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'Train up Child . . .'  
(Proverbs 22:6a):  
**ROLE OF SOCIETY  
AND CHURCH?**

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## INTRODUCTION

UNICEF reports that in Jamaica approximately 22,000 children work and some 2,500 children, mostly boys, live on the streets. Commercial sexual exploitation of children is an emerging concern. Child abuse is increasing, as is exposure to and involvement in violence at home and school (<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/jamaica.html>).

A sad picture to say the least! And the reason? Among other factors, UNICEF names "weakened family structures, weak community support systems and poor parenting" as "the key underlying causes"

(<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/jamaica.html>). The fact is that the poor treatment of children and even teenagers, as well as the maladaptive behaviour exhibited by them, comes out of dysfunctional family life. How can

this be corrected? How can the society produce adults who contribute to its development and not to its destruction? Although the home is failing, the truth remains that it is there that human socialization and development primarily takes place and no matter what the State or Church does, family generally plays the greatest role in determining our core values – values that last beyond the moment.

This is not to say that the State's and, especially, the Church's intervention cannot significantly alter the course of a child's life. In fact, the State actually has a grave responsibility to see to the welfare of children through the passing of child protection laws which it is also obligated to enforce. It also provides so called 'homes of safety'; what it needs to ensure is that these are actual homes of safety, giving succour to the vulnerable. Yes, the State does this and more. The Church also

contributes to the wellbeing of children through ‘homes’ and the selfless giving of individual church members who adopt needy children. Then there are useful church activities such as Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs, Youth Meetings and Sabbath and Sunday Schools, to name a few. Through these avenues one would trust that the personal development of children is being given considered attention. For this development to be holistic, however, education must go beyond the training of the intellect, the sharpening of skills. Intentional moral training must also be undertaken with unsurpassed commitment. And, of course, the Church would add training in the spiritual disciplines.

And so, the Biblical injunction to “train up a child in the way he should go” is one that the institutions of the family, State and Church should take seriously as they seek the child’s development. Each has an important role to play. If this is recognized, then the State and Church should do all they can to equip parents to carry out this function effectively because the training of a “child” is best done within the family. The family is the *primary* agent of socialization.

## THE CHILD’S VALUE

### Scriptural Ambivalence?

The State equipping parents to train children? Most definitely. Society has a vested interest in a child’s outcome. The Church equipping parents to “train children?” Mmm. Let’s think about that. Some would say a resounding “Amen,” but others will contend that the Church is already, at least, part of the problem. Child abuse can be credited to the Church’s influence as much as to any other factor. “Spare the rod and spoil the child,” is the cry of many a parent, as they with conviction quote the Scriptures. There is, in fact, no such imperative in the Bible. But that should not take away from the point, it could be argued, because the Scriptures are replete with the promulgation of the concept.

This is not an isolated view. Carroll (2001), Devries (2001) and Heskett (2001) are among many who believe that the Church's guidebook has led parents/guardians<sup>1</sup> to take a wrong approach to raising children. Carroll, for example, suggests that Christian scriptures and tradition are ambivalent towards children. They are presented as a "divine blessing" and yet "negative images abound as well" (2001, 121). In his analysis, Carroll presents what could be viewed as the devaluation or, better yet, wrong valuation of the child. Children, he contends, "were valued primarily for their future contribution as adults," for their assumption of "productive roles within the socio-economic and political systems" (122). Basically, "children embody the hope of the family or the people, for a meaningful future" (124). They were not valued for who they were as children. It is no wonder, therefore, that their assumed ignorance and immaturity (Proverbs 22:15) were to be driven out by the rod as they were moulded for adulthood.

And that, Devries would add, is not just an Old Testament perspective.

The household codes of Ephesians and Colossians and the few insights on child rearing in the Pastoral epistles present children as subordinate members of the household of faith who must be disciplined and instructed in the faith by their superiors – especially by fathers. (2001, 166)

This, she believes, goes counter to Jesus' teaching as it robs children of their unique role in the kingdom. Instead of being seen as "bearers of spiritual insight or models of faith," they are seen as "[physically, emotionally, and spiritually immature, rendering] them objects of adult discipline" (167). Jesus, on the other hand,

not only [welcomed] but [set] them up as models to be emulated. The value of these children, according to Jesus, is not for the sake of something else but simply for what they are in themselves as

