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## *Family-of-Origin's Importance*

This section of our newsletter intends to provide an open dialogue between interested readers and FCS. The focus zeros in on the broad area of initial and lifelong human formation. Again, as we experiment with the newsletter, this section will be shaped by the input, experiences, curiosity, questions, comments, observations, suggestions, etc., of interested readers.

We encourage you to email to us your queries, comments, feedback, etc. In this manner, together we can continue the conversation on human formation.

For example and as a beginning since this is the inaugural newsletter, a reader who is somewhat familiar with FCS might inquire or challenge FCS's emphasis on family-of-origin as a foundational building block for human formation. The person might state or ask something like the following:

I notice that throughout your materials, FCS places an accent and priority on family-of-origin. I kind of know and intuit that my family contributed much toward forming me. But at 67 years old and 48 years as a religious (or another younger person might say, as I continue my journey in initial formation, at age 27), I think the past is the past. Is not the present and future more important than the past? Why bring up unpleasant memories from the past through digging into and disturbing old family-of-origin stuff?

### **Reflection**

First, at FCS we are practitioners of the art of Reflective Living. In turn, we are interested in assisting other people with becoming practitioners of this reflective art. FCS asserts that consecrated life needs to be synonymous with living daily life as a reflective, openhearted human being. As children we first learned about being a reflective human beings (or not being reflective human beings) through our families and parents.

QU:

Describe how your family and parents taught you directly and indirectly to be:

- a reflective human being
- open to and embracing of your true and unique self
- self-aware
- to mature in self-awareness

Second, in mindful moments, we would likely all agree. When we were children and early adolescents, family impacted us in a wide variety of helpful and unhelpful ways. Sometimes the family was appreciative, warm, and affirming. Family and parents might have been enthusiastic about supporting and gently guiding us to embrace and explore life. In this way, they were helpful in shaping and forming us in a healthy way early in life. For example, through this helpfulness, we would have begun to discover, acknowledge, and value our giftedness, our wonderfulness for just being a child or adolescent human being. We would have learned to assume the tasks of daily life in a gentle, reflective, appreciative, confident, and competent manner. This helpfulness of our family and parents would have nurtured our self-esteem and the unfolding of our self-awareness. Family and parents would have encouraged an appreciative, reflective way of looking at one's self, others, and the world.

At other times, the family was harsh, critical, shaming, or wounding. This was unhelpful to our emerging experience of being a little girl or a little boy. For example, a parent might have been alcoholic, a gambler, emotionally unavailable, abusive and harsh in a variety of ways. In turn, the pathway into the heart would have been clogged up somewhat with unresolved stuff. This resulted in beginning the process of closing down and shutting off part of our heart. We might have begun to distrust ourselves and others. In this manner, we would have developed doubts about our emerging self. With diminished self-confidence, even though we were competent in many skills and ways of taking up the tasks of everyday life, we would have experienced ourselves perhaps as not good enough, inadequate, or not living up to their expectations.

Furthermore, because of our family-of-origin's unhelpfulness, we might have stumbled into unhelpful compensations due to the lack of affection, the lack of affirmation, the lack of a parental acclamation that we are a daughter or a son in whom the parent is most pleased, in whom the parent delights. Consequently, we may have developed ways of excessively pushing ourselves to overachieve, be important, standout, strive in outdoing and outperforming others. We developed pride and self-interest-ego strivings. Cynicism, sarcasm, a critical and blaming tongue were manifestations of our hurt. We might have become aggressive and overly competitive, focused on doing and accomplishing rather than being and interacting with self and others in an appreciative and gracious manner. We lost some of our humanness because of the unhelpfulness of the family.

Today, whether 67 or 27 years old, we might have been and continue to be successful in the eyes of the world. But at what cost, at what drain, at what consequence to ourselves personally and to those with whom we live, work, and minister? We might be harsh, lacking empathy, lacking appreciation toward ourselves and people with whom we live, work, or minister. We demand much from ourselves and others. These moments of harshness arise when we are stressed. But is our stress a usual way of life?

When we neglect to reflect on the past, when we lack curiosity and inquisitiveness concerning how we were shaped and formed along with implications for life and particularly as a consecrated person, then we will lack peacefulness. We will lack delight in ourselves for who we

are, as well as for our many accomplishments. We will lack a sufficient level of trust, security, and well-being. We will lack in the sustaining intimate relationship we desire to experience with our God. We will not have learned the painful lessons from our history. We will continue to make many of the same mistakes over and over again, just as our family and parents continued to do.

QU:

- Describe three ways that your family was helpful and three ways unhelpful when you were a child and a teenager.
- Describe how you have integrated your parents' and family's helpful and unhelpful ways into your life.
- Describe their continuing repercussions within your life today.
- Describe how these ways, especially the unhelpful ways, impact others?
- Are you aware of their impact on others?

Third, our parents were the primary formators in our early life. They remain impactful in our lives today whether they are dead or alive, whether or not we are aware of their ongoing impact. FCS assumes that every parent did the very best that he or she could. If parents could have done better, they would have. FCS does not blame parents or family members. Some parents come from families and backgrounds screeching with abuse, neglect, and hurt. They may have been emotionally diminished and some even emotionally bankrupt.

They were who they were. They are who they are. They offered to us what they had. Often it was not enough for a little girl or a little boy or for a young teenager. Some of our parents were bound up with much pain. It resulted in clogging up the pathways leading into their hearts, in closing up their hearts somewhat. Consequently, being a parent was at times overwhelming. In their overwhelmed state, they may have struck out, abusing, neglecting, and hurting. They may have been out of control and addicted to alcohol, food, or over-involvement with work or other activities. This resulted in separating themselves from being at home, attending to and interacting with the family and with you. In an unmindful way, they likely did this to distract and to anesthetize themselves from their own unresolved hurt from their family-of-origin.

QU:

- Describe some of the unresolved pain that your father and mother brought into their marriage.
- Describe how their unresolved pain impacted you while a child, while an adolescent.
- Describe the impact on you today.

Yes, some of the above may be part of our history and family-of-origin. However, as adults today, we need to assume personal responsibility for our lives, for our ongoing formation.

The situation is that unresolved stuff from the past obstructs living in the present, from being attentive in the moment, in the "now" as we would say. Unresolved family-of-origin conflicts

and hurts, interrupts the process of maturing in self-awareness and unfolding as a reflective human being.

Fourth, consequently, FCS places a high priority on family-of-origin because our unresolved history constantly revisits us. Without intentional change and growth, we end up being similar to our parents in many unhelpful ways. Unfortunately, we may become trapped in childhood residue of the past, preventing full maturity. We may focus on excessive involvement in the future. This all clutters and prevents our capacity to be and to live in the now, in the present moment, in the presence of God within which there are no worries and no problems. There is only comfort, love, and peace in the hands of God.

Having an understanding of the unhelpful aspects of growing up places us in a position to learn and integrate new ways of being a human being. These new ways would cultivate being a reflective human being, a self-aware human being, a relational human being, a peaceful human being. These are human characteristics that the Church, Institutes, and the people of God request that consecrated persons develop and manifest in everyday life.

Send us your reflections, comments, suggestions, and questions about the above conversation or on another topic of human formation. In this way, we can continue the conversation.