

GHARFIEN
IL-HAJJA UMANA



Gharfien il-Hajja Umana

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Rivista ta' formazzjoni teologika
li tittratta temi ta' duttrina biblika,
dommatika, morali u xjenzi umani

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Editorjal

Għarfien il-Hajja Umana

Fr Raymond Gatt OP

“*Aghraf lilek innifsek*” (*gnothi seauton*) kienet kitba minquxa fuq il-gebel fil-portiku tat-tempju ta’ Delfi fil-Grecja, li jmur lura lejn is-sena 800 q.K. Dan it-tempju Grieg kellu ’l fuq minn mitt dettatura li juru l-għerf tač-čiviltà Griega. Li ‘*tagħraf lilek innifsek*’ hija l-iktar kitba famuża fosthom kollha għax hija assoċjata mal-filosfu Sokrate (470-399 q.K.) u l-istudent tiegħu Platon (427-347 q.K.) li jsemmiha fid-diversi Djalogi tiegħu.¹

Sokrate jsostni li hajja umana mingħajr awto-riflessjoni kritika u introspezzjoni ġenwina ma tagħmilx sens tgħixha. Min-natura tiegħu l-bniedem huwa mxennaq li jsir jaf min hu, minn fejn ġej u fejn sejjer. Il-qawwa intellettuali tal-bniedem timbuttah biex jistaqsi mistoqsijiet tqal biex isir jaf aktar lilu nnifsu. Għalhekk hu meħtieġ li persuna tikkonsidra t-tifsira u l-għan tal-azzjonijiet, tad-deċiżjonijiet u tal-esperjenzi li tgħaddi minnhom matul hajjitha u b’hekk tkun iktar determinata u responsabbli li tiegħu l-hajja b’approċċ iktar sinifikattiv. Li wiehed jifhem lilu nnifsu huwa l-baži ta’ għajxien awtentiku.

Ix-xjenzi umani, fosthom il-psikologija flimkien mal-filosofija u t-teologija, għenu fl-għarfien tal-hajja umana u biex il-bniedem jagħraf il-milja tal-potenzjal tiegħu. L-istudji psikoloġiċi wrew li l-bniedem għandu storja interessanti ta’ kif hu jgħaddi mill-istadji kollha tal-hajja, mit-tniissil sa għeluq il-hajja terrestri. L-iżvilupp fiżjoloġiku, psikoloġiku, sesswali, intellettuali u morali tal-persuna jwassluna biex nagħrfu l-kobor li hu mżewwaq bih l-esseri uman – biżżejjed naraw il-qawwa ta’ fejn jista’ jasal il-moħħ tal-bniedem!

L-ewwel benniena tal-bniedem hija l-familja. Fiha jitwieled, jikber u jgħix matul iż-żmien. Il-ġenituri huma l-ewwel skola u edukaturi tat-tfal.

L-iżvilupp psikoloġiku tal-persuna jiġi influwenzat mit-trobbija li jkollu fi hdan il-familja. It-tisħih tal-familja jfisser soċjetà b'saħħitha. Huwa f'dan l-ambjent familjari li l-valuri jiġu mgħoddija liċ-ċittadini t'għada. L-edukazzjoni fl-iskejjel u fl-universitajiet għandha rwol indispensabbli fil-bini tal-karattru tal-persuna. Il-bniedem irid jibqa' jitgħallem biex ikompli jiżviluppa l-kapaċitajiet tiegħu.

Ix-xogħol huwa attività li tgħin lill-bniedem jiżviluppa l-personalità tiegħu. Ix-xogħol m'għandux jitqies biss għal skop ekonomiku imma jrid jgħin lill-persuna tikber fil-kapaċitajiet tagħha anki permezz tas-soċjalizzazzjoni ma' persuni oħra. Max-xogħol irid jingħaqad ukoll il-mistrieħ biex il-persuna tkun tista' tirkupra s-saħħa neċessarja halli tkompli l-hidma tagħha. Persuna b'saħħitha trid issib il-bilanċ bejn ix-xogħol u l-mistrieħ. B'hekk jiġi evitat il-mard li jista' jhalli konsegwenzi permanenti fuq il-persuna.

Illum il-mezzi tal-komunikazzjoni soċjali saru parti integrali mill-ħajja tal-bniedem. Huma għandhom influwenza kbira fuq il-persuna li trid tkun kapaċi tiddixxerni u tagħzel l-aħjar għal hajjitha. Ma' dan jidhol ukoll it-twemmin reliġjuż li jgħin biex fil-ħajja tal-persuna jkun hemm direzzjoni lejn il-gid tagħha u tal-oħrajn. Dan irid iwassal biex il-ħajja umana tiġi rispettata mill-bidu sat-tmiem u b'hekk tkun imħarsa ddinjità tal-bniedem. Meta wieħed iqis kemm il-ħajja umana hija kumplessa u qasira fl-istess hin, ikun f'waqtu li l-persuna dejjem tagħraf tgħix hajjitha b'responsabbiltà u servizz. Kif jgħid Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961): *'Iktar ma nersqu lejn nofs hajjitna, u nkunu stabbilizzajna ruhna b'mod tajjeb fl-attitudnijiet personali u pożizzjonijiet soċjali, dan juri li nkunu skoprejna t-triq it-tajba fl-ideali u l-prinċipji tal-imġiba tagħna'.²*

Noti

1. Ara Platon, *Karmide* (164d-165a), *Protagora* (343b), *Fedru* (230a), *Filebu* (48c), *Ligġijiet* (XI.923a) u *Alcibijadi I* (124b, 129a, 132c).
2. Ara, *The Essential Jung, Selected Writings*, Fontana Press, London, 1998, p.72.

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Il-formazzjoni tal-karattru: l-iżvilupp psikiku, emottiv, soċjali u inter-personali

Dr Michael Galea

Il-karattru hu d-destin tal-bniedem – George Eliot (1819-1880)

Il-kelma ‘karattru’ ġejja mill-Grieg (*kharakter*) li tfisser marka, tinqixa jew stampa distintiva u unika, bhal meta tnaqqax sinjal fuq ġebbla jew injama (Moody-Adams, 1990). Minn lenti psikologika, il-karattru jwassal għal attributi li bihom, persuna hi differenti minn oħrajn, attributi li jiffurmaw l-identità ta’ persuna. Ghalkemm jixbah lil personalità, il-karattru jwassal għal effetti u implikazzjonijiet morali partikolari. Dan ifisser allura li persuna ta’ karattru hi persuna li taġixxi b’mod morali jew etikament korrett. Tajjeb jingħad li l-karattru ma jirreferix għal xi virtù partikolari imma li bih, persuna taġixxi b’mod etiku.

Kull persuna, hi x’inh i l-età jew l-esperjenza tagħha, hi msejja għal proċess twil ta’ taġlim u formazzjoni b’dedikazzjoni shiha għall-iżvilupp u sens ta’ għarfien kontinwu. Imma xi jwassal għal formazzjoni tal-karattru? Din hi domanda kumplessa u taf iddaħħalna f’diskussjoni taħraq u kumplikata.

Ġudizzji dwar l-istima tagħna jvarjaw ferm għax jiddependu skont is-sorsi taġhom (morali jew le) u skont il-livell ta’ żvilupp. L-istima lejna nfusna tiddependi sew fuq li nilhqu l-ideali tagħna (Harter, 1983), nifhmu li hemm diskrepanzi bejn l-ideali ta’ persuna u r-realtà. Dan forsi jidher ċar fil-qasam morali. Ilkoll nafu li nibnu stima tajba lejna nfusna hi parti essenzjali mill-formazzjoni tal-karattru tagħna. Imma hu fatt ukoll li meta nimmiraw għal standards morali oghla, dan jaf iwassalna għal kritika ikbar tagħna nfusna. Dil-kritika possibilment taħdem il-kontra, għax tbaxxilna s-sens ta’ stima li jkollna tagħna nfusna. Sens ta’ stima lejna iktar baxxa mhux bilfors ikunilna ta’ ħsara, l-iktar jekk jimmotivana biex naħdmu iktar halli nsiru aħjar.

Jekk kellna naraw fuq fuq l-istorja wara l-formazzjoni u l-edukazzjoni tal-karattru, naraw diversi punti nteressanti.

Aristotile kien jemmen li l-karattru jiżviluppa biż-żmien hekk kif wiehed jikseb il-mezzi fuq kif iġhix u jadatta fil-hajja, l-ewwel mill-ġenituri fit-trobbija, u anke mill-komunità li fiha jġhix. Għal bidu dan isir permezz tal-premji u kastigi mogħtija. Maż-żmien, dawn jirfinaw. Per eżempju, persuna takkwista karattru tajjeb bħal meta titgħallem strument tal-mużika. Fil-bidu jinhass iebes u tqil biex tibda l-prattika u ssir iktar ta' rutina u spissa. Eventwalment, persuna tibda tħobb tipprattika iktar ma tikseb għarfien u prattika. Aristotile saħaq li persuna, xi ftit jew wisq, hi responsabli għal karattru tagħha, anke jekk iqajjem mistoqsija tajba jekk fil-verità hux aħna nfusna li nagħzlu l-karattru tagħna. Mill-banda l-oħra, persuna ta' karattru tajjeb tista' tagħzel b'mod liberu u anke hi kapaċi tiffaccja sitwazzjoni kumplessa b'mod rett. Il-formazzjoni tal-karattru jitlob riflessjoni razzjonali. Fil-fatt, dal-filosofu kbir antik saħaq li l-użu tad-dijalettika u diskussjoni razzjonali tista' tiġġenera prinċipji li jiggwidawna.

Sigmund Freud kellu nteress kbir fuq xi jwassal għall-iżvilupp tal-karattru, peress li dan kien marbut sew ma' temi li kienu jinteressawh sew f'ħidmietu, fosthom traċċi tal-memorja u l-funzjoni tas-sublimazzjoni mhollha fina mil-libidu preġenitali. Fil-ktieb *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900s), Freud jibni l-idea ta' karattru fuq ir-relazzjoni mas-subkonxju. Fih jindika li għalih il-karattru kien speċi ta' memorja, mibnija mit-tfulija tal-bniedem. Naraw ukoll żvilupp tal-ħsieb mill-kitbiet ta' Freud, dwar il-karattru, bħal f'affarijiet oħra. 'Il quddiem, Freud beda jifhem li l-karattru joriġina f'xi sens mill-istint uman.

Fis-sittinijiet, nilmhu bidla. Il-psikoloġija saret dixxiplina dominanti fejn jidhol l-edukazzjoni morali u tal-karattru. Teoriji progressivi fl-edukazzjoni enfasizzaw b'qawwa kbira d-drittijiet umani u tagħlim iffukat fuq it-tfulija u l-ewwel snin tal-hajja. Allura, il-bżonnijiet tat-tfal hadu preċedent.

Kif jissostna l-karattru?

Il-karattru ma jiġix f'daqqa imma jieħu ż-żmien, ħafna żmien biex jimmatura. Spiss jitlobna li niehdu xi riskji u fuq kollox nitgħallmu mill-iżbalji. Il-karattru jeħtieġ li jkun sostnut kontinwament. Is-sostenn jista'

jigi billi nohorġu 'l barra miz-zona tal-kumdità tagħna, dak li m-dorrija bih u nisfidaw lilna nfusna billi nirrelataw ma' persuni differenti minna, stranġieri u/jew ċirkustanzi diffiċli. Ikun sostnut ukoll billi nagħmluha ma' persuni pożittivi li nammiraw. Sostnut ukoll meta nidraw nagħtu każ tal-fqir, batut, marid, u dawk bil-bżonn madwarna. Kontroll tal-emozzjonijiet tagħna jgħinna wkoll insostnu l-karattru tagħna. Meta nitgħallem nitlef b' mod dinjituż, inkun ukoll insostni l-karattru tiegħi. Fuq kollox, għandi nkun persuna li nwettaq u mhux li npaċpaċ fuq x' għandu jsir... Importanti wkoll li wiehed ma jhallix il-fallimenti jiddefenuh. Tant li l-futur tas-soċjetà tiddependi ferm fuq il-formazzjoni ta' karattri sodi u tajba. Dan illum sar iktar pressanti u urġenti minn qatt qabel. Ir-realtà iebsa hi li l-kapaċità tal-ambjent u tal-ekosistemi naturali madwarna qegħdin jiffaċċjaw diversi riskji hekk kif il-bżonnijiet tal-ekonomija globali dejjem jikbru. Iktar ma l-ambjent jigi użat u esplotjat, iktar l-ikel, sigurtà tal-ilma, theddid minn traġedji naturali, bidla fil-klima u problemi ta' saħħa qed ikunu problemi iktar serji. U hawn tidhol ferm l-essenza tal-formazzjoni tal-karattru, għax skont u kif persuna taġixxi quddiem kwalunkwe sitwazzjoni, hi tkun tiddefinixxi x'tip ta' karattru thaddan. Ovvjament, iktar ma s-sitwazzjoni tkun diffiċli u kruċjali, iktar l-aġir tal-persuna se juri karattru sod u san, jew il-kontra... Hu dan il-karattru li jikxef x'hemm wara l-aġir uman u liema motivazzjoni qed twassal għal dan ir-rispons skjett hekk kif persuna tkun mhedda jew sfidata quddiem ċirkustanza problematika.

Skont Warren Bennis, wara l-viżjoni u l-passjoni, hi l-integrità jew karattru li hi l-iktar kompetenza fundamentali u bażika biex tkun mexxej tajjeb.

L-edukazzjoni u l-formazzjoni tal-karattru

It-tagħlim u l-edukazzjoni huma affarijiet li ma jsirux f'daqqa jew f'mument, imma li niks buhom matul haġjitna kollha, bla waqfien. Dan għax hu permezz ta' problemi u sfidi li niffaċċjaw kontinwament li niffurmaw, f'it f'it, il-karattru tagħna. It-tagħlim isehh bhala proċess ta' tibdil kontinwu – fil-fatt hu esperjenza personali tal-individwu. Minn dan jigi li l-iskola hi biss parti minn kullana ta' esperjenzi ta' tagħlim li jwasslu għall-formazzjoni shiha tal-individwu. Hu għal dan

li t-terminu ‘formazzjoni tal-karattru’ jinkludi kull attività implicita u esplicita li teduka u tiffirma l-karattru uman. Id-diversità ta’ dak li jista’ jissejjaħ formazzjoni tal-karattru tippermetti varjetà kbira fil-kontenut tal-formazzjoni tal-karattru. Il-formazzjoni mhix limitata biss għall-iskejjel, imma għax kull entità li tagħmel parti mis-soċjetà.

B’hekk, il-formazzjoni tal-karattru timmira li ssostni l-iżvilupp shiħ tal-persuna, inkluż dak etiku, intellettuali, ċiviku, soċjali, personali u anke spiritwali tal-bniedem.

Il-karattru llum sar umbrella ta’ termini li bażikament jirreferu għal dak kollu li jgħin lil bnedmin biex jgħixu tajjeb f’ dinja u f’ħajja li fihom sens, minkejja kull ostaklu, mard u nkwieta. F’dan is-sens, li tgħix tajjeb jiġi ekwivalenti għal żvilupp shiħ u san (*eudemonia*), li jitlob it-ħaddim tal-virtujiet (*arete*).

Ħajja mgħixa sew hi ħajja virtwali. Il-fehma ta’ Aristotile kienet fuq l-etika tal-karattru tal-persuna, iktar milli fuq l-aġir tagħha. Għalhekk, biex tkun taf x’ inhu l-aħjar li għandek tagħmel hu li tirrifletti kif l-aħjar tista’ tagħxi b’mod virtuż, iktar milli sempliciment tobdi lista’ ta’ regoli morali.

Formazzjoni dinamika

Il-formazzjoni hi proċess konxju u determinat li jwassal għal maturità fil-bniedem. Peress li qed nitkellmu minn formazzjoni tal-karattru, fejn il-karattru hu kunċett dinamiku u attiv u qatt statiku, hekk ukoll il-formazzjoni hi proċess attiv li dejjem jevolvi u jinbidel skont l-għarfien u l-esperjenza madwarna.

Pereżempju, t-ħfal huma individwi u għandhom jiġu trattati hekk, anke jekk xorta għandhom bżonn irawmu karattru fihom. Għalhekk il-ġenituri tajjeb li jkunu jafu x’tip ta’ limiti jew boundaries jehtieġ li jżommu fil-familja, u meta u kif għandhom jiddixxiplinawhom ta’ aġir żbaljat u meta għandhom jippremjaw aġir tajjeb. Ma ninsewx li d-dixxiplina hi investiment fil-futur tat-ħfal. Għalhekk, id-dixxiplina tajba toffri limiti u konsegwenzi filwaqt li tibni l-karattru u tafferma s-sigurtà. Dixxiplina u kastig mhumiex l-istess. Bħala ħfal, huma naturalment iffukati fihom infushom – għalhekk għandhom bżonn jitgħallmu jaħsbu wkoll fl-oħrajn. L-Iskrittura fiha diversi eżempji tal-importanza tad-dixxiplina. Vers li

ta' min jaghti kasu hu dak fil-Ktieb tal-Proverbji 29:17: *'iddixxiplina lil ibnek, u jagħtik il-mistrieħ; jhennilek qalbek...'*

Il-karattru jista' jitkejjel?

Il-formazzjoni tal-karattru għandha ferm x' taqsam mal-iżvilupp tal-valuri morali. Spiss, mil-lenti tal-psikoloġija naraw żewġ perspettivi jew interpretazzjonijiet dwar x' nifhmu bit-terminu 'karattru': dik dejqa, kostretta għall-moralità u żvilupp morali; u dik wiesgħa, li tara l-karattru bħala mwahhad mal-personalità. L-interpretazzjoni dejqa ta' 'karattru' toffrilna tifsir klassiku dwar żvilupp morali, imsejjes fuq sistemi ċari ta' proċess li jiżviluppa minn targa għall-oħra. Fost dawn insibu t-teorija ta' Jean Piaget (1896-1980) u dik tal-kollega tiegħu Amerikan Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987). Huma raw l-iżvilupp morali bħala progress ordnat li jsehħ flimkien mal-iżvilupp uman.

Mill-banda l-oħra, l-interpretazzjoni wiesgħa tqabbel il-karattru mal-personalità. Jidher li dawn jimxu flimkien f'bidla kontinwa. Bhalma hemm zieda fil-personalità umana iktar ma tiżdied l-età (mit-tfulija għaż-żgħożija naraw zieda f'ċerti dimensjonijiet importanti tal-personalità tagħna fosthom l-agreeableness (kemm il-persuna taqbel u hi miftuħa għal haddiehor), conscientiousness (kemm persuna hi sensitiva u/jew ordnata), stabbiltà emozzjonali, u dominanza soċjali), il-kontra jiġri iktar ma' persuna tikber u timmatura fl-età (Berg & Johansson, 2014). Għalhekk hu ovvju li quddiem dan il-bdil, tinghata importanza kif jixraq lill-edukazzjoni.

Konkluzjoni

Il-formazzjoni tal-karattru hu proċess kumpless ferm. Mhuwiex faċli li jiġi mkejjejl psikoloġikament. Dan l-aktar għax l-iżvilupp morali hu progressiv, mhux statiku (Killen & Mulvey, 2018). Il-bniedem min-natura tiegħu dejjem ifittex twegiba, anke fejn m'hemmx. M'ahniex magni. Bħala bnedmin, ahna kontinwament qed nibnu u nikkreaw id-dinja tagħna, ta' madwarna, fejn hi tagħmel sens għalina anke jekk madwarna hemm kaos jew ambigwiżà. L-umani jfittxu sens fil-hajja, f'kulma jagħmlu, u ma' dan, huma jfittxu wkoll il-valuri: liema azzjoni hi tajba, u għandha ssir iktar spiss, u liema le? Hi għlied kontinwa, li tidistingwina sew mill-magni. Hi din li tagħmilna umani.

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Reprogramming our mind

Bernard Caruana

Our mind is fascinating, amazing, and awesome. It is engineered by our physical body. The mind, however, is not physical we cannot locate it anywhere in our bodies, nor can we study it under a microscope. It is more than the brain organ. It is our consciousness, thoughts, dreams, plans, beliefs, and attitudes. These may be referred to as functions of our brain but they also influence our brain activity and body function. Thus, the mind is not just a product of our brain but it also influences our brain.

Our mind, so to speak, depends on our physical body/brain but then our body and its well-being depend on our mind. It is created by our bodies and then takes over and influences our bodies. Emile Durkheim had said that we are creatures and creators of our culture. Extending this to our personality, we are truly influenced by our past experiences but we also have the ability to break free and change that conditioning.

Our mind has great power and potential. Yet, at times, we may feel that our mind is working against us. Our brain is there to help us survive, thrive and be efficient in the complex environment we live in. There are times, however, when we get stuck in a negative loop pattern, which reinforces certain self-defeating behaviours.

It is of utmost importance to learn how to use our minds and brains well. It is important to learn how to make these rich and powerful tools work for us rather than against us. It is important to try to understand our mind to make the best use of it.

In order to do so we need to realize how our mind – our consciousness, thoughts, dreams, plans, beliefs, and attitudes – is developed and works. It is fed by our brain and the brain's interaction with the world around

it. The brain perceives the world through our senses. However, it is not our eyes that see, nor our fingers/skin that feel, or our ears that hear, etc. Our sense organs send different electro-chemical signals to our brain and our brain interprets these as a dog, a red rose, a sour taste, a pleasant aroma, etc. It is through these electrochemical signals that the brain makes sense of the world and builds its picture of the reality surrounding us.

Our brain enables the mind to give meaning to the outside world. This is done through our individual experiences, the persons we meet, our life-events. Thus, all of us experience the world/reality in a unique way. Our mind then continues to interpret and give meaning to events and stimuli we encounter according to our unique memories, beliefs, and attitudes we have already formed about the world, ourselves, and others. This process is not carried out on a conscious level. All our experiences, our parents, teachers, significant others, society, the media, contribute in the making of our unique conception of reality. To the development of our personality – our frame of mind, our beliefs, attitudes and reactions.

Our brain, however, is not fixed, it is continuously being shaped and re-shaped by our daily experiences. This in turn influences the mind which again influences changes in the brain and body. This is referred to as neural plasticity.

We can indeed reprogramme our mind and change our automatic brain patterns – neural pathways. Reprogramming happens through the combined activity of our mind, brain and body which are all interconnected and influence one another - what happens to one of these systems has a direct impact on the other two.

Let us start by discussing how our reality is constructed, how our perceptions, beliefs and attitudes are formed.

