

# Liberty and Responsibility

John A. Howard

*John A. Howard is a senior fellow at the Howard Center on Family, Religion and Society. This speech was delivered before the Court Street United Methodist Church, Rockford, IL.*

I want to begin by talking a little about Eric Harris and Dylan Kliebold, the two young men at Columbine High School in Colorado. You will remember they are the teenagers who planned and then carried out the slaughter of their fellow students last year. It was an utterly horrifying act. The American people were stunned. Clearly, something had to be done to put a stop to the repeated shootings on the school grounds. And so schools put in video monitors and metal detectors and increased the security police and hired more counselors and campaigns were mounted throughout the country to enact more stringent gun control laws.

You know what? As you think about all these efforts, it becomes apparent that nobody seems to understand the problem. Those two young men were, to put it bluntly, savages. They were completely incapable of recognizing and refraining from an act of absolute evil. They are moral ciphers, devoid of any sense of right and wrong.

And there is another aspect of the people's misunderstanding of the Columbine tragedy. Those two young men were the hapless victims of their country's default in its most fundamental obligation to its children. Every nation, large or small, tribal or industrialized, in order to sustain itself, must train each new generation how to live responsibly within that society. Human beings are not born with inclinations to behave as cooperative members of a group. This does not happen by itself. All youngsters have to be taught to be honest, lawful, truthful, kind, cooperative and all the other qualities of character that constitute civilized community life.

In America, until World War II, this process of acculturating the young people was carried out quite well. The standards of acceptable behavior, largely drawn from the Ten Commandments, were inculcated into the young people starting at an early age, by the churches, the schools and colleges and the families. And this was not an uphill struggle because most of the society was in agreement about these standards. Thus, the newspapers and magazines and films and plays did not utilize coarse language or present instances of explicit sexual activities. At all of America's residential universities, until 1970, parietal rules stipulated the hour when visitors of the opposite sex must leave the dormitories. Those parietal rules, by policy, indicated the formal support of the family and of pre-marital chastity by the entire academic community. New generations learned the established customs of cooperative and civilized behavior very much as they learned the language. This socialization was not a big hurdle to jump or a great burden to bear. It was just the

established way of life.

As you know, all this has changed. In the past thirty years, all the ancient concepts of right and wrong have been banished. The people have been encouraged to do their own thing rather than live by anybody else's concepts of acceptability. And God, once held to be sovereign over all peoples and all other matters, has been sidelined and instructed to stay out of public deliberations.

The trendsetters in the universities, the media and other idea industries have accomplished this transition from a Godly to an unGodly society, by wielding three rhetorical weapons—academic freedom, freedom of speech and freedom of the press. If someone advocates standards of right and wrong, that person is immediately and forcefully labeled an enemy of freedom by the attack dogs of the idea industries. The offense that is charged in that labeling is so reprehensible in a free society and so difficult to refute that almost no public figure even tries. University trustees, for example, with almost no exceptions, vote in behalf of academic freedom as an absolute, whenever a contravening issue is raised.

There are, of course, some independent organizations, publications and religious bodies, many of them with wise and courageous leaders, working to proclaim biblical truths and sustain the responsible way of living that once prevailed throughout the nation. Their success, however, has chiefly been in serving their own constituencies, as in the case of the home-schooling movement.

Today, the dominant leadership in the government, the schools and colleges, the media and the professions of law, medicine, publishing, advertising, social services, among many others, either supports or is willing to live with the orthodox opposition to standards of civic and moral behavior. The aversion to the inculcation of norms of right and wrong seems to be a fixture of contemporary America.

Are we, then, condemned to go on producing new generations of cultural orphans, unacquainted with and indifferent to the obligations of civilized living? Are we, in effect, condemned to go on cloning Eric Harris and Dylan Kliebold and vainly trying to restrain their savage passions with security forces and gun control laws? Well, perhaps we are. And then, maybe not.

