

ADDRESS TO THE ANNUAL MEETING OF LA LECHE LEAGUE OF MASSACHUSETTS

by

Samuel L. Blumenfeld

You have greatly honored me by inviting me to address you. For, after all, is there a more important audience than this one? Let's face it: without mothers, there is no future for the human race. ~~No consumers to buy the products all of these big companies are trying to sell, no pupils for teachers to teach, no recruits for the armies, no audiences for the theatres, no taxpayers.~~ Yet, we seem to think that we have an overpopulation problem. But the fact is that everyone alive today will be dead in about a hundred years, and unless our ranks are replenished by the mothers of today and tomorrow, our species will become extinct.

But I don't think that mothers were meant to make their decisions about motherhood with the future of the species in mind. I think that each individual woman makes the decision because of factors much closer to her personal life. And of course there are many women who become mothers despite themselves. In fact, statistics seem to confirm that most women, whether they want to or not, become mothers at some time in their lives. So why does our society make women feel negative about bearing children, even though most women will bear at least one child?

Why does our society encourage women to feel that being a mother is less important than becoming a corporation executive or a truck driver? Apparently, what is overlooked is that one of the reasons why men become executives, or engineers, or dedicated careerists is because they can't become mothers. They have no choice in the matter. Nature did not give them the equipment. So much for equal opportunity.

And that is also why the Equal Rights Amendment is ~~something of a joke~~ ^{somewhat misleading:} because, one, it projects a kind of unisex view of our species, which it is not, and two because it denies the very basic differences between men and women. Women can have babies; men cannot. Women can breastfeed; men cannot. These to me are very considerable differences; and La Leche League has been an important influence in helping many of us to understand these differences. By encouraging a return to breastfeeding, the League is making more and more Americans recognize the biological differences that make women into mothers and men into . . . truck drivers, explorers, football players. Our technological civilization has done such a good job in virtually eradicating these biological differences, that it has required a mammoth re-education program for women to discover what it is to be a nursing mother. And happily, League fathers have been the beneficiaries of this discovery which has provided them with a better understanding of their wives' needs and instincts. This knowledge, in fact, enhances the rapport between the sexes. Indeed, one of the reasons why Natural Family Planning is catching on so fast among married couples is because it permits a husband to understand his wife's ovulation cycle so much better. He learns what the feminine mood cycle is all about. Incidentally, I predict that Natural Family Planning is going to put The Pill out of business among married couples once the word gets out that the Natural way has a very positive effect on a couple's sex life. The reports are quite interesting on this subject.

La Leche League is in the forefront of this movement back to the natural: the natural in nursing, in childbirth, in family planning. After having attended the League convention in Toronto, I can't tell you how much I admire your organization and what you have accomplished thus far. When I think of what the Founding Mothers set out to do back in 1956, I can only conclude that they were launching then and there a movement that would truly liberate women, not from being women, but from enslavement to dehumanizing technology. Indeed, there are really two very different and opposing Women's Liberation movements in this country: the popular one which is using technology to liberate women from being women; and your movement which is rejecting dehumanizing technology so that women can be women.

If there has been a significant retreat from motherhood during the last ten years, much of it is related to the egalitarian emphasis of the popular Women's Liberation movement. There is not much difference between a man and a woman if you eliminate the business of childbearing. But once there are babies, the difference between a man and a woman takes on profound significance. A mother is more than just a woman; she is a very special woman, with a commitment to a new life intricately woven with her own. She can divorce a husband even on friendly terms and find a new mate; but she cannot divorce her child without doing it great violence of body and soul. Her child's vulnerability is her greatest trust, and instinctively she understands this.

In Toronto I created something of a stir because I voiced some rather strong sentiments against abortion. Probably about two thirds of the audience agreed with me and perhaps about a third did not. One of ^{those who disagreed} ~~the latter~~ was moved to write a letter of protest to the League Board of Directors, a copy of which she sent to me. In it she defended the right of women to abortion on demand, and she felt that my speech was the one thing that marred the convention for her. "The rest of the

Convention," she wrote, "was a joy and reaffirmed my faith and belief that 'good mothering through breastfeeding' is the key to a better civilization."

