

ON THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN

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for a person's spiritual state lies with the family*

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A child's upbringing commences at the moment of its conception. The embryo hears and feels in its mother's womb. Yes, it hears and it sees with its mother's eyes. It is aware of her movements and her emotions, even though its mind has not developed. If the mother's face darkens, it darkens too. If the mother is irritated, then it becomes irritated also. Whatever the mother experiences — sorrow, pain, fear, anxiety, etc. — is also experienced by the embryo.

If the mother doesn't want the child, if she doesn't love it, then the embryo senses this and traumas are created in its little soul that accompany it all its life. The opposite occurs through the mother's holy emotions. When she is filled with joy, peace and love for the embryo, she transmits these things to it mystically, just as happens to children that have been born.

For this reason a mother must pray a lot during her pregnancy and love the child growing within her, caressing her abdomen, reading psalms, singing hymns and living a holy life. This is also for her own benefit. But she makes sacrifices for the sake of the embryo so that the child will become more holy and will acquire from the very outset holy foundations.

Do you see how delicate a matter it is for a woman to go through a pregnancy? Such a responsibility and such an honour!

I'll tell you something about other animate and non-rational beings and you will understand what I mean. In America the following experiment was carried out: in two identical rooms which were kept at exactly the same temperature flowers were planted in identical soil and watered in exactly the same way. There was, however, one difference: in the one room gentle, soothing music was played. And the result? The flowers in that room displayed an enormous difference in relation to the flowers in the other room. They had a quite different vitality, their colours were more attractive and they grew incomparably better.

What saves and makes for good children is the life of the parents in the home

What saves and makes for good children is the life of the parents in the home. The parents need to devote themselves to the love of God. They need to become saints in their relation to their children through their mildness, patience and love. They need to make a new start every day, with a fresh outlook, renewed enthusiasm and love for their children. And the joy that will come to them, the holiness that will visit them, will shower grace on their children. Generally the parents are to blame for the bad behaviour of the children. And their behaviour is not improved by reprimands, disciplining, or strictness. If the parents do not pursue a life of holiness and if they don't engage in spiritual struggle, they make great mistakes and transmit the faults they have within them. If the parents do not live a holy life and do not display love towards each other, the devil torments the parents with the reactions of the children. Love, harmony and understanding between the parents are what are required for the children. This provides a great sense of security and certainty.

The behaviour of the children is directly related to the state of the parents. When the children are hurt by the bad behaviour of the parents towards each other, they lose the strength and desire to progress in their lives. Their lives are constructed shoddily and the edifice of their soul is in constant danger of collapsing. Let me give you two examples.

Two sisters came to see me. One of them had gone through some very distressing experiences and they asked me what was the cause of these. I answered them:

'It's because of your home; it stems from your parents.'

And as I looked at the girl I said:

'These are things you've inherited from your mother.'

'But,' she said, 'my parents are such perfect people. They're Christians, they go to confession, they receive Communion and we had a religious upbringing. Unless it is religion that is to blame...'

I said to them:

'I don't believe a word of all that you're telling me. I see one thing only, and that is that your parents don't live with the joy of Christ.'

On hearing this, the other girl said:

'Listen, Maria, the Father's quite right. Our parents go to confession and receive Holy Communion, but did we ever have any peace at home? Our father was constantly complaining about our mother. And every day either the one refused to sit at the table or the other refused to go out somewhere together. So you see what the Father is saying is true.'

‘What’s your father’s name?’ I asked her.

She told me.

‘What’s your mother’s name?’

She told me.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘the feelings you’ve got inside you towards your mother are not at all good.’

You see, the moment she told me her father’s name I saw his soul, and the moment she told me her mother’s name, I saw her mother and I saw the way her daughter looked at her.

Another day a mother came to visit me with one of her daughters. She was very distressed and broke down in tears.

‘What’s the matter?’ I asked.

‘I’m in total despair over my older daughter. She threw her husband out the house and deceived us all with a pack of lies.’

‘What kind of lies?’ I inquired.

