Parenting in the First Biblical Family*

Prof. Domagoj Runje, PhD

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Split, Split, Croatia

E-mail: drunje2@kbf.unist.hr

ORCID: 0000--0002-6244-362X

Summary

The article analyses fundamental anthropological and pedagogical insights of the biblical primaeval history through the relationships among Adam and Eve and their sons, Cain, Abel, and Seth. The author shows that upbringing in the first family unfolds without prior models, yet within a strong theological framework in which the human being is created in the image of God. The parents transmit to their children work-related, moral, and religious values, even though the biblical text does not describe explicit methods of upbringing. A key limit of parental influence is also emphasised: the freedom of children remains inviolable, as dramatically manifested in Cain's fratricide. A comparison of Cain's and Seth's lineages reveals how constructive and destructive values can be transmitted across generations, with Seth's line representing a renewal of religious and moral orientation. Thus, biblical primordial history offers a paradigmatic portrayal of upbringing rooted in a relationship with God, freedom, and responsibility.

Keywords: biblical anthropology, God the Creator, children, upbringing, parenthood, faith

1. Introduction

By examining the biblical figures of Adam and Eve and their children, we will attempt to identify certain elements arising from their mutual relationships. We do not know exactly how many children Adam and Eve had, since Genesis 5:4 states only that after the birth of their third son, Seth, "other sons and daughters were born to them." In biblical narratives, however, only three of their sons are highlighted: Cain, Abel, and Seth. Likewise, in the genealogies that follow, among the multitude of brothers and sisters, certain individuals are singled out and given more attention, depending on the significance of their role in biblical history.

Although this part of the Bible does not systematically address child upbringing, the theme is nonetheless woven into the very description of the creation of the world and the beginning of human history. Therefore, this section will focus on examining the relationship between parents and children in the first biblical generation of humanity.

2. Adam and Eve as Parents

When God created the first human beings, Adam and Eve, they were presented as young yet mature persons whom God blessed and addressed with the words: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). This command refers to humanity's openness to offspring, which also includes care for children, even though Adam and Eve—having been created, not born—had no experience of their own childhood or of being raised by parents. Despite this, the shared task of the first man and woman is not only reproductive but also pedagogical. The absence of explicit

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pedagogical instructions in the creation narrative may be interpreted as indicating that every human activity, including education, is meant to arise from humanity's relationship with God.

For the biblical author, it is unquestionable that the religious dimension permeates all areas of human life, since biblical anthropology knows no other way to speak of the human person than as a creature of God. In Scripture, there is no account of humanity coming into existence in any other way, nor is there a good and meaningful human life that is detached from a relationship with God. Within this relationship, pedagogy also develops and appears in various forms throughout many other parts of Sacred Scripture. As noted above, pedagogical instructions are not explicitly present in the creation narrative; however, if we focus on the relationship between parents and children in the first human generation, important pedagogical elements can nonetheless be discerned from the very account of creation and the birth of their children.

a) *The Creation of Humanity Is Announced* – In the first account of the creation of the world, found in Gen 1:1–2:3, the creation of humanity is described in ways that differ in several respects from the creation of other creatures. First, unlike the rest of creation, the creation of humanity is announced in advance. Whereas other creatures are brought into existence simply by God's spoken word, the creation of humanity is proclaimed with the words: "Let us make mankind in our image…" (Gen 1:26). Regardless of how the plural "let us make" is interpreted theologically, the fundamental point remains that the creation of humanity is not merely one act among many divine works, but a particularly deliberate and intentional act of God, carrying moral implications for the attitude towards every new human life.

Although from a human perspective there are unplanned and even unwanted children, from God's perspective every human being is both foreseen and desired. This is a fundamental biblical-anthropological principle, according to which every person's right to life has its source in God's creative love rather than in negotiated and changeable human conventions.

Moreover, the plural "let us make," viewed from the perspective of the future growth and development of the human race, conveys that the conception and birth of a new human being are the fruit of communion—not only between man and woman, but also of their cooperation with God in his work of creation, as noted above.

b) *Humanity Is Created in the Image of God in Every Generation* – God's creation of the first human being in his own image is also transmitted to the birth of subsequent generations, as explicitly stated in Adam's genealogy: "When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth" (Gen 5:3). Seth is Adam's third son and is mentioned in Gen 5:3 because the biblical author subsequently focuses on his descendants. What applies to Seth—namely, that he was born in the likeness of his father—naturally also applies to Adam's first two sons, Cain and Abel.