As stated above, we get information through our senses. Every second we have millions of bits of information impinging on our senses. In other words, our bodies send millions of bits of information to our brain to process per second. Our brain, however cannot process more than a little over 100, or even less, bits of information per second. The brain can cope with this influx through its 100 billion brain cells, which are connected to thousands of other brain cells. The brain will thus be

carrying out as many as 100 billion operations per second. This obviously cannot be done on a conscious level.

The mind/brain then uses three main processes: deletion, distortion and generalisation.

First of all the brain deletes the information it considers irrelevant/not important. If I am looking for the keys of my car and am already late to go to work, I will, in all probability not notice the sad facial expression of a relative or my mobile phone, which I will then have to look for later on. I may hear but not attend to what another person is saying. All the more I am not going to be aware of the texture of my clothes, the movements in my body and all the other million bits of information impinging on my senses. If, however, I am relaxing, I may hear the birds singing in the morning, sense the fresh air and the pleasant aroma of coffee brewing. In order to be efficient and effective our brain is deleting millions of bits per second as it processes only a little more than hundred per second.

My mind will check all new information against information it already has stored. Generalisation is another process which helps me to be more efficient. When I see a car, I know what it is as I have seen many other cars before. I need not examine it as I do when I see something for the first time. Even though there are different cars my mind will detect the salient common features and in less than a split of a second recognises it is a car. From a very young age I learn to categorise objects around me and to even recognise their particular qualities – a wooden chair or a metal chair or a chair made out of wood and metal. By just a glance I may also draw a conclusion on a hard seat or a soft cushioned seat before touching it. When new information does not match stored information, my mind will require my body to examine the object. This requires time.

Beliefs and attitudes are learned and generalised also. Beliefs may be transmitted by the significant others in my life or through my experiences and observations. Persons may believe that they are inferior to others or that they are not lovable, because they were always criticised and lacked affirmation. This belief will make them feel anxious when venturing on something new or challenging. Such anxiety will not help them to perform well and then they reinforce the belief that they are not up to

it. There are thousands of other beliefs we may hold such as: ‘men are not trustworthy’, ‘deep down every human being is a good person at heart’ etc. Some beliefs help us others not.

These beliefs, however, create an inner model and our mind will filter new information according to those inner models. This may lead to distortions.

Believing a coloured person is dangerous, the fight/fight response is triggered automatically when I come across such person. Believing that soft spoken persons are ok, I automatically trust them even if they are phonies trying to cheat me.

All this information is stored in our brain in different circuits which we call neural pathways. Different circuits each triggered by a bit of information processed which then ignites the above-mentioned metal processes which occur in a split of a second – that is why our brain is efficient.

These circuits or neural pathways are created by our past experiences. They, however, are not fixed – they can be changed. This is the process of neuroplasticity: how our neural pathways are created and reinforced and how they can be changed.

We may compare neural pathways to pathways in the countryside. When we walk in the countryside we create a trail. The grass flattens and the soil hardens. Passing through this same place again and again the grass will be worn away and the soil flattens. Eventually a durable pathway is formed and everybody will find it easy to pass through it. Thereby making it more comfortable and durable. If I am travelling, I will automatically take this pathway and not try to pass through grass, bushes and rocks. I will not think of creating a new pathway. Creating a new pathway, however is possible. Undoubtedly it will require effort and time. Once a new pathway is created and I (and others) start passing through it, the old pathway will start to fade away gradually as grass will start growing upon it again. This is how neural pathways work – a new circuit is created and the previous circuit fades away.

Being aware of this process and learning how to develop and strengthen new pathways we can change in the direction we want to change.

When forming new neural pathways we need to examine and challenge

our current beliefs. If we want to create new pathways to enjoy a happier and more relaxed life, we need to be aware and challenge beliefs that are keeping us stressed and deprived of enjoying life. For example “*seeking to be happy is egoistic*” or “*If I am not stressed it means I am lazy*”.

Many times we believe that our beliefs are facts or truth. In actual fact, many times they may be thoughts and feelings that have been running in our mind over and over again.

Beliefs grow from past experiences. For, example, if my parents worked hard and were always on the go. I may grow up with the belief that not working hard, and not being stressed out is wrong. I will internalise this belief, even though my parents did not relax because their wages were meagre and I have a good enough income to be able to afford not to work so hard. Some distorted beliefs are not based on facts or reality but on our interpretation of such facts. Once a belief is established, however, our mind keeps defending it. So if I want to have a relaxed life-style and change my neural pathways accordingly, I have to believe it's right for me to feel relaxed.

In order to change, in order to reprogramme our brain we need to be aware of our mind's subconscious filters. Then we need to use them to work for us. We need to be aware of our beliefs – which beliefs are guiding our actions and our feelings. We then need to examine these beliefs. Not all beliefs are truths. Which beliefs are helping us and which are hindering us from becoming the person we want to be?

We cannot change all the events occurring around us, and we definitely cannot change what happened in our past. We can, however, change the way we perceive these events, the meaning we give them and how we feel about them.

Our purpose must be simple and focused. We cannot hold conflicting beliefs as these will confuse our unconscious to our detriment. We need to challenge and change the beliefs which are not helping us or which are hindering us. We then need to change our pattern of thought and our reactions to what is happening around us and to past events. We need to see things from a different perspective. In order to be able to do so we need however, to have our beliefs in line. All our mental resources need to be in line - pointing to the same desired change.

Thoughts without feelings will not help us much. We need to believe, visualise and create that good feeling. That will stick in our unconscious mind. Our unconscious mind does not understand words but pictures and emotions/feelings. So we need to see what beliefs we need to adopt. Feel good about them. Visualise ourselves in the desired scenario and feel good about it. We need to repeat this.

Perseverance and repetition are the secret tools. The same as when we are creating a new pathway in the countryside. Our mind tends to go back to what it is used to do, what it was trained to do, that is only natural. When we find ourselves going back to past habits, past patterns of thought etc we need to gently redirect ourself to our new perspective – and feel good about it. I need to tell myself “*No, not the old way but yes to the bright new way*”. Patience and perseverance are the key we cannot expect reprogramming to happen instantly or over a short period of time. Giving up is no option even if we lapse.

When we are repeating old patterns, we are reinforcing and strengthening old brain circuits. When we are practicing change, we are not only learning a new skill but developing new neural pathways/new brain circuits. Thus, we are not only improving our reactions, behaviours and attitudes but we are actually changing our neural pathways which will then support our change.

This knowledge about reprogramming our brain can help us to become the persons we want to be. This forms the basis of psychological therapy. Applying this knowledge helps us to develop into the persons we want to be. It also helps therapists, counsellors, spiritual directors and coaches to help others change in the desired direction.

Il-persuna u l-familja: trobbija, żvilupp u edukazzjoni għall-ħajja

Roberta Farrugia Debono

Il-familja hija l-qofol ta' kollox. Fi hdan il-familja jkollna ħafna mill-ewwel esperjenzi tagħna. Huwa għalhekk li s-socjetà għandha bżonn familji b'saħħithom. It-trobbija ha tagħti l-ewwel tagħlim tal-ħajja. Ha nitgħallmu x'inhu t-tajjeb u l-ħażin. Ha nitgħallmu kif inħobbu. Ha nitgħallmu kif nagħmlu paċi wara li niġġieldu. Ha nitgħallmu kif ngħixu esperjenzi sbieħ u dawk inqas sbieħ, u x'nagħmlu bl-emozzjonijiet tagħna f'dawn il-mument. F'dan l-artiklu ha naraw kif il-familja tagħti dawn is-sisien lill-ulied.

Fil-familja ha jkollna l-ewwel esperjenzi ta' dixxiplina. Huwa importanti ħafna li jkun hemm dixxiplina bi mħabba. Jigifieri, dixxiplina biss mhix tajba, daqskemm imħabba biss mingħajr dixxiplina mhix tajba wkoll. Dixxiplina trid tibda minn meta t-tfal ikunu żgħar għax anke f'età żgħira ta' sentejn it-tfal iridu jibdew jifhmu x'inhu tajjeb u x'inhu ħażin. Ma rridux nibzghu ngħidu le lit-tfal u rridu nuruhom li ahna ha niddeċiedu x'inhu tajjeb u ħażin. Irridu nkunu wkoll konsistenti fid-dixxiplina tagħna, jigifieri l-ġenituri jridu jaqblu fuq il-mod ta' kif jiddixxiplinaw. Dan isir billi jkun hemm ħafna diskussjonijiet flimkien. Ma għandu jkun qatt li ġenitur jikser il-kelma tal-ġenitur l-ieħor quddiem it-tfal. Jekk ma taqbilx ma' xi haġa li jkun għamel il-ġenitur l-ieħor, l-aħjar haġa hi li wara li jgħaddi kollox wiehed jitkellem dwar dak li ġara u flimkien taraw kif tistgħu tagħmluha differenti d-darba li jmiss. Ma rridux nibzghu mill-fatt li meta ngħidu le huma ha jirrabjaw. Irridu biss nuruhom li nafu li qed jirrabjaw u ngħallmuhom x'għandhom jagħmlu b'dik ir-rabja.

Fl-istess ħin, tajjeb li mad-dixxiplina jkun hemm ħafna mħabba wkoll. Li jkun hemm mument fejn inti turi lit-tfal li inti kburi bihom, li inti

temmen fil-potenzjal tagħhom u li turi affezzjoni hija vera importanti għall-istima tagħhom. It-tfal jibnu l-istima tagħhom ibbażata fuq l-ewwel esperjenzi tagħhom fil-familja. Meta ġenituri jkunu kritiċi hafna huwa hażin daqskemm ikunu ġenituri li jagħmlu x'jagħmlu t-tfal dejjem huwa tajjeb. Importanti li t-tfal nuruhom fejn jistgħu jmorru għall-aħjar, imma jekk ikunu jisimġħu hekk biss jikbru jaħsbu li huma qatt mhuma tajbin bizżejjed. Daqstant ieħor, jekk lit-tfal nagħtuhom l-impresjoni li huma perfetti, li qatt ma jagħmlu xejn hażin, xorta qed nagħmlu hażin għax jitilgħu jaħsbu li huma perfetti u meta jikbru u d-dinja t'hemm barra tibda turihom li huma għandhom difetti bħal haddieħor, isibuha hafna diffiċli biex jaċċettaw kritika u jibdew jistennew li kulhadd ha joqgħod ifahharhom għal xejn b'xejn.

Fil-familja ha nitgħallmu x' nagħmlu bl-emozzjonijiet kollha li nhossu. Għaldaqstant, il-ġenituri huma l-ewwel għalliema tal-emozzjonijiet tagħna. Huwa importanti li ma nibzghux nuru emozzjonijiet, anke dawk diffiċli bħal dwejjaq, ansjetà u anke rabja. L-importanti hu li mbagħad nuru lit-tfal tagħna x' għandna nagħmlu biex inhossuna aħjar. Eżempju ċar huwa meta jmut xi pet jew anke xi hadd tal-familja meta t-tfal ikunu għandhom żgħar. Hafna drabi l-ġenituri jikkonfondu kif ha jitekallmu mat-tfal dwar dak li ġara u xi kultant saħansitra ma juruhomx x' ġara. Imma tajjeb li wieħed jifhem li t-tfal anke jekk ma tgħidilhom xejn, xorta ha jindunaw li ġrat xi haġa u tkun aghar għalihom għax ma jkunux jafu x'qed jiġri. Li jkollok mumentu ta' dwejjaq meta jmut xi hadd hija haġa naturali u umana, u għalhekk tajjeb li t-tfal jitgħallmu minnek dwar kif se jagħmlu meta jiġri hekk. Li titkellem mat-tfal meta tarahom imdejqin, irrabjati jew ansjuzi tagħmel tajjeb hafna għax hekk turihom li m'għandekx tahbi l-emozzjonijiet, u li meta titkellimhom ma' xi hadd dejjem ha thossok aħjar.

Il-familja hija l-ewwel post fejn ha nitgħallmu x' inhi mhabba u din issir b' diversi modi. It-tfal ha jimmudellaw il-mod ta' kif iħobbu fuq dak li jaraw fil-ġenituri tagħhom. Ha jitgħallmu kif juru rispett, kif jieħdu hsieb xulxin, kif jagħtu kas dak li persuna tkun għaddejja minnu u kif juru soġha meta jkunu wegġgħu lil haddieħor. Dawn huma l-ghodda li jagħmlu relazzjoni b'saħħitha. Li dejjem ikun hemm rispett fid-diskors tagħna lejn xulxin, imma anke lejn min ma nafuhx, bħall-immigranti,

nies ta' razza jew religjon differenti, bhal min huwa omosesswali jew transesswali, u nies ohra emarginati, jibni sens ta' kompassjoni fit-tfal taghna. Il-kompassjoni tinbena wkoll meta t-tfal jarawna niehdu hsieb xulxin; anke dik in-naqra tazza te meta wiehed ikun imhabbat, tista' taghmel id-differenza kollha.

Minghandna t-tfal jitghallmu l-valuri. Jitghallmu kif ikunu sensittivi ghal dak li haddiehor ikun ghaddej minnu. Jitghallmu kif ikunu empatiċi, kif jisimghu lil dak li jkun f'mument diffiċli, kif ikunu hemm ghal haddiehor, kif jaghmlu karità mal-batut u kif jiddefendu lil min huwa inqas minnhom. Hekk jitghallmu wkoll ikunu generużi u jaqsmu dak li ghandhom ma' haddiehor li forsi m'ghandux. Haġa ohra li nitghallmu fil-familja hija kif nghidu "sorry" meta nkunu wegġajna lil haddiehor. "Sorry" hi kelma zghira li tfisser hafna. Li nkunu nafu nghidu "sorry", u li t-tfal jisimghuna nghidu "sorry" tghin sabiex la jikbru jkunu jafu kif jahsbu fuq ghemilhom, u meta jwegġghu lil xi hadd jindunaw u jippruvaw jirrangaw dawk l-izbalji. It-tfal jitghallmu kif wiehed jaghmel paċi meta forsi ma jaqbilx fuq xi haġa, minghandna l-ġenituri. Ghalhekk iridu jarawna nghidu "sorry" u naghmlu paċi. Wahda mill-hiliet relazzjonali importanti hija li tkun taf kif terġa' ssewwi relazzjoni meta din tixxaqqaq xi ftit.

U kif nistghu ngħallmu dan kollu lil uliedna? L-iktar haġa importanti hija li nqattghu hin ta' kwalità flimkien. Il-hajja mgħaġġla tal-lum qajla taghtik spazju biex ikollok hin mal-familja, imma hemm modi differenti ta' kif wiehed jista' jibni dik il-haġa. Perezempju, il-hin tal-ikel huwa importanti hafna. Hin li l-familja tingabar flimkien (kemm jista' jkun minghajr affarijiet li jtellfu bhal mobiles u TV), jaghti spazju fejn wiehed jista' jittellem dwar il-ġurnata tieghu, dwar dak li għadda minnu u anke dwar dak li forsi qieghed itaqqlu. Imbagħad irid ikun hemm mument ohrajn fejn il-familja tiehu gost flimkien, fejn tilgħab flimkien u fejn tohroġ ftit fil-kampanja flimkien. Ma tridx tonfoq hafna flus biex tgawdi hin speċjali flimkien, imma fil-verità dan jiswa mitqllu deheb. Dan il-hin jghin lill-ġenituri biex isiru jafu l-karattru tat-tfal taghhom u hekk mill-ewwel jindunaw meta t-tfal ikunu ghaddejmin minn xi zmien diffiċli emozzjonalment. Hafna tfal illum qed ibatu s-solitudni anke fil-familja taghhom, u din hija tbatija iebesha ghal min hu kbir, ahseb u ara min hu zghir.

Il-hin ta' kwalità jagħti wkoll spazju għall-komunikazzjoni. Li wiehed ikun jaf li fil-ġenituri għandek hajt ta' kenn hi importanti hafna. Meta tiġri xi haġa, it-tfal iridu jhossuhom komdi li jgħidu lill-ġenituri tagħhom mingħajr biża' li se jiġu ġudikati jew kritikati. Dan ma jfissirx li wiehed m'għandux juri lit-tfal fejn għamlu żball, imma dan irid isir b'mod li jistgħu jitgħallmu minnu. Fil-familja, il-komunikazzjoni tgħin biex wiehed jitgħallem kif jagħti u anke jirċievi 'feedback'. Din hija hila importanti għal meta wiehed jikber u jkun fuq il-post tax-xogħol jew mal-ħbieb.

Li trabbi t-tfal fid-dinja tal-lum mhux faċli, però hawn hafna għajnuna wkoll. Sa minn meta t-tfal ikunu żgħar hemm servizzi bħal tal- 'positive parenting' li joffru għajnuna u tagħlim għall-ġenituri fuq it-trobbija tat-tfal. Nafu anke mir-riċerka li l-ewwel snin tat-tfal huma diffiċli hafna għall-ġenituri u għalhekk m'hemm xejn hażin li wiehed ifittex ftit għajnuna. Li tgħid li għandek bżonn l-għajnuna hija turija ta' saħħa fiha nfisha. L-isfidi għall-ġenituri hemm qegħdin, imma l-għajnuna hemm qieghda wkoll.

The Changing World of Adolescence

Fr Dunstan Xuereb

1.1 Introduction

Why adolescence is so relevant to merit being the subject matter for this paper? Apart from its practical, pastoral nature, I firmly believe that if we as pastoral agents are to really have some grips and comprehension on today's societal trends as portrayed in the not distant future we need such discussion. George Barna offers four reasons to further delve in this valid scenario. He claims that: firstly, teenagers largely define the values and leisure endeavours of a nation. Secondly, the economy is substantially shaped by their choices as consumers and by their work habits in the labour force. Thirdly, the nature of the family, the foundational unit of our society, depends on how teenagers prioritize family and approach parenting. And finally the future of the Church will be determined by their faith contours and commitment.¹

...Adolescence has its definite task to fulfil in the development of the individual; if this is not accomplished during the years of its biological designation, it will be made up later, if at all, but only with great suffering and sacrifice...²

Hence, it is a key moment in humanity and thus deserves some consideration. In this paper I will discuss at a certain length and detail the teenage world, especially the developmental issues: including the physical, cognitive, moral and psychosocial development.

1.2 What is adolescence?

Adolescence is the ripening of the first fruits sowed in infancy and the modelling of the first stems of a fast growing sapling. Such an

agrarian metaphor, is what best suits my in-depth exploration of the matter in question.

Each and every one of us has a close personal, cherished experience of this particular life period. It is that part of the developmental journey when we felt the most '*the rocking of the boat*'. I believe that this is that magical time when we came to realize that we are capable to change and muster our surroundings, being it to: increased physical development and endurance, or simply because we finally dispose of our infant behaviour and shed off the protective security petals of the paternal figures. Hence the adolescent meets the two primary developmental tasks of formation of identity – 'who am I' and the establishment of autonomy. Both require a stage when adolescents separate from their parents, a process which is painful for both parties,³ yet this transition involves important developments in self-concept and self-image.⁴ On the other hand, successful child-rearing requires parents to instil independence and free-thinking.⁵

Daniel Offer in his book on Normality recognized that the teenage transitional developmental period presented real challenges and the need to cope with change. Moreover, as with other age periods, some young people did experience emotional disturbance or behave in disruptive ways. But, despite some bickering and rebellion within the family, alienation from adults was the exception rather than the rule.⁶

1.3 Introduction to the Adolescent changing world

Adolescence is probably the most challenging and complicated period of life to describe or experience. The biological changes of puberty are universal; but in their own particular expression, timing, and extent, the variety shown is enormous and depends of course on sex, genes and nutrition. There is great diversity in cognitive development as well: many adolescents are as egocentric in some respect as preschool children, while others reach the stage of abstract thinking that characterizes advanced cognition. Psychosocial changes show even greater diversity, as adolescents develop their own identity, choosing from a vast number of sexual, moral, political, and educational paths. Most of this diversity

simply reveals the productive variation that typifies the human life course, but for one adolescent in four, fateful choices are made that handicap, and sometimes destroy the future.⁷

Yet such differences should not mask the commonality of the adolescent experience, for all adolescents are confronted with the same developmental tasks: they must adjust to their changing body size and shape, to their awakening sexuality, to new ways of thinking, and they must begin to strive for the emotional maturity, and economic independence that characterize adulthood. The adolescents' effort to come to grips with these tasks is often touched with confusion and poignancy.⁸ On in all it is a time when the emerging individual *'looks'* around with a deep yearning desire of wanting to reshape the society and the world around.⁹

1.3.1 Puberty

While the sequence of pubertal events is similar for most young people of both sexes in every culture, the timing of puberty shows considerable variation. Normal young people experience their first body changes any time between the ages of eight and fourteen. The process begins massive hormonal changes triggered from the hormone production in the brain.¹⁰ The growth spurt – first in weight, then in height, provides the first obvious evidence of puberty. To fuel such growth, adolescents experience increasing nutrition demands, for vitamins and minerals as well as for calories – more than any other period of life. Several specific problems such as adolescent obesity, bulimia and anorexia can interfere with normal nutrition especially for some girls who perceive the increase in body fat also known as puppy fat as a less welcome aspect and one that, in western societies is associated with a substantial increase in attempts to exert dietary control.¹¹ For boys, the increase in stature and body strength tends to be welcomed.¹² On in all to have said the whole truth regards nutrition, one must not forget to emphasis the grave fact, that teens of all colours and backgrounds have mediocre diets. Barna claims that only 6% of teenagers have a healthy diet.¹³

During puberty, all sex organs grow larger as the young person becomes sexually mature. The individual acquires the capacity for reproduction and the increase in sexual drive.¹⁴ Menarche in girls and ejaculation in boys

are the events usually taken to indicate reproductive potential, although full fertility is reached years after these initial stages of maturation. As the body changes, so must the individual's body image, for many adolescents, this is problematic, and many are dissatisfied because their actual new shape and appearance are not what they expected, or what the cultural ideal promotes.¹⁵ Most of them imagine that their bodies appear far less perfect than they actually are. This self-absorption leads to health problems and psychological depression¹⁶. Girls are particularly vulnerable, as dissatisfaction with weight can trigger dangerous dieting and anxiety.¹⁷ They are more dissatisfied with their appearance and to be particular concerned about particular parts of their bodies.

