



YOUTH AND FAMILY LIFE
H.G. Bishop Moussa

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YOUTH AND FAMILY LIFE
A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF MARRIAGE
(H.G. Bishop Moussa)

Christian marriage is different. It has a perspective of its own, which we need to get to know -if we want to get the full picture, and see it in all its purity. For Christian marriage is a sacrament: it is the Holy Spirit Who makes it work. So we need to approach it in a different way, with real spiritual depth. Then we will see it work out in practice, in authentic Christian behavior.

The Apostle Paul gives us two significant insights into the sanctity of marriage: "This is a great mystery" (Eph 5:32); "Marriage is honorable among all" (Heb 13:4).

Christian marriage goes beyond the coupling of bodies: it aspires to the coupling of souls. In the same way that the Holy Spirit is active in baptismal water to create a new person, so He is present in marriage. Just as He is at work in Meeron oil (Holy Chrism) to consecrate a human body to make it a temple of the Holy Spirit; just as He takes the bread and wine and transubstantiate them into the Lord's Holy body and blood; So he unites the bride and groom to each other and to the Lord, through sincere prayers and faith.

Yet, this unity is not accomplished in a magical way. The bride and groom are aware of and participate in it by their heartfelt prayers and positive response to the working of grace. This means that the sacraments do not work in a merely mechanical way: rather, they demand a spiritual response from the person who is receiving the sacrament. This is just as necessary as the involvement of an ordained priest; the holding of formal prayers - and the presence of the Spirit of God.

This divine work is the new thing in Christianity. For since the beginning of the creation there have been marriage rituals, agreement by both sides, and social aspects that differ from one community to another. But the new thing in Christianity is the work of the Holy Spirit that makes two individuals into a couple and the couple into one entity.

The Christian understanding of marriage is seen through specific characteristics some of which are:

1. One Partner

Christianity does not permit polygamy, i.e. getting married to more than one partner, Monogamy, or the law of one wife, is definite in Christianity and established in the Bible. In this context St. Paul's words are enough:

+ "Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (1 Cor 7:2).

+ "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have

authority over his own body, but the wife does" (1 Cor 7:4).

+ "Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband" (1 Cor 7:10).

+ "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Eph 5:31).

+ "He who loves his wife loves himself" (Eph 5:28).

This in fact is:

a. A restoration to the original state of affairs: "He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female'" (Mt 19:4).

b. Keeping Christ's command: "So then they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God had joined together, let not man separate" (Mt 19:6).

There is no doubt that the law of one wife has many important implications. It raises the status of the woman from just a mere tool to a life-partner; changes the significance of the children from sheer quantity to their quality, and refines the instinct from sensuality to spirituality. These three points we should consider deeply.

God has created only one Eve for Adam to make him realize that she is a help-meet for him, i.e. a life-partner on an equal footing. It is often said that God took Eve not from Adam's head, so as to be superior to him, nor from his leg, so as to be inferior. He took her from Adam's side to be an equal counterpart to him.

Moreover, the law of one wife changes the significance of children from their quantity to their quality. They are limited in number and raised on the basis of a sound Christian upbringing to become good citizens and faithful witnesses to the Lord. This is much better than having a big number of children who are badly brought up and have no share either in church membership or in eternal life hereafter.

The law of one wife also sublimates the instincts. Spiritual love is the secret of satisfaction, contentment and happiness, whereas uncontrolled, sensual love is a regression from the human to the animal level.

2. Oneness

Christian marriage is not just a contract between two parties whereby each person continues to follow his or her own ego. Instead Christianity unifies the two parties or rather the two partners in "one entity" for "the two shall become one flesh" (Mt 19:5). The expression "one" here is very precise, for the one flesh has many members but all are linked and unified in love, sacrifice, self-giving, and harmony. The one flesh is controlled by one network of thoughts and feelings and one will.

Therefore, the true Christian marriage turns the home into a new heaven and the family into a sacred church. There is no more duality but one entity integrated on the levels of:

Spirit: the two are united in God.

Mind: the two now have the mind of Christ.

Emotions: since the spiritual self-sacrificing love is their motto. "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Will: the Holy Spirit is the leader of each of their wills and unifies the two into one.