The reader will readily notice that Adam is described as created in the image of God, whereas Seth is said to have been born in the image of Adam. However, this expression does not diminish the self-evident biblical message that every human being is created in the image of God. In the biblical text, this universal anthropological claim is explicitly confirmed in Gen 9:6, where the image of God is mentioned in the context of the ancestors of all post-flood humanity, and in the Letter of James (3:9), which warns of the destructive power of the untamed tongue, by which one can paradoxically use the same instrument both to bless God and to curse human beings who have been created in his image.

The educational postulate arising from humanity's creation in the image of God is that every human being should strive to make this reality as visible as possible in all aspects of life. In Gen 1:26, God's decision to create humanity in his image is immediately followed by the human vocation " they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures

that move along the ground." In this context, humanity's dominion over the earth and other creatures is not left to arbitrary human will. If the human person is the image of God who creates and gives life, then human action—including in medicine, nursing, rehabilitation, and the care of the sick—is likewise called to be a reflection of God's care for his creatures, rather than a force that disrupts or destroys their life and living environment

c) *God Educates Humanity through His Commandments* – In his first address to humanity, God manifests his love for the created human being by blessing him. This love is also expressed through commandments and prohibitions whose purpose is to protect life. Just as parents, taking into account the (im)maturity of young children, forbid what is harmful without lengthy explanations, so God forbade Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He does not explain the nature of the tree to them, but rather warns them of the consequences of its fruit.

This divine manner of acting is also reflected in Jewish pedagogical tradition, which holds that children begin reading the Bible with the Book of Leviticus. In this book—unlike the narratively rich Book of Genesis—there is almost no storytelling that might appeal to a child's imagination. Instead, it contains concrete regulations governing daily life and relationships within the community: what is clean and what is unclean, what is permitted and what is forbidden, what may be eaten and what may not.

According to this pedagogical logic, children must first be practically formed in proper behaviour; only later, when the child begins to ask questions independently, does the moment for dialogue and deeper explanation arise.

A classic example is the celebration of Passover, the commemoration of liberation from Egyptian slavery. The Israelites are obliged to celebrate the feast and observe the Passover meal according to prescribed rituals. The explanation of these rites does not precede practice but comes when the child asks: "What do you mean by this service?" (Exod 12:26). This dialogue between parents and children forms an integral part of the act of remembrance. It makes God's deliverance present, preserves it from being forgotten, and transmits it to new generations.

From a pedagogical-psychological perspective, the child's question indicates readiness to receive a meaningful answer. When a child asks a question, a space opens in which an explanation can be understood, accepted, and integrated. However, for a child to be able to ask questions freely, it is first necessary to create a suitable environment—an atmosphere of trust and security—in which the child feels free to express curiosity.

d) *The Danger of Negative External Influence* – The next element in the relationship between God and Adam and Eve that can be applied to the issue of child upbringing is the influence of external factors. These may be either positive or negative; in this case, however, the focus is on a warning against negative influence.

Just as external forces sometimes intrude on the relationship between parents and children, undermining mutual trust, so too the relationship between God and the first human beings is disrupted by the cunning serpent, who calls into question the benevolence of God's prohibition against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. According to the serpent's words, it seems that God, although he created humanity in his image, does not truly wish human beings to become "like him", since they might then take his place. This introduces the theme of so-called divine hybris, that is, the mythological fear of the gods that human beings might become their rivals. In such conceptions, the gods hinder human progress to prevent humanity from approaching divine power.

Within the context of family relationships, this negative idea—present in ancient religions—can be recognised as unhealthy envy of the older toward the younger, or even of parents towards their own children. It is sometimes concealed beneath an excessively protective attitude that, in fact, prevents integral human growth and development. The Bible presents such behaviour as a cunning and evil deception by which the tempter, in the figure of the serpent, seeks to distort humanity's image of God and

to place himself in the position of one who mediates and controls the relationship between God and the human person.

