

EARLY CHILDHOOD IN TODAY'S FAMILY. THE CHRISTIAN LANDMARKS IN THE LIVES OF OUR CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT. Early childhood represents the most important developmental period. Parents are nowadays confronted with serious challenges in their educational strivings. Many young spouses choose to learn about child psychology to overcome the difficulties raised by a baby's presence. Christian parents delineate their educational efforts by taking into consideration God's commandments. Prayer and patience are combined so that a loving dialogue conducts all the family interactions. Pre-schoolers are extremely attentive to what their parents do every day. Their kind gestures and words form the child's personality. Participation in the liturgical program of a church proves the authentic faith of the parents. Accustomed to the intense atmosphere of a dynamic ecclesial community, the Christian children are taught how to use theological teaching in their daily life. They learn important rules and limits about emotional reactions, expressing compassion, and loving their family, friends, and even strangers. The model provided by mum and dad always had a formative effect. Christian parents instil in their children the willingness to follow love, faith, and trust as the main virtues that a human being can hope for.

Keywords: loving parents, self-control, emotional balance, prayer, compassionate hearts.

Introduction

Today's world has significant impacts on young people's existence. The most evident of all is the considerable amount of information available through the Internet. The libraries still represent important meeting points for passionate readers, but using the Internet at home, in the street, in school, and at work has certainly become a habit. The impact on our daily life is definitely enormous.

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Studies are proving the negative effects of digital media mainly on children's development. All parents should be aware of the risks taken when their child is exposed one too many hours to a screen. Psychologists constantly emphasize the tremendous role of voluntary attention in the entire process of brain formation. Left for hours in front of the TV or mobile phone, the child loses the strength to focus on learning activities. To derive benefit from the huge amount of non-stop digital media, every child should be taught how to become selective and to exert self-control when it comes to the overwhelming influence of these new technologies. Otherwise, parents should expect many unpleasant surprises along the way of their child's evolution.

Time crisis is one of the main problems in raising children nowadays. Parents are daily confronted with huge amounts of real hard work. They sometimes admit to being overwhelmed by the unnecessary requirements at their workplace. Living in a globalised society has in itself different negative consequences, such as the generalised perception that a child may represent a serious obstacle to a prosperous career. Caught up in demanding jobs, many married people decide to postpone a possible childbirth for the years to come. Your own children have become an unnecessary burden². The long-term good intentions of young families are more and more monopolized by a *childfree* ideology that supports abortion and contraceptive methods. Instead of giving birth to children, future mothers feel forced to reject the possibility of becoming a parent. Maternity is not anymore a gift and paternity is clearly disconsidered. Even Christian Orthodox families that should be aware of the appalling sin of killing an innocent unborn child end up using abortion as a solution to the enlargement of the family circle. Those families that have decided to keep all their babies and not trashing them away are a total surprise within the Church. Unfortunately, this is a reality of our sleeping conscience as a religious body. Love must be served with responsibility in any family³. Assuming all the troubles and demands that can come over your family is the only way to build your happiness. Asking help from God readjusts and drives away fears of not being able to deal with future challenges, especially the material ones. Children are not meant to obstruct their parents' professional objectives but to impose the necessary limits needed for complete family life.

² *The Basis of the Social Thinking of the Russian Orthodox Church*, in Germano Marani, Ioan I. Ică jr (coord.), *The Social Thinking of the Church Basis – Documents – Analysis – Perspectives* (Deisis: Sibiu, 2002), 233.

³ Feodor Borodin, *How to Raise a Happy Child*, trans. Diana Guțu (Sophia: Bucharest, 2021), 137.

1. Early Childhood is a decisive period in family development

Early childhood is the most important developmental period of someone's life. Even though many parents realise their role in the upbringing of their children they may discover that coping with all the responsibilities is exhausting and they could try to escape them in various ways. Some parents choose to spend considerable time outside their home involved in activities that are mistakenly considered as unavoidable. Some fathers are even convinced that taking care of the children is exclusively a wife's duty. Instead, they only need to gain money so that they can assure the security of the entire family. For these parents educating a child can become a serious struggle in the current society. Children's education requires mainly self-change. Most adults see themselves forced to fight with their flaws and shortcomings in order to get the best out of their family life. Early childhood is a sensitive stage in the formation of a child that comprises the first seven-eight years. It always involves dedication and respect for the unique personality of the child and, undoubtedly, consistent and purposeful love. It also demands inner strength and substantial willingness to get more and more informed about relevant aspects of children's development. Participation in training programs concerning children education is often met among the young families who thus recognise their inabilities to raise babies. Nowadays it is highly recommended to follow their example.