Therefore we call the individual a couple and the couple one. This is true as they are united in God. Each partner bears the other in the depths of his or her being. He or she is no longer one individual but a couple. Each thinks, moves or acts with the other partner hidden deep in the heart. At the same time, the couple becomes one, i.e. their behavior flows from a spring of profound unity created by the Holy Spirit.

That is why it is very important for the bride and groom to pay attention to the prayers and commandments recited in the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony. They need to rise to that Christian level where their marriage goes beyond social and physical coupling to a sacred spiritual unity.

3. Continuity

This is a third important characteristic of the Christian marriage. In fact, it is - as the Lord Jesus said - the principle on which Adam and Eve originally lived. Therefore, when the Jews tested the Lord on divorce saying: 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?' He replied: 'Have you not read that He Who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female' For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.' When they asked him: 'Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' He answered: 'Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so' (Mt 19:3-8).

From this text we can clearly see two facts:

- a. Marriage was originally based on continuity, i.e. the idea of divorce is completely rejected.
- b. Moses allowed the Jews to trespass over this boundary - with God's permission - because of the hardness of their hearts.

But Christ Who marked a new covenant of salvation and restored us to our original image and first nature, also

restored marriage to its original state, i.e. continuity and prohibition of divorce. God has not allowed divorce except for adultery because the guilty partner - by the nature of his or her sin - breaks the original marriage bond by uniting himself or herself by a new partner. However, if the innocent partner is willing to go on with the marriage and accepts the other partner's return, marriage can continue on the basis of the sinful partner's sincere repentance and rededication to the first marriage covenant.

The second reason for divorce is spiritual adultery, that is to say denial of faith and giving up Christianity. In this case the Christian partner is no longer bound by the marriage covenant and has the right to divorce the other partner.

As for the kind of reasons Christians are now putting forward to divorce, such as ill-treatment, separation, frequent absence and chronic diseases, they cannot set one's conscience at peace. For they are a mere veneer, to cover up for a basic selfishness and lack of love.

On the other side, the nullity of marriage is allowed in cases of cheating, impotence, and some other cases specified by the church. The nullity of marriage is a sound principle as there has to be basic elements to guarantee a sound marriage, such as full physical and mental maturity ... etc.

An overall view of the reasons for divorce today shows us how shallow the spiritual life is and how rare genuine love has become. It shows us the extent of selfishness and self-centeredness, and disobedience to Christ's commandments. May the Lord restore to the Christian family its ideal cohesion and unity; the cohesion and unity with which the Christian family has so long testified to Christ, its Savior.

4. Bearing Fruits

The Christian family - by the work of the Holy Spirit - bears the following fruits:

- a. Christian Virtue: reflected in the life of its members.
- b. Children: when God grants - they are blessed and raised in the fear of God and firmly at one with the church.
- c. Services: the family offers to everyone it deals with, in a true Christian love which knows neither discrimination, hatred, nor fanaticism.

The family is a small, lively, active church that testifies to its Lord Jesus Christ. Children are not an end but just fruits. How wonderful it is when the parents' hearts are enlarged to include a wider circle of love instead of confining their emotions to their children. How wonderful

it is when the couple, whom God has not granted children by the flesh, enlarge their hearts to adopt by the spirit a bigger number of children. At the same time, within God's church they look after thousands of children in true parental love.

These are some characteristics of the Christian marriage. May God give us the joy of seeing more marriages that witness to Christ.

YOUTH AND FAMILY LIFE
THE MATURITY NECESSARY FOR MARRIAGE
(H.G. Bishop Moussa)

Young people often rush into marriage. This is a natural inclination in the beginning of youth and the heat of the call of instinct. But mistakes always result from this hurriedness, for many reasons which will be dealt with in this chapter.

Every young person must be endowed with some important aspects of maturity in order to be in the right position to think and move towards the choice of a life-partner. Here are some of these aspects.