‘She threw her husband out the house ages ago and she didn’t tell us anything. We would ask on the phone, “How’s Stelios doing?”, and she would reply, “Oh, he’s fine. He’s just gone out to buy a newspaper.” Each time she would think up some new excuse so that we wouldn’t suspect anything. And this went on for two whole years. A few days ago we learned the truth from Stelios himself when we bumped into him by chance.’

So I said to her:

‘The fault’s your own. It’s you that’s to blame, you and your husband, but you most of all.’

‘What do you mean!’ she said indignantly. ‘I loved my children to the point that I was never out of the kitchen. I had no life of my own at all. I took them to the church and I was always telling them the right thing to do. How can you say that I’m to blame?’

I turned to her other daughter who was with her and asked:

‘What do you think about the matter?’

‘The Father’s right, Mum,’ she said. ‘We never ever enjoyed a single day when you weren’t quarrelling with Dad.’

‘Do you see then, how I’m right? It is you that are to blame. You traumatized the children. They are not to blame, but they are suffering the consequences.’

A psychological state is created in a child as a result of its parents that accompanies it throughout its life. Its later behaviour and its relationships with others are directly connected with the experiences that it carries with it from its childhood years. The child grows up and develops, but at bottom it does not change. This is manifested even in the smallest expressions

of life. For example, you get a craving for food and want to eat. You take something and eat it, then you see something else and you want that. You feel hungry and think that if you don't eat you'll feel faint and you'll start to tremble. You're afraid you'll lose weight. This is a psychological state that has its explanation. Perhaps you never knew your father or your mother, and you feel deprived and hungry, poor and weak. And this psychological reality is expressed by way of reflex as a weakness of the body.

A large part of the responsibility for a person's spiritual state lies with the family. For children to be released from their various inner problems it is not enough for them to receive good advice, or to be compelled by force; nor do logical arguments or threats do any good. These things rather make matters worse. The solution is to be found through the sanctification of the parents. Become saints and you will have no problems with your children. The sanctity of their parents releases the children from their problems. Children want to have saintly people at their side, people with lots of love who will neither intimidate them nor lecture them, but who will provide a saintly example and pray for them. You parents should pray silently to Christ with upraised arms and embrace your children mystically. When they misbehave you will take some disciplinary measures, but you will not coerce them. Above all you need to pray.

Parents, especially the mother, often cause hurt to a child for some act of misbehaviour by scolding it excessively. The child is then wounded. Even if you don't scold the child outwardly but bristle with anger inwardly or look fiercely at the child, the child understands. The child believes that its mother doesn't love it and asks, 'Do you love me, Mummy?' The mother answers, 'Yes, dear,' but the child is not convinced. It has been wounded. The mother loves it, she'll caress it later, but the child will pull its head away. It refuses to be caressed, regarding this as hypocrisy because it has been wounded.

Over-protectiveness leaves children immature

Another thing that harms children is over-protectiveness, that is, excessive care or excessive anxiety and worry on the part of the parents.

A mother used to complain to me that her five-year-old child was disobedient. 'It's your fault,' I told her, but she didn't understand. Once I went for a walk by the seaside with this mother along with the child. The little boy let go of his mother's hand and ran towards the sea. There was a sand dune there and the sea came in directly behind it. The mother immediately reacted with anxiety and was about to shout out and run

towards the boy who was standing on top of the dune with outstretched arms trying to keep his balance. I calmed her down and told her to turn her back on the boy while I kept an eye on him askance. When the boy despaired of provoking his mother's attention and causing her to panic and scream as usual, he calmly climbed down and walked towards us. That was the end of it. Then the mother understood what I meant.

Another mother used to complain that her little boy wouldn't eat all his food, especially his yoghurt. The little one was about three years old and tormented his mother every day. I said to her:

'What you should do is this. Empty the refrigerator completely and then fill it with some yoghurt. When lunchtime comes you'll give Peter his yoghurt. He'll refuse to eat it. In the evening you'll give him it again and the same the next day. In the end he'll get hungry and will try some. He'll throw a tantrum, but you'll just put up with it. Thereafter he'll eat it quite happily.'

