Modern and Postmodern Value Centers for the Family

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The phrase "family values" has come to occupy a central role in political and religious discourse in America. Politicians endeavor to associate themselves with this phrase, and some religious communities view family values as the cure to many of our nation's ills. The problem is that no one seems to know exactly what the phrase "family values" means. Many Americans relate these values to a Judeo-Christian moral tradition, where there is supposedly a clear moral compass for raising children and distinguishing right from wrong. However, this tradition is actually only one component of the values of American families--even religious families. Indeed, it is questionable whether a Judeo-Christian moral tradition is the primary component of American family values.

The purpose of this essay is to describe how two secular philosophies--modernism and postmodernism--are significant, if not crucial, forces in America's family values. Neither of these philosophies is typically associated with such values. However, these philosophies have together spawned four centers for family (and cultural) values that enjoy immense popularity. The term "center" is used here to mean the core or root of a particular system of values. To focus on a "center" is to cut away peripheral issues and study the main philosophies or theologies that give value systems their vitality and credibility. The first two centers--hedonism and moralism--are informed and sustained by modernism. They command the allegiance of the vast majority of American families, including, I contend, many religious families.

Two other family centers--relativism and relationalism--are informed and sustained most recently by postmodernism. Relativism is considerably more popular than relationalism in American families--including, again, religious families. Yet, relationalism is the one that is the most friendly to religion. Indeed, I argue that the relational brand of postmodernism is necessary to most Judeo-Christian religious

traditions, while hedonism, moralism, and relativism are inconsistent with these traditions. This argument may be surprising--especially to many religious communities--because postmodernism is often understood to be an "enemy" of the truly religious. Also, as I will show, many aspects of current religious practices and interpretations of scripture stem from hedonism, moralism, and relativism.

Modernist Centers for Family Values

Historians and philosophers have rendered various interpretations of modernism (e.g., Bevan, 1991; Faulconer & Williams, 1990; Schrag, 1990; Slife, in press; Slife & Williams, 1995). An important interpretation of the "core" of modernism, however, is described by social science historian, Donald Polkinghorne (1990), in this manner: "At the core of modernism or Enlightenment discourse was the belief that a method for uncovering the laws of nature had been discovered, and that the use of this method would eventually accumulate enough knowledge to build 'the heavenly kingdom on earth.'" (p. 92) The primary assertion of the modernist, then, is that scientific method will eventually discover the laws of nature. A sometimes overlooked assumption in this assertion, however, is that such "laws of nature" exist and are crucially important. That is, for science to do its job, as the modernist advocates, it must assume a world in which natural laws exist and are fundamental.

Modernist centers for family values are popularized and informed by this sometimes overlooked assumption. Indeed, two implications of this assumption are pivotal to these centers. The first implication involves the authority of those scientific principles that have become "laws of nature," and the second implication has to do with the assumed qualities of natural laws. The first concerns the pervasive influence and power of a particular naturalistic principle or law--namely, hedonism--the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Although natural scientists have no official "list" of natural laws, some scientific principles have nevertheless attained this status informally.

Indeed, as we shall see, this particular principle has become so influential that it is widely considered to govern social as well as natural science events.

The second implication of this modernist assumption involves the quality of lawfulness. In order for a natural law to be lawful, it must be unchanging and transcendent across time and place. This implication is sometimes termed atemporality, because lawfulness is "without time" or is timeless. That is, natural laws must apply to all times and places and must not, therefore, be limited to a particular time and a particular place. The law of gravity, for example, applied to both the Tenth and the Nineteenth Centuries (unchanging in time). Similarly, the law of gravity applies to both South America and North America (unchanging in location). If such laws changed from era to era or from context to context, then they could not be considered to be lawful. This type of lawfulness, therefore, requires a law or a principle to be timeless and contextless--i.e., atemporal.

These two modernist implications--the authority and atemporality of natural laws--may appear to have little relevance to family values. Many people consider the laws of nature to pertain to the physical world only and thus view them as having little to do with values. However, these implications are pivotal to modernist value centers for the family. The implication of authority has informally endowed the principle of hedonism with wide acceptance among the social sciences as well as authority over the everyday affairs and values of people. The implication of atemporality involves the use of timeless and contextless concepts to form family values--moralism. Atemporal moral principles are perhaps the most popular alternative to a hedonistic center for family values. Therefore, each of these centers is described in turn, with particular attention paid to those families who are often thought to be the most concerned with family values in American culture--religious families.

The Center of Hedonism

Hedonism is perhaps the most straightforward of the centers for family values. Although the word "hedonism" has many negative connotations--such as immediate, physical gratification--this word is also used to mean that a person (or family) should seek happiness (a form of pleasure) and should avoid suffering (a form of pain). The word "should" here is the key to the hedonist value orientation, because it tells us how people ought to act: They ought to act in ways that maximize their happiness and minimize their suffering.

Although natural scientists have not officially endowed this orientation with natural law status, hedonism has attained this status nevertheless. Scientists view virtually all plants and animals as seeking "pleasure" and avoiding "pain," because even a plant will move naturally toward a water or light source. Certainly, most biologists do not consider plants or animals to seek pain and suffering, at least not naturally. The reason is hedonism's perceived connection to evolution theory, where pleasure and pain are linked to species survival (e.g., Hamilton, 1964). To consistently engage in painful activity is presumably to court possible extinction.

As a basic principle or law of nature, hedonism has had a wide influence in the social sciences. Several approaches to behavior, mind, and personality consider hedonism to be critically important. Freud, for example, surmised that all operations of the psyche ultimately reduce to what he termed "The Pleasure Principle." Even the ego and superego--concerned primarily with reality and social values--ultimately serve the id and its seeking of pleasure. Behaviorists, as another example in the social sciences, have focused scientific attention on hedonism. They have historically assumed that reward or "reinforcement" is the prime motivator of all animals, including "higher" animals, such as humans. These basic conceptions have, in turn, influenced other social scientists, including, for example, economists and political scientists. Economists routinely make the "economic assumption" that people act in their own self-interest (Epstein, 1990), and

many political scientists presume that holders of political office are similarly hedonistic (Ceaser, 1990).

Many such scholars contend that hedonism is not a matter of what we "should" or "ought" to do, because this implies that we are agents of our actions--that we could do something other than seek pleasure and avoid pain. Many social scientists say simply that hedonism is the way we are, naturally. We have no choice about the matter, because our hedonism is a function of natural law. We do not control it; it has authority over us. We do not ordinarily think of a lower animal as having "values" that say it should avoid pain; lower animals simply do avoid pain, as a natural consequence of their genetic endowment. Similarly, humans as higher animals are not in the position of asking whether they should seek pleasure and avoid pain, because humans must seek pleasure and avoid pain, like all other animals in the evolutionary chain.