1. Spiritual Maturity

Though young people might not take this point too seriously, yet the guidance of the soul by God's Spirit is paramount. It is a serious matter for many reasons:

a. Marriage is a spiritual fellowship and an integral union in Christ. This necessitates a true Christian life for both partners so that they may (through the Holy Spirit working in the sacrament of matrimony) be brought together in a true and firm union. This union cannot take place without the intervention of the Holy Spirit, for He is the Spirit of unity and He integrates the two spirits in one entity. Through this spiritual union the husband and wife are united in mind and body.

b. Christ is the Lord of the house in which He dwells. Whenever the Lord takes His leading position in the family everything is performed according to His mind, love, and holy guidance. The Lord will be ever present at meals, the silent listener to every conversation, the divine Savior for every soul.

c. In the choice of life-partner the spirit should dominate over both mind and emotion, for the mind has limited vision and power, while the emotions are fickle. The spirit is the divine element in contact with God; capable of finding the way out, and controlling the course of mind and emotion. Therefore, young people have to activate their spiritual life and their fellowship with the Lord, so as not to be easily inclined either to the heat of their passion or to their limited thinking.

d. The blessing of the Lord and His sacred seal for the choice is the only sure guarantee for a happy life under His love. Even if you wear yourself out trying to find out all about your life-partner and trying to check that you made the right choice, you cannot without the intervention of the Holy Spirit succeed in this aim.

e. Marriage requires some significant concessions from both parties in a spirit of self-sacrificial love, not of destructive selfishness. This is quite impossible without

the work of the Holy Spirit, the only guarantee for self-denial and the surrender of many habits and patterns of thinking. This will enable the two partners to give before taking - giving with Christian joy, not with the resentment of the oppressed, nor in a quarrelsome and reluctant spirit.

Therefore, maturity is essential for both partners for leading a life of fellowship with the Lord and involvement in church life.

2. Psychological Maturity

Studies show that the young adult, at the beginning of university life, looks forward to choosing a life-partner and finding out about the opposite sex. It is also well known that this is merely a phase of life in youth called "general heterosexuality". In other words, we are looking at the opposite sex in frequent attempts to find out more about them. So we cannot identify the right person for the journey of life at this stage since our characters are still frequently changing. It is a good idea at this stage to mix in a spiritual environment that allows opportunities for general acquaintances without pairing off or getting involved in 'heavy' relationships. Such relationships are more harmful than useful as the two partners are distracted from establishing themselves spiritually and academically. They may also harm a girl's reputation, since how do we know that this relationship is God's choice? Are we not still at the stage of "general heterosexuality"?

When university life draws to its close, even after graduation, a young adult begins to move towards the stage of "specific heterosexuality", i.e. we may, through thought and prayer identify the specific person we feel is the choice of God for our lives. Now we are psychologically mature enough to take this crucial decision, the decision of a lifetime.

So we should get to understand these two phases. We should not choose hurriedly or get involved in 'heavy' relationships which finish in desolation and bitterness.

3. Emotional Maturity

This is significant too. There is a big difference between a young man driven by the heat of passion and another moved by spiritual love. Emotion is often deceitful and changeable. It is a facet of man's psychological make-up. It is merely a repeated attraction towards a particular person accompanied by a feeling of comfort. However, is this human feeling the final arbiter of partner selection? Where is God in this decision? Where is the mind? Where are the two families' views?

Moreover, emotion is usually a physical phenomenon. So it is part of our natural selves. Unless it is raised to the level of spirit, holiness and Christian love, it rapidly drags the couple into heavy, physical involvement. Christian marriage generally begins with a spiritual,

sincere, sublime love whereas an emotional one begins with a sensual affection, fading away when difficulties show up the fact that it was not love at all. Emotion is taking first, then giving. Spiritual love, however, is giving without necessarily receiving in return. So emotional love will vanish at the first ordeal: when a partner misbehaves, wants something without being able to give anything in return - in time of illness or trouble, for instance.

On the other hand, spiritual love is giving in essence. Therefore give "to all liberally and without reproach" (Jas 1:5), as the Lord does; without waiting for something in return.

It is here that emotional maturity is essential, where we enjoy the outpouring of God's sacrificial love into our hearts. Because of this we are capable of generous giving without waiting for compensation. Thus love thrives through marriage, and continues in spite of all life's crises, as a witness to the Lord Who loved us when we were still sinners. Many marriages today are violently shaken by life's blows, because of selfishness and fickle emotions. When the ego dominates, the family is torn apart.