The serpent thus represents an external, opposing force that intrudes into the relationship of trust between God and human beings—or, by analogy, between parents and children—and pretends to care more for human happiness than God, their Creator. For this very reason, the biblical text (Gen 3) strongly warns of the danger posed by external factors that sow distrust in the human relationship with God. Once this fundamental relationship is disrupted, all other relationships in human life are likewise damaged.

Adam and Eve, as described in Gen 3, succumbed to the serpent's deception; yet God intervened by seeking them and initiating a dialogue they themselves were unable to begin. The transgression of God's commandment had consequences, which, in biblical language, are presented as punishment. In this context, among other things, the woman is addressed with the words: "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labour you will give birth to children" (Gen 3:16). In this way, the woman is affected precisely in that which is specific to her, yet at the same time these words also contain a magnificent affirmation of women who, despite all the difficulties associated with pregnancy and motherhood, continue courageously to give birth to children, without whom the human race would have no future.

The greatness and significance of this gift in the context of the struggle against evil influences cannot be expressed more fittingly or more sublimely than in God's words announcing that the offspring of the woman will crush the head of the serpent, while the serpent will strike at his heel (cf. Gen 3:15), that is, that humanity will struggle against evil and ultimately overcome it.

e) *What Did Adam and Eve Teach Their Children?* – As already noted, despite their pedagogical vocation, the Bible records nothing explicit about their educational activity in their relationship with their own children. Their first two sons, Cain and Abel, although their births and the giving of their names are mentioned, enter the biblical narrative—like their parents—only in adulthood, when they are already capable of offering sacrifice to God from the fruits of their own labour.

Nevertheless, the fact that Cain became a farmer while Abel was a shepherd implies that they must have learned their respective occupations from someone. This implicitly expresses the educational role of parents, who are responsible for ensuring that their children learn to work so that they may live by the labour of their own hands. Moreover, since both Cain and Abel offer sacrifices to God from what they themselves have produced, it may be concluded that their education also included a religious dimension. Someone had to teach them not only practical skills, but also who God is—the Creator of all—and how he is to be worshipped through the offering of sacrifice.

In the biblical narrative, which identifies the beginning of human history with the beginning of a single family's history, "someone" can only be the parents. That Cain and Abel received religious instruction from their parents is further confirmed by the names they were given at birth. When Eve gave birth to her first son, Cain, she said, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man." (Gen 4:1), and the name Cain is associated with the Hebrew verb qānāh, meaning "to acquire" or "to obtain."

From a scholarly perspective, the etymology of the name Abel is uncertain. Nevertheless, it is often noted that the Hebrew form of the name corresponds to the word hebel, meaning "breath," "vapour," or "a fleeting mist." While some interpretations see in Abel's name an expression of the fragility of human life—which he would lose as a young man—breath also points to God as the giver of life. In any case, the first children born into this world were, from the very beginning of their lives, introduced into a living relationship with God through the mediation of their parents.

f) *The Limits of Parental Education* – In the only episode that describes their fraternal life, Cain and Abel already appear as adults. This episode concerning their offerings ends tragically: Cain kills his younger brother Abel

because God favoured Abel's offering but not Cain's. In this account, both the relationship between the two brothers and their relationship with God are presented in a way that does not explicitly mention their parents. Cain and Abel are portrayed as mature and independent individuals who, whether rightly or wrongly, shape their relationships with each other and with God on their own.

The narrative thus leads to the conclusion that Cain and Abel, although born to the same parents and raised in the same environment, developed into two very different persons. This implies that their behaviour is not an automatic consequence of parental or family upbringing, but that their own freedom and personal choice play a decisive role. This is most clearly seen in the negative example, namely, the case of Cain. He ignores God's warning, even though God, perceiving his intention to harm his brother out of envy, says to him: " Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." (Gen 4:7).

After Cain kills Abel and his dialogue with God ends, the biblical narrative nevertheless records the parents' reaction. This is expressed in the verse: "Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, saying, 'God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.'" (Gen 4:25). Eve's statement at the birth of her third son, whom she names Seth, again expresses awareness that the child she has borne is a gift from God, while also revealing the pain caused by Cain's crime. In Gen 5:3, it is Adam—rather than Eve, as in Gen 4:25—who is said to have given Seth his name, which allows us to conclude that his reaction to Abel's death was the same.