Other social science scholars disagree with this deterministic position, even if they agree with the centrality of hedonism in social life (cf. Gantt, 1996). These scholars argue that this position overlooks the evidence that humans possess an agency of sorts. Humans, they contend, really could "do otherwise" than seek pleasure and avoid pain--they just don't. That is, these scholars admit the possibility of a choice (cf. Rychlak, 1988), but assume that only the rare "Mother Teresa" will actually choose to "do otherwise." In this sense, there is little functional difference between the two positions--deterministic and agentic--at least in the mainstream of the social sciences. In either case, hedonism is considered an authoritative social force that leads the vast majority of people (and families) to engage in various forms of pleasure-seeking.

As mentioned, the most pervasive form of pleasure-seeking in our culture is probably the pursuit of happiness. Not only is this pursuit considered a fundamental political right, but it is also viewed as a moral good to which all people should aspire. Such happiness has, of course, many other aliases and guises in our culture: self-esteem, security, fulfillment, and peace, along with the avoidance of depression, insecurity,

anxiety, and discomfort. However, the common theme among all these aliases is that feelings like happiness and self-esteem are "good" and depression and discomfort are "bad." Indeed, these basic hedonistic notions are so ingrained in our cultural mind set that they have become a kind of "common sense." They are so common and so reasonable that only the weird or insane would appear not to follow them. Why would anyone ever want to seek suffering or anxiety, they seem to question.

Even the religious are not exempt from this hedonistic way of thinking. An equivalent way of thinking among religious people is that they should seek heaven and avoid hell. Although a divine being may be involved in this thinking, this being is viewed more as a means to these hedonistic ends than as an end itself. The pursuit of hedonistic pleasure, broadly speaking, encompasses many "religious" goals, including the seeking of "treasures in heaven" and the quest for some forms of "perfection" or "holiness." Reaching these goals may not be hedonism per se. However, seeking them as the ultimate objective--while treating everything else, including God--as the means to these self oriented ends is hedonism.

Likewise, the avoidance of suffering includes the avoidance of "fire and brimstone" as well as personal setbacks and physical ailments. For some hedonistic families, mortal suffering indicates questionable religious commitment. Because suffering is morally bad and God is the Grand Rewarder and Punisher, people who suffer may be in trouble with God. This is the flip side to the classic problem of theodicy: Why do good or innocent people suffer? Only bad or guilty people should suffer, and God is (or should be) the one who dispenses this hedonistic justice.

Parents of families with this hedonistic center have a simple injunction: Keep everyone happy. This injunction includes the long term as well as the short term, and one's spouse as well as one's children. Few parents, for example, are concerned with merely the short-term happiness of their families. Considerable parental energy is expended to prepare children for happiness and achievement in their future lives, even if

this means some short-term suffering. This preparation includes good work habits, social skills, emotional maturity, and all the rest of what today's society asks parents to teach their children--all for the sake of a child's future happiness. The measure of a parent is thus equally simple, according to this hedonistic center: A child's happiness, particularly in the long term, indicates successful parenting, while a child's long-term suffering is parental failure.

Marriages also are frequently gauged by these hedonistic values. Similar to the means-end relationship of the religious hedonist--with God as the means to a heavenly end--marriage is viewed as the cultural means to individual fulfillment. That is, people pursue marriage because they believe that it is necessary to a happy individual life (Fowers, 1993). Likewise, people divorce when the marriage is no longer fulfilling this function. After all, the hedonist argues, it is "common sense" for people who are unhappy in a marriage to seek a relationship that will make them happy. Individual happiness trumps marital commitment in the hedonistic family.

Needless to say, these hedonistic values lead families to partake of the widespread materialism in our society. Keeping up with the Joneses and buying all the new gadgets are justified because they supposedly increase our happiness and comfort; they are morally good. Conversely, there can be no meaning or goodness in suffering; suffering is morally repugnant. Children are taught very early that suffering is bad and should be avoided. Parents are to shield children from such things, unless, of course, some degree of suffering will help children suffer less in the future. Self-sacrifice, another form of suffering, makes no sense from this perspective, unless again, it is a trade-off for some greater happiness. Pure altruism, in the sense of doing a service without hope of a return, is either impossible, because all people must be hedonistic (as dictated by natural law)--or merely dumb, because all people should be hedonistic.

The Center of Moralism

A moralistic center for family values consists in a set of moral principles or ethical rules for living. A family adopts this center when its interactions and relationships focus on the principles and rules that it considers transcendent and absolute in nature. This particular center is probably the one most frequently associated with the "family values" movement. However, this center is perhaps more encompassing, because neither the broader culture nor a religious community has to sanction the principles and rules contained in this center. Generally endorsed or religiously sanctioned moral principles are perhaps the most prominent content of this center. Still, relatively unique moral codes and unarticulated rules of conduct can also be the center of family interactions. The pivotal characteristic of a moralistic center is that the family see the values as transcendent and absolute in nature.

The terms "transcendent" and "absolute" reveal this center's relationship to the assumption of modernism discussed briefly above--atemporality. For moral principles and rules of conduct to be transcendent or absolute they must be atemporal. That is, they must be timeless and contextless, because they exist, in a sense, outside of any particular time and place. Moral principles qua principles must exist in some other, metaphysical realm, and then be "applied" to a particular era, culture, or context. For example, many in the Judeo-Christian tradition consider the principle of "Thou shalt not kill" to be a transcendent and absolute principle. Because it is applicable to all contexts and all eras, it cannot reside in any one. It also cannot be essentially altered across these contexts and eras. Such moral principles are thought to transcend and unite our changing times, and provide a firm universal ground for the moralistic family to derive its values.

This atemporal quality of morality is considered to have a long history. Some readings of ancient Greek philosophy, for example, find atemporal themes in the thinking of Plato (Leahey, 1992; Viney, 1993). Plato is interpreted to contend that knowledge itself must be unchanging and absolute to be true knowledge. He called these objects of

knowledge Forms, and postulated that perceived objects are imperfect copies (or "applications") of these forms. His assumption about knowledge was similar to that of Aristotle: what needs explanation is change (Faulconer & Williams, 1990). Because change cannot explain itself, the ground of explanation and knowledge must be the unchanging. Moreover, knowledge must be transcendent. If an explanation only pertains to one place and one time, it is not transferable to other places and other times, and thus is not knowledge.

