

## **Family, the Primordial Locus for Wisdom (Prov 4:1-9): Parents' Role in Faith Transmission**

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### **Introduction**

It is a fact that family is the nucleus or the fundamental cell of any socio-political or religious organization at all levels, be it ethnic, tribal, state, national, continental or universal. It is “the place where parents pass on the faith to their children”.<sup>1</sup> Children are born in families, where their parents nurture them to maturity so as to cope with life and make the best out of it. The family is the primordial locus for wisdom instruction, which ultimately subsists in religious faith or belief. When this aspect fails, it reflects negatively in society.

Today, in addition to some postmodern ideologies and practices, some debilitating state legislation have made some parents neglect their sapiential didactic duty, bequeathing this primary task to secondary agents. By legalizing amorphous practices and unions, states create laws that prevent parents from carrying out their proper didactic duties towards their children.

Proverb 4:1-9 is a didactically sapiential text that gives a model of how parents should instruct their children in wisdom. The text equates wisdom and her cognates with the *tōrāh* (Law). In the NT, Jesus Christ replaces the Law. Using Proverbs 4 and related texts, this paper highlights the indispensable role of parents in the formation of their children's faith, and then hints at the danger inherent in neglecting, obstructing or interfering with this duty. Given human freedom and some state legislation, parents have limited time to get the children on the right track to true wisdom. As such, the need to begin from the cradle is thus emphasized.

### **1. Methodology and Scope of the Research**

This research analyses the leading text historico-critically, using the traditional tools, in order to ascertain how wisdom was transmitted in ancient Israel. Family being the locus for wisdom instruction, investigative and analytic methods are used to uncover the state of affairs in contemporary family. The investigation is not limited to any locale since the family is a universal reality that is affected almost by the same postmodern factors everywhere.

### **2. The Family Context of Proverbs 1:1-9:18**

Out of the nine sections in Proverbs, the first section, 1:1-9:18, which serves as a prologue to the whole book, is the latest collection. It is a theological reflection on wisdom. This section is full of instructions, which normally begin with an address like, “My son/child/children, listen to your father's instruction”, “take my word to your heart”, “forget not my teaching”, etc. (cf. 1:8; 2:1; 3:1, 21; 4:1, 10, 20; 5:1,7; 6:1, 20; 7:1). This supports the proposal that wisdom sayings originated first in homes before the organized-court wisdom. The father reinforced in his

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<sup>1</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, 3rd Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 2014),no. 33; cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (November 24, 2013), no. 66; Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (December 07, 1965), no. 52.

teaching the ethos of family, delineating, among others, two heinous misdeeds, which youngsters should avoid: bad company that concocts evil ways of getting rich quick (1:11-14, 2:10-15), and illicit sexual pleasures (5:1-6; 6:23-29). These and many other vices lead young people to perdition. Crenshaw discussing this issue remarks:

In both instances the father manipulates the rival discourse, underscoring the dangers accompanying such misconduct. He even reinforces his own authority by appealing metaphorically to a higher level, the transcendental, on which God disciplines wayward children. Furthermore, the father confesses that he was once a child, in this way drawing adults into the discourse and uniting the generations. Occasionally, the father appeals to the authority of [the] torah, a body of teaching that protects those who walk in its paths. A mother's voice, although never audible, gives additional weight to the warnings against dangerous conduct.<sup>2</sup>

The mother's voice is clearly expressed in the personified wisdom. In 1:20-33, Wisdom raises her voice at the public squares and city gates and calls on the simpletons to knowledge, but they ignore her. She outlines the impending peril for the obstinate and the reward of security for the obedient (1:32-33). In chapter 8, this Lady Wisdom continues her call like a mother on her children (*wā 'attāhbānīm*, and now my sons) to listen to her instruction, stressing again the outcome of each choice (8:34-36). In chapter 9, as the Lady Wisdom invites the simpleton to her banquet, as a mother normally does (9:1-6), the Dame Folly equally does the same (9:13-17).