4. Economic Maturity

This is the fourth pivotal point. Marriage has definite material prerequisites. Because of old fashioned traditions which we hope one day will disappear, the two partners are faced with huge material obligations. To mention but a few: marriage rings, gifts, shelter, furniture, celebrations inside and outside the church.

However young people, in their innocence and momentum, try to escape these traps. They find these traditions rigid like a rock, putting a stumbling-block in their path to marriage. Where love collides with a financial rock, their hearts are filled with bitterness even towards the partner who lets him or her down.

At this point, we need to be realistic. Life is not as smooth as imaginations and daydreams are. It is as tough as reality, its pains and its facts. The two partners have to estimate the costs before embarking on this step. As the girl will suffer more than her partner, she must be more prudent when love and harmony may be dashed on the rock of social and economic circumstances.

It is better to be jerked back into the real world than to fly into reveries with the wings of imagination and be deceived. We must get into the serious business of managing our material needs, before we stumble for lack of readiness.

Building on maturity in the four areas we have thought about, young people will be in a suitable position to choose a partner and look forward to a happy and lasting marriage.

YOUTH AND FAMILY LIFE
THE PERFECT CHOICE OF LIFE-PARTNER
(H.G. Bishop Moussa)

There is no doubt that the choice of a life-partner is a vital decision. It is the decision of a lifetime; you need to be successful in choosing your life-partner. No doubt there are many forces at work in this decision, the outcome of which is a crucial step; one of personal destiny. What are these forces? Let's consider them from the lowest upwards. The lower drives, unfortunately, are the most pressing and clamorous. The higher powers are less insistent, yet they are the more reliable guides.

1. Instinct

This is humanity's most basic drive, for we share it with the animals. A young person may imagine, at the onset of youth, that he or she has chosen the right life-partner. This choice may merely be the result of propinquity: of being crammed together in public transport or in overcrowded housing conditions. Most typically, it can stem from the incessant stimulation of the modern media and - even worse - video, which carries highly provocative material. However simplicity and chastity are assumed, the more powerful prompting voice lurking behind is undoubtedly instinct. It has its call, its heat, its treacherous currents, especially under the influence of external stimulation and internal hormonal activity.

It is well known that young people at that age undergo a phase where they are inclined to have knowledge of the other sex. So their attentions shift from one personality to another in a changeability characteristic of that age. Deception is so dangerous at this phase, when we think we have chosen well and are proceeding towards a perfect marriage. However good our intentions, however keen we may be to please God, the strong voice of instinct makes itself felt at this age. The truth, that instincts alone cannot lead us into the path of holy marriage, should be made clear.

The dangers of this attitude are clear enough, especially for the young girl. For they may lead to risky involvements and damaging results. Consequently, young people undergoing this phase need to be aware of the range of their instincts, their recognized limitations and the need to elevate them, in holiness and in progression towards maturity. Those envisaging marriage must not allow the message of the beauty of the body and sensual desires to determine their choice of life-partner. These motives must be cut down to size, since "Charm is deceitful, beauty is vain" (Prov 31:30) and the body returns to dust (Gen 3:19).

2. Emotions

This is the second set of drives. Although they may seem

finer than instincts, they are related at the core. Emotions are a part of the psychological system, necessarily then of the natural system.

Therefore, we cannot rely on them as a sufficient guide to the choice of life-partner. Untrammelled emotions are subject to human limitations: they are fickle, superficial and tend to get us into tricky situations.

Fickle: Emotion is not spiritual, pure, sacrificial love. It is a kind of trade-off: a relationship based on what you can get out of it. It is a form of selfishness: you have a special motive for love. You find in your partner something you are missing: a resource that you need and want to draw on. On the other hand, spiritual love carries on "in spite of ..." For it is a divine, self-giving love. It is generous, giving without waiting for a response, even without getting anything in return. It can be compared to God's love, which prefers giving to receiving: it gives itself to the other.

Superficial: Emotion does not run deep in the human being. Lovers get high on it for a quickly fading moment as it is superficial, highly excitable, not deeply rooted in the heart. It is facet of the soul - not of the spirit, which is the most profound part of our human identity.

May Degenerate: Emotion, without the spirit, may degenerate into bodily desires and sensuality at a rate which may vary from one person to the other, depending on that individual's concern for personal salvation, struggle against sin, and sanctification of marital life.