Recently, 1600 delegates assembled in Geneva, Switzerland, to participate in the second World Congress of Families. They were Muslims, Mormons, Jews, Roman and Eastern Orthodox Catholics, Evangelicals, main-line Protestants, African tribesmen and even a Navajo Indian, representing 275 organizations. A year earlier, the Planning Committee, drawn from the five inhabited continents, met in Rome to determine the agenda and devise an invitation that specified the meaning of the term "natural family" in behalf of which the Congress was initiated, the reasons for the gathering, and the themes that would be addressed.

I quote now from that invitation, which was designated "The Call."

The natural family is the fundamental social unit, inscribed in human nature, and centered around the voluntary union of a man and a woman in a lifelong covenant of marriage, for the purposes of: 1) Satisfying the longings of the human heart to give and receive love; 2) Welcoming and ensuring the full physical and emotional development of children; 3)

Building strong bonds among the generations to pass on a way of life that has transcendent meaning.

Three other purposes are listed, but I move on to the reasons why the Congress is needed.

Today, certain social, political and economic forces threaten the natural family, tearing the social fabric at local, national and international levels. Under slogans such as “modernity,” “globalization” and “progress,” and in the name of “civil society,” these forces have weakened the bonds between husband and wife, parent and child, and the generations.

The opening plenary session of the Congress took place in the great hall of the United Nations building in Geneva. Dr. Allan Carlson of The Howard Center in Rockford, Illinois gave the opening address. It was his vision and energy that led to the creation of The World Congress of Families in 1996. He reminded the audience that fifty-one years ago the United Nations adopted The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That declaration, he said,

. . . was a reaction to the horrors and crimes of Nazism and related ideologies. . . . In their pursuit of power and empire, the acts of marriage, human reproduction and child rearing were subordinated to the demands of the “racial state” with terrible results. And so, a critical task after the war was to restore the concept of the authentic, real or natural family.

Among the provisions of the Human Rights Declaration, which he quoted, is Article 12:

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence. Article 16: 1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and found a family. . . . 3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. . . . Article 26: Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

During the course of the Congress, a number of the 103 eminent speakers told how various governments and societies had disregarded or repudiated these ideals with devastating consequences. One such speaker, Dr. Margaret Ogola, also was featured at the opening session. She is a pediatrician from Kenya. She founded, and is the Medical Director of a hospice for HIV-positive orphans. She is also the Executive Director of The Family Life Counseling Association of Kenya. She enumerated various tribal taboos that were rooted in religious beliefs, which in the past had effectively sustained marriage and regulated the sexual activity within marriage and prohibited sexual activity outside of marriage. She said,

It appears that the general instinct of humanity (standing in awe before the power of the procreative act) was to shield the sexual act from misuse; and also to shield the society from the impact the misuse of sex could unleash

on a populace. . . . The Judeo-Christian and Muslim influence insured for a time that the idea that the relationship between a man and a woman was, to a certain degree, sacred (a taboo, as the Africans would say) so it persisted for a while in newly converted African communities . . .

However, by the late sixties, this ideal of sex only between men and women committed to each other in the bond of marriage began to come apart. . . . Once it began, the collapse of the ideal of the sacred nature of sex rapidly resulted in children being born out of wedlock, marital breakdown, abandonment of children and the elderly who used to be held in great esteem, and, of course, the explosive increase in sexually transmitted diseases of every imaginable kind.

What led to this massive collapse of an almost universal ideal? I put forward some suggestions:

- 1) Thanks to contraceptives and their worldwide marketing—most people could get away with infidelity and pre-marital sex, but deception, of course, quietly destroys relationships.
- 2) Demystification of sex: sex was no longer seen as a wonderful and sacred gift, nor the power to beget children as anything very special. A) Value-free education, based entirely on how pregnancy and disease could be avoided. No morals or responsibility to anyone is mentioned, other than momentary consent. B) This is Planet Hollywood—Worldwide dissemination of a culture of pleasure as the ultimate desirable good. Movie figures committing adultery, engaged in overt sexual play. Pure pornography can now be beamed to all corners of the world.
- 3) An entirely individualistic philosophy of ME and I. Traditional concepts of loyalty and the greater good of the family or society no longer exist. Divorce is cast in an attractive light. . . . A loss of any sense of Deity to whom all are ultimately responsible for their actions.

