

Parenthood

Love and parenthood

We who are sufficiently aware of ourselves soon discover our absence of being. We do so by measuring the distance that separates us irrevocably from what we ought to be if we are to be in accordance with the promise of love when it is born. In parenthood, we take this to an even deeper level.

Like love, parenthood does not discover itself at the very beginning in the form that it should take if it is to fulfill itself and its function. The demands made by parenthood are very similar to those made by love, but they go further.

Love has to become a reality that goes back above all to the being of the partners. Until the very end, however, it remains rooted in their possession of each other. If it is to grow, parenthood calls for a much more radical change. It has to be established at the level of the parent's and the child's being as soon as the child has become an adult, if it is not to be condemned to live in the past and in this way to become an anachronism.

The affinities that exist between parent and child are much more substantial than those that exist between husband and wife, but both reveal the depths that are contained in each person. The hereditary ties between parent and child do not result in their identity, but they mean that the child begins with certain fundamental attitudes that are peculiar to the parent and that these attitudes can easily develop. Married love between two human beings, on the other hand, may call for certain important similarities and complementary attitudes if it is ever to be born, but it only takes each partner to a deeper level of experience and does not ultimately make them more like each other.

Many influences are exerted on the child. Some are intimate and others are more remote. Many of these influences are not related to those received from the parents and some of them are even hostile to them. This rivalry is sometimes expressed as antagonism and is often accompanied by conscious crises. It is able to conceal the inheritance received from the parents for a long time, but cannot prevent it from appearing ultimately. This will take place at

all levels. Inherited attitudes and reactions will emerge together with the most free forms of behavior as soon as children reach the age of maturity and take full possession of their own humanity.

Parenthood is soon in competition with the influence of society on the child

To begin with, parenthood has an influence because the parents are close to and have authority over the child. If the parents are to continue to educate the child, however, the parents must change their way of behaving as it appears to be impossible to protect or help the child and to give the child a sense of direction simply by exercising authority. This, of course, takes place not just because the child has grown up and reached the age where the son or daughter is looking for emancipation. The parents' authority very quickly loses the almost absolute quality that it had at the beginning, even when the family continues to be harmoniously united. It finds itself in overt or concealed competition with other powerful influences.

Society no longer supports the parents' authority by a family-oriented framework of practices. In it, parenthood has been reduced to a minimal functional and legal capacity. At the very most, the institutions of society can only be sound enough to resist the demoralizing effect of almost subhuman practices which make a mockery or even a caricature of the family.

The members of modern society are pitilessly exposed to forces which build them up and above all tear them down from their earliest youth onward, whatever barriers the family may succeed in erecting to protect its children. Indeed, the family has reached the point where it is no longer regarded as irreplaceable in the life of its children, with the possible exception of their very early education, since it is true to say that, despite all technological advances, society cannot provide a substitute for the family at that early age. From adolescence onward, however, if the family proves that it cannot transcend the level of society in the intimacy and the grace that it emanates, it may be replaced by society without too much harm.

Confronted with the increasingly powerful influence that society exercises on the child as it becomes more and more perfectly organized, we are bound to try to discover the aspect of parenthood that transcends society if we are to continue to function as parents. We will not be able to continue playing our specific and essential part as parents to our children simply by exercising our authority as the heads of the family.

Changes in the parents' attitude

Although parenthood is conditioned by the special needs of the child during its early years, the parent has to change as the child grows. It is not

enough for the mother or father simply to change methods. They must begin to change quite soon and, when the children become adolescents and begin to assert themselves in order to find themselves, this need for radical change becomes urgent.

Adolescents, after all, use what comes to them from elsewhere, since they must in the first place separate themselves from their family, because they are, at the beginning, most deeply and visibly immersed in that group of people. Everything that they have—all the aspects of their age and generation, their social environment and way of life with others—is devoted to this task of breaking away, because they are not yet sufficiently in command of their personal assets, which are still for the most part only potential, for them to become firmly autonomous on the basis of what exists within themselves.