Although scholars regard Proverbs 1-9 as a post-exilic construction, judging from its high theological presentation of wisdom, these chapters delineate the role parents played in the transmission of wisdom to their children in families. The silence of the trainee in all these texts, normal for such instructions in Ancient Near East (ANE), denotes how children were resolutely loyal to their parents. It is only in an Egyptian instruction, *Anii*, that "a son actually responds to his dad's teachings, insisting that the vigorous moral demands are beyond his capability".<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Proverbs 4:1-9

Following the didactic family form of instruction, the sage summons his sons to wisdom. Some scholars propose that the address, 'my son/sons', is not that of a father to a child, but a teacher to a pupil, given the conspicuous presence of wisdom teachers in ANE in Solomon's days.<sup>4</sup> This notwithstanding, it could be more *ad rem* to say that it is not all 'my son/sons' addresses in Proverbs that come directly from family settings. The sages modelled their addresses to their pupils in the primordial wisdom form originating from homes; if not so, they could not have used family terminologies. Proverb 4:1-9 proves that the sages' sayings were heavily influenced by the collections from their parents' homes.

#### 3.1 A Call to Filial Obedience, Verses 1-2

The sage calls, *šim 'û bānīm mūsar 'āb* (v. 1, "hear, o sons, a father's instruction"). Up to this point in Proverbs, this address has been in the singular (*bānî*, my son...1:8; 2:1; 3:1, 21). The poet

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<sup>2</sup> James L. Crenshaw, "Proverbs, the Book of" in *ABD*, vol. 5, 515.

<sup>3</sup> Crenshaw, "Proverbs," 515.

<sup>4</sup> Concise Bible Dictionary, *Heavenward Lightening Bible Study*, V2.6, CD ROM, Hendrickson Publishers and GRAMCORD Institute, 2005.

has taken paternal authority, addressing his disciples as ‘sons’.<sup>5</sup> The sons are called to hear the *mūsār* of the father and pay attention carefully for the sake of *da‘at bīnāh* (v. 1). *Mūsār* has a compact meaning: instruction, discipline, education (Psa 50:17); correction, chastisement (Prov 13:24; 15:33; Isa 26:16), warning and reminder (Ezek 5:15). *Da‘at* (knowing, construct state.) etymologically implies “deposition or reception into the conscience and life”.<sup>6</sup> *Bīnāh* means ‘understanding’ (1 Chron 12:32) or ‘insight’ (Deut 4:6; Isa 29:24). The disciples are to hear instruction for the sake of gaining (knowing) insight. In verse 2, the sage gives good teaching (*leqaḥṭōb*), which should not be abandoned. By equating his teaching/insight (*leqaḥ*) to the commandment (*tōrāh*), he makes obedience to his instruction compulsory for the one who wants to have life.

### 3.2 A Model of Family Sapiential Upbringing, Verses 3-6

The sage presents his childhood filial obedience, when he was *rak wəyāḥ id lipnē ‘immō* (tender and solitary before his mother), as a model to his pupils (v. 3). In verse 4, the *hiphil* of *yrh*, to shoot, throw), means ‘to teach, instruct’; hence *wayyōrēnī* (waw convers. + imperf. 3 per. sing. + pronominal suffix), meaning “and he taught me”, referring to the father’s teaching, which is expressed in covenantal concepts: *yitmāk-dəbāray libbekā šəmōr mišwōtay wəḥyēh* (Let your heart hold fast to my words; observe my commandments and live). In verses 5-6, the sage uses rhetoric for impression and persuasion. With regard to wisdom, he makes some propositions and prohibitions, arranging them in a parallelism that is both chiastic, concentric and synthetic.

A<sup>1</sup> v. 5a: *qənēh ḥokmāh qənēh bīnāh* - Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding

B<sup>1</sup> v. 5b: *‘al-tiškah wə‘al-tēṭ mē‘imrē-pî* - Do not forget, and do not turn from the sayings  
of my mouth

B<sup>2</sup> v. 6a: *‘al-ta‘azbehā wəṭišmārekā* - Do not abandon her, and she will keep you

A<sup>2</sup> v. 6b: *‘ēhābehā wəṭiš šārekā* - Love her and she will guide you

### 3.3 Wisdom and Her Fruits, Verses 7-9

The sage makes an illogical statement in verse 7, committing the error of presumption. He sets out to define what constitutes the beginning of wisdom but ends up making no input. This could be due to the presumption that this job was already done in 1:7 (the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise *ḥokmāh* ‘wisdom’ and *mūsār* ‘instruction’, cf. 1:29 and 2:5). In verse 7, he uses the core word *ḥokmāh* twice, together with its cognate, *bīnāh*.

