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CHILDREN, OUR FUTURE

Editorial

Childhood, which in its broadest meaning comprises the first fourteen years of human life, is the most crucial phase of a person's development. Consisting of what Psychologists generally categorize as the first four developmental stages of the human person, it is in this period that the foundations of the personality are laid and its most basic characteristics shaped. The personality strengths acquired at this period become lasting gains that make the mastery of further skills and the fulfillment of roles proper to the later stages easier. The damages done to the child's personality are also mostly irreparable and they may permanently debilitate the person. The origins of most psychic disorders that cause so much personal pain and disruption of family and social relationships are traceable to childhood neglect or abuse.

However, when childhood development is normal it is perhaps the most fascinating period both for the child and for others. For the child it is the age of exploration and enchantment, discovery and progressive mastery of ones' surroundings and oneself. It receives so much love and admiration and it is valued and cherished for being simply itself irrespective of its achievements. For the parents as well as others, children with their total dependence and trust, incandescent innocence and disarming openness, are a delight. For the grown-ups children are a source of not only joy and fascination but also of growth and maturing. For it is a surprising fact the while the parents help the children to grow the children also in their way help the parents to grow. If parents bring up children, the children also have a way of brining up their parents. One of the basic principles of family spirituality

is that the main way for the sanctification of the parents is their sanctification of their children.

The flip side of childhood is that it is also the most vulnerable stage of human development. Children, being the weakest links of the family relational network, suffer the most severe of consequences of any serious conflict or problem in the family. The first and the most traumatized victims of any natural or man-made disaster or socio-economic oppression are the children. This is becoming increasingly evident in countries like India where oppressive social systems and exploitative economic policies are resulting in greater incidences of child labour, child abuses and crimes particularly against girl children.

It is platitudinous to say that the future of any society or culture depends on the way it treats and rears its children. The patterns of child rearing and treatment have their corresponding and consequential cultural patterns and characteristics in the society at large and each tend to reinforce the other. So any society that envisages a change of its culture may have to start with changing the way it treats and brings up its children.

What is true of the society applies to the Church as well. The future well-being of the Church depends on the present well-being of its children. The Church has been quite aware of this and has channalized so much of its resources and personnel to ministering the children. But its ministry to the children has been mostly restricted to only imparting education, particularly religious and moral. Its concern and commitment to the eradication of injustices to children has been only minimal. The creation of families and societies in which children can grow healthy and happy and realize their full potential still remains as a mission not fully accomplished. Only in such families and societies children can develop basic trust in which is rooted their belief in humanity and God. The various articles in this issue focus on this much neglected area of human and Christian concern. My hearty thanks to Fr. R. Mary John for his special help in preparing this issue.

D. ALPHONSE