This atemporality was preserved in the medieval period by viewing God as a transcendent and absolute entity. Because God was seen as atemporal, moral principles took on an atemporal quality as divine principles. Although modernists later essentially abandoned God as the atemporal link among contexts and eras, they are the present-day preservers of the notion that such a link remains necessary. As a consequence, modernists replaced an atemporal God with atemporal natural laws. Just as God was viewed as transcendent, immutable, and the unifier of all things, so now from a modernist perspective the principles of nature are viewed as transcendent, immutable, and the unifier of all things. In fact, all principles, including moral principles, are now thought to possess these atemporal properties.

What type of family centers itself on atemporal moralism? Some may assume incorrectly that the families associated with this center are all "self-righteous moralists" (cf. Yalom, 1985). This stereotype depicts moralists as rigid absolutists who focus exclusively on their own idiosyncratic rules and inflexible principles for living. The moralistic center described here, however, is more inclusive. It points to any set of values, however loosely or rigidly held and adhered to, that is thought to reside outside any particular context or era. Most professional organizations, for instance, have formulated codes of ethics that fit this description. Indeed, someone might well hold an atemporal moral principle that says that self-righteous moralists are morally

reprehensible. The issue is not, therefore, the particular values per se; the issue is the absolute and immutable quality of the values.

A moralistic center, then, depends on the type of moral principles that a family endorses. Many families, for example, endorse the dominant principles of their culture. In the case of many Americans, these principles center on the Judeo-Christian tradition, almost by default. This last phrase, "almost by default," connotes how few families sit down and discuss what type of values they will uphold. Family values, in this sense, are handed down by previous generations, with a few new generational "wrinkles." Each moralistic family puts its own unique imprint on the previous generation's values, to be sure. Nevertheless, much of the previous moral code is sometimes unknowingly preserved.

Part of this preservation is due to moralistic parents. These parents see the transfer of moral codes as their primary family task. Because moral principles are the center, or "glue," of the family, they are highly valued and viewed as the key to preserving the future generation. After all, without this critical glue, families are thought to be unable to exist and function. Giving children such "family values," then, is a crucial role for society in general. This role explains why so many politicians wish to associate themselves with family values. These politicians assume, along with moralists, that atemporal values are vital not only to the structure of families but also to the structure of society itself. Success in facilitating this structure is measured by how well children reflect these values in their behavior--by obeying the absolute rules of conduct. Behavior that violates this implicit or explicit code is considered a failure of parenting and, in some sense, a violation of the family structure itself.

Many religious families are found in this particular center for values. In fact, many people of all faiths return to church--sometimes after long absences--when they begin having children. They return because they are concerned about the conduct of their children and see churches as espousing elaborate sets of moral principles as well as

forming communities that support a child's obedience to these principles. Of course, few such parents would agree to just any set of principles. Many parents feel that churches support the right moral principles. In other words, these parents turn to churches, as opposed to other institutions supporting moral codes, because they assume that churches have access to inspired and righteous moral principles.

In Christianity, for example, moralism may mean that Christ himself is viewed as having lived by a moral code. Because he was the Messiah, the sacred job of Christians is to take the moral principles Christ lived by and adapt them to their own families. They accomplish this adaptation both by modeling his behaviors and by discerning the ethical rules that lie behind his sermons and other statements. Once families have adopted these principles, they are considered to be followers of Christ, because they have internalized his immutable rules for living. Moralistic families then assume the next steps are to apply these rules to their own lives and pass them on to subsequent generations.

Are moralistic and hedonistic value centers mutually exclusive? Is it possible for families to hold both centers at the same time? Although families can incorporate aspects of both centers, such as a family obeying the rules to achieve happiness, one center is typically ascendant. In this example, for instance, the ultimate end is happiness. Obeying the rules is the means, and happiness is the controller of the means. Presumably, if another means would facilitate the chosen end better, then obeying the rules would be replaced by this alternate means. In this sense, only one of the value centers has a privileged status, and the two centers (or four) cannot be mixed, at least regarding the ultimate objective of the family.

Postmodernist Centers for Family Values

At this juncture, we move away from a modernist understanding of the world--as manifested in its value centers of hedonism and moralism--and move toward the philosophical perspective generally considered to be a reaction to modernism--postmodernism. Unfortunately, postmodernism is notoriously difficult to capture. The

label "postmodernism" tends to encompass an extraordinarily diverse group of scholars whose only uniting bond may be a disenchantment with the tenets of modernism. Thus, postmodernism may be defined best in negative terms--what it is against. However, understanding what postmodernists are against provides us with clues as to what some postmodernists assert positively.

For example, the modernist bases of hedonism and moralism figure centrally in the complaints of many postmodernists. Recall that the authority of natural laws is considered vital to modernism. Why else would modernists expend so much energy attempting to discover these laws? The answer is that natural laws are considered to be foundational to any understanding or explanation of either natural or social events. As noted with hedonism, this "foundationalism" implies that such laws govern all these events, regardless of their culture or context. If a social psychologist, for instance, discovers a law of interpersonal attraction, then this law dictates the actions of all people caught up in the attraction. This means that the differing beliefs, cultures, and languages of the people have no consequence. The foundation of natural laws overrides any such "extraneous variables."

As we shall see, however, postmodernists reject this foundationalism. They contend, instead, that any foundation is itself formulated within a cultural context. For example, our hypothetical law of interpersonal attraction is cultural in at least two ways. One, it was formulated by real human beings (scientists) who are themselves participating in a cultural mind set and way of thinking. Two, the subjects used to scientifically investigate this "law" of attraction were themselves part of a particular culture. In other words, the culture itself is thought to contribute to what is considered a law. Indeed, the notion of natural law itself, including that of hedonism, is viewed as a product of culture. In this sense, the "education" of other cultures regarding "nature's laws" is a kind of cultural imperialism (Fowers & Richardson, 1996; Slife, 1996). From a postmodern perspective, any such "natural law" should be understood as relative to the

particular context in which it was derived.[1] This, then, is the first of our value centers to be informed and sustained by postmodernism--relativism.

The second of our postmodern value centers involves a similar negative reaction to the second of our modernist assumptions--atemporality. Recall that atemporality is a crucial quality of the lawfulness of natural laws. Lawfulness is timeless and contextless--unencumbered by a specific time or a specific context. Modernist truth is similarly atemporal. This view of truth is the reason that a modernist endows moral principles with atemporality so readily: If such principles are truthful, then they are assumed to be timeless and contextless as well. Any truth, by modernist definition, has to be transcendent and absolute.