This further means that by killing his brother, Cain not only transgressed God's commandment but also betrayed the upbringing he had received from his parents. In this way, albeit in a negative and dramatic manner, it is clearly shown that parental educational efforts have their limits, just as is the case in the human relationship with God: neither divine nor parental instruction abolishes the freedom of the one to whom it is addressed.

3. The Children of Cain

After being driven away and condemned to a life of wandering for having killed his brother, Cain nevertheless settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden, where he founded a family. In Gen 4:17, his wife's name is not mentioned; instead, the text refers to his son Enoch, after whom Cain named the city he built. From this, it may be concluded that Cain was attached to his son Enoch, although the biblical text provides no details about their family life.

It is significant that throughout the entire passage Gen 4:17–24, in which the names of Cain's descendants are listed, God is not mentioned even once. And yet, as will be shown, God is in a certain way implicitly present among Cain's descendants. In this genealogy, the biblical author pauses at Lamech, who was born in the fifth generation, not counting Cain himself. The example of Lamech demonstrates how, from the time Cain killed Abel, evil was transmitted from generation to generation within Cain's lineage.

Contrary to the marital ideal that "the two shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24), Lamech had two wives. Moreover, he treated them harshly, making known to them what he had done and what he was prepared to do in his vengeful disposition: "I have killed a man for wounding me, and a child for injuring me" (Gen 4:23). The killing of a child —who is not portrayed simply as an innocent victim—bears witness to distorted relationships between the old and the young, and consequently between parents and children. One might even ask whether the child who wounded Lamech and whom he killed could have been his own child. In any case, a relationship towards the young that is dominated by violence and killing in Gen 4:17–24 is implicitly marked as godless.

Although God is not explicitly mentioned, God's voice nonetheless resonates in Lamech's words. Lamech concludes his brief speech to his two wives with the words: "If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold" (Gen 4:24). These words echo what God had said to Cain when Cain complained about the severity

of the punishment imposed on him for killing his brother. Cain, evidently fearing that evil might be repaid with evil, said to God: "Whoever finds me will kill me" (Gen 4:14). God responded: "Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance" (Gen 4:15). With these words, God warns against the danger of vengeance, which is nothing other than a continuation of evil and violence.

If these divine words—together with Lamech's own interpretative addition—are recalled by Lamech, a fifth-generation descendant of Cain, this indicates that what God said to Cain became part of a family tradition transmitted from generation to generation. Thus, within the religious formation of Cain's descendants, the idea of God's protection of their forefather was deeply engraved in their consciousness.

However, what in Cain's case served as a warning against vengeance was transformed in later generations into a justification for their own aggressiveness. Others were forbidden to take vengeance upon Cain's descendants, but this tradition did not restrain Cain's lineage from committing evil themselves. In other words, the religious upbringing of Cain's descendants transmitted from generation to generation a distorted image of God. This image would be transformed and purified only during the great flood, when God would initiate a new beginning for humanity.

4. The Descendants of Seth

The genealogy of Adam's son Seth begins with the following words, which have already been partially cited:

"This is the account of Adam's descendants. When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God; male and female he created them. When they were created, he blessed them and named them Mankind. When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth" (Gen 5:1–3).

The statement that God created Adam in his own image is thus carried through to the birth of his third son, Seth. Although Adam's other children were likewise born in his likeness, the emphasis on Seth's resemblance to his father Adam—and thereby to God the Creator—has moral significance in this context. Seth himself is not described by any particular traits, yet among his descendants there arise figures portrayed as righteous and with an intense relationship with God.

The first of Seth's sons is Enosh. In the genealogy in Gen 5, nothing distinctive is said about him; however, earlier in Gen 4:26, the following statement appears: "To Seth also a son was born, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD." Interpreting why the name of the LORD began to be invoked precisely at that moment is difficult, yet the statement clearly conveys at least two important points. The first concerns the manner of worship of the LORD, and the second concerns the worshipers themselves.

The verb "to call upon" (Hebrew qārāʾ) denotes worship expressed through prayer and sacrifice, while the passive construction "people began" (Hebrew hōḥal) indicates that this was not individual but communal worship of the LORD. Thus, the emergence of communal worship in the generation of Seth's son Enosh stands in contrast to the individualistic attitude towards God exemplified by Lamech of Cain's lineage, which he inherited from his ancestor Cain.