The Hebrew term *ḥokmāh* (wisdom, *sophia* in Greek) has a wide range of meanings:<sup>7</sup>

a) In the least, wisdom refers to the cleverness of some negligible organisms (e.g, ant, badger, locust, lizard) that enables them achieve great fortunes (Pro 30:24-28). It also refers to human cleverness.

b) The ones who have the skill of an artisan are considered as “wise” (Exod 36:8).

<sup>5</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 6 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006) 76.

<sup>6</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 76.

<sup>7</sup> Roland E. Murphy, “Introduction to Wisdom Literature,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (NJBC), R. E. Brown et al. eds (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990), 447-461, 447.

c) Wisdom is also having the rudiments of coping with life here and now; and good life is marked by longevity, prosperity and prestige. The sage says in 4:8-9: “Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honour you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a fair garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.” A great section of Proverbs attributed to Solomon is on the rudiments of life (Prov 10:1-22:16): “When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but with the humble is wisdom” (Prov 11:2). “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice” (Prov 12:15).

d) Wisdom entails equally the ability to give sound royal judgment (1 Kgs 3:28).

e) Wisdom offers the proper rules of conduct that is in consonant with the divine intention. Though it is actuated through human effort, it is a gift that comes from God (Prov 2:1-22).

f) Ultimately, wisdom begins with recognition of the indispensable role of God in human existence; hence the expression: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of *ḥokmāh*(wisdom), and the knowledge of the Holy One is *bīnāh*(insight, Prov 9:10; cf. also 1:7; Job 28:28; Ps 111:10; Sir 1:16).<sup>8</sup>

From the foregoing the nature of wisdom is generic, having a universal application, to the extent of being related to non-rational organisms. Wisdom is however a property of rational beings only. It is not limited to any race, nation or religion. The nature of wisdom proves that “there is no incompatibility between the saving God of history and the God of human experience.”<sup>9</sup> There is no dichotomy between moral philosophy and theology, between reason and faith.

The approach of wisdom [Wisdom Literature] to morality is much broader than that of the Decalogue in that it aims at character formation...It aims to anticipate a stressful situation, and to strengthen resolve. If one may designate the codes in the OT as ‘law’, the wisdom rules are better described as ‘catechesis’ or moral formation.<sup>10</sup>

In the personification of wisdom in Proverb 8:22-31 and Wisdom 7:22-30, the sage presents wisdom as a being with divine attributes - eternity, purity, almighty, omniscience, glory, etc. The full revelation of the identity of wisdom is in the New Testament. Luke 11:49 reads, “therefore the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute’”. Paul clearly identifies this wisdom with Jesus Christ: “...but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24; cf. John 1:3; 1 Cor 1:21; Eph 3:10; Col 1:15-17). So, for Christians, wisdom instruction is ultimately an instruction on how to live a godly or Christian life.

#### **4. Family Wisdom Instruction in other Biblical Texts**

In ancient Israel, the wisdom transmitted at homes took precedence over instructions at schools or royal courts (Sir 51:23) because ordinary Israelites received no further education apart from the one parents offered. It was only in AD 63, that rabbi Joshua ben Gimla “decreed that every town and village should have a school which all children would have to attend from the age of

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<sup>8</sup> Murphy, “Introduction to Wisdom Literature,” 447.

<sup>9</sup> Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom in the OT,” in *ABD*, vol. 6, 920-931, 922.

<sup>10</sup> Murphy, “Wisdom in the OT,” 925.

six or seven”.<sup>11</sup> Clemens and some other scholars are suspicious of the theory of wisdom transmission in royal courts.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, home is the only indubitable locus where wisdom was originally taught in ancient Israel.

*Bêt-’ābî* (the house of the father, Gen 24:38) was “the most important small unit in the nation and for the individual Israelite. . .the essential locus of personal security.”<sup>13</sup> *Bêt ’immāh* “the house of the mother” is also mentioned (24:28; Ruth 1:8; Songs 3:4; 8:2); and there are cases where women are the prominent figures (Josh 2 & 6; 1 Kgs 17; 2 Kgs 4; Ruth 4:3). The mother of Lemuel, King of Massa, taught him the wisdom sayings in Proverb 31:1-9. Alluding to the concerns of a family (economic welfare, security, justice and education), Wright opines, “a most important aspect of the role of the family in ancient Israel was as the vehicle of continuity for the faith, history, law and traditions of the nation” (cf. Deut 6). The father must teach the children the law “as a condition for his own prolonged enjoyment of the gift of the land (Deut 6:7; 11:19; 32:46f).”<sup>14</sup> The children equally must obey their parents. The Decalogue has a landmark injunction on the children: “Honour your father and mother so that your days will be long in the land the Lord is giving you” (Exod 20:12). Discussing the catechetical passages (Exod 12:26f; 13:14f; Josh 4:6-7, 21–23; Deut 6:20–24), Wright affirms the family as their natural locus. Tobit instructs his son Tobias in wisdom (Tob 4:1-21). Because of the crucial role of the family, any offence that would disrupt its function is severely punished, for instance, the stoning to death of a disobedient son (Deut 21:18–21) and adulterers (Deut 22:22-26).