I hope that none of you here is so naive as to believe that breastfeeding is a substitute for a moral code, or that breastfeeding alone is going to save the world. The sole purpose of breastfeeding is to make you and your child happier with each other; happier, more contented, more satisfied than if you merely fed your child from a bottle. The purpose of breastfeeding is not to save the world, but to enable you and your child to develop a satisfying and durable attachment to one another. Breastfeeding^{alone} is not the key to a better civilization; only a humane moral code is. Which brings me to a second controversial issue.

In Toronto I also talked about God, because I found it impossible to talk about the sacred calling of motherhood without referring to the Divine Creator and the Divine Will. I suspected but had no idea how controversial a subject God is these days. That being the case, I hope that the atheists among you will hear me out. I certainly don't mean to imply that an atheist cannot make a good mother. Madlyn Murray O'Hare went all the way to the Supreme Court to make sure that her daughter was not exposed to any religious influences in our secular public schools. I assume that her concern was for her daughter's well being. But what is Mrs. O'Hare going to do someday when her daughter is attracted to the Hare Krishna movement, or Scientology, or Rev. Moon, or the Symbionese Liberation Army, or Charlie Manson?

What the rise of religious cultism has taught us is not that young people become rational, scientific atheists when deprived of religious influences. On the contrary, it has taught us that young people have as much of a need for spiritual nourishment as they do for physical nourishment, and when they are deprived of spiritual nourishment as children, they seek it in later life from a wide variety of strange and unpredictable sources, which in the end alienate them from their

parents. There is no greater heartbreak than the child who turns away from his or her parents and transfers filial loyalty to strangers who may want nothing more than to use that child.

And so, as you nurse your child and weave the fabric of a loving and enduring attachment, think of your child's need for spiritual nourishment and find a way to satisfy it. Introduce the child to the traditions and observances of your own religion. If possible, join a church or temple. Observe religious practices at home during appropriate holidays. Get a family Bible and read it. There is no book more spiritually uplifting, more soothing to the troubled mind than the Bible. It has everything. History, drama, heroic figures struggling with the age old problems of good and evil. Above all, it has Man in dialogue with God, walking with God, ~~talking with God~~, Man in rebellion against and submission to God. It projects the objective reality of God in the most dramatic and moving way.

And of course teach your child the Ten Commandments. Don't I sound old-fashioned. But the simple truth is that no better moral code has ever been devised, and it makes no difference whether you believe that Moses received the Commandments from God or chiseled them out of his own head, they are as applicable today as they were four thousand years ago.

Take, for example, the problem of premarital sex. The new morality--as defined by Seventeen magazine--teaches young girls that premarital recreational sex is okay so long as contraceptives are used. The result, however, has been about a million teenage pregnancies, rampant venereal disease, hundreds of thousands of abortions, traumatic emotional experiences, suicides, tragic family discord, and hundreds of thousands of unwed teenage mothers trying to complete high school and bring up infants without the help of supportive husbands. What a price to pay for a few "recreational" moments in the dark.

And so, today's sexual morality suggests the following sequence of activity: sex first, then pregnancy or venereal disease, then abortion or unwed motherhood, then love if at all possible in the mess, and then perhaps marriage. The Judeo-Christian tradition suggests a much saner sequence of events: first love, then marriage, then sex, then pregnancy. You don't have to be religious or even believe in God to recognize that the second sequence is far saner than the first. The only problem is that the saner course requires self-restraint, and in today's hedonist atmosphere of immediate gratification for every itch, sexual restraint is considered hopelessly square.

