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Hodel



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FAMILIES FOCUS ON THE WORLD

from Paul Williams in Switzerland

'NARROW', 'ISOLATED', 'cushioned', 'inward-looking'—these are some of the verbal arrows with which the nuclear family has been attacked.

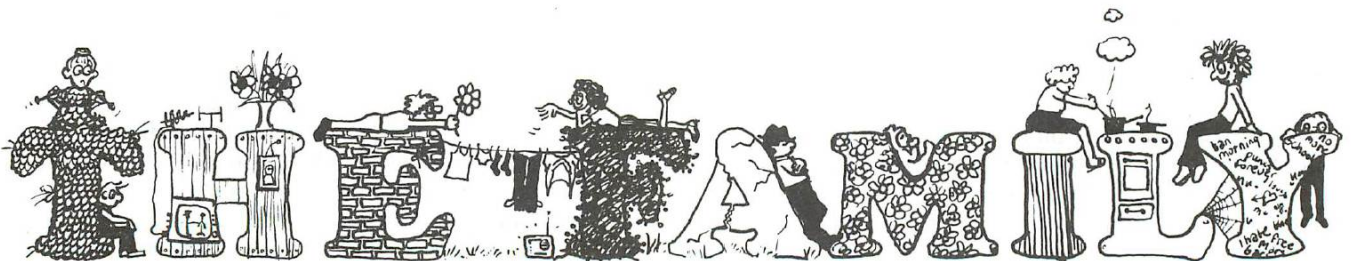
There may be some truth in these accusations, but this was not the picture painted by an international family conference just concluded in Switzerland. It portrayed the family not as a fortress holding the outside world at bay, but as a place where we can learn about the world, because many of the great issues facing the world are issues in the home as well.

'Families focus on the world' was the title of the 10-day conference held at Caux, the MRA conference centre above Montreux. It was attended by some 500 people, including 120 below seventeen. With, for example, families

from Japan, Uganda and Egypt rubbing shoulders with others from Finland, Belgium and Canada, it would have been hard for anyone to avoid absorbing something of the international atmosphere.

To explore the links between family and national situations, five major themes had been selected—power, peace, money, work and food. They were examined first in the family and then in their national and international contexts.

Could answers worked out in the family point to where solutions might be found on the larger stage? One participant who thought that they could was Dr Abdo Sallam from Egypt, attending the conference with his wife and three of their grandchildren. Presently Chairman of the Arab Company for Drug Industries and Medical Appliances, Dr





Gardner

Former Egyptian Minister of Health, Dr Abdo Sallam, with Mrs Sallam and two of their grandchildren

Sallam was a Minister of Health under Presidents Nasser and Sadat.

With his wife and in his family, he explained, he had learned to take decisions only after taking time to seek for God's direction and having regard to principles of absolute honesty, purity, love and unselfishness. 'Having been in many more or less important positions in my country, I never regretted a decision I took on this basis. Many of the decisions I shared in were of great national importance, though often we did not realise at the time how much they would affect the whole country.'

In the session on 'Power: who decides in the home and in the nation?' he related an incident where a decision made by President Nasser and the Egyptian Council of Ministers had been based on wrong information. He had been absent from the meeting when this occurred. Fortified by his deep conviction that decisions could only be right when based on correct information, he had succeeded in getting the President to reverse it—something quite unprecedented.

When examined, the means used to exert power in the family corresponded to a remarkable degree to those used in large organisations and in nations. These might vary from physical force (in the extreme child-battering and wife-beating) to making use of money, exclusive knowledge, the ability to disrupt, 'withdrawal of co-operation', tears, temper, praise and affection to get one's way.

Speakers who had employed various of these methods instanced how healing and transformed relationships had resulted from apology. A young New Zealander who had imposed his will by threatening to withdraw from the family circle had written a letter putting things right with his mother. A German father, speaking with two of his sons, told how he had provoked the elder one to explosion (the 'detonation' of a chocolate pudding all over the kitchen) and how relations had been subsequently restored.

Others discussed the power of strong personalities and of ambition in national and family life.