Dr. Ogola concluded by saying

The beauty of sexual love lies in the fact that it is “love”—that is, a decisive act of the will to love and to cherish, even when things get tough; yes, even when the spouse proves sometimes to be less worthy. He who lives in a mature way will then rise to the full stature of his potential as a human being—for when we truly love, the good comes back to us.

It was a powerful and unforgettable address. Remember that her profession is service in a hospice for HIV-positive orphans. When she spoke of the explosive increase in sexual disease of every imaginable kind, it was dramatically evident that she spoke from the heart-breaking experience of her daily work.

The cover article of the January 17 issue of *Newsweek* is entitled “10 Million

Orphans.” The subtitle is “The AIDS epidemic in Africa is leaving a generation of children without parents. Behind the plague and what can be done.”

As you can imagine, the “What-can-be-done” section turns out to be a replay of the Columbine High School response.

The trouble is that no one, rich or poor, makes choices on the basis of information alone. . . . The most successful prevention efforts have aimed not just to inform people, but to change social norms.

The authors then report how clever advertising has turned condoms into fashion accessories, but there is a problem.

Unfortunately, African women have little to say in condom use, or anything else. . . . “Empowering women is critical to controlling the epidemic,” says Barry Bloom, Dean of The Harvard School of Public Health.

The assumption is that indiscriminate sexual activity is here to stay and so the bad consequences must be blocked by equipment, clever marketing and imposing modern norms of male/female relationships.

In its preceding issue, *Newsweek* had a different take on this matter. George Will’s column was also devoted to the AIDS tragedy in Africa. Will described it as

. . . a plague akin to the Black Death which killed one-third of Europe’s population in the middle of the fourteenth century . . . In the fourteenth century.

Will goes on to say,

. . . the problem was in the air, food and water. . . . In Africa, AIDS is transmitted primarily by heterosexual sex. The problem is promiscuity.

You will recall Dr. Ogola’s statement,

It appears that the general instinct of humanity (standing in awe before the powers of the procreative act) was to shield the sexual union from misuse, and also to shield the society from the impact the misuse of sex could unleash on a populace.

This comment came just after she had told how tribal religion had previously confined sexual activity to married couples.

Last month, the newspapers, periodicals, talk shows and pundits trumpeted the great success story of America over the past century and marveled about the phenomenal accomplishments of our men and women of medicine, science, technology, industry and government. As the Cato Institute’s newsletter proclaimed,

There has been more improvement in living conditions in the United States in the twentieth century than in the entire world in all previous centuries combined, according to a study released today.

The title of this Cato study is "The Greatest Century That Ever Was."

In all the millennial self-congratulation, very little was said about the dark side of America, which shattered the nation's shell of complacency as it burst forth into public view at Columbine High School. The voices here and there which tried to call public attention to the cultural meltdown didn't get much play, except to be herded off into penalty boxes labeled "Radical Right" and "Religious Right."

Well, friends, Dr. Margaret Ogola, and the AIDS plague in the midst of which she lives her life, cannot be disposed of by name calling. As George Will flatly stated, the AIDS pestilence is the consequence of promiscuity. Human society cannot survive mass promiscuity, and we need to remember that word is not restricted to sexual license. It means indiscriminate action without analysis of the consequences. When it is applied to sexual activity, it signifies that the act has no significance other than temporary pleasure. There are no considerations of family, or commitment or possible consequences.

The nonjudgmental society is a promiscuous society. It is what Margaret Ogola designated "Planet Hollywood," spewing forth cultural products created with no thought as to how the incessant representation of uninhibited sexual activity smashes the moral foundation on which the family stands, and leads to crippling or deadly illnesses, and no thought as to how the incessant representation of killing and violence and lawlessness desensitizes impressionable minds to the civilized requirement of refraining from killing, violence and lawlessness. And it is Planet Hollywood as it operates in the schools and colleges which now provide within the educational programs nonjudgmental presentations of almost every activity that the norms of moral and civil society once deemed wrong and harmful to the general well-being.

I want to return now to the Congress and cite just one more of the many powerful and unforgettable speeches. This one is by Madame Jehan Sadat, the widow of Egypt's late President Anwar Sadat. She lives part-time in the United States. She has founded, headed and supported numerous charitable organizations and is often referred to as First Lady of the World.