By now you are probably wondering why a layman, speaking before this group, should spend so much time on religion. The answer is really quite simple. The moral issues of today, issues that are tearing apart the very fabric of our civilization, cannot be dealt with in any other way. Science has had its chance, and science has simply given us bigger bombs, more potent and dangerous pills, and a spiritual emptiness which is driving the human race to greater and greater excesses of brutality and pessimism. The simple truth is that a universe without God makes no sense, provides no meaning, and makes human beings feel no better than larvae in a swamp. What are we? Is not your child a miracle? And is not that miracle a gift from God?

Give the Bible at least equal time with Kojak or Charlie's Angels. Let your ^{ren}child know that there is an accumulated wisdom that has been passed down through the ages for ^{their}~~his or her~~ benefit. The ultimate state of wisdom is not to be found in McCall's latest issue. Let your ^{ren}child discover that the human race has been around long before television was invented. You might indeed consider severely restricting the viewing of television in your home while your children are young. Surveys indicate that children watch television an average of four hours a day -- four hours.

That's a lot of exposure to the peculiar values of show biz: sex, violence, and sensationalism. There is plenty of excitement in the Bible to match that on TV, but it is an excitement related to man's innermost spiritual struggles, and therefore it will help satisfy your child's spiritual needs far better than auto chases and cartoons.

So much for religion. Now, something about education. As a nursing mother you are keenly aware of the special bond that develops between mother and child, and that is one of the reasons why you decided to breastfeed: to enjoy the natural pleasures of that bond. I just ^{spoke} ~~finished speaking~~ of the spiritual bond that a mother can develop with her child. And now we come to what one might call the cultural bond.

Many mothers become anxious as their children approach school age. They are loving and protective and ^dso not want to see their children emotionally or physically hurt in today's troubled public schools. They are reluctant to put them on buses that take them to distant neighborhoods beset with racial tension. They are afraid -- and rightfully so -- to send them to unruly schools where youngsters are being introduced to drugs by their peers, robbed, beaten, or sexually molested. They are concerned with the pedagogical experimentation their children will be subjected to in these new schools without walls, without structure, with no indication of whether these new methods work or not. They certainly don't want their children to become hopeless functional illiterates. And they don't want their children to become alienated from them through the subtle seductions of the new "enlightened" values-oriented curriculum. If I were a parent, the last place I'd want to put my child is in a public school.

As an example of the grief that besets some parents, here's a letter I recently received from a mother in Ohio:

Dear Mr. Blumenfeld,

I have read your book, "the New Illiterates". I agree with what you wrote. Being the mother of a boy about to enter the 3rd grade, I am heartsick, knowing what has been done to my bright young son. What can I do to help him, his confusion is great and so is mine. When are you going to write a book to show parents how to undo the damage that has been done? I was taught to read in the same manner as he. I don't know the sounds of the alphabet myself. How can I teach him? . . . Where do I begin?

I have a friend with three children labeled "Dyslexic". She told me my son was one too. I am sending her the name of your book telling her to read it. How can parents fight this? I have tried to figure it out and the teachers have brushed me off. I am fighting mad but don't know how to begin my fight.

Well, fortunately, I was able to offer this poor woman some encouragement. I had written a book especially designed to help parents like herself undo the damage of educational malpractice. It is called HOW TO TUTOR and I highly recommend it to all of you. I think that every League mother should learn how to tutor her child in the three R's. It is not difficult to learn, and it will create the cultural bond that will strengthen the nurturing and spiritual bonds. Moreover, it will protect your child from the educational malpractice he or she may be exposed to in school. When a child can read before he gets to school, he has a tremendous advantage, particularly in today's chaotic learning atmosphere. I particularly recommend that League mothers work together ⁱⁿ ^{area} on this ~~project~~ and create their own pre-school learning groups.

Find out about the reading problem now, because before you know it, your child

will be ready for school. Moreover, some of you already have older children approaching school age. I recommend that you get a copy of my booklet, "Why America Still Has a Reading Problem," which is on sale at the conference bookstore. I also strongly suggest that you get on the mailing list of the Reading Reform Foundation, of which I am Massachusetts chairman. It is ^{a national} ~~an~~ organization that will provide you with the knowledge you will need about reading instruction when it comes time to put your child in school. It will save you from the kind of heartbreaking situation that that mother in Ohio is going through. It is no picnic to have to sit helplessly by and watch your child's intellect being destroyed by the local school. But this is a common everyday occurrence in every city and town of America. As common as bottle-feeding, and just as strongly defended and promoted.

