



BROTHERLY LOVE

3

Family Love



Translated by
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**In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit
One God, Amen**

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1

Family Bond

LOVE IS THE PILLAR OF THE FAMILY STRUCTURE

Our Lord Jesus Christ started his ministry by going to the wedding at Cana of Galilee, giving the family a major part in his divine work. The Lord Himself is present in the sacrament of marriage, and He accompanies the couple in their new home as it represents a small sacred church, that is an extension of the mother Church, which is dedicated for the Lord¹.

At the wedding of Cana of Galilee, the Lord requested empty jars, and ordered the servants to fill them with water. The guests were delighted when Christ turned the water in the jars into wine. The wine in the Holy Bible refers to love and also to spiritual joy. So the Lord in the sacrament of marriage, during the wedding, asks the couple for their empty jars, referring to their inability to provide for themselves or for others what pleases the heart and delights the soul.

The Lord asked for water, or asks for their emotions or instinctive love, to create wine out of it that is unique in its kind. The Lord raises their nature to what is above nature. By the Holy Spirit, He bestows in them love that swallows all emotions and excitement and transcends it, and it gives them love for one another like the eternal love of Christ to the Church.

This is the work of the sacrament of marriage; the Holy Spirit links the couple with true love as they become one body, to live together in love, united in their opinions, thoughts and their bodies also, through our Lord Jesus Christ, so they get to see and feel our Lord glorified in their lives.

Through this outlook, the couple gets to taste the fatherhood of our caring God, and realize the motherhood of our Church, so they get to understand Parenthood, not just by the motives of nature, but through deep faith in God. In addition, the children through their love to the Only-Begotten Son understand filiation in obedience and submission to their parents. Thus, the bonds between family members get to be based on deep spiritual basis beyond the limits of nature.

¹ *The Church in fact means:*

- *The community of the believers from Adam until the last advent of the Lord: those who already departed from this world, those who are still alive, and those who will come in the following generations*
- *The house of the Lord.*
- *The soul of the true believer, for she dwells in her.*
- *The true Christian family.*



FAMILY STABILITY

The Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ in a Christian home creates an atmosphere of real love that motivates unity and stability, things that do not unravel over time, or because of certain events. Our Church works to confirm and apply this family atmosphere in every way, so the family ties can be strong. The Church reinforces the following:

1. **Marriage is only between one man and one woman;** no third party comes in between. This was recommended by the Lord that a man will leave (and also a woman), his father and mother and be joined to his wife. It reaffirmed the importance of the unity of the home and its peace! It also keeps the bond between the couple and their children stable.

2. **Their bond in Jesus Christ:** it is not sufficient that the marriage is between a man and a woman who have affection and love for each other, and they isolate themselves from their parents, but they have to seek to be joined in the Person of our Lord Jesus, so their eyes will be looking toward the Cross always.

Marriage is not an emotional or affection harmony alone or agreement in thought or opinion, but it is a union in Jesus Christ through the Cross. **Through the Cross there is no division, no quarrel, no selfishness, but every member bears the weaknesses of others, offering his life as a sacrifice of love for their salvation.** No love greater than this?!

3. **Bonding of the couple and their children with the mother Church,** they all realize their roles, and that they received the spirit of unity and love from Jesus Christ, so they establish a church for Him in their lives, and become witnesses to His life in them, and hand over the true live faith across generations.

Jesus made sure to bond home with the Church, so everyone can live spiritually like Him, and get to grow in the life of love.

The family bond with the Church in all circumstances, in joy and sorrow, in sickness and in oppression. Under all circumstances the family seek the Church as a mother that support the house with prayers, praise, and thanksgiving, so everyone can live together under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, who gives love, joy, and peace (Galatians 5:22).

4. **Forbidding the divorce except for adultery:** so each member bears the weaknesses of the other member for the sake of our Lord. This way everyone is psychologically settled; man, wife, and children, and they get to be confident that stability does not depend on the whims and temperament of one person, especially since the Church prevent the remarriage of a divorcee if he or she was divorced because of adultery.



And more than this, the Church does not favor "second marriage" after the death of the first spouse. This benefits the psychological stability of the children from the first marriage, and strengthens the bond between the couple and their children.

In the book of "Shepherd" by Hermas¹, which had its own recognition in the first centuries, divorce was not allowed to a husband or a wife even if the other party fell in adultery, but to wait for his/her repentance and recovery, but if he or she fell again, divorce must take place otherwise the innocent party is considered careless, linear with the sin, and partner in adultery. I'm not saying that it means we do not accept divorce because of adultery for the first time, but this book reveals two important aspects: seeking the fallen repentance, and preserving the sanctity and unity of marriage as much as possible.

CARING FOR EVERY MEMBER OF THE FAMILY

Before Christianity, family was often based on almost a dictatorship. The head of the family acts like a mastermind in his own way, and the rest of the family accepts it without discussion, but in Christianity each member of the family is given a role, so they all integrate together in a spirit of harmony and understanding.

1. **For the wife,** it was some old laws that gave the man the right to treat woman the way he likes without accountability, and even in the religious view, she was considered the reason for the weakness that prevailed in the world. Christ came willing to redeem all: men and women; slave and free. And all became one in Him. Saint Paul the Apostle says: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ... there is neither slave nor free, there is **neither male nor female**, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3: 26-28).

The Incarnation of the Word of God from **the Virgin Mary**, who became above all earthly and the heavenly hosts, gave back to women's their dignity, and as **St. Augustine** says:

[By his birth from a woman, He wanted to reveal to us some of the heavenly secrets, because it is true my beloved that we have to recognize that He was able to become a human without his birth from a woman if He wanted to...

He was born from a woman in order to comfort women; as if He addressed humanity, saying: "It should be known that there is no evil in

¹ المؤلف: الآباء الرسوليون، ١٩٩١م، ص ١٥٨ (وصية ٤). *The author: The Apostolic Fathers, Commandment 4*
(in Arabic)



God's creation... I made human from the beginning, created male and female; I do not disdain the creation that I made.

Look I was born a man, and was born from a woman; so I'm not despise what I created, but sin which I did not create.

For the same reason, we find that women were the first to announce the resurrection of the Lord to the apostles. In the Paradise (Garden of Eden) the woman announced death to her husband, and in the Church women announced salvation to men. The apostles announced the resurrection of Christ to the nations, after the women announced that to the apostles¹.

St. Irenaeus said: [Although Eve had Adam as her husband, she was still a virgin. With her disobedience, she become the cause of death for herself and to all mankind, Mary was betrothed to Joseph and was a virgin; with her obedience, she became the cause of salvation for herself and for all mankind... Thus, the entanglement which was caused by the disobedience of Eve, was resolved by the obedience of Mary. What the virgin Eve had badly knotted by her lack of faith, the virgin Mary had untied by her faith...]

Origen refers to St. Mary as the one who restored dignity to women's gender, which was lost by Eve's sin. Women had found salvation by giving birth to children. "Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing" (1 Timothy 2: 15). He also says: "The joy that Gabriel brought to Mary removed the grief that was upon Eve, as the sin started by a woman then extended to the man, so began the Annunciation by women (Mary and Elizabeth)."

Thus women regained their dignity, and got their special discretion in the family as wives and mothers, we have already talked about the equality of the wife to the husband, in our conversation about marital love.

Perhaps one of the reasons that the Church pays special interest to the icon of the Virgin Mary carrying her Child our Lord Jesus Christ, and placing it on the iconostasis (icon holder) at the entrance of the main sanctuary, is to highlight the respect for women and appreciation for motherhood.

2. **As for children:** in the old Greek culture, sometimes they were allowed to kill their children if they were sick or weak. The children were left naked on a mountain to die. They also trained their children to eat food that makes them strong, and they taught them to steal food from the camps as long as they do not get caught, and the girls were trained to do rough physical exercises to give birth to strong and healthy children. So it was all about physically strong children without any consideration for the humanity of the weak children or respect for the girls' femininity.

¹ القديس أغسطينوس: عظات على فصول منتخبة من العهد الجديد (٣:١). Ser. On N.T.1:3.

But Christianity has raised the child entity:

a. **Jesus defended them** (Matthew 19:13-15), and brought our attention to the spiritual values of the children (Matthew 18:3-5): simplicity, innocence, and purity.

Since then, "Childhood" became a symbol, everyone longs to reach it, so they can qualify for the kingdom of heaven, as an example. **St. Augustine** says: [They are humble... We should be like small children'.]

b. **The faith of the Church in the role and importance of children is highlighted by their enjoyment of their second birth through baptism.** Perhaps he or she might be a few days old, but baptism allows the work of the Spirit of God in him or her, rendering them as children of God, and dwelling place for the Holy Spirit, having the rights of Church members.

❖ Who dares to say that Christ is not the Savior or Redeemer for children?²

St. Augustine

❖ Jesus Christ came to save everyone, I mean all who were born in Him again, whether they were children, youth, or elders³.

St. Irenaeus

❖ Those who have committed sins before God and they believe that they can receive forgiveness for their sins; no one can stop them from receiving baptism and grace. But children whose consciences are pure and did not commit any sin are still in need for baptism, because of Adam's sin that they inherited through birth, because baptism is a condition for salvation and forgiveness. For this reason, our synod stated: O beloved brother: It is not allowed to prevent anyone from baptism and the grace of God, He who is righteous and merciful towards everyone. Baptism is for everyone, especially for young children, those who get our attention and the goodness of God.⁴

St. Cyprian the Martyr

❖ Many are the disciples of Christ (by disciples he meant baptized children)⁵.

St. Justin

❖ Do you have children? Do not allow evil to get to them, but keep them pure, and let the Holy Spirit work in them from their infancy.

¹ المرجع السابق ٨:١٦.

² St. Augustine: On Forgiveness of sins and Baptism.

³ St. Irenaeus: Adv. Haer. 2:229-11.

⁴ Epis. 59.

⁵ Apology 1:15.



Moms are afraid of God's service because of one reason or another! It may be natural or spiritual weakness, or may be lack of faith! Look at Hanna; before she gave birth to Samuel, she promised him to God (1 Samuel 1:11), and after his birth, right after he was weaned she gave him to the Lord, she was not worried about him being young and weak, but trusted in God. Hand your children to the Holy Trinity, for It is a great and noble guard¹.

- ❖ What can we say about those who are still babies, and did not acquire loss or blessing?!

Do they get baptized also?! Of course, it's better for them to gain it, even without realizing it, than to bear the risk of leaving this world without this seal and this dedication².

St. Gregory Nazianzus

- ❖ The Church received the tradition of baptizing the children from the apostles, for the remission of the inherited sin³.

Origen

- ❖ Baptize your nursing babies, and bring them to the Lord who says: Let the children come to me and do not forbid them⁴.

Apostolic Constitutions

The Coptic child enjoys the mystery of the Eucharist, he feels that the Church is his mother that nourishes him with the body and blood of the Lord, seeks the salvation of his soul, and cares for him.

c. During liturgical services in the Coptic Church, especially the Liturgy of the Eucharist, children share with adults, without being isolated in a place outside the church. This connects the children to worship in the church, and makes them feel that the church appreciates them, and that they are members of the church. Our church is not an organization, but it is a family that includes all its members together with love in the most sacred moments of worship.

d. The Coptic Church is characterized by its smooth hymns, and joyful rituals that attract the heart of the children, so they do not get bored of worship.

¹ On Baptism.

² Orat. 40:28.

³ In Lev; hom 8:3; in Luc. Hom 14, in Epist ad Rom 5:9.

⁴ Apost. Const. 6:15.



e. The Church highlights her appreciation for the children and shows how much She honors them through the many festivals dedicated to various martyrs, and saints among children and boys, and asking their prayers for us. The Church also names churches after them, such as those of the children martyrs of Bethlehem, St. Kyriakos the child and his mother Julita, St. Abanoub the young boy, St. mother Dolaji and her children, as well as that of St. Rebekah and her children etc.¹

- ❖ Truly, are we children of God? Have we gotten rid of our old man, and taken off the dress of evil and put on the immortality of Christ? Have we become sacred new people through the new birth, and preserved ourselves from impurities and as God's children, washed ourselves from adultery?²

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ Let us escape from all pride and have the simplicity of the children, righteousness is inconsistent with pride, while simplicity complements it and magnifies it by its humility³.

St. Ambrose

- ❖ These are the outlines of the true wisdom: to be simple with understanding. Truly this is the angelic life, because the soul of a little boy is pure of all (bad) desires⁴.

- ❖ The disciples prevented the crowds from bringing their children because they thought it did not suit the prestige of Christ. But our Savior wanted to teach His disciples humility and how to overcome pride. He hugged the children and attributed the kingdom of God to them.

- ❖ Truly a child's mind is pure from the pains of sin; so it is fitting for us to exercise with our full freedom what the children do by their nature.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ He did not say "for those," but said, "**for such as these is the kingdom of God,**" i.e. for those who have the intention and the behavior of the children.

A child by nature is simple, has no selfishness, does not hate, and does not harbor evil intentions. Even if his mother hits him, he does not leave her, and if she dressed him in cheap clothes, he sees them better than royal clothes.

Likewise, whoever walks in the path of his good mother the Church, does not honor anything more than Her, even his own pleasures, for Her

¹ راجع للمؤلف: الكنيسة القبطية الأرثوذكسية والروحانية، ١٩٨٧م، أتوا، كندا، ص ١٩٤-١٩٦.

² Instr. 1:6.

³ In Luc 18: 17.

⁴ In Matt. hom 62:4.



being the queen of all. As the Lord says, **"Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a boy will not enter it."**

Fr. Theophlaktius, Patriarch of Bulgaria

f. The Church **deterred parents from being spiteful or irritating towards their children**, as we will see.

In all this, family connections are based on true love, mutual respect, and appreciation for each member, as Christ died for each one of them.



2

Parenthood in Christianity

THE CONCEPT OF PARENTHOOD

God gave humans, animals, and birds a motive for Parenthood. A father loves his son, cares for him, and defends him, willing to sacrifice everything for him, even his life. He looks at him as an extension of his own life.

God put this motive in human life in varying degrees, to grow and mature day by day. No wonder we see a little girl playing a game where she gets to be a mother and cares for her doll as her daughter.