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<sup>1</sup> There will be no more references to "guardian." The term "parent" will be used to signify all caregivers within the family.

children: that is, Jesus holds childhood as intrinsically valuable (Devries 2001, 164)

“Permit the little children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these (Mark 10: 13-16),” he firmly asserted when his disciples sought to prevent children being brought to Him. The disciples’ attitude was likely symptomatic of the society at large, but Jesus’ rebuke made it clear that it was not to be condoned. But was this attitude nurtured and fed by negative pictures of children in the Scriptures which overrode in their psyche the positive images also found therein? That may be the case because of our natural propensity to focus on the negatives, but what Carroll sees as ambivalence and Devries sees as contradictory perspectives within the Bible may just be a balanced assessment of the child.

### **Balanced Assessment**

The Scriptures taken as a whole teach that children are “a heritage of the Lord” (Psalm 127:3). That is to say they are a gift from God. They are to be appreciated. They are to be treasured. It teaches that they should be valued for who they are *and* for who they will become. To say, for example, that foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child is to acknowledge a reality. The fact is that children are ignorant, that ‘foolishness’ is found in their hearts. This is not simply saying that they are lacking in knowledge or intellectual insight, but that they are prone to foolhardy decision-making and lifestyle choices. This is not an indictment on them as children; it’s just a reality that accompanies that stage of life which, if not corrected then, accompanies one into adulthood. And so it is important that parents exercise some control over their children and that children exhibit an attitude of submission. Anathema to some. But why should submission to parental authority be seen as negative?

If children are paradigmatic of the kingdom and this is seen as a positive representation, then submission should also be seen as positive, for this is what God expects of His children. Carroll himself says that as children of God our “identity and group membership are defined by commitment to ‘do the will of God’” (2001, 127). As children are in relation to parents, so are we in relation to God: in need of moral and

spiritual guidance. The difference, though, is that whereas God has nothing to learn from us, the Bible makes it quite clear that we – including parents/guardians – have something to learn from children. Believers are to exhibit childlike faith and trust and dependence on God and are to acknowledge and acquiesce to the Lordship of Christ. This is submission. And even among the Persons of the Godhead this is evident. The Son always spoke of Himself as being in subjection to the Father and the Holy Spirit seeks to divert attention away from Himself and to the Son. And yet the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one. None is inferior to the other. *Submission does not mean inferiority.*

### Valuable Contribution

Children are in no way inferior to adults. And so, just like adults, they are trainable and capable of maturing; Paul speaks of Timothy's capacity to learn as a child and to make decisions of life-transforming proportions (2 Timothy 3: 15-17). Children can contribute and can be prepared to contribute to society. 1 Samuel 3 recounts the fact that Samuel ministered to the Lord as a boy. No details are given as to what he did but what is clear is that it was not underrated simply because he was a child. Jeremiah too was called to ministry at a young age but thought this was a definite disadvantage. He felt inadequate. But God responded:

Do not say I am a youth, because everywhere I send you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak (Jeremiah 1: 7)

Paul would add:

Let no one look down on your youthfulness (1 Timothy 4: 12).

There is a tendency to undervalue the contribution of the young, children, in particular, but there is no real Scriptural precedence for this. The recognition that they need to mature and that this is to be effected through discipline does not contradict the affirming statements mentioned above. Let's look at Samuel again. We see quite clearly where the Lord spoke to him directly revealing His plans, His will, endowing him with the gift of prophecy, yet it is also said of him:

So Samuel grew and the Lord was with him ... (1 Samuel 3: 19) Mention is made here of the maturing of Samuel. No doubt, he did not only grow physically but in all the other aspects of his life. Even the Lord Jesus Christ as a child “continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom” (Luke 2:40). And even He is said to have been trained by the suffering He endured (Hebrews 5:8). It is exactly because they are valuable and valued that children should be disciplined so that they can achieve their full potential and reach the highest level of self-actualization. Through discipline one’s abilities are honed and developed. Training children is, therefore, imperative.

### TRAIN UP A CHILD – SIGNIFICANCE

Proverbs 22:6 is an oft quoted verse – “train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.” But what does it mean? What does it mean to “train up”? Who is the “child”? Is the way he should go predetermined? Or can it only be known when one knows the actual child? Is the promise attached to the condition in the proverb to be taken as universally or generally true?