Adolescents are daily bombarded with media images of handsome faces and beautiful bodies selling everything from cloths to cosmetics. These images reinforce the cultural idea that men should be tall and muscular, and women thin and shapely. Understanding instead of criticism, on the other hand might have far-reaching benefits, not only for the adolescent's body image but also for his or her self-esteem and social acceptance. This is especially of great importance when one comes to consider that dealing with the external image is an uncomfortable challenge to the average teen, especially when taking in consideration that most adults especially the media do refer pessimistically to teens as, slackers and self-absorbed.¹⁸ Naturally few teens view themselves or their generation in such negative terms, they do not believe that adults respect them, or give them the freedom and creative licence they desire.¹⁹

Finally, it is important to recognize that over the last hundred years there has been a quite marked secular change in which the age of puberty has fallen progressively. Recent data suggest that this fall has now flattened out but it is the case that, as compared with their parents and grandparents, most girls today are reaching puberty at a much earlier age. Not surprisingly that has been accompanied by and probably has contributed to the already noted earlier age of initiating sexual activities. Of course, changes in attitudes to sexuality have also played a part.²⁰

The individual's sex genes, body type, and nutrition all effect the age of which puberty begins and ends. Girls typically begin puberty ahead of boys, and children with more body fat begin earlier than those who

are lean. Consequently, some young women are, essentially, full-grown by age thirteen, while some young men still are growing at age eighteen. While not all teenagers have a difficult adolescence, early-maturing girls and late-maturing boys are more likely to experience stress because of their off-time physical development. This problem has no long-lasting impact for girls, as long as they do not become sexually active and pregnant, but the lack of confidence in late maturing boys may continue into adulthood. For both sexes, the ecological context – specifically, other changes such as the transmission from elementary school to junior high – can ameliorate or exacerbate the problem.

1.3.2 Brain and Cognitive development during adolescence

For a long time the main evidence on brain development during adolescence came from postmortem studies but during recent years data have also become available from prospective magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans undertaken by following children with repeated scans as they grow older. Nevertheless, there is a general pattern of an increase in total gray matter volume during childhood that is followed by loss during adolescence.²¹ Although the most rapid period of brain development is in early life, research has shown that there is an important brain development during the period of adolescence and that this is accompanied by changes in cognitive functioning.

During adolescence, young people become better able to speculate hypothesize and fantasize emphasizing possibility more than reality. Adolescents can build formal systems and general theories that transcend, and sometimes ignore, practical experience. Their reason can be formal and abstract rather than empirical and concrete. The ability to think logically is the hallmark of formal operational thought. Between twelve and fifteen, many young people become able to articulate scientific principles. They are more able to follow logical arguments and social problems.²²

Another characteristic of adolescent's mode of thinking is a particular form of egocentrism that leads young people to overestimate their significance to others. This characteristic is sometimes expressed in a personal invincibility fable about the grand and glorious deeds they will

perform in adulthood.²³ Most adolescents think they are untouchable.²⁴ Hence it leads many young people to imagine themselves as continually being at centre stage, the focus of everyone's attention.²⁵ This according to Barna is due to the fact that young people today think differently: they are abundantly comfortable with contradictions, and they are quite relaxed about the intellectual and emotional tensions that surround them.²⁶

1.3.3 Schools, Learning and the Adolescent Mind

During the time of mixed openness and egocentrism, adolescents find themselves eager for intellectual interaction yet highly vulnerable to self-doubt. Many students enter secondary schools feeling less able, less conscientious, and less motivated than they did in the elementary school. Compared to elementary schools, most secondary schools have more rigid behavioural demands, intensified competition, more punitive grading practices, and less individualized attention and procedures. Thus it is a fact when one claims that society tends to be disappointed by the outcome of most adolescents; this is mainly due by the way society is organized: teens are repeatedly tested and graded, and most will inevitably fall short of the expectations of their parents.²⁷ Consequently schools can be organized to make a decided difference in academic achievement, self-image, delinquency, and future success by setting educational goals that are too high, clear and attainable, and that are supported by the entire staff.²⁸

1.3.4 Moral development

Moral reasoning also becomes more complex during adolescence, for the young person who can grasp general laws of physics or principles of logic is more likely to articulate moral laws and ethical principles.²⁹ Kohlberg proposes that the development of moral reasoning occurs through six stages of increasing complexity, from the elemental 'might makes right' to the recognition of universal ethical principles.

Barna concludes that teens don't think about moral truths often or deeply because they are neither challenged to do so nor is such behaviour modelled for them. Their attitude suggests that they have a sneaking suspicion that it is a vital issue, but without the people they trust and

imitate devoting themselves to the matter, they have no trouble ignoring the issue.³⁰ As a matter of fact, teens' confusion regarding truth is the reflection of the disordered and contradictory teaching and modelling they receive from adults.³¹ Yet on the other hand regarding moral truths Barna's study has found that the most influential in attaining these truths is the family gaining 21%, followed by religious beliefs 9%, the Bible 8%, friends 5%, personal feeling 4%, and books read 1%.³²

A majority of teens do not have a well defined position on moral relativism, half of which only accept the existence of absolute moral truth, 29% relative to circumstances, while 15% claim that moral relativism absolutes are changing.³³ This is part of the so-called '*anything goes*' mentality, which is a vital part of the teen's tendency to reject all moral absolutes.³⁴ Yet on the other hand, Barna claims that 70% are interested to have a life with a high level of integrity.³⁵

1.4 Psychosocial Development

One of the major goals of adolescence is identity achievement, which can be affected by personal factors – including relationships with family and peers – the nature of society, and the economic and political circumstances of the times. Identity achievement can be especially problematic for members of a minority group in a multiethnic society.³⁶ According to Eric Erikson, the psychosocial crisis of adolescence is identity versus role confusion. Ideally, adolescents resolve this crisis by developing sense of both their own uniqueness and their relationship to the larger society, especially establishing a sexual, political, moral and vocational identity in the process.³⁷

Sometimes the pressure to resolve the identity crises is too great, and instead of exploring alternative roles, young people foreclose their options, establishing a premature identity. Other people simply choose values and roles opposite to those expected by parents and society, thus forming a negative identity. The process of identity formation depends partly on the society: if its basic values are consistent and widely accepted, and if social change is slow, the adolescent task is fairly easy. By contrast, in industrial and post-industrial societies, social change is rapid, and identity possibilities are endless. Consequently identity

achievement typically takes a decade or more and can be very difficult, especially for those members of minorities, who can be easily, be caught between diverse cultural patters.³⁸

As regards the positive self concept, in his extensive study Barna found: that three out of four teens find themselves as physical attractive; four out of five say they are trusting to other people and four out of five claims to be 'very intelligent'.³⁹ He adds that, while girls are more likely to be optimistic, reflective, insecure, and religious oriented and self-confident, boys on the other hand excel in viewing themselves as very popular.⁴⁰ He concludes by pointing out that most teens are confident that they can handle whatever the world may throw at them, and they are anxious to make a positive difference in a world that, despite their optimism they believe need substantial change.⁴¹

Parents are an important influence on adolescents. The generation gap with the families is usually not very large, especially with regard to basic values. Peer groups are an important source of information and encouragement for adolescents. The adolescent sub-culture provides a buffer between the world of children and that of adults, allowing for example a social context for the beginning of heterosexual relationships. Thus parents and peers are important social influences for the adolescent, filling complimentary rather than conflicting roles. However as they grow older, adolescents spend more time with peers - who usually listen to them than with their parents – who often tell them what to do.⁴² On the other hand in a positive note, research shows that teens actually respect their parents' opinions and values much more than we might expect. Many teens hold their parents' views on music and fashion in great contempt, and won't talk about their friendships. When it comes to fundamental values, there is more respect and consistency.⁴³

Notes

1. See Barna G., (2001) *Real Teens*, California: Regal p. 18
2. Fleege U., H., (1994) *Today's Adolescent*, in Schmiedeler E., J. (ed.) *The Child & Problems of Today*, Bombay: Better Yourself Books p.128.
3. See Bedell G., (2006), *Psychologies Magazine*, February UK Edition. www.psychologies.co.uk p. 52.

4. See Rutter M., (2007), *Journal of Youth Adolescence* , V. 36: p. 102
5. See Bedell G., *Psychologies Magazine*, p. 55
6. Rutter M., *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, p. 101
7. See Berger K., S, (1994), *The Developing Person Through the Life Span*, New York: Worth Publishers p. 367
8. See Ibid. p. 376
9. See Barna G., *Real Teens*, p. 89
10. See Rutter M., *Journal of Youth Adolescence* p. 102, & see Berger K., S, *The Developing Person Through the Life Span*, p. 384
11. See Ibid p. 102
12. See Ibid p. 102
13. See Barna G., *Real Teens*, p. 103
14. See Rutter M., *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, p. 102
15. See Berger K., S, *The Developing Person Through the Life Span*, p. 385
16. See Ibid. p. 378
17. See Ibid. p. 384
18. See, Barna G., *Real Teens*, p. 54
19. See Ibid.
20. See Rutter M., *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, p. 104
21. See Ibid. p. 103
22. See Berger K., S, *The Developing Person Through the Life Span*, p. 408
23. See *ibid.*
24. See Bedell G., *Psychologies Magazine*, p. 53
25. See Berger K., S, *The Developing Person Through the Life Span*, p. 408
26. See Barna G., *Real Teens*, p. 60
27. See Bedell G., *Psychologies Magazine*, p. 53
28. See Berger K., S, *The Developing Person Through the Life Span*, p. 409
29. See *ibid.*
30. See Barna G., *Real Teens*, p. 92
31. See *ibid*, p. 93
32. See *ibid*, p. 92
33. See *ibid*, p. 90
34. See *ibid* p. 40
35. See *ibid*, p. 85
36. See Berger K., S, *The Developing Person Through the Life Span*, p. 439
37. See *ibid*. pp. 412-3
38. See *ibid*. p. 438
39. See Barna G., *Real Teens*, pp. 46- 47

40. See *ibid.* p. 48
41. See *ibid.* p. 47
42. See Berger K., S, *The Developing Person Through the Life Span*, p. 438
43. See Bedell G., *Psychologies Magazine*, p. 55

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Ir-relazzjonijiet romantiċi u s-sesswalità

Dr Nicholas Briffa

Inhobb niddeskrivi s-sesswalità bħala l-potenzjal tal-bniedem biex jirrelata b' mod romantiku (jigifieri vicinanza emozzjonali) u erotiku miegħu nnifsu u/jew ma' persuna oħra. Is-sesswalità hija parti integrali fil-ħajja tal-bniedem li permezz tagħha jipprokrea, jesperjenza emozzjonijiet importanti, jiżviluppa bħala persuna, jesprimi ruħu, jesperimenta u anke jikkomunika mal-persuna li jingħaqad magħha fizikament. Dan l-aspett fiziku huwa dejjem preżenti fil-ħajja tagħna tant li l-organi sesswali jiżviluppaw f' tarbija fil-ġuf u s-sesswalità tibqa' preżenti sal-anzjanità. Il-fażijiet tal-iżvilupp, li kollha fihom stadji importanti fil-ħajja sesswali tal-bniedem, huma differenti u jevolvu mal-persuna u mal-koppji.

Diversi koppji żgur li ġieli qalu kemm huma mħabbtin. Iridu jlahħqu ma' ħafna affarijiet – tfal, xogħol professjonali, xogħol domestiku eċċ. Ħafna minn dawn il-koppji jista' jkun li jhossu li s-sess dejjem jieħu post lura ħafna fil-lista tal-affarijiet li għandna nagħmlu. Ċertament wara x-xogħol, l-edukazzjoni, it-trobbija, u prijoritajiet importanti oħra. It-tluġh u l-inżul fil-frekwenza u l-kwalità tal-attività sesswali huma normali f' relazzjoni, u saħansitra kultant ikun meħtieġ li npoġġu ftit is-sess mal-ġenb speċjalment fi żminijiet ta' bidliet kbar bħal ngħidu aħna ftit wara t-twelid ta' tarbija jew xi operazzjoni. Madankollu, jekk huwa konsistentement diffiċli għalik u għall-partner tiegħek li ssib hin għas-sess fil-ħajja ta' kuljum, dawn li ġejjin huma ftit affarijiet li tistgħu tippruvaw.

Djalogu miftuħ dwar is-sess

Jekk is-sess huwa importanti għalik u tixtieq tibda tiddedika aktar hin għalih, l-ewwel pass huwa li tkellem lill-partner tiegħek dwar dan. Għalkemm dan jista' jkun djalogu informali, huwa importanti li tersaq

minn perspettiva ta' kurzità u pożittività, aktar milli tippruvaw taraw ta' min hu t-tort. Ibda billi tirrikonoxxi l-affarijiet li sejrin tajjeb fir-relazzjoni tieghek, anke jekk mhumiex relatati mas-sess. Dan jistabbilixxi pjattaforma għal komunikazzjoni produttiva dwar il-ħsibijiet u s-sentimenti tieghek dwar is-sess, u kif bhala koppja qed tharsu lejn is-sesswalità.

Filwaqt li n-nuqqas ta' hin jista' jkun l-ehfef hati fuq xiex nixhtu t-tort, zomm f' mohħok li huwa possibbli li fatturi emozzjonali jew fiziċi ohra qed jimpedixxu l-konnessjoni sesswali tagħkom bhala koppja. Jekk dan huwa l-każ, komunikazzjoni miftuħa tista' tkun ta' għajjnuna biex tindirizza kwalunkwe thassib u tesprimi kwalunkwe xewqa sesswali li kull wieħed minnkom jista' jkollu. Generalment huwa wara djalogi skomdi li jibda jkun hemm tahrika 'l quddiem.

Immaniġġja l-aspettattivi tieghek

Kultant, diversi koppji jistennew li s-sess ikun avveniment kbir komplut b'akkumulazzjoni romantika u li jilhaq il-milja tiegħu b'orgaźmi intensi fl-aħħar. Għalkemm dan jista' jkun il-każ xi drabi, li jkollna aspettattivi għoljin dwar is-sess jista' jservi ta' xkiel għall-konnessjoni tagħkom bhala koppja b'mod speċjalment jekk il-hin huwa limitat. Minflok, ikkunsidra li tiehu sodisfazzjon u pjaċir b'forom ohra ta' sess li bħalissa huma iżjed vijabbli għalikom bhala koppja. L-importanti li dejjem ikun hemm djalogu rispettuż dwar dan kollu.

Agħti definizzjoni ġdida lill-Intimità

Simili għas-suġġeriment preċedenti, xi koppji jsibuha ta' għajjnuna li jiftakru li l-intimità tinkludi aktar minn sempliċement sess. It-tgħanniq, il-bews romantiku, il-massaġġi mhux sesswali, iż-żamma tal-idejn, u forom ohra ta' qrubija emozzjonali u fizika jistgħu jgħinu lill-imsieħba jhossuhom magħqudin ma' xulxin. Paradossalment, it-tneħħija tal-pressjoni żejda fuq is-sess bhala l-uniku mezz ta' intimità jista' fil-fatt iżid iċ-ċansijiet tal-koppja li jkollha sess sodisfaċenti.

Aghraf meta jkollok aptit sesswali

Hafna koppji jemmnu li jridu jkunu fil-burdata perfetta li jagħmlu s-sess qabel ma jibdedw. Madankollu, mudelli attwali tar-rispons sesswali

jissuġġerixxu li x-xewqa tista' tirreagixxi għat-tqanqil, li jfisser li tista' tibda thossok li għandek aptit sesswali ġaladarba tibda l-attività sesswali. F'dan il-każ, tista' tikkunsidra li tidhol f'sitwazzjonijiet ta' tqanqil sesswali mas-sieheb tiegħek biex tinstiga l-aptit sesswali.

Ippjanaw is-sess

Fil-aħħar nett, hafna koppji li huma mhabbta hafna jsibuha utli li jiskedaw is-sess. Filwaqt li għall-ewwel dan jista' jinħass inqas attraenti mis-sess spontanju, jista' jkun mod effettiv biex iżzommu hajja l-konnessjoni tagħhom. Barra minn hekk, li jkollok 'sess' immarkat fuq il-kalendarju jista' jnaqqas l-ansjetà assoċjata ma' li ma jkollokx biżżejjed hin għalih. Vantaġġ iehor li xi nies jaqsmu miegħi hi li tiddedika hin għalih jista' jzid l-antiċipazzjoni pożittiva għall-esperjenza sesswali.

Filwaqt li r-relazzjonijiet kollha huma differenti, hemm xi karatteristiċi ewlenin li jgħinu jiddistingwu konnessjoni interpersonali b'saħħitha u oħra inqas b'saħħitha.

Onestà

F'relazzjoni b'saħħitha, għandek tkun kapaċi thoss li tista' tkun int innifsek. Filwaqt li l-koppji kollha għandhom livelli differenti ta' kif bil-mod il-mod isiru jafu lil xulxin iżjed fil-fond, qatt m'għandek taħbi affarijiet importanti dwarek jew tiddel min int. Li tkun miftuh u onest mal-partner mhux biss jgħinek thossok aktar viċin mal-partner, iżda jgħin ukoll li titkattar il-fiduċja.

Fil-bidu ta' relazzjoni, huwa normali li żżomm lura minn kemm tiżvela informazzjoni dwarek. Maż-żmien, hekk kif l-intimità ta' relazzjoni tiżdied, il-koppja jibdeu jiżvelaw aktar il-ħsbijiet, l-opinjoni, it-tweġmin, l-interessi, il-fantasji u l-memorji tagħhom lil xulxin.

Dan ma jfissirx li trid taqşam kull haġa mas-sieheb tiegħek. Kull individwu għandu bżonn il-privatezza u l-ispazju tiegħu. L-iktar haġa importanti hi li kull individwu jhossu komdu jaqşam it-tamiet, il-biżgħat u s-sentimenti tiegħu. Koppji b'saħħithom m'għandhomx għalfejn ikunu flimkien il-hin kollu jew jaqsmu kollox, sal-inqas haġa trivjali.

Madankollu d-differenzi fl-opinjoni fuq kemm onestà għandu jkun hemm f'relazzjoni jistgħu jikkawżaw problemi u konflitti. Fortunatament,

fi studju li ħdimt fuqu f'Ruma sibna li meta n-nies ma jkunux kuntenti bil-livell ta' ftuħ (openness) tas-sieheb tagħhom, ġeneralment jiddiskutu din l-problema mas-sieheb tagħhom minnufih. Dan hu eżempju tajjeb ta' kif li tindirizza problema miftuħa tista' tgħin biex issaħħaħ relazzjoni.

Filwaqt li s-sieheb tiegħek jista' jkollu bżonnijiet differenti minnek, huwa importanti li ssib modi biex tikkomprometti u ssib in-nofs triq bejn dawn il-bżonnijiet waqt li tibqa' żżomm il-konfini (*boundaries*) tiegħek stess. B'dan il-mod tkun qiegħed tirrispetta kemm lilek innifsek kif ukoll lill-partner. Il-konfini m'għandhomx x'jaqsmu mas-segretezza. Anzi l-konfini jistabbilixxu l-bżonnijiet u l-aspettattivi ta' kull persuna fir-relazzjoni.

Boundaries b'saħħithom f'relazzjoni jippermettulek li kemm tibqa' tagħti prijorià lir-relazzjoni kif ukoll li tibqa' tagħmel l-affarijiet li huma importanti għalik, bħal ngħidu ahna toħroġ mal-ħbieb, iżżomm il-privatezza tiegħek u żżomm id-delizzju tiegħek, waqt li tibqa' taqsam affarijiet importanti mal-partner tiegħek.

Rispett Reċiproku

F'relazzjonijiet b'saħħithom, in-nies għandhom rispett għal xulxin. Huma ma jirredikolawx lil xulxin u joffru appoġġ u sigurtà.

Hemm numru ta' modi differenti kif il-koppji jistgħu juru rispett lejn xulxin. Dawn jinkludu:

Nisimgħu u nifhmu lil xulxin.

Ma tippoġġastinax meta s-sieheb tiegħek jitlob li tagħmel xi haġa jew pjaċir.

Tifhem u taħfer meta persuna tagħmel żball.

Nibnu lil xulxin; mhux inkissru lil xulxin.

Tagħmel post f'hajtek għas-sieheb tiegħek.

Thallix lill-ġenituri tiegħek jindahħlu fir-relazzjoni tagħkom.

Ħu interess fl-affarijiet li joghġbu lis-sieheb tiegħek.

Ħalli lis-sieheb tiegħek ikollu l-individwalità tiegħu stess.

Appoġġja u inkoraġġixxi lis-sieheb tiegħek fil-passjonijiet tiegħu.

Uru apprezzament u gratitudni lil xulxin.

Uru empatija lil xulxin.

Il-hajja u l-persuni b'dizabbiltà

Dr Vickie Gauci

Meta nitkellmu fuq id-dizabbiltà, hafna nies tiġihom il-hasra għax jaħsbu li aħna l-persuni b'dizabbiltà ma nistgħu qatt ngħixu kuntenti. Jaħsbu li aħna nkunu dejjem nixtiequ li jiġri xi miraklu u nfiequ, jew li nkunu dejjem qed naħsbu fuq l-'isfortuna' jew 'it-traġedja' li għratilna. Uħud jaħsbu li hajjitna hi mimlija biss bl-uġiġh u bit-tbatija. Jista' jkun li hawn persuni b'dizabbiltà li jgħixu b'dawn il-hsibijiet u x-xewqat, u jista' jkun li ċertu dizabbiltajiet iġibu magħhom tbatija fizika u mentali, iżda l-maġġoranza tagħna għandna kwalità ta' hajja tajba u naħdmu biex dejjem intejbuha għalina u għal oħrajn bħalna. Min aħna, l-identità tagħna, tmur 'il bogħod mid-dizabbiltà tagħna. Naturalment, għandna l-isfidi tagħna, iżda ma jfissirx li m'ahniex kuntenti b'hajjitna.

F'artiklu li kien kiteb fuq waħda mill-gazzetti ewlenin, il-habib tiegħi Gordon Cardona, li kien attivista fis-settur tagħna u li halliena fl-2014, qal hekk, "Hafna drabi hija s-soċjetà li toħloq kundizzjonijiet li fihom aħna nkunu mġieghla nbatu. Inbatu meta is-soċjetà tinsa li neżistu, jew meta ma jifhmuniex u jiġġudikawna sempliċement għax aħna differenti" (Cardona, 2012).

Len Barton, attivista b'dizabbiltà u akkademiku fl-istudji tad-dizabbiltà kiteb li "il-mod kif inharsu u niddefinixxu d-dizabbiltà huwa fundamentali, għaliex is-suppożizzjonijiet li fuqhom huma bbażati dawn l-istess definizzjonijiet jistgħu jkunu offensivi u jistgħu johlqu sterjotipi u stigma."

Allura tajjeb nistaqsu, "Minn fejn għew dawn l-isterjotipi u s-suppożizzjonijiet dwar id-dizabbiltà? Għaliex fl-2024 għadna nassoċjaw id-dizabbiltà mat-traġedja u l-karità?"

