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Editorial

The Art of Parenting and Formation

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them. (Mark 10: 13-16)

Sunderland (2006) portrayed that ‘parenting’ is obviously a gender-neutral term purporting to include both the mother and the father. In the book ‘Parenting Culture Studies,’ Lee (2014) wrote about how parenting suggests that the fathers and mothers of today need to ‘acquire skills’ through ‘expert help’ to play their role as parents efficiently. Parenting is an art that requires skill and a deep sense of understanding of what one brings into the responsibility of making a socially responsible and dutiful human being. New parents feel the rush of love and warmth that they have never felt before when they hear the cries of their newborn child. They are put into a responsibility that they might have read about or heard about since then but never had a firsthand experience with it. No new parent can tell that they are 100% ready for what is coming at them, but they can always look up to various references which can guide them in their parenting journey.

The process of childbirth itself has become medically secure and more and more fathers are opting to be present in the delivery room. From the womb to the tomb- that is a journey that awaits the new born child and most of them born into a Christian family now will be raised in the ways and manners of a Christian. They would be taught the rituals and the meanings of those practices, and some of them will even go into

the life of ministry. More or less, there will be some of them who will continue practicing the Christian life and believe in it that they will pass it on to the next generation. And much more will find understanding in other ways of life and manage to have as much a good life as any other normal human being. The understanding here is that when a person chooses to grow into the Christian life, it is a responsibility that starts early on in life and continues even when there are others around who choose to live differently. Hence it will be right to say that formators overlooking the formation of Christian missionaries may have as much responsibility as those parents holding their newborn child in their arms.

A famous child expert, D. W. Winnicott had mentioned that children and parents are to be considered as a team working together where a problem with the child's behavior would imply an imbalance in the functioning of the team (Jackson, 2009). When children no longer feel that they are important to their parents, or that their parents are not sincerely concerned about them, it can cause deep hurt. Bobbie Sandoz was also of this opinion and had said that "If you wish to keep communications with your children open, you'll need to stop interruptive behaviors, hurried problem-solving, and denials and defenses; then listen with a mind quiet enough to hear your child deeply." Payne (2015) in the book "The Soul of Discipline" talks about three phases of parental involvement that build on each other namely Governor- Gardener- Guide parenting approach.

Governor is the phase of parenting which looks over the early stages of the parenthood where the main aim is to keep the child feel safe. They have the role of helping the child control their impulses and teach the children to follow instructions by letting them know that they are the parents and they are in charge. A healthy progression in this phases leads to a transition into the second phase of a Gardner. A Gardner tends to the blooming years of a child's life- the pre-teenage years. The pre-teenager would be encouraged to see themselves as a part of the family where they work and develop together. The Gardner is still required to show that they are in charge but refines the way in which they reach out to the teenager by showing the difference in the way they hear things and makes decisions. They are in charge of emotional growth and is a decision maker based on carefully listening, assisting the child in making plans that include the entire family into consideration. A healthy development in this phase leads to the final phase of the Guide who is aware of the tougher dealings ahead. The teenager in these years requires the Guide to listen to them and assist them in the decisions that are made together.

The Guide plans with the teenager their hopes, dreams, and goals. The Guide can be called a sounding-board, and a moral compass for these future adults and help them build them a sense of life for healthy decision making. This can be used as a healthy guide to understanding the roles parents play in various stages of the child's development. The Governor-Gardener- Guide approach can be an effective tool for formation.

Most of the households nowadays contain working parents and most of the times the children are raised up as latch-key children. Parents would rely on educational institutions and other day-care centers to model and teach these children basic instructions and delegate their moral formation. Though a difficult situation to argue the level of sacrifices either of the parents must take to ensure that the child learns to be a good citizen, it can be agreed that sacrifices and negotiations are a huge part of parenthood. Keeping aside time to be physically present for the child is crucial because the child had placed their trust on their parents. This forms the foundation for their affective and ethical development (*Amoris Laetitia*, 2015).

Mark's gospel (Mark 10: 13-16) highlights a very important aspect of parenting. The way Jesus reacted to His disciples and drew the children closer to Him must have had a deeper meaning for the parents of the children more than His disciples. The parents who brought their children to Jesus would have known of His powers to heal the sick and the wisdom with which He spoke. More than Him healing physical ailments or teaching young children the parables of life, just being in the presence of Jesus and being held by Him was far more important. New parents are often given two kinds of speeches- "quality time" and "quantity time" speeches (Smylie & Smylie, 1991). Quality time would consist of the parents being more than just being physically present for the child. Quantity time would ensure that the child knows that their parents are there for them and takes them as their top priority even though they are busy with the challenging demands of their lives.