This motive grows in one direction or another, as dictated by the individual's culture and background. He or she grows to be a father or a mother; loving or harsh, spoiling, taunting or moderate, encouraging his children or discouraging them or ignoring their affairs, commanding, or nice and compassionate, or someone who does not care!

For that reason, God the Lover of Mankind offers us His paternity, and the Church declares to us her motherhood. Through them, we draw genuine and true parenthood skills; we get to understand it, practice it, even if we did not have children according to the flesh.

How plentiful is God assurance for us! He Himself announced that (Matthew 6:31-32; 7:10-11; Luke 12:32), and through his prophets and apostles (Isaiah 63:16; 64:8), the true paternity of God is declared towards us through our union with Him.

This paternity is enjoyed by any faithful couple through their union with God in Christ Jesus, and that surpasses natural parenthood. Their children feel it at a very young age, so they grow to experience the warm love of their parents at a heavenly level.

The main feature of a Christian house is true love. The child tastes it from his birth, and as **St. Jerome** said when he guided a mother on how to raise her daughter:

- ❖ She will hug her mom, and relatives will kiss her¹.
- ❖ Her grandfather will play with her, and she will smile at her father. All family members will love and adore her.

You can tell her about her grandfather and aunt, **but she also needs to know which army she belongs to. As a spiritual soldier against sin, she also needs to know who her true leader is. It is the Lord Jesus Christ,**

¹ Epistle 128:1.



the One who invited her to serve under his leadership.

St. Jerome

This love does not stem from the mere emotion of parenthood, but through faith in God. "God is love." The children get attracted to the Lord through their parents; they get to understand the caring fatherhood of God and worship in its life-giving spirit. Thus, the Christian home gets to be the living link for the children with the Lord, their God.

On the contrary, when a child is deprived from the real paternity or maternity on the faithful level, his parents stand like a stumbling block in his understanding of "life with the Lord," and his acceptance of the Heavenly Paternity or the Motherhood of the Church.

When the earthly fathers - despite personal weaknesses - live with the Spirit of the Lord and his Church, united with God, they provide for their children deep vivid picture of the Divine Paternity that penetrates deep into their hearts.



3

Responsible Parenthood

Since parents should draw their parenthood skills from our Heavenly Father and His Church, it is fitting for them to live with the Divine Love and taste it in their lives. That will give them a better understanding of their mission and role in life so they can care for their children in the same way God and the Church care for them, purposeful loving care and passionate firm guidance.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RAISING CHILDREN

Children are precious talent that God gives the parents, more precious than anything else in the whole wide world. God entrust them to their parents not to feel that they own them or to mold them as they desire, or control them or to take pride in them, but first and foremost to care for them as persons that Christ died for. They help them grow as live members in the body of Christ, sacred altars for the Holy Spirit, God's children, heirs of God, and heirs with Christ; the image of God that glorifies Him.

In other words, parents should not look to their child as something precious they acquired, but as a living soul that has a great value in God's eyes, and sharing with them the same destiny. **St. John Chrysostom** says:

[If some people obtain great honor for making sculptures or painting pictures of kings, how much more would it be for us who adorn the image of the King of Kings (because the human is the image of God)?! Myriads of blessings; as we establish a real example, because a real example is in the virtue of the Spirit; when we train our children to be good, meek, forgiving, pious, and compassionate, and when we teach them to look at the present world as nothing!¹]

Thus, **St. John Chrysostom** states that the parents do not provide a statue to God, but a vivid picture of Him in their children when they have the same attributes of Jesus Christ in them and as icon for heaven when they do not care for the world and its temptations. So the parents who bear the image of God enjoy his company, and rejoice with the heavenly life in their hearts and in their home, and offer a sacred generation to the Lord, that continues the testimony for the Lord from the previous generation, and completes its work!

It does not stop at us receiving our children from the hand of God as a living trust who gets to continue our journey as we continued the journey of past generations, in order to join the generations together as one body that

¹ In Eph. Hom. 20.



completes the work of Christ, who is the Head of all, but we need to realize that we are required to bring them to the Lord as an offering of love, by placing in them the struggling spirit as good spiritual soldiers, carrying the Cross with us joyfully. **St. John Chrysostom** commented on 1 Timothy 2:15, saying:

[Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with self-control" (1 Timothy 2:15)... which means that the parents should maintain the born children in the love and holiness.

It means that they do not gain just a small reward for their work, but the parents get rewarded a great reward **as they teach them to be struggling spiritual soldiers to serve Christ**, and that is what it is meant by the holy life, humbleness and self-control...

Hear this, O fathers and mothers, you will not lose your reward for raising your children...

It is not a little matter that you consecrate your children as an offering to God, because if the foundation you put in them is righteousness, then your reward is great, but if you neglect them, the punishment will be great. An example of that is Eli the priest who neglected raising his two sons because he did not want them to suffer or be punished... so he lost himself and them too¹.]

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE!

❖ We read about Eli the Priest, and how God was not pleased with him because of the sins of his children.

St. Paul commands us not to choose a bishop if his children were corrupt or not respectable.

On the contrary, he says that a woman "will be saved with the birth of children, if she keeps them locked in faith, love, and holiness with sobriety" (1 Timothy 2:15).

If parents are responsible for their children even when they are mature and can depend on themselves, how much more is their responsibility if the children are still young and weak, or, according to the word of God, "are not able to distinguish their right hand from their left" (Jonah 4:11), which means that they are not able to distinguish good from evil?!

If you make sure that your daughter does not get hurt physically from a wild animal, why don't you give her the same care when it comes to her soul, and prevent her from going out with Dinah to see the daughters of the earth (Genesis 34)?!

¹ In 1 Tim. Hom. 9.



Why do you say: "The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son" but "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20)? I answer that by explaining that this statement refers to those who can distinguish like the one whose parents said about him in the Bible "he is of age... he will speak for himself" (John 9:21).

So parents are responsible for the work of their children, whether it is good or evil, as long as they are young, until they reach the age when they can choose for themselves which way to go¹.

St. Jerome

❖ Let the young come, let the patients come to the doctor, let everyone who is lost come to the Savior, they all shall come and no one prevents them.

If the branches (children) did not commit any sin yet, but perished because of their roots, let the Healer touch the young with the adults "He will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great" (Ps. 115: 13)...

If the lost included everyone, let salvation be for everyone. We all lost our way, let us find it in Christ... so that He does not exclude anyone from his salvation².

St. Augustine

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE EVEN FOR THE SALVATION OF THE ILLEGITIMATE SON

Any soul is very precious in God's eyes, so it is very difficult to estimate how huge is the responsibility that a human bears in regards to the salvation of his children who are loved by God Himself. **St. Basil the Great** affirms this responsibility even to a child who is a fruit of a sin, meaning an illegitimate son. He says: [women who give birth to a child and leave him on the road, if she could rescue him but neglected him, if she thinks that she is covering up her sin, she should be tried as a murderer³.]

¹ Ep. 107:6.

² Ser. On N.T. 65: 4.

³ Ep. 217 to Ampilochius. 52.



4

Parenthood between Love and Authority

CHILDHOOD WORLD

Children have their own world. It is befitting for the parents - as leaders - to learn it, so they can enter it, not with the spirit of authority or control, or to take it lightly and underestimating it, but in the spirit of love and poise and respect to live with them in the "world of childhood" and walk with them to "the teenage world" and then to "the maturity world," where children, walking along with their parents, grow together in knowledge and experience.

To get through the door of "the world of childhood" without breaking into it, and for the parents to exercise their true love, we need to take into consideration the following basic principles:

1. PARENTAL AUTHORITY IS FOR THE CHILDREN!

Jesus showed His love for those who were sick and healed them even on Saturday, stressing that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27), because He sees that the human is the most valuable of all, and the commandments were made for him. With this understanding we can say that parental authority is for the children, not the children for parental authority. It is befitting for parents and all leaders in the church and in society to acknowledge that the life and development of a child is greater than any authority or power. Our mission is to help him reach maturity, not to assert our authority on him, but to let him enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God (Romans 8:21).

We need to be able to develop every child strong in Jesus Christ and not to control him, so he can enjoy in Jesus' Kingdom of Love. Thus, as we carry our Christ crucified, the lover of children, it is fitting for us to crucify the love of control in ourselves. So, we put down ourselves to help them, and get into their world with the spirit of true love, understand their feelings, appreciate their points of view, and get to know their secrets with reverence, so that they open their hearts to us and accept us into their private world.

In everyday life, if you feel that your child resents to share with you his worldview even by giving you a hint, examine yourself, maybe one day you might have despised his way of playing, or did not answer his questions, or considered his actions a waste of time, or dealt with his friends with contempt etc. Our Christ came down to our world, and did not despise our lives, but shared with us our hopes and feelings, that is why we open up our hearts to him with love! Let us deal with our children as our Lord deals with us, so they would accept us in their world and truly listen to us!



2. YOUR JOB IS TO PAVE THE WAY NOT TO OWN THEM

Professor Costi Bandali¹ states that it is befitting for parents to treat their children with the attitude of St. John the Baptist towards Christ, who after paving the way for Christ stepped down with joy, saying: "He who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled" (John 3:29).

Parents often feel that they own their children. In Roman law, the life of a child was under the mercy of his father, he can slay him or keep him². To this day, many parents want their children to remain under their control in everything, even after getting married. Wise parents follow John the Baptist's example; they prepare the way for their children as their friends, serve them, feel happy with their good development even if they have different talents or capabilities. They do not ask their children to be copies of them, but to be mature persons who have their own independent personality and their private entity.

3. MUTUAL BENEFITS

By having children, the couple gets new experiences, since with every child born, they prepare themselves psychologically to learn and enjoy parenthood throughout different stages of their child growth. The role of the father (or mother) is not to issue orders of do's and don'ts, or to form their child according to their whims, but to teach him love, prayer, reading, and how to seek advice. However, it is most important for parents to learn from their child, because learning is mutually exchangeable in the circle of love.

St. Cyprian³, a bishop famous for his constant learning with his people, he taught them and learned from them. He said; "a wise spiritual father interacts with confessors under the guidance of the Spirit of God and also learns from them." Let us listen to our children and take care of their overt and covert actions, not to control it, but to guide them with love and pick from them what is beneficial for us!

4. MUTUAL OBEDIENCE

At the age of eighteenth months, a child starts to practice saying "no,"

¹ مواقف الآباء ومشاكل البنين، منشورات النور بلبنان، ص ٣٤-٣٥.

² راجع سليمان نسيم: تاريخ التربية القبطية، ص ١٦٠.

³ المؤلف: الحب الرعوي، ١٩٦٥، ص ٨.



because he turns from a psychological little infant who cannot help but to do what his mother wants him to do into recognizing his "ego," which was formerly integrated with his mother. In order to achieve this self-starting in independence, he says "no" to his mother and does "yes." This means: "No, because you ask me," At the same time, I do "yes," because I want to do that¹.

Hopefully, we do not misunderstand "no" here as means of disobedience and stubbornness, but the desire for maturity and formation of his own personality, which has its entity independent from the mother, so instead of resisting, she can disclose to him with love for the concept of obedience by obeying him in what is right and proper, so he realizes that maturity is achieved not by "no" but with love and accepting what is right. This does not mean that we submit to our children in all their requests and orders, otherwise it turns obedience to the chaos, and love to carelessness.

How beautiful is it that a mother bows with love to listen to her child, and obey him with the spirit of love, and how great is it for a priest to bend to hear the voice of the people in a spirit of piety and wisdom. Do not be surprised to hear about obedience of parents and leaders to a child, and their appreciation for him and his entity. God Himself has taught us this. The One to Whom all the heavenly and earthly creations subject to, says to Moses: "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by your name" (Exodus 33:17).

5. THE SPIRIT OF DIALOGUE

A child is not a pretty doll or a puppet that we own and be proud of, nor is he a very precious property that we hold, but he is a living human being with his own personality, concepts, abilities, and intelligence. We need to respect him and deal with him as a person to person. We need to learn from God himself, He Who knows everything, and how He deals with us, as it was said: "The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11).

Have conversations and discussions with your child, but do not dictate your concepts or ideas, and then demand his obedience, but listen to him and hear his questions with great interest and appreciate his ideas and concepts, and learn what is behind his actions.

A child who is about three years old begins to wonder what all things are and what is their source! These questions indicate his thirst to discover the world around him, and his yearning for knowledge. It may be also due to

¹ كوستي بندلي، ص ٥٥.

Dr. Françoise Dolto: *Lorsque l'enfant paraît*, pp. 148 et 151, Seuil, is, 1977.



fear or anxiety. A parent's heart expands to hear in attention and care, and answers without a lie: in a simple, explicit way to the extent that is understood by the child that is necessary to his development without misunderstanding. We should respect our children thoughts, and give them the attention even if the matter seems trivial to us. By this way, we give them sound knowledge about everything that goes on around them and the children would trust us and do not hide or conceal something in their hearts, and they also do not go to get advice from others, especially in adolescence. Dr. Malak Guirguis gave some examples of the children's questions and how to answer them¹.

On the other hand, when children have questions about sexuality, we should listen to them without reprimanding them or showing any kind of disgust, and answer those questions in a simple, quiet, and wise way; we can explain to the children as much as they could understand, offering them the truth in a proper way.

I recall the words of a woman who said to me: "One of the scenes that are very influential in my life is when one day, I entered the church and found Father Bishoy Kamel putting his hand on a little girl's shoulder and bending down completely to listen to her! I knew how he was able to climb into the world of childhood!"

6. ASCENDING TO THE WORLD OF CHILDHOOD

We cannot get into the world of childhood if we did not understand the concept behind the child's behavior. Quoted here are some examples mentioned by Dr. Costi Bandali about some situations mentioned in the writings of some scholars in development:

a. A child, who was twenty months of age, deliberately made her hands dirty with the coal, and then came to the maid to wash her hands. The mother was angry at the beginning, but after a little while, she realized that the child **wants to learn how to wash her own hands**, and the maid insists on washing her hands. The mother began to teach her how to wash her hands by herself, and as soon as she learned, the girl stopped getting her hands dirty.

b. A boy came in with his bike that was soiled with mud to the family room, his father got angry and asked him to take his bike back outside, but the boy through a tantrum and said "no," the father said the bike is dirty and the room is clean, the child still did not care. Then the father smiled and told his son **to invite his friend to spend the night with him**, and it is not appropriate for his friend to come and see the room dirty. The boy then took his bike outside and came back in and cleaned the carpet!