The maternal love offered in the first year affects the emotional life of the baby for the entire life. Studies have proven so far that babies already have the capacity to learn things while they are in their mother's womb. They clearly perceive the parents' negative attitude towards their coming into the world and they react to it. Later on, these children are confronted with neurosis and the tendency to get involved in dangerous acts such as drug consumption and delinquency⁴. In other words, they simply hate themselves and feel a compulsive need to punish their own person. Psychologists emphasize the importance of the nine months before birth when a pregnant woman should be surrounded by people who appreciate and support her without hesitation. Her mental state affects the unborn child. After birth, this baby becomes extremely susceptible to stress. The learning process slows down and thus it deteriorates significantly. In school, they attract easily teachers' animosity because they stubbornly refuse to cooperate. When confronted with an intense level of emotional pressure these children search desperately for their mum's protection. Researchers from Yale University affirm that a high level of persistent stress hinders the development of the prefrontal cortex which is responsible for our thinking abilities⁵. At the

⁴ Tinca Crețu, *Development Psychology* (Polirom: Iași, 2016), 98.

⁵ Walter Mischel, *The Test of the Marshmallow Development Strategies of the Self-control Ability*, trans. Cristina Drăgulin (Curtea Veche: Bucharest, 2017), 60-1.

same time, stress slowly destroys the functions of this essential part of the brain. When parents constantly quarrel in the nearby of the cot the baby's brain starts to suffer from stress. This is one of the reasons why sometimes children feel relieved when parents finally decide to divorce. Taking into account the fact that most divorce cases usually take place at an early age, especially when the little ones are between three and six years old, it is explainable why these children are so nervous and reluctant to adults' requirements⁶.

Communication within a family starts prior to the marriage of the spouses. The friendship between the two is the basis for the future dialogue developed in their home. A friend always had a special place in our lives. She or he deserves full attention. The friendship between a woman and a man is essential before a marriage takes place. For a Christian, knowing your future partner well before deciding to form a family is a mandatory responsibility because it consolidates their love and contributes to a proper choice⁷. Ultimately, it helps the two persons to avoid a lifetime of suffering and distress. Their abilities to communicate prepare slowly the dialogue with the children they intend to give birth to. At the same time, the friendship developed before marriage expresses their emotional balance. This is meant to build the peaceful family climate that a child necessitates for growing healthy. The parents' inner balance determines the emotional evolution of the baby. The negative reactions to the baby's presence inflict a deep emotional suffering. The lack of maternal love affects tremendously the child's development. After birth, many women find themselves unable to initiate a warm dialogue with the baby. Unfortunately, their new-born child receives no concrete opportunities to enjoy a safe and friendly environment that usually creates a secure attachment, especially to the mother. In this case, the interaction pattern of the family does not provide the fulfilment of the baby's emotional needs.

2. Emotionally balanced children are the result of parents' strong self-control

The formative value of family relationships is unquestionable. Parents represent the example that children follow. Their influence upon the children at early age determines their entire life. Adults who fail in their educational endeavors have the unfortunate capacity to make their children unhappy in the long run. It is easily noticeable that these children tend to remain stuck in some kind of emotional suffering that only time can heal. The love between parents inspires

⁶ Anne Bacus, *The Child from Three to Six Years Old The Physical, Mental, Emotional, Intellectual and Social Development*, trans. Traiana Necşa (Teora: Bucharest, 2005), 7.

