

Kramer vs. Kramer/Work vs. Family

Is there anyone who hasn't seen the movie "Kramer Vs. Kramer"? Because I had read and heard so much about it, I thought I was prepared for the emotional impact, but I wasn't. When the man sitting on the other side of me wept openly, I knew he had experienced the pain of losing his children through divorce, and that did it. It was a twenty-Kleenex movie for me.

Later on, in a less emotionally charged atmosphere, I reflected on the movie's implications in today's society. The story, in the event you've been locked in the broom closet, is of a custody fight over a delightful young boy who could also be as obnoxious as any other five-year-old.

His mother, Joanna, walked out of the marriage to "find herself," leaving her husband, an upward striving workaholic in the New York advertising field, to experience fathering at close range for the first time. When he finally got the hang of it, after a few hilarious scenes of making French toast and the like, he began to discover the joys and pangs of fathering, obviously a first time feeling for him.

To me, the disturbing and unanswered question

Dolores Curran



Talks With Parents

the movie presented was, "What would have happened if Joanna hadn't left?" Let's go back to that point, the point at which the movie opens. Obviously, she was in a position that is familiar to so many women with husbands like hers today. He used his work for his sustenance, not his family or his faith. He didn't allow her to become a part of his work and, as he later admitted in court, he didn't see any responsibility in meeting her needs which, to him, were satisfied by furnishing her with a good home and money.

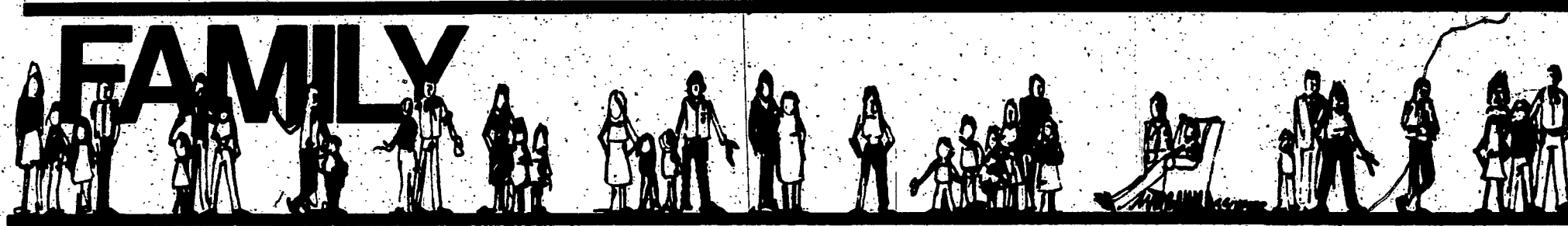
His life was almost totally work centered. The family existed to support him. And he used his work as a reason for withdrawing from the family. From his experiences immediately following the separation,

he didn't know his son intimately, either. He was simply his boy.

How do we call the needs of the family to the attention of such men without separating? Obviously, Joanna had tried to talk with him numerous times earlier, but he had dismissed her pleas as feminine whining. Even when she took the drastic step of leaving him without notice, he reacted not to her pain or to his personal loss, but to his work situation: "It's a helluva time to do this, with the new account coming in . . ."

The movie didn't address this question adequately. We like Kramer very much. We empathize with his difficult balancing act between work and son. We see him grow more than his son.

But we know that none of this would have occurred if his wife had remained. We can only speculate what that marriage and those people would have become: bitter, frenzied, perhaps alcoholic, perhaps unfaithful, certainly tearing at each other. In a sense, then, the movie tells us that divorce and parent custody is the only way to turn such men into fathers. Is it?



Accurate Reporting

When Pope John Paul II issued his 1980 Holy Thursday letter to bishops of the church, our local secular paper headlined its brief Associated Press story covering the document, "Boost for Latin."

The Vatican City based AP account ran this way: "Taking the side of traditionalists, Pope John Paul II on Tuesday gave a major boost to the use of Latin in the Mass and warned against interpreting the Second Vatican Council reforms too freely."

"In a 50-page letter to the world's bishops, the pontiff specifically banned the reading of unauthorized texts for the Mass and demanded that priests wear proper vestments for the service."

"The Polish-born pope condemned the widespread tendency, at least in some places, to desecralize everything."

When I finally obtained the official papal text and read it through carefully, the Holy Father's letter struck me quite differently. Moreover, the Associated Press account seemed quite distorted and entirely negative.

Notice, first of all, the verbs used: "Taking the side of . . . warned against . . . specifically banned . . . demanded . . . condemned . . ." Each one either suggests a conflict or conveys some prohibition. Was that condemnatory tone the major thrust of this lengthy document on the "Mystery and Worship of the Holy Eucharist"? By no means.