That's just what happened and yoghurt became Peter's favourite food.

These things aren't difficult, but many mothers are unable to do them and the result is that they give their children a very bad upbringing. Mothers who are always standing over their children and pressurizing them, that is, over-protecting them, have failed in their task. You need to leave the child alone to take an interest in its own progress. Then you will succeed. When you are always standing over them, the children react. They become lethargic and weak-willed and generally are unsuccessful in life. This is a kind of over-protectiveness that leaves the children immature.

A few days ago a mother came here in a state of despair because of her son's repeated failures in the university entrance exams. He had been an excellent pupil in elementary school and all the way through high school. But in the end he failed repeatedly and showed indifference and had strange reactions.

'It's your fault,' I said to the mother, 'educated woman though you are! How else did you expect the boy to react? Pressure, pressure, pressure all these years, "Make sure you're top of the class, don't let us down, get yourself an important position in society..." Now he's thrown in the towel; he doesn't want anything. Stop this pressure and over-protection and you'll see that the boy will regain his equilibrium. He'll make progress once you let him be.'

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A mother should not be satisfied by giving her child a physical caress,

but should also coddle it with the caress of prayer. In the depths of its soul the child senses the spiritual caress that its mother conveys to it and is drawn to her. It feels security and certainty when its mother mystically embraces it with constant, intense and fervent prayer and releases it from whatever is oppressing it.

Mothers know how to express anxiety, offer advice and talk incessantly, but they haven't learned to pray. Most advice and criticism does a great deal of harm. You don't need to say a lot to children. Words hammer at the ears, but prayer goes to the heart. Prayer is required, with faith and without anxiety, along with a good example.

One day a mother came here distraught about her son, George. He was very mixed-up. He stayed out late at night and the company he kept was far from good. Every day things were getting worse. The mother was overcome by anxiety and distress.

I said to her:

'Don't say a word. Just pray.'

We agreed that between ten and ten fifteen every evening we would both pray. I told her to say not a word and to leave her son to stay out till whatever time he wanted, without asking him, 'What sort of time is this to come home? Where were you?', or any such thing. Instead she would say to him as lovingly as possible, 'Come and eat, George, there's food in the fridge.' Beyond this she was to say nothing. She would behave towards him with love and not stop praying.

The mother began to apply this tactic, and after about twenty days had passed the boy asked her:

'Mother, why don't you speak to me?'

'What do you mean, George, that I don't speak to you?'

'You've got something against me, Mother, and you're not speaking to me.'

'What strange idea is this that you've got into your head, George? Of course I speak to you. Am I not speaking to you now? What do you want me to say to you?'

George made no reply.

The mother then came to the monastery and asked me:

'Elder, what was the meaning of this that the boy said to me?'

'Our tactic has worked!'

'What tactic?'

'The tactic I told you — of not speaking and simply praying secretly and that the boy would come to his senses.'

'Do you think that that is it?'

'That is it,' I told her. 'He wants you to ask him "Where were you? What were you doing?" so that he can shout and react and come home even later the next night.'

'Is that so?' she said. 'What strange mysteries are hidden!'

'Do you understand now? He was tormenting you because he wanted you to react to his behaviour so that he could stage his little act. Now that you're not shouting at him he is upset. Instead of you being upset when he does what he wants, now he is upset because you don't appear distressed and you display indifference.'

One day George announced that he was giving up his job and going to Canada. He had told his boss to find a replacement because he was leaving. In the meantime I said to his parents:

'We'll pray.'

'But he's ready to leave... I'll grab him by the scruff of the neck!' said his father.

'No,' I told him, 'don't do anything.'

'But the boy's leaving, Elder!'

I said: 'Let him leave. You just devote yourselves to prayer and I'll be with you.'

Two or three days later early one Sunday morning George announced to his parents:

'I'm going off today with my friends.'

'Fine,' they replied, 'do as you want.'