⁷ Nicolae Tănase, *The Ideal Husband, The Ideal Wife* (Anastasis: Sibiu, 2011), 12.

children to become loving companions for other people. Participation of parents in the life of the Church opens up children's hearts toward the unseen world of God. When both mother and father are authentic believers, children will most probably be the same in adulthood. Religious education demands as any other segment of a child's education a lot of voluntary attention. One of the main tasks parents have during their children's early age is to concentrate on activities that develop this attention because it plays a decisive role in all developmental stages comprised within a person's childhood, from birth to adolescence. Walter Mischel, the famous psychologist that did the "Marshmallow Test" in 1960, recommended that parents install rules and rituals that help little children to control their immediate desires⁸. This effort consolidates self-control. One example can be the observance of the time you shut down the TV or computer. During the first six-seven years, a child must develop inhibitory control over feelings and gestures. It is obvious that all adults need to have very good self-command when they are near a child. Already at three years old, children are able to talk about feelings with their close ones. Conversations between mothers and children should offer enough explanations about emotions because children are usually avid about finding out the reasons that stand behind the behaviour of adults⁹. These discussions help preschoolers understand more and more the inner life of others. At the same time, they absorb the rules that guide our emotional life in a particular place and background. The pre-schooler may gain emotional competence if the parents are preoccupied to teach proper ways to handle emotions. Being emotionally competent enables you to define well your own states of mind and identify correctly other people's emotions. Using local vocabulary which defines feelings as they are used in your community depends mainly on how adults choose to talk around the child. The capacity to offer emotional support to someone in trouble and adapt to your negative emotions is a quality that emotionally competent children gain an early age if parents stay really close and observe how they express emotions, especially when they interact outside their home. This is the reason why constant exposure to relevant groups of people that can influence positively the child's behaviour is a recommended educational approach. Christian teaching emphasizes the capacity of a family to teach the little ones what compassion is. Experts involved in youth drug abuse firmly affirm that compassionate people are usually less likely to emerge in self-destructive actions. In Christian education building a kind heart in your children is mandatory. Understanding the importance of emotions within the relationships developed with others is incumbent upon parents from an early age. Gentleness

⁸ Lucy Jo Palladino, *Parenting in the Age of Attention Snatchers. A Step-by-Step Guide to Balancing Your Child's Use of Technology*, trans. Miruna Andriescu (Polirom: Iasi, 2015), 52.

⁹ H. Rudolph Schaffer, *Introduction in the Child's Psychology*, trans. Thea Ionescu (ASCR: Cluj-Napoca, 2007), 134.

and kindness should be instilled into children by the adults' daily gestures. Self-control over your emotional life must be learned in the first seven years of life and it remains one of the most precious educational treasures a person can have. Cuddling and fondling always represent the start in developing emotional competence. Children need most of all to feel the love of their close adults so that they can become confident in their initiatives towards others.

3. Prayers and good deeds in early childhood represent the sources of the social Christian behaviour

All these aspects necessitate a considerable endeavour from parents. Some of them are sometimes overwhelmed by the outbursts that a child can have. They realise that they need to do something in order to be able to get over this period without disturbing or destroying the relationships with the child. Considering all the difficulties that can prevent from taking good care of children, many parents start learning child psychology with great interest. Thus they try to find answers to their specific situation. For Christian parents, prayer remains undoubtedly the main educational resource. Children must be taught at an early age to pray when they experience distress. Praying daily is a practice that Christian parents are called to develop within their families. Unfortunately, there are just a few parents that still preserve it and struggle to enhance the opportunities to tell prayers when children are around. These prayers are meant to strengthen family unity which God always blesses. Prayer is an excellent method to help children become aware of the needs of other people that may be in trouble. Good deeds do not necessitate every time a thing to offer but they can include time dedicated to praying for others. Parents should make sure that children learn at an early age about the entire panoply of deeds that they can exert for the benefit of their neighbours. The entire Christian theology is about praying and doing good to others. In this respect, Saint Paul the Apostle emphasizes in his epistles the positive role of the Christians in a world of scarcity and physical suffering. Nowadays children can participate with their parents in philanthropic activities. There are numerous occasions in our society to do so. Sunday is the perfect day to spread Christian kindness. After participation in the Holy Liturgy, a family may involve children in simple but important deeds for the others¹⁰. Some parishes have special programs organized with the intention to give children the possibility to act as a benefactor.

¹⁰ Alexie Graciov, *What Any Boy Should Know or Spiritual Conversations About What is Important in Life*, trans. Cristea Florentina (Egumenița: Galați, 2017), pp. 34-5.

