

was that lasting sound relations and political co-operation between the state and the churches are necessary and possible. It set down in its resolution the basic principles of church-state relations. These declare that the churches should offer more resolute support for the state and the social order of the Hungarian People's Republic and for the building of socialism because this corresponds with the interests both of the people and of religiously-inclined workers. They should be actively involved in the struggle to preserve world peace on the basis of the idea of friendship between peoples. Furthermore, progressive church figures should participate — as indeed they are already doing — in the Patriotic People's Front, the Peace Council, and the church peace committees; and they should receive representation in Parliament and in the work of local organisations. The state authorities guarantee religious freedom, and by their financial support make it possible for the churches to operate. Church leaders on the other hand should not tolerate

the activities of church reactionaries against our system, and they should struggle against the forces of church reaction.

Alongside the tasks to be solved in this field the Politburo recommends to the government that a fortnightly paper should be published under the supervision of the Catholic Committee of the National Peace Council. The ideological standpoint of the HSWP, which has shown consistency, tolerance and realism, and the strengthening of socialism in our country and internationally have contributed to positive developments in this complex area. The resolution states that:

The camp of progressively-minded individuals in the churches and among church leaders . . . grows in size from day to day . . . They now understand the laws of social development and they have drawn appropriate conclusions: they have decided in the interests of the survival and unity of the church that they should support the power of the working class and the work of constructing socialism.

The Problems of the Family in a Totalitarian State

Dr Václav Benda, a Czech Catholic philosopher and former Charter '77 spokesman, was born in 1946. He gained his doctorate from Charles University, Prague, in 1970 and was assistant professor of philosophy at the same university until his dismissal for political reasons in 1971. Since signing Charter '77 in 1977, Dr Benda has held a variety of jobs, most recently working as a stoker in a Prague hotel. A founding member of VONS, the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted,

Benda was arrested in 1979 and received a four-year prison sentence for "subversion of the Republic".

Václav Benda is the author of numerous political and philosophical documents published in samizdat form. In addition he has written many short articles dealing with religious and moral questions. "The Problems of the Family in a Totalitarian State", written in 1984, develops the theme of the role of Christians in totalitarian societies raised in "Catholicism and Politics in

Czechoslovakia" (RCL Document Vol. 9 Nos. 1-2, 1981). In this latest essay Benda, himself the father of six children, emphasises the importance of the strong family unit based on hierarchy. An abridged version of it is printed below.

What follows is not the result of thorough research into the subject, nor is it based on reliable statistics — given present conditions in Czechoslovakia this would be impossible. It is, for the most part, the product of personal experiences and wide-ranging, often confused, discussions on the theme.

[. . .] From the first, the communist state has used its totalitarian position to launch an attack on all the social institutions. Some of these — the army, the police, the powerful political machinery — were taken over wholesale, while others — economics, education, science and culture — were virtually annihilated or reformed according to the communist ideal. In fact only two such institutions, the church and the family, put up any significant resistance to the totalitarian state, and to this day continue to create problems for it.

The family has always been a thorn in the flesh of the communist, totalitarian state. Most irksome to it is the principle of parentage and the mutual dependence of close relatives, which with fierce tenacity endures all the sudden switches in communist tactics. But the family unit itself has also proved to be a problem: from the purely biological angle it is more difficult to destroy, prohibit or completely infiltrate the family group than other more complex social groups. Furthermore, acts of terrorism such as are currently used to liquidate or alienate troublesome individuals cannot be so well applied to the family as a whole. The first radical attempts to liquidate the

family in the name of some kind of emancipatory revolution, tendencies characteristic of the Soviet Union in the 1920s and felt during the first years of communist rule in other countries, soon came to an end. The totalitarian power soon came to realise that the problem of the family is firmly entrenched in human nature and that by loosening family ties it runs the risk of creating substitute relationships, which would be even more difficult to control. Since that time the state has always kept a very tight rein on the family, attempting to devalue it totally and rob it of all its vitality — social, moral and even reproductive.

While the totalitarian power has not yet succeeded in totally solving the family problem, this is not to say that this institution has not been dealt a mortal blow [. . .]

[In Czechoslovakia] mothers of young children, even mothers of large families, are obliged to return to work. If the family is not merely to survive but to maintain at least an average living standard, both breadwinners have to work for much longer than eight hours a day. For those employed in industry this extra money forms a considerable proportion of the total income.

For forty years there has been a need for new flats in almost every area, which is almost certainly becoming more acute. This is clearly not just a result of the complete inability of the totalitarian regime to solve major social problems, but is part of a deliberate policy aimed at weakening the family institution, preventing the flat from ever becoming a real home or refuge providing at least temporary protection from the outside world. This policy is reflected in the present housing laws, which restrict every person (except most senior officials) to a maximum of 12 square metres living space, or with certain restrictions and at a

higher charge, 18 square metres. This law also makes it in most cases impossible for young couples intending to have large families to find flats big enough to accommodate them. All young families are faced with a dilemma: whether to endure in silence the steady worsening of living conditions, until such time as they become unbearable, or with the birth of each new baby to attempt, with little hope of success, to exchange their flat for a larger one — a costly and tiresome business. The same strict limitations apply also to small houses, which are privately owned and indeed often built by the owner himself. (No provision whatsoever is made under the law for larger families and these are, therefore, totally dependent on the goodwill of the authorities in providing them with at least adequate accommodation.) And this state of affairs is evidently so acceptable to the state that it has tolerated the growth of a large-scale black market in flats, the existence of tens of thousands of unoccupied flats saved, by means of “dead souls” and other loopholes in the law, for yet unborn children and grandchildren. Moreover, it has turned a blind eye to that considerable percentage of the population which has two homes, compensating for poor everyday living conditions with a so-called “holiday home”. This policy is further reflected in the building profession as a whole, which constructs exclusively flats smaller than the stated minimum area, i.e. sixty square metres. These are designed primarily for overnighting in, or conceivably even for watching television in. All recently built flats incorporate the so-called “nucleus” — w.c., bathroom and kitchen — ensuring the most elementary physiological functions. But as the public has not yet developed the habit of copulating on the toilet, sleeping in the bath or watching television in the

kitchen, it has been found necessary, in the short term, to adjoin to this “nucleus” additional space.