He left, and along with his friends, two girls and two boys, he hired a car and set off for Chalkida. They drove around aimlessly here and there. Then they went past the church of Saint John the Russian and from there to Mantoudi, Aghia Anna and beyond to Vasilika. They had a swim in the Aegean Sea, they ate, drank and had a fine time. At the end of it all they set off on the road home. It was already dark. George was driving. As they were passing through Aghia Anna the car hit the corner of a house and was badly damaged. What could they do now? They managed to bring the car back to Athens at a crawling pace.

George arrived back home in the early hours of the morning. His parents said nothing to him and he went off to sleep. When he woke up he came and said to his father:

'Do you know what happened?... Now we'll have to repair the car and it will cost a lot of money.'

His father said:

'Well, George, you'll have to find a solution to this yourself. You know I've got debts to pay and your sisters to look after...'

‘What can I do, father?’

‘Do whatever you like. You’re grown-up and you’ve got a brain of your own. Go off to Canada and make some money...’

‘I can’t do that. We have to repair the car now.’

‘I’ve no idea what you should do,’ said his father. ‘Sort it out yourself.’

So, seeing that further dialogue with his father was pointless, he said no more and left. He went to his boss and said:

‘I had an accident with a car. I don’t want to leave now, so don’t hire anyone else.’

His boss said:

‘That’s all right by me, lad.’

‘Yes, but I would like you to give me some money in advance.’

‘That’s fine, but you were wanting to leave. If you want money, your father will have to sign for it.’

‘I’ll sign for it myself. My father doesn’t want to get involved. He told me so. I’ll work and I’ll repay it.’

Now isn’t that a miracle?

When the boy’s mother came again to see me I said to her:

‘The method we employed worked and God heard our prayer. The accident was from God and now the boy will stay at home and will come to his senses.’

That’s what happened through our prayer. It was a miracle. The parents fasted, prayed and kept silent and they were successful. Some time later the boy himself came and found me — without any of his family having said anything to him about me. George became a very fine man and now works in the air force and is married with a lovely family.

With children what is required is a lot of prayer and few words

All things are achieved through prayer, silence and love. Have you understood the effects of prayer? Love in prayer, love in Christ. That is what is truly beneficial. As long as you love your children with human love — which is often pathological — the more they will be mixed-up, and the more their behaviour will be negative. But when the love between you and towards your children is holy and Christian love, then you will have no problem. The sanctity of the parents saves the children. For this to come about, divine grace must act on the souls of the parents. No one can be sanctified on his own. The same divine grace will then illuminate, warm and animate the souls of the children.

People often telephone me from abroad and ask me about their

children and about other matters. Today a mother phoned me from Milan and asked me how she should behave towards her children. What I said to her was this:

‘Pray, and when you have to, speak to your children with love. Lots of prayer and few words. Lots of prayer and few words for everyone. We mustn’t become an annoyance, but rather pray secretly and then speak, and God will let us know in our hearts whether the others have accepted what we have said. If not, we won’t speak. We will simply pray mystically. Because if we speak we become an annoyance and make others react or even infuriate them. That is why it is better to speak mystically to the heart of others through secret prayer rather than to their ears.

‘Pray and then speak. That’s what to do with your children. If you are constantly lecturing them, you’ll become tiresome and when they grow up they’ll feel a kind of oppression. Prefer prayer and speak to them through prayer. Speak to God and God will speak to their hearts. That is, you shouldn’t give guidance to your children with a voice that they hear with their ears. You may do this too, but above all you should speak to God about your children. Say, “Lord Jesus Christ, give Your light to my children. I entrust them to You. You gave them to me, but I am weak and unable to guide them, so, please, illuminate them.” And God will speak to them and they will say to themselves, “Oh dear, I shouldn’t have upset Mummy by doing that!” And with the grace of God this will come from their heart.’

This is the most perfect way — for the mother to speak to God and for God to speak to the children. If you do not communicate in this way, constant lecturing becomes a kind of intimidation. And when the child grows up it begins to rebel, that is, to take revenge, so to speak, on its father and mother who coerced it. One way is the perfect way — for the mother’s and father’s holiness and love in Christ to speak. The radiance of sanctity and not human effort makes for good children.