¹ سلسلة مشاكل الصحة النفسية للأطفال وعلاجها، ج ٦، مكتبة المحبة.



c. **To give an order to a child to leave his game so he can go eat or sleep immediately** is not the right thing to do because though he might listen right away, deep inside he might feel frustrated, or feel that he is a failure, and loses self-confidence, because someone broke into his world. He was very happy imagining himself as a horse or an elephant, or maybe a bird, and no one gave him a few minutes to come out of it and prepare himself to accept the change.

d. **Throwing orders of "Dos" and "Don'ts" in moments of anger** develop an adverse reaction in children. Leaders (parents) who could not control their temper cannot raise a generation free of nervousness. **Let us hope that in our dealings with our children, we do not stop at the outer appearance, but look for the internal motives of the children!** I recall, for example:

I. **We accuse a child of violence because he tried to hurt his younger brother while playing with him when his parents were not around.** We can prevent him from doing that by rebuking him, but aggression will remain suppressed within him. He was the only son, the king of the house, and the focus of interest of the whole family, so he feels that his younger brother stripped him of his throne, so jealousy is normal. If we would ignore it, it can get transformed into a desire to torture animals, birds or insects, and perhaps can turn later on to a desire to torture others, even his parents when he gets to his teenage years. It might even accompany him all his life. A teacher gave a doll to a child like that, and asked him to beat it. In the beginning the child did not accept, but days later after it lost value in his eyes, he started beating the doll until it came apart. But the teacher managed to talk to him, so he realized his mistake, and turned to a loving child even to his brother!

II. **A mom might force her daughter to meet friends** to help her get rid of her shyness, but to no avail. So, it is important to understand what is the reason for her timidity. Maybe, the reason is a particular incident that caused her to fear all those who are around her, or perhaps she feels that she is a failure as a result of constant criticism by her parents, especially in front of others.

III. **We may accuse a child of theft** because he takes what is not his. In fact, it is a setback to early childhood in which the child feels that he owns everything. Failure leads him to revert to an early age, and exercise actions that is below his age; as his desire to own everything or bedwetting, etc.

IV. We may accuse a child of lying, while he does not differentiate between fact and fiction. What we think is a lie, might actually be an expression of his daydreaming, which shows the wishes of the child and his desires.



7. THE UNVEILING OF A CHILD'S TALENTS AND ABILITIES BY THE SPIRIT OF ENCOURAGEMENT

A wise parent is the one who knows the talents and the capabilities of his child, so he can guide him to work in a direction that will utilize his energies, developing it and unveiling new talents in his life. The parent must take into account the child's age, ability, and psychology, never describe the child as stupid, otherwise he will act stupid, nor to make him bear more than his capacity, leading him to failure.

Christ said: "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). Work is the first commandment that was given to man when he was in the Garden of Eden at the start of human life. Work in human life - whether a child or an old man - is essential. Without it he loses his vitality, loses his peace, and falls into the abyss of boredom and weariness.

Work has its special blessings in childhood if it is guided in the proper way, including:

a. **It increases his experience;** it teaches the child something new every day. That is why **St. Jerome** asked a mother to take care of filling her little girl's time with what benefits her. He wrote in a letter addressed to the mother: [Bring a set of characters made of wood or ivory, and give each character a suitable name... Let her play with these things, **to learn something new, even in her play**¹.]

b. **Encourage their development with joy:** Parents need to wisely guide their children; they should encourage their children's work and give them confidence and joy, and not resort to reprimanding them, especially in front of others so they do not fall into despair. This way, they enhance their love to achieve and make them more eager to learn. As **St. Jerome** said; [Offer your daughter gifts for proper pronunciation, **encourage her with gifts that rejoice children of her age.** Let her have friends during her school years then she will learn how to compete, **do not rebuke her if she is not doing good in school,** but try to encourage her so she does better and feels good about herself. **Above all, avoid presenting her with tasteless lessons;** otherwise she will grow up to hate learning and knowledge².]

c. **Devote a special share in their time for spiritual work during childhood years,** as it keeps them going all the days of their lives. **St. Augustine** admits that, during that time of his life when he was still doing evil deeds, **the words of his mother during his childhood were like pricks in his heart.**

¹ Epistle 107:4.

² Epistle 107:4.



The Early Fathers asked parents to pay special attention to teaching their children the church hymns and psalms. In the words of **St. Jerome** to a mother: [Reward your daughter for **praising with psalms**, so she will love to learn it with joy, and not being forced to do it¹.]

d. **Absorb the energies of the child in a positive way:** We often hear about the “**problem child**” who is violent and tends to ruin things. A child like that has a lot of energy that needs to be directed in the right way. He needs wise parents who gets him involved in the work around the house. He also can take a role in the church, so he can grow to be a valued individual who is useful for himself and for others without any suppression or recklessness. A “**naughty**” child is fit to become an energetic effective leader.

e. **Participation in the family life:** The house for any child is the first school that could makes out of him a lively active person, with an ample heart full of love for the Lord and all people, or it can create a dead, negative, close-minded person who does not enjoy the company of the Lord or the people. Since the Christian home is an extension of the church and a living member within her; let us pay special attention to what happened on the day of Pentecost, as the Holy Spirit settled on the disciples in the form of tongues of fire on each one of them. Everyone received a special tongue; a special talent and a specific work, that integrated with and complemented all the others.

Church also in its unity provides each one of her children with a special “tongue,” meaning that she believes in his distinctive personality and special talents. So the church lives with love in unity and harmony, **without molding every member in the same mold**, but offering each one of them his special work, and none of them is left out without a function.

So also for the Christian home, it is appropriate for parents to realize that their children are not robots who follow their orders or their demands without discussion, but to know that they are living members, and they have their own ideas, their potential, their feelings, and their talents. Having that in mind, parents should be able to help their children grow with a broad mind and heart and become an active member in their home, church, country and in the society as well.

8. CARING FOR THE CHILD AS A WHOLE

As we believe that each child has his own personal entity, it is fitting for us to take care of all aspects of his life without favoring one aspect at the

¹ Epistle 128:1.



expense of the others. I mean his spiritual life, his physical and psychological health, also his involvement in sports and games, as well as his relationship with others, how he gets involved in family matters, his mental abilities, and how he is doing in school etc. This caring will not be achieved unless his family has a real balance in every aspect of life, and then he gets to feel the warmth of love in his family, especially among his parents, and also feels how they truly rely on God joyfully within their family, without complaining or feeling discontent or distressed, and also gets a taste of the church's true spiritual environment in his parents' spirituality.

OWNING OR LAUNCHING?

Dr. Costi Bandali offers a frank question to all parents: Is your love for your child "owning or launching?"¹ I already spoke about the relationship between parents and their adolescent children in the book "Let Me Grow Up" offering the same idea under the title: "Do Not Buy Me With Money... I am a human!"²

Proper family relationship is not based on selfish love, which suffocates and destroys, but on love that offers freedom and vitality. The parents have the right to own their child if they let their child own them in return, so they would not suppress their child's capabilities! Mutual ownership that is based on love and freedom is a sacred ownership, just like a shadow for our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, where we say to Him: "My Beloved is mine and I am His" (Song of Songs 2:16). Before He claimed us to Himself, He offered Himself first for us to own! So we get to see that our Lord and Savior does not treat us as precious objects He acquired for Himself. Rather, He treats us as people whom He loves with different talents and abilities. Even though these talents and abilities are all gifts from Him, they became an integral part of our being. He sanctifies them and helps their development.

With the same essence it is befitting for parents to give their children the right to grow according to their own special talents and abilities, to set them off as independent figures, firmly directing them with love, but without oppression or tyranny. Give them what is positive for their development with appreciation and respect.

Education scholars give us some reasons why parents want to be controlling and why they desire to keep the child under their protection, as if he was completely helpless, or to be an exact copy of one of them, or to

¹ كوستي بندلي، القسم الأول، ص ١٧ الخ.
² المؤلف: دعوني أتمو، ١٩٩٠، ص ٧٦ الخ.



follow their commands blindly, even when he would reach the age of puberty¹:

1. **The need to feel that we are important**; we take advantage of the child's dependency on us, and him seeking our care, so we stop him from thinking for himself, make him hesitant in whatever he is doing, not trusting in his potentials. Sometimes we push him to be shy or lazy, while we consider that as politeness or as a quiet nature, or we might lead him to violence, carelessness, and inability to bear responsibility.

2. **Sometimes we behave as if we were semi-gods**; we crush the will of our children to affirm ours, instead of helping them fulfill their entity. In this we violate God's plan for them, because He is the Creator of everyone, yet He does not exercise control on His creation, but offers them love based on the spirit of mutual understanding and dialogue.

Use of control may bring respect ostensibly and temporarily, which masks a sense of aggression that can explode in the adolescent years and beyond, when a person who declares retribution repels against his family and/or all the human or divine authority, even at the expense of destroying his entire life!

3. **A father would practice his passion to own his child when he ignores the true identity of the child** and his unique characteristics; and he might desire to fulfill his own dreams in his child even if it was inconsistent with the child's character or his tastes or circumstances. So, he would push his son in a certain direction that is not suitable for him, and that leads him from one failure to another, at the end it demolish all his child's talents. A university professor would aspire to see his child grow up fast, and follow his foot-steps, so he would pass along to him all his experience and expertise in his field, even if that field does not match what his son or daughter might like.

A father might find in his child a way to compensate for what he was denied or has suffered from in his own childhood or his youth. So, a father who had been deprived of the kindness of his parents, becomes too lenient with his child and excessively does not set limits to his demands, which leads the child to lose his sense of responsibility. And a mother, who did not have a good husband, might ask her daughter to act in a certain way when she gets married!

4. Perhaps one of the most serious practices that parents can fall into is that **they would love their child not for himself but as an extension of themselves**, especially if there is a family dispute, each party will try to

¹ كوستي بندي، القسم الأول، ص ١٧ الخ.



attract the child, and fulfills all his/her requests, regardless of his/her mistakes, which will make him/her lose his/her sensibility and ability to withstand responsibility.

Sometimes in family disputes the father finds a substitute for his wife in his daughter, and the mother finds a substitute for her husband in her son, and they end up controlling them like puppets and they never mature psychologically.

5. **A parent's possession of his child through a narcissistic relationship with his son/daughter**; he sees his own self-image in his son/daughter, he wants him/her to be an exact copy of him, and to be an extension of his existence, and to commemorate him.

Now let us seriously think about our children and about the sincerity of our love for them. Let us learn how to love them without excessive pampering, and how to care for them without shattering their will, their personalities or their self-entity in the Lord.



Parenthood and Sacred Love

We talked about parenthood as a shadow of God's true Fatherhood that bears love not authority, and we discussed, through the Bible, the positive and negative sides of upbringing children.

To some extent, modern psychology embraces the same biblical directions, as it demands true firm love, so that the child does not suffer from his parents' violence or excessive spoiling. Here, I would like to emphasize that the correct love is only another form of a true sacred life that is based on sincerity and purity of the heart, and not limited to rituals or visible behavior.

PARENTHOOD AND THE SANCTITY OF PARENTS

Our Lord Jesus Christ looked up to the Father, saying: "**It is for them I sanctify Myself.**" The Holy Son of God, who knows no sin, the One who sanctifies the souls and saves them from corruption, proclaims that He sanctifies Himself so that we may be holy in Him. He is the Holy One who dedicates His life for our sanctification and our salvation when He says that He sanctifies Himself.

Thus, we can see in Our Lord Jesus Christ the greatest and unique ideal, and in turn, we need to sanctify ourselves for the sanctification of the new generation, as well as our own growth in the holy life. So, **a child training and upbringing begins in the life of his parents, even before they have him.**

Child rearing starts from the parents' bedroom in their private living association with the Holy God, and their bond together through true love in God. An expert in education was asked: "When should I start raising my son?" He replied, "Twenty years before his birth." Ever since the Old Testament, the Bible focuses on the lives of the parents as being the spring that flows into the children.

I might add that, although some children had been deprived of their parents' nurturing and compassion for one reason or another, but the blessings and prayers of their parents do accompany them in their path.

The greatest in prophets, Samuel, was born as a fruit of love in between his parents, and also the harvest of his mother's contrition prayers.

John the Baptist was the son of two righteous people, who passed away and left him, and he lived in the wilderness supported by their blessings and prayers!

Moses was deprived of his parents, except for a few years in his childhood when he was breastfed by his mother in the palace of Pharaoh. She



founded the spirit of faith in him, which remained with him to the end despite the pagan environment in which he lived and the temptations that surrounded him in the palace.

On the contrary, many people harshly attempted to raise their children in God's arms to live in the fear of the Lord. But the parents' lives which were built on sand with no foundation, limited to appearances and without roots or depth; that turned the children off from all what is related to religion. Some even antagonized the Church and resisted the truth!

The secret of Paula's success was her mother's, Leita, sacred life. **St. Jerome** wrote to the mother a letter saying:

[In answer to your requests and the requests of the blessed Marcella, I would like to correspond with you as a mother, and coach you on how to raise Paula who is dear to us. She is the one who was sanctified for Christ before her birth and was consecrated to his service even before her conception.

Here, in our times, the story told by our prophets about Hannah is being repeated. She started as barren, but then she became fertile...

I also trust that since you offer the first born to the Lord, you will become a mother to many children. According to the Law, the first born is sanctified to the Lord (Exodus 13:2)¹.]

CREATE CHURCH ENVIRONMENT

During the sacrament of marriage the bride and groom listen to these Gospel words: "In the beginning was the Word... All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made... But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:1-13).

The aim of marriage - after enjoying the spirit of union and love - is producing children to live in the shadow of love in the spirit of the Church. The Church therefore emphasizes to the newlyweds as they unite that their offspring are from God. "All things were made through Him," and not the result of united flesh or some lust. They are God's holy gift. The church lifts their eyes for them to offer their children to God, not as if they own them, but as "children of God" born of the water and the Spirit.

