

To meet the special needs of children today who are growing up in a world of confused moral values requires more than programmes to alleviate specific problems. IYC has taught us that the good of family life ought to have a central place in the formulation of public policy. Families are affected by powerful economic and social forces over which they have little control -- unemployment, inflation, increased housing costs. If we truly want to advance the rights of children we must examine more critically the reasons for the increasing breakdown of family life as it shows up in the high divorce statistics, child abuse, and teen-age suicide and pregnancy rates. All of this needs to be probed, especially in relation to our growing knowledge of the character and personality formation in the critical learning years of childhood, between the ages of three and five.

When we also look at how children are exploited by television violence, pornography merchants and drug peddlars, it ought to fill adults with shame.

By the time the average child graduates from high school, he or she will have witnessed 18,000 fictionalized violent deaths on TV. Violence has now become an accepted form of entertainment, thus giving the child a distorted view of proper moral and ethical behaviour.

How is it that a society priding itself on civilized social values allows itself to be victimized by the pornography merchants who do not even hesitate to use children in their nefarious business? Degradation of the human person is objectionable in whatever form it takes; but degradation of the person of the child is especially intolerable.

The drug culture also exploits young people. The size and youthfulness of the drug-using population is known to be growing, with children increasingly exposed to a greater variety and availability of dangerous drugs.

Readily available alcohol is another well-known trap awaiting children.

It is not easy growing up in the modern world and, as the father of five children, I salute young people for meeting head-on and, in most cases, triumphing over the obstacles we have placed in their path. It is a tribute to the resilience of today's young generation that they cope as well as they do in a culture that is only now beginning to realize that technology alone is not the answer to a more human existence.

We need more programmes to relieve the harm done to those children who are dispirited, angry and withdrawn. But we need even more the full attention of society on ways to help children grow into mature, responsible and caring adults. This