that they needed. On the other hand we cannot close our eyes to the fact that our precious Christian heritage is threatened by adverse influences. It does indeed seem to me that if the years to come are to see some real spiritual recovery, the women of our nation must be deeply concerned with religion and our homes the very place where it should start. It is the creative and dynamic power of Christianity which can help us to carry the moral responsibilities which history is placing on our shoulders. If our homes can be truly Christian, then the influence of that spirit will assuredly spread like leaven through all the aspects of our common life, social, industrial and political.'

These are the finest words I have ever heard on the radio, and coming from our Queen, they must have and continue to have a great effect on the nation and the Empire.

' Home ' is an English word. There is no French or Latin for it. It conveys an idea of being at our ease and comfort, among our own people and with our own things around us, a place where we can be ourselves and have some privacy too, where there is understanding and sympathy—and some criticism too, if there is a healthy home life. Perhaps the first essential for national peace and happiness would be happy family life at home. If homes are happy the nation is happy; if family life is strong and healthy, the nation is strong and healthy. Now this implies many things. For happy homes you must have a sensibly built house to begin with; a flat, of course, may be a home, but a house with a bit of garden is much more likely to be,

¹ This speech was delivered on the second day of the Rugby Christian Life Week, May 10th, 1943.

a house that is fairly easy to keep clean, and is well equipped with labour saving devices and well arranged as to rooms, with a place for children to play without being worried by grown-ups.

This is addressed especially to women, for women are the authorities on the home; they are the makers of a home much more than men can be. Various consequences follow from that. A mother ought never to be compelled to go out to work when she has children under school age; never be *compelled*, I say. That is why Day Nurseries are going to be useful, for the mother can't leave a child alone in an empty house and it's hard if she always has to take him out shopping. Nursery schools are useful also when a mother has several children, provided that women who know their job are in charge of them. But after all, nothing can compensate for the mother's care, and if you think of the family meal when all sit down together to it that's real home. And for a happy home, the father and mother and the children must help one another, think of one another, and so they must be unselfish. Do you remember the simple definition of work the Queen gave—'doing something useful that helps others'?—most people are doing something useful in these days; that is a good result of the war and we are happier for it. But what a tragedy it is that it should take a war to bring that about! And all this will help to wipe out selfishness. And then of course we must check the other things that spoil a happy home, bad temper, sulkiness, irritability.

Overwork and overstrain spoil a happy home, especially when it is the mother who is over-worked, and so she ought to have some leisure. And if she has servants, they ought to have some leisure too. But who, after this war, will have domestic servants? I take it for granted that there will be children; In fact I can't imagine a happy home without children. There will of course always be men and women who, from necessity or choice, are bachelors or spinsters, and I suppose there will always be unfortunate married couples who would like to have children and cannot. But in the ideal home there will be children and the best education any child can have comes from his brothers and sisters—better even, perhaps, than what he gets from his parents, or from his teachers. Brothers and sisters know each other inside out, they allow for this and that, they know how far to go in a joke, they won't stand selfishness or bullying, they knock the sharp corners off one another and make a happy little community of their own. The 'only child' misses all that, misses a lot of real education in its most impressionable years, and I don't think he can ever make up for it.

If we look at the state of family life in England at the present day, there are some married couples who prefer not to have children. Some prefer to have one or two and no more. If we look into the cause, perhaps the rising standard of living in England has had something to do with it. Parents seem to feel obliged to give their children the comfort and education which they have had, or would like to have had themselves. But if this means having only one or two children, the loss is surely greater than the gain. A little more hardship would probably have done the children good, and a little more courage on the part of the parents would have made the home happier and less selfish. The childless couple who could have children and won't, tend to become selfish; love between them tends to become lust; material pleasure becomes the principal aim in their life and divorce often ends it. The childless wife who refuses to have any children is bad for any society. It may be want of means which induces married people not to have children, and if this is so then the fault lies with our social system. It is the duty of the State to remove that burden. And the Beveridge Report about which we have all been talking—though few of us have read it—strongly recommends family allowances. I hope you notice that the Beveridge Report need not be taken en bloc as a whole. There are lot of good things in it, excellent things which can be introduced separately by themselves. And the scheme of Family Allowances is one of these. But of course the real ideal is not that, but a Family Wage;—that is, every adult should be paid a wage sufficient for him to keep a wife and family in reasonable comfort. Remember also that Family Allowances won't be sufficient to induce selfish people to have children. I was glad to read these words in a recent speech by Mr. Herbert Morrison: 'I should be the last to suggest that any specific acts of Government or provision of particular benefits . . . can of themselves solve this question. I believe we have got to look to a change of fashion, and that change of fashion itself will come only when there is a change of heart.'

It is so true. You see, we don't make enough of the family in England. We make it hard for young people to marry early, we make it hard for them to get a home of their own suitable for a family, hard for them to afford to have children. Even if we decide to give things to the children—free milk, mid-day meals, etc.—we give them these things, not through the family but through the school. And this is quite wrong. This is not the way to encourage married couples to have children. All benefits to the child should come through the home with the co-operation of the parents. It will

educate the parents and that is what is needed. The more responsibility we put on parents, the more we encourage the home and the family. Such, at least, is my view of it.

