

The Dilemma of Two Worlds: A Personal View

ELIZABETH FLETCHER CROOK

I really did not start out from age twelve to get a Ph.D. In fact, when I applied to college, I was seriously thinking of majoring in modern dance. I guess the turning point came when I decided to apply for the Smith College Junior Year In Geneva. This was a very "Seven Sisters" Program and I think they accepted me from Brigham Young University through sheer astonishment. I still remember sitting in the Hotel de Russie library reading a piece about British entry into the Common Market. Suddenly a feeling came over me which I can only describe as love—real emotional love. I was captivated, fascinated, enchanted by the entire field of international relations.

However, my inherent dichotomy showed itself during this same trip. I remember standing in front of a small art gallery, my attention caught by a splendid primitive sketch of a man, woman and child, cupped into an egg shape, woman nursing her babe, man looking protectively on. I returned the next day with my small savings and bought the sketch on the spot. There it was—my dichotomy—I loved both babies and international relations!

For the first few years of married life, I felt little conflict between my responsibilities as wife and mother and my own need for intellectual challenge and growth. In fact, my "Nevada-farmer-turned-scholar" husband put my degree-seeking above his for several years. We were able to find a comfortable niche at a girls' boarding school outside Boston. I taught for two years while he attended classes, then we simply switched. I finished up my classwork, while he taught the high school seniors introductory economics and political science.

As I look back on that period of struggle and sacrifice, I am impressed by the satisfaction we felt as we helped each other, alternating teaching, child-care, and thesis-writing. We had a joy which came from doing something out of the ordinary, but we did not realize to what degree we shared the best of two, almost mutually exclusive worlds.

Now that we have "joined" society, with my husband slipping into the role of bread-winner with an eight hour a day job and myself home with four small children, I realize how much we both have given up. I stress the word "both," for I feel strongly that a man misses as much as a woman by being confined to the traditional roles assigned by society. The exclusive role of breadwinner for the father and child-rearer for the mother inhibit, to one degree or another, the complete development of individual potential.

Each of these two worlds has possibilities for personality growth. As for the woman's role, I have no doubt that great personal growth comes from caring for children. The experiences of putting the interests of children before one's own and the need to submerge one's desires for the good of the family both tend to encourage altruism. In addition, because one of the main functions of motherhood is the teaching of moral principle, mainly by example, a mother constantly needs to reevaluate her own principles and behavior. There is a great built-in incentive to be the best person she can, as she senses her children using her as a model.

A man's world, for the most part, necessitates personal ambition and drive, a

need for success, sometimes at the expense of others. It is his role to act in his own interests, not to submerge them. He has little opportunity to share the spontaneous joy of his children as the world unfolds around them. He has less chance to evaluate his behavior in moral terms and the demands of his workday world create more possibility for spiritual neglect.

A woman's world also appears to offer greater freedom of choice in terms of timing and schedule. There are duties, to be sure, many of them arduous and time-consuming. There are activities which must be performed at the moment. Children's baths, bedtime and meals cannot be put off indefinitely, but there is a natural rhythm to these demands. One does not have to feel guilty about leaving the house to take a picnic in the woods. A man's work used to be bound to the demands of nature and the seasons, but there is an artificiality to the eight (and too often ten and twelve) hour day. A man must put in his time, laboring or supervising, although sometimes inspiration may come at midnight or the need to walk through the woods at 2 p.m.

Finally, a woman's life tends to promote healthier relationships between herself and her "peers"—other mothers. Although there might be some competition when it comes to decorating houses, putting on dinners, or comparing notes on children, women live for the most part in a cooperative world. My husband has remarked several times that he has formed few truly close friendships since he left the mission field. This is not an accident, as friendships develop best in a cooperative, giving atmosphere. A woman often has the experience of helping out a sick neighbor with her children, or taking a casserole to a new family in the neighborhood. I have helped and been helped many times since I entered the world of motherhood with the concomitant feelings of warmth and gratitude. Indeed women far from parents and relatives must depend on each other for many of the emergencies which the bearing and rearing of small children bring.