When the children are traumatized and hurt on account of some serious situation, don’t let it affect you when they react negatively and speak rudely. In reality they don’t want to, but can’t help themselves at difficult times. They are remorseful afterwards. But if you become irritated and enraged, you become one with the evil spirit and it makes a mockery of you all.

The sanctity of the parents is the best way of bringing up children in the Lord

We must see God in the faces of our children and give God’s love to our children. The children should learn to pray. And in order for children

Eph. 6:4 to pray they must have in them the blood of praying parents. This is where some people make the mistake of saying, 'Since the parents are devout and pray, meditate on Holy Scripture and bring up their children *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*, it is natural that they will become good children.' But nevertheless we see the very opposite result on account of coercion.

It is not sufficient for the parents to be devout. They mustn't oppress the children to make them good by force. We may repel our children from Christ when we pursue the things of our religion with egotism. Children cannot endure coercion. Don't compel them to come with you to church. You can say, 'Whoever wants can come with me now or come later.' Leave God to speak to their souls. The reason why the children of some devout parents become rebellious when they grow up and reject the Church and everything connected with it and go off to seek satisfaction elsewhere is because of this pressure which they feel from their 'good' parents. The so-called 'devout' parents, who were anxious to make 'good Christians' of their children with their human love, pressurized their children and produced the opposite result. The children are pressurized when they are young, and when they reach the age of sixteen, seventeen or eighteen years old, they end up the opposite of what was intended. By way of reaction they start to mix with bad company and to use bad language.

When children grow up in an atmosphere of freedom and at the same time are surrounded by the good example of grown-ups, they are a joy to see. The secret is to be good and saintly and to inspire and radiate. The life of the children seems to be affected by the radiation of their parents. If the parents insist, 'Come on now, go and make confession, go and receive Communion', and so on, nothing is achieved. But what does your child see in you? How do you live and what do you radiate? Does Christ radiate in you? That is what is transmitted to your child. This is where the secret lies. And if this is done when the child is young, it will not be necessary for it to undergo '*great travail*' when it grows up. Solomon the Wise uses a beautiful image about exactly this subject, underlining the importance of a good start and good foundations: *He who seeks her [Wisdom] early shall have no great travail; for he shall find her sitting at his doors.* The person who '*seeks her early*' is the person who occupies himself with Wisdom from an early age. Wisdom is Christ.

When the parents are saintly and transmit this to the child and give the child an upbringing 'in the Lord', then the child, whatever the bad influences around it, will not be affected because by the door of its heart will be Wisdom — Christ Himself. The child will not undergo

great travail to acquire Wisdom. It seems very difficult to become good, but in reality it is very easy when from an early age you start with good experiences. As you grow up effort is not required; you have goodness within you and you experience it. You don't weary yourself; it is yours, a possession which you preserve, if you are careful, throughout your life.

With prayer and sanctity you can also help children at school

What is true for parents is also true for teachers. With prayer and sanctity you can also help children at school. The grace of God can overshadow them and make them good. Don't attempt with human methods to correct bad situations. No good will come of this. Only with prayer will you produce results. Invoke the grace of God on all the children — for divine grace to enter their souls and transform them. That is what it means to be a Christian.

You teachers transmit your anxiety to the children, without realizing it, and this affects them. With faith anxiety dissolves. What is it that we say? 'We commit our whole life to Christ our God.'*

Respond to the love of the children with discernment. And once they love you, you will be able to lead them to Christ. You will become the means. Let your love be genuine. Don't love them in a human way, as parents usually do. This does not help them. Love in prayer, love in Christ. This is truly beneficial. Pray for each child you see, and God will send His grace and will unite the child to Him. Before you enter the classroom, especially difficult classes, repeat the prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ...'. And as you enter, embrace all the children with your gaze, pray and then start your lesson, offering your whole self. By making this offering in Christ, you will be filled with joy. And in this way both you and the children will be sanctified. You will live in the love of Christ and of His Church, because you will become good during your work.