"The family," she said

. . . is the most basic and critical element of society, whether it be a thoroughly modern one or one of the few remaining primitive, isolated societies existing in the world today . . . The influence of the family is beyond measure, standing alone in its position of prominence in determining the quality of life . . .

Without God, without the family, mankind is lost, left to wander and stumble blindly in a wilderness. . . . Without God, we will never be able to realize the beauty of peace and the wholesomeness of life.

When the family is sound and the relationship among its members is rooted in mutual love, trust, respect and dignity, then, and only then can the entire community hope to be strong and weather the storms of life. Under any other conditions, society, no matter how developed or how prosperous, is doomed . . .

Although the world has undergone many changes . . . change need not imply the loss of values. Nor is progress another word for moral decay. It is not development and progress that jeopardize values and morality, but rather the absence of a strong and secure moral foundation developed first and foremost in the family . . .

For a society to be fully developed, it must comprehend and accept the relevance, to the welfare of its people, of both social and religious traditions. My religion, Islam, is more than 1444 years old; yet it remains a living system of beliefs, setting forth the principles and codes of ethics that have sustained and will sustain generations of believers. This is also true of other great religions . . . Compassion, integrity, justice, tolerance and love do not belong to one people or religion, nor will they ever become irrelevant or obsolete . . .

Mothers are our first teachers, giving us the lessons and values we will carry for the rest of our lives. A mother's greatest gift to her society is a righteous son or daughter.

The speakers—lawyers, doctors, psychologists, sociologists, clergy, including several bishops and a Cardinal, cabinet officers, social workers, journalists, ambassadors, economists, statisticians, bankers, and study center executives, were all in agreement that the natural family, ordained by God, is the most powerful and beneficial force in human society. It preceded all forms of government and is more important than government. It must not be altered, restricted or interfered with by government, as was affirmed and made clear by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations.

One could not participate in the World Congress without sensing that the reconstitution of the natural family as the accepted norm for all societies offers the brightest hope for avoiding the ultimate tragedy of moral anarchy toward which the nonjudgmental cultures of today are driving the world. The sturdiest bulwark against the eternal conflict of every interest group battling for more than its share against every other interest group is a growing cohort of socially mature, public spirited young people loved and trained in the natural family.

Progress toward that goal will be slow and arduous because the cause of sexual liberation has been waged so powerfully that its advocates are entrenched in positions of primary influence throughout the idea industries. Even so, the tide of public influence may be turning. Of the 1600 exceedingly diverse delegates who attended the World Congress, all but five or six endorsed by vote the Declaration

of support for the natural family, phrased in twelve explicit paragraphs. That represents an unprecedented unity of purpose and dedication.

All of the speeches of the Congress are available on the internet. Although the website of the Congress is a fairly recent acquisition, more than 40,000 individuals have already registered their names and addresses in support of The Call and now the organizational support is beginning to surface. Associations representing more than 14 million Spaniards have just registered their endorsement.

Returning to the question of whether an initiative in behalf of norms of acceptable behavior is a threat to freedom, I turn to a biblical verse that often is cited by the all-voices-must-be-heard people, "The truth shall make you free." That phrase, in which Jesus is talking, is found in the *Gospel of John*, Chapter 8, Verse 32, but it is yanked out of context. The full sentence begins in Verse 31. It reads,

If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

The word "then" is emphasized in Italics in the Bible. It is through following the mandates of Jesus, living a life according to specific virtues, that a person's life becomes truly free.

I conclude with a bit of advice from one of the wise men of the twentieth century. Dr. Viktor Frankl was a Jewish physician incarcerated in one of Hitler's concentration camps. From that experience, he developed a new school of psychiatry, based on the premise that mental wellness is not achieved by helping the individual understand what caused his psychological problems. Rather, his recovery is earned by taking action to resolve the problem. In the latter decades of his life, Dr. Frankl lectured frequently in the United States. In every one of those speeches, he concluded with a plea for Americans to erect a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast to balance the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast, because, he declared, freedom requires a balance between those two ideals, liberty AND responsibility.   Ω