#### *Absolute or Statistical Generalization?*

The promise of Proverbs 22:6 has been a source of encouragement to some and a source of guilt to others. Many have been assured that their child-rearing efforts will not be in vain, for even if as an adult the ‘child’ goes astray, there is a guarantee that he will eventually take heed to his godly training. Others, on the other hand, are convinced that their efforts were inadequate and riddled with mistakes, though at the time they thought they were obeying the injunction/precept and so would be sure beneficiaries of the promise. In both these cases, meeting the condition is deemed to guarantee a particular conclusion: the child will become a godly adult. Of course, there are those whose faith in the truth of the Scriptures have been severely challenged, if not shattered, because they believe they have done all that can be reasonably expected of fallible man to train their children aright and yet have not seen the desired end. What all parties need to realize, however, is that a proverb, even in the Scriptures, should be understood as just that: a proverb. It is not an absolute generalization

but a statistical one which means it would be true in most situations, not necessarily all. So there may be exceptions to the rule as training does not take away choice from the child.

### *Definite (Predetermined) or Dependent?*

But it is also important to realize that our understanding of “training” may be faulty. What is meant by “train up” as expressed in Proverbs 22:6? The answer is not as simple as it may first appear.

Ted Hildebrandt contends that

the verb ‘to train’ really refers to a bestowal of status and responsibility. The noun translated ‘child’ denotes the status of a late adolescent rather than a child. ‘In the way he should go’ is best understood as ‘according to what is expected.’ The original intent then of this verse addresses a late adolescent’s entrance into his place in adult society. This should be done with celebration and encouragement – giving him respect, status and responsibility commensurate with his position as a young adult (1988, 3)

This proverb, says Hildebrandt, goes “beyond the concerns of childrearing” (3). It may indeed go beyond it, if his interpretation is to be accepted, but let’s not lose sight of the point that it must also include it for how will this celebration of adulthood take place if due consideration is not given to the individual’s upbringing during childhood.

Matthew Henry and Merrill Unger see training up a child in the way he should go as initiation: The child is to be initiated or dedicated “by giving him the training he needs for life” (Unger 1981, 1040). Henry offers the following extended understanding:

Train up children in that age of vanity, in that learning age, to prepare them for what they are designed for. *Catechise them; initiate them; keep them under discipline. Train them up, not in the way they would go (the bias of their corrupt hearts would draw them aside), but in the way they should go, the way in which, if*

you love them, you would have them go. *Train up a child according as he is capable* (so some take it), with a gentle hand, as nurses feed children, little and often, Deut. vi 7. 2 (Henry 1935, 917)

So for Henry the proverb is not just referring to adolescents, but to children. Gæbelein concurs. He sees “child” as a reference to “the youngest years, although the Talmud would place him between sixteen and twenty-four” (1991, 1061). He points out that “the NEB captures the point of early instruction: ‘Start a boy on the right road.’ ... The way the verse has been translated shows that there is a standard of life to which he should go.” Where he differs from Henry and is in definite agreement with Hildebrandt is on what is *not meant* by the expression: “the way he should go.” He says that

In recent years it has become popular to interpret this verse to mean that the training should be according to the child’s way. The view is not new; over a thousand years ago Saadia suggested that one should train the child in accordance with his ability and potential. The wise parent will discern the natural bent of the individual child and train it accordingly. Kidner acknowledges that the wording implies respect for the child’s individuality but not his self-will; he reminds us that the emphasis is still on the parental duty of training. (Gæbelein 1991, 1061)

He maintains, however, that although it is “a practical and useful idea,” it is not the meaning of the expression. He finds it hard to understand “why a natural bent needs training.” It would seem that he is right. A natural bent could not need training. One would not train a child to do what he would naturally do. But, one could certainly train a child with his bent uppermost in one’s mind. Training would then be in accordance with his natural bent and not in contradiction to it. To condense Henry’s thoughts, training would be in line with what God had designed, but doing so at a rate and in a way the child is capable of learning it.

Upon further consideration, however, it could be argued that one *can* train a child to do what is natural. Let’s take the matter of talent.

Talent is not a guarantee of success; it has to be honed and channelled aright for it to find true expression. Without practice, without training, one's natural bent can be bent out of shape. That is to say one will not be the best that one can be. Could not God be saying: "Help sharpen the child's natural ability but make sure to direct its use in a way that brings glory to Me?" Training does this because it involves discipline and *then* the "bestowal of status and responsibility" at the appropriate time on the individual in training.