The limits of the parents' protection

If the parents have lived consciously and fully, they will know—thanks to their own experience, based on memories of their own youth reconsidered in adult years, and thanks too to their knowledge of other people—how complex and ambiguous life can be. From the very beginning, all people must follow their own way alone, not only in their essential solitude, but also in a relative isolation in the midst of other beings against whom they brush. They can never become entirely themselves without running the risks of freedom. These ways are certainly wide and they are full of anonymous beings who have been influenced, obscurely and individually, by the same forces.

Children too—as parents well know—will have to experience this law of the herd, without even knowing what is happening, without knowing themselves and before they have the courage to be individuals. They will have to run many risks—all of them unpredictable, inevitable and perhaps even necessary—and they may even have to succumb for a time before they are able to take off the masks that have been placed on them by the faceless and wandering crowd.

Mother and father have a clear duty to protect their children while they are too young to be able to defend themselves except by reacting instinctively. They also want to arrange the conditions of their children's lives as much as they can so that they will be less dangerous and more harmonious than the conditions that they experienced when they were younger. Despite this, however, parents know that they ought only to intervene in their child's life when it is absolutely necessary. Without very much hope of doing more than simply avoiding the worst possible outcome, they know how impotent they are to help their children any more than this. They are aware, after all—and this consciousness causes them pain—that there are many experiences that their children, when given complete freedom, will have to undergo alone. There are

also, they recognize, aspects of knowledge that their children must acquire alone and that, in acquiring them, they may experience the rough and often painful shock of events and encounters. They know finally that their children will have to suffer in many ways alone. At these times, they are far from their sons and daughters even though they may physically be at their side. They lean over them and hold them in their heart. They silently bear their anxiety and their suffering. They are watchful and patient. They are passion. They are suffering.

The limits of parents' counsels

The parents also become gradually aware of a difference between their spontaneous reactions and their own possibilities on the one hand and what they ought to think or do in order to adapt themselves to the spirit of the times and to deal with the social pressures that are always present in their lives. They are not capable of telling their grown-up sons and daughters—even if they would agree to listen to them and could, if they listened, understand them—how to behave with regard to the changing opinions and habits of the period and how to act without becoming enslaved.

If they did this, they would risk leading them astray into attitudes, activities and reactions that are too deeply marked by the past. Normally, they can only help them by their strong, silent presence to confront life and its hazards and to rouse the necessary energy and kindle the required light in them.

Collaboration between father and son, mother and daughter helps parenthood to develop

The parents are helped to find their true place beside their children by this wisdom in which are found, closely joined together, a knowledge of the risks that have to be taken in life, a deep trust in the virtue inherited from the family's ancestors and a humility born of a clear and strong maturity. They discover this wisdom gradually by following the steps taken in adolescence. To carry out their mission as parents completely, they have for a long time to prepare and wait for the time when their children will aspire of their own accord to the honor of being an adult standing upright and independent.

Although they may not know it themselves, sons and daughters make silent appeals to their parents. These are the small beginnings of the new relationship for which they are almost unconsciously hoping. They help their parents to be their parents by making countless invisible signs, of which they are not conscious, but which the parents observe because they are made by beings who are very close to them. This secret communion helps both the parents, who are waiting for their children, to know themselves better and the

children, who are living in the light shed by their parents, to find themselves. This communion is so effective that all of them, in their solitude and their moments of recall, will inevitably experience more and more frequently the grace in which they will be conscious of being present to the others and bound to them forever.

It is true to say, then, that parenthood is expressed less and less as authority or in the name of an experience that is accepted without question. It gradually changes and becomes an appeal. If this condition prevails, the relationship between parents and children will become deeper and will not simply disappear in superficial and sentimental appearances and traces of the past to which both parents and children continue frequently to be deeply attached because it is their own past. In other words, parenthood of authority must be replaced by the parenthood of appeal.