Peace

'Peace starts in the home' was the title of a session which looked at creating peace on the level of human relationships. Andrew, an 11-year-old from Uganda, made a link between the family and the world when he spoke at the end of the conference. 'I have been wishing that the world could

find a way of making peace instead of threatening to blow each other up,' he said. 'Here I have had the thought to be kinder to my brothers and my sister.'

A 12-year-old girl, whose parents had been divorced, told how she had found at the conference how to get rid of hate. It began with honesty about her feelings. 'I hated my step-mother for taking my father away from me. All the time I wanted people to feel sorry for me and say how bad my step-mother was. Now I have written a letter to her. That is my part in bringing change.'

A secretary described how peace had begun to be restored to her family shattered when her mother had left her alcoholic father. 'One day I realised that I had spent nearly 25 years of my life forcing myself in as a buffer between my parents—defending my mother and fighting my father.'

First she had found a new approach to the problem from Al Anon, the self-help group for families of alcoholics. Then, earlier this year, she read a book which opened a new chapter for her. 'It presented to me a practical God who, it said, could speak and guide you daily if you would only spend time early in the morning in quiet with him.'

'I decided to make my own experiment with faith and I gave my life to God and asked Him to come in and take over. My first thought was to tell my father what I had done and, horrific as that appeared at the time, I followed God's word. It led miraculously to a moment several weeks ago when I realised I had developed a love for my father and should go and tell him.'

'My mother, too, has found a faith which she never had and is a changed woman—at peace with herself and not tormented by guilt all the time.'

'We now have a peace and unity in our family which I thought would never exist. My parents are still separated, but though we are physically apart I know that we are held together by God and His love.'

Peace, it was emphasised, was not just the absence of conflict. It was, rather, the positive unity that comes when conflicts are resolved. James Hore-Ruthven, who lives in London and was present with his family, put it this way, 'In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says to us, "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God." Not the peace-lovers, not the peace-marchers or even the peace-keepers, but the peace-makers.'

Fear was a bad foundation on which to build the future.

Yet fear was so often fanned and manipulated by both sides of the arms debate. 'What is needed is not mobilisation of fear, but liberation from fear,' said another speaker.

Cash

Nobody seemed to be short of stories about money in the family. 'Can we talk about it, or only argue?' the session title asked.

I liked the story told by Françoise Munz from Lausanne, Switzerland, about deficit financing in her home. When her daughter was six, she started giving her 20 centimes pocket money each week. 'At first she would just spend it right away. Then, after we had talked it over, she decided to save for a few weeks in order to buy something more worthwhile. When she had one franc I took her to the shops again. She saw something she really wanted, but it cost one franc and ten centimes. She asked if she could have the extra ten centimes out of next week's pocket money, and I agreed. Going a little above what she had become a habit and I often forgot what she "owed" me. One day I decided that the overspending should end. Now she can only spend what she has, and if something costs more, she has to wait. It is important to learn that lesson early.'

Charles Piguet, who lives in Montreux, told how his son, at the age of six, had been given a large gift of money. At first he and his wife had been angry. Then they saw it as an opportunity to help their son learn something about the responsibility of having money. He had been quite unable to decide between all the attractive things he could buy. They told him that he had three choices: he could spend the money outright, he could give it away to someone in need, or he could keep it until he knew what to spend it on.

'After a little thought, he decided on the third course of action. It came to him quite clearly that this was the thing to do, and he was completely satisfied.'

Money so often divides. One couple related how they had got into a fight over money they might get if they won a *Reader's Digest* jackpot prize!

Could money, instead of being something that divides classes, countries and families, be something that unites them, Mrs Piguet asked. 'If we are guided by neither greed nor fear, and if we say honestly what we think, it can happen.'

Finnish businessman Paul Gundersen warned that a pre-occupation with profit and cash could blind industry about the problems that lie ahead. 'And it is a gross misjudgement of the longing for greater aims that you find in many young men and women in business and industry.'

Work

All the themes were illustrated in short sketches written and produced by the teenage drama workshop, as well as being discussed in smaller groups. The sketch on work was set in the office of a company personnel officer interviewing for a vacant position and illustrated different attitudes to work.