Israel is called *bêt-Yahweh* (the family or house of Yahweh, Num 12:7; Jer 12:7; Hos 8:1; Mic 4:2). Given the family image used to depict Israel in the OT “it is not surprising that the early Christians also took over the metaphorical use of family as a picture for the whole Church...so the Church, as the heir and organic continuum of Israel, could be called the *oīkos* of God (Eph 2:19; Gal 6:10; Heb 3:2–6; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 4:17).”<sup>15</sup>

As the family played a major role in teaching the faith in the Jewish setting, so also it did in the Greco-Roman setting. The early Christians prayed together as a family (Acts 2:13-14) and broke bread *kat’oīkon* (in their home, Act 2:46). They were both in the temple and in their homes proclaiming Christ (Acts 5:42). Mary, the mother of John Mark, had a group of believers in her house (Acts 12:12). Peter began the transmission of the faith to the gentiles in a family setting, with the conversion of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10). Paul equally on many occasions transmitted the faith in family settings: Baptised with her household, Lydia urged Paul and his companion to stay in her home (Acts 16:15); Paul baptized the jailer at Philippi with his household (Act 16:35), likewise the family of Stephanas (1 Cor 1:16). At Corinth, Crispus and his household became believers (Act 18:8). Gaius hosted Paul and the whole Church probably in his home (Rom 16:23). Paul sent greetings to some family churches: Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19); Nympha (Col 4:14) and Archippus (Phil 1:2). These show that the early church upheld the family as the nucleus of society and the church<sup>16</sup>, where the members are

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<sup>11</sup>Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965) 50; cf. Robert I Bradshaw, “Wisdom” available online, [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\\_wisdom2.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_wisdom2.html), 1999, accessed 10/09/14.

<sup>12</sup>R. E. Clements, *A Century of Old Testament Study* (Guildford & London: The Lutterworth Press, 1976) 111-112.

<sup>13</sup>C. J. H. Wright, “Family,” in *ABD*, vol. 2, 761-769, 763.

<sup>14</sup>Wright, “Family,” 764.

<sup>15</sup>Wright, “Family,” 769.

<sup>16</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, See Preface.

instructed in wisdom. The household codes (Col 3:18–4:1; Eph 5:21–6:9; Titus 2:1–10) point to how parents, children and even slave in homes should behave towards one another.

## **5. The Erosion of Didactic Function in Contemporary Families**

Family is gradually losing its didactic function, which is its constitutive part. The number of single parents in society is on the increase. A child growing under only a father or a mother is more prone to developing some imbalances in character and faith. It is true that some of such children have become great people in society; but they could have been greater than what they are today, had they the opportunity of growing under the tutelage of both parents, presumably creditable ones. In the Western world, single parenthood seems no longer to be a thing of social concern for it has become very rampant.

Divorce is another factor that erodes the didactic function of parents. Many children are suffering some psychological trauma due to the divorce of their parents. They learn hatred instead of love when they listen to the bitter and heart-breaking stories from both sides. Economic stress has torn many families apart in many subtle and obvious ways. Nowadays, women have become as economically empowered as men. Both partners could be employees in corporate firms and institutions, where they work all day long. Though this brings economic gain to the family, such parents sometimes abdicate their didactic role in the family to secondary agents like house helpers, relatives and school teachers. It is even worse when these parents have to live separately or even become migrants.

The effect of secularism and materialism adds its sting. Many people value what brings material gain most; and they reckon their worth based on what they have. Many parents have keyed to this trend. Spiritual values are waning daily. Parents who no longer care about their spiritual life cannot transmit any meaningful faith to their children.

Children born in mixed marriages are caught up amidst the two faiths of their parents. It does not always go smoothly both for the parents and the children. Eventually duress is used on either partner to abandon his/her faith; and women are most often on the receiving end.