When God awards a child to a couple, they in turn offer the child to God, to become His son through the sacrament of baptism. In baptism, the Lord returns the child to the parents and they promise to raise him in the Spirit of God, to live as a son of the Church. The parents or "godparents" are

¹ Epistle 107:3.



then committed to bring the baptized up in the Church environment, especially as he has become a temple of the Holy Spirit.

The priest advises the parents, saying:

[Today my beloved, your children became heirs to life with Our Lord Jesus Christ!

Today your children got included in the purchased life, and became established in the proper Orthodox faith.

They were slaves, not free at birth, but today they have become winners against wicked plots...

Now my beloved know that you received your children according to a holy, pure and spiritual baptism, and that you are accountable to God for them if you neglect them and their discipline or if you do not keep them away from inappropriate matters.

Strive in teaching them to memorize and recite the Scriptures which are the breath of God, and to stick to the church in morning and night and to observe the apostolic instructions...

Protect your children and do not allow them to go to unsuitable places, for the Lord to guard them from evil temptations.

Plant beautiful qualities in them, sow righteousness and praise in them, sow celibacy in them, etc.]

❖ It is customary to call godparents spiritual parents¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ We believe and trust that the parents' and godparents' faith **provide an** advantage for the children.

❖ The children come to gain spiritual grace, not by those who carry them in their hands... but they are taught and prepared by the whole congregation including saints and believers (i.e. godparents represent the whole all-embracing Church)².

St. Augustine

❖ The ceremony of baptism occurs through a person called a godparent. This person testifies to the good deeds of the one who is about to be baptized. The godparent confirms that the person for baptism was rightly counseled, did all the required preparation before coming for baptism and is worthy to become a citizen of the (heavenly) city. The godparent is not responsible for the sins that the baptized person might commit in the future – because every person answers to God about his own deeds. But he

¹ Cf. E. C. Whitaker: *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 1970, p 33.

² Epistle 89:5.



is correctly referred to as a guarantor, because his testimony qualifies the counseled person for baptism¹.

❖ The godparent will reply on your behalf (during the ceremony) and becomes your mentor and leader in the heavenly city to help you settle there².

Fr. Theodore

There are many commandments, but they could be summarized in one; that is the upbringing of the child should be contained within their church and according to her spirit. **The following are some of the commandments given by some Fathers so that children thrive in a Church environment and enjoy the Church's motherly care through in the holy house.**

❖ As you know, Samuel grew up in the Temple, and John was trained in the wilderness. The first was offered to the Lord, so he grew his hair, did not drink wine or alcoholic drinks, and spoke with God when he was a child. The second left city life, was clothed in camel's hair, and his food was locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3:4)... That is how the soul which is God's temple should be refined.

It is not appropriate for Paula to hear, learn, or speak of anything other than what demonstrates the Lord's fear. It should not know profane words or worldly songs.

Its tongue should indulge in the sweetness of the Psalms³.

❖ When Paula grows up like her Groom, in wisdom and grace before God and people (Luke 2:52), she will go with her parents to the Temple of her real Father. They will not take her back with them - away from Him, but they will search for her among relatives and acquaintances of this world and she will not be found (Luke 2:43-46), except in the security of the Scriptures, asking prophets and apostles about the meaning of the spiritual marriage which she vowed for.

Encourage her to follow Mary's example, whom the angel Gabriel found alone in her room (praying), and she was disturbed (Luke 1:29) when she saw a man in her room!

Let her follow the saying: "The royal daughter is all glorious within" (Psalm 45:13).

Let her be targeted by the arrows of love and say to her Groom: "Take me away with You – let us hurry! Let the King bring me into his chambers" (Songs 1:4)

¹ Cf. E. C. Whitaker: *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, p 45.

² Cf. E. C. Whitaker: *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, p 45.

³ Epistle 107:3, 4.



Do not let her go outside, lest the guards would find her and take her veil of chastity (Songs 5:6), and leave her naked in her blood (Ezekiel 16:1-10). But, better that she says to the one who knocks on her door (Songs 5:2): "I am a wall and my breasts are like towers" (Songs 8:10), and "I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?!" (Songs 5:3)...

- ❖ From now, teach her not to drink wine, "in which is dissipation" (Ephesians 5:18)...
- ❖ Let her be deaf to the sound of the organ, and unable to use the flute and harp (for the worldly songs)...
- ❖ Let her daily chore be in giving you flowers which she hand-picks from the Bible¹.
- ❖ It is proper that she wakes up at night to recite prayers and psalms, and to sing praise in the morning, and in the time of the third, sixth and ninth hours. She should take a place among the ranks of the warriors for Christ's name. Finally, she should light her lamp and give evening offerings.

These works should be the routine of her day and night; they will keep her occupied. If she prays after reading and reads after praying, she will be busy with many varied chores and time will pass quicker.

[Then he talked about craftsmanship... It is important that a child is brought up from an early age to work diligently.]

- ❖ Let her restrain and mortify her body by vigils and fasting.
The cold chastity will enable her to extinguish the flames of lust and suppress the hot desires of youth.
- ❖ Her treasures shouldn't be silk and jewels, but manuscripts of the holy books...
- ❖ Let her dresses and robes befit the One she is devoted to!
Do not let her hurt her ears or paint her face, which was sanctified for Christ, with colors of red and white...
Her jewels should be of a different kind. She can sell ordinary jewels later, and buy instead the One Pearl "of great price" (Matthew 13:46).
- ❖ Let her start with learning the Psalms and understand the wise behavior in life from Solomon's book of Proverbs - so that she can perfect the habit of ridiculing the world and its false people, and try to be like Job in his virtues and patience. Then, to progress to the Gospels and not let go of them as long as she has hold of them!

¹ Epistle 107:7-9.

After that, she sips the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters with content heart.

As she stocks up her mind with these treasures, she learns the books of the Prophets, the Heptateuch (the seven books from Genesis to Judges), the books of Kings and Chronicles, Ezra and Esther...

When she completes all of that, she can confidently read the Song of Songs. She should not read it before completing all other readings, because she will fail to understand it. Despite being written in physical terms, it is in fact the wedding song to the Groom of the soul. It might disgust a reader who does not understand it...

She should avoid fraudulent books...

Let the writings of Cyprian be always in her hands.

Let her learn Athanasius' letters and the treatises of Hillary and do not think that she might struggle to understand¹.

St. Jerome

- ❖ "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

He says "hymns and spiritual songs" while your children perform Satan's songs and dances... It is a real shame that not one of them knows a psalm!...

Teach your child to be mindful of the psalms that are full of the love of wisdom, and touch on chastity, and avoiding the companion of evil-doers...

Then after the Psalms, they should learn divine praises – that is what the heavenly powers sing².

St. John Chrysostom

CAREFULNESS IN SELECTING OF THE NANNY, SERVANT AND FRIEND

A human's personality is formed during his early childhood, and on this foundation, he lives for the rest of his life. For this reason, when giving the children back to their parents, the church in great care, cautioned the parents about having immoral nannies, servants, friends, or any other caregivers for their children, lest they permeate corruption to the children's good nature.

¹ Epistle 107:11-12.

² In Colos 9.



- ❖ The damage caused to a free person from employing crooked slaves is immeasurable¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Keep Paula away from the boys and their sinful ideas. It is appropriate that her nannies and other helpers should give up the life of worldly (scornful) society, because when they learn bad matters, they will pass it onto her, maybe even in a worse form².
- ❖ Beware that your daughter is not led by wicked women. With them, she might get used to speak in nicknames (for alluring) or seek vanity in gold and purple dresses. The first will mess up her talk and the second will blemish her personality.

She must not learn anything during her childhood that is not appropriate to learn later on³.

It is difficult for the mind to get rid of early influences. Who can restore the brilliant white color of wool once it is stained with purple?! A jar which is not used for a long time retains the taste and smell of what previously filled it.

The Greek history tells us about Emperor Alexander - who dominated the whole world – and how he was unable to get rid of the effects of the immoral behaviors instilled in him by Governor Londius, during his childhood.

We are always quick to imitate what is evil. In no time, mistakes become our nature and virtues then become difficult. That is why Paula's nanny must not be loose, corrupt or foolish.

Any person in close proximity to her or is involved in attending to her in any way should be respectable and sincere. So, when she sees her grandfather, she would jump on his chest and put her arms around his neck, and, whether he likes it or not, sing "Alleluia" in his ears (because she learned praises, not songs)⁴.

Do not let her mix with strangers unless accompanied by you. She also can go to church or visit the shrine of a martyr, but only with her mother.

Do not give permission to young men to greet her with smiles or try to lure her with locks in their hair...

¹ In Colos 9.

² Epistle 107

³ It was customary for some mothers and nannies to teach young children some swearing and strong language. They are delighted when the child could utter them innocently. But we should not teach our children what we do not want them to learn in their adolescence and when they mature.

⁴ Epistle 107:4.



- ❖ Encourage her to befriend some older virgins who have advocated faith, strong personality, and chastity. For them to be live examples for her, so she would learn by words and deeds¹.

St. Jerome

- ❖ Our spiritual teachers thought about this matter and they agreed that biological parents can entrust a righteous mentor for the care of their children. The children remain under his care as a holy father to secure sacred salvation. During the ceremony of the sacrament (baptism), that mentor lifts the child, advocates holy life, condemns the devil and declares the faith².

St. Dionysius Areopagite

PRACTICAL DEVOTION

St. John Chrysostom considered it important that parents should not only care that their children are engaged in holy life, but also to prepare them for sanctified married life³. A home is like a school in preparing the child for work. Likewise, the home prepares him to put the foundation of a new 'home.' In other words, it is the parents' duty to create a generation who is ready to prepare the next generation that succeeds them, and so on. This thought must never depart from their mind.

This requires the children to be familiar with life of patience and endurance and to be able to face difficulties with good practical faith.

- ❖ Let us train our children to be able to tolerate every trial, and not to be surprised by what happen to them because of this trial⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

GOOD EXAMPLES

Parents' sanctified life provides a good example that is sensed by a baby, a child, and youth. Children learn from their parents not through orders and prohibitions (do's and don'ts), but through their lifestyle. That is why the church very much cares that Christian homes should live an unblemished life with meaningful reverence.

A child is able to detect his parents' lies, anger, insincerity (hypocrisy) in worship, and all their vulnerable points, which takes away their authority to direct and guide him. The parents' job is to present the child with a live model of the practical faith, and a sincere spiritual picture,

¹ Epistle 107:11.

³ In 1 Timothy 9.

⁴ In Ephes. 20.

² رئاسة الكهنوت ٧: ١١، ١٢.



reflecting the same status they wish him to be. Then, they will not resort to giving many instructions, and the children would accept their advice with love and understanding to its reasoning.

- ❖ “In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works” (Titus 2:7).
The apostle directs that older women and older men advise young women and young men to be sensible.
All should become institute and example of virtue in everything.
Your glowing example will be displayed in great beauty for anyone seeking examples for good things.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ It is proper that you would be as a school for her and a model for what you wants her to be, whilst you plan her childhood.
Let neither you - nor her father – allow her to see any of your doings that, if she copied, she would be doing wrong!
Remember that you are the parents of a consecrated virgin and that you teach her more through your conduct than through your instructions¹.

St. Jerome

¹ Epistle 107:9.



6

Parenthood and Firmness

WORKING WITH GOD!

Parents are accountable before God for giving their child as an unblemished offering to the Lord. They prepare this offering through the church, the work of the Holy Spirit, and their own diligent nurturing, so that the child becomes a viable offering living for the Lord with open heart to all human beings.

This is a truly critical responsibility for the father and the mother. They need special qualifications in spiritual and mental maturity as well as understanding their obligations towards their children to discern their minds, strengths, abilities, and talents¹.

However, **St. John Chrysostom** reassures us by saying: [Let’s ask God to help us on this matter. If he sees us caring and concerned about it, he will help us. But if he sees us indifferent about it, he would not lend us a hand. He does not grant his assistance when we slumber, but when we toil.]

LOVE; BETWEEN COMPASSION AND FIRMNESS

In our discussion "Parenthood; between Love and Authority," we have seen that love does not mean immense spoiling. Instead, it is meaningful and purposeful compassion towards self-edifying and personal growth. The result of over mollycoddle does not differ much from the result of violence and cruelty. In another words, love, kindness, and dialogue with the children do not conflict with wise and purposeful discipline.

God disciplines us as our Father, not in retaliation, but mercifully and compassionately for our edification and growth. Solomon the Wise says: "Because the Lord disciplines those He loves and as a Father the son in whom he delights" (Proverbs 3:12).

Parental discipline differs from cruelty that is outside parenthood, because it stems from sincere love. We have already spoken extensively about the "spiritual father’s firmness in caring for his children²." And, there is no need to reiterate that here.

We need to keep in mind that **our hearts should be filled with love before we rebuke**, according to the words of **St. Augustine**: [Reprimand must be preceded by compassion not anger].

¹ *The Ten Commandments' (2nd commandment) by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III.*

² *The Author: My apprenticeship to my father in confession, 1965 edition, 170-192 (in Arabic).*



At the same time, let's observe these words and sayings:

"He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him" (Proverbs 13:24).

"Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death" (Proverbs 19:18).

"Do not withhold correction from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from hell" (Proverbs 23:13-14).

"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself, brings shame to his mother" (Proverbs 29:15).

❖ Let there be love that is not flaccid!

Let cruelty be not severe!

Let compassion be according to the situation without disproportionate lenience!

Father Gregory

❖ Fathers: Teach your sons in the Lord, and nurture them with the knowledge and discipline of Christ. Teach them appropriate trade so that they do not become idle.

Do not worry about rebuking or teaching them good standing because in doing so you are not killing them but loving them.

Constitutions of Ebn El-Assal

❖ Do not be afraid to reprimand them or firmly teach them wisdom, because your discipline will not kill them, but rather safeguard them... Whoever neglects advising or teaching his son, hates him¹.

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles

We have previously clarified the terms of discipline²:

1. Not to rush to discipline, lest the father might make mistake.
2. Show love in discipline, so that it is accepted without grumbling.
3. Show truth and fairness before discipline so that it yields the desired effect.
4. Discipline should be proportionate and not rigid.

DO NOT PROVOKE THEM

A commandment is directed to children: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and your mother..." Parents should also oblige by the rest of the same commandment: "And you, fathers do not provoke your children to wrath but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:1-4).