French music teacher Felix Lisiecki told the session how his real interests had lain outside his job, which he had seen simply as a means of earning money. A visit to Caux had sparked his imagination and his teaching methods had changed. He wrote songs for his pupils which contained truths and which stimulated their minds. 'God has a plan, a strategy for our work,' he said. 'Work which has some-



Bishop Chrysostomos of Kitium, Cyprus, with Reverend Elkanah Folorunso of Nigeria

thing of God's purpose in it can become exciting.'

Ethel Roberts, who had been responsible for the training of secretaries in the British Civil Service, agreed. 'When I began work I was a reluctant secretary,' she said. 'It was second best to me. I really wanted to be a teacher. So I was always restless, just living from one weekend to the other. When I met MRA and learned that God had a plan for my life, I began to accept my job as the place God wanted me to be. Life became interesting, sometimes exciting, and I began to find satisfaction in it. I started training people and so my original ambition to teach was fulfilled in a different way.'

'I have found that to accept and live fully into retirement is as great a challenge. There is security and prestige in a job, and just like the unemployed it is shattering to realise that you have lost your identity—that it doesn't really matter whether or not you get up in the morning.' She had found that through taking time to listen to the 'still small voice' of conscience and direction, she could still find 'a creative plan for living'.

The importance of encouraging even quite young children to help in the home was avidly debated by our discussion group. One couple from the West of England had excused their daughter from work in the home, especially when her studies became more serious. But later they had had to face her accusations that they had left her unprepared to cope when she was on her own.

Food

The subject of food provided a final link between the family and the world. Finnish MP Vaino Rautiainen, attending the conference with his wife and daughter, illustrated the changing attitudes to hunger and plenty by reference to the history of his own country. Whereas in the last century hunger had been a serious problem in Finland, with whole villages starving, people were now more likely to suffer from overeating.

There was now enough in the world to feed everyone, but sharing it out and finding the will to balance inequalities remained the problem. 'If we can answer division, greed, corruption and laziness we can succeed,' claimed Jim Wigan who has farmed in both Africa and Britain. 'They are the things that lie at the heart of the problem.'

'When you give spiritual food to children, they begin to think about the material food of others,' said Bishop Chrysostomos of Kitium (Larnaca) in Cyprus. During the



Hodiel

The Rautiainen family from Finland

United Nations 'Year of the Child' he and a headmaster had worked with refugee Cypriot children to produce a play about the plight of even poorer children in the Third World. They had sent \$10,000 raised from showings to UNICEF and started an organisation to help fight world starvation.

'We must bring up our children to regard food, like life, as sacred,' said Monica Spooner, a doctor and mother of three from Edinburgh. 'In our home we have a rule that the children must have at least a teaspoonful of everything that is served. Also that nothing more is given until a plate is clean.'

Others stressed that the care put into preparing and serving food was as important as the food itself. 'When I am lazy I find I need more expensive products,' said one housewife. 'Although it may not be true that if we eat less, others will automatically eat more, we can use food in the home to answer greed,' said a father of three boys. 'It is a basic need of our society.' Another family told how they had regularly gone without their Sunday joint and sent the money saved to help with an MRA action in another country.

Uncorked

A family conference on such topical subjects, organised for all ages and attended by so many nationalities, could not fail to be fascinating in its outreach and variety. That it had an unusual depth too was underlined for me by a remark of a Norwegian teenager. 'At home, there are only one or two people I can talk to about everything,' he said. 'Here at Caux I can talk to everybody about everything.'

New decisions by young and old signalled that the experience of the conference was breaking old moulds, transforming relationships within families and breathing new life into different situations. Some teenagers spoke of finding an answer to fear and shyness, others told of deciding to hand over their lives to God.

Two Finnish sisters spoke at one of the last sessions. 'My life was like a bottle when I came here, full of questions but with no answers,' said Tuuli Aulo. 'During the everyday life here I have found answers to my questions. I have sometimes felt uncertain about my future. Here at Caux I realised there is a plan of God for everyone. I don't have to be worried any more. I will take the cork out of the bottle and tell all my friends in Finland what I have experienced here.'