## **6. Some Challenges Posed by State Legislation**

Some state laws on family issues have complicated the didactic function of parents, because these state laws encourage individualism and superficiality on critical issues.<sup>17</sup> They limit drastically the didactic power of parents on their children. The negligence of these laws results in some legal consequences. Here we are concerned with the legislation on: a) child's right to religious freedom, b) corporal punishment, c) same-sex marriage, and d) contraceptives and abortion. They affect the transmission of faith in families.

### **6.1 Legislation on Child's Right to Religious Freedom**

The United Nations convention on November 28, 1989 adopted 41 articles on "The Rights of a Child" which came into force on September 2, 1990. Article 14 grants the child the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. However, it respects the rights and duties of parents and legal guardians to direct the child in the exercise of this right.<sup>18</sup> Even before this convention, some countries have laws on the religious right of a child. The German Law, *Religiöse*

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<sup>17</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 65.

<sup>18</sup> "The United Nations Convention on the Child's Right" available on line, [http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC\\_PRESS200910web.pdf](http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf), accessed 02/09/14.

*Kindererziehung* (Child's Religious Upbringing), states that children above 14 years have unrestricted freedom to reject or accept any faith. Children above 12 years cannot be compelled to change to any faith. Children above 10 years must be heard before one introduces them to another faith.<sup>19</sup> Switzerland, Austria and perhaps some countries have similar laws. This means that, with these provisions, parents' right of instruction and direction has become very much restricted. The *Instrumentum Laboris* states, "...parents appear overly cautious in applying any pressure on their children in religious practice. Precisely in this regard, they seek to avoid any type of conflict instead of dealing with it. In addition, when the subject of religion is raised, these same parents often feel insecure and, instead of passing on the faith, they often remain silent and relegate their task, even if considered important, to religious institutions. This seems to demonstrate a weakness among adults, especially young parents"<sup>20</sup>

Hugh LaFollette discusses the conflicting of parents' and children's religious rights witnessed in the USA law courts. He is of the view of that children's right supersedes that of parents because they should not constrict their children only to beliefs that are in congruent with theirs, otherwise the children will not have alternatives for making free religious choices.<sup>21</sup>

## 6.2 Legislation on Corporal Punishment

Some governments have outlawed corporal punishment of children at homes and in school. In a research published in August 2014, 38 countries have already this law, the latest being Bolivia, whose president on July 17, 2014 signed into law a new "Children and Adolescents Code", which explicitly prohibits all corporal punishment of children.<sup>22</sup> Although this law has its positive side, in that it protects and defends human dignity, it has also its boomerang. To carry out an action, the goodness of which is not at the moment clearly perceived, human nature exhibits some lethargy that could be overcome only with some force or pressure. This pressure could come in form of laws or an appeal to reason. But in the case of a minor, an appeal to reason may not always be enough, let alone the law, since the thinking capacity is not yet mature. It then becomes expedient for parents to use a proportionally corrective corporal punishment in educating the children. Parents in the countries that have legislated against corporal punishment are in a state of debacle as to how to handle some related cases.

## 6.3 Legalization of same-Sex Marriage

Same-sex marriage, known as gay marriage, is between two people of the same biological sexes. It is both a human and civil rights issue, as well as socio-political and religious. In Canada marriage has been recently asexually defined as "the state of being a married couple voluntarily joined for life (or until divorce)." The *French Larousse Dictionary* redefines marriage as a "solemn act between two same-sex or different-sex persons, who decide to establish a union". *The Oxford Dictionary* is also towing this line.<sup>23</sup> By June 28, 2014, about sixteen countries have

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<sup>19</sup> *Bundesgesetz über die religiöse Kindererziehung* 1985, StF: BGBl. Nr.155/1985 (WV), See <http://www.familienrecht.at/fileadmin/gesetze/abgb/rekerz.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 135.

<sup>21</sup> Hugh LaFollette, "Freedom of Religion and Children," *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 75-89 (1989), available on line, <http://www.hughlafollette.com/papers/freedom.of.religion.and.children.htm>, accessed 02/10/14.

<sup>22</sup> "End All Corporal Punishment of Children", available online, [http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/prohib\\_states.html](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/prohib_states.html), August 2014, accessed 19/09/14.