But some of you will be wondering why I don't come to religion, and what part religion should play in the home. So far we have been considering the material side, homes, houses, wages, etc. But this is deliberate on my part. For what is religion? It is not merely going to church, it is simply this—the love of God and the love of one another, and the love of one another depends on our love of God. Our Lord, as you know, gave us these two commands, love of God with our whole heart and soul and strength, and love of our neighbour as ourself. If you take his public life, he spent a lot of time teaching, and healing the sick and diseased, and he told us that at the Last Judgement it will be those who have done works of mercy out of love of God, who will be rewarded; because every act of kindness done to one of his brethren he accepts as done to him. So religion includes all these things of which I have been speaking, but it must also include love of God, or it is not religion, and if God is excluded from the home, there will be no strong family life. And you know, to keep up family life is not easy; there has to be self-sacrifice, self-discipline, and above all affection. You see it is not like the sex instinct or the parental instinct which we share with the animals. The family is distinctively a human institution, far above the animal world, and like anything else worth having, it means a great deal of moral effort and strict social discipline if it is to be kept healthy and vigorous. It's no use imagining, as some seem to imagine, that men and women can abandon moral effort and shake off all spiritual discipline without losing the achievements of civilisation and culture, because it is only spiritual discipline which makes us capable of these achievements. If we allow sex or any other instinct to dominate our life, we lose self-control, we become slaves to instinct, guided by it like the animals, not by principles, and this is the very ruin of society. Nothing in society can make up for the loss of family life. The State cannot make up for it. The history of the decline of the Roman Empire shows that, as the family declines, the state grows in power. It was very powerful in those days; its machinery for bureaucratic administration was marvellous—but all the time society was dying, because the natural reserves of vitality on which social strength depends were drying up, and no amount of governmental organisation can take its place. My fear is that this is now happening here in England. If the family fails now our society is dying, our age is past, our civilisation is passing and some

healthier race living under simpler conditions and preserving family life, will take our place. And that is why I am always glad to talk about Christian Life in the home.

If God is in the home, all is well, but no amount of government legislation can restore home life, unless we keep God's laws. We cannot break the law of God without suffering for it. They are, as my friend Mr. Sheed says, like the maker's instructions issued with a new car. You may ignore police instructions, you may drive through traffic lights when they are red without injuring your car, or exceed the 30 mile limit, but if you try to drive the car without any water in the radiator or without any oil in the engine, you won't get very far. It gets red hot and seizes up, and that's the end of your engine.

It is the same if we try to live our family life without obeying the instructions issued by the Maker of mankind. God made mankind; he knows exactly what we are capable of, and how we ought to work, and he has told us what we ought to do. If we obey his Law all is well; if we don't, we perish.

The family is God's unit of society; other units, like schools, or town councils, or political parties, or government departments, are all human units, but God arranges that we are born into a family, father, mother and child. We are not independent individuals from the moment of our birth, on the contrary, as Mr. Livie Noble has said, we are helpless babies, completely dependent on the care of our mother and the support of our father. This is God's way of bringing us into the world and we cannot alter it. So, of strict necessity, no man can choose to be just an individual. Long before adolescence is reached he is affected through and through by the influences of his childhood, and God intends these to be conveyed in a good healthy family life. It is not, therefore, just isolated individuals who compose society but individuals who are already members of various families, and the fundamental unit of political society is the family.

As Christians, we ought not to tolerate any attack, direct or indirect, on the sanctity of family life. Any measure which helps to preserve family life it is our duty, as Christians, to support. Any practices which tend to destroy family life it is our duty as Christians to oppose. You cannot banish God from society and still expect society to flourish. You cannot banish God from the home and still expect the home to flourish. And that is why it was grand to hear the words of the Queen's broadcast—'if our homes can be truly Christian, the nation will be Christian.'

Children begin life at home, not at school; it is home influences which count in life. If God is in the home, all is well, but don't let us make the mistake of thinking that when once we have put education on the right lines the problem has been solved. It hasn't, because we have not yet got down to the roots of the evil. The foundations of society are in the home and until we have happy homes with God's laws kept in them our society is not sound or healthy.

A Christian home is one in which there is love, love between all members of the family, love of God first of all, and the love of God shown by father, mother, and the children; keeping his commandments, and worshipping God by prayer, acts of corporate worship; loving and respecting one another because God loves us. We shall have to answer to him for our treatment of one another. So, let us do all we can to make our homes Christian. Let us begin with our own home because religion has not only to be taught, it has to be lived, and we teach it best by living it ourselves. Father and mother can both help if they worship God themselves and so teach their children to do so. They can teach the children to love our Lord and to say their prayers; and if father and mother join with the children, this is the way to teach a child; it is grand to have the father and mother and children saying prayers together and saying Grace together before and after meals. This is the way to teach religion, to have God living in the home. Thus religion for the child begins in the best possible way, because it begins on the authority of his mother and father, and you know a small child cannot imagine anyone more wise or powerful than his mother and father. As the child grows up and goes to school, don't let there be one standard of behaviour at home and another at school. Get the right sort of school where religion is taught and remember it is home influences that are going to count most in life in the long run. So, to come back to the words of the Queen, 'if our homes are Christian, the nation will be Christian.' And each one of us can do our best, and I hope we shall do our best, to make our own home Christian.

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