A postmodern reaction to this modernist rendition of truth is to question just how timeless and contextless truth can be. As noted above, the very notion of lawfulness--and thus contextlessness--is itself considered to be a product of culture. Moreover, the only way in which truth can be known is in and through contexts, because this is the only place in which we, as beings embedded in specific contexts, can exist. The modernist difficulty with this notion of a contextual truth is that it can change, because context itself can change. From the modernist perspective, a changeable truth is the same as no truth, because a primary quality of truth is its atemporality. Nevertheless, from a postmodern perspective, the assumption that truth must be atemporal is just that--an assumption; it does not <u>have</u> to be the truth about truth. This type of postmodernist contends that our values and morals are not valid unless they are understood <u>in relation to</u> the changeable nature of truth.[2] This is the second center for family values to be informed by postmodernism--relationalism. This second center, however, is less widely

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[1]There is some debate about whether the relativism described here is truly postmodern. That is, there are some who would view the historicism inherent in this relativistic position as essentially making the same foundational assumptions as the modernist (e.g., Faulconer & Williams, 1985). Although I basically agree with this view, I adopt the more conventional tack of considering this form of relativism and historicism to be a conceptual branch of postmodernism.

[2]As I will attempt to show later, this "in relation to" does not mean a "correspondence to" some atemporal truth.

known, particularly in the United States. Consequently, this center is discussed after the more familiar and popular notion of relativism.

The Center of Relativism

A "center of relativism" may seem a contradiction in terms. Indeed, many relativists would claim to have avoided a moral center of any kind. Siding with their postmodern allies, they decry foundationalism, because "foundations" and "centers" are viewed as merely social constructions (e.g., Gergen, 1985, 1994). What is foundational for one particular culture may not be foundational for another. Who is to say which foundation is correct? Why should one culture's "natural laws" or moral system be privileged over another? In this sense, no particular "center for values" should be considered more important or basic. This is not to say that certain moral systems do not enjoy a privileged status in their respective cultures. However, these systems are thought to attain this status through power rather than truth. That is, the privileging of certain social constructions cannot be justified by their being true in any objective sense; they can only be legitimized by the social power that supports them. In this manner, the relativist seems to have avoided any sort of moral center.

This conclusion is premature, however, because these relativist contentions have led to many relativist moral implications. Notice the moral language of the relativist--as just reviewed above and as re-reviewed and underscored below. Words like "should" and "ought" betray the value center of the relativist. If no particular moral system has any objective justification for its privileged status--and none can, from a relativistic perspective--then no moral system should be privileged in a particular culture. Power may help some to privilege their particular morality, but this use of power is morally unjustified. Instead, people ought to be respectful and tolerant of other moral orientations. People should not judge others from their own moral framework, nor ought they consider their own views and morals to be better than those of others. Certainly, under no circumstances should they seek to impose their morals on others.

At this point, the relativistic center for family values should begin to become clear. Although there is a sense in which the relativist endorses none of the existing moral systems, there is also a sense in which this lack of endorsement is itself a moral system. That is, the notion that one ought to avoid endorsing a particular moral system itself implies a host of implicit moral injunctions that form the center for relativism. First, it is wrong to claim an objective or absolute moral justification that one does not possess. (One should be honest.) Second, it is wrong to privilege one moral system over another, when the only basis for privileging is "might makes right." (Might should not make right.) Third, the tolerance of other moral systems is a supreme virtue. (Intolerance should not be tolerated.) Fourth, it is wrong to "judge" other people from one's own moral framework. (One should be nonjudgmental.) And fifth, it is wrong to persuade others to abandon their own moral system. (One should respect the views of others.)

The paradox of this relativist moral position, then, is that it is a particular moral position while simultaneously claiming that one should not endorse a particular moral position. To illustrate, consider the possibility of a relativist coming upon a culture that explicitly holds that its own moral system is the absolute, objective truth. Many cultures, in fact, assert this moral position (cf. Fowers & Richardson, 1996). If relativists deny this cultural position in favor of their own moral position, then they are disrespectful to and intolerant of this culture. If relativists, on the other hand, choose to respect this culture's absolute values, then they must deny the truth of their own relativism. Put another way, the relativist claims that all value centers are relative to the particular culture in which they are embedded, yet the values of the relativist--tolerance, respect, honesty--appear to be independent of any particular cultural context. If, on the other hand, the relativist holds that relativism is itself a product of a particular culture, this implies that cultures holding that relativism is wrong should be given equal

consideration. In this case, relativism--by its own rationale--has no justification for its rationale being taken seriously.

Interestingly, the paradoxical nature of this relativistic center for family values has not precluded its widespread endorsement and popular use among many American families. Many parents assert the legitimacy of the relativist values described above. These parents are particularly sensitive to the relativist caveats regarding power. According to relativists, American parents are the "power brokers" of their respective families. This means that parents should be especially careful not to impose their own "family values" upon their children. After all, what right do parents have to do this? Why would a parent's own views about family values, given the essential equivalence of such value systems, be any better than those of their children? Encouraging children to adopt a specific moral system is akin to a boss encouraging employees to adopt a specific moral system. It violates the dual injunctions of the relativist against intolerance and the misuse of power. Children should be allowed to experiment, grow, and eventually find their own way, without parental influence. Parents should avoid all "power plays," such as limit-setting and authoritarian guidelines, and should attempt to facilitate a nonjudgmental and affirming view of the world that allows all moral systems to be respected as basically equal.

This respect also implies that family members should avoid taking any <u>particular</u> moral system too seriously. All value systems should have a certain degree of respect, of course, but a child's endorsement of a particular system--especially as the child grows into adulthood--is perhaps the greatest fear of a relativistic parent. The reason is that an endorsement of this sort means the adult-child is no longer a relativist. To endorse one particular moral orientation--to take it truly seriously--is to hold that all moral systems are <u>not</u> essentially equivalent. Indeed, moral systems that disagree with the one being affirmed must be considered wrong, at least in part. Furthermore, it is the nature of any moral system to make discriminations between what is right and what is wrong. Such

discriminations mean that some judgments are needed and some things should not be tolerated.

This situation violates the relativist's own injunctions against intolerance and judging others. That these values are themselves a type of moral system points again to the paradoxical nature of this value center. Nevertheless, the relativist points to the difficulty of objectively evaluating the rightness or truth of any moral system. What reason, asks the relativist, has anyone for adopting a particular moral system? From this perspective, the only logical approach is to avoid becoming too serious about any such system. A religious system, for example, is all right in its place. However, even religious people should avoid a serious belief in their religious system, because this would lead to "fanaticism" or "extremism" and ultimately to a brand of "close-mindedness"--positions that offend the relativist.

According to this view, children should instead be taught an important friend of tolerance: open-mindedness. Open-mindedness (rather than cleanliness) is next to godliness. All world views and all religious systems have their place, but none should ever be taken in and truly incorporated into one's own beliefs. An incorporation of this sort would disallow an openness to all points of view--a "godly" trait from the relativist's perspective. Without such openness or "objectivity," as it is sometimes termed, the world would not be seen for what it is, because the observer would be biased. This bias would lead the observer to attend to certain aspects of the world and not to others, and to view even those aspects in ways that are affected by the biased "lens" through which they are seeing the events. All this can be avoided, warns the relativist, by not taking any moral or religious system too seriously. Religions and moral orientations are nice places to visit--for educational purposes--but no one should ever want to live with any of them.