¹ *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles 4: 2: 12.*

² راجع تلمذتي لأب اعترافي، ص ١٨٥-١٩٢.



St. John Chrysostom commented on this commandment, saying:

❖ It did not say 'Love them,' because this is normal and subconsciously expected by instinct. In fact it would be curious to have such a commandment.

But what does it say? "**Provoke not your children**," as many people do by depriving them of their inheritance, disowning them, or nastily treating them as if they were slaves, not free individuals...

The main issue is that (the Apostle) showed them how to lead the children to obedience by explaining the reasoning in the same way he explained a wife's obedience to her husband.

He directed the largest part of the commandments towards the man, advising him to draw his wife towards himself by the power of love. Here, too, he refers to a dynamic force (love), saying: "Bring them up in the fear and discipline of the Lord."

You can see how the spiritual bonds are followed by the natural bonds!

Do you want to have an obedient son? Start with the Lord's discipline and warnings.

St. John Chrysostom



Raising Children and Vainglory

St. John Chrysostom presented to us a sermon or an article entitled "*On Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring up Their Children.*"

This article received great interest from some Orthodox scholars and others, because it touches on the lives of the Christian family, the whole Church, and society. It takes a serious look at our appreciation of the child's vital role in these lives. The article comprises 90 paragraphs, 74 of which address the subject of child rearing by giving parental advice on pastoral, psychological, and educational matters based on the Church spiritual writings.

I assigned this chapter to present the thoughts and views of this saint, together with comments of some scholars regarding this article which deserves every attention from all.

It is a fact that in raising children, many parents seek the guidance and support of teachers, professors of psychology and sociology, relatives and friends. These sources undoubtedly have major significance, especially in providing a closer look to life. However, it is proper that parents should first and foremost submit to Christ himself and to the Church to get to know the extent of their responsibility towards their children. They should present their own lives as true models for the children, so that they can bring them up as members of the holy family i.e. the Church¹.

VAINGLORY AND THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN

In his analysis of this article, Richard J. Vincent said that Chrysostom had dedicated the first one-sixth (1/6) of his homily for lamenting over the exceeding decadence in his surroundings which are dominated by the sin of vainglory. This sin had its impact on the Church. It "**Destroyed... and tore the one body... and shattered love**" (Chapter 1). Vainglory is attractive, as it has its many temptations (Chapter 2), but at the end, it is devastating, and only provides what is a vacuum, and idleness (Chapters 3, 4). People make huge efforts to gain praise which is not only unbeneficial to them, but also leads to them being deserted and forgotten by others (chapters 5-8). The madness of vainglory bears destruction and quick extinction.

St. John Chrysostom opens his article by talking about vainglory. Perhaps, because the main concern of many parents toward their children is driven by their own vainglory, instead of working towards their children's salvation, inner growth, and real success. They want them to succeed in their

¹ Kathleen Haverlack: *Using Saint John Chrysostom's Views to Raise Children in the Orthodox Faith.*



professions, become rich, and secure high social status, only to boast about them. So, the children become their parents' means of vainglory. This blow is felt in our modern societies. Parents want their children to achieve where they themselves failed, for nothing but their own pride!

The fifteenth chapter is a link between talking about vainglory and the upbringing of children. St. John Chrysostom considers that parents' failure in training the new generation on virtues leads to serious damage which manifests itself in the madness of vainglory. This is when parents are most concerned about external appearances of their children instead of inner virtues, which consequently gives way to vainglory (Chapter 16).

The Saint realized that many people underestimate his words, and consider them to be trivial: [**No one is thinking about his children. No one discusses celibacy and self-respect, or contempt of wealth and fame or the commandments listed in the Scriptures**] (chapter 17).

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILD REARING

St. John Chrysostom considers that the Thanksgiving sacrifice from parents to God should be to bring the children up according to what pleases God. Their minds should be set that their work is not for the children's pleasure or delight of their parents. or their country, but to please God (Chapter 90). Through God's satisfaction, everyone will gain happiness.

The birth of a child is a blessing from God, a gift offered to the parents. It is therefore appropriate to dedicate the child to the God whom they know and love as their Creator and Father. Without this, their love of God is not evident. St. John says that every child becomes a child of God in Christ through Baptism, Chrismation, and the Eucharist by the Holy Spirit who dwells in him. Therefore, the parents' responsibility is to ensure that the child remains a child of God, to follow the commandments of Christ and his teachings, and to strive for the virtues of the Christian life. St. Chrysostom provided tips for parents to help them with the child's growth and to remove obstacles facing the child in his development by giving them the positive and negative aspects.

CHILD REARING IS A SACRED WORK!

Archbishop Chrysostom regards the role of parents in bringing up their children as a sacred work, practiced by parents to submit to God thanksgiving sacrifices for his delight and satisfaction. He emphasizes that it is not obligatory that every child should practice or be prepared for monastic life. But parents should teach their children "**to be proper from their early youth**" (Chapter 19).

❖ **It is natural and instinctive for a person to have children, but to bring them up and teach them virtues is within the mind and the willpower.**



- ❖ When I say commitment towards the upbringing of children, I do not mean not to leave children starving to death as many people would stop at that - this has been clearly stated by nature itself and does not need books or laws to be taught. But what I am talking about is the attention to children's hearts and piety. This is a sacred duty and whoever violates it commits some type of murder of these children.
- ❖ This commitment concerns both fathers as well as mothers. Many fathers sacrifice everything to secure pleasures for their children and make them heirs to wealth, but do not care much about their Christianity or their practice of piety. What blindness! This is deemed as a crime! It is ridiculous negligence leading to confusion which causes bitterness in the society. Suppose you prepare great possessions for them. If they were ignorant of how to behave in their lives, certainly these possessions will not last in their hands. The inheritances will dissipate and perish with their owners and the whole matter will become a very precarious legacy!
- ❖ Your children will always have sufficient riches if they get a righteous upbringing from you that enables them to manage their behavior and have an ethical life. Therefore, hopefully you will not strive to make them rich, but to make them pious, in control of their desires and rich in virtues. Teach them not to think of deceptive needs or think that they are valued based on contemporary standards (worldly and materialistic). Gently watch their behavior, their friends, and their acquaintances – do not expect God's mercy if you do not fulfill your duty.

FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF PARENTS WHO CARED FOR THEIR CHILDREN

- ❖ Follow Job's example, he was constantly caring for his children, and made sacrifices for mercy for any wrongdoing, which they might secretly have, done (Job 1:5).
Follow Abraham who did not concern himself with requesting riches as much as keeping every member of his household in God's commandments. The Lord testified for him, "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice" (cf. Gen 18: 19).



When David was close to death, he wanted to leave Solomon a secure legacy. So he made him clearly repeat the following wise words: "That the Lord may fulfill His word, which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'if your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul.' He said, 'you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel'" (1 Kings 2: 4).

We need to follow these examples in our lives until the last breath.

EARLY ATTENTION TO CHILD REARING

The Archbishop urges his people to act as early as possible when training their children. A child is more open to accepting guidance at the start of his life (Chapter 20). If a person delays the process of upbringing, it would be difficult to change the child's personality or to guide him to the better (Chapter 21).

- ❖ If the Apostle commands us to care about others more than ourselves, and if we are considered sinners, if we neglect their welfare, wouldn't we be sinners even more if this matter concerned those who are close to us?

The Lord will say: "Was it not I Who gave these children a place in your family? Was it not I Who entrusted them to your care, and made you masters, guardians, and judges over them? I gave you full authority upon them. I handed them entirely over to you, in order to raise them.

You might tell me that they did not want to bow their necks to the yoke, and they abandon it. But this could have been avoided from the very beginning. It would have been fitting for you to bow their young souls under the yoke of faithfulness, and teach them to get used to it. By this way, you would be treating a wound at its beginning.

It was fitting of you to pull out the weeds as they appeared near the plant, and inappropriate to wait until they deepen their roots and it becomes impossible to tame and control desires. Gradually correct them during their growth and development.

The Son of Sirach says: "Do you have children? Teach them and bend their necks from childhood" (Sirach 7:23). The Lord did not only push us to follow this commandment through his prophet's words, but he also took our side, and awarded this commandment a terrifying punishment waiting for those children who do not submit to the authority of their parents; "For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death" (Leviticus 20:9)... They rebel against God Himself, and defy his commandments, yet you watch this without showing any disgust, without even giving minimum criticism to your children!...



- ❖ **The children, who are respectful and faithful to God in obedience to his laws, find an enormous source of happiness even in this materialistic life. A poor man with Christian ethics inspires others to honor and love him. On the other hand, the wealth of one with an evil and dishonest heart will not save him from the anger of everyone around him or God's wrath.**
- ❖ **The youth whom you grant righteous upbringing does not only enjoy others' appreciation, but will also become very close to you too. His devotion to you will not only be because of nature, but will be a fruit of his virtues. For this, in your old age, you will reap the fruit of his kin's love and services. He will be of help to you. Since those who do not revere the Lord are disrespectful to their parents, those who revere God - the Father of all human beings - will give every respect to those who gave them life.**

ADVICES FOR PARENTS

1. Choosing his/her Name:

St. John Chrysostom believes that the first lesson the parents give to their child is in **choosing his/her name**. He addressed this topic in a lengthy manner and requested that the child should be named after one of the martyrs, the apostles or the bishops not after other family members (Chapter 47), wanting parents to realize that their child belongs to the heavenly family more than to them, or to their families. A child takes pride in his given name and tries to be like its carrier, whether it's one of the martyrs, the apostles or the bishops, offering his heart wholly in devotion to the Lord.

A loving relationship develops between the child and the Saint whom he is named after. This relationship grows over time, and the child aspires to be like him, and requests his prayer. However, the child will not become a replica of that Saint, because every believer has a unique personality and is a unique son to the Lord!¹

Based on this advice, some believe that the first gift offered to a child on his birthday (or baptism) should be the icon of the Saint, whom the child is named after. If the feast of that Saint falls on a different day to the child's birthday, the family should celebrate that feast as a special day for the child.

2. Teach the Child Satisfaction and Contentment:

It was important to Saint John that parents guided their child towards

¹ Kathleen Haverlack: *Using Saint John Chrysostom's Views to Raise Children in the Orthodox Faith*.



satisfaction and contentment, as the Wise says: "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with trouble. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred" (Proverbs 15:16-17).

3. Direct the Child towards the Scriptures:

St. John Chrysostom calls for the parents to guide their children to enjoy and study the Bible. The parents harvest the first fruits of this course as the Bible instructs the children on obedience to their parents. So, the parents will find the spirit of meekness and obedience in their children.

On the other hand, it seems that some parents were worried about their children's interest in the Bible, that they might get inclined towards the monastic life. That is why the Saint explained that the children who live in the world - as they grow in stature - need to practice the word of God more than the monks. This is because they face more tests and trials. As many are interested in the education of their children so that they attain higher jobs in a royal palace or other places, which in turn, would expose them to the spirit of pride and arrogance. Who can contain these thoughts? They need the Bible more than monks for this.

- ❖ **Because it is necessary to give guidance to the children, the Apostle directed his letter to the parents saying: "And you parents... bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).**

Do you want your son to be obedient? From the start, raise him according to the teaching and manners of the Lord.

You should not assume that it is not necessary that the child pays attention to the Holy Scriptures. The first thing he would hear is: "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12), and immediately you begin reaping your reward.

Do not say that the Bible is for monks and question yourself saying: Do I want to make my son a monk? No. It is not necessary for him to be a monk. Make him a Christian!

Why are you skeptic of a good thing? It is fitting for everyone to know the biblical teachings, and it is a true necessity for children... Let's teach them to study the Bible from early years and be an example to them.

- ❖ **Whom does the monk speak with? With the walls of his cell, or with his blanket (cover)? Or does he speak with the desert or the shrubs, or with hills or trees?**

Accordingly why would he need that teaching? The fact is, he fights to become perfect – he does not teach others, but needs it for himself.



What about those who live in this life (in the world)? They are in dire need of this teaching, because a person in the world deals with more sources of trouble and trials than a monk.

Be advised that a person with such teaching is more appreciated than others. Everyone will respect him when they realize that he is not bad-tempered or ruthless.

Now you know this; teach your children to know the Lord and His counsel!

What if a person was poor?... Just because he does not serve among the royal courtiers does not mean that this learning will harm him. Instead, it will earn him the admiration of others... If the external appearance of philosophers, alone, as an image of abstract philosophy, can lift a person's status, what would it be for the love of true and enlightening wisdom? Wouldn't everyone start to respect such a person? Wouldn't they unreservedly trust him with their homes, wives and children?

- ❖ Tell me, which trees are best? Don't we prefer trees which are strong inside? Don't we prefer the ones that are not damaged by rain, hail, storms or any type of harsh weather conditions, but are exposed to all of this without the need for protection of walls or structures? Whoever truly loves wisdom is indeed like that, and he is rich by it, as already described. He has nothing but has everything; has everything but has nothing. A fence does not protect the inner strength and a wall is not natural support, because they are superficial protection... A man rich in virtues is a real lover of wisdom and does not need any of these things. That is why the Apostle advises us to raise our children on the Lord's discipline and warnings (Eph. 6:4)...

- ❖ Let us raise our children according to the Lord's teachings and warnings so that we may secure a great reward. If artists who make sculptures and paint pictures of kings receive great recognition, wouldn't God bless myriads of times whoever proclaims and adorns his image, because man is the image of God?

When we teach our children to be good, friendly, and forgiving (these are all attributes ascribed to God), and to be generous and loving to their neighbors, considering this present time as nothing, we instill virtue in their souls and declare God's image in them.

This, then, is our duty: to teach ourselves, and our children piety. Otherwise, what would be our answer before Christ's throne of judgment? If a person who has unruly children does not qualify to be a bishop, how would he qualify for the kingdom of heaven?



4. Deliver the Child into the Hands of the Lord!

- ❖ Why refuse to follow the examples of men and women saints of the Old Testament? Tell me! Especially you mothers; think about Hannah's example and see what she did. She brought her only son Samuel to the Temple when he was only a child!

Which one of you does not want her son to be like Samuel, who was better than any king in the whole world myriads of times?

You might say: "That's impossible! My son will not be so great like him!"

Why is it impossible? Maybe it is because you don't really want that! Put him in the hands of the Capable One who can make him great. And Who is this? God!

