

## HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN THE FAMILY (1/3)

**Developing the Human Rights Family  
How Adlerian Principles and Methods  
Contribute to Human Rights in the Family**

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### INTRODUCTION

It is my honour and privilege today as the representative of the **International Committee for Adlerian Summer Schools and Institutes (ICASSI)** to address this distinguished gathering of experts and representatives of the various organisations interested in the role and well-being of the family. My task today is to focus attention on the part that psychology, in particular Individual Psychology of Dr. Alfred Adler, plays in the Family – the upbringing of responsible children, the formation of cooperative adolescents and the initiation of the young adult as a contributor to Society at large.

### CURRICULUM VITA

Before I go on to my exposition of this afternoon's theme, I should like to give a brief description of the work that I do, here in Malta, and my connection with ICASSI. My name is Brother Saviour Gatt. I am a member of the International Order of Christian Brothers who are devoted to the Christian Education of children and young people in all types of schools and institutions of higher education in more than 80 countries throughout the developed and developing world. The Order that I belong to, and which has served education for over 300 years, was founded in France by John Baptist de La Salle, a canonised member of the Catholic Church. By profession I am a teacher, psychotherapist and counsellor. I am a graduate of the Victoria University of Manchester (UK) and hold a Master's Degree in Psychology from Loyola University in Chicago (USA). I have been engaged in education for some thirty years, teaching practically all grades in school. Since 1987 I have been running various workshops and seminars for Parents and also for Teachers. Together with this, my task during these years has been to teach and counsel the young, using a method that I have labelled **Adolescent Aware Programme**, while with parents I conduct the **Parent Orientation Programme**, using the

Adlerian style which is to me both pragmatic and sound. In recent years I have become convinced of the need of creating yet another model of education, one which would incorporate in it the education of parents too. This would have as one of its objectives the teaching of the democratic style of bringing up children. Parents seem ardent about finding out new methods and strategies for helping their siblings to mature in a balanced and non-stressful way. Adler's methods and philosophy are becoming more known, practised and appreciated here in Malta, too, because parents are gradually becoming aware of their relevance when dealing with siblings.

### ICASSI

The International Committee for Adlerian Summer Schools and Institutes which I am representing was founded by Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs, a close collaborator of Alfred Adler. His aim was to spread the teaching of Alfred Adler as a striking and most efficacious means of preventive therapy with children, their parents and other adults. When Dr. Dreikurs started practising psychiatry in Vienna, he soon recognised the need to extend his services into the community. (1) He was convinced that the Adlerian style of the education of children and adolescents, in the home and school, would enable them to reach a higher potential of functioning through the development of their needs of belonging and of contributing positively to their home and community. Dreikurs was also convinced that preventive methods were more effective than corrective ones.

The first International Summer Institute was held in Brazil in 1937. Others followed in Israel, 1959, and in Denmark, 1962. It was the explicit wish of Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs that the Summer Institute be held in a different country each year. The last, the 26th, was held this summer in Brno, the Czech Republic, in which close to 400 participants took part. It is most likely that Malta will be the venue for the 1995 ICASSI Summer Institute. Today, Dr. Eva Dreikurs Ferguson, the daughter of Dr. Dreikurs, is the co-Chairman of ICASSI.

### THE MALTA EXPERIENCE

For several months now, Malta has been engaged in the lengthy process of updating the Law of the Family - "Equal Partners in Marriage". The Bill which has recently been enacted will come into force in two days time, precisely on December 1. This Forum is therefore most opportune for us living in these Islands. For many centuries the family in Malta has held the premier position in our society as it developed in spite, or because of, the influences, of the various occupying rulers from different cultures in the Mediterranean Region and beyond. I am sure that other speakers from Malta will have more to say about the various aspects of the Maltese family.

### THE THEORY OF ALFRED ADLER

Alfred Adler was an active member of the so-called 'Wednesday Meeting' which Sigmund Freud and others had formed in Vienna at the turn of the century. In 1911, having identified fundamentally different views from Freud regarding the nature of human motivation and behaviour, Adler broke away from the Psycho-analytic group and went to develop his own theory which came to be known as

'Individual Psychology'. By the 1920s Adler had developed a systematic and practical approach, which helps parents and teachers alike in the upbringing and education of children. To quote Eva Dreikurs, "Adler's Individual Psychology is a personality theory that is social-psychological, developmental and cognitive." (2) By the time of his sudden death in 1937, Adler had already expressed his principal idea, namely, that each person's most central need is to belong, first in the family and gradually in society. As this need is acquired, the individual develops the capacity to contribute to the well-being of others.