On the other hand, a man's world can bring, if he is in a professional or academic calling, great intellectual growth. The mind becomes acute and verbal ability improves. The abilities to cut into false argument, to scrutinize evidence, to effectively present a case, increase. A woman, unless she makes a special effort, has little of this mental growth. There is the challenge of raising children, but it is more of an intuitive, emotional, and spiritual challenge than an intellectual one. In addition, much of her day is taken up with routine tasks—dishes, bed-making, clothes-washing—which give a sense of accomplishment, but require little mental effort. True, there is an administrative and organizational ability required, but as Norman Mailer discovered, after caring for his five children for six weeks, it is not enough. In his essay "The Prisoner of Sex" (*Harpers*, March 1971), he says:

(I) could immerse (my) self in the unintriguing subtleties of the thousand acts of order and timing which make the difference between efficient and catastrophic keeping of house—could do all this for year after year and never write another word, be content, honorably fatigued, empty of doubt about (my) worth, free of dread, all credit deposited to (my) moral foundations, but in no uncertainty that *the most interesting part of [my] mind and heart was condemned to dry on the vine.*

In addition, a man's world, while limiting freedom in terms of scheduling, gives much greater freedom in choice of occupation and consequent development of individual talents. A man can be a musician, an architect, a plumber, a sociologist, all according to his individual preferences and abilities.

In contrast, a woman's daily activity is similar whether she has talent and training in the fields of art, chemistry, law or archeology. At best, she can pursue her in-

terest only part-time, and often even this becomes impossible as unmade beds and dirty dishes threaten to multiply. True, certain activities are compatible with home-making—music, interior design, sewing, cooking, even horticulture—all certainly enrich the home and give many women joy and satisfaction. But there are those of us who cannot sew and who cause flowers to wilt more often than grow, and yet who have a real interest in international affairs or chemistry, or a gift for writing poetry. The feeling of frustration is enhanced if we have pursued long hours of study, know that our ability is comparable with others, and have tasted the thrill of accomplishment through contribution in our chosen field. Yet we can feel our skills decline as we are unable to do research, write, experiment, or carry on activities in our fields.

What happens to a woman or any individual who is unable to develop her talents to any extent? Very often she develops feelings of passivity or unworthiness. Later on, a woman might become too dependent on the accomplishments of her husband and children and find herself leading a vicarious, rather than a productive, life. There is also the rather unfortunate matter of financial reimbursement. It is significant that a man gets paid for his contribution to society while a woman does not. As a result, it is hard for a woman to value herself or her accomplishments to the same extent that her salary-earning husband is valued. On the other hand, it seems unfair for the man to bear the total weight for earning the family living.

This, then, is the dilemma of the two worlds. The woman has more opportunity for emotional and perhaps spiritual growth, the man for intellectual growth. What can be done to bring these two worlds together, to allow more husbands and wives to share the opportunities for growth contained in each sphere?

Church activity accomplishes this in many respects. For the man, it gives opportunity for cooperative relationships. There is, for example, the feeling of closeness which comes from activity in a bishopric or even from a day's work on the stake farm. The Church also offers the chance to subsume one's interests in the needs of others. In addition, the content of many meetings gives a man a chance to review moral principles in relation to his own life. Thus he receives constant exhortations to improve himself and his relationship with others. This offsets forces in the world which pull him toward compromise and mediocrity.

But the Church does *not* help in escaping the organizational demands of the modern technological world. There are meetings our men must attend, perhaps when they need most to escape from the tedium of sitting and listening. How often my husband has remarked that, when growing up on the farm, he looked forward to Sunday as a complete change from the week's activities. Now he finds that while the content of the day reflects a worthwhile change from his week's work, the form remains the same—sitting in a meeting, listening or talking, taking notes, making appointments, etc.

In addition, when the Church takes a man out of the house for the number of activities which a leadership position demands, the responsibility for small children falls even more heavily on the wife. Thus the reverse of what needs to occur actually happens. The husband does not spend time with children and the wife does not get her "time away" for pursuit of intellectually stimulating activities. This situation might be ameliorated as the children get older and the husband's absence does not automatically mean greater home responsibility for the wife. But for the family with small children, a big church job for the husband means the loss of precious moments of time alone for the wife.