Hannah entrusted Samuel in God's hands.

Eli the high priest was not the person who shaped Samuel. In fact, he failed in shaping his own two sons. It was the faith of the mother and her devotion that made everything possible.

He was her first-born and only child. She did not know if she would have another child, however, she never said: "I'll wait until he grows up, and taste the joys of the world, at least in his youth." No, she rejected all such ideas. She had one goal, and from the start, she was able to devote the joy of her heart to God.

Men; be ashamed of yourselves when faced by the wisdom of this woman. She offered Samuel to and left him with the Lord. Because of this her marriage was blessed further, since her main interest was in spiritual matters. She devoted her womb's first born to God and gained many more sons afterwards. She also saw Samuel honored in this life.

If people respond to honor with honor, wouldn't God do more to those who honor Him? He gives a lot even to those who don't honor Him!

How long would we remain stuck to our earthly bodies?

How long would we hold on to the world?

Everything should come in the second place after our interest in our children, so that we bring them up in the Lord's teachings and warnings (Eph. 6: 4).

5. God's Own Interest in Child Rearing

St. John Chrysostom tells us about God's own interest in the upbringing of children, for they are precious souls in his eyes. It was Him who created paternity and maternity motives in the parents. Through this



motive, 'Parenthood,' both the father and the mother feel the obligation to bring up their children.

God also put commandments and laws in the Scriptures to demonstrate his interest in the upbringing of children.

St. John Chrysostom believes that God cares so much about raising children that he commanded the children to be obedient to their parents, and He Himself rewarded the obedient, while making parents proud of their children. Children are at the center of God's care.

❖ **God himself gives great attention to upbringing of children. This is the reason for which He put such natural affinity between parents and their children - that is to put parents in a position which compels them to care for their children.**

He made specific laws for this care, and established special feasts to get us to demonstrate its meaning.

For example, He summed up the meaning of Passover in the following teaching: "And you shall tell your son in that day, saying: This is done because of what the Lord did for me when I came up from Egypt" (Exodus 13: 8).

He did the same regarding the Law. When he talked about the firstborn, he added: "So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come saying, 'What is this?' that you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go that the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animal. Therefore, I sacrifice to the Lord all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem'" (Exodus 13: 14-15).

Through all of that God commanded a parent to show his children the way to know Him.

As for the children, God commanded them too on many occasions regarding their parents. And, God gave rewards for the obedient and punishment for the defiant, in order to make the parents more proud of their children.

6. Appreciation for the Value of the Child and his Abilities

St. Chrysostom looks to the child in amazing appreciation and pride. He sees children as **philosophers** in formation, **warriors** in training, and **citizens** who evolve in readiness for eternal life in heaven (Chapters 38, 39). The Saint sees in them great capabilities achieved through dedicated training.

The Saint perceives the child as a city with many gates or entrances.



A soul may be inhabited by good judges and magistrates or by evil and dishonorable ones. Therefore, the child is in need for laws to regulate wrong actions. Slackness leads to the destruction of the city (Chapters 23-26).

The gates of the city that need to be guarded are the five senses: the tongue (taste and speech), sight, smell, touch and hearing (Chapter 27-37).

7. Warning of Corporal Punishment!

The Saint had indeed explained that making rules for conduct without practicing them, would invalidate them (Chapter 26), and also that the threat of punishment without implementation is useless (Chapter 30). Discipline and strictness are two important matters, but he warns parents against the use of corporal punishment. In his view, the wise father (or mother) is obliged to stop the extended use of corporal punishment, i.e. using a stick. The use of the stick leads to the child's disregard and indifference of punishment, and also it does not create the love of virtue. The child should fear punishment, but do not have to suffer from it (Chapter 30).

8. The Child's Learning & Training should be According to his Abilities:

The Saint considers the words of the Apostle: "provoke not your children" (Eph. 6: 4 and Cor 3: 21), as a request not to make demand of the child which exceeds his abilities and potential. Elaboration on his education is not appropriate (Chapter 52) so that he is not scared of learning.

9. Teach by Example:

The Saint focused on the parents' function as role models in the lives of their children, and since they ask them to be philosophers, fighters and heavenly citizens, it is fitting for parents to be like that so that the children may have actual examples in them.

10. Awareness of Other People who have Influence on the Child:

The Saint stresses the importance of the parents' careful consideration when choosing anyone who will have influence on their children. They should not allow those who are close to them to tell them trivial and nonsense stories, but their children should listen to stories from the Bible in a delightful way with opportunity for dialogue and discussion. In addition, it is not appropriate to ignore discussing the Lord's discipline for the wicked as well as explaining God's love for us.

11. Attention to Sanctification of the Child's Senses:

We saw how the Saint pays attention to the senses as being the main gates of the soul (the city). He began by talking about the tongue.



He did not mention the sense of smell as much but he emphasized that parents should not overdo the use of fragrances. The purpose of the nose is to breathe air that is beneficial to the body - not indulging in fragrances. Some consider this a trivial matter but the Saint confirms otherwise (Chapter 54).

12. Purity of the Heart:

The Saint focused on parents' alertness in guiding their child towards purity of the inner heart, by teaching him love and patience, especially in dealing with servants (Chapters 66-69) and with his younger siblings (Chapter 74), and to treat his servants as brothers (Chapter 72).

13. Chastity and Purity in the Lives of our Children

The Saint asks parents not to allow their child to go to the theaters so that sexual promiscuity does not creep on him (Chapter 77). This is only the negative approach. From the positive side, they should support him to keep the fast on Wednesdays and Fridays to enjoy the life of purity and chastity.

He asks the parents to encourage their child to marry early, after he matures into proper life, to save his purity.

14. Wisdom as a Priority in Child Rearing:

The Saint highlights the parents' important role in instilling wisdom into their child which will grant him self-control (Chapter 85), and give him sound understanding of wealth, fame and power, by implanting the fear of the Lord in his heart (Chapter 85), that he would desire the heavenly, not the earthly, realm. Through wisdom he will be a good citizen who could also carry out political affairs without fault (Chapter 89).

- ❖ **If we, from the beginning, teach them the love of the true wisdom, they will have better and greater wealth than that brought by richness. Learning a trade or receiving higher education for a very lucrative profession counts as nothing when compared to the ability to give up wealth. If you want to make your child wealthy, teach him this. A truly wealthy person is he who does not desire great possessions or surrounds himself with riches, but the one who does not demand anything!**
- ❖ **Do not speculate on how he can enjoy long life here, but how to enjoy indefinitely the eternal life to come. Introduce him to the significant, not the frivolous matters. Do not strive to make him a brilliant speaker, but teach him to love true wisdom. He would not suffer anything if he lacked clever words, but if he lacked wisdom, all the eloquence of the world will not help him... I do not mean that current education is worthless and should be ignored, but we must not overstress its importance or worry about it!**



15. Protect them from Pagan Customs:

St. John Chrysostom pointed out in his article the need to keep the children away from pagan customs.

This commandment remains relevant to this generation one way or another. We note the ideas that infiltrated the Church in the West, such as Santa Claus, who gives gifts at Christmas, and the Easter Bunny, to an extent that these almost eliminated the spiritual concepts of Christmas and Easter (Christian Passover), and also started to move slowly to the East.

It is befitting that at Christmas we should focus on the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ as a gift by the Father to mankind and clarify that the story of Santa Claus was adapted from the person of St. Nicholas who loved giving. As for Easter, we should pay attention to giving palm leaves on Palm Sunday and using them in making crosses and hearts, to demonstrate the entry of our Lord Jesus Christ into our hearts – the Inner Jerusalem, and confirm the act of redemption and salvation for the whole world.

16. Not to Put Wrong Concepts in the Children's Minds:

St. Chrysostom warns parents about labeling serious errors and improper actions with glorified terms, because this would ruin the children's lives and leads them to decay and looseness.

- ❖ **It is bad enough to encourage your children to practice what is against Christ's commandments, without having to disguise these practices under glamorous names. You would call the frequent going to horse races and theatres, "social life," the acquisition of wealth is "freedom," recklessness is "openness," extravagance and waste are "human practice" and injustice is "manliness." As if this deception was not enough, you also label virtues with insulting names. So modesty is "ignorance," meekness is "cowardice," justice is "weakness," humility is "failing," and controlling anger is "disability." As if you worry in case your son hears real names of the virtues and improprieties he might escapes from the improprieties, as if they were plague-like...**

What is more evil; is that you encourage them to do evil not only by your words but also by your deeds... which is not fair for their souls...

You make every effort to provide your son with a servant, a horse (car in modern times) and luxurious clothing, but you avoid the thought that he himself should be righteous. You are interested in



rocks and trees, but you do not pay any attention to souls. You do everything to ensure that your house has beautiful statues (ornaments) and a golden roof, but the soul - which is much more precious than all golden statues - has no consideration from you...

When your son is physically sick, you do not need anybody to urge you to get him to full physical health and strength. On the contrary, you would use every resource until his body is in good health and also ensure no recurrence of the disease.

Yet when their children's souls are sick, they claim that the need for healing is deemed unnecessary. And then they dare to call themselves parents!

17. Be Interested in the Salvation of your Children!

❖ We do not save any effort and would use every means to teach our children modern sciences, so that they can serve as good citizens. At the same time, we do not value the knowledge of the sacred faith or the service to the Heavenly King.

We allow them to attend theatres, but do not care whether they went to church or showed respect whilst there. If we ask them to be accountable to what they learned in the institutions of the world, why then not to ask them about what they heard in the house of the Lord?

18. Paying Special Attention to Children's Education and Caring for Earthly Matters:

The saint's focus on heavenly wisdom and up-bringing of children through the word of God, did not mean ignoring their education of modern sciences or sorting out current matters for them.

You say: "What? Should we seek wisdom and abandon everything from the world?" No, you the very distinguished honorable person. This is because it is not love of wisdom, but lack of it, which could lead to corruption and destruction of everything.

19. Encouraging Children towards Consecration:

Just as saintly parents support their children and their blessings remain to support the grandchildren for many generations, likewise, saintly children who consecrate their hearts and lives are supportive to their parents. It was because of David the prophet that the Lord blessed his son Solomon and some of his grandchildren e.g. Hezekiah the king. Samuel the prophet, who came to the world as a result of his mother's prayers, was also a source of blessing to her.

❖ Let us offer our children to serve God. We should lead them not only to the temple, as happened with Samuel, but also to heaven itself to serve with angels and archangels. It is evident that whoever devotes his life to the love of true wisdom will serve with the angels. That is why such children can greatly meditate not only for themselves, but also for us. If some children receive God's help because of their parents, it is more likely that parents get help because of their children. In the first case, the help comes through nature and in the second it is through nurturing, which is much more important than nature.

Here are some examples from the Holy Bible:

Hezekiah, the righteous king, whose good deeds were not enough to intercede for him when he was threatened by a great danger, but God saved him because of his father's virtues, as God had said Himself: "For I will defend this city, to save it for My Own sake and for my servant David's sake" (2 Kings 19:34).

In addition, Paul the Apostle, in his letter to Timothy, says about parents: "Nevertheless, she (the mother) will be saved in childbearing if they (the children) continue in faith and holiness with self-control" (1 Timothy 2: 15).

And, the Bible praises Job because he was blameless and upright, a devout and pure person who steered away from evil (Job 1: 1) and also because of his care for his children (Job 1: 5).

20. Discipline your Child before Life Disciplines Him!

❖ If righteous parents endeavored to give their children a good upbringing, we would have no need for rules, judges, courts or punishment. The judicial system exists because of our lack in morals.

21. Negligence in Child Rearing is a Crime:

St. John Chrysostom often warned parents against neglect in the upbringing of their children, showing how dangerous this sin is. In fact he considered it one of the utmost serious sins and did not hesitate in calling it killing of children.

❖ Suppose you fulfill the commandments of the Scriptures in all other matters, but discount this one commandment. You will then be severely punished.

Note this through the history of the ancient people. You will see how horrific punishments came down on parents who neglected in the upbringing of their children. Among the Jews, there was a reverent priest because of his meek personality, named Eli. This



priest had two sons who submitted their souls to every vice. Their father underestimated the matter and ignored it. When their despicable behavior exceeded limits, he reprimanded them mildly, without passion or authority. He should have very firmly punished them to put a stop to that evil, but he did nothing. He only stopped at giving advice, saying: “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people” (1 Samuel 2:23). Was this adequate? Both sons defied and disobeyed the one who gave them life, and despite this he continued to accept them as members of his family – his advice was empty and useless. He should have made them fearful, to remove such blindness from their hearts.

What an empty advice! Eli’s sons did not need such advice; they were useless words! The two became victims through this sinful meekness! A war started, and the two were prey for the enemies. When their father knew about their calamity, he fell to the ground, broke his neck and died (1 Samuel 4:18)!

I previously mentioned that parents who do not care about raising their children in Christian upbringing are killers of those children. Isn’t this true?! Who should Eli blame for the death of his two sons? He ought to blame himself! It is true that the enemy’s sword killed them, or was it their father’s carelessness that aimed the blow towards them. When heavenly help parted from them, they became exposed to the arrows of the Palestinians. The father destroyed himself and devastated them. Nonetheless, we come across this on a daily basis.

How many parents do not want to take responsibility for reforming and disciplining their unruly children? They are like some people who are afraid to distress their children lest the power of firm words control foul likings. What would be the result? Their sickness increases, and as they become resistant to punishment, they commit crimes. They are led to courts and desperately die at the hands of their prosecutors.

You give up your personal rights over them and therefore lead them to civil punishments where human justice is cruel.

You worry about insulting them with mild punishment in your presence, but what a horrific insult if a father is no longer able to see his son beside him, but hiding and being chased by his accusers, and wouldn’t dare appear in any place!

- ❖ Negligence in raising children is one of the greatest sins. It is the highest level of wickedness... If we do not pay attention to the salvation of our children, we will get the harshest punishment.

You are aware of the story of Eli the high priest in the Holy Scriptures. He was a well-known elderly priest who judged the Jewish nation without error for twenty years. He lived in times when harsh firmness was not widespread. Yet he could not uphold himself. On the contrary, he horrifically perished in a disaster because he did not care about the behavior of his two sons, as he should have done. His carelessness and negligence were considered great sins, which overshadowed his good traits and all his good deeds.