The fields of pediatrics and education are similar in that both have been plagued by quackery and malpractice. In both, radical innovations have been made with little regard to what their future ramifications might be. For example, during the 1940's and 50's many maternity clinics routinely subjected about four million newborn babies to high doses of radiation on the theory that such treatment would eliminate the need for future tonsillectomies. But today it has been discovered that all of these grown up individuals are now susceptible to cancer of the thyroid because of that supposedly benign dose of radiation. The result has been a massive medical recall operation.

Likewise, American educators during the thirties and forties decided that American children should be taught to read as if English were like Chinese. They didn't bother to inform the parents about this change. The result has been an epidemic of reading disability that has intellectually crippled millions of Americans. But unlike the medical counterpart, there has been no recall. Instead, remedial reading has become a permanent part of American education and a vast new industry

has grown up to service the millions of learning disabled youngsters our school system creates each year.

So you can see, much is required of a mother these days, if she is to protect her youngster from the institutions that may harm him or the forces that want to alienate child from parent. And here is where fathers come into the picture. They can help strengthen family bonds by assisting in weaving the spiritual and cultural bonds as the children get older. They too can learn to tutor and lead grace at family meals. I think that when children see their mothers and fathers at prayer they learn something of great spiritual value that lasts a lifetime.

But I don't want to leave you with the impression that even if you do all of these things, there may not be disappointments. You and I know that there are limits to what parents can do, that your child, like every human being who has come before and will come after, ^{may} ~~will~~ be tempted beyond his ability to resist -- at school, in the street, among friends. The personal struggle against evil is the inheritance and burden of every human being. Mothers ^{ought not to feel guilty of their children's sins} ~~must shed themselves of the notion that~~ ^{our less than} ~~their job is to produce perfect children.~~ ^{be likely} There is no such thing as a perfect child, for human beings are not perfectible. The wise mother learns quite early that her child is a separate human being whose ultimate destiny is in God's hands not hers. The most that any mother can do is simply instill in her child a sense of trust, constancy, and harmony, and hope for the best.

If motherhood is a sacred calling, as I believe it to be, it is because a mother must also be prepared to accept the heartbreak of a sick child, a handicapped child, a child who may one day go astray. It is well to remind ourselves that everyone has to have a mother, everyone, the good and the bad, the saved and the damned, the ugly and the beautiful, the idiot and the genius, the success and the failure. That is why it helps a mother to believe in God, so that she can accept with serenity God's plan and thereby, through the power of her own love and faith,

transform misfortune into blessing.

After I ^{expressed} ~~said~~ these ^{sentiments} ~~words~~ in Toronto, a young mother came up to me at the table where I was autographing books. She carried in her arms a small boy wearing leg braces. An overwhelming feeling of pity and compassion went through me. But I'm sure that she was one of those capable of transforming misfortune into blessing. Later that summer I met a man who had written a book about how he and his wife had brought up a retarded son. Doctors had told his wife that the boy would never learn to read or write. Yet, with patience and determination, that mother taught her retarded son to read and write better than many of the children his age. What hidden strengths we find in ourselves when love forces us to rise to the occasion!

To me La Leche League represents the most pro-life force in America today, because it is centered on love: love between mother and child, which springs out of love between husband and wife. And it is love that springs out of natural needs and natural instincts. When a child experiences that love as his first knowledge of life, how marvelous the world must seem to him.