The Center of Relationalism

The center of relationalism addresses directly the modernist assumption of atemporality. As noted in our discussion of moralism, atemporality is thought to be part

of the legacy of influential Greek philosophers and medieval theologians. This legacy has become so prevalent and so endemic to Western conceptions that atemporality is now widely considered an essential property of truth. That is, truth is absolute and immutable, or it is not truth. Moreover, many religious people have assumed that timelessness and unchangeability are sure signs of divine truth. Some postmodernists, however, claim not only that secular truth is temporal, rather than atemporal, but that religious truth can also be understood as temporal. Indeed, I argue that temporality is necessary for those who claim specifically Christian family values.

What then is this temporal and relational value center for families? How, especially, can this value center claim to be dealing with truth? To answer these questions, I first attempt to describe the postmodern conception of temporality, differentiating it specifically from relativism. Next, I attempt to reveal the "relational" properties of this value center. Because this latter task is impossible to accomplish without a context, and because it is contended that Christianity requires this relationalism, I attempt to show this relationalism in the context of a "Christ-centered" family. This type of center is then differentiated from the other three centers for values--hedonism, moralism, and relativism.

Temporality. Temporal explanations stem from the hermeneutic tradition, where the philosopher, Martin Heidegger, among others, believed that humans are inherently temporal. As he contended in his seminal book, Being and Time (1962), "to be is to be temporal" (Gelven, 1989, p. 169). Unlike the subject matter of some natural sciences, humans--as social agents--dwell more in the realm of the possible and the particular than in the realm of the necessary and the universal. Humans are inherently contextual and changeable, and thus require explanations that reflect this contextuality and changeableness. As a consequence, temporal explanations are full of time, rather than timeless (Slife, 1993, in press; Faulconer & Williams, 1985; Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, in press). Temporal explanations are full of the era and context of their construction and

interpretation. In this sense, they are bound to context and culture.[3] They claim no special transcendent status beyond their cultural and contextual embeddedness.

Temporality also implies a temporariness or a "willingness" to be replaced with another explanation (Gadamer, 1982; Slife, in press; Slife & Williams, 1995). That is, temporal explanations imply their own inadequacy, incompleteness, and potential inappropriateness to the context at hand. Each explanation is a "humble" explanation, containing within itself the possibility of its own negation. Unlike atemporal explanations that presume objective contact with and representation of a permanent reality, temporal explanations are humble because they make no such presumption. Instead, implicit within temporal explanations is the assumption that they are context-dependent and thus potentially inapplicable to another context. Temporality thus allows an openness to and an expectation of change that is not possible in atemporal approaches (Yanchar & Slife, 1997).

Indeed, atemporality rules out all meaningful change and possibility. Because the atemporal laws and truths of modernism are themselves unchanging, and because these laws and truths are thought to control and govern all natural and social events, the possibility of these events being otherwise than they are is ruled out. Natural and social events may seem to change, but in modernist "reality," they are dictated by unseen laws and truths that reside outside the events and contexts themselves. People, for instance, may appear to change--to make different choices, to direct themselves toward various goals (agency). However, these changes, choices, and goals are themselves determined by the atemporal truths and laws that govern these events, and thus these people.

The temporal relationalist views the determinism of atemporality as excluding morality. Because people and their families have no means of being "otherwise" than they are, they have no way to be moral. People who do good things, for instance, should

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[3]As I will attempt to show, this "boundedness" does not mean that culture or context can be reified as a thing with objectified boundaries. This reified notion of culture and context is itself atemporal.

receive no credit, because some set of psychological or biological laws presumably determined these actions. These people could not have acted otherwise. Similarly, if people behave badly or even criminally, they cannot be held responsible for their actions. Such criminals were shaped or programmed by their past environment or governed by their genetic endowment, or some lawful interaction of the two. They, therefore, have no capacity for moral decision-making, because no possibility is possible in a truly atemporal world.

A temporal world, by contrast, is filled with possibility. Because the relationalist does not postulate an unchanging, metaphysical world that governs all contexts, contexts can be taken for what they are--sometimes shifting, sometimes changeable, and often otherwise than any law would determine them to be. In this temporal world, persons and families are constantly confronted with possibilities. These persons and families must constantly choose from among these possibilities, and thus must constantly judge which possibilities are good and which are bad. Judgments of goodness and badness are irrelevant in a modernist world, because this world is amoral. That is, things and events of this world are neither moral nor immoral--they just are what they are, naturally--as dictated by atemporal laws. In a temporal world, however, some things are good and some things are bad, depending upon the context. Choices and changes must therefore be made in light of these moral and contextual evaluations.

Distinguishing Temporality from Relativity. At this point, temporality may appear to be similar to relativity. Certainly, both conceptions attempt to take into account context, time, and human agency. However, unlike relativism, the relationalist assumes that morality and values are themselves grounded in truth--temporal truth. From the perspective of the relationalist, relativism supposes incorrectly that the changing nature of contexts--both across time and across places--rules out the possibility of truth. Because values are relative to changing societies and cultures, the relativist concludes there can be no truth. This conclusion, however, makes an important but

unacknowledged assumption about the nature of truth--that truth is atemporal. In other words, this conclusion assumes that truth has to be transcendent to (and outside of) the various cultures and contexts to be truth. Because values do not seem to be transcendent across cultures, and because cultures are pivotal, there can be no atemporal truth.

The relationalist, on the other hand, asserts that truth is temporal. Truth, in this sense, is manifest in how things are, rather than in what things are (Faulconer & Williams, 1985). The "what" of things leads to a focus on static, transcendent properties, whereas the "how" of things leads to a focus on action, articulation, and change--temporality. With this latter focus, one can legitimately ask questions and discern true and false answers. However, the truth of an answer is not found in its correspondence to an unchanging, static reality, outside the context in which the question is asked. The truth of an answer is found inside[4] the context itself. Consequently, a relational center for family values grounds its values and morals in a truth that is contextual and possibly changing, rather than transcendent and immutable.

