

Family and Nation Building in the Pluri-religious and Multi-cultural India

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Attention to life in the family helps to make the dynamism of love to reach out to every corner of India spreading harmony, peace, and dialogue among believers of various religions. Pope Francis has expressed it eloquently: “The family is where we are formed as people. Every family is a brick in the building of society.” ‘Please’, ‘thank you’ and ‘sorry’ are simple but three magical words which can translate the silence into joyful moments of mutual understanding.” “The forgiving love of members forms the corner stone of a happy family,” he continued.

I love you in the family

The “I love you” is expressed in a family through million gestures of love and communication. When the partners are aware of their greatest communication strengths and weaknesses, the flow of message is made easier. Late Pope John Paul II has evidenced this in *Ecclesia in Asia*: “The Christian family, like the Church as a whole, should be a place where the truth of the Gospel is the rule of life and the gift which the family members bring to the wider community.”¹

Holiness and elasticity and readiness to move out of prejudices are required to enter in dialogue and to strengthen family ties. To be informed to discern the signs of the times, in the extraordinary complexity the socio-cultural context in which we live is a must today. Efforts have to be made to train children capable of integrating the native values in the values of their belief system. Parents have to become competent in perceiving the positive manifestations in India, in the religious experience of those with whom they are called to dialogue.

Witness to lasting fidelities

In a World that is witnessing rapid changes, marked economic growth and far reaching scientific and technological advancement, the family members are challenged to be a group set apart that witnesses to a set of values and belief systems that are long lasting.

Today, more than ever we need visionary parents who understand life well enough to delve beyond the rules of reason and create a healthy family pattern in which the members can enjoy life and proclaim its beauty and splendor to those around. Experience in one's family is the rock on which lasting fidelities are lived to its full. Relationships are the key to lasting fidelities. "Fidelity" writes Erikson "is the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of value systems."² Sharing love and life in the family reveal the beauty of married life as a covenant relationship.

Openness and renewal in the family

Today is the time for openness and renewal in the family. Family without frontiers is a net work of relationships. It is: re-founding of existing families, formation of young couples, rediscovering of strong motivation for today, formation of children capable of combining strong convictions, zealous ambitions and energetic work. No more as mere spectators but as active participants in a world of religious pluralism. Jim Butcher has expressed it well: "When everything goes to hell, the people who stand by you without flinching-they are your family."

The family is a unit of the large human family. The family is a school of training and formation. Evan Esar affirms: "Family: A social unit where the father is concerned with parking space, the children with outer space, and the mother with closet space." The family is a privileged place for love, friendship and growth. It is worth spending a few seconds over the following quotes³:

Children have more need of models than critics - *French (on parents and children)*

Home is where the heart is - *J.J. McCloskey (1870)*

One father is more than a hundred schoolmasters - *George Herbert (1593-1633)*

What children say, they have heard at home - *Wolof (West African on parenting and children)*

You can do anything with children if only you play with them - *German (on parenting and children)*

It is not flesh and blood but the heart which makes us fathers and sons - *Johann Schiller*

You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them - *Desmond Tutu*

Families are the compass that guides us. They are the inspiration to reach great heights, and our comfort when we occasionally falter - *Brad Henry*

Each day of our lives we make deposits in the memory banks of our children - *Charles R. Swindoll*

Home is where you are loved the most and act the worst - *Marjorie Pay Hinckley*

Feelings of worth can flourish only in an atmosphere where individual differences are appreciated, mistakes are tolerated, communication is open, and rules are flexible — the kind of atmosphere that is found in a nurturing family - *Virginia Satir*

The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother - *Theodore Hesburgh*

The above family quotes truly communicate wisdom. In our work as educators, we had ample opportunities to interact with young people and it is indispensable that parents and educators take time to understand what children between the age group of 11-15 in India are saying today:

