

Robert Walley

Mothers Are Women Too The Value of Motherhood

Motherhood has special significance in every culture as the most complete expression of the special vocation of women. In some developing countries, motherhood is taken even more seriously, and mothers are revered, considered to be a central part of the family. In *Mulieris dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II writes that women make a '**sincere gift of self**' to others, which is made clear and obvious in the case of motherhood. The woman as mother is entrusted with the responsibility of bearing and bringing to birth human beings. The woman has her own way of existing for others, of making a gift of self to others,

Motherhood implies a special openness to the new person. She is entrusted with human beings and has received love in order to give love; it is her characteristic dignity. "Parenthood" is realised much more fully in the woman; pregnancy absorbs all her energies, body and soul, as her body becomes the home and source of nourishment for her child. Motherhood, in Christian tradition since Mary's faithful Fiat, became a part of God's new covenant with humanity. It is therefore the gift to humanity, of such fundamental importance, that it must be cherished and served in special ways, appreciating its dignity as the key to healthy families and societies.

"A Mother"

when you're a child she walks before you.....

to set an example

when you're a teenager she walks behind you.....

to be there should you need her

when you're an adult she walks beside you.....

so that as two friends you can enjoy life together

But do we, in contemporary society, acknowledge and cherish the role of motherhood? Each year, on March 8th for International Women's Day, organizations from around the world come together to celebrate, acknowledge and address issues affecting women. We hear words like "equality", "inclusiveness" and "justice". However, all too often, the word we don't hear, a word central to humanity, is **motherhood**. It is a role too often dismissed and undervalued by today's women's movements. The reason for this is simple. We in the west have reduced motherhood to a choice, and choice shifts the burden of responsibility. Women have been convinced that continuing a pregnancy is an act of choice, and that they are solely responsible for the outcome of that choice. Thus, mothers have been largely omitted from conversations in the public realm about women's issues.

In 2018, during a speech made at the Gates Foundation's Goalkeepers Summit, French President Macron commented that mothers with large families, those with several or more children, have multiple children due to ignorance and lack of education, echoing the prevalent Western stigma against motherhood. Similar statements are echoed in the chambers of politicians, throughout the world. Macron and those like him are seemingly ignorant of the fact that large families have been culturally the norm for generations in many countries, and many successful and educated families, including those in Canada, the United States and Europe, are

included in this tradition. To state that large families is a signifier of ignorance or lack of education not only insults mothers who have specifically decided to have many children, but also adds to the decline in the value of motherhood on a rampant rise in Western society. The treatment of mothers and children, the vulnerable populations in our communities, is the benchmark of a society's moral integrity. It is our hope that world leaders can not only learn from these women and their families, but also support them and provide them with the resources they so desperately need in order to successfully conceive, deliver and parent their children.

Women comprise 49.6% of the world's population. The majority will each spend nearly 20 years potentially becoming pregnant, and then the rest of their lives as a mother. We must bring mothers back to the forefront of our conversations about women, because mothers face especially challenging obstacles. For example, being a mother in Canada or the United States is the primary determining factor as to whether or not a woman lives below the poverty line. Also, being pregnant puts women at higher risk for physical violence (homicide is the number one cause of death among pregnant women in the United States). When a mother chooses to stay home and raise her children, she becomes the greatest protector of the environment, but our society punishes her, not only economically but also socially, stigmatizing and devaluing her role in our community. Worst of all, in countries without proper health care, pregnancy can be a death sentence.

As maternal health care providers, we believe it is our responsibility to offer an alternative to a choice-based consumer culture that prizes wealth and power over inherent value and dignity. We acknowledge that people are shaped by their surroundings. Our focus is to surround women and children with an alternative perspective of life based on community, charity and potentiality. Mothers deserve to be at the centre of our discussions and acknowledgements about womanhood, rather than be excluded and silenced by the prevailing pro-choice ideology.

The year 2017 marked the 50th anniversary of the passage of the UK abortion law, the first in a Western country which brought about a fundamental change in traditional Hippocratic medical practice in obstetrics and gynaecology. Through a process of gradualism, abortion on demand became the basis on which maternal health care was/is based. For the first time, doctors were given a license to use their skills to kill one of their patients, the unborn. This process has continued in throughout the west, today all medical professionals face medical and moral dilemmas with the passage of legislation approving physician assisted suicide on the rise. Doctors will use professional skills or co-operate in the killing of their patients, the disabled, newborns, the terminally ill, and the elderly, as a health care service. The right to practice according to conscience is also being denied and criminalized. The result is that the traditional relationship between patient and doctor will undergo, and is undergoing, a fundamental change from a covenant of trust, to simply a contractual agreement. Thus, medicine will no longer be a vocation. With this and the decrease in religious vocations and increasing pressure on Catholic health organizations, the fundamental ministry of the Church is under threat.

Christian obstetricians and midwives are privileged to serve the co-creators of new life. Therefore, theirs is a special responsibility to provide care, for mothers and their babies, based on life and hope, especially when life threatening complications arise for either or both of them. We need to revitalize the women's movement by advocating the role of mothers, recalling the special vocation of motherhood and its importance to our society. Women's global voice is not a whole without the voices of mothers from around the world.

“The most important person on earth is a mother. She cannot claim honour of having built Notre Dame Cathedral. She need not. She has built something more magnificent than any cathedral- a dwelling for an immortal soul, her baby’s body. The angels have not been blessed with such a grace. They cannot share in God’s creative miracle to bring new saints to heaven. Only a human mother can. Mothers are closer to God the Creator than any other creature. God joins forces with mothers in performing an act of creation. What on God’s good earth is more glorious than to be a mother?”
The Venerable Cardinal Josef Mindszenty of Hungary (1892-1975)

Dr. Robert Walley (1938 – 2020), Founder of the MaterCare International (MCI). The fragments of his last public lecture delivered in 2019 in Rzeszów, Poland at the International Conference „Science in the Service of Life” (photo).