If a pupil causes a problem, make a general observation first, such as: 'Children, we're all here for a lesson, for a serious business. I'm here to help you. You are working hard to succeed in life, and I, who love you all very much, am also working hard. So please be quiet so that we can achieve our aim.'

And while you're saying this don't look at the pupil who's misbehaving. If he continues, address yourself to him, not with anger, but with seriousness and resolution. You need to be watchful and to keep control

* Words repeated again and again throughout the Divine Liturgy.

of the class to be able to influence their souls. The children are not at fault if they cause problems. It is the grown-ups who are to blame.

Don't speak much about Christ and God to the children, but pray to God for the children. Words enter the ears, but prayer enters the heart. Listen to a secret. The first day you enter a class, don't have a lesson. Speak to the children warmly and clearly and behave with love towards them. To begin with don't speak to them at all about God or about the soul. This comes later. But on the day when you decide to speak to them about God, prepare yourself well and say:

'There is a subject about which many people have great doubts. It is the subject 'God'. What's your opinion about this?'

And then you will have a discussion. On another day you will broach the subject of the 'soul'.

'Is there such a thing as the "soul"?''

Then you can talk about evil from a philosophical point of view. Tell them that we have two selves, a good and a bad. We must cultivate the good self. It is the good self that desires progress, kindness and love. We need to wake up this good self in order to become right-minded people in society. Remember that hymn: 'O soul, my soul, arise, why are you sleeping?'

* Don't tell them it like this, but with other words, for example: 'Be bright and awake for good things — for education, for love. Only love makes all things beautiful and fills our life and gives it meaning. Our wicked self desires laziness and indifference. But that takes all flavour from life and takes away all meaning and beauty.'

All these things, however, require preparation. Love demands sacrifices and very often sacrifice of time. Make sure you have mastery of your subject and are ready to give to the children. Be prepared and say everything with love and above all with joy. Show them all your love and know what you want and what you are saying. But how to behave towards children is an art. I heard a lovely story about this. Listen.

There was a teacher who was being tormented by the behaviour of one of the boys and wanted to expel him from the school. In the meantime, however, a new teacher arrived and took over the class. The new teacher was told in advance about the problem pupil. He also heard that the boy in question was mad about bicycles. So, on the second day, when he entered the classroom he said:

'Children, I've got a problem. I live far from the school and I want to get a bicycle so that I don't tire my feet out every day walking here, but

* The *Kontakion* from the Great Canon by Saint Andrew of Crete.

I don't know how to ride one. Could any one of you teach me how to ride a bike?'

The mischievous boy jumped up at once and said, 'I'll teach you, Sir.'

'Do you know how to ride a bike?'

'Yes, Sir.'

From that moment on they became best friends, to the point that the old teacher got upset when he saw them. He felt a sense of inadequacy that he had been unable to evoke respect from the boy.

There are often orphan children at a school. It's a hard thing to be an orphan. A child who's deprived of its parents, especially at an early age, becomes unhappy in life. But if it acquires spiritual parents in Christ and our Holy Lady, it becomes a saint. Treat orphan children with love and understanding, but above all bring them into contact with Christ and the Church.

Teach the children to seek God's help

The medicine and great secret for children's progress is humility. Trust in God gives perfect security. God is everything. No one can say that I am everything. That cultivates egotism. God desires us to lead children to humility. Without humility neither we nor children will achieve anything. You need to be careful when you encourage children. You shouldn't say to a child, 'You'll succeed, you're great, you're young, you're fearless, you're perfect!' This is not good for the child. You can tell the child to pray, and say, 'The talents you have, have been given to you by God. Pray and God will give you strength to cultivate them and in that way you will succeed. God will give you His grace.' That is the best way. Children should learn to seek God's help in everything.