3. Mind

This is a higher power. It distinguishes human beings from the animals. The animal has rudimentary instincts and emotions, but human beings are characterized by the mind and the spirit. The mind is a noble gift of the Creator, yet it is substantially limited. It cannot be the sole arbiter of this crucial choice. Can the mind really get to the bottom of things? Can it, no matter how intelligent one may be, discover the depths of the chosen partner's psychology and his or her character? Can it gauge the unknown and the future and foretell what destiny is reserved for him or her? Or for his or her life-partner? So, the couple and both their families have to think through things. Yet the mind alone is not enough as a guide. Yes the mind ponders the suitability of both partners socially, ethically, economically, religiously, etc. What is possible and what is not? What is fitting and what is not? Nevertheless, the mind is unable to give the last word.

4. Spirit:

This is the decisive element, the divine part in us, the power which links us to God. By it we believe in God, gaze into His heaven and live out His commandments. Therefore, the divine voice is the most significant. The satisfaction

of the spirit is really crucial. The only guarantees for giving the spirit its opportunity to thrive, to move and to guide are:

+ Sincere and consistent prayers in true surrender, in accordance with God's will, with the conviction that God knows and will choose the best, and works out everything for our good. He works in a way which is radically different from our limited human approach.

+ Finding pointers of Christ's ideas in His Holy Gospel, as it shines in our hearts in a special way and gives a power of discernment in controversial matters.

+ Giving opportunities for discussion with family members and friends capable of giving the right advice. Sharing our thoughts with others cancels psychological tension and its bad effects. Being open to the Lord to speak through family, friends and the spiritual father.

These are the main forces at work in making this important decision. Let us summarize them according to their importance:

1. Spirit: praying in surrender, asking for the Lord's guidance.

2. Mind: thinking calmly and intelligently.

3. Emotions: feeling acceptance towards the partner-to-be.

4. Instincts: sacred, caught up into an expression of spiritual love, within a family which is a true church and a unity blessed by the Most Holy.

Proceed, my friend, keep yourself under the protection of prayer

YOUTH AND FAMILY LIFE
THE ENGAGEMENT PERIOD
(H.G. Bishop Moussa)

The engagement period starts with the agreement to get married and ends by actual marriage. It is a very important period because it gives the chance to get to know each other deeply and to grow in Christian love, to sense the potential for fulfilling the engagement with a happy marriage. Just as the couple needs to get to know each other, so every family member pulls together for the building up of a marriage that will be blessed.

The engagement period provides a chance for both parties to speak out openly and frankly.

THE BETROTHAL ORDINANCES

Are brief. They comprise:

1. The triple sign

The sign of the cross is made three times on both the engaged couple and the marriage rings (as the rings mark a covenant of love and firm union). The priest says:

O "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!"
O "Blessed is the Father, Almighty. Amen!"
O "Blessed is His Holy Son our Lord Jesus Christ!"
O "Blessed is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Amen!"

This is how the One and Only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit blesses this project, based upon the acceptance of both the fiances and barring any legal impediments, or other objections.

2. Prayer of Thanksgiving

In which the priest offers everybody's thanks to the Lord for the blessing of the establishment of a new family as a small church. This new church family will, with God's blessing, bring children into the Lord's house to complete the body of Jesus and the number of the saints.

3. Prayers of Counsel

These aim at explaining the dimensions of engagement to the engaged couple, asking the Lord for the completion of that project at the appropriate time, for their salvation and happiness.

While uplifting anthems are sung, the rings are put on as a symbol of the covenant. Then the priest commands the engaged couple to live a holy, chaste life, to read the

Bible at every opportunity and end the reading with prayers, in order that their engagement might be made holy and mark a chaste beginning to a blessed marriage.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ENGAGEMENT PERIOD

1. Each party recognizes the characteristics of the future partner: thoughts, opinions, aspirations and life-style.
2. Both the fiances may grow in a holy spiritual life, where they are taught how to fight against sensualities, how to acquire chaste manners and how to achieve spiritual fullness as the only way to a sacred marriage.
3. Both families are introduced. This promotes the spirit of love and understanding, cooperation and care for the growth of the new plant.
4. Everybody cooperates for meeting all the needs of the newly formed household in a truly Christian spirit. This means shunning all extreme behavior such as showing off, sulking, secretiveness, crookedness, annoying the other partner, or failing to keep promises.