So there is a concern for both the present and the future. "When he is old he will not depart from it" suggests training with the future in mind. Hildebrandt's attempt to frame the text only in the light of adolescence and adulthood is misguided. It is actually unnecessary. For, as has been said before, if there is to be a bestowal of status and responsibility on a functional adult, there has to be a proper foundation laid during childhood.

### *Guidance or Punishment?*

Now, discipline has often been equated with punishment. Terms such as "the rod of correction" conjure up in the mind images of beatings. The whole idea of guidance and of exemplification is not considered by some. This, therefore, limits for them, the significance of training children which unfortunately can lead to child abuse. It is no wonder that there are those who see the Scriptures as advocating this type of abuse and find this abhorrent. Carroll is one such. He even criticizes the concept of God as disciplinarian: "Hebrews projects the parent's role as disciplinarian onto God. God 'educates' us after the fashion of human parents." Carroll shows how the writer taps Proverbs 3:11-12 "to score the point that God disciplines those whom God loves." He posits that:

this picture of God borrows from conventional parenting practices of the author's time, but it is deeply troubling for readers today. Not only does it imply that God sends personal misfortunes to 'train' us; this image of God also, in turn, appears to endorse abusive treatment of children by their parents. (2001, ---)

Abuse? The fact that discipline has been understood as punishment and punishment can be abusive is no reason to project this unto the text. The text must be interpreted, not only within the historical context into which it is set, but must be interpreted in its own right. The writers of Scriptures have often sought to correct normative practices and present a new and radical perspective. The hermeneutic of grace, for example, abounds in the New Testament and cannot be conveniently ignored as we seek to come to terms with passages such as Hebrews 12:5-11.

Discipline is more than punishment. The synonymous parallelism seen in Deuteronomy 36 juxtaposes discipline and instruction or teaching. The one in Proverbs 13:18 and 15:5, 10, 32 shows that discipline has to do with correction. Verse 10, in particular, indicates that this has to do with keeping someone aligned to the path God has determined, a path of obedience to His will. And, Proverbs 23:13 links discipline with punishment: “Do not withhold discipline from your son; if you beat him with a rod, he will not die.” The point is that discipline has various elements which include instruction and correction which, in turn, may include punishment.

The Hebrew word for discipline (*musār*) best translates as instruction or education. The opening verses of Proverbs clearly lay out its purpose: ‘For learning about wisdom and instruction (*musār*), for understanding words of insight, for gaining instruction (*musār*) in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity; to teach shrewdness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young.’ The aim here is to inculcate instruction in wise behaviour. The main purpose of discipline should be instruct or teach our children how to be wise, just, and fair – not to punish them. (Heskett 2001, 182)

Heskett is so right when he says that the main purpose of discipline is not punishment and that “true discipline teaches children how to live lives that are rich and full” (183). The hope of every parent should be that punishment will not be necessary. But sometimes it is.

Punishment can take many forms; spanking is one. Concerning this matter, Heskett says: Those who resort to spanking frequently find that it demoralizes and angers their children” (183). One is not sure what Heskett is positing here. Is he saying that parents who spank, frequently find ... or is he saying that parents who spank frequently, find ...? There is a big difference to meaning depending on where the comma is placed, for in the first instance it would be reasonable to prohibit spanking under all circumstances; in the second it could be recommended for extreme circumstances like outright rebellion. As seen from Proverbs 23:13, spanking is a method seemingly endorsed by the Scriptures. The rod of correction, however, should not be seen in this one dimensional way. The rod was not *only* used to beat, it was *also* used to steer sheep in the right direction. And in Psalm 23, it is said to provide comfort. If discipline is to achieve the goal of life enrichment and fulfilment then affirmation must be a part of it.

### TRAIN UP A CHILD – PROCESS

An examination of Proverbs 22:6 has given us some insight into what it means to “train up a child in the way he should go.” This will indeed serve as a bridge as we seek to apply this verse to our present context.