- Thank you for providing us whatever we demand from you
- As a girl child I will try to give you the happiness of having a wonderful daughter
- Sorry for our mistakes and sorry if we hurt you
- We all love you and we thank you for all your care and for what you give us
- We want our parents to understand each other and fight less
- We want our parents to be open with us and share everything
- Please give us confidence wherever we are
- Teach us path of truth and share with us everything
- Thank you for saying no to us
- Because of you parents we are here in this beautiful world

- Please trust us we will never give you chance to get disappointed with us
- In our eyes you are the most precious pearl in the world
- Do always give us confidence whenever we are weak
- Always guide us to the right path
- Satisfy your needs and have your equal share of whatever we get
- You should not feel guilty of yourself that you are not fulfilling our needs
- Don't spend the money which you get on us but also on yourself.
- Trust us and don't compare us with others and don't kill your desires for us
- You have given us the precious gift of our life so do not give us any other gift on our birthday
- We want our parents to be united
- We want our parents to take out some time from the busy schedule to spend time with us
- Give us a chance to prove our talent
- As a girl child I am sure I get your wishes at the top of the world
- We want our parents to spend some time with us
- We like to thank our parents for loving us and taking care of us
- Thank you so much for whatever you have done for us
- Please take some time for yourselves because you are always knotted into my wishes
- We want our parents to take care of us as well as of them
- We want our parents to be loving with each other and do not discriminate between first and second child
- Thank you because you always fulfill our needs
- You help us in various activities
- My parents are the precious pearls for me in my life and in front of my eyes my parents are my biggest God
- Our parents should not scold us for little things and they should not only think about us and also should think of themselves.
- Mom and dad always love and trust me

- Don't spend much money on me, I have what I want and I promise you that I will study well
- Don't take stress that I am a girl and what I will do when I will be elder than my brother
- I want my parents to spend time with me and not with the job they do.
- I am glad that you took pain to take me step by step to the journey of life
- Please don't wake up late at night when my exams are going on and don't spoil your health
- We know you expect much from us and we respect your expectation but do not put our studies as burden on us and if you ensure this we promise you that one day we will make you proud
- Give us time
- Not to worry so much about us
- Understand our feelings
- Observe our talents
- Stop comparing us with other siblings
- We want liberty
- Have faith in us
- Scold us not in front of others
- Thank you for giving us birth
- We are satisfied with what we get from our parents
- Sorry for our misbehavior
- To continue to be what you are
- Keep trust in us
- Not to be partial with us and our siblings
- Not to scold us too much, teach us to learn from our mistakes
- Stop pressurizing us
- Keep up the promises
- When we are asked to take care of our younger siblings allow us to scold them

- You work so hard for us and we irritate you and especially during our examinations you leave your own entertainment. We want you to enjoy your life.
- We would like to ask forgiveness from you our parents because sometimes when we get short tempered we do give back answers
- The money our parents earn with so much dedication we don't want them to spend it all on us but also to care for themselves
- Thank you for supporting us through bad and good
- Mom and dad you are God for us
- Parents should know how to say no to their children and thanks for fulfilling all our wishes, we love you parents
- Thank you for guiding us in each and every way and for your encouragement

There is a remarkable change in the expressions of college going youngsters. Parents and educators need to understand that it is part of their growth process:

- Trust
- Interfere less in our lives
- Appreciate more
- Keeping no high expectations
- No assumptions
- Advice but no questions
- Don't over react
- Some freedom
- No Demands
- Listen to our suggestions also and then scold or advice us
- Not to be overprotective
- Should not pose unnecessary restrictions on us
- Every sacrifice you made for us is something we understand

we know that everything we have is because of you and believe us even if we don't say so

- We appreciate every decision you take for us
- All we want is little more of understanding and space for us.