In many ways, the role of a formator is like Jesus. Pope Francis (2016) suggested in *The Gift of Priestly Vocation*, the need to revamp, renew and restore the formation of Priests has to be given attention. We have been encouraged and illuminated by the teaching of Pope Francis: the priest is not a functionary, but the Pastors are anointed for the people of God, who has the compassionate and merciful heart of Christ for the weary and exhausted throng. In the Document the directions regarding integral formation, offered by *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, from 1992, are recalled,

that is to say, the ability to unite, in a balanced way, the human, as well as the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral dimensions, through a gradual instructional personalized course. Regarding the first – the human dimension – there is particular stress: one cannot be a priest without the balance of mind and heart and affective maturity, and every unresolved lacuna or problem in this area risks becoming gravely harmful, both for the person as well as for the People of God.

Some important keywords that can be seen in the document are humanity, spirituality, and discernment. Humanity is seen in the need for seminarians to be accompanied through a growth process which will help develop humanly balanced, serene and stable persons. Spirituality should never be taken for granted. “The conscience of priestly identity is necessarily founded upon this aspect: the priest is not a man of action, a leader, religious organizer, or a functionary of the sacred.” Discernment is seen in the one “who follows the Gospel way and who immerses himself in life in the Spirit. They overcome both an ideological as well as a rigorist approach, discovering that the processes and situations of life cannot be classified through inflexible schemata or abstract norms, but instead need listening, dialogue, and interpretations of the heart’s movements.” Research has shown that harsh parenting and child externalizing problems is strongest when the mother-child relationship lacks warmth (Deater-Deckard, Ivy, & Petrill, 2006). As Karl Menninger once said, “What’s done to children, they will do to society.” This places the responsibility on parents and formators, as educators, for instilling in their children trust and loving respect.

I have seen the effect of parents who walk the spiritual walk with the children being able to help in their child’s spiritual transformation. I had known about a young man in the church youth who said that every time his mother lead the family in prayer, he would have tears in his eyes. This was because he would remember all the things that he is grateful for and realize that his parents need God as much as he needs the divine presence in his life. As a spiritual leader, I too was lead and challenged in my journey of finding spirituality through the walk with my formators. It can be concluded that the elements of a sound human formation are many and the demands may vary for different individuals. In *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992) Pope John Paul II enumerated the some of the most important points considered for sound priestly formation: the balanced development of the human faculties (intelligence, will, passions, feelings); the capacity for human relationships; affective

maturity; and the development of a moral conscience. A balanced life includes the needs of all areas like intellect, physical, emotional as well as spiritual needs. Capacity for relationships can be seen as the ability to relate appropriately to others no matter their age, gender, ethnicity or other factors. Affective maturity would involve understanding and accept oneself as a sexual person and to learn to relate comfortably with others are ongoing developmental tasks which will always be present in a person's life. The development of a moral conscience or Human maturity, especially in the affective dimension, is manifested and deepened through a responsible use of freedom. Respect for self and others as sacred in the eyes of God must guide decisions and conduct as private individuals and also public figures in ministry. In addition, the gift of priestly vocation invites the church to propose solid and sound formation to the candidates.

In the document *The Gift of Priestly Vocation* (2016), Pope Francis said the vocation to ordained ministry a "treasure hidden in a field." Vocation is like a "diamond in the rough"- the beauty of it comes after it is cut, refined and polished with a lot of care and patience. The works of a Seminarian who goes through the patient and careful formation, keeping in mind their unique gifts, would be able to shine among the People of God. Pope Francis had recommended that formators can use Jesus' model of teaching others to "come and follow me," and "do as I do." The formation is an ongoing process that priests never cease to be disciples of Jesus although they may falter or fall as they follow Him.

"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born, I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). Formation and parenting is a journey in line with God's providential design. Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her" (Luke 1:38). Every aspect of formation can refer to Mary. No one can better correspond to the vocation of taking the Word of God and conceiving it in her heart and in the flesh than Mother Mary. Like good parenting, the good formation will help foster empathy, honesty, self-reliance, self-control, kindness, cooperation, and cheerfulness in the candidates, qualities which are very much required in the present challenges of the Christian world today.

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