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR THAT PERIOD

The relationship between the two fiances often suffers severe fluctuations, instead of tightening up and becoming stronger. There are many crucial factors that both of them should watch out for if they really want their relationship to continue and be transformed into a sacred marriage.

1. One of the critical causes of failure is blind jealousy between the engaged couple, i.e. if one sees the other paying some attention to a third person the former misunderstands and consequently starts to make trouble, expressing doubts and quarrelling. Just as it is essential for each of them to be firmly loyal to the other, so it is essential for both of them to get rid of that jealousy that only indicates selfishness and awful self-centeredness. Paying attentions to a third person may have only been done out of politeness and good manners, or it may have been done in good faith, although jealousy would see it as betrayal. The more people are attracted to Jesus, the closer they get to each other in a proper Christian way, free of all forms of excessive possessiveness.
2. Another factor that could ruin the relationship between the two fiances is the tight feelings of love between the parents of one partner and their son or daughter. This leads to the suspicion that the other partner will deprive them of that love. So they would tend not to give their son or daughter the appropriate advice that would make their lives easier. The fear of testing out the probabilities even magnifies situations and so complicated ordinary, everyday problems.
3. A third pitfall is when one partner asks about the past of the other partner. Although this may be done out of

goodwill, yet dragging up an affair that is over and done with, may only lead to jealousy and psychological disturbances. It may even give rise to the suspicion of one partner that the other might easily fall into temptation. That is why we advise them to avoid the following:

a. Revealing old bad experiences that one has already confessed; as they are no longer a part of our lives.

b. Going along with any sort of flirtation or physical contact however slight, as this only creates doubts between the two of them.

c. Asking the other partner repeatedly about past experiences or sins in a stiff way that will only lead to lying, or the admission of facts that might ruin the engagement. Christ has forgotten all our sins, so let us all forget the past and look forward to the future.

4. Disagreement on financial matters is a common reason for the breaking of engagements. That is why it is preferable to agree to all the details before the engagement: the marriage rings, the new house, its furnishing and each party's contribution to it, ceremonies, and all other aspects. As Christian believers, we should avoid all showing-off and extravagance in the engagement ceremonies or overburdening one partner more than the other. We hope that the rising generations would be able to break all those obsolete habits so that marriage would no longer require large amounts of money. Why should not economize on the ceremonies? Why have candy boxes? Wouldn't a religious picture card do? Why not economize on the furniture so that it is no longer heavy, impractical, very tiring to buy, to clean and to maintain. A simple, cozy sitting room, a dining room, multi-purpose beds etc... could be more practical.

The most important thing is that each partner should act in a spirit of cooperation, frankness, honesty and commitment to fulfill obligations, so as to maintain goodwill, without avoiding any obligations or cheating the other partner in a way that may disturb the existing amity or give an impression of deceit.

Breaking off the Engagement

If it becomes impossible to go through with the marriage for any reason, then either both parties or whoever feels unable to continue must break it off in a proper way, as follows:

1. Exchanging all civil rights and referring any disagreement to their priest.

2. The withdrawing party leaving the marriage rings, all the non consumable presents and the money to the other party. This is without taking into account food and clothing and so on.

3. Each party keeping - forever - all the secrets of the

other party. God has a special punishment for the betrayer.

4. The priest issuing an official report as a final settlement - civil and canonical.

5. If the engaged couple disagree on civil matters the engagement is broken canonically - even at the request of only one party and, at the same time, maintaining the civil rights to both parties.

Nowadays people are in the habit of breaking engagements at the drop of a hat, and this only goes to show how hasty they are in making decisions. They rush into decisions without bringing them to the Lord due to their spiritual shallowness and materialism.

Let's develop our lives in the Lord, asking His divine guidance at every step. Let's deal with the other partner in a generous, loving spirit. The Lord Himself is the secret of blessing and joy: He is the foundation for success and unity.

