

**FAITH EDUCATION
AND INTEGRAL FORMATION
(1/2)**

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The person, according to the Christian view of mankind, is a unit that is made up of three integrated levels that are indissoluble and that interact reciprocally: the physical, the psychological and the spiritual. The last level integrates and gives meaning to the other two. Happiness implies living on these levels in a harmonious way starting from the spiritual level. Not living on these levels in a positive way produces unhappiness.

This truth is already expressed in both a positive and negative way in the narrative of the creation of the world and mankind.

1. "God saw that all he made was good".

The description of the beginning of the world shows us what God is like and how God is revealed in his actions. Genesis repeatedly refers to the fact that after he created each item God recognized that what he created "was good". This trait gives us a glimpse of God's mode of being and also of his actions which are derived from and united to his being. He does only good things because he is good; he is love. We are inspired in this. This unity between being and acting, between being and speaking, between interior and exterior, between faith and the practical...continues to be the theoretical and practical reference for many of our situations and experiences. This unifying desire continues having a reason for being and is directly and indirectly based on the creative actions of the same God.

The first time that we know something comes from God we have a positive reference towards him, which indicates a life program for humanity. In addition, looking then at the history of mankind and our own history we have only positive experiences with regard to God and ourselves. We all look for ways to repeat this first experience in order to remain faithful to God and

to be like him. To be able to say "*all is good*" presupposes this unity that we desire. But, indirectly, it is said that this unity is looking for a point of reference. In our case, this reference is God's action in creating the world.

This having been said, it should be kept in mind that we are faced many times with the expression "it is good", but with reference points different from God's actions. The faith teacher needs to be able to know and to discern between these various points of reference. Discernment in this context means be able to know well the difference and how to analyze it so as to be able to decide and opt for the true point of reference. This is true for the educator and also for those confided to his care. The teacher, with regard to them, takes the place of God. His ministry is not the creation of light and water...but the creation of persons that are confided to him, as an indissoluble unity, and having as a central reference point the area of spirituality. Others must be able to say of him "he did well what he had to do".

2. "Let us make man in our image and likeness".

Even though he had made things, God saw that his presence and accessibility to him were not sufficiently clear nor understandable. He created mankind in both male and female forms. In other words, he needed a visible and accessible intermediary. Humankind is that visible and accessible being that God created so that humankind might be the very presence of God himself, his mediator.

For that reason he endowed humanity from the very beginning with identifiable traits of God himself: a life lived in harmony with nature and the animals, in harmony with God, in harmony with mankind itself and with its fellow human beings. In a word, a dynamic life filled with love.

The Bible describes this positive experience that affects the totality of the person: in his interior being and in his relationship with nature, with God and with the other. It also says that the experience that characterized them was that "they lived happily". And such happiness was the result of this unity and harmony.

From this initial biblical description a plan and a life program follows. As a plan, we have the model of God who reveals himself as love, as unity as the one who does all things well, as the one who is "altruism", the one who creates nature and mankind so that he is made known to them and so that his creation might be able to participate in what he himself is.

The life program consists in looking at ourselves and at our surroundings. We look at ourselves to see if we are doing things well, if our relationships are really altruistic and loving. We look at our surroundings to see if there too is seen clearly the image and likeness of God. And in addition to seeing, one must try to

strengthen the positive that exists both within us and outside of us, and improve both interiorly and exteriorly that which in its very essence and actions is not the image and likeness of God.

3. The role of faith education.

The principal function of faith education consists in setting up real conditions so that all who are involved in it can follow God and reveal him as being essentially love; and to then do everything for the sake of love and to live a life of love and so that God might be perceived, experienced and accepted by all.

This supposes and demands some steps:

a) To know God well and the ways through which he reveals himself to us throughout the course of the history of humankind and the history of each person. It also supposes discerning between the authentic God and the forms of God that are human projections and above all the fruit of particular egoistic and utilitarian interests.

Today the use of spiritual content as a projection of indifference is frequent. One cannot accomplish a true faith education by starting from vague, confusing and anthropologically doubtful ideas. In order to grasp the truth about God and about humankind, there is nothing better than to know the person and the actions of Jesus Christ well and then to be able to decide to follow Jesus completely.

b) To discover more and more that God is in the innermost part of each person, especially in the sensitivity to truth and as a guide for the conscience and the authenticity of life.

Faith education needs to be an aid for true self-knowledge and for knowing others as well, so that the truth that is lived and celebrated can produce even more life. In order for this to happen, the methods of interiorization and meditation are important. Instead of being distracted and scattered about in the external world, a more real and authentic path, although more difficult and arduous, is when each one sincerely follows a well-formed conscience; that is to say, one that has been formed based on evangelical, objective criteria.

c) Another task of faith education consists in correcting in ourselves and in those confided to us the false images of God, actions that do not generate life, the egotistical actions. Also it is necessary to correct relationships and processes that diminish the likeness with our God. Another aspect is teaching and respecting and loving each person as God respects and loves that person. The pedagogical form to achieve this requires a profound knowledge of the cause of this dissimilarity; there also needs to be a positive model in the person of the faith educator; it also demands alternative celebrations carried out within a process of change that lead us to the sacraments and other positive existential forms.

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