One could go on to describe in detail a series of factors designed to bring about the destruction of the family: from the failure of services to the intentional overworking of children, with the demands of school and extracurricular work making their day far exceed the statutory eight-hour working day of adults. It is perhaps also worth noting the systematic closure of small, local schools in the cause of centralisation. This forces children to spend hours walking or travelling to school and at the same time helps advance the process of weakening family bonds.

This said, it is time to turn to the positive part of this essay.

To the writer of this article marriage and the family are such important institutions that he cannot share the currently popular view of them as restrictive ties. Furthermore, the Christian tradition, which has prevailed in the Western world for a thousand years, views the family as, amongst other things, the embodiment of God’s three most basic gifts to man.

The first of these is productive fraternal love, in which we are by virtue of our very proximity bound to our neighbours, not because we are deserving of this love or have any right to it, but because of our mutual need [. . .]

The second gift is freedom, given us so absolutely that mortal and immersed in the affairs of the world though we are, we are none the less capable of making lasting commitments. Every marriage vow kept, every act of fidelity in the face of adversity is a radical defiance of our mortality which raises us above the level of angels.

Finally, the third gift demonstrated within the family is the value and unique role of the individual. In

virtually all other social roles we are replaceable and, rightly or wrongly, may be stripped of these roles. Yet between couples, children and parents it is not cold, calculating justice but the law of love that prevails; and where love fails completely still there remains the appeal of joint responsibility for mutual salvation, which does not permit one to abandon undeserving children, unfaithful spouses or aged parents.

What then does the author believe Czechoslovak citizens instinctively long for? For a dependable, stable family, fostering mutual love and ensuring a permanent sharing of responsibility. For a real home, intimate and closed to external adversity. But these aspirations can only be realised if a number of conditions are first met. Some of these we can fulfill ourselves and should not be afraid to do so, whilst making every effort to ensure that those beyond our means come within it.

First of all we must recreate family relations which offer hope, though not a guarantee, of some overlap with the life to come and thereby enrich every family member. This is not to advocate parental pressure of any kind, nor the foolish aberrations of feminism, nor even some kind of pseudo-equality of family members or the glorification of children. For the family is not just the sum of its members. The Christian conviction makes this clear: it is Christ who is the real centre, and it is in His service that individual members share their mutual salvation. Fundamental to this is the idea that each of these members and parts can have a meaningful existence only in the service of others; that the privileges each enjoys is, or should be, balanced against his duties and obligations. This idea is particularly relevant to the family. For purely biological reasons equality in the

family is virtually impracticable. But inequality, which does not accept that individuals are irreplaceable and entails far more obligations than privileges, is immoral and eventually destructive.

Psychologists are well aware of the often tragic consequences of attempts to substitute or combine male or female roles, and of the burden of being an only child. In "normal", or rather natural or large families, the writer considers a hierarchical structure to be ideal. This is natural and useful, with the older children automatically ruling over the younger, while accepting responsibility for their upbringing and protection. For their part, the younger children learn obedience and a sense of the wonder of the world through the love and attention of their brothers and sisters.

Unfortunately, however, living conditions are seldom right for this kind of family. There are at least three prerequisites.

Firstly, the husband's pay must be sufficient to provide adequately for the family's needs. This is something Czech wives long for, and for which they are even willing to sacrifice some of their feminist ideals [. . .]

Secondly, the flat should be a real home, that is a comfortable, private place, safe from the outside world; a place from which we set out to experience life and to which we know we may always return. It has to be a place to which any member of the family can bring guests, a place in which to watch television together and to which unexpected guests may come. It has to be said that the solution to this problem depends not so much on the size of the flat, but rather on the practicality of its design and how suited it is to housing a family.

Thirdly, education must be education, not a systematic negation of individuality and the destruction of

all moral qualities. This clearly applies to all state education (no other type exists): pre-school, school and higher. It is scandalous that totally inappropriate demands of time and intellect are made on children, clearly not with the aim of achieving improvements in their performance, but with that of undermining and repressing the children's individuality. Equally scandalous is the fact that the length of a child's education depends on the cadre qualities of his parents. And lastly it is scandalous that, in violation of international agreements ratified by Czechoslovakia, parents are not free to determine the orientation of their

children's education, all children being taught according to the same atheist and socialist ethic.

All this has an unfortunate effect on the family itself: every child has the right to be fed and changed, to ask a hundred and one questions, to wear out his clothes and break a window, to be oversensitive during adolescence and self-confident after. Moreover, he has a right to a guaranteed place in the family circle. For it is only there that he learns to respect authority and the hierarchy. If the family does not grant the child his rights, it cannot reasonably expect him to fulfil his obligations and duties.

Samizdat Bibliographies and Documents

Keston College continues to publish a comprehensive listing of Soviet religious samizdat, which is updated periodically as new documents are received. Readers may request bibliographical summaries of all Soviet religious samizdat, or of specified denominations only. Photocopies of complete documents are also available. Summaries and texts ordered from Keston College cost 10p per page (plus VAT, UK only), plus postage.

Information about samizdat documents from other countries is available from the respective researchers at Keston College.

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