



Newsletter – July 2018

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Family Life Today

We have learnt from the recent CFSM session on St Joseph the Worker¹ that the Industrial Revolution happened only about two hundred years ago. Has family life always been subjected to a life as fast-paced as what we are facing today? Did human beings always have the accumulation of mass consumer products we are having today? To cope with the pace, our present information age has invented the modern electronic mobile devices which are supposed to enable us work from home but at the same time, it has enabled us to continue working after office hours – the line between work and family time has thus blurred. This has given us a false sense of assurance that using our mobile devices to communicate with our children whilst we are at work and being at home spending time online with our work means we spend more time with our children. This has been accepted as the way of life: e.g. that we bring work home through our laptops/mobile devices, the hectic schedule at work, that children have to spend more time in school and because of work that children as young as one or two year olds can be sent to infant care centres.

See

Our development as a person is affected by our environment acting on our brains and neurons, which takes many generations to evolve. It takes effort and continual repeated interaction before we master a practice/skill. There are articles about how learning is significantly effective if a student hand-write the notes rather than type-out on the ubiquitous laptop, or we absorb information better from paper notes and books vs computer screen, even for students born in this Millennial era (computer age)². There is even a theory that humans need to practice 10,000 hours³ in order to master the skill of any subject.



¹ CFSM commemoration session on Feast of St Joseph the Worker, 1 May 2018

² The human nervous system that controls our muscle/movement and our perception of the world send signals through axons to junctions (synapses). With each time it happens, the signals grow stronger, the cells become more developed and it becomes a cycle where the developed cells enable signals to connect better.

³ Gladwell, Malcolm, 2008, *Outliers – The Story of Success*, Little Brown & Company, New York, USA. (Although this theory was controversial, generating an interesting debate amongst academics/internet community)

Judge

The parallel is in applying this to human relationship bonding in the family and the development of a child: a child naturally and instinctively need a healthy relationship with both parents to feel a sense of security. The relationship takes time, continuous effort and physical contact to forge⁴. It takes both quantity and quality of time in the interaction for parents to impart their values and to enable their children to “socialize” and mature into a member of the family and community. As the study on hands-on practice indicate, it takes “face-time”, the sense of physical touch and movement for learning and the bonding to take place. Conversely human bonds need a physical presence to forge which is poorly substituted by screen and other electronic means (voice, text or even skype).

A short but telling story was the bible account of Moses killing an Egyptian whom he saw ill-treating a Hebrew⁵. I find it strange that Moses, who was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter which means he lived as a royalty and who was used to being served by servants/slaves, be so infuriated by the treatment of the Hebrew? Perhaps it was because the Pharaoh's daughter outsourced him to the care of a Hebrew family (nursed by his own mother. In historical time, children of rich and powerful families were nursed until they were about three or four years old⁶). He would have spent much time with his Hebrew “mother” and his identity as a Hebrew would have been stronger than his affinity to the Egyptians.

Human societies in the past would have factored this in when the family and community have their various interactions and rite of passages. For example, only when a youth is formed and nurtured or gained a certain of self-mastery is s/he allowed to handle freedom. Today, we have lost that rite of passage; rather age and the ability to do well academically is seen as a yardstick to gauge the growth of youth. In our present pursuit of economic growth in the consumeristic society, technologists, employers and the secular leadership are eager to show that they can solve social problems by using technology. We who are called into the vocation of building the family should be discerning about such optimism. If technology is a poor substitute for learning to be human and building relationship (e.g. charity, fortitude, tenderness), we have to use it with caution. Be wary of the false sense of security (thus reducing parents' time with their growing children) it brings and undermining our growth as family.

Act

Being aware of this now, it may explain why youth delinquency seem to be a greater problem in the larger society in recent time. Secondly, this may, in a way, indicate why so little is mentioned about Jesus in the first 30 years of his life because as a growing youth, he was subjected to the care of Joseph and Mary, nothing spectacular for it is stated in the scripture that: “Then He went down to Nazareth with them and was subject to them. But His mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”⁷ The traditional Jews are close-knitted, family focussed group in terms of cultural and religious practice⁸. Today, as we work to provide for the family we may

⁴ Encycl., Casti Connubii, Pope Pius XI, December 1930

⁵ Exodus 2 :11-15

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wet_nurse
www.alanmacfarlane.com/savage/INFANTS.PDF

⁷ Lk 2:51-52

⁸ Sacks, J. 2014, “*Family Is Most Humanizing Institution in History*”, address at colloquim on *The Complementarity of Man and Woman*, The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Vatican.
Sylvester R. and Thomson A., 2007, 3 November, *Jonathan Sacks's solution to Family Breakdown*, The Telegraph, UK.

want to evaluate our lifestyle and the material needs in life; is the formation of our children worth the trade-off? As a community we have to be certain about our priorities. C.S. Lewis had this to say, in a letter written on 16 March 1955 to a Mrs Ashton from Magdalene College, Oxford. C.S. Lewis said the homemaker is the ultimate career:

"I think I can understand that feeling about a housewife's work being like that of Sisyphus (who was the stone rolling gentleman). But it is surely in reality the most important work in the world. What do ships, railways, miners, cars, government etc exist for except that people may be fed, warmed, and safe in their own homes? As Dr. Johnson said, 'To be happy at home is the end of all human endeavour'. (1st to be happy to prepare for being happy in our own real home hereafter: 2nd in the meantime to be happy in our houses.) We wage war in order to have peace, we work in order to have leisure, we produce food in order to eat it. So your job is the one for which all others exist..."

- pg 447- Letter of CS Lewis 1988 ed.

For those of us parents whose children have grown up with the benefit of hindsight and with such reflections, we can actively support the CFMS in its mission by helping to mentor the younger families and share our learning and the relevance of the Church wisdom.

- Andrew
Solemnity of the Holy Trinity 2018

Reflection

See

1. Look within our family; could it have been better had we spent more time with our children?
2. Look at the larger community/society; could the youths be better if families spend greater quantity and quality time with the youths in their growing years?

Judge

3. What is the Church's teaching about family and caring for children?
4. What is the CFMS doing about it?

Act

5. What can we do about it?
 - Within the family
 - Extended family and friends
 - Larger community
6. In our decision making and caring for the children, do we pray?