## SOCIAL INTEREST

Adler uses the expression 'Social Interest' or "To see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another." (3) He further describes Social Interest as "feeling with the whole, *sub specie aeternitatis*, under the aspect of eternity." (4) The German term which has no exact English equivalent is "Gemeinschaftsgefühl".

The principle of Social Interest is central to Individual Psychology and is also relevant to our argument today. According to Griffith and Powers, "The term refers to the individual's awareness of belonging in the human community and the extent of his or her sense of being a fellow being." (5) and "In the Adlerian schema, Social Interest can be thought of as an index to successful adaptation - the more developed the social interest, the more diminished the individual's feelings of inferiority, alienation and isolation." (6) Thus the mutuality that is inherent in the term Social Interest is not only applicable to Human Rights in the family, but also outside the family circle. It is a matter of give and take or "Do unto others..."

There are two aspect of Social Interest that work towards maintaining and enhancing human rights. First, there is the sense of belonging. This feeling of "at homeness" is first nurtured in the family and later it is extended to the community and the rest of society. As Powers says, "I'm in it with others. I have my place." Once the child's innate potential of Social Interest is developed, he will be in a position to contribute towards the common good as well as able to participate in the life of the family.

As ample references will be made in this paper to the principle of Social Interest, it will suffice to end this brief description by quoting Adler once more in this respect: "All failures....are products of inadequate preparation in social interest. They are all non-cooperative, solitary beings who run more or less counter to the rest of the world; beings who are more or less asocial if not antisocial." (7) This warning by Adler places grave responsibility on parents, teachers and youth leaders to train children and adolescents to develop their sense of belonging and cooperation in their relationships with others.

## EQUALITY

Children, from a very early age, are given opportunities to enhance their self-esteem by being treated as equally important in the family by both parents and older siblings. This same idea is expressed in the very first article of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, when it states that, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." (8) The sense of importance is made manifest in a tangible way by the respect that is shown by, and at the same

time expected from, all members of the family. Both Adler and Dreikurs considered all psychological malfunction to stem from an unsatisfied need for equality. Conflicts in the family, and in society at large, for that matter, seem to originate from a lack of respect for the uniqueness of the individual person. Of course this must not be interpreted to mean that all members of the family are the same. This would be a very dangerous assumption that would itself jeopardise the same Human Rights that we are discussing here. One example will suffice to clarify the notion of equality. In a family, all, children and adults, equally need nourishment. However, children and adults need different types and quantities of food to assist their growth and satisfy their appetite. So while we are all **equal** we can be considered as **different**, both in the status that we hold and the role that we play. To me this recognition is vital in order to strengthen Human Rights in the Family.

## RESPONSIBILITY

Closely linked with the above, Adlerians speak of the responsibility that parents ought to instil in their children from a very early age. This sense of responsibility which is nurtured in the family is later practised in the society that the child will eventually find himself in. Grunwald and McAbee (9) distinguish between the responsibility of sharing household chores and the responsibility of furnishing opportunities for the children to learn to contribute to the well-being of others. The first type of responsibility would teach the child, even the very young infant, that, as it is an important member of the family, it too, ought to be involved in the day to day functioning of the house. This type of responsibility will not be met with resentment, if properly introduced, but will be a useful means of developing self-esteem in the child. The second type of responsibility suggests to the child that it is not always on the receiving side, always having adults serving it and meeting its many demands. Armed with a sense of responsibility, children in the family can contribute to its smooth running and to its healthy growth and development. It is a big mistake to take children for granted or worse still to fail to take them seriously. Dreikurs says, "Educators (especially parents) who refuse to take the child seriously deprive him of his sense of responsibility." (10)

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(1) Adler and his associates also established child guidance centres in the public schools where children and their families could receive counselling. By the 1930s there were 30 such clinics in Vienna alone.

(2) Dreikurs Ferguson, Eva, *Adlerian Theory, An Introduction*, p. 1

(3) Ansbacher, Heinz L. and Rowena R., *The Individual psychology of Alfred Adler*, p. 135.

(4) Adler Alfred, *Superiority and Social Interest*, p.34.

(5) Griffith, J. and Powers, Robert L., *An Adlerian lexicon*. p. 7.

(6) Griffith, J. and Powers, Robert L., *Ibid* p. 7.

(7) Adler, Alfred, *Ibid*, p. 90.

(8) Proclaimed by the United Nations on 10 December 1948.

(9) Grunwald, B.B.; McAbee, H.V., *Guiding the Family - Practical Counselling techniques*, p. 194.

(10) Dreikurs, Rudolf, *Fundamentals of Adlerian psychology*, p. 82.