Parenthood based on authority and the parenthood of appeal

Parenthood of authority is for the most part expressed in the sphere of ordinary goods. The adult is, of course, overwhelmingly superior in this sphere and the children are totally dependent on the parents. They do not yet belong to themselves. They belong, as far as these goods are concerned, to their parents. In the beginning at least, it is in this way that their parents love them. They want them to have the good that they have had in the past. They also often want them to do what they have not been able to do. They believe that this is in a sense a compensation for the failures and limitations that life has imposed on them. Parenthood based on authority implies possession of the child, just as love that is just born implies possession of the one who is loved. It seeks at all costs the most exact form of similarity and even, if it were possible, complete identification. It is nourished by this possession, which is, of course, lost as soon as the child becomes emancipated.

The parenthood of appeal, on the other hand, is free from all self-interest. Like mature love, it is most effective when it is present without revealing itself. It does not derive its reality from anything apart from the parent's very being. It expresses itself because of the affinity existing between father and son, mother and daughter, and because of the secret attraction which draws the father to the son, the mother to the daughter, in a unique and almost substantial way, although they remain existentially quite independent. This parenthood of appeal requires the parents to renounce themselves completely and to abandon what they long for in their children and really also long for in themselves. It calls on them to give what they have and to give up what they would like to have in their children. It also calls on them to offer without reservation what they are.

The parenthood of appeal and the parents' being

If power were to remain the main source of the parents authority, the ultimate result would be spiritual paralysis both in the parent and in the child, because of the parent's excessive possessiveness and the child's continued state of immaturity. Even if that power were not used by the parents to endow themselves with authority, it would inevitably gradually disappear and discreetly allow the parents to reveal their message. If this were not so, the parenthood of appeal would never be understood or welcomed at its own distinctive level. It is, after all, the very being of the parents themselves that makes this appeal and not what they have. What they have only confuses the message of their being. It would change that appeal into an order. It would prevent the parent from being a true leaven by the exact forms and the authority that it would give to that appeal.

The parents' being is heard more often in silence than in words, which are so permeated with recollections that they are quite capable of expressing this appeal. These words emerge from the silent solitude of the parents to reach the solitude of the children, but no force is exerted on either solitude. The real content of this appeal is not the objective meaning of the words, but their echoes in the children. If they receive that echo, they and they alone are able to understand it and let it develop in them, because they are the children.

The parenthood of appeal survives the parent

The parents may die, but they will not disappear from their children's horizons if they have continued to be true parents to the end. The son and daughter will retain a memory of them because of their intimate understanding acquired in the light of their own lives. Indeed, it often happens that the parents' being does not become really clear to the child until after the parents' deaths. Until that time, their physical presence has obscured their real being. The authority that they have exerted, however discreetly, has been too burdened with memories and the habits of the past for it to be properly understood. It has overshadowed the silent sign made by the parents by what they were and what they continue to be beyond death.

Parenthood and the relationship of children

The way leading from parenthood based on authority to the parenthood of appeal is even less well known than that leading from love that has just been born to mature love. Little help can be gained here from instinct, and society can do little more, since it can only establish itself on the basis of pow-

er. The gradual discovery of all the aspects of parenthood, however, is made easier by the discovery of the bonds which tie the adult son and daughter to their own parents, so long as the parents have really continued to the end to be a father and a mother.

At the beginning of their lives, the children only very slowly become aware of their relationship. They are also so preoccupied with the need to assert their autonomy and originality that they remain for a long time only very imperfectly conscious of this tie. The most important affinities that bind parents and children together are also at the same time the most fully concealed and it is therefore all the more difficult to discover them and this discovery can be a very slow process. These affinities are not revealed during early youth, because the parents' authority is at that stage exercised directly and explicitly and no special use is made of the affinities in question. They only begin to appear when the children approach maturity. It is then that they remember most clearly the behavior of their parents toward them when they had already achieved a certain degree of independence and were beginning to think about it in the light of their own experiences of life. It is, however, above all when they themselves begin to go forward along the path of parenthood that they really become conscious of what their parents were and still are for them. Parenthood and child relationship support each other in this way. We grow as we begin to understand both parenthood and child relationship at the same time.