X'tghidilna l-istorja

Il-persuni b' diżabbiltà minn dejjem kienu kkunsidrati bħala 'differenti' mill-bqija tas-soċjetà. L-istorja wrietna li minn żmien l-antikità, kien hemm prattiċi li juru li d-diżabbiltà minn dejjem kienet mistmerra. Saħansitra trabi u persuni li kien ikollhom xi forma ta' diżabbiltà kienu jiġu mwarba, maqtula jew moħbija. Dan minħabba li, skont it-tweemmin ta' dak iż-żmien, kienu jaħsbu li d-diżabbiltà kienet kastig mill-allat li kienu jemmnu fihom. Kienu jemmnu wkoll li d-diżabbiltà kienet riżultat tad-dnub, jew tal-persuna nnifisha jew tal-ġenituri tagħha.

Meta għadda ż-żmien u nholqu metodi ġodda ta' xogħol, in-nies bdew jitolqu mill-kampanja lejn l-ibliet biex ifittxu xogħol fil-fabbriki. Min kellu xi diżabbiltà qatt ma seta' jlahħaq max-xiftijiet twal u l-makkinarju tqil li kien jintuża, u hafna spiċċaw jgħixu fit-toroq, jittalbu għall-ghixien ta' kuljum. Minn hawn nibtet l-assoċjazzjoni tad-diżabbiltà mal-karità. Din żdiedet ukoll għax nies ta' qalbhom tajba u għaqdiet ta' karità kienu jgħinu lil dawn in-nies biex ikollhom x'jieklu u x'jilbsu. Biex isibu soluzzjoni aktar permanenti għal dan il-fenomeno, inholqu istituzzjonijiet li fihom kienu jingabru n-nies kollha li b'xi mod kienu 'differenti'. Persuni b' diżabbiltà li ma kellhomx fejn joqogħdu u li ma kellhomx xogħol, spiċċaw jgħixu ma' nies sakranazzi, kriminali u oħrajn. Il-kundizzjonijiet f' dawn l-istituzzjonijiet kienu mill-agħar, kemm fir-rigward ta' ndafa, u kemm fir-rigward ta' kif kienu jiġu stmati minn min kien imexxi dawn il-postijiet. Biż-żmien imbagħad, peress li kien hemm problema ta' ffullar, dawn l-istituzzjonijiet ġew kategorizzati skont in-nies li kienu jgħixu fihom u għalhekk inholqu l-ħabsijiet għall-kriminali, u istituzzjonijiet għall-morda u nies b' diżabbiltà. Meta fis-seklu dsatax bdiet tiżviluppa l-mediċina u x-xjenza, hafna minn dawn il-postijiet kienu jintużaw biex isiru esperimenti fuq il-persuni li kienu jgħixu fihom. F'dan il-perijodu, id-diżabbiltà kienet titqies bħala problema individwali skont id-dijanjozi li kienu jagħtu t-tobba u esperti mediċi oħrajn. Għal dan il-għan inholqu hafna professjonijiet biex jassistu fil-fejqa ta' dawn il-persuni permezz ta' terapiji u teknoloġiji differenti. Il-mudell mediku tad-diżabbiltà kien qawwi hafna f'dan iż-żmien. Kien għalhekk li fis-sebghinijiet, il-persuni b' diżabbiltà li kienu jgħixu fl-istituzzjonijiet bdew jipprotestaw għax xtaqu li jkollhom iżjed kontroll fuq haġġithom u iżjed vuċi fuq dak li kien

jirrigwarda lilhom. Kien hawn li twieled il-mudell soċjali tad-dizabbiltà li qaleb il-mod kif is-soċjetà kellha thares lejn dan il-fenomeni ta' taht fuq. Il-persuni li proponew dan il-mudell kienu persuni b'dizabbiltà u qalu li l-problemi li kellhom fil-hajja tagħhom ma kinux ġejjin biss min-nuqqas bijoloġiku li kellhom, iżda iktar mill-oppressjoni li kienet ġejja mis-soċjetà ta' madwarhom. Bdew jitkellmu dwar id-diffikultajiet li jhabbtu wiċċhom magħhom minhabba nuqqas ta' aċċess fil-bini u fit-toroq, u minhabba l-attitudnijiet zbaljati li kienu juru lejhom in-nies ta' dak iż-żmien. Mela l-mistoqsija ma kellhiex tibqa', 'Kif se nfejqu lil dawn il-persuni biex jerġghu jiġu normali?', imma 'X' ghandha tagħmel is-soċjetà biex tneħhi t-tfixkil li jezisti fl-ambjent u fl-attitudnijiet tan-nies li jikkunsidraw ruħhom normali?'

F'Malta, naturalment, ukoll ġejna influwenzati minn dan it-twemmin dwar id-dizabbiltà fil-perjodi kollha tal-istorja. Nistghu nġhidu li kienet il-Knisja l-ewwel li bdiet servizzi fil-qasam soċjali, u l-ewwel li xammret il-kmiem biex tgħin lil kull min kien fil-bżonn, fosthom persuni b'dizabbiltà. Kulhadd jaf l-istorja ta' Monsinjur Mikiel Azzopardi u kif waqqaf id-Dar tal-Providenza. Dan kien l-ewwel pass biex persuni b'dizabbiltà Maltin johorġu fil-berah u mill-kantini fejn kienu jkunu moħbjija. Mons. Azzopardi ried juri lis-soċjetà ta' dak iż-żmien li dawn in-nies kellhom jiġu trattati b'dinjità ta' persuni umani u f'ambjent li kien jixbah id-dar tal-familja. Minn dak iż-żmien 'l hawn saru hafna avvanzji f'dan il-qasam, bis-saħħa tal-Knisja, tal-ġenituri u aħwa ta' persuni b'dizabbiltà, ta' professjonisti, ta' għaqdiet non-governattivi, tal-gvernijiet diversi u, aktar riċentament, ta' persuni b'dizabbiltà nfushom. Tnejn mill-iktar inizjattivi importanti matul iż-żmien kienu t-twaqqif tal-Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni b'Dizabbiltà (KNPD) fl-1987 bl-ewwel Chairperson ikun is-Sur Joseph M. Camilleri, u l-hruġ tal-Liġi Opportunitajiet Indaqs fl-2000. Iktar riċentement il-KNPD sar jisimha il-Kummissjoni għad-Drittijiet tal-Persuni b'Dizabbiltà (CRPD) biex jinghataw aktar importanza d-drittijiet kif mahruġa fil-Konvenzjoni tan-Nazzjonijiet Uniti għad-Drittijiet tal-Persuni b'Dizabbiltà (UNCRPD) fl-2006. It-twaqqif tal-Aġenzija Sapport bhala l-entità nazzjonali li tipprovdi servizzi lill-persuni b'dizabbiltà u l-familji tagħhom fis-sena 2001, kien ukoll pass importanti biex jinghata s-sapport meħtieġ lil min ikollu bżonnu.

L-isfidi ewlenin

Allura, la żdiedu s-servizzi u l-leġiżlazzjonijiet, żdied l-gharfien u t-tagħlim, x'inhuma l-bżonnijiet li jhabbtu wiċċhom magħhom il-persuni b'diżabbiltà u l-familji tagħhom illum? Diversi xogħlijiet ta' riċerka li saru f'Malta u Għawdex f'dan il-qasam f'dawn l-aħħar snin juru li għadha teżisti problema bl-aċċess fiżiku, mhux biss fil-bini u t-toroq imma wkoll fl-aċċess għas-servizzi u l-informazzjoni. Dan tal-aħħar jolqot l-iżjed lill-persuni li għandhom nuqqas ta' smigh u ta' vista, meta tingħatalhom informazzjoni f'format li ma jistgħux jisimgħuh u jarawh. Il-kunċett ta' ddisinjar universali jidher li għadu jrid jinxtered, pereżempju kif jiġu disinjati l-websites, kif jintwerew il-films u l-programmi fuq it-televiżjoni, mhux dejjem isir b'mod li kulhadd ikun jista' jsegwi.

Fil-qasam edukattiv, għalkemm qieghed isir hafna xogħol siewi, ir-riċerka qed turi li studenti b'diżabbiltà għadhom qed isibu diffikultajiet biex ikunu nklużi verament fil-kurrikulu kollu mal-istudenti l-oħrajn. Iktar milli minhabba nuqqas ta' riżorsi materjali, iktar huma l-attitudnijiet negattivi u r-reżistenza li tintwera biex akkomodazzjonijiet partikulari jingħataw fil-hin u b'mod effettiv. Rapport min-*network* ewropew ta' esperti dwar id-diżabbiltà (EDE, 2021) isemmi diversi problemi fil-qasam edukattiv Malti. Fost oħrajn isemmi diskrepanzi bejn kif skejjel differenti jimplementaw il-politika ta' edukazzjoni inklussiva; direttivi tal-*unions* tal-edukaturi li mhux dejjem jirrispettaw din il-politika; tfal li minhabba l-imġiba diffiċli tagħhom jiġu esklużi mill-iskejjel *mainstream*; nuqqas ta' LSEs li jistgħu jagħtu s-servizz tagħhom meta l-LSE tat-tfal tkun assenti, u tfal b'diżabbiltà li ma jiġux inkluzi fl-ippjanar tal-programmi edukattivi individwali tagħhom stess.

Fil-qasam tax-xogħol, hafna persuni b'diżabbiltà, speċjalment dawk b'nuqqas intellettuali u dawk li għandhom mard mentali, għadhom qegħdin ibatu minn diskriminazzjoni minn kull livell. Fil-fatt, f'Malta, il-maġġoranza tal-persuni b'diżabbiltà għandhom livell edukattiv ta' skola sekondarja u dawk li huma mpjegati, għandhom xogħol bażiku li hu mhallas mill-inqas (CRPD, 2020). In-nisa b'diżabbiltà jerga' qegħdin f'sitwazzjoni iżjed żvantaġġata mill-irġiel fis-settur ta' l-impjiegi (European Disability Expertise, 2021).

Għalkemm imxejna hafna 'l quddiem fejn jidhlu ligijiet, is-CRPD u l-NGOs lokali għad m'għandhomx fondi biżżejjed biex jimplementaw u jaċcertaw li d-drittijiet tal-persuni b'diżabbiltà Maltin qegħdin verament jiġu rispettati f'kull qasam tal-hajja. Sfidi oħra jinkludu n-nuqqas ta' servizzi ta' protezzjoni għall-adulti li għandhom diżabbiltà (*adult protection services*), nuqqas ta' servizzi fil-komunità li huma mfassla apposta għall-individwi li għandhom bżonnhom, u nuqqas ta' opportunitajiet għall-ghixien indipendenti ssupportjat (*independent supported living*) (Callus, 2018). Din tal-aħhar torbot mar-riforma li qed tagħmel l-Aġenzija Sapport biex persuni b'diżabbiltà ma jibqgħux jgħixu f'istituzzjonijiet kbar, iżda jkunu jistgħu jgħixu fil-komunità bhal haddieħor bis-sapport li għandhom bżonn.

Inkwetanti wkoll għall-persuni b'diżabbiltà hija l-ghajta riċenti għal iktar drittijiet riproduttivi, l-ewtanasja u s-suwicidju assistit. Dawn huma ta' thassib ghalina, għaliex iqajmu mistoqsijiet serji dwar min se jiddeciedi min se jgħix u min le, min jista' jitwieled u min le, u fejn se tinqata' l-linja. Jehtieg li noqogħdu hafna attenti li għajtiet bhal dawn ma jkomplux ixerrdu l-idea li aħjar tkun mejjet milli tgħix b'diżabbiltà. Ahna li ngħixu din l-esperjenza nafu li dan mhux veru u għalhekk semmajna lehinna meta kien hemm bżonn (Vella, 2022; Agius et al., 2022).

Però l-isfidi tal-persuni b'diżabbiltà u l-familji tagħhom mhumiex biss dawn imsemmija hawn fuq. Riċerka oħra li saret ma' persuni b'diżabbiltajiet varji dwar kif iħossuhom milqugħa fil-parroċċa tagħhom u jekk iqisux lilhom infushom membri attivi fi hdan il-parroċċa (Buttigieg, 2021), wriet li l-attitudni tal-komunità, inkluzi l-kleru, lejn dawn il-persuni hija l-iktar haġa li ddejjaqhom u li ggeġhelhom ma' jħossuhomx komdi. Dan, kemm meta qegħdin jattendu għal-liturgija, kif ukoll meta jiġu mistednin jattendu għal attivitajiet ta' xorta oħra organizzati mill-komunità parrokkjali. Din l-attitudni hija wahda ta' "imsieken" u li "jaħasra hemm bżonn nitolbu għalihom biex ikollhom haġja aħjar". Il-partecipanti li l-età tagħhom kienet tvarja bejn it-tnejn u għoxrin sena u l-erbgha u erbghin sena, semmew ukoll li mhux dejjem isibu aċċess fiżiku u għall-informazzjoni fil-parroċċi tagħhom. Hareġ ukoll il-fatt li nies b'diżabbiltà huma kważi inviżibbli fl-istrutturi parrokkjali u djoċesani. Dan igieghel lill-persuni b'diżabbiltà jaħsbu li din il-Knisja mhix wahda

awtentika għat-tagħlim ta' Kristu, iżda hija replika tas-soċjetà ingenerali. Fil-maġġoranza tal-każi huma kienu jhossuhom estranji għall-komunità u eventwalment birdu u tista' tghid li m'għadhomx jiehdu sehem fil-hajja tal-Knisja. Ghalkemm ma nistghux niġġeneralizzaw, din ir-riċerka ġġiegħlna naħsbu dwar prattiċi li għad iridu jiġu mħaddna biex tassew kulhadd ihossu inkluz fil-knejjes tagħna.

Il-problema ta' protezzjoni żejda ġiet indikata wkoll bħala wahda serja, speċjalment minn persuni b'dizabbiltà intellettuali (Callus et al., 2019). Ghalkemm hafna drabi l-ġenituri jipproteġu lil dawn uliedhom b'intenzjonijiet tajba, il-persuni stess irrakkuntaw li protezzjoni żejda kienet qiegħda tohnoqhom u tnaqqsielhom mill-opportunitajiet biex huma jikbru bħala nies indipendenti u li kapaċi jiddeċiedu għalihom infushom, anki jekk bis-sapport mehtieg.

Soluzzjonijiet

Dawn id-diffikultajiet ma jissolvewx malajr. Ghaddew snin twal biex wasalna fejn qegħdin illum u għad fadal hafna xi jsir. Jehtieg nisimgħu iżjed x'għandhom x'jgħidu l-persuni b'dizabbiltà nfushom, u l-ġenituri tagħhom fil-każ ta' dawk li ma jistghux jikkomunikaw, għaliex huma qegħdin jghixu din l-esperjenza kuljum u jistgħu jagħtu kontribut qawwi biex jitrangaw hafna affarijiet li bħalissa mhumiex jaħdmu kif nixtiequ. Iżda lil dawn il-persuni rridu nagħtuhom iżjed opportunitajiet biex isemmghu lehinhom. Hija haġa tajba ferm li llum għandna persuni b'dizabbiltà fi rwoli importanti f'dan is-settur. Issa jmiss li aktar persuni b'dizabbiltà, bit-taħriġ mehtieg, jingħataw rwoli f'bordijiet u kumitati f'setturi oħra wkoll, biex id-dizabbiltà dejjem tkun rappreżentata f'kull deċizjoni li tittiehed fil-pajjiż.

Konkluzjoni

Id-dizabbiltà, bħalma huma t-tbatija, il-vulnerabbiltà, il-fragilità, hija parti mill-esperjenza umana u kulhadd, f'xi żmien jew ieħor fil-hajja tagħna, jista' jghix din l-esperjenza. Jekk fil-bini tal-ambjenti tagħna, is-sistemi, il-liġijiet, il-politika, il-prattiċi, l-attitudnijiet, naħsbu fl-iktar firxa wiesgħa ta' nies li jkunu se jużawhom jew li jkunu se jiġu milquta minnhom, ikunu xi jkunu l-abbilitajiet, l-età, it-twemmin, is-sess, il-kulur

tal-ġilda tagħhom, allura ma jkunx hemm bżonn li noholqu servizzi ‘speċjali’ għal min hu ‘differenti’. Dan għaliex kulhadd ikun jista’ jinqed fil-komunità tiegħu u ma jkunx hemm għalfejn nitkarrbu – sempliċement għax nappartjenu għal xi grupp minoritarju – għall-affarijiet/sistemi li għandhom ikunu tagħna għax aħna ċittadini bħal kulhadd. Il-motto tal-moviment tal-persuni b’diżabbiltà fid-dinja, Xejn Dwarna Mingħajrna (*Nothing about us, without us*) (Charlton, 1998), jista’ biss isir realtà jekk aħna niġu mogħtija s-sapport u l-akkomodazzjonijiet meħtieġa biex nipparteċipaw bis-shih fl-aspetti kollha tal-hajja. Kulhadd għandu jhossu responsabbli biex dan iseħħ jekk verament nemmnu fid-demokrazija u l-ġustizzja soċjali.

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Psychology at the workplace

Dr Gottfried Catania

Psychology can be defined as the scientific study of human behaviour. The main difference between psychology and the other social sciences, such as sociology and anthropology, is that psychology is not just concerned with group characteristics and differences, but focuses also on the individual and individual differences, trying to understand how individuals with difference characteristics behave and react to situations. Workplace psychology applies this knowledge to situations which occur at the workplace.

It is an undeniable fact that work is a very important part of the human experience. Between the ages of around 18 and 65 most people will have spent almost half of their waking hours at work. Whereas in the past work was primarily seen as a means of making money and providing for one's family, nowadays most of us expect much more – we expect our work to provide us with a sense of meaning and satisfaction. Work psychology tries to enable us to achieve that aim by providing suggestions based on evidence provided from research conducted according to scientific principles.

One of the most important individual differences which affects the perception of one's job, and can therefore have a profound effect on job satisfaction and finding meaning at work is personality. One of the most important definitions of personality in psychology considers as a set of relatively stable traits which in turn affect emotions and behaviour. What we mean by "relatively stable" is that these characteristics do not change much over one's lifespan. The most well researched theory in this regard has come to be known as the five factor, or Big-5 theory, as personality is seen as varying over five continua – Extraversion, Emotional Stability,

Agreeableness, Openness to Experience, and Conscientiousness. Each of these factors is independent of each other, and any individual can score low, high or towards the middle of each one. This will consequently affect one's behaviour and emotions. Applying this theory to the workplace, one can understand that not all types of jobs and workplaces are suitable for all individuals – what we call the person – environment fit hypothesis. A person who is very high in introversion (the opposite end of the extroversion continuum), for example, typically has a few very close friends, rather than many superficial ones, and functions best in quiet environments. Such a person will probably not enjoy working in a noisy, open plan office with a lot of conversations going on at the same time. A person high in conscientiousness tends to be goal oriented, like doing things properly and to a good standard, and work better in organised settings. Such a person will find it difficult to work in a chaotic environment, where quality is not prioritised and deadlines are treated as suggestions. An understanding of how personalities and workplace environments interact can help employers design workplaces which are more suited to their employees, thus enhancing job satisfaction and motivation in their employees.

Another individual difference which is important in the workplace is intelligence. The measurement of intelligence has been a concern of psychology for more than a hundred years, with tests of ever-increasing quality being designed to measure intelligence as accurately as possible. The more complex the job, the more suited it is to persons of higher intelligence – a more intelligent person will probably become easily bored and unmotivated in a job which does not require complex thinking and decision making, while conversely a person who is not that intelligent might become anxious in a complex job.

Given the considerations above it is clear that, as far as possible, selecting the right person for a job, and making the right choices when it comes to promotion decisions, are essential for the better functioning of both the individuals and the organisation confirmed. Once again, workplace psychology has a lot to contribute in this respect. Most workplaces use the interview as the main tool for selection and promotion purposes. Research in workplace psychology has a number of suggestions

to make as to how the interviewing process can be improved, including using panel interviews, training interviewers, and using the same set of questions for all applicants to aid comparison. However, the interview still remains subject to the conscious and unconscious biases which interviewers might have, and how well the applicant can manage the impression they give to the interviewers. Another way of increasing the quality of selection and promotion decisions is to use more objective measures of performance, usually in conjunction with the interview. Such tests may include tests of personality and/or intelligence, already described above, as well as specialised tests created on purpose for the particular job. The latter may include work sample tests, in which the applicant is asked to carry out some of the responsibilities the job entails, and situational judgement tests, which present a series of work relevant situations to which the applicants must find the best possible solution.

Making the best possible selection and promotion decisions is of course not enough – the organisation also needs to manage the performance of its employees to maximise performance as much as possible. In most organisations doing so takes the form of a regular performance management meeting. This is a meeting between a line manager and their employees, in which employee performance since the last meeting is discussed. These meetings are typically held once a year, although some organisations, especially fast-growing ones, hold them more frequently, such as every six months, and some others (typically more established ones) may hold them every other year. Once again, workplace psychology has had a lot of influence in making these meetings more effective, suggesting ways in which questions can be phrased to make them more useful at eliciting information, as well as giving hints about how both employees and managers can be trained to give feedback which is more constructive and consequently has a better chance of being received well. Research has also suggested new forms of performance management meetings which might be more useful in some settings, such as meetings using multi source feedback, also known as 360-degree feedback, where the employee is given feedback from colleagues at different levels, such as the line manager, a fellow employee, and a subordinate or client. This has the advantage of the

person receiving more comprehensive feedback from various sources, all of whom can be impacted differently by how the person performs.

Another important contribution of workplace psychology is in the field of motivation. Understanding how to motivate one's workers has a number of important effects, such as increasing and maintaining their job satisfaction and keeping performance levels high, thus having clear benefits for both the employees concerned and the organisation. One of the most important and widely applicable theories of motivation is Locke and Latham's goal setting theory which, in a nutshell, states that the best types of goals to motivate employees are those which are clear, measurable, and difficult but not impossible to achieve. Other theories focus on more specific characteristics which might motivate some employees and not others, again depending on individual differences, which can then inform the way in which a workplace is organised. Some types of employees, for example, prefer autonomy in their jobs, defined as a degree of flexibility as to where, when and how they conduct their work, as long as they achieve the desired objectives. Such employees will be more motivated in a workplace which allows them to do so, such as offering flexible working times and allowing them to work from outside the office, and measuring productivity by quantity and quality of tasks completed rather than by number of hours worked. Other employees prefer the stability of a nine to five job in the office as they like to keep their work separate from the rest of their lives. Once again, if organisations understand individual differences they can go a long way in enhancing motivation in their employees.

All roles in an organisation are important, but undoubtedly leadership and management can have a big say in the success or otherwise of an organisation. Workplace psychology has contributed extensively to understanding what makes leaders and managers more effective in different situations, providing theories such as those which differentiate between autocratic, democratic, and laissez faire leaders, explaining the advantages and disadvantages of each, and the situations in which each leadership style is most effective. More recent theories include those describing the characteristics of transactional and transformational leaders, both of which have been shown to be effective in most situations,

as well as the importance of authenticity as a leadership characteristic.