What would be our conviction as we live in times which fully encourage the love of wisdom when we do not even practice Eli’s virtues?

- ❖ Children’s corruption does not arise in a vacuum, but from parent’s delusions about earthly matters. Because they focus their interest only on earthly matters and consider anything else to be of no value, they are automatically driven towards neglecting their children’s hearts.

I say, that these parents (no one should think that I came up with these words in anger) – are worse than murderers of children. One separates the body from the soul, and the other sends both to hell. Death is inevitable according to the laws of nature but the fate that follows can be avoided if parents’ neglect did not cause it in the first place.

Physical death will end at the moment of resurrection, but there would be no reward waiting for a lost soul. It will not benefit from resurrection, but endure eternal suffering. This means that it is not unfair to consider these parents worse than killers of children. Sharpening a dagger and holding it in a hand, ready to put in a child’s heart is not as cruel as degrading and destroying a soul. Nothing is equivalent to the soul.

22. Prepare Them for Sacred Marriage:

We have seen that some people seem to worry that studying the Bible may make their children love ascetic monastic life. The Saint explained to them that the person who lives in the world - so to speak – has great need for the word of God to discipline and sanctify him, so that he is blessed and successful, both in his life and in his dealings with others. With that, the Saint stresses the children’s need for holy teaching to prepare them for sacred marriage.

- ❖ If we put boundaries (for children) from an early age, we wouldn’t later on have the need for such great effort. On the contrary, the



boundaries will become their routine and rules. We should not allow them to be involved in leisure activities which are damaging at the same time. Pleasing them only because they are children will harm them more than anything during their adolescence...

Find them wives at an early age, so that they unite with their brides with pure and uncorrupted bodies...

Whoever is chaste before marriage is the same after marriage. Those who learned adultery before marriage, do the same afterwards. It is written in the Divine Scriptures "All bread is sweet to the adulterer" (Sirach 23:17). For this reason, a crown is placed on the head (in the altar), as a sign of victory. They are entering the wedding not conquered or oppressed by lust. There is no reason to put a crown on the head of whoever gets into the love of pleasures and surrenders his soul to adultery, because he has been defeated. Instill this in them, teach and pressure them by all means.



8

Loving Parents

LOVE IN THE LORD!

God prepared the heavenly kingdom for man exclusive of all other terrestrial creatures. Therefore, it is befitting that parents do not limit their love for their children to flesh or timely future, but should reach for eternal life for them.

The parents' job does not stop at working and struggling to provide for their children, or raising prayers and submitting offerings for them to attain qualifications or secure employment or get married, but to first seek God's kingdom and its righteousness for them, and all other things will be provided.

St. John Chrysostom rebukes us saying:

❖ We care about our possessions for our children, but never care about our children!

How absurd?

Shape your child's soul uprightly so that he reaches everything else. Wealth will not give him an advantage if he was not righteous, and poverty will not harm him if he was.

You want him to be rich? Then, teach him to be righteous!...

You mothers, shape them (your daughters) in the same manner. You will not be saving them only, but also their husbands, their children and grandchildren! This is because a good root produces good branches which can get even better. And you will be rewarded for that!

So, let's do things which benefit not only one, but many souls through the one soul¹.

St. John Chrysostom

LOVING PARENTS IN THE LORD

The Bible and the history of the Church gave us living examples of loving parents who understood real parenthood in the Lord. Some examples are:

1 – Hannah: Samuel's Mother²

We proudly mention the mother of the prophet Samuel, who brought

¹ In 1 Tim hom 9.

² الوصايا العشر لقداسة البابا شنودة الثالث، وصية ٣.



up her son in the fear of the Lord, gave him up to serve in the Temple, and graciously said: "For this child I prayed and the Lord has granted me my petition which I asked of him. Therefore, I also have lent him to the Lord, as long as he lives he shall be lent to the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:27-28).

2 – Eunice: Timothy's Mother

St. Paul wrote to his disciple St. Timothy, saying: "I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2 Timothy 1:5).

3 – The Prophet Moses' Mother

Despite the short period of time she spent with Moses - her son who was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter - she was able to put the seeds of faith into him to reject the treasures and pleasures of the world even though he lived in a pagan environment.

She prepared her baby for the work of God to become a prophet.

4 – Paula's Family

St. Jerome made known in his letters to Lady Paula and her family how they lived devoted to the true love in the Lord.

I personally felt ashamed of myself when I knew what this lady told **St. Jerome** that as a privileged Roman citizen, she could borrow money any time she wanted, while a poor person couldn't and would die of starvation, because no one would lend to him, and she felt guilty about that. That is why she preferred to borrow money and pay interest to give to the needy.

She – as she said – wished that her children did not find enough money to buy her coffin when she passed away for the sake of the poor....

Her daughter-in-law, Lady Leata wrote to **St. Jerome** for guidance on how to raise her only daughter Paula (named after her grandmother) to be a sanctified virgin to the Lord¹.

Grandmother Paula showed deep love for her children in the Lord, as demonstrated in **St. Jerome's** letter to her daughter *Eustochium*:

[I know that whenever she learned about serious illness affecting any of her children, especially *Toxotios* whom she loved very much, she would firstly whisper to herself: "I'm so troubled that I cannot speak" (Psalm 77:4). Then she would cry words from the Bible: "He who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37), and pray to the Lord, saying: "O Lord, save your children whom you destined for death, those who die in the flesh for you every day."]

¹ St. Jerome: Epistle 107.



5 – Monica's Love for her Son Augustine

She prayed with tears night and day for nearly twenty years without despair, for the recovery of her son and his repentance. Her preference was that he would lose his great fame and worldly glory rather than losing his life with the Lord! It is sufficient to mention a small segment of what her son wrote about her, saying:

[My faithful mother cried to You for my sake, and her weeping exceeded that of a mother grieving over the loss of her only son.

My mother was devoted to You and full of the Holy Spirit, and so she realized the danger of death which I was holding onto! And You, O Lord answered her; You did not mock her tears, because wherever she prayed, her tears would cover the ground she was standing on...

My mother was able to meet the Bishop (St. Ambrose). She persisted with a lot of tears in her pleas to him hoping he would see me and talk to me. He was distressed for her perseverance and told her: "Go home. May the Lord bless you. **The son of these tears will never perish.**" What a great answer my mother was able to receive?!

She mentioned this to me many times and she believed it came from heaven.]

6 – A Mother's Love for her Son the Patriarch

It was mentioned in the story of the life of Pope Macarius, the Fifty-Ninth Pope, that he went to his hometown to ask after his mother. When she heard of his arrival, she did not come out. As he entered the house, she was spinning and did not greet him or pay him any attention.

He thought that she didn't recognize him, so he said to her: "Don't you know that I am your son Macarius who was promoted to the highest position, won great authority, and is called master of many people?!"

She replied tearfully: "I do recognize you and I am aware of your status, but my son, I wish they have brought you to me in a coffin, rather than to know or see you as a Patriarch. Don't you realize that before, you were only responsible for yourself? But now you are accountable for all your people's souls. Beware that you are now in a dire risk..."

These words were big incentive for him to struggle and work hard all his days as a Pope.

7 - The Martyrs' Love for their Children

The martyrs revealed their real love for their children. As an example; some women refused martyrdom until they saw their children martyred before them, so as not to enter Paradise while their children would grow up in a pagan life, without the person who could teach them the Orthodox faith, and therefore would lose their eternity.



8 – Tobit’s Love to his Son

St. Cyprian acknowledged Tobias’ amazing love towards his son, as during the intensity of troubles, he commanded him to stick to the Lord. The Saint says:

[If you do not guide your children and strive to keep them in faith and piety, you would be a traitor who is not worthy to be a father.

You care for their earthly possessions much more than you care about their heavenly ones, and in doing that you advocate Satan not Christ. By that, you commit two sins, a double crime. One, you do not provide them with their Heavenly Father’s support, and the other, you teach them to love their possessions more than Christ.

It is better to be a father similar to Tobit. Command your son as Tobit did saying: "Listen, my sons, to your father. Worship the Lord rightly, and seek his satisfaction. Command your sons to do justice and charity, and to truly proclaim and praise God all the time with all their strength" (Tobit 14:8-9).

And he also said: "As for you, may God dwell in your heart all the days of your life, and avoid settling for sins and breaking our Lord’s commandments. Give donations from your money and do not turn your face away from the poor so that the Lord does not turn his face away from you...." (Tobit 4:5, 7)].

9 – Parents’ Encouragement for their Children towards Consecration

The history of the Church witnessed, and still witnessing to this day, the love of many families to God. They compete in offering their children as a consecration to the Lord, as monks and nuns in particular. These families consider it a great honor, they are not worthy of, and a special gift permitted by God to them.

It is not easy - in the view of many – when a son becomes a monk. This is because he is cut off from the family both physically and emotionally. It is the beginning of a choice to carry the cross till death, which is difficult for parents to accept or be satisfied with, unless God’s love would have infiltrated the depth of their souls.

Therefore we shouldn’t be surprised when they do not clearly approve monasticism, nor should we be sad when we see their fatherly feelings and motherly compassion make them cry. But, what makes us sad and ashamed is what we see in our families – regrettably – of persistence in refusal and an actual use of violent and cruel discipline in their blocking to this calling. What a spiritual drought that afflicted us!

What selfishness has seized control of us that parents love themselves more than their God and their children! Shouldn’t a father’s happiness be in finding his son content in God’s arms?!



It was mentioned in the story of **Anba Bishop’s** life that an angel appeared to his mother and told her: "The Lord says: 'Give me one of your children to serve me.'" She replied: "Sir, take any one you want..."

When **Anba Shenouda's** father noticed his son’s inclination towards worship and solitude, he handed him - despite his wealth - to his uncle Pigol, who was the head of one of the monasteries in Sohag to raise him...

EXAMPLES FOR MORTAL LOVE

1 – The Love of Augustine’s Father:

This represents an example of not thousands, but millions, of fathers and mothers who desire only earthly success for their children. St. Augustine says:

[When I was six-years-old, there was a period of disruption to my education due to my father’s financial hardship. I lived with my family. I had increased twinges of impure desires. I used to go to the bathhouses, and there my father would see me. Then, he would joyfully go to my mother and tell her how delighted he was with what he was watching!

He wished that I grew to be like him. The filthy sensations that I felt, at the time, pleased him. These sensations which made the world forget you, O Creator.]

2 – A Mother Pushes her Daughter into the Sweeping Tide of the World:

❖ In the last few days, Lady *Praetextata*, who is of high status, altered her virgin daughter’s dress, and styled her hair in the latest craze, as dictated by her husband *Hymettius* (*Eustochium’s* uncle), who wanted to overcome the will of the virgin herself and the expressed wishes of her mother. On the same night, Lady *Praetextata* saw an angel in a dream. He terrifyingly stared at her and said: "How dare you put your husband’s commandments before the commandments of Christ?! In defiance, you put those hands that desecrate what is sacred over the head of the virgin?! If you persist in your misdeed, I will deprive you of your husband and your children."

That is how with awe, Christ punishes those who violate His temple, and jealously defends His precious jewels¹.

St. Jerome

¹ Epistle 107:5.



Christian Filiation

When the Only Begotten Son came to us in the flesh, He made known to us a new and unique concept of child-parent relationship where the Son and the Father are of one essence and one nature. Through our bond to the Son, we get to understand this child-parent relationship as much as our hearts could expand for the union with him. As a result we sense contentment in submitting to our fathers and obeying them in the Lord till death.

God's love is wonderful and infinite. While He is the Creator of all, He accepted to become a Son to the Virgin Mary in the flesh, and to be adopted by St. Joseph. That is how He carries us with Him into this child-parent relationship, even to the earthly parents, to obey and submit to them.

QUALITIES OF LOVING CHILDREN

1 - Obedience to Parents:

It was said about Jesus: "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). We, as members of His body, as we unite with Him, are rightly considered obedient because we then attain His qualities. In addition, we get to understand obedience, not as suppression, humiliation or demeaning to us, but as union with Christ, Who obeyed the Father with whom He is One in essence, and also obeyed St. Mary and St. Joseph, who are the making of his own hands. Thus we understand true obedience as maturity and union with our Lord Jesus Christ.

❖ The Bible says, "**He was obedient to them.**" To whom did Jesus was obedient?! Did he not was obedient to His parents?! As the Son of Man, He was obedient to His parents (St. Joseph, His father according to the laws, and His mother St. Mary)...

The children should understand the commandment concerning them: obedience and submission to their parents. The whole world is subjected to Christ, and still Christ was obedient to His parents¹.

St. Augustine

❖ [In a letter he wrote to a mother and her celibate daughter, when they had a dispute among themselves:]

If you love each other, then what you are doing is not worthy of praise. But if you hate each other, then you commit a crime!

Jesus was obedient to His parents (Luke 2:51). He respected His mother, although He Himself was her Father!

¹ *Sermons on the N.T. 1.*



He honored His adoptive father, who himself was provided for by Christ! That was because he appreciated that the first carried Him in her womb and the second carried Him in his arms...

Actually, I will not say anything to the mother, because her excuse may be old age, weakness or loneliness. But I tell you, O daughter: Is your mother's home too small to accommodate you?! She is the one whose womb wasn't too small to carry you!

If you could live for nine months in her womb, can you not live one more day in her home? Or is it that you cannot tolerate her?!...

Your response might be: my mother's behavior is wicked! She seeks earthly things! She despises fasting! Sin is her make-up! She walks about in obscene clothes! That's why I cannot live with her!

Before anything else, even if she was as you described her, you will be rewarded for declining to search for her mistakes.

She carried you in her womb, nurtured you, and kindly put up with your childhood with noble affection. She washed your clothes and nursed you in illness... She sustained you till you became a young woman and taught you the love of Christ. Therefore, you should not be annoyed by the behavior of your mother who dedicated you as a virgin to serve your Groom "Lord Jesus."

St. Jerome

2 - Obedience in the Lord

The believer obeys his parents and his kin for the sake of God. But if this obedience means disobedience to God, then obedience to God prevails. The apostle commands us: "Children, obey your parents **in the Lord**, for this is right."