- All I Need is my parent's love and understanding
- Being a single child I know I am center of attraction for my parents
- I feel they should understand my space and my problems
- I am happy with whatever they provide with
- All I need is their love and understanding
- Appreciate my individuality
- We are your children
- We are your children not the society's
- Our main aim is to satisfy you and see you happy and not the society
- You are perfect to us the way you are...
- There are times and situations when we get angry but that is just frustration coming out of us and we love you and you are perfect to us the way you are...
- Even though we don't express it but we love you very much
- We love you and we will try our best to live up to your expectations
- We may not express our feelings but deep inside we do care and love you from the bottom of our hearts
- There are situations when I may fight with you but I never got the intention of hurting you
- All I want to say is thank you mom and dad for tolerating my moods swings even when you don't have to
- Thank you mom and dad for everything we have received from you
- We will surely make you proud one day
- Parents should trust us and give us responsibilities so that we can discover our capabilities and prove ourselves
- Mom and Dad don't think that we don't love you. It is just because we don't express ... it is XII not a pressure cooker.
- From time to time change your mentality don't follow everything blindly but there are few things which needs to be changed from time to time.
- Understand our view point and don't scold us in front of every one
- Don't scold us but make us understand and don't over react
- We know you will be there to guide us and to tell us what is right

- We know that you care for us but sometimes you interfere a lot.
- We know our responsibilities and we expect you to trust us and have faith in us and in your upbringing.
- If we divert from the right path, we know you will be there to guide us and to tell us what is right.
- Mom and dad, please don't underestimate us
- We know you expect a lot from us but a few failures cannot foretell the future so please support us and do not say discouraging things which only make us feel low.

Re-launch our religious identity in the context of dialogue

Our religious identity is the best gift that we can offer to our people and our nation. Organizations invest large amount of finances to train personnel in order to make them capable of giving their best in achieving the organizational goals. Human resource management processes today are ever on the increase. There is a very close-knit relationship between human resource function and the communication technology. Why not think seriously as a family on re-launching our religious identity in the context of dialogue. Are we just taking for granted that we are in a pluri-religious context? Can we take up concrete steps to bring the members of various religions and especially the members of our families to commit ourselves to build a society where everyone can experience freedom, peace and justice?

Interreligious Dialogue and Social Action

Families can break new grounds in interreligious dialogue and social action. In many cultures of the world, religion and culture are indivisible, thus inter-religious dialogue is integral to intercultural relations. In recent years, we observe a resurgence of interest in diversity of religions and in inter-religious questions in the educational system as well as in social interactions. Thanks to religious pluralism that is part and parcel of India's rich heritage, we had and still have in our country, men and women open and daring. They have reached out irrespective of caste and creed to all. Today we need to be leading in making dialogue our style of life.

Interreligious Consulting and Counselling Service

If not in all families at least in few, we can launch ***Interreligious Consulting and Counselling Service***. Families can offer an expert consulting service to individuals and professional assistance to community organizations, civic and public institutions. The aim is to enable these individuals and organizations to evaluate their needs, clarify their interreligious training objectives, assist in the creation of interreligious programs, help to reach and establish contacts with diverse communities, and provide follow-up to training. A colloquium on Conditions for and Obstacle to Inter-religious Dialogue where people from different religious communities could be invited to speak and engage in a dialogue, a one-day training program on Inter-religious Conflict Resolution is yet another initiative that can be promoted. Why not challenge ourselves to get to know the religion of our brother, sister next door?

Accommodation and love for life

Dialogue will teach us the art of accommodating. Our love for life has to be lived in the context of religious pluralism and multi cultural reality. How much do I know about the religion of my neighbour? What efforts have I made to know more about his/her style of life, prayer, meditation, contemplation etc.? Accommodation is a dynamic and transforming process. How much am I prepared to speak courageously about the core values of my religion? Am I open to share how the divine is shaping my life style and my way of being and doing?

Believers of various religions can play a vital role in upholding the truth of life. As the culture of death is propagated in the modern world, religious traditions as families and communities and as a world human family need to shield and protect all life, especially human life. Religious traditions have to invest time, money and personnel to transmit to younger generations the meaning and significance of life. Attention to the family is a happy expression of the growing openness to human dimensions. *The future of humanity passes by way of the family.*⁴

The commitment of believers to preserve peace, to build up a society worthy of human beings, to live a life based on values, exacts greater openness for dialogue. The challenges families face today cannot be ignored or kept away from such dialogue. The language of our dialogue has to come from our profound experience of the divine. Today, one can no more think of living in isolation. The dynamics of globalization and migration have brought such radical changes that humanity has to bring forth a new style of living. In this context there is an urgent need to *share the richness of one's spiritual heritage as a family*.