A few decades ago, the workplace was a relatively stable place. Change, such as in response to new market conditions or technology, was rarely necessary and, when organisations needed to change, they did so by entering a period of instability until the necessary changes took place, followed by an extended period of stability until the next major change was needed. This is not the case anymore. Rapid technological advances have meant that change is now seen as the new constant – rather than change being an intermediate situation between long periods of stability, organisations now need to be constantly changing just to be able to keep up with their competitors and the market, as well as situations which occur. A recent example of this was the situation with restaurants during the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the lockdown periods, where nobody was allowed to go out of the house except for essential services, some restaurants had to close down completely as their business ground to a complete halt. This situation saw the rapid rise of third-party delivery services which would pick up food from restaurants and deliver to clients who had booked through an online app. Those restaurants which embraced this service flourished, and these services proved so popular that they have continued to be utilised extensively after the lockdown period has ended.

The changes in the workplace noted above, such as those introduced by technology – including the possibility of working remotely, online communication using technological platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet, email communication, mobile phones, and other factors – have increased the challenges of maintaining a balance between work and the rest of one's life. In the past it was easy to separate work from other commitments. One typically worked fixed hours, such as between 9am and 5pm, five days a week. The transit back home, by car or bus, served as the boundary. On arrival home, the employee could switch off completely from work and get on with the rest of their lives, focusing on their families, hobbies, and other, non-work related activities. Technology has changed all of this – many of us now look at our work emails as soon as we arrive home, answer work related mobile telephone calls at all hours, and schedule online meetings at all times. The blurring of boundaries

between work and the rest of our lives does not work well for everyone – research in workplace psychology has shown that while some people are happy with this flexibility as it allows them to structure their time in any way they seem fit, others prefer rigid boundaries between work and the rest of their lives and thus, for example, find mobile calls from their managers outside working hours upsetting and invasive. This situation has also made it more difficult for workers to be able to keep track of how many hours they are actually working during the week, with the result that many are working longer hours than they are paid for and not resting enough, leading to an increased possibility of burnout and stress related illness. All of this has resulted in the EU recently considering legislation to regulate communication with employees using technology outside working hours, following the recommendations from workplace psychologists carrying out research in this area.

This article has focused on some of the contributions made by workplace psychology to enhancing the work experience for individuals. The overall aim of work psychology is twofold – to enhance the employee experience at work, thus increasing employee motivation and job satisfaction, and to increase the competitiveness of the organisation by enhancing productivity and ensuring that valued employees remain fully committed to their workplace.

Where are we going?

The value of the presence, creativity and self-care in enhancing wellbeing

Pam Abela

As we struggle to find our centre, our being in the present, we need to turn to a deep connection with our commonality. This is embedded in our spaces of living, our natural landscapes, our cities and our homes, both as a place of residence and as a physical, bodily experience. All the common stories we live, our relation to ourselves and to others, our shared past and future hopes; all tie in together creating a complex web of containment. We need to define and reinforce this structure so that we can stabilize the experience of the present.

From Homelessness to Groundlessness

Some 10 years ago I was looking into the phenomenon of homelessness whilst researching the effect of illness on the individual.¹ Heidegger (1962) proposed that Dasein which means ‘to exist’ or ‘to be there, to be here’ suffers meaninglessness on encountering the absurd in life. There is a consequential breakdown in the individual’s meaning-making structures. A senselessness in the world-structure itself triggers an indefinite anxiety as ordinary understanding and activity collapses. Such a turn of events does not allow the self to feel at home in his/her own body.

This led me to question how our health and wellbeing is also affected by the collective sense of unease many feel due to the peculiar times we are living. Otto Scharmer (2021) in his reflections *Protecting the Flame: Circles of Radical Presence in Times of Collapse* noticed three emerging themes.

The first theme is that we are living in a time of *accelerated breakdown and collapse in our civilisation*. “We see the symptoms of this in the degradation of our ecosystem, in climate destabilization, in falling water

tables, in the loss of topsoil, and in the alarming loss of biodiversity. We see the symptoms of social system breakdown in heightened levels of polarization, inequality, racism, violence, and war, as well as in the beginnings of climate-related mass migration.”

The second theme is the *sinking feeling* one experiences when realising the uselessness of it all and that there seems to be nothing we can do and that maybe it’s already *too late*. A pervasive collective depression has started to condition people’s outlook, especially that of our youth, who will carry the weight of our societal failures into the future.

The third theme has to do with the paradox that we *know* almost everything that is necessary to prevent civilizational collapse – we have most of the knowledge, most of the technologies, and all the financial means necessary to turn things around – and yet we are *not doing* it. In short: The third theme is about the massive *knowing-doing gap* that has been embodied in our collective behaviour over the past 50+ years.

Otto Scharmer asks in this article: When systems collapse, what are we left with? The response he gives is that we are left: “With how we relate to Mother Nature, how we relate to each other, and how we relate to our emerging Selves.” He calls for the formation of small circles of radical presence “as a holding space for supporting each other in protecting the flame of our – and our planet’s – highest future potential at this juncture of existential risk. It’s these fields of deepened connection – of radical shared presence – that can support the healing and can function as the soil and seed for a new civilization to emerge”. In this global scenario we are therefore faced with the search for our wellbeing as we try to stabilise our experience of life and look after our health as it related to nature and culture.

Redefining Wellbeing from an authentic place

When we think of our wellbeing, we automatically think of ourselves in an idealised state. A state where we lack nothing and feel complete. Maybe we even picture ourselves not having any problems, living life fully and feeling happy and joyful. Wellbeing is defined (WHO, 2004, p. 12) as being a state “in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work

productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

As one ages and experience in life sets in, one realises that many do not live in a balanced state of mental, emotional and physical health; many go through hardships and difficult situations including alienation, separation, trauma and illness. This understanding of wellbeing automatically excludes anyone going through such a crisis in life. From grief, loneliness and loss leading to depression, relational and social anxiety, lack of meaning in work and life and sustained stress and fatigue leading to burnout; all contribute to a sense of unease in the self which can ultimately lead to disease.

My own personal experience throughout life and working with people who are going through illness and who must cope with living with limitations, shows that the parameters described in the WHO’s definition are not necessarily needed to achieve wellbeing. One questions how we should be managing our life to FEEL whole and well and how we can live a fulfilled life where all aspect of our functioning are in a harmonious, meaningful balance. So, in what ways can we readdress this problematic understanding of wellbeing if we want to be true to ourselves and all that may entail?

When one considers the word wellbeing as well & being, the word BEING is clearly not the joint attributes of self-realisation/good coping skills/work-life balance/being productive/feeling valued & loved. The word BEING, having the suffix ING, is to BE in a continuous regenerative moment. If one adds WELL to this, the meaning revealed is ‘to be well in the regenerative moment’.

Considering this as my own personal perspective, I asked myself how does one BE? One IS with one’s WHOLE organism – when one’s thoughts, feelings and actions (mind – spirit – body) are in congruence. In fact, we can say that to BE WELL – one IS in *positive congruence* with the self AND with the moment leading to the experience of wholeness within the fragility of the authentic self and the ever-changing nature of the present moment. A positive ORIENTATION in both happens when:

- One's thoughts are positive, in gratitude for the moment
- One is in good spirit meaning that one is feeling well and projecting it outwardly
- One's body is acting in a way that the person is empowered in doing

The creative act roots all the above three aspects in the field of *potentiality* – bringing in new possibilities, empowering the person in a creative doing act. In the world of entanglement and engagement, we enter in a state of constant flux that can leave the person feeling challenged and displaced or at the mercy of external forces beyond personal control. If we had to see this as living in a world of free fall or groundlessness where the individual feels a lack of control, what would living in Wellbeing look like?

An understanding of the role of the creative act to enhance the wellbeing of the authentic self

After working as a curator at Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre between 2015 and 2019, I have kept ties to the centre and am still involved in projects such as the greening of the Palliative Care Unit balcony and curating the Radiotherapy department. During the Deep Shelter Research, Dr Benna Chase and I, analysed the role of art in supporting the patient's wellbeing. Different art-modalities workshops were fine tuned to the needs of the clients. In palliative care we found that certain modalities such as story telling in combination with music performance with a violin or guitar playing is the most effective intervention that can be carried out. The psychologist's presence allows for processing of emerging emotions to take place.

It is not just the art work or art session that encourages the client to engage meaningfully with their life during a time of crises, but it is the relation of the two that allows for this to happen. Therefore, through art we create a space that can 'hold' or support but it is through presence that we encourage engagement with this 'holding'. How did we create a web of containment to enhance wellbeing? Some of the insights revealed during the workshops point towards the collective as being a source of

support where the person is embraced by a commonality that contains the self throughout the process. The cycles of nature, common heritage and history also contribute to this. As nature and history goes through its own phases, we too continuously relate to our life-death cycles. Following each cycle of growth, we experience the formation of new meaning in our life. In this way we start to make sense of all we go through. This leads to surrender and acceptance as the person embarks on a process that enhances awareness.

Some Practical Steps to live better

Stress less. Communicate more.

Share meals with your family and find the time to talk and discuss.

Go for walks/swims with your family and enjoy your time together especially in nature.

Open up about feelings in a safe non-judgemental way, show affection and support.

At work: Improving the flow of communication co-workers and supervisors is imperative for reducing stress.

Share quick updates and fluid conversation.

You should ALWAYS tell someone if you are feeling any of the following ways: overwhelmed and conflicted over how to deal with an issue

Find Your Place to Vent

Keep it together. Stay organized.

Control what you can. Accept what you cannot

Create More Stability

Get Your Budget in Order

Keep a clean home and surround yourself with things you find beautiful or like

At work: Keep a clean, safe and organized work environment

Say No and Stop Over-Committing Yourself

Identify Your Top Priorities

Improving your sense of self-control at work

Exercise, relaxation, rest, sleep and balanced diet

Eat well and avoid refined foods and sugars
Do the things you enjoy doing – a walk by the sea, meet with a friend, cook a meal you like and share it
Maximize Your Alone Time
Limit Your Screen Time especially at night
Sleep for 7 to 8 hours when possible

Reflective writing: creating a space for inquiry/reflection

Self-reflection can help you make sense of your emotions, understand yourself more, and uncover ways to deal with situations positively instead of letting them consume you. Try to find time to reflect a few times a week by writing down what's on your mind and what's happened in your life...

Living in gratitude

Exercise gratitude at the beginning and the end of each day
take a moment to think of one thing that you're grateful for
Be kind to yourself, be true to yourself
Think of one person that you're grateful for, let them know
Every day say something nice to at least one person

Feel Your Feelings

Give yourself permission to feel daily without trying to analyse or eliminate your feelings. Seek to understand your feelings but try to do so without judgment or attachment.

Creating a micro-culture that's positive and compassionate

Practice compassion not only for ourselves and with ourselves but with others. This creates **Balance**. Reflect:

How did my family heal themselves in time of challenge?
What is it that you do to approach things differently?
How do you nurture hopefulness, accountability and integrity in yourself and in others?

Can you think of the time when you were hard on yourself?
What was your fear at that time? Imagine how you could
have acted with more compassion.

Daily practice for centering yourself – mindfulness/ meditation/prayer

Using body scans to become more aware of how you are feeling and noticing things about yourself

In the morning ask yourself what your intentions are for the day then at the end of the day ask what you can let go of.

After you've made that decision don't pick it up and continue to drag it around – let it go and set aside time for yourself each day

Attending creative course and art programs

At Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Center, we realised that art creates chords of empathy that support wellbeing. A variety of art modalities, when presented as workshops in small communities of people going through their cancer journey, have the effect of centering the self just like meditation or prayer would. Engaging in art within a group helps us reach this space of connectivity through self-reflexivity, which evokes insight and awareness that leads to surrender.

Conclusively, to live in awareness was seen to be a way of living happily and to be conscious of this happiness as we go through life by living as simply as possible. During Deep Shelter workshops, one of the participants noted that we have to be careful not to come to a point when we say to ourselves that we were happy and we did not realise it. We need to change the idea that life is a struggle. Illness is seen as a teacher and it can open up doorways that we would never have entered. 'We need to believe that we are enough... we can be happy just by being', one patient said. *Being happy just by being* should maybe be the new Wellbeing definition.

Note

1. https://www.academia.edu/9808252/Trespassing_the_Boundaries_of_Flesh_Exploring_wounded_embodiment_through_artistic_practice

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‘Online’, therefore I am. Living in a hyperconnected world.

Fr Joe Borg and Prof. Mary Anne Lauri

“Social media give the right to speak to legions of idiots who first spoke only at the bar after a glass of wine, without damaging the community. They were quickly silenced, and now they have the same right to speak of a Nobel Prize winner. It is the invasion of fools” (Umberto Eco quoted in Huffpost, 2018). Umberto Eco’s comment about social media is not shared by all. Zuckerberg (2019), on the 15th anniversary of his launching of Facebook challenges this position arguing that some people overemphasise the negative elements of online connectivity. He says Facebook empowers people, replaces traditional hierarchies, and reshapes institutions in our society – from government to business and from media to communities (Zuckerman, 2019).

Eco’s and Zuckerberg’s radically different appraisal of the social media agree on one point – the social media are fundamentally changing society as they have become the constant go-to technology used by most people. People’s constant use of the social media is evidenced by the frequent use of smart phones which have become the preferred technology of accessing the Internet and social networking sites. A study carried out in the United States in 2022 by the firm Dscout found that people touch their smart phone some 2,600 times a day (Winnick, & Zolna, 2016). Though this widely used statistic is challenged by Groshek (Groshek, 2018), the vast use of the social media, many times through a smart phone, is acknowledged by all.

Social media in the Maltese context

There are no available statistics about how many times people in Malta touch their smart phones. According to the National Statistics Office

(ICT Usage by Households, 2022) 91.5% of Maltese people between the ages of 16 and 74 use the Internet every day or almost every day. The same source shows that everyone in the 16 to 24 age cohort uses the Internet daily. The use by those over 65 is increasing significantly every year from 38% in 2018 to 65% in 2022.

The MISCO study (Social Media Trends, 2023) shows that 97% of Maltese people use WhatsApp, 95% use Facebook, and 65% use Instagram. Facebook is mostly used for news and communication with friends and family members. Six out of ten share videos. Two out of five order food with a dedicated app. There is a gender difference in some uses of social networking sites. Women between the ages of 16 and 34 mostly buy products and services online. Among the things that are bought on line are clothes, plane tickets, days in hotels, insurance, and leisure activities.

Much more than ‘tools’

When considering the time used on these media and the ever-increasing multitude of tasks we use them for, one cannot consider them as just ordinary tools. These media are radically changing us. McLuhan (1964) describes them as extensions of our senses, de Chardin as a collective nervous system (Dulchinos, 2021) and de Kerckhove (1995) as the skin of culture.

In the late 1950s, Carothers (1959) researched how people living in an aural-oral culture have a different psychological development from those living in a literate culture. More recently, in a review of the literature, Korte (2020) explains the effects of these media on the way our mind is wired. He listed the positive results but included research which shows that excessive use can lead to loss in the ability to remember things and in the skill of reading.

Floridi (2015) argues that we do not go online but we live online so much so that he came up with the term ‘onlife’ to describe this new style of our existence. The term ‘onlife’ is used to accentuate the fact that the boundaries between life offline and life online have been obfuscated. Onlife combines personal and social life in its various expressions, being digital or physical spaces. Floridi argues that the

digital information and communication media are considered to be environmental forces that are increasingly affecting our self-perception, our mutual interactions, our perception of reality and our interactions with reality. The Catholic Church consolidated the image of social media as “spaces” and not just “tools”. “We turn to social media for a sense of belonging and affirmation, transforming it into a vital space where the communication of core values and beliefs takes place (Dicastery for Communication, para 10). Pope Francis has acknowledged that the digital world is “indistinguishable from the sphere of everyday life,” and it is changing the way humanity accumulates knowledge, disseminates information, and develops relationships (Pope Francis, 2019).

As a result of these techno-human developments, today we contemporaneously live in two spaces: the physical space and in the virtual space. Both are real but different kind of spaces.

Adolescents’ identity development in the new media ecology

The role of social media is particularly important in the development of identity in adolescents and young adults. Erikson (1963), in his theory of psychosexual development, suggests that adolescence is a crucial period for establishing identity through interactions in the social context. Identity is “the entity that gives one the power to move with satisfying direction in one’s life and to recognize and be recognized as a unique individual by others in the social context” (Kroger, 2015, p. 537). When constructing their identities through social media, adolescents can portray their ideal image, seek peer acceptance, make and maintain relationships, and experiment in an environment with a reduced risk of embarrassment. Anonymity allows control over what to disclose and how to present themselves, giving them freedom while minimizing the embarrassment of not being accepted (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011; Vásquez, 2014). Those aspects of identity that receive positive feedback from peers are integrated, while they seek alternatives for those aspects that are not validated (Salimkhan, Manago, & Greenfield, 2010). Online interactions, including self-presentation and self-disclosure, become spaces for negotiating identity.

There are some risks in this process. While online interactions can help in identity formation, they can also be harmful especially when hurtful and toxic messages are sent anonymously (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Engaging in self-disclosure as part of their search for social connections can become risky (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). From the adolescents' point of view, the online environment facilitates taking emotional risks because it is easier to face negative outcomes (Bradley, 2005). Sometimes such risks involve sending images and content which can be abused by recipients. The effects of such behaviour on the identity and personality of an adolescent may be exacerbated by the fact that a message can be shared against one's will with many people in a short period of time and thus may have long lasting consequences.

While anonymous media platforms help adolescents avoid awkward face-to-face conversations, this can backfire giving rise to harassment and abuse (Binns, 2013; Farrugia, Lauri, Borg, O'Neill, 2018; Lauri & Farrugia, 2020). Cyberbullying and the creation of fake news are two ways how such media can be used to harm people (Lauri, Farrugia & Lauri, 2022). Anonymity on social media encourages "disinhibited, aggressive, and insulting comments, as well as cyberbullying and online harassment of peers" (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011, p. 122).

Online harassment is a problem encountered by all ages and genders. Children who had these experiences of risk mention feeling upset or very upset in most instances (Lauri, Borg & Farrugia, 2015). Adolescents, adults and even older adults also fall victims to harassment and abuse in spite of the fact, that they are either more technologically savvy or have more life-experience in negotiating relationships.

The fear of missing out, known as FOMO, is another phenomenon created by social media (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). It is the feeling that one must be connected all the time for fear of missing out on events, experiences, gossip and what significant others are doing with their life. In the last decade, FOMO has been attributed to a number of negative psychological and behavioural symptoms. While on one hand it provides many opportunities for engagement in social activities, it also creates a sense of anxiety of not being in the right place at the right time with the right people. This anxiety can lead to psychological dependence on

social media and when taken to an extreme it can also lead to problematic internet use (Shapira et al. 2003).

Citizens of the digital world

Cyberspace, like the physical world, can be kind or cruel; humane or brutal. It has a number of opportunities as well as challenges over the physical world. It facilitates our access to all types of information. It creates “an environment where people interact, share experiences, and cultivate relationships unlike ever before” as the limitations of physical space are surpassed (Dicastery of Communication, 2023, para 1). The epidemic of COVID-19 helped people exploit the endless possibilities of these space-biased media. On the other hand, the virtual world increases the fear of missing out and can encourage cyberbullying as well as keyboard warriors. The abuse of artificial intelligence is making it easier to spread falsehoods. Today it is difficult to know what is true and what is false, a danger which is exploited by individuals, organizations and corrupt political regimes.

The citizens of the digital world – both the digital natives and the digital immigrants – need empowerment through regulatory measures and programmes of media education (Wright, Borg & Lauri, 2015). States are duty bound to set up a regulatory environment that safeguards the rights of citizens from the power of the mega commercial organizations which own the major media platforms. This urgent need is shared by over 1,000 artificial intelligence experts and industry executives who in March 2023 signed a letter demanding such regulation. “Should we let machines flood our information channels with propaganda and untruth? ... Should we develop nonhuman minds that might eventually outnumber, outsmart, obsolete, and replace us ... such decisions must not be delegated to unelected tech leaders.” (Pause Giant AI Experiment: An Open Letter (2023). The Digital Services Act and The Digital Markets Act of the European Union are examples of the setting of clear obligations on the online platforms to counter illegal goods, services or content online (Europe fit for the Digital Age, n.d.).

Apart from legislation there is need for empowerment of citizens through programmes of media education. Such programmes should be

an integral part of formal and informal education at all levels (Borg & Lauri, 2014). This type of education goes beyond giving students and citizens an understanding of the skills needed to master the use of different platforms, apps and other areas of the digital world. Without such skills they will have the same disadvantages and feeling of disempowerment that illiterate people had in the print culture. In addition to such technical skills, persons should have the necessary knowledge to be critical of the messages that they are constantly being bombarded with (Borg & Lauri, 2011). Without such critical skills, particularly in a culture dominated by fake news and deep fake AI generated content, children, adolescents, and adults cannot be active citizens of the digital world.

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Il-Psikologija u r-Religjon: differenzi u konvergenzi

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Meta wiehed ihares lejn dan it-titlu forsi jibda jistaqsi, dawn x'ghandhom x'jaqsmu ma' xulxin? Anki ghax dawn fil-bidu ma tantx kellhom relazzjoni tajba. Fir-realtà, waqt li hemm differenzi kbar bejniethom hemm ukoll punti ta' konvergenza importanti. Wiehed jibda billi jghid li l-psikologija hija dixxiplina aktar ricenti, filwaqt li r-religjon ilha tezisti mill-bidu tal-bniedem u kienet tkopri funzjonijiet li illum nassocejawhom aktar mal-psikologija jew max-xjenza. Il-funzjoni ewlenija tal-psikologija hija l-istudju tal-imgiba tal-bniedem fil-forom kollha taghha u ghalhekk tinkludi anki dik religjuza. Hija ma tistudjax it-twemmin u ferm inqas ma tiggdikah. Illum nistghu nghidu li din id-dixxiplina hija rikonoxxuta bhala xjenza proprja ghax tadotta l-metodu uzat fil-psikologija generali u fir-ricerka. F'dan il-każ hija tipprova tifhem mhux biss xi jfisser it-twemmin religjuż għall-persuna izda wkoll x'impatt għandu fuq il-hajja tiegħu individwali waqt li toqghod lura milli tagħmel għudizzju fuqu.