The Holy Thursday letter, on the contrary, contains in the main a rich, positive, profound treatment of eucharist and priesthood. True, it

Fr. Joseph M. Champlin



Our Church Family

contains occasional cautions, but these are more in passing mention of excesses which can detract from a proper appreciation of the Mass.

The media coverage I judge not only excessively negative, but also quite inaccurate. Here are two illustrations. I invite readers to examine the cases and reach their own conclusions.

First, "taking the side of traditionalists" and a major boost for Latin in the Mass.

In fact, only one paragraph out of more than 100 in the letter discusses Latin. That part of section 10 follows:

"Nevertheless, there are also those people who, having been educated on the basis of the old liturgy in Latin, experience the lack of this one language, which in all the world was an expression of the unity of the church and through its dignified character elicited a profound sense of the eucharistic mystery. It is therefore necessary to show not only understanding but also full respect toward these sentiments and desires. As far as possible these sentiments and desires are to be accommodated, as is moreover provided for in the new dispositions. The Roman church has special obligations toward Latin, the splendid language of ancient Rome, and she

must manifest them whenever the occasion presents itself."

Moreover, in the very preceding paragraph, our Holy Father praises the value of the vernacular in the liturgy. Discussing the passages of sacred scripture chosen for each day and the psalm responses inserted within our worship, Pope John Paul II notes:

"The fact that these texts are read and sung in the vernacular enables everyone to participate with fuller understanding."

Second, "The pontiff specifically banned the reading of unauthorized texts for the Mass."

Pope John Paul II's teaching on this subject forms only a portion of one paragraph in a section covering "The Table of the Word of God." Moreover, the very next sentences in that same paragraph praise so-called secular readings and encourage their use in the homily which is surely part of the Mass.

Our Holy Father's words follow:

"Furthermore, it must always be remembered that only the word of God can be used for Mass readings. The reading of scripture cannot be replaced by the reading of other texts, however much they may be endowed with undoubted religious and moral values. On the other hand such texts can be used very profitably in the homily. Indeed the homily is supremely suitable for the use of such texts, provided that their content corresponds to the required conditions, since it is one of the tasks that belong to the nature of the homily to show the points of convergence between revealed divine wisdom and noble human thought seeking the truth by various paths."

Refrigerator Repair Can Be Simple

I fixed the refrigerator the other day and when I was through the head of the house said "well done" and gave me a pat on the back. I accepted the praise with equanimity, my head swelling only a very little.

The refrigerator had been making a funny rattling noise on and off for a couple of weeks and we were thinking of calling a repairman.

Then one night I reached up and adjusted the lid on the porcelain casserole dish that was sitting on top of the fridge and voila! the noise disappeared.

My husband and I are both very skilled when it comes to such home repairs.

He once fixed the kitchen table which had a slope of about 20 degrees (and necessitated holding our dinner plates in place with our left hands) by folding an envelope into eights and putting it under the pedestal.

I, in turn, distinguished myself by kicking the garbage disposal (from underneath) into working order after it balked over some watermelon rind.

Sarah Child



All in the Family

We did not always take such pride in our efforts. Indeed, there was a time when we hung our heads in shame as the neighbors would show off their latest handiwork.

"Fantastic," we would say, gritting our teeth as our neighbors would show us the tree house that they built for their kids with hot and cold running water, crown moulding and its own weathervane.

"Magnificent," we would mutter with somewhat less gusto as they then led us into the house to show us the handcrafted grandfather's clock fashioned without benefit of a kit.

Then at some point it occurred to us that we had

nothing to be ashamed of. We were newspaper people and everybody knew or should know that people who work with words are notoriously deficient in home improvement skills.

The one exception I can remember was Bill Hackman, cousin to actor Gene, who, while book editor on the morning paper, built his own house.

I once asked Bill to recommend a power tool for me to give my husband after we were first married. (I obviously didn't know my spouse as well as I thought.) Bill said a quarter-inch drill was the most versatile. That was 15 years ago and we are still trying to figure out how to affix the sander-buffer accessory to it.

Such ineffectiveness is still embarrassing at times, but it also has its compensations. When we need something done we call a repairman, which can be the cheapest way out in the long run.

When we can't get a handyman we ask the 12-year-old to take care of it. Thus far he has made the folding door fold again, repaired the wiring on several lamps, assembled a propane gas grill, taken the kinks out of the electric frying pan, and more.

It's fairly clear, even at this age, that he probably won't become a newspaperman.