Besides the visible results of these projects, children may use the interaction with fellows of the same age in order to develop their Christian social behaviour. Parents are aware of the direct educational benefits for the development of children. Involved in action groups of little friends that help sick and lonely people, children take the time to feel useful to somebody. At the same time, they play undoubtedly the role of an authentic Christian missionary. Good deeds wear always the divine light within them, but the children are even more special representatives of the Christian philanthropy. Their presence intensifies the joy of the beneficiaries. Involving children in philanthropic actions together with other children has in time an important side-effect that should be pointed out. At the preschool age children are self-centered. Adults are often forced to limit their tendency towards egoism, haughtiness, stubbornness, envy, laziness, greed or avarice¹¹. And many other flaws and weaknesses that the human character may be "endowed" with. Getting acquainted with the hardships of different people makes children more responsible and ready to offer support every time a new opportunity would arise. And doing so they form for themselves a Christian conscience that is always based on certain values such as unconditional love combined with a strong faith in the help of God, powerful reciprocal respect, perseverance enabled by ever-lasting patience and many more. Consequently, it is highly recommendable to take notice as a parent of all the bad habits that your child may have and intervene by slowly providing organized occasions to counteract their development. Children become messengers of the Christian teaching and the future laity¹².

Parents need to offer their offspring not only the best model of parenthood but also a conjugal life full of affection. Every person receives at baptism gifts from the Holy Spirit that should be activated along the course of life. This special divine bestowal received through baptism is used when the Christian believer serves others¹³. One of the most important services is to pray for another. Showing children, a conjugal relationship full of respect and sacrifice is the best way to open up children's hearts and fulfil them with love. A kind-hearted child will not lose the chance to pray for loved ones and other people.

The human brain's development ends around the age of 25. Early age and the years to follow represent the period when the constant habits of the child create neural paths within the brain. The habits developed during childhood, especially in the first seven-eight years, are preserved for the entire life.

¹¹ Saint Vladimir of Kiev, *About Education*, trans. Adrian Tănăsescu-Vlas (Sophia, Siluana: Bucharest, 2020), 113.

¹² Radu Preda, *The Signs of the Time* (Renașterea: Cluj-Napoca, 2008), 139.

¹³ *The Basis of the Social Thinking of the Russian Orthodox Church*, 187.

Reading and doing sports, for instance, are two activities that must be encouraged at an early age. The human brain does not have a special area that determines and coordinates the desire for reading books. In other words, a human being can survive without the delight induced by the written text. However, it was discovered that children who read during childhood develop parts of the brain that considerably improve their language and, ultimately, their thinking capacity¹⁴. As emphasized earlier, praying should be a common exercise for a Christian pre-schooler. It always necessitates voluntary attention which is the essential element in learning perseverance. Without strong attention gained through constant effort, children find themselves helpless when confronted with difficult activities. Psychologists consider that a child should have the inner capacity to confront hardships. It is well-known that the main reason children and young people start using drugs is the lack of inner strength to overcome harsh moments in life¹⁵. Another important element that develops when children start praying is gratitude for what they have around them. It is common sense wisdom to appreciate the people God has surrounded us with. Christianity considers gratitude leverage of communication in itself. Expressing gratitude for all the benevolence that God offered us is a way to recognize His grandeur. At the same time, praying for the ones next to us is the single way to maintain unity of a group¹⁶. Encouraging the children to pray for others plays a certain role in their socio-emotional development. They have the possibility to experience at the early an age that God responds to their warm prayers. Praying frequently becomes a habit that slowly imprints decisively into the brain. The child's prayers have determined the divine grace to work for the benefit of others and this is indeed a perceptible miracle. When prayers are fulfilled, children learn easily to entrust themselves to the care of God. Praying is a precious educational method that makes the child aware of the presence of God and His wonders. Love showed to others by praying for them activates the gifts received at baptism. Praying for others must be perceived as a direct consequence of the revival experienced within the baptism. It strengthens the unity within the Body of Jesus Christ that is the Church. The meaning of praying for another person becomes clearer later when the child will be able to understand the sense of life as a gift from God.