Wiehed irid jghid li din id-distinzjoni mhux dejjem kienet rispettata mill-iskejjel kollha tal-psikologija. Fil-każ ta' Freud, il-pijunier tal-psikologija moderna, naraw kritika qawwija għar-religjon għaliex kien jorbotha mal-immaturità u mad-disturbi mentali tal-pazjenti li kien jara, bhalmu huma l-iskruplużi jew l-ossessjonati. Waqt li dawn il-każi għadhom jeżistu sal-lum u għadna narawhom f'dawk li jfittxu l-qrar ta' sikwit, illum nafu li din hija marda u ma tigix mir-religjon.¹

Min-naħa l-oħra, hemm każi fejn il-psikologija stess issir speċi ta' twemmin fiha nnifisha billi toffri forom ta' hsieb u stili ta' hajja li jistghu jitqiesu bhala religjon alternattiva. Fost dawn hemm il-psikologi li jagħmlu parti mill-iskola hekk imsejha umanistika, bhalmu huma

Maslow, Fromm jew May. Dawn joffru mudelli ta' hsieb u mgiba li jmorru 'l bogħod minn dik li hija psikoloġija.²

Anki fil-kamp tar-religjon naraw tibdil li qabel f'it kien jinħass, bħalma hija d-distinzjoni, jew is-separazzjoni, bejn ir-religjon u l-ispiritwalità. Ħafna llum huma dawk, speċjalment fid-dinja tal-Punent, li jqisu ruħhom aktar spiritwali milli religjużi. Id-dibattitu huwa għajn ta' kontroversja kbira u ilu sejjer snin.³ Dan jirrifletti forma ta' sekularizzazzjoni parzjali fid-dinja tal-Punent.

Min-naħa waħda, dan jista' jkun tentattiv ta' ħelsien mir-religjon jew religjonijiet tradizzjonali u istituzzjonalizzati. Min-naħa l-oħra, juri karatteristika jew bżonn fil-bniedem li jrid b'xi mod jimla l-vojt eżistenzjali b'mod indipendenti u soġġettiv u jagħzel religjon aktar personalizzata. Din tista' tfisser li hemm realtà fil-bniedem li ma tistax tiġi injorata. Fil-fatt, mal-mument li wiehed jibda jagħmel il-mistoqsijiet eżistenzjali huwa jidhol fil-kamp tal-ispiritwalità, jgħifieri fid-dinja tal-ħsieb u tar-riflessjonijiet li hija differenti mid-dinja materjali. Għaldaqstant wiehed għandu għazla bejn li jaċċetta t-tweġibiet għall-mistoqsijiet eżistenzjali li joffru r-religjonijiet stabbiliti mwasslin mill-kultura li jgħix fiha, jew inkella jsib tweġibiet minn rajh. Din b'xi mod tirrifletti dak li kien jgħid il-psikologu Jung li dawn il-mistoqsijiet ma tistax taħrabhom u xi darba jew oħra jkollok tħabbat wiċċek magħhom. Ta' min isemmi li Jung kien dak il-psikologu li ta valur kbir lir-religjon u kien iqisha bħala komponent essenzjali fit-terapija u fil-fejqa.⁴ Naturalment, dan ma jfissirx li wiehed għandu bilfors jaċċetta din il-pożizzjoni minhabba li din ittappan kull distinzjoni bejn il-psikoloġija jew terapija u r-religjon.

Minkejja dawn l-eżempji estremi, jeżistu diversi riċerkaturi li adottaw metodi newtrali biex jistudjaw dan il-fenomeno b'metodi xjentifiċi u mingħajr preġudizzji. Fil-fatt huwa possibbli li wiehed jistudja l-imġiba religjuża b'mod xjentifiku kemm 'il darba jġu adottati l-metodi adatti u rigorużi bħalma jeżistu fl-oqsma oħra tax-xjenzi umani.⁵ Dan huwa possibbli kemm 'il darba wiehed iħares lejn l-imġiba religjuża bħala atteggiament (attitude). Fil-fatt, wiehed mill-għanijiet ewlenin tal-psikoloġija huwa l-istudju tal-atteggiamenti.⁶

L-imġiba religjuża wkoll hija sensiela ta' atteggiamenti u għalhekk

dan jista' jkun il-punt ta' konvergenza bejn iż-żewġ dixxiplini, ir-religjon u l-psikoloġija. L-atteġġjamenti jinvolvu l-persuna shiha għaliex għandhom fihom komponent konjittiv (tal-ħsieb), komponent affettiv (l-emozzjonijiet) kif ukoll komponent komportamentali (l-imġiba). Kemm hu minnu dan narawh anki mill-Bibbja stess anki jekk dan ma ntqalx fil-kuntest li qed jissemma hawn. Fid-Dewteronomju hemm il-kmand: "Hobb il-Mulej Alla tiegħek b' *mohħok* kollu, b' *qalbek* kollha u bis-*sahħa* tiegħek kollha".⁷ Dan mhux għax kien hemm xi konoxxenza tal-psikoloġija, iżda għaliex dawn it-tliet fakultajiet jesprimu l-bniedem fit-totalità tiegħu. Ir-religjon għandha dimensjonijiet li jolqtu l-ħsieb, l-emozzjonijiet kif ukoll l-imġiba jew id-deciżjonijiet li wiehed jiehu.

Meta wiehed jiddeciedi li jistudja r-religjon minn perspettiva psikoloġika huwa essenzjali li jagħraf kemm liema dimensjoni tar-religjon qed janalizza, kif ukoll li jara li dak li qed jistudja jikkwalifika bħala religjon. In-nuqqas ta' distinzjoni twassal biex jew kollox jispiçça bħala religjuż jew li r-religjon titqies bħala mġiba oħra bħall-oħrajn. Fil-fatt, hemm diversi interpretazzjonijiet ta' xi tfisser religjon. Mill-etimoloġija tal-kelma, *re-ligare* din tista' tfisser sew rabta ma' xi divinità jew forzi spiritwali, jew rabta mad-dinja jew in-natura. Tista' tfisser ukoll xewqa għal riparazzjoni jew fejqan interjuri għal xi qasmiet jew kontradizzjonijiet. Kif ukoll tista' tfisser twegiba u impenn totali għal xi sejha jew vokazzjoni.

Kemm fl-istudju tal-psikoloġija tar-religjon u kemm f'dak tas-soċjoloġija tar-religjon jissemmew diversi dimensjonijiet ta' x'inhir-religjon. Normalment, jiddistingwu ħamsa jew sitt dimensjonijiet: (1) It-Twemmin; (2) It-Tagħlim Religjuż; (3) L-Esperjenza Religjuża; (4) Ir-Ritwal; (5) L-Imġiba u (6) s-Soċjetà.⁸

Fid-dimensjoni tat-twemmin jiġi kkonsidrat dak li wiehed jemmen fih, jiġifieri, l-kontenut ta' fidi bħalma huwa li temmen f' Alla wiehed jew fl-Ispirti, eċċ... Dawn jissejhu wkoll *miti*, mingħajr ebda sens ta' disprezz. Eżempji ta' dawn huma l-ħolqien mix-xejn, il-ħelsien tal-bniedem, il-qawmien mill-imwiet jew reinkarnazzjoni, eċċ... Dawn jitqiesu bħala l-ġebel li bihom tinbena kull religjon. Fil-kuntest Nisrani dawn jissejhu wkoll dommi tal-fidi. Mill-aspett psikoloġiku wiehed jistudja kemm huma qawwijin u x'influwenza dawn għandhom fuq il-ħajja tal-individwu.

It-tagħlim reliġjuż jikkomplimenta din id-dimensjoni. Kull reliġjon tipprova tfisser, telabora u tiġbed konklużjonijiet ibbażati fuq it-twemmin anki billi tadotta forom ta' hsieb jew filosofiji li jkunu attwali f'ċerti żminijiet. Minnu johroġ ukoll il-mod ta' kif tiġi mfiġsra u mgħallma r-reliġjon lit-tfal, lill-kbar jew lil dawk li qed jithejjew biex jadottawha. Din id-dimensjoni hija importanti hafna għaliex minnha jiddependi x'tip ta' atteġġjament wiehed jadotta, sew jekk wiehed radikali reliġjuż u fanatiku, u sew jekk inhu atteġġjament aktar miftuħ li jwassal biex tifhem u tapprezza reliġjonijiet oħra wkoll.

L-esperjenza reliġjuża hija probabbilment l-aktar waħda qawwija u rilevanti għal hafna nies. Din hija soġġettiva u l-emozzjonijiet għandhom rwol importanti hafna. Din tista' tqarrbek jew twarrbek kompletament milli thaddan xi twemmin jew tinghaqad ma' xi komunità, moviment jew kult. Għal hafna, l-esperjenza emozzjonali hija dik li tagħti validità għat-twemmin. Din tinkludi t-talb, il-meditazzjoni u l-esperjenzi mistiċi, kif ukoll il-konsolazzjonijiet li jiġu mit-twemmin. Din tista' tkun l-ixprun li jwassal lil xi hadd biex jemmen jew jikkonverti, kif ukoll tista' tkun ir-raġuni għaliex wiehed jabbanduna l-fidi speċjalment wara xi esperjenza qarsa. Ghalkemm importanti, din hija l-aktar waħda diffiċli biex tistudjaha għaliex hija soġġettiva għall-ahħar.⁹ Kienu diversi dawk il-psikologi li indirizzaw din id-dimensjoni. L-ewwel wiehed kien William James (1842-1910) fil-ktieb magħruf tiegħu *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902).¹⁰ Warajh insibu lil Abraham Maslow bil-kunċett ta' *peak experiences* u oħrajn.¹¹ Maslow jgħid li din it-tip ta' esperjenza hija l-qofol tal-hajja ta' kull bniedem u tista' tkun marbuta anki ma' esperjenzi purament sekolari.¹²

Ir-ritwal jew il-prattika reliġjuża hija d-dimensjoni l-aktar studjata minhabba li hija l-aktar waħda oġġettiva u li tista' tkun osservata u mkejla.¹³ Hafna surveys li jsiru jistharrġu din id-dimensjoni billi jistaqsu mistoqsijiet bħalma huma: kemm-il darba tmur quddies jew titqarben, jekk tiżzewwiġx fil-knisja, tgħammidx it-trabi tiegħek, eċċ... Din fiha l-vantaġġi u l-iżvantaġġi. Waqt li huwa diffiċli li wiehed imur il-quddies u ma jkunx jemmen, huwa possibbli li wiehed ma jmurx quddies għal diversi raġunijiet imma jkun jemmen. Barra minn dan, jista' jiġri li jkun hemm firda kważi totali bejn it-twemmin u l-imġiba reliġjuża

bhalma jista' jkun il-każ tal-festi f'Malta li aktar ma jgħaddi ż-żmien aktar qed isiru sekolarizzati. Dan juri kemm wiehed ma jistax jistudja l-komportament reliġjuż minn dimensjoni waħda biss.

Id-dimensjoni l-oħra msejha bhala dik tal-konsegwenzi, hija marbuta mal-imgħiba morali. Din turi x'effett għandha r-reliġjon fuq il-hajja tal-persuna u kemm tittiehed bis-serjetà meta wiehed jiġi biex jiehu deċiżjoni li tolgot aspetti oħra tal-hajja bhalma huma n-negozju, r-responsabbiltà lejn is-soċjetà, il-hajja tal-familja jew taż-żwieġ, eċċ... Din id-dimensjoni tista' tkun xhieda ta' kemm wiehed jemmen għaliex tidher, jew bil-maqlub, xhieda tal-firda bejn il-fidi u l-hajja. Din ukoll tista' tkun riżultat tas-sekolarizzazzjoni.

L-aħħar dimensjoni hija dik li għandha x'taqsam mas-soċjetà. Għalkemm din hija tema ċentrali għas-soċjoloġija, hija wkoll ta' interess għall-psikoloġija, jew il-psikoloġija soċjali. Għalkemm illum hemm hafna li jhaddnu forum ta' hsieb u twemmin li mhux ġejjin mill-kultura li wiehed għex u trabba fiha, min-naħa l-oħra huwa diffiċli tifred ir-reliġjon mill-kultura tal-post. Hafna jitrawmu fir-reliġjon li jkunu jhaddnu l-ġenituri tagħhom anki jekk forsi meta jikbru jabbandunawha. Izda huwa diffiċli hafna li wiehed jinsa kompletament il-kultura tal-post. Dan jidher sew meta persuni jemigraw f'art oħra. Waqt li l-ġenituri jgħixu dan il-konflitt, għal uliedhom din hija storja oħra għax huma jassimilaw il-kultura tal-post. Din id-dimensjoni hija importanti hafna għalina illum minhabba li qed jgħixu magħna hafna nies li ġejjin minn kulturi u reliġjonijiet differenti u li aħna rridu nitgħallmu nifhmuhom u ngħixu magħhom. Din hija l-esperjenza ta' bliet kosmopolitani fejn jgħixu flimkien nies minn kull razza, kultura u twemmin.

X'inhuma l-vantaġġi u r-riskji li tistudja r-reliġjon minn perspettiva psikoloġika? Minhabba li l-ewwel impatt bejn il-psikoloġija u reliġjon fl-Ewropa kien wiehed negattiv dan żera' hafna suspetti lejn l-istess psikoloġija. Min-naħa tar-reliġjon qamet il-biża' li issa l-psikoloġija mhux biss iġġib fix-xejn it-twemmin reliġjuż iżda li anki toħdilha postha. Il-pożizzjoni determinista ta' Freud, jiġifieri li bniedem huwa mmexxi mill-istinti, halliet impatt qawwi anki f'dik li hija mġiba morali. Issa l-bniedem ma kellu l-ebda għażla hlief li jrażzan l-istinti u b'hekk iżid it-tensjoni li tista' twassal għan-nevrozi. Issa l-kunċett ta' dnuv inbidel

għax sar ġustifikat jew minn nuqqas ta' libertà jew għax kawżat mill-mard mentali. Hekk in-nies issa flok imorru jqerru dnubiethom għand il-qassis qed imorru għat-terapija għand il-psikologu.

Anki verżjonijiet aktar moderni tal-psikoloġija li kienu reazzjoni għan-negattività tal-psikanalizi allarmaw in-nies mill-kamp reliġjuż minhabba t-tip ta' filosofija tal-bniedem li huma haddnu fosthom li l-bniedem huwa kompletament hieles, tajjeb, u b'potenzjal illimitat. Wiehed seta' jaqra hawn li dawn l-attributi li bniedem dejjem għaraf f'Alla issa qed jagħrafhom fih innifsu. Anki din il-pożizzjoni dgħajfet il-funzjoni tar-reliġjon li issa ma baqgħalha xejn iżjed x'toffri lill-bniedem għax m'għandu bżonn ta' xejn għajr li jirrealizza lilu nnifsu u mingħajr xkiel. Anzi, fil-każ li r-reliġjon setgħet tkun ta' xkiel, is-soluzzjoni offruta hija waħda sempliċi, tajjar ir-reliġjon.¹⁴

Dawn il-pożizzjonijiet iżda jidhru li ġejjin kemm min-nuqqas ta' apprezzament ta' x'inhil r-reliġjon u l-funzjoni tagħha għall-bniedem, u kemm minhabba nuqqas ta' kjarizza u distinzjoni bejn dak li huwa xjentifiku u interpretazzjonijiet aktar filosofici jew ideologici. Illum is-sitwazzjoni nbidlet hafna għal diversi raġunijiet. L-ewwel waħda minhabba l-iżvilupp tal-filosofija tax-xjenza u l-għarfien tal-metodu xjentifiku li ma jippermettu għall-ebda forma ta' kontaminazzjoni li ġejja minn preġudizzji jew ideologiji. B'dan il-mod wiehed seta' jinvestiga l-imġiba reliġjuża minn perspettiva purament psikoloġika bħalma jinvestiga kull imġiba oħra. Dan wassal biex illum għandna dixxiplina għaliha li tissejjah Psikoloġija tar-Reliġjon u li qanqlet interess miż-żewġ naħat, kemm tal-psikoloġija u kemm tar-reliġjon.¹⁵

Min-naħa tal-psikologu, huwa importanti li jifhem ir-rwol tar-reliġjon fil-hajja tal-persuna kemm jekk huwa klijent tiegħu, u kemm jekk hija s-socjetà biex jifhem ċerti fenomeni bħal konverżjoni, radikalizzazzjoni, fanatiżmu, gwerer reliġjużi, eċċ... Waqt li illum fil-Punent qed naraw ir-reliġjonijiet tradizzjonali jidgħajfu, min-naħa l-oħra qed naraw tkabbir fil-movimenti reliġjużi godda jew setet (New Religious Movements). Din tagħmel l-istudju tal-fenomeni reliġjuż aktar importanti u fl-istess hin aktar komplikat.¹⁶

Min-naħa tal-kamp reliġjuż, huwa importanti li dawn jagħrfu l-kontribut siewi li tista' tagħti l-psikoloġija sew f'dak li huwa għarfien

tal-persuna u għad-dixxerniment spiritwali, kif ukoll biex tagħraf xi blokki mentali jew emozzjonali li jistgħu jfixklu l-iżvilupp shiħ. L-applikazzjoni tal-psikoloġija fil-pastorali tista' tkun ta' għajnuma kbira kemm mill-aspett pedagoġiku u anki mezz ta' kollaborazzjoni ma' professjonisti oħra.¹⁷ Illum m'hemmx dubju bil-htieġa tax-xjenzi umani speċjalment tal-psikoloġija, fl-għazla u fit-thejjija għas-sacerdozju u għall-hajja reliġjuża.¹⁸

Illum aktar minn qabel, huwa mehtieġ li dan id-djalogu u kollaborazzjoni bejn dawn iż-żewġ dixxiplini jkompli jikber u jissahhaħ mingħajr preġudizzji u fl-interess ta' kulhadd. Il-qasam tal-psikoloġija jista' jitgħallem hafna mit-tradizzjonijiet u valuri reliġjużi li għamlu hafna ġid lil tant nies tul il-medda tas-snin. Min-naħa tar-reliġjon, l-istess djalogu max-xjenzi umani jista' jwassal għall-mod ġdid ta' kif wiehed iħares lejn l-istess reliġjon u t-tifsira tagħha. L-interess qawwi li jeżisti illum fl-ispiritwalità jista' jservi ta' sfida għar-reliġjonijiet li jkunu lesti li jifhmu din il-qawwa interna li hemm fil-bniedem biex jagħmel sens mill-hajja. Din tixhed ukoll li r-reliġjon mhux ser tgħib minn wiċċ l-art malajr kif forsi jahsbu xi whud.

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The respect due to human life from conception to death

Fr Edgar Busuttill SJ

In secular contemporary anthropology there are two main tendencies. *Scientific anthropologies* and *Philosophical Anthropologies*. The former tend to explain human beings deterministically, leaving little room for that in humans which cannot be explained empirically, including human freedom. Several philosophical anthropologies, on the other hand, base everything on human freedom which they consider to be absolute, without taking into account man's limits.

Since the Enlightenment the attempt has been made to make humans gods or to reduce them to the status of an animal. It is clear that contemporary human beings are in the middle of an identity crisis.¹ These approaches have not made them more human. On the contrary they have led to their dehumanization. Both of the contemporary anthropological approaches just mentioned lead to an identical result: Humans are reduced to what Jean Paul Sartre has termed "useless passion". Their existence leading to nothingness and death.² It is not surprising that in this atmosphere of existential emptiness Auschwitz and Hiroshima and other terrible events have taken place and continue to occur today.³

In order to rediscover their humanity, human beings need to be convinced that they transcend the animal kingdom and at the same time they must accept that they are endowed with limited freedom. In an age which exalts scientific discovery and technology, one might wonder why a scientific view of human beings have led them to this dead end of despair. It is important to note that the contribution provided by the scientific anthropology and the other human sciences is indispensable in order to understand the structure and finality of the human person. However, on its own this information is not sufficient. This is so because,

these sciences study the human person as an object. They do not consider the existential, personal dimension of the human being. If the reality of the human person is to be investigated in such a way that ethical judgements are to be made on any area of his/her life, the existential personal dimension is indispensable. A philosophical anthropological approach studies the human being from the point of view of the subject, while taking into account his objective reality.⁴

In the following section I will attempt to draw on material from several philosophical anthropological approaches which do not fall into the pitfall of anthropocentricity and which respect his unobjectifiable mystery.

Man's greatness and man's littleness

...Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed. ... even if the universe were to crush him, man would still be nobler than his slayer, because he knows that he is dying and the advantage the universe has over him. The universe knows none of this...⁵

Humans transcend the animal kingdom

Human beings on the one hand, are biologically defective creatures. They do not have a protective environment. They are overstimulated by stimuli from the external world and are uncertain in their instincts. Unlike any other animal, human beings are not defined by their natural environment. On the other hand, humans are culture making animals. Human reason and their freedom distinguish them from the rest of the animal kingdom. At the same time, they are the engine for their innate search for the infinite and self-transcendence.

Human Reason

Human beings are creatures who are able to arrive at truth. This is so because they are able to know themselves as knowers.⁶ The experience of oneself as a knower is rooted in the deeper experience of subjectivity. Rahner calls it the "original experience" It is the experience through which a human being is conscious of himself as more than the

product of numerous forces outside himself. He experiences himself as self. Subjectivity is not experienced as something humans have but as something they are. Human beings experience themselves to be transcendent. The unlimited horizon of questioning which is innate to them, demonstrates that their power of transcendence is infinite. Human transcendence is founded on a tacit awareness of infinite realities. It is a knowledge which is not made into an object for mental reflection, but accompanies all human conceptual knowing.⁷

Human Freedom

Unlike any other animal, humans are endowed with freedom. Each individual act of freedom, from the most insignificant choices to important decisions are truly free only inasmuch as they mediate and concretize the person's transcendental freedom. This freedom does not concern the objects of one's experience but the person himself. Freedom is not the ability to do this or that, but the power to decide and actualize oneself.⁸ As has been pointed out above there is a tendency today to consider humans to be entirely the product of forces beyond their control - these forces being environmental or innate. In distinguishing the formal structure or essence of freedom from its material content, Rahner demonstrates that transcendent freedom is a reality the person is, irrespective of the determining conditions of his life, since the person's explicit or implicit decision to accept or reject cannot but entail his freedom.⁹

The unlimited horizon of man's questioning, as well as the infinite scope of man's desire may be plausibly considered to be signs that unlike other earthly creatures, humans have an eternal destiny.¹⁰

Human beings remain creatures

Humans are persons who are open to the infinite. They transcend themselves continually but this does not mean that they are absolute. Human beings are knowers who are open to the ineffable. However, at the same time the fact that they never reach the unquestioning and unquestioned resolution of all their questions indicates that their knowledge is always limited. Humans are really endowed with freedom; are really responsible for the person they are and are to become through

their decisions and acts. However, they do not create themselves from nothing, nor do they create the space in which they live from nothing. They are not fully self-sufficient. It is not possible for them withdraw from the interpersonal world of space and time. They are constantly receiving their very existence from a source beyond their control.¹¹

Karl Rahner is the first to stress the self-transcendence and self-determination of human beings but he also points to their “*fatum*”. Humans are “thrown” into the world. They start off with a given, before they embark on their history as free beings. Not accepting the “*fatum*” is the root of their anguish:

Wherever the ... **fatum** ... is no longer achieved, and wherever this **fatum** is no longer accepted confidently in patience and humility as a generous gift of **incomprehensible** love, man is subject to total neurosis, to a basic fear concerning his destiny which weighs more heavily than all the things which, as a result of fear, he tries to escape from.¹²

The human body and its structure, which has emerged through the process of evolution, is an essential dimension¹³ of this “*fatum*”. Since humans’ emergence the history which they inherited from evolution is continued now in a conscious and a free way. Thus, the body is the vehicle of personal history and the matrix and mode of expression of that freedom.¹⁴ Therefore humans’ freedom is intimately connected with the respect due to their body. If they mistreat their bodily structures, they endanger their personhood:

The biological nature of every human is untouchable, in the sense that it is constituent of the personal identity of the individual throughout the course of his history. Each person, in his absolutely unique singularity, is constituted not only by his spirit, but by his body as well. Thus, in the body and through the body, one touches the person himself in his concrete reality. To respect the dignity of the human being consequently amounts to safeguarding this identity of the person ‘*corpore et anima unum*’, as the Second Vatican Council says (*Gaudium et Spes*, 14, par.1)...¹⁵

What is essential to safeguard and promote man's dignity

As Rahner points out humans' dignity may be regarded both as something pre-established as well as a dignity to be fulfilled. This final and definitive dignity can be lost or gained depending on whether the pre-established dignity is accepted or rejected.