Her sister Marjo said that meeting so many different people from so many countries had given her a new interest in the world. 'When I go home I will read the newspapers more thoroughly and watch television news more closely and with more interest. I think the best place to practise what we have learnt here is in our family.'

MARGARET PALMER is an attorney in Chicago, Illinois:

AFTER DIVORCE— UNRAVELLING THE WEB

ONE EVENING my husband and I were walking with a friend as our children went from door to door collecting candy and showing off their costumes. Our friend was talking about the divorce he was going through. No easy words of advice came—the anger, bitterness, humiliation and despair felt very familiar to me. This is my second marriage. I was divorced from my first husband about seven years ago.

So many of my decisions at that time were made out of fear. I jumped to the nearest person or job. I couldn't wait; I couldn't be alone. I asked angrily why this had happened to me. I wasn't very good, but did I deserve this? It wasn't fair that people should look down on me as a divorced woman. I was a victim of circumstances. I was stuck with a small child, no money and no family; I had lost everything I ever had and everything I ever expected in life. But I ducked the help people offered me. There was a certain satisfaction in at least controlling my life (and others around me) to that extent.

But there were people around me who loved me in spite of everything. Time passed and a healing set in.

One afternoon, sitting on a balcony in the sun, I saw a spider in the middle of its web. As I looked at it, I realised that my life had been very like that spider's. I was the centre of my world, I had lured people to me and used them. Then another clear thought came. 'God made that spider and He loves her. God made me also; God loves me too.' I had to begin to unravel the web of self-deceit I had woven around myself; there was no need for it, I saw how destructive it had been.

The change came slowly. I took a few steps forward in faith, beginning with my present husband. Slowly, haltingly, sometimes painfully, I began putting straight the half-truths and filling in the gaps. Sometimes I had to go back and correct myself where my courage to be totally honest had failed. When at last all the deceptions I could remember had been corrected, there was a tremendous sense of freedom. We no longer needed a protective barrier between us. Although we went over some rocky ground, we built a strong foundation for our marriage. We had a new joy and sharing between us.



Braeckle

Margaret Palmer

As I dug further, I uncovered the truth about my first marriage. I had entered it for a number of vague reasons—I wanted to get away from home; other people thought it was a good idea; I wanted to be supported while I studied music; I had been in love with someone else and I thought I would never love another man so it didn't matter who I married. My first husband had wanted very much to marry me and, I think, in his own way had loved me. For me it was a sort of arrangement and I was angry when it did not turn out the way I had expected. I never accepted him with his problems and I did not pray for him.

Although I could not go back and change things, I felt at least I had to say sorry for what had happened. He had lost his business and a great deal more. He had started out with one of the finest educations possible and with family advantages and money, but he had lost it all and was now serving a term in federal prison for misuse of his clients' funds. I decided that one thing I could do was to give him back some jewellery he had given me. He could use it to begin his life again when he was released from prison. At one time I had thought, 'Over my dead body will I give him anything'—he had spent huge sums on luxuries and travelling, paid nothing for the support of his child and made my life as tough as possible. It felt strange to go against the grain of feelings I had had for years, but I knew it was the right thing to do. Realising my part in what had gone wrong and correcting what I could cut loose one more strand of deceit which held me down.

The past no longer poisons the present. The freedom from hatred and bitterness is incredible. Here in my home with my new baby girl, I feel surrounded by love. How will I teach her? Will as many of her decisions be based on fear or can we together find God's purpose for our lives in faith? ■

The writer, mother of two adult sons, lives in Britain:

No hothouse on the rock

ONE OF OUR SONS once wrote to us that he felt that we were a close, united and loving family, but must beware of becoming like hothouse plants. I was hurt, thinking of all that had gone into creating a family with those positive qualities. But I knew that I had to swallow my pride and try to understand what he meant.

I began to see that home and family must mean more than self-indulgence and personal satisfaction. They are a school for life and as such the basis of our democratic system.