Men and women who have reached the stage of parenthood based on appeal are present in a special way to their children, above all when those children are trying themselves to be parents to their own sons and daughters. They continue this mission with their children. They help them to discover the parenthood of appeal and to make it their own. They are effective in them through their spirit. That spirit is much more than an inheritance. It is different in kind from all the ordinary family customs. It is, in fact, a real transference from one being to another and is, in the child, a source of that spirit and its continued support. It transcends all other gifts and is the grace that comes from the parent and is received by the child.

The approach to the parenthood of appeal

Over many years, the parents' daily lives with their children provide them with many opportunities to discover the paths that they ought to follow to approach the parenthood of appeal. They will inevitably make this discovery so long as they have reached sufficient depth of experience and are sufficiently recollected to be able to be present to their children in an understanding and attentive way.

When parents look at their new-born child, the parents are struck by the living silence that emanates from the cradle and removes them from the sphere of spiritual distraction in which they usually find themselves. They are at this time also especially inclined to look at the obscure future awaiting this little, sleeping child, who belongs far more to the parents than the parents are able at this time to know. This child is indeed theirs and will also be very different when older. Will this child ever know how precious it is to its parents? Will this child ever know what the parents really are for it? These three beings are so near to each other and yet so far apart! What will this child, who bears the family name, is nourished by their blood, forms the center of their thoughts and is inseparable from their being be when, in a few years' time, they too have passed away?

Contemplation of this child enables the parents to understand their personal solitude more completely. The irreducible difference that separates these three beings despite everything that brings them together passes between them, beneath the surface of the extreme closeness required by the care and attention that surround the new-born child.

When the child is still very young, this distance that separates them may disappear in the parents' eyes at least, to the extent that their authority is directly felt and the child obeys their orders with an impersonal form of obedience. All the same, it still continues to exist. The parents can never know what is taking place in the head of their little child, behind the eyes that look at them and the ears that listen to them. This distance, however, which is glimpsed more than it is strictly measured, can help them to grow in parenthood.

The parents are inevitably drawn to respect and even to revere their child as a marvel that is full of as yet unknown promise, a marvel that will grow and develop. Although the child will for a long time be almost defenselessly exposed to brutal and dehumanizing forces, the parents, without ceasing to protect it, will at the same time let their child try out its wings on its own.

The parents exercise their authority more and more discreetly as time passes, until they reach the point where it is presented to their children only in the form of counsel. It gradually changes into an indirect appeal on the basis of the parents' personal witness. Sometimes the parents withdraw and let the child go ahead, not because they are afraid to act authoritatively, but because they want this child to grow in experience. Their authority as parents becomes seed or leaven and is directed more toward the future than toward the present. Sometimes it is expressed only as a trusting glance exchanged between people. The parents may not even be afraid to show their children their own poverty and weaknesses, the limitations emphasized by increasing years. They will do this when they recognize that this son or daughter is able

to understand as their child. They know that the heart cannot be aroused except by such revelations and at such a cost.

However much it may cost them, then, the parents gradually become more reserved with regard to their children. They allow an increasing discretion to grow within the framework of their relationship with their children in an attempt to prepare them for full autonomy when that shows itself to be necessary.