The Bible and the Church history gave examples to that:

a. **The sons of the Rechabites disobeyed a Prophet**

The Lord wanted to present them as model for "**in the Lord**" obedience and also to rebuke the unruly Israelites. Therefore, he sent the prophet Jeremiah to them who said: "drink wine." They told him: "We do not drink wine," (Jeremiah 35:6). They said "No" to the prophet and became the highest model for obedience to the Lord, and for the implementation of His commandment, although they disobeyed a prophet!

St. Paul says: "For even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). The Apostle Peter emphasizes: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).



b. Demiana the Martyr admonished her father

St. Demiana the Martyr lived in the fear of God, and learned how to obey and subject herself to her father. But, the moment she heard that her father denied the faith, she rushed to his palace, entered it without giving any greeting or salute, and told him: "What is this that I heard about you? I wish I received news of your death rather than hearing that you have abandoned the God Who created you from nothing into existence to bow to hand-made idols! Be warned, if you insist on what you are doing now and do not leave the worship of idols, you will not be my father any more, and I will not be your daughter". Then she left.

c. A sister reprimands her brother

It is recorded in the Synaxarium (6th of Baramhat) that someone from Alexandria named Dioscorus denied the Christian faith. His sister was in Fayoum when she learned about this, she wrote him a message: "How much I would have liked to receive news of your death as a Christian – I would have been overjoyed – and not receive news that you deserted Christ, your God...

I make it clear that this message is to be the last communication between us. From now on, do not show me your face or write to me".

❖ "Children, obey your parents **in the Lord**" (Eph. 6:1), i.e. according to the Lord's will. He meant to say, "Obey them in what is commanded by the Lord." What if they instructed with stupid matters?!...

In any case, the Apostle was cautious when he said "**in the Lord**," so as not to disobey God.

Therefore, if a father is a Gentile or a heretic, we are not obliged to obey him (if he contravenes the Lord), because he is not instructing us "**in the Lord**".

❖ Do not be surprised that St. Paul gave specific guidance about parents, commanding us to obey them in all matters, because he meant that obedience to them would apply as long as it does not hinder piety.

It is truly a sacred duty to honor them, but if they ask what is beyond duty, it is not appropriate to obey them.

This was mentioned in Luke's gospel: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). Jesus did not command us to loathe them, as this is a violation of the Law, but He was concerned with any person who might love anyone else more than Him, because it means that this person hates Him, and that is destructive to both the loving and the beloved, too.

¹ In Ephes. hom. 21.

He made this clear in order to strengthen children's willpower and increase the parents' nobleness¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ If I hear my father, my mother, or my brother say anything against Christ, my Master, I will denounce the insults of his mouth as if they were coming out of the mouth of a rabid dog... Whoever does not acknowledge his father or his mother (because of their denial to the faith), carries out the will of the Lord, because whoever loves a father or mother more than Christ, is not worthy of Him (Matt. 10:37).

St. Jerome

❖ You might say: I am afraid to anger those who are higher than me! Then do all you can not to anger them and not anger God.

If you are afraid to upset those who are above you, look whether there is a God above them. Then, by all means, do not upset anyone above all of you.

This is an established principle, but is it not obvious that in all circumstances, you should not anger the One who is above all?!...

Your father and your mother are first in being older than you. If they taught you upright and brought you to Christ, then, listen to them and obey them in everything. The hope is that they will not command anything against the One who is above them - so that they may be obeyed!²

Only if a father orders his son contrary to the Lord God's wishes, the son must disobey his father.

And the father must not be angry that the son favored God!

But if a father's instructions do not contradict the Lord, he should be listened to, for one's obedience to his father is a divine commandment³.

St. Augustine

❖ [St. Jerome wrote in the year 373 or 374 AD to Heliodorus encouraging him to the monastic life, despite his parents' refusal. Here are some extracts:]

"You asked me to invite you to the desert, where I reside... so I am inviting you now: Come and come quickly.

No longer think of old connections. The desert is only for those who left everything! Do not let the burden of your old travels delay you. You believe in Christ. Believe in his words: "But seek first the kingdom of God

¹ In Matt. hom. 35:3.

² عظائم على فصول منتخبة من العهد الجديد.

³ On the Psalms 71:1.



and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

But what am I doing? Why do I foolishly beseech you again?!

I will not revert to pleas, and I will end pleasantries.

You disrespected my pleas, and I hope you will consider my challenges. What is still keeping you in your father's house, you spoiled soldier?! Where are your barriers and trenches?!...

Remember the day your name was registered, when you were buried with Christ in the baptism. You promised to be faithful to Him, and declared that - for His sake - you are willing to break away from your father and mother.

Watch all the enemy's ranks sigh in grief because of the gift that you gained when you entered in the service of Christ!

Does your young nephew embrace you?! Do not pay him attention.

Your mother is putting ashes on her head and tearing her clothes to show you the bosom which nurtured you?! Do not weaken for this. Does your father stretch out across the door?! Cross over to the road still.

Let's maintain our focus on the Cross with dry eyes. In such cases, cruelty is the real love.

A day will come – actually it has come - when you return victorious to the true city and walk about in heavenly Jerusalem, wearing the crown of bravery... You will then request such trip for your parents. You will also plea for me, the one who sustained you to cross for victory.

- ❖ I am not ignoring the ties which may be your excuse as barriers that stop you. My bosom is not iron, my heart is not stone, I am not made of granite, nor was I breastfed from a tiger!

I went through difficulties similar to yours!

Your widow sister nicely hugs you. The slaves scream "What is the reason for you leaving us?" The old nanny and the maid say: "Just wait until we die and take us to the cemetery!" God's love and the fear of hell will get you through this easily!

- ❖ The Bible commands us to obey our parents, but whoever loves them more than Christ loses himself (Matthew 10:37). When the enemy raises a sword to kill me, would I think of my mother's tears?!

Or would I despise the service of Christ to bury my father?

I'm a true servant to Christ and I owe this to everyone...

If they have faith, they should order me in God's peace to go and fight (spiritually by going to the monastery for a fiercer battle) for his name. If they did not believe in Him, then let the dead bury their dead...

St. Jerome



3 - Accepting Discipline:

True parenthood compels constructive disciplining, and a sincere filiation would tolerate such discipline in love and gratification, as the Wise says:

"My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be graceful ornaments on your head, and a pendant for your neck" (Proverbs 1:8-9).

"Hear, my children, the instruction of a father and give attention that you may gain understanding" (Proverbs 4:1).

"For the commandment is a lamp, and the Law is light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life" (Proverbs 6:23).

"He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses reproof goes astray" (Proverbs 10:17).

"Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, and he who hates reproof is stupid" (Proverbs 12:1).

"A wise son loves correction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke" (Proverbs 13:1).

"Poverty and shame will come to him who disdains correction, but he who regards reproof will be honored" (Proverbs 13:18).

"He who hates reproof will die" (Proverbs 15:10).

"He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but whoever heeds reproof acquires understanding" (Proverbs 15:32).

"Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov. 27:5-6).

"The eye that mocks his father, and scorns obedience to his mother, will be plucked out by brook ravens; devoured by a brood vultures." (Proverbs 30:17).

4 –Supporting their Parents:

We have the example of our Master, Jesus Christ. As the Son of the Virgin Mary according to the flesh, He cared for her very much. Even whilst on the cross, He handed her over to the care of His beloved disciple.

The Lord rebuked the Jews for making up new worldly tradition to avoid caring for their parents. In their stinginess, they came up with a new teaching which would allow them to exempt themselves from supporting their parents financially, if they made some offering to the Lord in advance.

- ❖ He did not say to them, "the tradition of your fathers," but rather "**your own tradition,**" as they were teaching the young ones to despise their parents under the pretense of piety. How?



Their teaching was: If a parent asked his son for a sheep, bull or anything like that, the response would be: "It is a gift to God, and not for your benefit. Do not take it."

Their insult to their parents was hidden under the word 'offering.' As a result, they insulted their parents claiming it was for the sake of God, even though God never stated such a thing. They thus insulted God by insulting their parents.

Observe the Law in which God made clear His passionate desire to honor the parents. He says: "Honor your father and your mother; that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (Mark 7:10) and "He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death," (Exodus 20:12; Eph 6:1-3).

If verbally insulting them leads to such punishment, how much more would it be if the insult was by action?!¹

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ When He was hanging on the cross, He commanded His disciple - the one who always stayed close to Him before all the sufferings - to take care of His mother.

St. Jerome

- ❖ Every person must care for his own kin, especially the believers. The Apostle says in his first letter to Timothy: "If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1Timothy 5:8).

St. Cyprian, the Martyr

¹ In Matt. hom. 1:2



10

**Wonderful Father
Sons and Daughters in the Lord**

During my review to this chapter, I started to write an explanation to the book of Job, and I felt deeply obliged to dedicate here a section about this wonderful father and his sons and daughters in the Lord¹.

This was a glorious picture of a very wealthy man. Neither he nor his children were absorbed by riches and wealth, but they all met in the spirit of love, unity, and good deeds. The sons took turns to hold banquets in their houses and invited their sisters too. Lovingly and in the spirit of unity, each son hosted a banquet for his brothers and sisters. As the Psalmist says: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133: 1).

The following could be noticed at those banquets:

1. Were held in homes, not in public places, so that the family's revered nature may be maintained even in the banquet and celebrations.

2. Inviting the sisters is an indication that these were family banquets, and likely to have been exclusive to Job's family only.

3. Job did not go to these banquets, not out of rigidity, but he wished his children joy, as long as it was in the Lord. He thought that his presence as an older person might hamper the young people to lighten up, even if it was in the Lord.

- ❖ Great wealth is a common cause for disputes among brothers. This father cannot be praised enough! His wealth was known, as was the harmony among his children. Wealth was distributed between them but love remained whole and filled all their hearts!

Pope Gregory (the Great)

4. Despite not physically joining the banquets, Job was involved through his kind and loving fatherly spirit. He was zealous about the salvation of their souls, and was worried lest they became corrupted even in thought, and then be considered as blasphemers on God the Holy. The Scripture says: "So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said: It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus Job did regularly" (Job 1:5).

¹ عن تفسير سفر أيوب، الأصحاح ١.



Job was the family priest. He knew that he was unable to sanctify his children, for this is God's work, so he offered numerous burnt offerings according to the numbers of his children. He did this not only at the start or end of the banquets' series, but every day of the feast, and every day of the year. "Job did so every day (regularly)." Perhaps, he offered a burnt offering for the whole family every day, but in the days of feasting, he made offerings on behalf of each one of them, because sins – especially of the thought - can easily infiltrate the minds in the banquets' atmosphere.

- ❖ He made offerings for their hidden sins, and the mistakes that they did not confess. If Job was so cautious about hidden sins which were committed unknowingly, what do you think he did about the obvious ones?

Notice how the words of the Apostle were put to action: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6: 4), that is to say; everyone should care about his children. It is a practice of parental protection. Notice the level of perfection he wanted to lead them to...

As for obvious mistakes, he could correct them, but what could he do about hidden sins? It was said to Moses about this: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever" (Deuteronomy 29: 29). In any case, Job did not ignore even the hidden mistakes in his relationship with God, but committed himself to personally correct them with remedial methods. These methods enabled him to attack and pull out mistakes, and also teach his children...

You can see that he did not only correct the shortcomings in their deeds, but also what involved in their thoughts. This practically fulfills Christ's words: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts... these are the things which defile a man" (Matthew 15: 19-20)... Here you see cleansing that is not according to Moses or to the Law, but in an apostolic manner, as he commands daily cleansing of thoughts, not only advising and counseling them, but also praying to God for them and protecting them. This is the work of both the father and the priest, even though we know that there was not a priest yet...

Some argue that there were priests in those days like Melchizedek, who were not chosen by people.

- ❖ Thus, Job purified his children. Because if one gives offerings on behalf of secret sins, how much more would he care about obvious ones?¹

¹ The Gospel of St. Matthew homily 42:3.



- ❖ Job applied remedies even for his sons' thoughts¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Job gained the greatest piety through this act. Many people are used to rise early in the morning to do earthly work; they spend the whole night dedicating their thoughts to riches, glory or social power, so they get up early to put their ideas into practice. The prophet lamented about them: "Woe to those who devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it" (Micah 2:1). As for Job, he was not consumed by this, but at dawn he offered service to God, the Maker of daylight... The real offering is in observing the commandments and doing virtues (Sirach 35:1-3). Paul's letter to the Hebrews helps in giving us an example: "Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God... but do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:15-16).

Job thought about the chances that his children might have sinned and blasphemed against God secretly in their hearts (Job 1:5). It is clear that Job was an honest and law-abiding person! His goodness was complete to righteousness. He was a wise father, an experienced master, a tower (among the stars) of wisdom, and a righteous guide who held external reins to restrain internal desires.... David sang: "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults" (Psalm 19:12).

Job reiterated what David said, and then put the commandment of the Scriptures in action. Jesus said: "the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15).

Job did not take the commandments and the laws lightly. John the theologian wrote: "And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For, if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God" (1 John 3:19-21). The Lord Himself says: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies, these are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man" (Matthew 15:19-20). So let us purify ourselves from these acts. Let us demand fruits from our souls every day, like Job was "upright and blameless", and focus on the words "Thus, Job did every day (regularly)".

Father Hesychius of Jerusalem

¹ The Gospel of St. Matthew homily 86:4.



❖ "He would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all" (Job 1:5). This saint knew that it was unlikely to feast without misdeeds. He knew that wrong pleasures from banquets must be purified by sacrifices. Whatever the children did to blemish themselves during these banquets, the father washed it through sacrifices... Parties are often associated with desires. Whilst the body is slack in enjoying the pleasures, the heart submits to false happiness. It was written: "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play" (Exodus 32:6).

Pope Gregory (the Great)

Job was content about the actions of his sons and daughters in their love for each other, their united and harmonious spirit, and was positive about their behavior and their speech, but he did not know what went on in their thoughts and hearts. He took neither a judgmental approach to determine what was in their minds nor did he take a complacent approach, and considered that he had no responsibility towards what was in their hearts. Nevertheless, in love filled with wisdom, he sought refuge in God and offered spiritual sacrifices and burnt offerings for each and every one of them. God alone knows all hidden secrets and is capable of sanctifying the depth of the souls.



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