The challenge is how to create the rock on which to build our foundations. I think that one of the ingredients is a willingness to risk everything—even losing each other—rather than lower the standards which we know in our hearts are necessary for us all to become the people we are meant to be.

But alongside this we need a willingness to stand aside and allow each other total freedom to discover and carry through our own decisions and convictions, trusting that we will each learn from our mistakes.

I once realised that what one son resented more than anything was my assumption that I understood him. He felt

I was intruding on his privacy. He'd been through a bad time mentally and physically and needed the security of a home which was available without question and free of the pressure of my feelings. After two and a half years he admitted us into his confidence again. We each reserved the right to be wrong, to learn and find it is possible to disagree without destroying the basic rock. ■

Breaking the sound barrier

by Maria Grace, Berkshire



WE LIVE HAPPILY in a block of four terraced houses with small gardens. Happily that is, except for the irritation caused by the incessant yapping of our neighbours' dog.

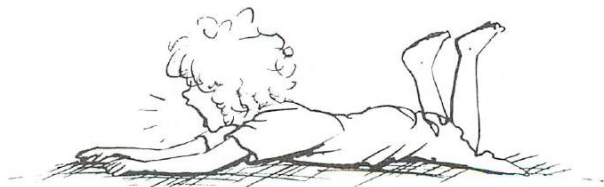
I wanted to say something to our neighbour about this without getting angry. But as soon as I mentioned the dog, I was met with a flow of words attacking our three-year-old daughter Karen, for her human equivalent of yapping. After about five minutes I was ready to explode. Then out it came: 'If that dog barks once more I'll throw a brick at it!' This led to the inevitable threat of legal action.

After our neighbour went indoors I sat down feeling shattered. Then up came Wendy, aged four, who had picked up the highlights of the conversation. 'Mummy, why are you going to throw a brick at the dog?' It sounded the most normal thing in the world.

This sort of thing can easily escalate, so when my husband came home he spoke to our neighbour's husband over the fence and invited them in to talk it over. Once again some heat was generated, but our husbands provided the calming influence.

Our neighbours insisted that their dog never made any noise unless provoked, as it had been when Karen poked it with a stick through the fence. At that moment the dog, which was alone next door, started barking. We were pleased that our case had been proved and started to say that Karen was really a happy child, who didn't cry more than others. There was a loud bang from upstairs, followed by an energetic howl. For the first time in her life, Karen had fallen out of bed. The humour of the situation helped to break down the barriers. I apologised for threatening to throw the brick and, interestingly enough, in the two months since the dog has not made a sound.

When we were both hanging out our washing next day she asked me if I ironed it all. I was so glad we could talk again in a normal way. If this hadn't been sorted out, I don't think I could have uttered a word to her, for a long time. ■



Extracts from a talk on married life by Stella and Kenneth Belden in St Martin's Hall, Knebworth

HUSBAND AND WIFE ARE ONE...

Kenneth Belden

MEN USUALLY HAVE a quite unreal picture of themselves. They have no idea of the fears, angers, resentments, desires, hurts which impel them but which are thrust down and covered up. But they come out in their attitudes and actions. This is why they often mess up relationships at home or at work or elsewhere, why they mishandle the important meeting with management or the union, or antagonise their best customer, or get in the hair of the choir at church or the headmaster at school, or whatever it may be. So the insight of wives is of paramount importance.

A few months after we were married, I came home one evening in a vile mood. Stella asked, 'What's the matter?' I snapped back, 'What do you mean, what's the matter? Nothing's the matter.' A child of two could have seen I was lying, so she persisted, and finally I burst out, 'So-and-so just treats me like an office boy!'

So-and-so was one of my oldest colleagues, a bit senior to me. My head of steam was so high that it was plain to Stella that there was more to it than some casual remark by an old friend in the course of the day. So she tried to find out what lay behind it. I hadn't the faintest idea. But she knew there must be something, so she kept at it. And because she loved me I began to feel able, for the first time, to look at the hurts and feelings I didn't even know were there because I had pushed them so deep down inside me that I could no longer feel the pain of them, although they were governing my actions. In the end, as we talked and pondered, it suddenly came to me: an incident six years before when this man had done something to me which I felt was unjust, and I hadn't had the nerve to have it out with him. But, although we often worked together, I had nursed this deep resentment against him, and this is what had burst out again that day.