¹⁴ Lucy Jo Palladino, *Parenting in the Age of Attention Snatchers*, 111-2.

¹⁵ Tatiana Șișova, Galina Kozlovskaja, *Dialogues About the Problems of Children and Adolescents*, trans. Adrian Tănăsescu-Vlas (Sophia: Bucharest, 2021), 284.

¹⁶ Zaharia Zaharou, *The Seal of the Christ's Presence in the Heart of Man*, trans. Monahia Porfiria, Monahia Tecla (Basilica: Bucharest, 2020), 142-3.

4. The constant participation of the family in the divine service develops generosity in children's heart

The model played by parents is tremendous. There are studies that prove that a faithful father who constantly prays determines the child to remain connected to the Church's worship in adulthood. The consistent behaviour of grown-ups helps pre-schoolers understand that the world functions because everyone abides some rules¹⁷. Adults reacting the same to the bad behaviour of children teaches them the idea that there is the constancy in the manner people act in particular circumstances. Observing adults allows the little ones to untangle reality. At the same time, the preschool child starts perceiving reality as having limits established by adults. These limits reassure children that they are safe in their surroundings. When limits and by rules remain stable, children tend to relax and not experience fear or anxiety. The life of prayer and going often to a church should characterize the life of a faithful adult. Accompanying parents to church on Sundays is a special moment during the week. The child feels its solemnity and absorbs the peaceful gestures of the parents. Participating in the divine service is thus an event. The parish where a family goes is where the child should have the experience of a community that loves Jesus Christ. All its initiatives are driven by the urge to serve one another, following the example of our Lord, the Son of God. Children are very perceptive. They appreciate kind people at once. The groups of people met in the church can provide sheer examples of loving and dedicated God's servants. Generosity inspires children to become attentive to others and understand what their needs might be. The ability to share things with another is learned at an early age¹⁸. Christian parents need to stay alert all time and assure themselves that their children have enough opportunities to practice generosity. Their little hearts are endowed with the quality to expand indefinitely with the help of divine grace that always brings love along. An ecclesial community develops thus a child's emotional competence. Children interact with many adults and children while in church. They are given an extra chance to express their feelings and speak about them. Poor emotional functioning is often diagnosed when children use negative conduct. At the age of five pre-schoolers can analyze in an impersonal manner the emotions they experience and succeed in managing them properly¹⁹. Furthermore, they are able to react to others' emotions and act upon them with positive effects. For instance, if a child is an angry way too much a pre-schooler can diminish this outburst so that

¹⁷ Cindy Terebush, *Teach the Whole Pre-schooler: Strategies for Nurturing Developing Minds*, trans. Cristina Firoiu (Trei: Bucharest, 2020), 122-3.

¹⁸ Feodor Borodin, *How to Raise a Happy Child*, 96.

¹⁹ H. Rudolph Schaffer, *Introduction in the Child's Psychology*, 151.

the affected fellow calms down completely. Unfortunately, this precocious quality of the pre-schooler is often noticed in those children coming from households where parents quarrel a lot in the presence of children. In these cases, the irresponsibility of the adults is paid with the untimely growing up of the little ones who learn conflict resolution and useless suffering too early.

Taking part in the activities developed by a parish allows children to do good deeds. This atmosphere of constant dedication strengthens perseverance which is the necessary engine of a strong will. Parents should offer proper occasions for the child to solve problems. The will of a child starts developing around the age of five and it necessitates help from adults. Confronted with different dilemmas pre-schoolers are forced to identify solutions. Christian parents have now the possibility to teach their children that answering to God's love involves prayers, repentance and good deeds that boost generosity. Asceticism represents the way Christians create an equilibrium between divine will and their lives. This daily struggle leads us to His resemblance²⁰. Our will obeys God's will and gains unexpected energy to surpass all difficulties and perils.