Humans' pre-established dignity could be summed up in two words He/she is a human person.¹⁶ This means that he/she is a being who possesses himself/herself knowingly and in freedom. Is ontologically an end and not a means. He is not an end to himself but he finds himself when he is in relation towards other persons. He has "absolute" value and dignity. This is not to say that he has no limits. A human being, as we have seen is a finite creature: "absolute" here means "unconditional". The human person by his nature and dignity demands an unconditional respect. This dignity may never be sacrificed for the sake of another end whatever this end might be.

This pre-established dignity of a human as a person is but the foundation for a human's definitive dignity. Through revelation we know that human beings are called to be direct partners with God who is the Absolute and Infinite. In Christ humans are made sons and daughters of God. This gift is given in this world. It is a gift which penetrates humans' whole being and grows like a seed grows into a tree. Human beings' personhood will become definitively fulfilled when they become fully sons and daughters of God. All this means that human beings dignity in the here and now are given a greater quality through their call to grow as sons and daughters of God.¹⁷

Moral criteria with which emerge from the respect due to the dignity of all human beings:

A. Each human being ought to be treated as an end and never as a means. This implies that the benefit which can be obtained by one or any number of persons can never justify the killing or any other kind of harming of another or any number of other human beings. Special concern must be given to protect the good of the weakest persons involved.

B. The human body of each person must be respected as an integral dimension of the person. This means that it may never be manipulated

as a means towards an end but always for its own good which is the good of the person.

Dignity due to the Human Embryo

From a scientific point of view there are strong indications that human life starts at the moment of fertilization of the human egg by the sperm. At the moment of conception, the human sperm and egg join together to form one cell (the Zygote) which has all the genetic information necessary to form a human being. This genetic information is called the Genome. It confers on the zygote a specific and individual identity. As soon as the sperm penetrates the egg the “switch” is on and a new human individual begins to grow. This new human cell starts to act immediately as an “individual unity”. The genetic plan written in the zygote, given the necessary conditions, begins to gradually unfold from the moment of conception. This process will not stop until the moment of death of the individual. All this points to the following reality: that the “new human cell”, which is formed at the moment of conception represents the “initial structure” of a “new human subject” through which the latter starts off “his/her own vital cycle”. This means that scientific facts indicate that from the moment of conception a human individual is present.

Dignity due to the human person until death

The life of a human person needs to be respected until the moment of death. As has been pointed out the human body is part of the *fatum* of the human being. Human beings need to respect the truth of who they are. They are not God. They need to respect their limits. If they disrespect their bodies they do not respect themselves. This means that on the one hand they have a duty to alleviate the pain and discomfort of disease and sickness and if they cannot cure these they have a duty to provide adequate palliative care for persons who are close to death. However no argument to decide to directly end human life may be justified. This would go against their respect due to their body and therefore their person and it would mean disrespecting their limitations and *fatum* as human persons.

Notes

1. cf: Giannino Piana, "Libertà e responsabilità" *Nouvo Dizionario di Teologia Morale* (Milano: Edizione Paoline, 1991) p. 659.
2. Cf: G. Piana, "Libertà e responsabilità" p. 660.
3. cf: Jurgen Moltmann *Man: Christian Anthropology in the Conflicts of the Present* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1974) p.107.
4. Note that a philosophical anthropology must always take into account of the objective data on man obtained from the human sciences.
5. Blaise, Pascal, *Pensees* (England: Penguin Books edition 1966) p.95.
6. The intellect reaches truth because it reflects on itself. Beings which have reason, 'return' to their own essence with a 'complete return' *Reditio Completa*. Since the act of knowing is intermediate between the subject knower and the object it follows that in the act of knowing something, the knower starts to return to himself. This return is completed in as much as the knower knows his essence ie: himself as a knower. cf: Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* q.1,a1.
7. Anne E Carr "Starting with the Human" *A World of Grace* Ed. Leo, J, O'Donovan (New York The Seabury Press 1980) pp. 17-20.
8. *Ibid* pp. 23-26.
9. Anne E Carr "Starting with the human" pp.23-26.
10. Augusto Cavadi "L'uomo ha più dimensioni" *Alla ricerca dell'uomo: Lineamenti di antropologia filosofica* (Palermo: Ed. Augustinus, 1988) pp. 63-68.
11. cf: Anne Carr "Starting with the human" pp. 17-30.
12. *Investigations* vol IX (London: Darton, Longman and Todd 1972) p. 244.
13. The intention here is not to separate man into two different parts: body and soul. As shall be emphasized below man is a unique individual existing substance.
14. cf: Brian Johnstone, "Introduction to Biomedical ethics" *Lecture Notes for students Accademia Alfonsiana* p.75.
15. Pope John Paul II, "Discourse to the members of the 35th General Assembly of the world Medical Association, 19 October 1983": *AAS* 76 (1984) p.393.
16. cf: what has been said in the sections above how man transcends nature and at the same time remains a creature.
17. cf: Karl Rahner, "The dignity and freedom of man" *Theological Investigations* vol 2, London: Darton Longman & Todd pp. 235-246.



Conforming to Christ and not Hebel: Understanding what it means to be human from a biblical perspective

Fr Justin Schembri OP

1. Conforming to the God you are under

What does it mean to be human and what is humanity's role in the cosmos? Questions such as these are among the most germane that many today are asking – and not without reason. Indeed, not only do such questions seem pertinent when we consider the implications of issues like the push towards artificial intelligence but also the implications on what it means to be a part of the human race, be it from the shores of Canada or the little Island of Malta – or both.

Of course, our generation is not the first generation to ask such significant questions. Rather, such issues are continually raised according to the circumstances that people around the world find themselves in. Indeed, “throughout the ancient world and in almost every period of history unto the current, scholars have wrestled with this question”¹ – be it debates among Greeks and Romans, scholastics, or even among the children of the enlightenment, the question “what is a man?” has always been a chief issue to reflect on.

This was no different for the authors of Judeo-Christian Scriptures. For instance, the psalmist asks “what are human beings that you [God] are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” (Ps 8,4). In answering such a question, the same psalmist recognises humanity's special place in the cosmos, being made “a little lower than God and crowned with glory and honour” (Ps 8,5). Such an answer is, of course, born out of the psalmist's own reflection of the creation accounts found in Genesis 1–2. There, as Maston points out, humanity “is the final creature brought forth by God and marked out because humans – both male and female – bear the image [and likeness] of God.”²

In Antiquity, the phrase “image” (*šelem*) and “likeness” (*dāmût*) was often used to explain how gods or kings were “believed to dwell in their statues and images.”³ In this way, what such terms were meant to explain was how, at the same time, the statue or image was not the actual god or king but also how it represented and contain some of the exemplar’s presence. By creating humanity as his own icon, God illustrates that there is his presence within us, a presence that is narratively explained by God communicating the *ruah Adonai* to humanity in Gen 2,7. It is not without reason that human dignity, understood as the glory of the adam (*kevod ha-adam*), is grounded in the glory of God (*kavod YHWH*) for living fully as humans requires humanity to recognise and appreciate not only its own creatureliness but also God’s own imprint within it.⁴

To my mind, it is clear that the scriptural claim that humanity is created in the image and likeness of God “does point out what Scriptures think to be the ‘*essence* of human identity’ – and this essence, in terms of relationship, is best understood as an original state of union and kinship with God, a union which implies a sharing in divine glory, life, and right covenantal relations.”⁵

Indeed, it is only in such union that humanity can truly flourish and live the life it were created to live because “the creational goal is one of communion where we are called to holiness, to be separated *for* God and *not from* God.”⁶ Such a goal likewise implies that we must “*conform* to God and to live according to God’s way of life.”⁷ This is concretely expressed “through the mutual relationship of love, which involves both a reciprocal seeking of each other for each other’s own sake and a single-minded reciprocal focus on each other.”⁸

What means to be human according to the Judeo-Christian perspective, then, is indelibly linked to our relationship with God. To flourish as a human, the Scriptures would claim, one would need to reorient one’s whole life towards God and to live that style of life that is conducive of actualizing the will of the Lord on earth as in heaven. To rebel against God, to choose to live life under some idol rather than living life *under* God, is to wither and to *dehumanize oneself*.⁹

Thus, I think Rosner has it right in pointing out that Scriptures ground “the identity of human beings in being known intimately and personally by God.”¹⁰ Of course, from a New Testament perspective, this statement takes on an even more significant role because, in becoming man, Jesus, that perfect heaven-and-earth person, shows us what it really means to be human for, in him, we have been redeemed and rescued from the power of darkness (Col 1,13-14) and now have peace with God (Rom 5,1). Fundamentally, then, Jesus becomes the pivot and centerpiece of “the life story of all those who belong to him.”¹¹

All of this boils down to one specific and immutable truth found in Scriptures: human freedom is never absolute since humanity, as a created being, is always found under some Lord, be it Jesus Christ or be it some idol that attempts to take the place of Jesus in our lives to our detrimental. As “no one can serve two masters” (Mt 6,24), each human being is either found under Christ or under *hebel*.

In this paper, *I will sustain that the anthropological question concerning what it means to be human is ultimately linked to conformity to Christ and cannot be separated from our God-given vocation as the icon of God. The ramifications of this statement, I will also sustain, are far-reaching because this would imply that genuine human living denotes a fundamental truth, that living the life humanity was created to live is ultimately relational. Therefore, refusal to live under Christ so as to live under hebel is dehumanizing since such an act effectively reduces all relations towards the transactional.*

In order to do so, I must first discuss what happens if we decide not conform to Jesus and decide to place ourselves under *hebel*. This examination will give way to the positive side of the argument by explaining what does it mean to conform to Jesus through a study of Phil 2,1-11. Lastly, I will extrapolate the theological implications of living out the Christian vocation in today’s world.

In the end, it is hoped that such reflections will not only expound what it means to be human from a biblical perspective but also give hope and encouragement to our readers to live full and genuine human lives under Christ and to the advantage of the other.

2. If you worship *hebel*, you become *hebel* (Jer 2,5)

The pseudeipgrahon *The Apocalypse of Abraham* tells the story of how Abraham not only rejects idolatry but also how he comes to meet the one true creator God face-to-face.¹² The first eight chapters of this work, in a semi-comical way, recounts how Abraham observes that his father, Terah, is “the god of his gods, because they come into being from his sculpting, his planning, and his skill” (*Apoc Ab* 3,3). What is more is that Abraham observes how lifeless are each of the idols that his father had made since one idol lost its head (*Apoc Ab* 1,5-9), another was crushed and sunk in the sea (*Apoc Ab* 2,4-9), and yet another was burnt up in the fire (*Apoc Ab* 5,6-10).

In reality, such a critique on idolatry, while comical, explains a poignant truth: idols are devoid of life. Throughout Scriptures, there is a contrast between God, who not only is life itself but also the only one who has the power and ability to create, and idols, who in their lifelessness, “have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see” (Ps 115,5). It stands to reason then the statement “gods made by human hands” (Deut 4,28) is an “oxymoron”¹³ – just as the *Apocalypse of Abraham* makes clear – because the creative force and power stands with God alone.

In-between these two poles, of life and lifelessness, we find humanity, living icons of God. Indeed, on the one hand, it is clear that humans cannot create as God can create but, on the other, unlike idols, they are able to see and speak.¹⁴ Such a critique that places humanity in-between God and idols has the rhetorical value of warning Israel of what would happen if Israel decides to fall prey to the trap of making and worshiping idols: they will become like them, devoid of life and unable to live life genuinely as humans. In being unable to truly see, speak, and hear (Ps 115,8), humanity would *conform* to idols rather than God.

The paradigmatic episode that explains just this is the heartbreaking episode of the golden calf in Exodus 32. At the beginning of this unhappy episode, we find the people impatient with Moses who has remained on the top of Sinai talking with God face-to-face (Ex 32,1). This impatience eventually leads the people to instruct Aaron to make a god for them, which Aaron duly does by making a golden calf (Ex 32,2-3). Upon doing so, not only do the people cry out “this is your god” who brought out

of the land of Egypt (Ex 32,4; c.f. 1 Kings 12,28) but also, in the most deplorable of ways, does Aaron say that, tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord (YHWH) effectively making the calf the false icon of God (Ex 32,5). The depravity reaches its climax when they celebrate by eating and drinking in a way that symbolized the ratification of the pact as was done in Ex 24,11.

The implications of all this are far-reaching. In contrast to Moses' "covenantal friendship" with God, Aaron and the people "mechanize" the relationship between them and God which creates a transactional affiliation devoid of all true sense of relationship.

In other terms, the association between "god" and the people becomes almost magical – so much so that, when asked what he did, Aaron simply states that he threw the gold in the fire and out came the calf (Ex 32,24) as if the process was automatic and mechanical. In truth, if Moses' relationship with God is intimate, habitual, reciprocal, and even at times emotional¹⁵, Aaron's affiliation with the golden calf is precisely the opposite: superficial, momentary, self-involved and devoid of emotion. Rather than dealing with persons, such an affiliation is one with a lifeless object. And, since we conform with what we worship, such an affiliation causes Aaron (and the people) to wither away not all that dissimilar to that lifeless calf.

All of this, of course, does not go unnoticed by God who tells Moses that this people, in acting perversely, are a stiff-necked (*qəšeh`oreph*) people (Ex 32,9; see also Ex 33,3.5; 34,9). Now, while this Hebrew phrase is often interpreted to mean obstinate or stubborn (c.f. Jer 17,23), I think that this phrase has a deeper meaning. After all, in this episode, we not only see that Israel is called stiff-necked precisely in connection to their going astray from God but also that it called this in connection to the construction of the bull, an undomesticated animal that needs to be "broken-in" if it is to be able to do what it is supposed to do.

In this way, since you conform to what you worship, just as the undomesticated bull without a yoke is stiff-necked and is unable to plow straight paths, so too is Israel unable to walk on the straight paths that lead to its true God, the God who truly redeemed them from the land of bondage. In being unable to do so, Israel *dehumanizes itself* which

is best exhibited in their running out of control like a wild beast or a camel in heat to the derision of other nations (Ex 32,25; c.f. Jer 2,20.23). In being “stiffed-necked”, the turning away from God was not simply a momentary lapse of judgement but rather about “the loss of trust in God, about the act of disobedience, and a subsequent rupture in a unique relationship that used to bind God and human beings.”¹⁶

In dehumanizing themselves, in becoming like an undomesticated beast, Israel not only rebels against the one true God but also negates its own sense of self-worth. It is no wonder, then, Jeremiah, on reflecting on such acts, asks *what wrong did your ancestors find in me [God] that they went far from me, and went after hebel and become hebel themselves* (Jer 2,5)?

But what does *hebel* mean?¹⁷ While *hebel* is a notorious word to translate, we can state that this term literally means “air” or “vapor” as in Job 7,16, Ps 62,9; 144,4, and Isa 57,13. In all these cases, the use of the word *hebel* is something negative that refers to something that is here one moment and gone the next. And yet, in most cases, as in Deut 32,21, 1 Kings 16,13.26, 2 Kings 17,15, and Jer 2,5, this term is used symbolically to express the “nothingness” of idols that, according to Isa 57,13, are here one moment but gone the next. To put it plainly, by worshiping lifeless idols who cannot speak, listen, see, or walk, Israel becomes just as lifeless – as they worship nothing, they become nothing.

The repercussions of the dehumanizing effect of idolatry are far-reaching because they do not only affect the vertical relationship between Israel and God – that would be bad enough. This dehumanization of idolatry likewise affects the horizontal relationship among not only human beings themselves but also the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation.

It is not without reason, therefore, that after telling Israel that they became nothing, Jeremiah reminds the people that they are stained with the lifeblood of the poor (Jer 2,34) thereby polluting the land (Jer 3,2). In the New Testament, Paul says as much when he tells us that, in not acknowledging God as God, people were filled with every kind of wickedness even towards each other (Rom 1,18-30; c.f. Ps 81,11-12). In all of this, it is clear that when humanity freely decides to worship nothing,

it becomes nothing which completely distorts “genuine humanness”¹⁸ since everything becomes transactionally self-centered in both vertical and horizontal dimensions of life.

If truth be told, if this was the end of the story, Israel’s chance of flourishing would have come to an abrupt end. And yet, we know that it does not. The larger context of the ill-fated episode of the golden calf is the giving of the law (Ex 20–34). This law, called a yoke in Sir 51,26, is the antidote to Israel’s stiff-neck because, in putting it on, it has the function to act as a tether which keeps Israel clinging to God that “tugs” Israel back to God whenever Israel strays too far.

It is this yoke of the law that permits Israel to live out its true identity that “revolves around how Israel lives for God alone, something that is expressed in Israel’s submission and obedience to the will of the Lord.”¹⁹ In submitting to God and purifying its heart, it was hoped that Israel could indeed live out life in its most genuine form; in being holy as God is holy (Lev 19,1-2), Israel was called to love both God and neighbor (Deut 6,4-9; Lev 19,9-18).

It is no coincidence, then, that the psalm of the *miserere* requires us all to have a “broken spirit” – typical of the wild animal who is broken-in – if we are to rediscover our humanity and to live the life we were created to live (Ps 51,17) under God. The alternative is to become as fleeting as the wind and as lifeless as the idol.

3. Living as genuine human beings necessitates conformity to Christ

3.1. Conformity implies participation in Christ

In the previous section, I hope that I explained what are the consequences of humanity’s free decision to worship idols: in becoming nothing, every relationship that was forged for flourishing withers – be it the relationship between God and humanity, among human beings themselves, or humanity and the rest of creation.

I also explained that, in understanding humanity’s finicky heart, God does not leave us to our own devices. Rather, he gives us a tool, a yoke, which would allow us to keep on the straight path that leads to God himself. And this yoke is none other than the law whose final aim

is to help bring about what God desires from us: to love God with all of one's being and to love one's neighbor as oneself. As this implies *shalom*, the "webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight,"²⁰ this is at the heart of what it means to live truly human lives.

And yet, as I have explained elsewhere, Israel was not able to keep the peace – neither between itself and God nor amongst each other. Such peace, after all, was only possible through the decisive act of God in which he sent his own son as an atoning sacrifice to make the pact right. Indeed, Christ's saving act on the cross made justification – the renewal of the pact – possible by reconciling all of creation, and humanity most of all, to God (2 Cor 5,18-20). In this way then the "*purpose of Christ's death was not merely to offer forgiveness of sins so that people could go on their merry way*. Rather, its purpose was to completely reorient human existence towards God [...], expressed in living for Christ rather than for self."²¹

It is no surprise, therefore, that "every serious reader of Paul has long recognized [...] the cross of Jesus the Messiah stands at the heart of Paul's vision of the one true God."²² This cross, in fact, stands in the middle of time and divides what came before and after and is the key means which God uses to make the pact, marred by human rebellion, right.

But there is more to the cross. Indeed, if at the heart of the cross is *kenosis*, a self-emptying love, then it is indicative of a God whose very nature is a giving of himself to his creation.²³ Indeed, the very act of creation is *kenotic* because God, all-powerful and transcendent, created creation not to be exploited or dominated over with brute force but rather for the sole purpose of having an abiding covenant of peace and communion.

Therefore, if the cross is something which "defines" some part of God, then this cross must also be the embodiment of a lifestyle – the lifestyle of cruciformity – that the believer is called to live if the believer is to remain attached to Christ. The cross, then, is at the heart of Christian spirituality both because it is the best way to experience God and also because it is at the heart of the lifestyle of each and every believer.

It is this conformity with the cross that Pauline scholars call

“participation.” Indeed, participation, firstly, requires that humanity partakes in the same *kenotic* life of God through baptism – through which we are incorporated into Christ –, and secondly, our free decision to partake in the same cruciform lifestyle that Christ himself lived. Anything less than this makes participation impossible because it is neither mechanical nor magical but rather based on the reciprocity of the pact forged at the beginning and made possible again through the cross.

This conviction is neatly encapsulated in the phrase “Christ is the *telos* of the law” (Rom 10,4) because this means that the final aim of the law, true human flourishing as witnessed in a genuine love of God and love of neighbour, can only be truly actualized if we participate in Christ – the sharing of Christ’s life and living for Christ rather than for self. Consequently, we are required to examine how did Jesus Christ live and conform to him if we are to live genuinely as humans. And, I think, the best place to see how Christ’s story and humanity’s story interconnects is witnessed in Phil 2,1-11.

3.2. Conforming to the God of *kenosis*: a study on Phil 2,1-11

3.2.1. The text

¹If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

3.2.2. A comment on the *kenosis* and *exaltation* of Christ and those who are Christlike

In Phil 2,1-5, Paul focuses on the internal relationships among the members of the community living life in Christ. This part of the text concerns four premises about what does the life in Christ (Phil 2,1) implies: a request to be of one mind (Phil 2,2a), and a series of phrases describing the nature of that one mind in terms of unity and humility (others-oriented love rather than self-interest; Phil 2,2b-4).