At the Toronto Convention I was amazed to see so many small infants and babies ^{and fathers.} being toted about comfortably by their mothers. One heard all of the usual gurglings, and babblings, and occasional cries. But not once did I hear that kind of unnerving piercing shriek you sometimes hear in a supermarket when a tense mother and a frustrated child are in conflict. It was a joy to see with my own eyes what La Leche League has accomplished. So many infants and not a milk bottle in sight. Yet, so much satisfaction, playfulness, good feeling, and harmony.

It was marvelous to attend a highly scientific session with infants all over place and mothers nursing spontaneously and comfortably when the little ones seemed to need it. That, to my mind, was a truly integrated audience with no ^{sign or suggestion} ~~possibility~~ of a generation gap. The children, in fact, were a pleasant distraction when the speaker

got too dull. One speaker, on the other hand, enhanced her presentation when in the middle of her talk, she briefly stopped, picked up her infant who had become restless, began nursing him, and continued to read her paper in the most relaxed and natural way. Everyone applauded, and everyone was happy: the baby, the mother, and the audience. I had never seen anything like this before. What miracles La Leche League is causing.

And the next night, when I gave my speech before a banquet audience of over a thousand, one third of whom were small babies, I was amazed at how little if any distraction the children caused. In fact, at those moments when I spoke in a low expressive voice, you could almost hear a pin drop. The children were in harmony with the adults, picking up the same vibrations as their parents. It was a remarkable experience for me. It proved that children need not be in constant conflict with their parents as they seem to be in today's world. Conflict between ^{mother} ~~parent~~ and child is unnatural. Breastfeeding shows the way to harmony because it is based on ~~natural~~ ^{mutual} natural/needs. In fact, that is the lesson that La Leche League has taught us all about breastfeeding: that the mother gets as much emotional value out of it as the infant.

I think the difference between bottlefeeding and breastfeeding can be summed up in two key words: conflict and harmony. The scientific pediatric philosophy behind bottle feeding creates conflict between mother and child because it elevates technology over human feeling; the natural instinctual philosophy behind breastfeeding creates harmony between mother and child because it is based on the harmonious workings of hormones and feelings. When you deprive a child of mother's milk, you deprive him of much more than merely nature's best nutrition. You deprive him of *the* relaxing and soothing experience that goes with breastfeeding: body warmth, the soft touch, the pleasant smell, the enveloping arms, the loving embrace. Contrast this

with the mother who props a bottle in her baby's mouth and then goes about her business of housecleaning or cooking dinner. The human infant needs the tactile experience that goes with breastfeeding, and when he doesn't get it, tension and frustration build up.

There really is no way of overestimating the marvelous work La Leche League is doing in enabling thousands of women to discover and experience the joys of motherhood by doing what is natural, what their instincts tell them to do. But we know that successful breastfeeding requires the support of other women and of husbands who make it possible for a young mother to concentrate her attention on her infant. And all of this requires a stable and moral society based on family values. The unwed teenage mother, struggling to survive, cannot relax and enjoy the blissful harmony of breastfeeding. ^{In many cases} /She's not even sure she will be able to keep the baby. ^{unwed such} Thousands of mother-child separations occur each year with devastating effects on the child's emotional life. Thus, La Leche League, by its very nature, must endorse and encourage sexual responsibility which includes sexual restraint before marriage. The happiness and well-being of future generations depend on it.

No one can tell what the future will bring. It's all in the hands of today's children who learn from today's adults. But one thing ~~has~~ that has impressed me greatly is the kind of children La Leche League parents are raising. They tend to reflect the positive values of maternal love and family attachment. And this is most encouraging.

Let me close by saying that the steady growth and expansion of La Leche League is the one great positive hope for the future, not merely for what it has done to re-establish the centrality of the mother-infant relationship, but because of the many ramifications it will have in due time on other aspects of our culture. In this century, where we focus so much of our attention and hopes on romantic and sexual

love, we tend to forget that mother love is a far greater sustainer of life in the long run. Not too many songs are written about mother love, but without it few of us would be here. And that's what makes a La Leche League convention such a marvelous experience. It's like hearing songs about mother love. On that note let me wish you all happy and harmonious days. Thank you.