Their son's or daughter's marriage is an occasion of general happiness and at the same time a confrontation with an unknown future. The parents will inevitably experience both hope and anxiety as they look at the two young people who know each other so little, however much they may believe that they do. They are alone, ready to set off on a path beyond the horizons of the families from which they come. They know little about their new life and cannot be helped, yet they are filled with new assurance with regard to the future ahead of them. They have great confidence in themselves and are quite intoxicated with their youth and freedom. But how are they to overcome the difficulties that will face them in the future? No one can really speak to them about these difficulties, not even their parents who have known them so long and so well, since, however closely related the causes of these difficulties may be, each difficulty is new and special for each person and for each couple. The reserve that has grown up between the parents and the son or daughter therefore increases because of the mysterious alchemy of love which, for a time at least, changes their appearance and even seems to change their natures.

From the time of the wedding, the parents continue to be alone, but they continue to be what they are, the father and the mother. Their parenthood remains active and is not restricted to pure memory. The separation which becomes more and more pronounced between parents and children as their lives become more and more distinct cannot in any way be abolished or even reduced. This is demanded by the future of the bride and groom and their family. It is, however, necessary to go beyond this distance. This can only be achieved by a fatherhood and motherhood that have come from the parents' being and have been received by the children's being. The parents have to discover this parenthood in its new dimensions and gain access to it. But how will they succeed in doing this if they have not prepared themselves for it for a long time previously? The preparation will necessarily take the form of a deepening of their own humanity so that they will be capable of achieving the inner change that will enable their parenthood to be fulfilled.

The parenthood of appeal calls for faith in the children

The gradual growth in discretion and reserve that takes place in the relationship between the parents and the children is certainly not the result of a

break accepted permanently by them that would make them definitively alien to each other. This discretion is not, for example, systematically practiced, like a method used in teaching. It is inspired by the parents' special feeling for the children and the unique regard that the parents have for them. It is the gradually ripening fruit of the parents' faith in that son and daughter.

This faith, which is at the same time permeated with respect and patience, nourished by wisdom and secure in its foundation, means that there is a presence between parents and children which exists in spite of the increasing distance between them. It decreases the distance brought about by the difference between the parents' destiny and the children's. It changes the nature of this separation and changes it at the same time into a closeness at the depths of their beings. Thanks to this same faith, across this distance and by means of this communion too, the parents' presence increases in the children.

The parents' faith in their children

The parents' faith in their children is to parenthood what married faith is to love. They are both of the same order. Whereas the second, however, is born of the encounter between man and woman at the level of their living dynamism, the first is the result of the parents' faith in themselves, since the children form part of the parents' existence. As soon as they have acquired a sufficient degree of humanity, they are bound to know this faith. They grow in their children because they are theirs.

This faith in their children is not the result of the parents' self-esteem. It exists long before the children are sufficiently developed for trust in them to be justified. It transcends that trust. Even if everything seems to point to the contrary, the parents who retain this faith in their children will continue to be parents. Sometimes too, they will have the opportunity in the future to recognize that their children have continued to be their children after passing through all the positive and negative experiences and difficulties of life.

Parents are parents by virtue of what they are for their children and what their children are for them at the most intimate level. Their function with regard to their children does not exhaust this relationship which is essential for every parent. It does not call for it absolutely since, by being adopted, this function can be accepted, perhaps not totally, but at least to a great extent. It is not enough to set up the bonds of parenthood between parents and children, but there can be no doubt that the parents receive elements of their own maturity from their children. This is simply because their children are grafted on to them and nourished by the same sap. The man or woman who carries out the parent's function without being a parent will not be able to find in that function such a special and intimate depth, although this depth may for other and more especially spiritual reasons be very real.

The parents know their children, not only through the intuitions that are derived from the love that they have for them, but also because of the knowledge that they have of themselves. On the other hand, they are able, too, to know themselves in their children, since their children belong to them and are an extension of them. Sometimes too, they can discover themselves in their children, because the latter experience the inner states that they themselves experienced in the past and had forgotten. Through their children they accept themselves in a way that they would not be able to by their own means. They reach themselves in their depths. They give meaning to their existence. It is in this way, then, that the parents' faith in themselves and the faith that they have in their children—both of which are inseparably united to their growth in humanity—are manifested.