Paul does this to make an important point: if the community is to be *Christlike*, then it must be in communion with each other in cruciform living. This implies that it does nothing for selfish ambition; rather, in humility, each member regards the other as better than oneself. Therefore, far from the transactional and mechanical model that there was between the calf and the people, based on self-ambition and conceit, Paul exhorts the community to have an intimate, habitual, reciprocal, and even emotional bond with one another not dissimilar to that friendship that Moses himself had with God.

This, of course, is only possible if we are of the same bent of mind as Jesus (Phil 2,5).²⁴ After all, it is only by having the same bent of mind of Jesus, in conforming to him, can we experience a lasting communion with him (vertical) and with others (horizontal). Therefore, in Phil 2,1-5, Paul makes the claim that there is a necessary correspondence between the pattern of Christ's story and the pattern of life of those who are "in Christ."

Moving to the hymn itself, Phil 2,5 is both a conclusion and opening. Indeed, as Phil 2,6 opens with a relative clause, it is important to understand that the "who" that we are talking about is none other than Jesus Christ. In essence, the text portrays Christ, in contrast to the self-exalting behaviour of Adam and of Roman emperors, as the fulfilment of the Isaianic servant of God, the one who was equal to God but willingly became a human being and suffered on the cross. He was consequently exalted by God to the position of Lord, sharing in the honour due God alone.²⁵

In Phil 2,6, Paul recognizes that Jesus was "the form of God" which really means that he is equal to God (and therefore God). And yet,

although he is the omnipotent and transcendent God, Jesus did not exploit this to his own advantage.

Rather, in v. 7, Paul tells us that he emptied (*kenosis*) himself and took the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. Therefore, the *kenotic* nature of Jesus is found in the incarnation: the self-lowering that becoming human implied for one equal to God. Indeed, “form of God” is contrasted to “form of slave” and is fleshed out in the following expression “being born in human likeness.” What is more is that, God that he was (everlasting and omnipotent), Jesus furthered humbled himself by dying on the cross (v. 8).

What Phil 2,6-8 offers is an interpretation of Christ’s incarnation and death as a pattern of non-self-centered, self-giving obedience, in basic continuity with the narrative of Isaiah’s suffering servant. In fact, the link between “servant/slave” and “obedience” in vv. 7-8, not only underscores this link but also contrasts Jesus’ obedience with Adam’s disobedience (c.f. Rom 5,12-21).²⁶ The whole sequence is kenotic, self-emptying, and downwardly oriented. It is an un-Roman résumé of shame, a counter-cultural and upending of what society thought should have happened.²⁷

In other words, from the point of view of the Greco-Roman, Jesus “acted *out of character*”²⁸ – in a shockingly ungodlike manner –, when he emptied and humbled himself; it was sheer and utter folly as it was a stumbling block for Jews (1 Cor 1,23). But for the Christian, who understands that this was always typical of God, it was not “out of character” at all; rather, Jesus was showing, by this humbling, that he was indeed God. Therefore, *kenosis* does not mean that Christ emptied himself of his divinity but rather manifested his divinity, his equality with God.²⁹

Moving on to the second part of the hymn, Phil 2,9-11, the “therefore” stresses Jesus’ exaltation by God as a direct consequence of Christ’s obedience. The “imperial and cosmic overtones of [these verses] should not be missed. Jesus is honored along with God the Father as integral to the divine identity.”³⁰ Thus, if Jesus shares in the reign of God over all creation it is because he was, is, and remains equal to God. If this is so, it stands to reason that Jesus claims the “rightful rule over all the

cosmos”³¹ which challenging all others – includes any and all idols – “who might issue a claim to universal sovereignty or demand worship from humans or other creatures.”³²

Again, based on the pattern of the suffering servant, God rewards and exalts the servant for fulfilling his mission in dying.³³ Some have wondered whether God exalts Christ to a position “higher” than (promoting) or otherwise different from the “equality with God” he possessed according to Phil 2,6. That is impossible since being God is as high as one can go!

What these verses suggest is that human beings will appropriately render a kind of homage to Jesus that is properly due only to God. The “therefore” of v. 9, then, explains that God has *vindicated* and understood Jesus’ self-emptying and self-humbling as the display of true divinity that he already had and continues to have and that makes the worship of Jesus as Lord “perfectly appropriate.”³⁴

This is Christ’s story. But if this hymn is the best way to understand participation, then Phil 2,6-11 must also present our story, wherein the community of believers are to be “a living exegesis”³⁵ of it. As Christ’s story had two parts to it, abasement and exaltation, so too must the Christian story have.³⁶

As to the abasement, this is witnessed concretely in conformity with the cross. “The cross, then, is neither simply two pieces of wood put together to kill a person nor simply a burden to be borne. Rather, it should also be understood as a lifestyle that the Christian must live – that lifestyle typical of the *poor in spirit* who seek the Kingdom and God’s righteousness before anything else (Mt 6,33; Lk 12,31).”³⁷ The point of such abasement is to conform to Christ and to live to the advantage of the other as Christ does for us all.

What of vindication? This vindicated exaltation is simply the natural consequence of living life as fully human in conformity with Christ; if we live the life of perfection in cruciform living in the here and now, we too will take our rightful place in the kingdom of God living out the creational goal of communion when Christ comes again. In this way, just as Revelation prophesizes, those who hold fast to the lamb will partake in his life as the children of God when heavenly Jerusalem comes down consummating the kingdom forever more (Rev 21,1-7).

4. What it means to be human: the relational vocation of the imago Dei

In this essay, I have attempted to explain what humanity is within a biblical perspective. To begin with, I grounded the anthropological question “what is a man?” on the theological revelation that humanity is created in the image and likeness of God. This indicates that we cannot understand what it means to live genuine human lives unless we live in accordance to, and in conformity with, this God-given vocation.

I, then, explained what happens when we reject such a God-given vocation and conform to idols: we dehumanize ourselves becoming similar to the idols we worship, idols which are *hebel*, here today but gone tomorrow.

Lastly, I moved on to explain what it means to live genuine human lives by conforming to Jesus and living Christlike lives in conformity with the cross. Here, in fact, I explained how true human flourishing can only be possible if we submit to Christ for his story is also humanity’s story wherein the inter-webbing of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is the natural consequence of kenotic cruciformity.

In this, I hope that I have persuaded my audience that the *anthropological question concerning what it means to be human is ultimately linked to conformity to Christ and cannot be separated from our God-given vocation as the icon of God.*

It is also hoped that I have likewise persuaded my audience that human flourishing is ultimately relational, wherein the relationships between God and humanity and humanity amongst itself (within the larger context of creation) are real relationships based on intimacy, habitualness, reciprocity, and even some emotion. Moreover, if idolatry effectively flattens relationships to be superficial, momentary, self-involved, and devoid of emotion, then being found under idols effectively dehumanizes us and makes us *hebel*, as fleeting as the wind and as lifeless as the golden calf.

Of course, this conclusion is not just important in principle; rather, it must be translated in our everyday living even with our contemporary age of the twenty-first century. What I mean here is that, while there

are many places around the world where the worship of idols made by human hands still happens, this is not the only type of idolatry that contemporary humanity can be guilty of.

Certainly, even Jesus himself makes clear that “mammon” (Mt 6,24; Lk 16,13) or “the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things” (Mk 4,19; see also Mt 13,22; Lk 8,14) can become one’s “master” (Mt 6,24; Lk 16,13). Allowing ourselves to be aligned to such idols will work to our disadvantage for, in dehumanizing ourselves, we will yield no fruit and we will effectively wither and die.

This dehumanization, in fact, can be said to warp all relationships since it effectively flattens out the dynamism of relationship in which transactions become the *modus vivendi* of all life. Indeed, from this point of view, as we saw with Aaron in Ex 32,25, gods, humans, and the rest of creation simply turn into automatic vending machines doling out whatever we think we desire. And yet, for those who end up like this, all that can be found is death and destruction.

In our contemporary world, this call to be careful of dehumanized interactions can also seem to be a primary challenge in the world of artificial intelligence and social media. While such things can certainly be harnessed and used for the benefit of humankind, it is also true that contemporary society can become more transactional, momentary, self-centered, and superficial if such things are used unwisely; after all, having hundreds of “friends” on social media does not always translate into intimate and lasting relationships.

If my claim is correct that all forms of idolatry boil down to entrenching one’s “heart” into anything that is not God, thereby “exchanging the glory of the immortal God” (Rom 1,23) with that which is created, then it is possible that things like artificial intelligence and social media can become idolatric because, if used unwisely, they too can become “gods made by human hands” and can cut us off from the very things that make us human.

In the end, if the antidote to Israel’s stiff-neck was the yoke of the law in the Old Testament, then the antidote provided in the New Testament is the yoke of Christ (Mt 11,28-30) for this yoke, while gentle and light, will keep our heart on the straight path that leads to the kingdom,

a kingdom in which all humanity can flourish because it can live life through the dynamism of relationship, seeking the intimate, habitual, reciprocal and even emotional ties that bind us not only to each other but also to God who created, redeemed, and sanctified us.

If, then, we desire to flourish, we would do well to “seek first the righteousness of God and his kingdom” (Mt 6,33) for just as “God has an undivided love for all humanity and demonstrates this in action”³⁸ so too must the disciple have “a total, undivided allegiance to God.”³⁹ As this means “detaching oneself from that which separates from God,”⁴⁰ living genuinely as humans requires us to purify our hearts and submit to Jesus for this is the only path that allows us to not only submit to each other (Eph 5,21) in kenotic cruciformity but also the only way that we can grasp the very desire of our hearts and the very scope of our creation: shalomic rest.

Notes

1. JASON MASTON, “Introduction”, *Anthropology and New Testament Theology* (ed. JASON MASTON – BENJAMIN E. REYNOLDS) (LNTS 529; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2018) 2.
2. MASTON, “Introduction”, 1.
3. YAIR LORBERBAUM, “Human dignity in the Jewish tradition”, *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity. Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (ed. MARCUS DÜWELL et al.) (Cambridge 2014) 137.
4. See LORBERBAUM, “Human dignity in the Jewish tradition”, 135.
5. JUSTIN SCHEMBRI, “Made in the Image of God. Towards an Understanding of the Christian’s Modus Vivendi”, *Favur il-Hajja fil-Ġuf* (ed. RAYMOND GATT) (Knisja Elfejn 135; Rabat, Malta: Publikazzjonijiet Dumnikani 2021) 55-56. See also CATHERINE L. MCDOWELL, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden. The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5–3:24 in light of mīs pî pīt pî and wpt-r rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt* (Siphrut 15; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2015) 18; JAMES P. WARE, *Paul’s Theology in Context. Creation, Incarnation, Covenant, and Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans 2019) 30.
6. JUSTIN SCHEMBRI, “Sitting Mary as a corrective to Standing Martha (Lk 10,38-42). Hospitality as *Shalom* in practice”, *Il-Virtù tal-Ospitalità* (ed.

- RAYMOND GATT) (Knisja Elfejn 143; Rabat, Malta: Pubblikazzjonijiet Dumnikani 2023) 17.
7. SCHEMBRI, “Made in the Image of God”, 56
 8. SCHEMBRI, “Made in the Image of God”, 56.
 9. See SIMON DÜRR, *Paul on the Human Vocation*. Reason language in Romans and Ancient Philosophical Tradition (BZAW 226; Berlin: Walter De Gruyter 2021) 17.
 10. BRIAN S. ROSNER, “Son of God at the Centre. Anthropology in Biblical-Theological Perspective”, *Anthropology and New Testament Theology* (ed. JASON MASTON – BENJAMIN E. REYNOLDS) (LNTS 529; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2018) 227.
 11. ROSNER, “Son of God at the Centre”, 228.
 12. This was written at the end of the first century AD. For the text, see RYSZARD RUBINKIEWICZ – HORCE G. LUNT (trans. and revised), “The Apocalypse of Abraham”, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. I. Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments. New translations from authoritative texts with introductions and critical notes by an international team of scholars (ed. J. H. CHARLESWORTH) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 2019) 689-705.
 13. YAEL AVRAHAMI, *The Senses of Scripture*. Sensory perception in the Hebrew Bible (LHBOTS 545; London 2014) 190.
 14. See AVRAHAMI, *The Senses of Scripture*, 189.
 15. See JACQUELINE E. LAPSLEY, “Friends with God? Moses and the possibility of covenantal friendship”, *Interpretation* 58 (2004) 117-129.
 16. DOMINIKA A. KUREK-CHOMYCZ, “Sincerity and Chastity for Christ. A textual problem in 2 Cor. 11:3 reconsidered”, *Novum Testamentum* 49 (2007) 82. See also JUSTIN SCHEMBRI, “‘Baptism into Moses’ (1 Cor 10,2). Mosaic incorporation and its Christian consequence”, *Perspettivi Fuq Mosè* (ed. RAYMOND GATT) (Knisja Elfejn 138; Rabat, Malta: Pubblikazzjonijiet Dumnikani 2021) 32-33.
 17. The difficulty in understanding the term can be seen in how the different translations try to translate it. For instance, the KJV, NAS, NRSV all read “vanity.” The NIV reads “meaningless.” The NJB reads “futile.” Other translations from scholars are “useless” and “absurd.” For scholarly discussions on word hebel, see RUSSELL L. MEEK, “Twentieth- and Twenty-first-century Readings of Hebel (לִבְהָ) in Ecclesiastes”, *Currents in Biblical Research* 14 (2016) 279-297; MARK SNEED, “לִבְהָ as ‘Worthless’ in Qoheleth. A critique of Michael V. Fox’s ‘Absurd’ Thesis”, *Journal of*

- Biblical Literature* 136 (2017) 879-894; SAMUEL T. S. GOH, “The Hebel World, its Ambiguities and Contradictions”, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 45 (2020) 198-216.
18. DÜRR, *Paul on the Human Vocation*, 161.
 19. JUSTIN SCHEMBRI, “On the Unity of the Two Testaments. How is the Torah a law for Christians?”, *Nova et Vetera, English edition* 18 (2020) 1332.
 20. CORNELIUS PLANTINGA, JR., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be. A breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans 1995) 11.
 21. MICHAEL J. GORMAN, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord. A theological introduction to Paul and his letters. Second edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans 2017) 364. See SCHEMBRI, “Made in the Image of God”, 58.
 22. NICHOLAS T. WRIGHT, *Paul. In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 2005) 96.
 23. God however always remains God. Jesus always remains God. *Kenosis* therefore is not to be understood as if Jesus was not divine. This remark is simply stating that God, in the very act of creation, invites something unlike him to enter into communion. Also, Jesus, in the incarnation, humbles himself, God that he is, and becomes man. The cross, therefore, is typical of God’s logic of what it means to be all-powerful and to use that power.
 24. See GORMAN, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 501.
 25. See MICHAEL J. GORMAN, “‘Although/Because He was in the Form of God’. The Theological significance of Paul’s Master Story (Phil 2:6-11)”, *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 1 (2007) 152.
 26. In agreement with Gorman, the Christology present here is essentially Caledonian since it affirms that Christ embodies both true divinity and, as the antitype of Adam, true humanity. See GORMAN, “Although/Because He was in the Form of God”, 149.
 27. See GORMAN, “Although/Because He was in the Form of God”, 153.
 28. GORMAN, “Although/Because He was in the Form of God”, 161.
 29. See GORMAN, “Although/Because He was in the Form of God”, 162.
 30. GORMAN, “Although/Because He was in the Form of God”, 164.
 31. GORMAN, “Although/Because He was in the Form of God”, 164.
 32. GORMAN, “Although/Because He was in the Form of God”, 164.
 33. *See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high* (Isa 52,13). *Therefore, I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death* (Isa 53,12).

34. GORMAN, “Although/Because He was in the Form of God”, 164.
35. GORMAN, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 510.
36. See RICHARD J. WEYMOUTH, “The Christ-Story of Philippians 2:6-11. Narrative shape and paraenetic purpose in Paul’s letter to Philippi”, *Tyndale Bulletin* 67 (2016) 317-320.
37. SCHEMBRI, “Sitting Mary as a corrective to Standing Martha”, 24.
38. PATRICK J. HARTIN, “Call to be Perfect through Suffering (James 1,2-4). The concept of perfection in the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount”, *Biblica* 77 (1996) 486.
39. HARTIN, “Call to be Perfect”, 486.
40. GERHARD DELLING, “τέλος, τελέω, ἐπιτελέω, συντελέω, συντέλεια, παντελής, τέλειος, τελειότης, τελειόω, τελείωσις, τελειωτής”, *TDNT* VIII, 74.

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- , “Made in the Image of God. Towards an Understanding of the Christian’s Modus Vivendi”, *Favur il-Hajja fil-Ġuf* (ed. RAYMOND GATT) (Knisja Elfejn 135; Rabat, Malta: Pubblikazzjonijiet Dumnikani 2021) 53-68.

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Dr Michael Galea huwa lettur anzjan fid-Dipartiment tas-Saħha Mentali fl-Università ta' Malta u wkoll psikologu kliniku u terapista tal-familja. Studja t-Teologija Pastorali fl-Università ta' Londra u wara mar jistudja l-Psikologija fl-Università ta' Loyola, Baltimore fl-Istati Uniti, fejn speċjalizza fuq it-trauma fost it-tfal. Hu hadem f'diversi pajjiżi fosthom l-Istati Uniti, l-Ingilterra u l-Kenja. Hu midhla sew tal-midja soċjali kemm bhala preżentatur u anki ha sehem f'diversi programmi fuq it-televiżjoni u r-radju. Riċentement huwa beda sensiela ta' riflessjonijiet qosra ta' minuta bl-Ingliż fuq *You Tube*.

Prof. Fr Paul Galea wara li kiseb il-Masters fit-Teologija Pastorali fl-1979, kompli l-istudji tiegħu fl-Università Pontifiċja Gregorjana f'Ruma fejn kiseb Baċellerat fil-Psikologija (1981) u Liċenzjat fl-istess suġġett (1982). Imbagħad huwa beda l-istudji għad-Dottorat fil-Pastoral Counseling fl-Università ta' Loyola, Baltimore, fl-Istati Uniti. Mill-1996 huwa kien Senior Lecturer fil-Fakultà tat-Teologija fl-Università ta' Malta u lecturer fil-Psikologija fid-Dipartiment tal-Psikologija. Huwa kien kap tad-Dipartiment tat-Teologija Pastorali mis-sena 2000 u Deputy Dean tal-Fakultà tat-Teologija. Kien membru tas-Senat tal-Università ta' Malta mill-2001 sal-2011.

Fr Raymond Gatt OP twieled fil-Belt Valletta fl-1966. Daħal fl-Ordni tal-Predikaturi fl-1983 u ġie ordnat presbiteru fl-1993. Huwa studja l-Filosofija, is-Soċjoloġija u l-Psikoloġija (1986-89) u t-Teoloġija (1989-92) fl-Università ta' Malta u wara kompla l-istudju tiegħu fl-*Institute Catholique de Toulouse* fi Franza fejn kiseb il-Liċenzjat fit-Teoloġija fl-1994. Huwa serva f'diversi uffičċji tal-Ordni Dumnikan kemm f'Malta u anki għal xi żmien fl-Albanija. Huwa ilu editur tar-rivista Dumnikana *Knisja 2000* sa mill-1994. Bħalissa huwa qiegħed iwettaq il-ħidma pastorali tiegħu fil-knisja ta' Sidtna Marija tal-Għar u ta' San Duminku fir-Rabat u huwa membru tal-Kunsill Presbiterali tal-Arcidjoċesi ta' Malta.

Dr Vickie Gauci hija lecturer fid-Dipartiment tal-istudji tad-Dizabbiltà tal-Fakultà tas-Social Wellbeing, fl-Università ta' Malta. Hija għandha Dottorat mill-Università ta' Leeds, l-Ingilterra. Ir-riċerka tagħha għandha t-titlu ta' 'Enabling Technology and Employment exploring the dis/ability assemblage'. Vickie hija Occupational Therapist u għandha Masters fi neurohabilitation mill-Università Brunel ta' Londra. Hija riċerkatriċi b' dizabbiltà u hija membru tal-Bord Editorjali għar-rivista internazzjonali 'Disability and Society'. Ir-riċerka tagħha hi ffukata fuq id-dizabbiltà.

Prof. Mary Anne Lauri ggradwat permezz ta' Baċellerat fil-Psikoloġija mill-Università ta' Malta u mbagħad kisbet Masters fil-Psikoloġija Soċjali mill-London School of Economics (LSE). Hija ħadet id-Dottorat mill-Università ta' Londra taħt is-supervizjoni tal-Professor George Gaskell. Bdiet tgħallem fl-Università ta' Malta bħala Assistant Lecturer fl-1992. Bejn l-2006 u l-2016 kienet Pro-Rettur responsabbli mill-istudenti u l-materji istituzzjonali tal-Università ta' Malta. L-interess tagħha huwa fil-psikoloġija soċjali fejn jidhlu issues ta' reliġjon, saħħa u midja. Hija kienet president tal-Assoċjazzjoni Psikoloġi Maltin bejn l-2004 u l-2008.

Fr Justin Schembri OP daħal fl-Ordni tal-Predikaturi fl-1997. Wara n-novizzjat (2000) u l-professjoni sempliċi (2001), huwa studja l-Filosofija u l-Psikoloġija fl-Università ta' Malta. Fl-2004 huwa beda l-istudju tat-Teoloġija fil-Fakultà di Teologia dell'Emilia Romagna (FTER) f'Bologna. Fl-1 ta' Lulju 2007 huwa ġie ordnat presbiteru. Fl-2008 kompla l-istudji tiegħu fil-Pontificio Istituto Biblico (PIB) f'Ruma fejn kiseb il-Liċenzjat fl-Iskrittura Mqaddsa (2012). Imbagħad huwa għadda biex ikompli l-istudji għad-Dottorat fit-Teoloġija Biblika fejn fl-2018 huwa kiseb id-Dottorat mill-Pontificia Università San

Tommaso d'Aquino (Angelicum), fejn issa qiegħed jgħallem full-time it-Teologija Biblika.

Fr Dunstan Xuereb huwa saċerdot tal-Arċidjoċesi ta' Malta sa mill-2006. Qabel ma beda l-istudju tiegħu għas-saċerdozju huwa kellu l-Baċellerat fil-Psikologija mill-Università ta' Malta. Wara huwa kompli l-istudju tiegħu fil-Filosofija u t-Teologija fl-istess Università fejn ha l-Baċellerat u l-Liċenzjat fit-Teologija. Wara sentejn hidma pastorali huwa kompli l-istudju tiegħu fil-Loyola University f'Maryland fl-Istati Uniti fejn kiseb l-MS u CAS fil-Pastoral Counselling.



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