#### *The Challenge*

If one accepts that in training a child “in the way he should go” one must “train a child according to his way” i.e. “according to his particular traits, capacities, and characteristics,” (Carter 1968, 559) then one might think that the Scriptural adage, though not easy to adhere to, would not be as much of the challenge that it seems to be. After all, children have inherited tendencies. Idiomatic expressions such as *like father like son* and *a chip off the old block* bear this out. It is interesting that God has so designed the human make-up that we naturally take many of the traits of our parents. And so, parents will understand the natural disposition of the child and presumably know how to nurture the child into becoming the best that he could be. But, for a number of reasons, this is

very often not the case. Parents may not want children to be like them as they consider themselves failures, perhaps because they themselves were not encouraged and affirmed; they may even have been abused. Then there are times when the child does not follow directly in the way of the parents. This too may pose a problem if the parents expect their children to live out their desires and ambitions – sometimes unfulfilled in their (the parents’) own lives. This is especially so when the parents’ concept of success is defined in terms of wealth and prestige but the children’s goals and aspirations won’t lead them in that direction.

You would think this would not be an issue with Christian parents but this is not the case. Christian parents also struggle in these ways. And then, when one adds to the equation the fact that many want their children to live out God’s purpose in their lives, the child’s natural disposition may be of little or no concern and so little attention is paid to it, or there may actually be attempts to curb it if it is not perceived as ‘godly’.

But, even if Christian parents try all they can to bring up their children in the “discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4), even if they seek wholeheartedly to bring their children to the point of commitment to Christ and to the acknowledgment of His Lordship in their daily lives, if this is not done with the acknowledgement that these children are whole beings, who have physical and emotional needs that must also be met, all the attempts to do the necessary and primary “spiritual duty” in child rearing has a good chance of being less than effective. Sometimes individuals who grew up in Christian homes renounce anything to do with the Christianity, some even turning out to be atheists. One should not say that in all cases parents are to be blamed. But, let’s think about it. Christian parents can be abusive in the name of discipline. They may succumb to the pressure to ensure that their children live morally upright, godly lives by trying to prove they are in charge of the home and no child “gwen rule dem.”<sup>2</sup> The child, therefore, has no “talk.”<sup>3</sup> If this is the approach taken, then the child may feel alienated and have no sense of the worth or value that comes from a sense of belonging. The parents’ attitude may be projected unto God and could result in no

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<sup>2</sup> This is Jamaican Creole. It means, “is going to rule/control them.”

<sup>3</sup> That is “has no contribution to make in discussions” and/or “is in position to make decisions.”

desire or capacity to engender intimacy with Him. It's not sufficient to teach the right things, vitally important though it is; employing the right approach and methodology in teaching is also critical. Let it also be said that catering to the whims and fancies of the child is not a part of the "correct methodology."

### *The Principles*

Teaching the right things using the right methods.

Love for God, honour of parents, respect for others, self-discipline and a proper work ethic are supposed to be inculcated in people from young. If this is not done then, it will be very difficult indeed to do in the adolescent or adult years. Moses realized this and instructed Israel thus in Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

<sup>4</sup>"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! <sup>5</sup>"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup>"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup>"You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. <sup>8</sup>"You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. <sup>9</sup>"You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Telling what is required with constant, though not overbearing reminders. Then verses 18-25 of the same chapter reveal Moses encouraging parents to explain why the commandments should be followed. What is also interesting is that children were expected to ask questions (N.B.: v20). Nowadays we talk about discovery learning. This is not a new concept. And in verse 17 we see that parents should exemplify what is being taught. So children were to be taught what to do, why they should do it, and how it should be done.

<sup>17</sup>"You should diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and His testimonies and His statutes which He has commanded you. <sup>18</sup>"You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you and that you may go in and possess the good land which the LORD swore to give your fathers, <sup>19</sup>by driving out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has spoken. <sup>20</sup>"When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the LORD our God commanded you?' <sup>21</sup>then you shall say to your son, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; <sup>23</sup>He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.' <sup>24</sup>"So the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always and for our survival, as it is today. <sup>25</sup>"It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Jesus in Matthew 28: 19-20. He did not have children specifically in mind, but His thoughts are applicable because children are like disciples. Moses, in Deuteronomy 6, addressed key principles in teaching children. Jesus' interactions with His disciples reveal those and at least one more. We see where Jesus sent out His disciples to practice what had been taught verbally and by example (Matthew 10:1-11:1; Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-16). Life skills were, of course, constantly being shaped and would be evident as they related to each other. But some skills could only be tested outside of the 'home', outside of the watchful eye of the mentor. They had to learn and demonstrate relative independence. There would come a time when they would be on their own. They needed to be prepared for that time while some supervision could be administered. And so when they returned from their practicum experience, they reported "all that they had done" (Luke 9:10; 10:17) and received the necessary feedback (Luke 10:18-20). Jesus also rejoiced and pronounced them blessed. They were like, as Hildebrandt

would put it, adolescents preparing for their entrance into adult society. Even at this preparatory stage, Jesus was rejoicing. The celebration and encouragement of which Hildebrandt spoke was evident in Jesus' response as he 'weaned' his disciples. And in John 14:12 He gave them the "respect, status and responsibility commensurate with [their] position as ['adults']" (Hildebrandt 1988, 3).