The difficulty is that this contextual truth may appear to make truth itself relative, leaving us with only "local" truths and no unity or oneness of truth. From the relationalist perspective, this apparent problem is due to our misconception of the context of truth. Relativists (mis)conceive this context as a bounded "object" that is essentially independent of other bounded, objective contexts. A Chinese culture, for instance, is thought to be essentially independent of an American culture--with different languages, customs, traditions, and meanings. Although some "translation" between cultures can occur, all contexts and cultures are incommensurable in many important respects (cf. Slife, in press). Furthermore, each context is viewed as containing its own qualities. One does not understand a culture, for example, by understanding other cultures; one understands a culture by studying the qualities of the culture itself. This qualitative

[4]Most postmodernists avoid the inside/outside distinction altogether. If there is no metaphysical realm of truth or laws "outside" of context, then there is no need to designate an "inside." I use this language here only to distinguish the postmodern contextual from the modernist metaphysical.

difference among cultures implies that local truths must remain local, and that such truths have no universality or essential relationship to each other.

The relationalist disputes this implication. Postmodernism's temporality considers contexts and cultures to be parts of wholes that acquire at least some of their qualities from their relation to other contexts and cultures--past, present, and future. Temporality assumes that the "moment" of any context is inextricably woven into the tapestry of all contextual moments across time. That is, all contexts (or cultures) overflow their presumed boundaries and thus participate significantly in all other contexts. This participation allows a unity (or commensurability) among contexts, because any context (or culture) is itself part of the whole of contexts, past and future, far and near. How would we know that Chinese culture was different from American culture unless there was some common ground--some commensurability--to compare the two cultures? Indeed, the very notion of a "culture" requires a (contrasting) relation to other cultures to know that it <u>is</u> a culture. This contextuality of context prevents temporal truth from being merely a "local" truth, since any truth garners many of its qualities from the context of other "local" truths.

Consider the analogy of a novice player in the middle of a chess game (Faulconer & Williams, 1985; Slife, 1993). If this player turns to a chess master and asks for the best next move, the chess master cannot appeal to an atemporal game. That is, no timeless or transcendent game will be of much help in arriving at the best next move for this <u>particular</u> game. Of course, there are a set of universally accepted rules for playing chess. Nevertheless, an appeal to these rules alone will not provide a suitable answer to the question of the best next move for this specific context. Moreover, the chess master should not necessarily assume that these players are using universally accepted rules. It is common, for instance, for novices to play chess without a time clock, a universally accepted requirement of tournament chess. The point is that the specific rules used are

themselves part of the context, rather than a transcendent truth. A truthful answer to the novice's question, then, cannot be an atemporal answer.

A truthful answer has to take into account the specific context of the question and the questioner: Does the novice want to win? Are the players using accepted rules? And, of course, what is the context of this particular game? Laid out before the chess master is the past, present, and future of the game--its temporality. The present configuration of the board includes the prior movements of the pieces (the givenness of the past) and the possibilities of piece movements (the opportunities of the future). A truthful answer must consider the past, present, and future contexts of this particular game as well as other related games. In this sense, a truthful answer is more than a local truth, because inherent in it is a type of temporal "transcendence" of the local context of the particular move. Unlike atemporality that posits a bounded and objectified present context which is independent of other contexts (past and future), temporality assumes that the context of the "now" is significantly related to all the other contexts--past and future--in the now (Slife, 1993; Slife, 1995). A truthful answer must take into account this temporal context of the game.

A truthful answer by the chess master must also acknowledge that the game's context--and its nonlocal relation to other games and other moves--can shift, even within the particular game. In this sense, the best move can itself change, because it is necessarily sensitive to its context. For the relativist, however, this contextual changeableness implies that the notion of truth must be abandoned altogether. Because the truth can change from game to game (or context to context), and because truth is assumed to be atemporal, there can be no truth. Indeed, as described above, the relativist derives an entire set of moral implications from this lack of truth. People are to be respectful and tolerant, for instance, because they cannot claim to have the truth.

The problem with relativism--from a relational perspective--is that it has given up on truth too easily. The true, the right, and the moral still exist, but they are implicit in

the context itself. In fact, the morality of a context cannot be avoided, as even the relativist's own paradoxical attempt to give up morality can attest. Recall that the relativist's assertion of no objective morality led to a very specific list of moral rights and wrongs. In the case of the chess game, there are also right moves and wrong moves. Given, say, that the novice wants to win, plays by the rules, and is engaging a Sicilian chess defense, there are good moves and bad moves. There may be many rights and many wrongs, many truths and many falsities. Nevertheless, the point is that the truth, in this case, is a temporal truth. Indeed, because all cases are always specific cases--i.e., all people in all places are embedded in a specific context--all truths are necessarily temporal truths.

Temporality in the Christian Family. Temporality might make some sense of a chess game, but how could it possibly be understood in the context of a religious family? As noted above, many religious people have understood their morality from a modernist, atemporal perspective. At this point, I explore how a relational perspective pertains to the dominant religion of America--Christianity. At the outset, the relationalist assumes that morality is implicit in the context itself. The relationalist contends that "family values"--or any values, for that matter--are found by centering the family on this contextual morality. In the case of the Christian family, Christ himself is assumed to be part of the context. Christians, as followers of Christ, understand Christ to be a living, resurrected being who can communicate proper values to them and intervene morally in their lives through the Holy Spirit.

Christ, in this sense, is the Christian's "chess master." This is not to discount the participation of the other two parts of the godhead--God and the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, one could consider any one of the three, or all three, to be the chess master, because all are united in the same purpose. I focus on Christ in this essay, because he is typically understood as the focus of salvation in Christianity. Also, he is believed to be continually involved in the "game" of living and always available for consultation (via

the Holy Spirit). This Master can advise the family on the "best next move" for moral action, or this Master can intervene on behalf of what is right or good in relation to the specific context.

Because Christ is believed to be intimately involved in every person's life, this Master--like the chess master--must take into account the temporality of the game of living. In this sense, a Christ-centered family requires a temporal or relational value center. This type of center puts the emphasis squarely upon one's relationship with this Master rather than moral principles (moralism), and one's obedience to this contextual divinity rather than tolerance (relativism) or happiness (hedonism). Indeed, a Christian family should include this divine being as the central member of their family--as their "head," with the family as Christ's "body."

This Christian relationship is temporal both in the sense of "full of time" (rather than without time) and in the sense of "temporary" (rather than immutable). From a Christian viewpoint, Christ is a resurrected being who can and does participate in our particular context through the Holy Spirit. If he were a being entirely outside our particular context (atemporal), he could not truly minister to a family's unique needs or intervene in their unique circumstances. As a contextual being, at least in part, Christ is involved in all people's contexts, whether they know him or not. This Christian temporality allows him to become a guide for one's values. No translation (or application) of abstract moral principles is necessary in this relational understanding of Christianity. Christ knows his people and their world intimately, in their own special circumstances, and can intervene accordingly.

Similar to the chess master, this intimate knowledge requires continual adjustment, depending on the context, family, and Christ himself. In other words, if Christ lives and participates in a family's context, then he cannot be an unchangeable (atemporal) being. He must have the capacity to make these adjustments. He must be

able to change in order to meet the ongoing and changing demands of his being the Christ.