The Church also offers women an important balance to their life's activities. Through it comes a certain amount of intellectual stimulation, for example, in the teaching functions and in some of the Relief Society lessons. There also comes the opportunity for development of organizational skills through the administration of the various auxiliaries. Some talents are developed—music, drama, art, in particular. But for those of us whose interests lie in chemistry or political science, Church activity, *per se*, generally does not help, and by taking up valuable time, may actually hinder the development of these abilities. (There are of course, many other reasons for Church activity. The development of one's own talents may actually be far down the list in importance.)

Thus, for some (indeed perhaps most) individuals, the Church might successfully fill the developmental lacks inherent in the dichotomy of two worlds. But there are those of us who feel the need for greater participation in the "other world." What possible solution can be found for us?

My husband and I have tried a variety of arrangements to allow each of us participation in the other's world. These have ranged from complete role reversal, when I worked full-time while my husband stayed home with house and child and took classes in the evening, to the present situation where I am at home with our four small children while my husband is gone constantly with job and Church activities. Both arrangements are far from ideal, as far as we are concerned. I see too much of the children, my husband not enough. I hardly write an intelligible sentence from day to day, while he comes home utterly exhausted after 8-10 hours of pure research.

The best arrangements we have found are flexible part-time arrangements such as we had when we were going to school and teaching, sharing house-keeping and child-rearing functions. I remember feeling like the mistress of two wonderful worlds as I left the humdrum of dishes and washing to walk into the meditative atmosphere of a graduate school library. At the same time, it was relaxing beyond measure to return from an overheated seminar discussion to sorting clothes or reading a child's story. Strangely enough, I think my husband really enjoyed his time at home. Our kitchen has never been so organized, nor the children so happy as when he has had a part-time responsibility for the home.

However (as we have been told again and again), present society is not set up for such flexible arrangements. We have felt that perhaps only in a university setting could we share both worlds. We could, of course, leave the children with a full-time sitter while we both worked, but neither of us feel the family's full potential (children included) would be served by this arrangement.

Thus, the great challenge in many marriages of today, ours included, is to balance the demands and responsibilities of earning a living and rearing children while maximizing the opportunities for individual growth.

There is no set pattern for achieving the ideal balance. Rather, it depends upon each individual couple, their age, family size, their ability and training, and their degree of flexibility with regard to traditional roles. In the Church, most women choose the home. On the outside, many more women are choosing a career. Some of us, however, have tried to travel both roads. I still am trying, to some extent. But I am terribly fearful that much grass has grown on the academic road. Ten years ago, I took on teaching those high school seniors without a second thought. Now I am worried about the prospects of returning to the same endeavor. Will this sophisticated generation deride me as a housewife out of place trying to explain

fluctuations in foreign exchange rates? It seems an eternity since someone called me "Doctor" instead of "Mrs.," "Sister," or "Mom." If a choice has to be made, I think I made the right one. Of all the appellations, "Doctor" is probably the least significant. But I feel real anguish when I ask, "Why does a choice have to be made?" "Why does a woman have to feel so torn between two worlds, each good in its own way?"

I worry greatly when some Church leaders indicate that the traditional role separation between men and women is divinely sanctioned. I can readily understand a concern for children left without adequate parental love and concern. Often the "working mother" signifies exactly this situation. However, I do not want to be locked in the home. I also, most emphatically, do not want my husband to be locked out of the home! I still deeply believe that the crucial test for each family unit is the degree to which it promotes the perfection of its members. What I see lacking in so many marriages is a true realization of the limitations under which the other partner is operating. Instead of sensitive understanding and teamwork which can go so far to mitigate the handicaps imposed by the "two worlds," there is a tendency for each to go his or her separate way—for the man to spend long hours at his job (Church included) and for the woman to struggle alone with the children. Surely Church leaders can recognize that this situation is far from ideal. Why can there not be more acknowledgement by them, then, that great personal growth can occur and the responsibilities of child-rearing and bread-earning made easier, if there is a true sharing of roles within the family unit?