Children need to see their close ones loving others. Parents' preoccupation to teach children how to express their warm feelings towards people in distress is extremely important. Surrounding others with care and mercy is the proper model to raise a sympathetic child. During childhood there are many opportunities to help practically neighbours, friends or strangers having trouble. Keeping always an eye open and a warm heart for good deeds represent the best path to develop a child's personality. It is easy to notice that nowadays human ability to care for others that are not a part of your family has considerably diminished. It is important therefore to offer the little ones the opportunity to practice in specific moments and situations the good deed. Compassion must be instilled in children's souls starting with the first seven years. When this parental effort takes place, many lovely surprises can be offered by loving children. But the most important of all will be their interest to take care of their own parents when they are going to be old and sick. In this endeavour to bring up compassionate offsprings, a faithful mum and dad have the examples of the Saints. Our Church has plenty of well-doers among the Saints. Everyone knows Saint Nicholas and his exceptional good acts. Saint Mina and Saint George, Saint John the Baptist and Saint Andrew are famous in the world. A Christian is urged to dedicate time for the benefit of others. When it comes to good deeds, a family should provide occasions when children are asked to use their creativity to show love to those in trouble. Money is not always at hand to be able to intervene right away when

²⁰ John Breck, *The Sacred Gift of Life Bioethics Treatise*, trans. Irineu Pop Bistrițeanul (Patmos: Cluj-Napoca, 2007), 43.

someone necessitates help. Becoming a volunteer in a philanthropic organization can be an option. A Russian priest was totally surprised by one of his adolescent sons who had a party for the children of a sick woman. He did not have money and then he decided to cook some pancakes with different fillings for these friends that were sad and concerned about their mother's difficult situation.

5. Gentle playful parental authority favors communication between children and adults

Gaining a good heart is indeed a wonderful gift that Christian parents can cultivate. It is mandatory to use the proper authority skills in order to succeed. Harsh punishment is not recommendable unless it is justified. Imposing parental will requires a lot of wisdom, calm, and love. Priests encourage parents when a situation becomes too tense to use specific tasks within the family circle in order to avoid conflicts with their children and still inspire responsibility. When a family has more than two children parents discover easily that their parental style needs adjustments²¹. Indulgent overprotection is not a successful educational method, even though many parents would like to maintain this status quo for all their children. Family rules and limits are changed because parents start to feel overwhelmed. Pre-schoolers are extremely attentive to the way parents handle each situation as far as individual child care is spread among brothers and sisters. It is well known the negative reaction of the older child to a new baby. Mothers are 'the main actress' in a family and they need to be able to show the same love and respect to all children. It is undisputable and a difficult task for a single person. That is why fathers should be invited and given space to play their specific roles. Men tend to be left out when it comes to raising babies. They go to work long hours and when they return home, they should be offered tasks that are incumbent upon them. They can also keep a crying baby in their strong arms and survive the moment every time²². Some fathers feel often marginalized in their families. They tend to experience isolation and rejection. A wife must take good care of the male sensitivity and allow her husband to find out the mysteries of early childhood while she does the same thing.

A positive image of the father is extremely important for educating healthy children. Boys experience the need to have a positive paternal example to follow during childhood and after that. When a father avoids constantly

²¹ Ecaterina Burmistrova, Mihail Burmistrov, *The Mathematics of the Family Life Two Points of View About a Happy Marriage*, trans. Adrian Tănăsescu-Vlas, Sophia, Bucharest, 2020, pp. 111-2.

²² Lawrence J. Cohen, *Playful Parenting*, trans. Anacaona Mîndrilă-Sonetto, Trei, Bucharest, 2012, pp. 52-3.