Discover committed believers

Conscious of who they are and what their religious beliefs are, different people have made courageous efforts to study, reflect, get to know and voice their opinion regarding other religions. Today, in the spirit of profound respect we shall consider one such person: Buddhadasa Indapanno. Buddhadasa is a great patriarch who brought a lot of renewal within Buddhism, and is one of the Buddhists who have written most on Christ. Buddhadasa was born on 27 May 1906 at Bumrieng, in Thailand. Right from his early age he was in contact with children from Muslim families. This helped him to understand that “committed, virtuous and spiritual persons can be found also outside Buddhism”. Besides a good basic intellectual formation he had experience of work in the family shop especially after the death of his father. The contacts he had with western technicians settled in Thailand offered him possibilities to be open to other parts of the world. He committed himself to a constant discovery of Buddhism. To return to the original message of Buddha, he searched in the sacred texts especially in *tripitaka* without passing through the comments and other books. As a result of all this he decided to create a quiet place in order to “verify and deepen the doctrine” that he had learned. He decided to live a life that is “transparent, extremely independent, to search now on wards purity and truth [...] from now on we will not follow the world [...] we will live in it physically, but, spiritually, we will make it the best possibly independent, to find purity [...] we will do like Buddha.”⁵

Education within the family

From cultivate, bring out and develop the term education is used to refer to a promotional intervention referring to both external and internal aspects. It can be said that the historical use of the word education as synonymous to “development, growth, formation, socialisation,

inculturation, instruction, teaching, training, updating; call forth intervention of particular institutional set-ups such as the family, the school, the churches, groups, associations, movements, but also invest the social responsibility in its complex reality”.⁶

Martin Luther’s vision of Reformation saw the state, family, and school along with the Church as leaders of Reformation. Perhaps Shakespeare says it best of all: “***There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them though we may***”. This means to know the story of our religion, what riches of religious traditions do we have to contribute to the building up of the human family, the nation and the world at large. Various studies and researches have highlighted that most of the youngsters still consider important those values the adult world considers necessary for the realisation of a life worthy of human beings. Where the distance sets in therefore is not in the values but in the hierarchy of values in its personal and subjective dimension. Many of the researches have evidenced that family, love and friendship are the three priorities that youngsters highlight today. Normally these three values are followed by that of work and the use of free time. Is it not true that the greatest crisis we face today is ethical? Learning to care and learning to share is far more important than just learning to raise money. Is it not the family the privileged place to initiate, nurture and sustain the four pillars of education: “***learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be***”⁷ that UNESCO is promoting?

A renewed commitment to education within the family

Education is always a timely response to the cultural context. To make this response relevant and appealing, keeping in mind the challenges we face today, there needs to be a renewed commitment to education within the family itself. The large number of students coming to and who go out of our Educational Institutions year after year and the countless number of men, women and children who benefit from our humanitarian services will bear testimony to the unique role of the families in Nation Building hand in hand with other agencies of education and formation.

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Footnotes

- 1 John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 1999, 46.
- 2 Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility*, 125.
- 3 <http://www.wiseoldsayings.com/family-quotes/>(accessed on 24/12/2017).
- 4 John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*,86.
- 5 It is said that for all his life, he tried his best to conform himself to this programme which he described in one of his letters to his brother (*Un Buddista parla del ristianesimo ai Buddisti* (traduzione di Francesco Caponi), Milano, Paoline, 1990, 10-11).
- 6 Nanni C., *Educazione* in *Dizionario di Scienze dell' Educazione* (a.c. di Josè Manuel Prellezo (coord.) Carlo Nanni, Guglielmo Malizia), ELLE DI CI, Torino 1997, 340.
- 7 <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/networks/global-networks/aspnet/about-us/strategy/the-four-pillars-of-learning/> (accessed on 12/01/2018).