<sup>23</sup> "The Oxford Dictionary Is Changing The Definition of 'Marriage' To Include Gay Couples", available online, <http://www.businessinsider.com/oxford-dictionary-re-defining-marriage-2013-7#ixzz3DPiOnesB>, accessed 19/09/14.

already legalized gay union. In these countries, the couples have the same legal rights as the couples of the normal opposite-sex marriage. Countries like Nigeria and Kenya have legally banned gay unions or activities. There are many voices defending such unions in the current debate that goes on across age, race, political affiliations and religions. Astoundingly, some Christian churches like United Church of Christ, U.S. Episcopalians and the Church of England have even gay bishops.

All these astronomical changes in peoples' mentality, society and religion threaten the essence of the wisdom or faith that parents transmit to their children. Even though Christians are divided on this issue, Catholics maintain firmly the biblical concept of marriage.

#### **6.4 Legalization of Contraceptives and Abortion**

Contraceptive is any device, medical or mechanical, used to prevent conception. Abortion is the elimination of human life at any stage of its formation. Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* states very clearly that both, in any form at all, are intrinsically against God's intention for a human being, who is always an end but not a means.<sup>24</sup> Many people reject this teaching.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately many states have legalized abortion and the use of contraceptives. From the research conducted,<sup>26</sup> published and updated in June 2013, 66 countries, 25.64% of the world's population, prohibit abortion, and allow it only when the life of the woman is in danger. 59 countries, 13.75%, add the preservation of the woman's physical or mental health as a justified reason for abortion. In these two cases, one could propose that a better term for this legislation be sought, for it might not be "abortion" per se that is really intended. *Humanae Vitae* states, "The Church does not consider at all illicit the use of those therapeutic means necessary to cure bodily diseases, even if a foreseeable impediment to procreation should result there from—provided such impediment is not directly intended for any motive whatsoever."<sup>27</sup> From the June 2013 research, it is disheartening that 13 Countries, 21.58%, legalized abortion even on socio-economic ground, and the worst of all, 61 countries, 39.22%, did the same without restriction to any reason; and many of these are Christian countries, including Italy, the host of the Holy See. Contraceptive mentality impacts negatively on family relationships.<sup>28</sup>

### **7. The Way Forward**

Since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of *ḥokmāh*(wisdom), and the knowledge of the Holy One is *bīnāh* (insight, Prov 9:10; cf. also 1:7), parents should instruct their children to live in line with the God's commandments, which for Christians is culminated in Jesus Christ. This calls for an "authentic Christian experience, namely, an encounter with Christ on a personal and

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<sup>24</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Humane Vitae*, Encyclical Letter, On the Regulation of Birth (July 25, 1968), no. 14.

<sup>25</sup> Cardinal Joseph Suenens, one of the pillars of Vatican II, criticized Paul VI and called *Humanae Vitae* a non-collegial act (Suenens, Interview in *Informations Catholiques Internationales*, 15 May 1969). He had supporters like Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, Christopher Butler and Charles Curran. Canadian and Dutch Bishops separately issued documents that were against Pope's teaching on artificial birth control. Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini accused the Pope of hiding the truth, cf. Martini Carlo M. and Sporschill Georg, *Conversazioni Notturme A Gerusalemme—Sul rischio della Fede* (Milano: Mondadori, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Center For Reproductive Rights, "The World's Abortion Laws Map 2013 Update", available online, [http://reproductiverights.org/sites/crr.civicactions.net/files/documents/AbortionMap\\_Factsheet\\_2013.pdf](http://reproductiverights.org/sites/crr.civicactions.net/files/documents/AbortionMap_Factsheet_2013.pdf), accessed 15/09/14.

<sup>27</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, no. 15.

<sup>28</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 65.

communal level, for which no doctrinal presentation, no matter how accurate, can substitute.”<sup>29</sup> Children are called upon to obey their parents (Prov 4:1; Exod 20:12), for that gives them the foundation on which to build.

Sexual discipline is one of the great themes of the wisdom books, especially in Proverbs (cf. 5:1-6; 6:23-29). Parents have to work hard to inculcate in their children sexual discipline that frowns at promiscuity. Over-exposure to mass media, internet and entertainment gadgets, which threaten the sacredness and stability of family, should be checked.<sup>30</sup> Prospective young couples should be led through the different traditional stages to marriage so as to have enough time to know themselves. This will reduce the rate of divorce in society. Dangers inherent in mixed marriage should be made know to young people. This may help dissuade them from such unions, except when unavoidable.

