

Today's Children—A Lost Generation

By Pastor Rolfe Westendorf

Never has a generation treated its children so poorly:

1. Today's adults have presented to children an enormous federal deficit. Unwilling to lower our own standard of living, we have borrowed billions that our children will have to repay, after we are no longer around to be responsible for our carelessness. I am in no position to argue with economists about the real future impact of this deficit. I am not sure that children can sense the burden that we are dumping upon them. Nevertheless, our willingness to spend money that must be repaid by future generations is symptomatic of the general lack of concern for their welfare.
2. Our generation has denied to children the right to life within the womb. I do not deny that a woman who is unwillingly pregnant has some rights too, but that is another issue which is inextricably involved with abortion. But the fact remains. Our law allows children to be killed before they are born. And that sends a message to every child born since 1973, even to those who were treasured and nourished by their parents. Our government would not have protected them before they left the womb. The law itself diminishes the worth of children, and children are aware of this, especially when they are also rejected and abandoned by their parents.
3. Our generation has sanctified the proposition that making money is more important than tending children. Our generation did not invent the idea, but it has supported it by word and action so that part-time parenting is the norm rather than the exception. Even in the church the woman who "has to work" has a horde of defenders. For the sake of this argument it is not necessary to establish that women don't have to work. Whether necessary or not, the effect is the same, that making money is more important than tending children. Hence children are less important than money. And it doesn't matter whether one actually believes it or not. The practice of part-time parenting plainly shows children that they are less important than money, thus distorting their values and endangering their self-esteem.
4. Our generation has accepted the concept of single parenthood. That makes it easier for those who are single parents, but it does not discourage others from becoming single parents. For the most part single parents are not to blame for their dilemma. The fault lies rather with a society that promotes sexual activity and devalues the marriage vows, so that single girls get pregnant and marriage problems are solved by divorce lawyers. Single parents are guilty no more than others of the problem. But the acceptance of single parenthood implies that single parents can give children as much as two parents, and that is simply not true. Our generation has in effect approved depriving children of one-half of their parental resources.
5. Our society has placed the rights of women ahead of the rights of children. I have no problem with equal rights for women. I support and respect the roles established for men and women in God's Word. But I also recognize that society as such does not accept the authority of God's Word. I cannot expect society to be guided by the superior wisdom of the Bible. But feminism aims to set women free from the responsibilities of motherhood, as if this were a burden that men had designed for women. But the burden is because children are. And women's rights have made no provision for the nurturing of children. Perhaps there is a way that all the benefits of mothering can be derived from other sources. But that is not feminism's concern. Many women have neglected the nurturing of their children without first being sure of the

alternate sources of nurturing. The oversight has been disastrous. A generation that sends mothers off to war has certainly lost track of the needs and rights of children.

6. Our generation has reduced the procreative act to an act of entertainment. The most obvious evidence is a flood of erotic stimulation that results in unwanted pregnancies and unwanted children. Pity the poor child who comes in to the world only because his biological parents wanted to have fun. And then fear him, for when he is old enough he will repay the society who has treated him so poorly. But the acceptance of sex for pleasure sends a larger message to today's children. If sex is a game, then children are toys, because they are an intricate part of the game. Cheap sex means cheap kids. Again I'm not sure that the implication filters down to the child's consciousness, but they can figure it out from the tangible results of this policy. And the attitudes that they absorb from their elders, particularly their immediate elders, will convey to them the notion that they are worth less because of cheap sex.

7. Our generation has supported media that forcefully covers up the damage that is being done to children. Surely the media wails and laments the plight of abused and abandoned children. They condemn politicians for their failure to spend more to help and heal the wounded child. But these unwitting hypocrites at the same time promote every activity that cripples the home from which children must draw their character and strength. The media currently sees itself as the champion of individual rights fighting against religious bigotry. And the public, which funds the media, has allowed that perception to stand.

8. Our generation has deprived children of the opportunity for meaningful labor. Of course, the children don't mind this in the least. The older generation regularly grumbled and complained when their parents thrust these chores upon them. But those necessary household duties were essential to building character. The child who throws a shovelful of coal on the fire and carries out the ashes has contributed something of value to the comfort of his family, and he feels good about himself for the contribution he has made, especially if his labor is duly noted and appreciated. Advancing prosperity and technology have robbed today's children of that satisfaction. Even the satisfaction of reading a book has been replaced with the lethargy that comes with watching hours of television. At the same time, some of the remaining opportunities for youthful labor have been taken over by adults who cannot trust the children with machinery. Who will not relinquish the fun of running these machines themselves.

9. It is, of course, true that most of these negatives are not unique to our generation. Today's adults have personally endured them and survived, even succeeded. The special burden that falls upon today's children is the fact that all these negatives are occurring simultaneously. Taken individually, these burdens are not unbearable, and not every child endures every one of them. But the cumulative effect upon children as a whole has contributed significantly to the increasing rate of failure that we are reading about in our daily newspapers.

No other generation has treated their children so poorly. Today's children are for the most part well-fed and well-clothed. They have little drudgery and bountiful entertainment. They have excellent opportunities for education, but they are not better educated. They are poorly prepared for adult responsibilities, because our generation has fed their bodies and starved their souls. And we will be sorry to see much of what their adulthood brings.

The damage may already be too extensive for significant correction. But if we recognize the problem, we must take forceful action now:

1. I have little hope for a political solution to the problem. A Christian monarch could do what needs to be done. But the facts of political life make it impossible to pass the necessary

rules. This is democracy, and the majority is not interested in making sacrifices for the sake of their children. And those who are interested don't realize that sacrifices have to be made.

2. A defensive posture is called for. Many Christian families remain strong. But they will need more help as the negative pressure increases. Every congregation needs a family ministry and forceful preaching to support it.

3. We also need to take offensive measures by using the media to promote the values that strengthen the family. When the networks and the newspapers present something of value, we need to shout it from the housetops. But we also need to go head to head with the purveyors of sex and violence, with advertising that says sex is sacred and marriage is to be honored by all.

4. Personally we need to show our own children that they are precious, by giving them our time, our attention, our love and our discipline, and avoid drowning them with a flood of material delights.

5. Finally we need to preach the Word, both Law and Gospel, as we have always done. In fact, that is most of what we can realistically do. And since we have already been doing that, perhaps nothing short of Judgment Day will end such abuse of children.