Vital honesty

Some days later I had a long talk with him and apologised deeply for my bitterness. I told him exactly what had happened six years before, and we have been the closest friends and colleagues again for the past 35 years.

These hidden hurts, resentments, hatreds, battered self-esteem, go very deep with all of us. We can nurse such feelings for years, for decades, even about people in our own families. They often start in childhood. They can show themselves in a range of feelings from open hate right through to a reluctance to work with a particular person or visit someone—'Do we have to go and see your mother this weekend?' But the root is the same, and Christ can heal it the moment we face the truth about ourselves and are ready to put things right and turn to Him for forgiveness. The fact that He can make us different is all-important in married life. Otherwise we can pigeon-hole each other: that's what he always does; she's always like that. It can go on for 30 years, and it's deadly. But the good news is that people can be changed, ourselves included.



Loughman

I have always been grateful to Stella for the way she has helped me to change over the years. She hasn't often gone in for the traditional feminine pressures—tears, tantrums and temper (though she did blow up rather effectively at Chicago airport last March, which I richly deserved!). Such pressures may force some temporary concessions for the sake of a quiet life, but tend to leave the husband as stubborn as before. Stella has a way of just being honest with me. She will ask if I realise how what I said or did made her, or someone else, feel. Then she tells me, without heat or judgement but with considerable clarity, and she leaves it as a factual statement, without further comment. It is then between me and God what happens next. It is very effective. It may call for thought, and prayer, and wisdom and courage, but honesty is vital in the home, if people are going to mature and advance together.

Everything needful

We should never expect from each other what only Christ can give. Many of our demands in marriage reveal a search which we hope will be satisfied there when it can only be fulfilled elsewhere. 'Our souls are restless till they rest in Thee.' Of course He mediates many marvellous things to each of us through our love for each other, as He does through anyone, married or unmarried, who cares for other people. But in the last resort our job is to draw each other to Him, not to ourselves. It takes the strain out of difficulties, however great, because all we have to do is to accompany each other to the throne of the heavenly grace, as the prayer book used to say, and He can do everything needful for each and for both of us, above all we can ask or think.

...BUT WHICH ONE?

Stella Belden

HUSBAND AND WIFE ARE ONE, but interestingly they don't have to be alike—in fact it's much more interesting if they aren't! The differences add, and we must learn to respect them: which sounds terribly obvious, but it took me a long time to learn.

It's curious how you can think you've learnt to get along with people pretty well, so of course it will be all right living with the person you love so much that you've chosen to be joined with them for life and to create a home and family together. Surely, being in love will make everything easy?

Anywhere else in life, if a situation gets too stressful—or even just unenjoyable—you can usually move on. You can leave home, change your job, gradually see less of some people and more of others. But you're stuck with marriage in a much more fundamental way. To grow together something has to give. One never wants it to be oneself, so one turns one's mind to one's partner.

I don't know how many women are like me in imagining they are right about improvements and changes which—if Ken would just accept my advice—would make him a much better, more successful person, of whom I could be even prouder!

Early on I felt he needed to be more dynamic, more like a friend of ours who, I felt, had similar abilities but seemed to make more of them—more obviously, anyway. One morning, as Ken had his hand on the doorknob I gave him a parting injunction. Suddenly his shoulders sagged, the stuffing seemed to have gone out of him. 'Heavens,' I thought, 'what a way to send him out to the day,' just the opposite of the effect I was aiming at. So I learnt.

That incident taught me to accept the person I had married, not to try and make him into someone else. The fascinating discovery is that with acceptance comes fresh understanding. When someone feels wholly accepted they can trust you more and you begin to hear about things they've never told anyone else. They may even begin to glimpse things they never knew about themselves, things that affected their attitudes to themselves, qualities they never knew they had.