Praise is harmful to children. What does Scripture say? *O my people, those who call you blessed lead you astray, and pervert the path of your feet.* The person who praises us leads us astray and perverts the paths of our life. How wise God's words are! Praise does not prepare children for any difficulties in life and they grow up badly adjusted; they lose their way and in the end they become failures. Now the world has gone hay-wire. Little children are constantly being praised. We are told not to scold children, not to go against their will and not to impose on them. The child learns to expect this, however, and is unable to deal maturely with even the slightest difficulty. As soon as it encounters opposition, it is defeated and drained of all strength. Isa. 3:12

Prime responsibility for the failure of children in life lies with their

parents and thereafter with their teachers. They praise them constantly. They fill them with egotistical words. They do not lead them to the spirit of God and they alienate them from the Church. When the children grow up a little and go to school with this egotism they abandon and disdain religion and they lose their respect for God, for their parents and for everyone. They become stubborn, hard and unfeeling, with no respect for religion or for God. We have produced a generation of egotists and not of Christians.

Children are not edified by constant praise

Children are not edified by constant praise. They become self-centred and vain. All their lives they will want everyone to be praising them constantly, even if they are being told lies. Unfortunately, nowadays all people have learned to tell lies and the conceited accept those lies as their daily sustenance. 'Say it, even if it's not true, even if it's ironical,' they say. God does not want this. God wants truth. Unfortunately, not all people understand this and they do the very opposite.

When you praise children constantly and indiscriminately, they fall prey to the temptations of the evil one. He sets the mill of egotism in motion, and accustomed as they are to praise from their parents and teachers, they make progress at school perhaps, but what is the gain? In life they will be egotists and not Christians. Egotists can never be Christians. Egotists desire to be praised constantly by everyone, for everyone to love them and for everyone to speak well of them, and this is something that our God, our Church and our Christ do not want.

Our religion does not wish for this kind of upbringing. On the contrary, it wants children to learn the truth from an early age. The truth of Christ emphasizes that if you praise a person you make him an egotist. An egotist is mixed-up and is led by the devil and the evil spirit. And so, growing up in the spirit of egotism, his first task is to deny God and to be a badly adjusted egotist in society.

You must tell the truth for a person to learn it. Otherwise you sustain him in his ignorance. When you tell someone the truth, he finds his bearings, he takes care, he listens to other people and he restrains himself. And so to a child also you must tell the truth and scold it so that it knows that what it is doing is not good. What does Solomon say? *He that spares the rod hates his son, but he that loves him chastens him diligently.* I don't mean, of course, for you to beat the child with a stick. Then we overstep the bounds and produce the opposite result.

Prov. 13:24

By praising our children from an early age we lead them to egotism. And you can hoodwink an egotist, provided you tell him how good he is and inflate his ego. And so he tells you, 'This person who praises me is good.' These things are not right. Because such a person grows up with egotism, confusions arise within him, he suffers and he doesn't know what he is doing. The cause of psychological instability and disorder is egotism. This is something that psychiatrists themselves, if they explore the matter, will discover, namely, that the egotist is sick.

We should never praise and flatter our fellow men, but rather lead them to humility and love of God. Nor should we seek to be loved by flattering others. Let us learn to love and not seek to be loved. Let us love everyone and make sacrifices, as great as we are able, for all our brothers and sisters in Christ, without expecting praise and love from them in return. They will do for us whatever God inspires them to. If they are Christians, they will give glory to God that we helped them or spoke a good word to them.

This is also the way you should guide the children at school. This is the truth. Otherwise they grow up maladjusted. They don't know what they are doing and where they are going, and we are the cause of it, on account of the way we have brought them up. We have not led them to truth, to humility and to the love of God. We have turned them into egotists and look at the result!

There are also, however, children who come from humble parents who spoke to them from an early age about God and about holy humility. These children do not create problems to their fellow men. They do not get angry when you point out their error, but try to correct it and pray that God may help them not to become egotists.

When I went to the Holy Mountain I lived with exceedingly saintly elders. They never said to me, 'Well done.' They always counselled me how to love God and how to be always humble, to invoke God to fortify my soul and to love Him greatly. I didn't know what 'well done' was, nor did I ever desire it. On the contrary, I was distressed if my elders didn't scold me. I said to myself, 'Heavens above, I haven't found myself good elders!' I wanted them to correct me, to censure me and behave strictly towards me. If a Christian were to hear what I'm saying now, what would he say? He would be taken aback and reject it. But nevertheless that is what is right, humble and sincere.