Parents who work all day long should be conscious of this predicament, and consequently make maximum use of their free times for teaching their children. They should create quality time for the family during weekends and when on work leave. Granted that parents should work hard for economic wellbeing, they should inculcate in their child that one’s worth is in one’s being, not in possession.<sup>31</sup> This will help check the trend of individualism and consumerism.

Spiritual activities like family prayer, bible reading and catechesis should be included in the family programme. If parents let their children see them take interest in religious exercises at home and in the Church, they will follow suit. John Paul II state that “in places where anti-religious legislation endeavours even to prevent education in the faith, and in places where widespread unbelief or invasive secularism makes real religious growth practically impossible, ‘the Church of the home’ remains the one place where children and young people can receive authentic catechesis”.<sup>32</sup> Pope Francis hints at this as he calls for dialogue in families.<sup>33</sup> Inspired by the concentrically synthetic and chiasmic parallelism in Proverb 4:5-6, used for impressive and persuasive purposes, parents should always think of the best way to present their teachings so as to attain the desired result. This requires preparation and prayer.

Parents should be aware that their religious right and authority over a child wanes as the child grows up, and should make hay while the sun still shines. Like the sage in Proverbs 4:3-4, whose parents taught wisdom when he was still *raḱ* (tender) and *yāh* *īd* (solitary), so should parents transmit the ultimate wisdom to their children when they are still like tabula rasa.

The illegality of corporal punishment at home in some states stresses the exigency of beginning parental instructions, coupled with the appropriate witnessing, right from the “children’s tenderest age” (Prov 4:3).<sup>34</sup> The cases of physical abuse of children at homes necessitated this law. Parents should therefore avoid this aberration, but should not hesitate to apply any

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<sup>29</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 15.

<sup>30</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel (November 24, 2013), no. 65; cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Apostolic Exhortation (November 06, 1999) 7.

<sup>31</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, 74.

<sup>32</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in our Time (October 16, 1979), no. 68. Cf. Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, no. 11; cf. Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, no. 11.

<sup>33</sup>*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 70.

<sup>34</sup>*Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 68; cf. Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 52; Vatican Council II, *Gravissimum Educationis*, The Declaration on Christian Education, no. 3.

proportionally effective and corrective corporal punishment, irrespective of state legislation. Based on Proverb 4:1, the concept of *mûsār* (instruction) includes some forms of discipline and chastisement; and the nature of children requires sometimes physical discipline. “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline (*mûsār*) him” (Prov 13:24).

Legalization of same-sex marriage in some states should spur concerned parents to intensify their effort in teaching the children the values in the normal marriage between a man and a woman, where children are brought up in the loving hands of opposite sexes that complement each other. They should keep at the disposal of children genuine literature on marriage that counteracts whatever false marital ideas they get from school and society in general.

Legalization of contraceptives and abortion is a great disservice to the Christian faith. Though great and reputable personalities and organisations, both in the ecclesial and societal circles, kicked and are still kicking against Pope Paul VI’s rejection of all forms of contraceptives and abortion in *Humane Vitae*<sup>35</sup>, it is a classically and sapientially inspired teaching that will continue to stand the test of time, if humans are to keep to their divine vocation and the dignity and sanctity of human life. That is the model that all should aspire to, despite weaknesses, which are unavoidable. Parents should begin early to teach their children the value of human life and sexual continence. Parents’ life of witness through their continence and faithfulness should be an example.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has delineated the importance of imparting wisdom to children in homes. This is the most important work that parents have to do. Proverb 4:1-9 calls for filial obedience, while giving a model of parental didactic instruction at homes and the content of this instruction. It is all about wisdom, which has its culmination in Jesus Christ. Even though some states, influenced by post-modern thoughts, have come up with laws that militate against the didactic function of parents in families, parents should be ready to go against the laws that forestall their duty as teachers at homes. Parents have to recognise too that some of the state laws help them to realise that their didactic function begins when their children are still in the cradle and wanes as the children gradually become adults. Therefore, transmission of faith to the children must begin from the cradle.

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<sup>35</sup> Johan Bonny, a Belgian Catholic Bishop, in his “*Die Bischofssynode über die Familie: Erwartungen eines Diözesanbischofs*”, is against *Humanae Vitae*, accusing Paul VI of breaking the collegiality of Vatican II. He is expecting the 2014-15 Synod on Family to invalidate this document.