### *The Parent/Child Relationship*

Jesus' ministry was founded on relationship. He brought his disciples to maturity, not simply through instruction, not simply through modeling correct *behaviour*, but as a result of His relationship with them. His was a loving father-figure to His disciples – age notwithstanding.

"Training up a child in the way he should go" does not take place in a vacuum. As it was with Jesus and His disciples, a nurturing environment is required. And this must begin from infancy – as a matter of fact from the womb.

According to attachment theory, the child begins in infancy to develop cognitive models of relationships with others based on interactions with early caregivers, usually a parent or parents. Children whose needs are met in these interactions develop models of the self as competent, effective, and lovable; models of others as predictable and trustworthy; and models of relationships as potentially rewarding and worthwhile ... these children also experience a sense of security and readiness to explore the environment, while maintaining the parent as a secure base to whom they can return if necessary. (Bolger, Patterson and Kupersmidt 1998, 1171)

Learning is inhibited by a low self-concept. In any case, what is it that we want children to learn: information or life skills? Sometimes, because parents are concerned about securing their own future, they focus on educating their children for the purpose of getting a job which can ensure this. This, however, is short-sighted and can be considered downright selfish. If a child does not develop good inter-personal skills, if he/she

does not learn to love, if he/she does not learn to respect others, not just for what they can offer, but as persons made in the image of God, then the parents may not get what they bargained for. The honouring of parents will be easier for the grown offspring if it comes as part of the respect-for-others package. And this respect is not to be expected from someone who lacks self-respect and feels unworthy of being loved. As Bolger has said, the types of relationships children foster are directly related to the nature of their relationship with their parents.

The Biblical principle of love governing all actions is one that all parents should adopt. It, therefore, ought not to be named once among Christian parents that a child be taught moral standards of conduct in an unloving, abusive context. In fact, good parent/child relationships engender good peer relationships which, in turn, “promote the development of moral reasoning, cooperation, and reciprocity” (Bolger, Patterson and Kupersmidt 1998, 1172). And the opposite occurs when children are not cherished, but maltreated. They develop poor peer relationships which “have been found to predict current and later adjustment problems, including anti-social behaviour and psychiatric disorder” (1172). Social skills are learnt from the home.

Maltreatment presents in a number of ways. Some parents provide little or no structure for their children. Parents who allow children to have ‘what they want, when they want it, how they want it, *because* they want it’ are harming their children. The implications of this approach to child rearing are far reaching and potentially disastrous as in the adult world they will only have a similar experience if they operate by force, for even psychological manipulation has its limitations. And even so, not everyone will give in to threats of physical harm. These children may, therefore, become frustrated adults who find it difficult to cope. For example, finding a job may prove problematic. People don’t want to employ individuals with poor social skills who cannot relate fairly well with their colleagues and who are not respectful of authority figures. In addition, their insistence on getting their own way may make them instigators of conflict, leading sometimes to violent acts which they themselves perpetrate or which are perpetrated against them. It is an imperative, therefore, that parents understand that trying to make life less stressful for

oneself by just giving in to the demands of the child is certainly not in the best interest of the child. It is no wonder, then, that parents who do not discipline their children are said to hate them:

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently. (Proverbs 13:24-25)

So, in not offering a child structure one is maltreating him/her. It may even be considered psychological and spiritual abuse.