Some blocks can shift fairly easily when opened up to the loving searchlight we can play on them for each other. Others are harder to shift, and may be deeply rooted in family life and upbringing. It is important to be interested in *this and learn to know and love each other's families*, which are so much a part of ourselves.

Ending of guilt

Ken was an only child, much loved by his parents, with whom he could talk much more freely than I could with mine. They had their difficulties, but they *did not* turn into tragedies, and there was always a tremendous sense of encouragement and support between them.

I was fifth of six children. There were four deaths in our immediate family before I was 18—father, stepfather and two brothers—and anyway it was not a family where life was particularly easy. Our mother was more French than English, intelligent and artistic with a probing Latin mind; a feminist before her time but intensely loyal and conscientious as wife and mother. We were wonderfully cared for materially, but Mother was grappling with her own stresses and problems and was not free to understand or help with ours. Looking back I wish I had been able to give her more, instead of feeling resentful she wasn't giving more understanding to me.

Mother used to call me her snow princess—after the princess with a heart of ice in Hans Andersen's fairy tales. These things stay with you. I felt my heart was near to breaking sometimes, but with the French logic we had been raised in I would say to myself it was probably breaking over myself, not anyone else, and so it was a heart of ice. Things like this make you feel guilty and you don't like yourself.

All through our married life—until quite recently—Ken has had to cope with my guilty feelings, and I have marvelled and sometimes protested at his cheerful refusal

to feel unnecessarily guilty himself, in spite of my efforts to make him feel bad too. I thought it a lack of reality.

'Reality' was always more negative to me than positive. Once I was going on at Ken about something on these lines as we went to bed, till he lost patience, told me to 'jolly well think it out for yourself', turned over and went to sleep. That shook me wide awake and into a moment of great truth. God put the thought into my mind, 'Your roots have been planted in a soil of tragedy, and everything you draw up from that soil is negative. Let Me transplant you into healthy soil, so you draw positive nourishment.' I knew only God could do that. I thanked Him, went to sleep and woke feeling entirely different.

Since then I have been able to accept Ken's love and God's love more fully, to accept forgiveness, and to believe that God loves me as I am, warts and all, made me and wants to use me. It has made a fundamental difference to life and opened the door to many good and growing things.

Satisfaction

We have found a recipe for success in decision-making in the four absolute standards with which someone has summarised the Sermon on the Mount: absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute love.

Expressing a hurt, or a fundamental disagreement, or putting some proposition which may affect our plans or our whole lifestyle, calls for an *honesty which may be difficult*. The decision to have a child, for instance, may involve giving up the wife's earnings and faces many today. The whole subject of money demands honesty. You have to work through inherited attitudes to understanding and a common mind. Unless we take time to do it—and it may need quite a bit of prayer, waiting for, or even creating, the right moment, and being free from demand for instant understanding—barriers can begin to grow, and lives begin to be lived separately. But if we do do it, however hard and painful it may be, it will be strengthening and enriching. This is where that first decision—to be one for life—gives solid ground to stand on.

The next ingredient in this recipe for success, *absolute purity*, is linked closely with satisfaction. We all know how when we're fed up or dissatisfied we start nibbling. It can lead to horrifying results on the scales! I think in the same way a lot of sex problems arise because there is a lack of basic satisfaction and clarity in the relationship.

God has given us our bodies, and took one on Himself. If His plan for us is marriage and the creation of a loving family, of course the physical side is His glorious gift. But if we start making it the chief source of satisfaction it can go bad on us and make our whole relationship brittle. And if, when things get tough, one uses something which should be an expression of one heart and mind as a means of cementing the cracks, one may be disappointed.

But suppose life is really tough from circumstances outside one's control—illness, unemployment, unavoidable separation, stresses at work or at home which make husband or wife hard to live with for a while. This calls for a decision, made on one's own, to ask God for a miracle and to have the faith that He'll give it—the miracle that He will free us from the satisfaction we want, and give us His. It takes faith, but He does do it. This is where those other two ingredients of unselfishness and love come in. We do it for the sake of the other, and a deeper love begins to grow, fed by constant turning to God for His endless resources. ■

The writer lives in the United States:

Heartbeat House

FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS my husband and I have lived in a city where the population is almost equally balanced between black and white. We work with people of all racial and economic groups who are trying to build a community which has positive experiences to offer to the nation. We see this as a natural extension to our home and family life.