This ability to change does not preclude consistency and unity. In fact, a relational, temporal center requires some unity among past, present, and future contexts (as described above). For this reason, it is not unexpected that Christ would bind himself to certain covenants with his people, such as his promise to love them. However, this binding and his promises are distinguished from the modernist notion of atemporality. As noted above, atemporality ultimately precludes possibility and thus morality itself, because the unchangeable (e.g., laws, truth) governs all things, including presumably Christ himself. There would be no reason to praise Christ or God, because these divine beings would have to do what they do--as a result of atemporal laws.

A divine being that is temporal, on the other hand, can truly love, because He does not have to love. He has real choices and possibilities that allow Him to be a truly moral being and thus be praised. This is part of the wonder of His continual love for us as sinners--He does not have to love us. Another part of the wonder of this love is its contextuality. God knows every hair on our heads and thus can minister to each of us uniquely, with changes in how His love is manifested, depending on the circumstances.

This temporality of Christianity may explain the seeming inconsistencies of other deity-human relationships. In the Old Testament, for example, God utters a commandment, such as "Thou shalt not kill" (Deuteronomy 5: 17), and then commands the Israelites a few years later to kill certain populations of people, including women and children: "[The Israelites] totally destroyed all who breathed, just as the Lord, the God of Israel, had commanded" (Joshua 10: 40).

This apparent inconsistency is inconsistent only from a modernist, atemporal understanding of Christianity, not from a postmodern, temporal understanding of Christianity. From a temporal perspective, a Christian's obedience to God or Christ takes precedence over any atemporal notion of a commandment. One should first obey the

law-giver, and in so doing obey the (temporal) law. Some contexts may require a person to act inconsistently with the law, as understood atemporally, and yet consistently with the law-giver. Who can know better, from a Christian perspective, what is needed in a particular context than God or Christ? Who can know better what is truth for a specific family than God or Christ? Therefore, the primary thrust of a truly Christian family should be on developing a relationship with these contextual "Truth Tellers," so that the family can be inspired to act morally in each of life's situations.

Comparing the Four Centers of Family Values

This relational value center may become clearer when it is compared to the other value centers. Specifically, I contend that the relational center permits a family to be truly Christ-centered, while the other three centers are inconsistent with a Christian perspective.

Moralism. First, a relationship with Christ, or even an obedience to him, does not mean that one should discern Christ's moral principles and then live by them. This moralistic approach would imply that once this discernment had occurred, the Christian no longer needed Christ. Christian families could just center themselves on the moral principles discerned. Moreover, if the principles of this morality were at least implicit in the Old Testament, as Christ himself indicated, then a correct discernment of these principles would mean that the advent of a Savior was unnecessary. Given, however, that Christians do not consider Christ to be unnecessary--in New Testament times or now--the discernment of Christ's moral principles must not be the correct source (or correct center) for Christian "family values."

Perhaps the Christian family should model Christ? This modeling would be a variation on the moral principles' theme, where one attempts to discover the pattern of Christ's conduct in the various moral situations recorded in scripture, and then tries to duplicate his actions in similar situations. Unfortunately, this modeling process has the same problem as conventional moralism--it can become an idol. Indeed, it is a type of

Phariseeism. The Pharisees whom Jesus criticized acted according to patterns or principles, without the spirit of the principles, as Christ himself noted. Christ, however, took pains in scripture to say that even correct action cannot be the center of a Christian's life. Christ came into the world, in part, to write God's laws in people's "hearts." From a Christian perspective, it is never sufficient merely to duplicate Christ's actions. Christians must also want to do Christ's will (and thus God's will) in their unique circumstances and situations.

Of course, a Christian family may want to model Christ in these circumstances. Still, the unique nature of our circumstances raises another problem for a moralistic centering of the family: To model the pattern or follow the principles of Christ's actions, one must translate the pattern or principle into the special context of a family. Principles and patterns, by their very nature, apply to many or all families and must therefore be tailored to the specific family and situation at hand. Parents who have tried to model a "perfect" parent or apply a principle of parenting to a particular situation know that this tailoring is not always a straightforward task. Even if parents know the correct rules, they are often not sure how to apply these rules. How can Christians be assured they have applied the rules correctly?

Some moralists may say that the scriptural record of Christ provides us with guidelines. Unfortunately, many family situations are different from the situations in which we see Christ in scripture. Christ, for example, never disciplined his own children. This does not mean that Christian parents are left entirely without scriptural guidance for disciplinary actions. However, from a moralist perspective, it does mean that this scriptural guidance must be translated and applied. It means that family actions and relations cannot be a straightforward obedience to this guidance, because a vital and influential translation process must also come into play. Sometimes this translation process can make all the difference in what is considered right and wrong in a particular instance. Are Christians left to their own devices for this important application process?

From a postmodern relational perspective, the answer to this question will be "no." If Christ is resurrected and able to minister to people through the Holy Spirit, then as a living, loving being, Christ knows the special situations of his people and can advise them (or intervene) accordingly. Christians also view Christ as inviting and perhaps even desiring a personal relationship with them. Abstract principles and patterns of conduct can be distractions from this personal relationship. At best, such principles and patterns are one step removed from this loving relationship. At worst, they are cultural prejudices in the guise of religious principles. In either case, principles and patterns can lead Christians to focus too much on the historical Christ of scripture--where Christians are supposedly to discern his moral code--and not enough on the living Christ who was sent to minister to people in their context, and who continues to minister to them in their everyday situations.

A continuing temptation for Christian moralists is to focus on their own discernment of the proper rules. As evidenced by the Pharisees whom Jesus criticized, this leads to a set of human-crafted principles of behavior--with contributions from other, sometimes unrecognized sources--instead of a relationship with a living, divine being. Some form of discernment of this relationship is surely necessary, as Christian families attempt to understand Christ's will in their lives. However, this sort of discernment is never a set of moral principles. That is, it is never a once-and-for-all discernment, or even a once-and-for-a-little-while discernment; temporality requires a continual dependence on Christ, rather than a dependence--even for a short time--on a behavioral pattern or moral principle.

Hedonism. Can this continual dependence on Christ produce happiness? Why is a "hedonistic" family center so divorced from a Christ-centered family? The "can" of this first question is tricky, because happiness is, of course, possible with Christ. From a Christian viewpoint, almost anything is possible with Christ. The important question is: Should a Christian expect or seek happiness? If Christ's life reveals nothing else, it

reveals that a Christian family is likely to experience suffering as well as happiness. (The book of Job describes another devoutly religious person who suffered considerably.) It is only the modernist "foundation" of hedonism that leads many to assume that a Christian family should experience mainly joy and happiness. Why else, from a hedonistic perspective, would anyone want to be a Christian?