Severe discipline, however, is not the remedy. Sirach's proposes that:

He who loves his son will whip him often, in order that he may rejoice at the way he turns out. He who disciplines his son will profit by him, and will boast of him among his acquaintances ... Pamper a child and he will frighten you; play with him and he will give you grief ... (Carroll 2001, 125)

*Never* pamper your child! *Never* play with your child! Whip him *often*! Harsh words indeed. If children experience the sorrow of punishment, but not the joy of affirmation, how do they know that they are loved? And yet, unfortunately, Sirach's philosophy has been adopted by many Jamaican families. In an attempt not to pamper their children, too many parents do not play with their children nor entertain their seemingly frivolous chatter. According to Leo-Rhynie,

There is a lack of verbal interaction in many family environments: adults do not talk to children; they exclude children from their talk; they complain that the children talk too much and ask too many questions; and they do not provide experiences for children about which they can talk ... In many homes, language is used almost exclusively to express anger and disappointment and to reprimand (1993, 17).

Barrett captures the essence of Leo-Rhynie's thoughts thus: "Socialization by conversation and communication, talking 'with' rather than 'at' children appeared to be virtually non-existent" (400). In a study

conducted by the Caribbean Child Development Centre in conjunction with the University of the West Indies' Department of Sociology and Social Work parents were generally found to recognize the need for telling their children stories (Barrow and Reddock 2001, 444). However, these lighthearted moments which may actually last a moment do not negate the adverse effect of the verbal abuse to which the child is normally subjected.

Now, many children are not only verbally abused, they are also physically abused. These two types of abuse are often used in combination. Never pamper. Never play. Whip often. Interestingly, parents themselves will admit the ineffectiveness of this method, yet they persist in employing it. Perhaps they are thinking that if this does not work, nothing else will. In any case, it may not be working now, but the end result will bring no regrets for its benefits will be reaped in adulthood – “train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Corporal punishment is seen as an important part of training, so much so that even parents who have easy recourse to the alternative of withholding privileges from children still engage in it. But really, verbal and physical abuse reinforces negative behaviour. The idea that children will do all they can to avoid pain, though a seemingly reasonable one, does not always hold true. For abused children, “the need for love and acceptance many times outweighs the desire to avoid pain and discomfort” (Doyle 1997). And so actually, one may find a child acting up, doing wrong in order to get attention – the attention of a “cussing” or a beating may be preferred to the “inattention of neglect” (Doyle 1997). In such a case, punishment just reinforces bad behaviour instead of good. Can you imagine this being transferred to adult relationships? Well, it is. Adults do conduct themselves poorly in order to be noticed.

Then some children also learn that one should always try to ensure that one is in a position of power. Such children may model quite well the hostility and aggression of their parents. And others may accept the position of vulnerability “permanently”; they may, therefore, find themselves “always the victim” – frequently in abusive relationships. You see, from observation children will know that adults make mistakes too

and that not all of them result in punishment. It will also be clear that the difference in treatment has to do with the power relationship, a matter over which they have little control – for now. Such children will surely feel exasperated. In Col. 3: 20-1 and Eph. 6: 1-4, parents are enjoined not to exasperate and embitter their children. Instead, God's example should be followed. The discipline of the Lord is not oppressive. It is not selfish. It is done for the good of the child of God – it is done out of love, not simply anger – as a matter of fact, the anger is rooted and motivated by love. It is restorative, not simply punitive. It is the right mix of justice and of mercy and grace. He remembers that we are dust. And He is the Almighty. Why can't we realize that our children are dust – frail, just like we are? We don't always live up to our own expectations much less that of our Heavenly Father.

If children are not to be exasperated, then parents must not make unreasonable demands of them. The definition of "bad behaviour" must depend on the stage of development and on what was communicated to the child as right or wrong action.

Parents must not arbitrarily assert their authority. Let's take the matter of pretence as an example. Young children who have their own world of make-believe should not be punished for lying as it is a natural part of their development. What parents must seek to ensure, over time, is that the child understands the difference between fantasy and fact, the imagination and reality. Therefore, their participation and involvement in the play of their children would be very useful. However, the assumption might be that since "play is an activity that is done for its own sake, for the present enjoyment of the activity, without regard to future outcomes" (Devries 2001, 165) it is a time-wasting exercise from which to dissuade children. And so, what Schleiermacher calls "practice" may be that which parents want of their children. Practice, as defined by him, is "the arduous repetition and development of skills for the purpose of mastery and perfect execution of some future production or artefact" (165). But, in fact, play is very meaningful. The key is to achieve the correct balance for "preoccupation with play might lead to irresponsibility, but preoccupation with practice can make a person rigid and closed off from fresh insights that arise as one actually experiences life in the moment" (165).

