

THE SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF THE CHILD (2)

2. *The religious or relational aspect:* *ALTERITY IN FUNCTION OF GROWTH.*

This is *the most factual* of "the spiritual". This aspect lies in what the psychologist Lacan defines as the passage from "the fusional state" (the child in the mother's womb) to "the relational state" (the child engaged in the pursuit of autonomous fulfilment). It is true that fulfilment is always conditioned by "the other". One has to define oneself in relation to the Other by viewing him as being "other", that is different from "me", but also as being the Other one in his alterity, that is, as a being endowed with an autonomy fully his own, in the same ways as I am myself.

This necessary alterity is a condition of development, fullness of being, happiness. Alone man cannot reach fulfilment. In order to liberate him from the permanent temptation of returning to the fusional state, the relational state must become "communional", and so we recognize the three main choices in human existence, which are the most explosive expression of the density and the originality of the human spirit:

— the choice of the conjugal partner: the couple and the family;

man develops through communion with *the other*;

— the choice of the social partner: society and profession;

man develops through communion with *the others*;

— the choice of the religious partner: the absolute and the infinite;

man develops through communion with *the Other*.

It is clear that, while these three choices have to be distinguished as such, it does not follow that they are always and necessarily separated in each person. There will normally be association and mixture of choices.

This is the second aspect of the spiritual existence of the human person. *The demands of the spirit which prompt a human being* towards achieving full development therefore guide him towards relation, communion, the choice of a partner, with whom he establishes, "community" in order to reach achievement. This threefold choice which consists in exercising freedom, as

far as man is concerned, is therefore the major expression of man's spiritual being.

Thus, the religious aspect of the spiritual is a dimension of the destiny of man who develops through his relation to the "Other". In this sense man is a "religious element". "Man is a fallen God, who remembers Heaven", man is searching for the other side. He needs something absolute to feel he is alive; he senses that he came from elsewhere and is bound for that elsewhere. He finds his finitude unbearable. Those other places in which he seeks evasion are called alcohol, drugs, sex, travel, suicide. Those "absolutes" which seduce him are science, trade, power, good causes. Those other places which satiate him are sects, religions, faith.

Whereas the anthropological or constitutive aspect of the spiritual is the most fundamental, the religious aspect (or the relational aspect) is the most universal. As was the case at certain periods in the past, when powerful empires and great cultures fell apart, the present time also shows signs of dwindling religiosity, of religious disinformation as well as of religious fanaticism and imperialism. All of these create a serious danger for the human being. There is a disquieting spiritual void. Urgent action is needed.

3. *The Christian and Evangelical aspect:* *the MYSTERY OF FAITH*

This is the most original aspect of the "spiritual", which in this case and in this case alone should be written with a capital "S". It cannot be detected, unless by grace, that is, in the light of the Holy Spirit, the good tidings of the Gospel and the meeting of the Lord. This is the divine LIFE which is deposited as a seed through baptism, fecundated by the Word and nourished by the Sacraments.

In this sense the "Spiritual" consequently is the life of Faith, that is to say, a new life, which, as all life, is born from the contact of two seeds: the *Word* of God which is revealed and the *freedom* of man, which decides. When faith impregnates human existence in the entire person, both body and soul, it is an eminently spiritual activity.

It cannot be doubted that at this point in time the end of our century, a crisis of faith and hence a crisis of the Spiritual is weighing upon Western countries. This third aspect of the spiritual void raises a challenge for the ICCB, just as the other two aspects. This however touches ICCB more particularly a Catholic organisation. And in this case too, urgent action is needed.

And so, as in the three panels of a triptych, the three aspects of spiritual growth of the child unfold in the promotion of:

- the spirit of its being human
- the spirit if its being religious
- the spirit of its being Christian

Given its specifically Christian nature, it is only natural that the ICCB places a particular

emphasis on the Christian and evangelical aspects of the spiritual growth of the child. As already indicated in paragraph 3 of the preliminary remarks, this does not imply that it thereby rejects other religious or spiritual currents, which, eventually, may associate with the ICCB's project.

II - Path of spiritual growth: education and pedagogics

The spiritual exists in the child as a seed and a source, as a potential and an energy. Growth then means a pedagogy of arousing and of threshold; a pedagogy of promotion.

We can distinguish two levels:

1. The spiritual awakening and promotion: anthropological and religious action

— This may be accomplished in two directions:

I) *The values of deepening consciousness and autonomy*

— The birth of *interiority* for awakening conscience. This is an educational pedagogy which gives its density to the personal mystery of the child in the consciousness of its "I" and its "me". A reflection on the right use of active methods, audio-visual techniques, as well as symbols, silence, arts, might be put into motion in this perspective. In this way conscience, that science of the interior being, comes to life.

— The taste for effort through the joy of *surpassing* oneself. One only becomes oneself through concentration and transcendence. That goes for sportsmen as well as for artists, for researchers as well as for creators. Effort has no value as such, in human beings it is but the liberation of the being to be born.

— Learning *discernment* in the search for truth. Credulity as well as contestation are full of risks. A critical spirit implies questioning and evaluation. Full truth is never acquired, one approaches it through reflection, judgment, dialogue and sharing in patience and humility.

II) *The values of relation and communion*

— The sense of *nearness* in the practice of goodwill. The bringing about of community comes about through the mutual recognition of the other who has some value: one cannot be and develop unless one is recognized; this comes about through goodwill, by which what good there is in the other is recognized. And finally it comes about by the riches resulting from differences and the positive management of conflicts.

— The sense of *generosity* in a perspective of *gratuity*. In a world where everything bought and sold, the binding tissue of community is fed by the oxygen and the fresh blood of gratuitous acts which are carriers of love.

— The sense of solidarity in terms of *responsibility*. The privileged and the profiteers produce sterility in any community. A community cannot live nor can it progress unless every one of its members is servant to the commonweal and shares in the common task: responsibility fecundates the community.

These six fundamental values are efficacious signs of the spiritual growth of the child.

2. The arousing and the promotion of the Spiritual:

— *an education in grace:*

As any life, the life of faith cannot come to birth, nor can it be promoted unless it is borne by a community which fosters it, and it is grafted upon or nestled in an amalgamating tissue for nourishment: this shows the importance of the family.

— *A quality seed:*

This is the Word of God revealed in the Good News in catechesis.

— *An initiation in the Sacraments:*

This means discovering signs and symbols, a meeting of man with God..

— *An education in contemplation:*

which means the most complete search of the Absolute.

III - The agents of spiritual growth: action and concertation

What is at stake today is spiritual growth and it is of such paramount importance that it requires vigorous and concerted action. The ICCB should promote such action.

1. *At the level of structures and institutions: the educational communities*

Research in that field should start in the family and the school.

2. *At the level of environment and climate: the educational factors*

An emergency programme is needed for promoting the spiritual growth of children:

— by media: press, literature, audio-visual means, cinema. T.V., video-cassettes;

— by free-time activities: sports, children's movements, tourism, art.

3. *At the level of Churches and Catholic agencies at the service of children*

— in communities of catechetical renewal,
— in apostolic children's movements.

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