It is true that those who have lived a Christ-centered life report an inner peace from doing God's will. Nonetheless, it is quite debatable, if not unlikely, that this peace is anything like the personal fulfillment which is discussed and pursued in our popular culture. Indeed, this peace from a Christian perspective can never be pursued; it can only ensue. That is, if a Christian family pursues this peace for its own sake, or if a Christian family tries to build a relationship with Christ for the sake of this peace, then this "Christian" is self-centered rather than Christ-centered, and a relational center cannot be effected. Christ and his will must be both the means and the end to be truly Christian. Happiness and peace may ensue, but happiness and peace are really irrelevant to what Christian families must truly be seeking--obedience to their Lord. Christian families may be promised a type of peace from this obedience. However, this type of peace must be distinguished from popular forms of peace that depict it as freedom from conflict and suffering (cf. John 14: 27). The peace "that passes all understanding" finds meaning (and peace) in many forms of suffering and conflict.

Unfortunately, American culture is so heavily hedonistic that it has given all suffering and conflict a bad name. As mentioned earlier, all sorts of suffering--depression, anxiety, insecurity, blows to the ego, and pain of all types--are automatically viewed as bad things of which to rid ourselves. Indeed, a whole class of drugs and a whole set of psychotherapies have been formulated to help rid us of these "bad" things. Consequently, suffering is rarely thought to be meaningful or good--if you feel bad, then it must be bad. A Christ-centered family, however, cannot so easily equate feeling bad

with being bad. Suffering can hold significant meaning or signal important family problems, including problems in recognizing the family's "head," Christ himself.

With a relational center, then, Christian families should never automatically rid themselves of suffering, without first understanding the possible function of that suffering in the family's relation to Christ. For example, this understanding of suffering could be an important feature of a family's attempts to heal broken relationships. This is not to say that suffering always means that something is wrong with relationships. This would be a subtle hedonism again--suffering is bad. In fact, there is much right in suffering, including both physical pain and emotional suffering. Suffering may have all sorts of divine purposes and meanings, from refining one's Christianity, to teaching an old-fashioned lesson, to understanding more fully Christ's atonement. Getting rid of this type of suffering would be, in effect, getting rid of a crucial part of Christ's relationship with Christian families. Suffering, then, can be a necessary and good part of a relational center for family values.

Relativism. A family centered on relativism might seem to be the easiest to distinguish from a Christ-centered family. After all, Christ stood for particular moral actions. Clearly, he would not, as relativism implies, consider all actions to be morally equivalent. However, this distinction becomes complicated when one can no longer turn to a set of moral principles for all moral questions. If Christ did not want Christians to center their families on moral principles, then how are Christians to stand against relativism?

From a relational perspective, Christian families are to stand against relativism by making Christ their moral ground. Moral principles are always one step removed from Christ, because they are characterizations of how he lived and behaved. Why emphasize a characterization when the real thing is alive and available? As Christians make decisions about their families and formulate important relationships, they do not have to consult a code, a principle, or a "what would Christ have done" hypothetical. Such

actions may invite people to move toward Christ, but they miss the mark if codes and principles become substitutes for directly relating to him. Christians can consult Christ himself through prayer and the light he sheds in scripture and the Christian community. They do not fight relativism with a moral system but with a relationship.

This relationship is not a "romantic" one in which a family "falls in love" with Christ. This relationship is best understood as a family relationship, with Christ as a supremely loving and wise Brother, and God as a Heavenly Father. Such a relationship would give families perspective, provide them with inspiration, fill them with love, and help them to know the truth for their families in any given moment or circumstance. Martin Buber's (1959) "I-Thou" and Emmanuel Levinas's (1969) "obligation to the other" are examples of conceptions that have some consonance with this relational center.

This relational center must surely be "good news" for Christian parents. These parents are saddled with a difficult responsibility in today's society. It is perhaps this kind of burden that led Christ to say, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11: 28). With a relationship to Christ, parents are no longer solely responsible for their children's happiness or their children's obedience to a set of moral principles, including a relativist's "moral principles." The good news is that Christian parents are not alone in leading their families. In fact, part of being a Christian parent is pointing consistently and continually to the real Leader. Parents still have responsibilities and still must lead, to be sure, but their leadership and responsibilities lie with their responsiveness to Christ's leadership. Christian parents love, for example, not because they are tolerant (relativism) or because a moral principle says they should (moralism) or because love provides them a reward (hedonism). Christian parents love because they are responsive to their loving relationship with Christ (1 John 3: 16).

It is important to recognize a type of relativism implicit in this responsiveness. Although this relativism contrasts sharply with the relativist center described above, there

is a "relative to" that is necessary to a Christian family's relationship with Christ. Because Christ is available to families in their own unique situations, Christ will take this situation into account when he answers people's queries and intervenes on their behalf. In other words, the moral grounding of Christ is always relative to the context in which Christian families find themselves. Christ is part of this context. With his help, the Christian family can know--without need of translation or application--what is right and what is wrong. This relationalism, then, implies that all actions are not morally equivalent. Contrary to relativism, there is a right and a wrong, or several rights and wrongs, given a particular history, context, and relationship. A relational center also means--unlike the relativistic center--that a judgment is required, and some things--the wrong things--should not be tolerated.

What do Christian parents do, then, with the oft-cited "Christian" injunctions against judging others and being intolerant of another's beliefs? Actually, these injunctions have little to do with judgment and tolerance in themselves. Rather, these injunctions involve who is to decide what is tolerated and how judgments are to be rendered. Put this way, the "who" is obvious for the Christian parent--Christ is to decide. However, it is easy, as all Christians know, to insert themselves into this decision-making process and either eliminate Christ's contribution or assign it a secondary status. In this sense, charity and humility are necessary in our relationships with others, because Christ can provide different guidance to different individuals, even within a particular community. Again, this does not have to mean that there is no right or wrong, but rather that differing parts of a community can complement and give balance to one another.

Conclusion

Four centers for family values have been described, both in general terms and in the context of Christianity--a religion that has historically been highly attendant to the "family values" issue. Even in this religious context, however, where the Judeo-Christian moral tradition would seem to be especially strong, two secular philosophies figure

prominently in these values--modernism and postmodernism. Each of these philosophies has lent its own particular meaning to the moral systems involved. Each of these philosophies has determined a surprising proportion of the variation among families concerning their values. Consequently, the important political and religious debate that is now occurring in regard to such values requires some knowledge of both philosophies. Indeed, Christians in this debate may need to pay particular attention to the possibility, contended here, that only a more relational center for family values creates the space necessary for a specifically Christ-centered outcome.

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