The necessity of the parents' faith in their children

This faith is as necessary to the parent as married faith is necessary to the partners in marriage. If the parents succeed in denying this faith, something essential in them is destroyed beyond repair. They will, if necessary, be able to carry out the function of parenthood at the material level and they will retain the appearance of parents if there is need for affection, but they will in fact become insensitive to their child's being. In denying their faith in their child, they give up their parenthood. In giving it up, they reject the demands that no law can force them to accept, but from which they cannot be exempted. They are condemned to lose their child as every good that is simply possessed is lost. They also lose themselves. The path leading to full being is forever closed to them as it is when married faith is abandoned. Instead of a spiritual life, all that is left to them are various sentimental and intellectual satisfactions called by religious or humanistic names.

The children will feel the effects of the spiritual abandonment that has been theirs because their parents have really, if not visibly, forsaken them. They will inevitably ignore these effects for a long time but this absence undermines their existence as deeply as a lack of love in very early childhood. They will only discover this deprivation very slowly and may never even discover it at all. The discovery will in any case always be an indirect one, because it is an absolute lack. It can hardly be cured and the children will encounter obstacles that they will recognize as very frustrating, without at first being able to understand their origin. The remote and concealed cause of these obstacles in their lives is, of course, the deprivation from which they are suffering, often dully and bitterly and containing echoes of a very distant past. Because of their own parents' failure as parents, they will react, sometimes violently, to the question as to how they themselves ought to act for their own children, so that the latter will receive what they have the right to receive.

This understanding, which has its origin in the passions rather than in the spirit, cannot however replace the love and understanding that come from a good family tradition. It is not really enough for the children to reach the parenthood of appeal. Unknown to themselves, they are often impelled by the facts of their situation to behave quite spontaneously with regard to their own children in the same way as their own parents behaved toward them. On the other hand, they may take the opposite view and allow themselves simply to drift. There is indisputably a very special unity between the children and their parents at the highest and at the lowest levels—like parent, like child. The son or daughter can only escape from the lowest level by being spiritually active in a way that is seldom as easy as natural behavior.

The children's faith is at the source of the parents' dependence on their children and the spiritual richness of parenthood

The parents are made dependent on their children, other beings to whom they are attached by every fibre of their own being, but on whom they can only have an effect in a very indirect way and whose destiny ultimately eludes them. They are dependent in this way on their children because of their parenthood. Although the situation is very similar in married love, this appeal of the parents' love, however weak its authority may be and however devoid of strength, is nonetheless effective. The parents' faith in their children helps the children to believe in their parents and does so just at the time when everything is urging the children to dispute their parents' authority.

As soon as the parents and the children are joined together in faith—and there is no need for them to tell each other explicitly that they are—they are enabled, through this faith, to be present to each other in a way that influences each one's destiny as no other influence can, however powerful or detailed it may be. No other presence can be closer than this, no other can be more natural and none can be more fully in accordance with what the children themselves deeply desire. The distance between parents and children remains and, thanks to it, the children's autonomy also continues. There is, however, no other life that is more personal and more intimately desired than that led by the children when they are animated by this presence. This presence, which is all appeal, evokes in the children the pure response which will give it life. They do not really know that they are expecting this new word that is as yet unknown to them. Despite this, however, it is extremely important to them. Because of this presence, they have extracted this word from themselves and repeated it to themselves in silence. Their parents cannot do it, nor can they give any explicit help to their children without stripping this word of its original effectiveness. This fruit of the children's freedom is nourished by the parents' being.

Action and passion as consequences of married faith and the parents' faith

The highest form of activity that any parent can find in this world is to work at faith. The husband's faith in his wife, the wife's faith in her husband, and the parents' faith in the child are all woven into a lasting fabric that goes beyond time yet is fashioned at the same time of material that passes. Faith of this kind has to fulfill a task that is at the deepest level one experiences and to do this in the midst of many different contingencies, none of which goes directly back to the initiative of faith itself. The effectiveness of this faith, however, comes from the very being from which it emanates.