Applied to religious education, this means that among the descendants of Seth it occurs within a community of believers that transmits to future generations a shared form of worship of God. Such communal worship prevents a situation in which one person's sacrifice is pleasing to God while another's is not, as occurred in the case of Cain and Abel.

The next descendant of Seth whose relationship with God is particularly emphasised is Enoch. Counting from Adam, Enoch is the seventh generation, a fact that is likely not without symbolic significance. In the seventh generation, a nearly ideal figure emerges, of whom it is simply said: "Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away" (Gen 5:24). In the Hebrew text, the verb hālak appears in the reciprocal form yithallēk,

indicating a mutual relationship between two subjects. Thus, the statement "Enoch walked with God" could be rendered more precisely as "Enoch and God walked with one another."

In this earthly walk, Enoch lived for 365 years, an unmistakable allusion to the 365 days of the solar year. Compared with the other patriarchs listed in Gen 5, this is the shortest lifespan; yet, since God took him, Enoch merely passed into another form of life with God. At the same time, Enoch was the father of Methuselah, the longest-lived of Seth's descendants, who lived 969 years.

Nevertheless, Enoch is not the most significant righteous figure in Seth's—or Adam's—genealogy in Gen 5. That figure is Noah, Enoch's great-grandson, Methuselah's grandson, and Lamech's son.

The name Lamech has already appeared in Cain's lineage, allowing for a meaningful comparison. Whereas Cain's Lamech speaks in a threatening tone, claiming to have killed a man and a child who wounded and struck him—thus expressing his readiness to take vengeance on anyone who might harm him in any way, even a child—Seth's Lamech is a completely different figure. His vision of the future, embodied in his son Noah, is filled with hope despite the distorted conditions on the earth:

"When Lamech had lived one hundred and eighty-two years, he became the father of a son; and he named him Noah, saying, 'Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands'" (Gen 5:28–29).

As in many other cases, the Bible does not provide details about the family life of Lamech and Noah. Nevertheless, Lamech's fundamentally positive response to the birth of his son Noah suggests a favourable family environment in which the young Noah grew up, despite an otherwise unfavourable social context. Within such an environment, Noah developed into a figure of whom it is said, similarly to his great-grandfather Enoch: "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God" (Gen 6:9).

Through the narrative of the great flood, in which the survival not only of humanity but of all living creatures on the earth is preserved through Noah, the importance of the individual is emphasised—an individual who, by living a righteous life in communion with God, lays the foundation for a new and more just world. Although the post-flood world will not be ideal, the principle of preserving life remains constant and is grounded in the righteous and responsible conduct of each human being.

5. Conclusion

Examining the relationship between parents and children in the biblical primeval history reveals that the earliest biblical texts, though they do not offer a systematic pedagogy, provide profound insights into fundamental educational values. From the creation of Adam and Eve to the genealogy of Seth's lineage and the emergence of Noah, Scripture presents the human person as created in the image of God and called to live in relationships marked by love, responsibility, and trust—first towards God, and then within the family.

The first parents, despite having no experience of childhood themselves, are entrusted with passing on to their children knowledge of work, a proper relationship with creation, and the worship of God. At the same time, the biblical narrative honestly portrays the limits of parental influence: Cain's murder of his brother confirms that education never abolishes freedom of choice. In both major genealogies—those of Cain and of Seth—we see how values are transmitted, but also distorted, across generations, revealing the significance of spiritual heritage and the powerful influence of the family and social environment.

In contrast to the violent development of Cain's line, the lineage of Seth gives rise to figures such as Enosh, Enoch, and Noah, who embody a renewed image of humanity in relationship with God. Their example offers an answer to the question of what kind of upbringing opens the path to a more just society: an education grounded in the communal invocation of God's

name, walking with God, and the transmission of hope and trust.

Thus, the biblical primeval history shows that healthy parent-child relationships are not grounded in perfect conditions—which, in the Bible as in life, are almost never present—but in faithfulness, trust, responsibility, and openness to God. In this light, the family emerges as the primary place of growth, and education as the means by which God's plan for life is preserved and handed on.

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