parental responsibilities or expresses a harsh attitude towards the family as a whole, children search for protection to the female actors of the family circle. The lack of paternal affection leaves deep wounds inside a child's heart. In these circumstances, boys try to identify themselves with a male model found inside their gang, in a football team or in movies²³. And there is needless to say that these outsiders do not have the educational impact necessary to form in long run an emotionally healthy adult. Statistics show that where a father goes to church and prays during the day, children remain faithful believers in adulthood. But not only that helps considerably in raising happy children. The availability of the father to get involved in a child's play has special importance in itself. The bond between the child and the father strengthens and it remains unchanged during the entire childhood. Many parents do not have time or refuse to become an active part of the children's activities even if they are often invited to do so. These parents did not have the possibility in their own childhood to play with one of the adults and now, when they have their own children, feel uncomfortable in this novel situation. Psychologists affirm that a playful attitude towards the child's whims and negative behavior may change completely the whole parental effort. This is the reason why they strongly recommend especially to the fathers to bend down their knees and sit down on the floor to start playing with their child. Games represent the way children discover the world around them before they go to school around the age of seven. Having an adult next to them in this process changes completely their understanding of the surroundings. Children become confident to explore their perceptions of people and situations. The pre-schoolers usually strive to gain deep insight into adults' reactions and actions. Surprisingly, at the age of three, a child already identifies correctly not only the emotions experienced by another but also the reason which determined them. Their emotional sensitivity functions undoubtedly to the maximum. Also, playing is how children let the adults understand that something goes wrong with them and that they have some kind of suffering. The inside world of a pre-schooler is marvelous. When parents play with them cuddling and embracing them a lot, these little children may start crying without a reason. This means that they have experienced so much happiness while playing with their parent that they have to empty their own soul in some way. And crying is the way they find it possible. It is indeed a strange reaction that parents must be aware of. This single example indicates once more that early childhood represents a complex and amazing period in a child's development. Reading the parental education literature is therefore highly advisable. Books about children's

²³ Vasile Thermos, *Advice for a Healthy Raising of the Children*, trans. Șerban Tica, Sophia, Bucharest, 2009, p. 198.

development offer considerable support for raising a child. They teach parents what to take notice of and how to use their parental objectives for the benefit of all the members of the family, including grandparents, aunts or uncles, cousins and close friends. Many mistakes are avoided when reading psychology books. Mum and dad find new leverages to deal with particular situations and often discover their own flaws and shortcomings. The Orthodox children's education teaching insists on the personal improvement of the parents, suggesting that their strive for a holy life is what makes children grow up healthy and happy. The bad habits of the parents are rapidly copied by little children and preserved for the rest of their life if the adults do not realize their negative influence on their offspring and intervene to do some change in their faulty personalities. But this of course necessitates a merciless battle with your inner conflicts and habits for the sake of the children.

6. Strong connection with the child at an early age represents the premise for an authentic Christian destiny

Christian parents are responsible in front of God for the evolution of their children. Every effort to offer them a complete education has consequently divine support when it is asked. The prayers of the parents contribute enormously to the development of a healthy child. The connection of the adults with the divine grace influences directly their ability to communicate with the children. The affection oriented towards the child needs to be genuine. The impossibility to be a part of the life of your child does not exist. Every parent must consider parenthood as a priority. There has been a lot of turmoil in the existence of many families who decided to disregard children and leave for a foreign country to gain more money. In these cases, many children remained at home with close relatives, hoping that their parents would return soon. This unhappy situation proved that children are not just simply pawns on a chess table, but unique human beings that miss terribly their mum and dad.

Children need to see their parents daily and watch them how they choose to live so that they can become their role models. All the good habits that a child attains at an early age are developed under the kind eyes of the parents who act as positive examples. A Christian child is taught how to say a prayer before sitting down at the table, how to contribute to the well-being of the entire family by executing some precise chores, how to avoid harmful decisions such as smoking and overeating, how to control emotions and show unceasingly respect to parents or any other person. Loving God's commandments depends almost exclusively on parents' ability to live authentically their own faith. Their desire to

remain close to the life of a church influences terribly children's development. Jesus Christ is the center of their life and all they do for the benefit of their family is in accordance with His teachings. In today's world keeping a close relationship with the Son of God requires a doubled effort than centuries before. Many temptations come across their good intentions and call for a compromise that ultimately affects the relationship with God. Faithful parents that follow all God's commandments are rare. But they definitely impress with their capacity to love each other, their children and their fellows, no matter who they happen to be. Children find in these parents a wonderful example of divine maturity that needs to be replicated later in their own adulthood.

Faithful parents imbibe any gesture with divine grace. Even their words bear divine grace. They share it with the ones hearing them. These parents detain impressive knowledge not only about the Church's history but also about its Tradition. They put into practice the spiritual progress that derives from the Christian teaching. They notice easily by fulfilling commandments that God loves greatly all the humanity. Love, faith and trust are the most important theological virtues that a child should learn from their close adults. They are enough to help them build a beautiful and compassionate destiny.

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