Through faith, we secretly incline toward other people. Through faith, we appeal to other people. Through faith too, we reach them in their essential solitude. Through faith, we are silent prayer, revealed by every formula. We even ask for help and become beggars in order to arouse in others what cannot be obtained by any gift. We are suffering, but not a cruel form of suffering. We grow in a calm and even blessed state because not only are we full of hope, but also because faith radiates joy when it is fruitful. In this way, we discover the full movement of being in communication.

This would certainly be the case if the mother and father or the husband and wife lived totally in faith. At certain times, when they are most clearly illuminated and recollected, they are firmly rooted in this peace and happiness. They catch a glimpse of themselves in this light and cling to themselves by their own fruitfulness, which gives them to themselves. This is the ultimate demand made by their being. In fact, however, they live much more outside themselves in activity and in what they gain for themselves than inside themselves and by what they are. They are committed, by the complex and ambiguous nature of their humanity and by the factors conditioning their development to conquer, although what they conquer is always disappearing, and to seek a security that is always threatened. Their faith cannot exempt them from this search. It can only enable them to transcend it. So they lean on what surrounds them in preference to living from faith and continue to be separated from the movement that urges them to be. They are enslaved to the need to possess and every time they cannot possess they experience a dizziness that goes beyond the feeling of regret caused by the loss of some good to which they are attached. This dizziness is a metaphysical fear of the void. The essential passion that is given to them by the being of faith itself and which arouses them to themselves is therefore often overshadowed by the bitter and dramatic form of suffering caused by this continuous and endless stripping away that seems to sound the knell of annihilation.

Loving is a source both of special joys and of painful ordeals for the spouse and parent. Flesh undoubtedly plays a part in this, but this suffering would not penetrate so deeply within us if its causes did not directly question

what is essential in our humanity. If we are in control of this suffering, it can lead us to fulfill ourselves. If it is too heavy for us to bear, it will paralyze us. If we reject it, it will change our nature. If we are open to being through married and parental faith and still reject this suffering, we will no longer be able to believe in ourselves.

Parenthood, like love, leads to the discovery of the absence of being

A fulfilled parenthood is, like love, undoubtedly a brilliant star in the firmament of every man and woman, but it is at the same time a star that is seen and followed all too seldom. When it is born, it powerfully expresses what mature, adult love should be. Parenthood, on the other hand, only gives us, at least to begin with, the happiness of a joyful event. If the partners in marriage are resigned to the failure of love and have accepted it as well as they can, they will be extremely discreet about married love. Usually, however, the need to maintain appearances is the only point of agreement between a husband and a wife already disunited in their life together.

This is not the same in the case of a failure in parenthood. Neither the parent nor the child tries to hide this failure. On the contrary, it is for whoever is prepared to proclaim it to do so, as though the confession of the one person unburdens that individual, while placing a burden on the shoulders of the other. Failure is such a common occurrence that even a sick and dying parenthood that is engulfed in a tender but barren memory may appear to be successful.

The distance separating the parents from the parenthood that they have already achieved is much more difficult to discover and even more impossible to cross than the distance between the partner in marriage and full love. The first is even more likely to be instinctively overlooked than the second. It is insensitive to both society and law that only deal authoritatively with what is possible and do not call for anything more than that. Even if it is only relatively successful, parenthood still fails to an extent that parents cannot overlook, at least so long as they have reached sufficient clarity and profundity in their inner life. No other experience of life is better able to make them aware both of the fundamental impotence that their human condition imposes on them and of that state to which they are obscurely moved and to which they are called. Through parenthood, just as through love, but even more powerfully, they move darkly along the path of their being and discover the first light of their dawn.