My parents never said 'well done' to me either. For that reason, whatever I did, I did selflessly. Now that I hear people singing my praises, I feel very bad. There's something that kicks in protest inside me when

other people say to me, 'well done'. The fact that I learned humility did me no harm. And why do I not want to be applauded now? Because I know that praise makes a person empty and expels the grace of God. The grace of God comes only with holy humility. A humble man is a perfect man. Is that not a fine thing? Is that not true?

If you tell this to anyone they will immediately say, 'What a piece of nonsense! If you don't praise your child he won't be able to do his school-work or anything...' But that happens because that's what we're like, and we have made our children the same. In other words, we have strayed from the truth. Egotism evicted man from Paradise; it is a great evil. Adam and Eve were simple and humble; that's why they lived in Paradise. They didn't have egotism. They did, however, have the 'primal nature', as we call it in theological language. When we say 'primal nature' we mean the gifts of grace that God bestowed on man in the beginning when He created him, namely, life, immortality, consciousness, freedom of will, love, humility, etc. Through flattery, however, the devil managed to delude them. They became filled with egotism. The natural state of man as created by God, however, is humility. Egotism, on the contrary, is something unnatural, an illness and contrary to nature.

When we, with our laudations, create this 'superego' in the child, we inflate its egotism and we do it great harm. We make the child more susceptible to demonic influence. And so, as we bring it up, we steadily distance it from the values of life. Don't you believe that this is the reason why children go astray and people rebel? It is the egotism that their parents have implanted in them from an early age. The devil is the great egotist, the great Lucifer. In other words, we live with Lucifer inside us, with the devil. We don't live with humility. Humility is from God; it is something essential for the human soul. It is something organic. And if it is missing, it is as if the heart were missing from the human organism. The heart gives life to the body and humility gives life to the soul. With egotism a person is given over to the part of the evil spirit, that is, he develops with the evil spirit and not with the good spirit.

This is what the devil has succeeded in achieving. He has turned the earth into a labyrinth so that we are unable to come to an understanding with one another. What has happened to us without our realizing it? Do you see how we have been led astray? We have turned our world and our age into one large psychiatric hospital! And we don't understand what's gone wrong. We all ask, 'What's become of us, where are we going, why have our children taken off, why have they left their homes, why have they resigned from life, why have they given up their studies?

Why is all this happening?' The devil has succeeded in concealing himself and in making people use other names. Doctors and psychologists often say when someone is tormented, 'Ah, this person has a neurosis or is suffering from anxiety.' They don't accept that the devil is inciting and arousing egotism in the person. But yet the devil exists and is the spirit of evil. If we say he doesn't exist, it is as if we are rejecting the Gospel that speaks of him. He is our enemy, our adversary in life, the contrary of Christ, which is why he is called the Anti-Christ. Christ came to earth to release us from the devil and to grant us salvation.

The conclusion is that we need to teach our children to live humbly and simply and not continually to seek praise and applause. We need to teach them that there is humility and that this is the healthy state of life.

The mind-set of our contemporary society does harm to children. It is based on another psychology and another theory of education that is addressed to the children of atheists. This frame of mind leads to complete disregard for the consequences of one's actions. And you see the results in our children and young people. Young people nowadays say, 'You need to understand us!' But we mustn't go to them. On the contrary, we need to pray for them, to say what is right, to live by what is right, and proclaim what is right, and not conform ourselves to their way of thinking. We mustn't compromise the magnificence of our faith. We cannot, in order to help them, adopt their own frame of mind. We need to remain the people that we are and proclaim the truth and the light.

The children will learn from the Holy Fathers. The teaching of the Fathers will instruct our children about confession, about the passions, about evils and about how the saints conquered their evil selves. And we will pray that God will enter into them.

WOUNDED BY LOVE

The Life and the Wisdom
of Saint Porphyrios



*edited from an archive of notes and recordings
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