Recently I had lunch with a woman whose husband is involved in urban development. I asked her to explain more about his fascinating work. She replied, 'I don't know anything about it.' When I looked surprised she added, 'I guess I need an arena of my own,' and went on to tell me of her excellent volunteer work in the schools. It made me realise that just putting people together in a home doesn't necessarily produce common aims.

In our family we want to discover a uniting commitment which produces real teamwork. This requires taking long enough in quiet early each day to ask God to illuminate the barriers which grow up between us and to give us direction for our lives. We have managed to explain to our lively two-year-old what an important part of the day this is for us, so that he plays quietly in his room. We look for adequate information about the world and current events and we try to take time over dinner every evening to discuss the day.

A year ago an outstanding black woman came to our city to take up a position in race relations. She launched some excellent projects, but her new approach was not always welcomed. We decided to invite her to our home for dinner, although I was not sure she would want to come. She arrived full of her concerns and frustrations. We listened. Then she told us about her childhood in foster homes and her struggle to put herself through university. She began to express her vision for our city. She was full of hope, eager to help bring change and excited about the possibilities she saw. Finally she said how lonely she had been and that we were the first white family to invite her to their home. It was an evening when a friendship was built.

No housewife blues

On another occasion 76 people from every section of the community crowded into our home to meet a distinguished overseas visitor. Neighbours and friends brought the food. In order to get more people in the front door we had to ask some to move out the back into the garden. People were delighted to meet our guest, but even more surprised and delighted to meet each other. The vice-president of one of the Community Colleges said, 'We should have events like this all over the city.' He felt that an evening in a home together was even more valuable than the race-relations workshops he ran.

A group of students and young professionals meet

regularly in our home on Sunday evenings for a meal and discussion. Recently they put on a reading of a play which they felt focused the issues and decisions that people in our country must face. Now others in the city are eager to have further readings of the play.

We invited one of these students, a young man from Hong Kong, to join us for Easter Sunday. He asked if he could bring a professor from Peking who is studying in the United States for two years. When they arrived, our little boy, who is usually shy with strangers, suddenly took the professor by the hand and led him upstairs to see his toys. When they came down for lunch the professor was smiling, relaxed and part of the family. I had made a small Easter Garden as a table decoration to help explain Easter to our son. Our guest asked about its significance and in a simple way we were able to explain the deepest meaning of our faith and the hope of a new world that it gives us.

Using our home in this way is a total answer for me to the 'housewife blues' or the feeling of being trapped at home with small children. Each day can be exciting as we discover how to make our home a heartbeat for our city. ■

A mother writes from North-West England:

Home executive

I ONCE HEARD of a woman who was so disgusted at people thinking that she did not work because she was a housewife that she described herself as a 'home executive'. Her description highlights one of the pitfalls for a mother—to get so involved with plans and organisation that there is little time left for relaxing or for talking and listening to others in the home.

I find the desire to control other people in the family a strong temptation. It's frequently non-productive. Recently we were watching a brilliant World Cup football match on television, which was going to continue long past our son's usual bedtime. For various reasons, not least because my authority was being questioned, I insisted that he went to bed at half-time. He resisted vigorously but finally departed. I was left feeling that I had done the wrong thing, and he did not get the sleep I considered he needed as he emerged from his bedroom an hour later demanding to know the final score. It was a trivial, but I hope timely, lesson on the fruitlessness of imposing my own will instead of discussing an issue with the family and together seeking the right solution.

The Pope recently described the family as a place for 'total mutual self-giving'. Sometimes I feel, often falsely, that I am doing more self-giving than others—for example, when faced with a sink full of washing-up and a meal that must be produced on time. Voicing my resentments honestly is often enlightening. With my husband's help, it's easier to see where I have taken on too much or where others can help. ■

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