Now, since "preoccupation with play might lead to irresponsibility," (165) this means that as children mature they should be given more and more responsibilities to prepare them for adulthood. But we should also recognize that play does prepare an individual for adulthood. How? When children are emotionally and physically abused as unreasonable limits are placed on their self-expression, when they are "prevented from exploring their world and satisfying their curiosity because if they go beyond [these] very tight limits or cause any disruption they will be punished, eventually it becomes more expedient not to reach out, not to try anything different." (Doyle 1997, 21) This attitude very likely would continue into adulthood. And although as an adult one should not be childish, being childlike, i.e. enjoying the moment, having a sense of adventure, is actually an advantage in adulthood, leading to discoveries and inventions and an ability to solve problems.

Then there are "those teenage years." Kerr points out that in the 1940s and 1950s, peasants in the Caribbean did not seem to see it as a phase of life (1952, 80). The same rings true today. Teenagers often do not experience an "adolescent period" (Barrow, 400). There is this sudden movement from childhood to adulthood without the necessary transition. You do, of course, have the opposite occurring where parents don't encourage the maturing process in their children, and even seek to stifle it. And so the desire for and exercise of independence may be labelled by parents as rebellion. But really, parents should encourage their teenagers to make "independent decisions" and to "do things on their own." Within limit. For even at this stage structure is necessary. And if the teenager enjoyed this from childhood, then it will be more readily accepted at this stage of his/her development, without an attendant rebellious spirit. In addition to this groundwork in childhood: the provision of structure, parents should prepare their children for what Henriques calls "the conflicts of a psychological and social nature attendant upon adolescence" (1953, 134). If structure and preparation are put in place from early, if teenagers are allowed to exercise their desire for independence, then the rebellious spirit associated with the teen years will very likely not express itself.

The point should be clear: there must be age-appropriate expectations. This will mean less frustration for both parents and

offspring. It will also mean that the temptation to short circuit a child's development in order to rush him to another stage will be avoided. Children must be allowed to enjoy their childhood, teenagers their teenaged years and not be forced to take on responsibilities that are more fitting for a later stage of development.

When adults view children's unfolding development as good and support that development, youngsters learn with excitement. When adults validate and respect children's feelings, [they] begin to form separate identities ... when adults are authentic with children and allow honest emotional exchanges, [they] become independent and learn to cooperate and negotiate individual differences. (Paris 1992, xi)

One suspects this is what Christian parents want for their offspring: their "learning with excitement," their having a sense of individual identity and independence that allows them to be firm in their convictions and not gullible to 'every wind of doctrine,' their being able to "cooperate and negotiate individual differences." But this is not going to be achieved by wishing it into being. Parenting has to be purposeful. How else will children and young people be disciplined i.e. guided aright?

It must be acknowledged that each developmental stage contributes to the next and to the ultimate: adulthood. This does not mean that each must be valued only because and inasmuch as it makes this contribution. As the child has value in himself so each stage must be enjoyed for what it does to enhance life now and the part it plays in giving us a glimpse of another aspect of the image of God. For, each individual expresses something of that image that no-one else can.

## CONCLUSION

"Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Advice that transcends time and culture. Every generation, every society understands that intentional instruction of children is necessary. That's not a matter of contention. What is debated is what the child should learn and how it should be taught. There is a sense in which each generation, each society must determine

this for itself. And yet, “the way he should go” is already set. It is God who establishes it. The command is given in the context of *Proverbs* whose focus is summarized in 1:7: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” And throughout the book we get to understand that knowledge, wisdom and instruction have to do with relationship with God and the following of His precepts. So, whereas societies may differ in what it deems relevant for children to know and in what approach it should adopt in getting the message across, godliness is not an option. Better put, it is an option which if rejected will lead to dire consequences. So there is basic content that must be a part of the training manual. Whatever else it contains it must have as primary material, the Word of God.

And the approach? This too is culture-dependent. And, yet – again – the Scriptures must guide the process. We have Moses’ instructions; we have Jesus’ example. What else do we need? The enabling power of the Holy Spirit. The fact is that our best efforts can fall short. We can impart the right things in the right way and not get the right results. Part of the problem may lie in our dependence on a formula instead of dependence on God.

God is the Master Parent. Let us learn from Him; let us depend on Him as the challenging, but potentially highly rewarding task of parenting is carried out.

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