YOUTH AND FAMILY LIFE
THE MARRIAGE CEREMONIES
(H.G. Bishop Moussa)

Marriage in the Coptic Orthodox church - as well as all the other traditional churches - is a sacrament; and this means that all three conditions of the other sacraments have to be fulfilled. These cover:

1. Those receiving the sacrament.
2. The sacramental prayers and materials.
3. The ordained priest.

"Mystery" is not the ecclesiastical definition of a sacrament: for "mystery" means "obscurity," whereas "sacrament" means the "unseen gift" that we obtain as a result of our conscious participation in the holy sacrament. It is "the invisible blessing that we receive in the midst of physical, visible manifestations."

1. Those Receiving the Sacrament

The couple approaching holy matrimony are like those who come for baptism or confirmation. As they approach this holy sacrament they have to meet certain special conditions, such as:

- The Legal minimum age (16 for her and 18 for him).
- The absence of any legal impediments or any kinship which may disqualify them as marriage partners.
- The full consent of both parties.
- Suitable spiritual preparation, such as repentance, confession and receiving the Holy Communion.
- Mental, psychological and social readiness.
- A sound understanding of Christian marriage.

2. The Sacramental Prayers & Materials

Everything is "sanctified by the Word of God and prayer" (1Tim 4:5). So are the bride and groom. They must listen carefully to extensive prayers, to readings from St. Paul's letters, the Psalms and the Gospels. These deal with every aspect of Christian marriage. The couple are also anointed with holy oil. It is above all after they have been anointed in the name of the Holy Trinity three times that they receive the Spirit of God and He makes them one in Christ.

The Ordained Priest

If the sacrament is to be effective, the priest is essential: for he has the authority of the church to carry it out. It is not just the prospect of parenthood for the bride groom, or even the spiritual aspects of marriage that are involved in the performance of the sacrament. The sacrament also involves the canonical rites, and these depend on the ecclesiastical authority handed down to the priest.

As a holy sacrament, marriage requires canonical prayers. In those prayers we call on God's Spirit to bless the bride and groom and sanctify their union. Is it possible for that to happen in a civil marriage, a marriage by private contract or in a mixed marriage between persons from different religious backgrounds? Definitely not! For those marriages are man-made and not from God, and Christianity rejects them.

Matrimonial Ceremony

It involves successive steps that are vitally linked. In fact, the ceremony used to take place between the Raising of Incense at Matins and the Eucharistic Liturgy, just as the rites of monasticism do now. For as the monk becomes attached to the Lord, so the bride and the groom become attached to one another in the Lord. In this way they are prepared for receiving the holy communion, as the first step to be taken immediately after getting married. In the old days there was a custom, based on the Book of Tobit, that the newly married couple should spend the first three days of marriage fasting from physical contact so as to deepen their spiritual love and thus to abide by and in the Lord.

1. The Contract of Appropriation

The vow to belong to one another used to be taken immediately upon engagement, in the form of public prayers. However, these prayers have since been separated from the engagement rites. For whereas the engagement can be broken, the 'contract of appropriation' is binding. Saying the prayers amounts to a real, legal marriage contract that cannot be broken except for legal reasons.

Those prayers or at least, the most significant part of them are now transferred to the wedding itself. We take from them the Triple Sign which is at the heart of those prayers.

2. The Triple Sign

This is just like the blessing given for the engagement, "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen! Blessed is God the Father, blessed is the only Son, and blessed is the Holy Spirit." This is done for the newly married couple and their wedding rings, as a blessing for the partners and for their partnership, and for the covenant of love between them.

3. The Letters From St. Paul

A passage is read from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians (5:22-6:3) where the Apostle draws our attention to the proper foundations for the Christian home: a husband that loves his wife as much as himself and a wife that obeys her husband. As much as the husband gives love, the wife gives obedience and vice versa. It is a wonderful recipe for the unity and the continuity of the Christian home.

4. The Gospel

After Psalm 19: "Like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber" (verses 5,6) and Psalm 128: "Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house" (verse 3) are read out, there comes the Gospel according to St. Matthew where the Lord stresses:

a. The law of monogamy (one wife): "He Who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female'" (Mt 19:4).

b. The unity of the married couple: "The two shall become one flesh" (Mt19:5).

c. The continuity of the marriage: "What God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mt 19:6).

5. The Litany

In which the priest and all the congregation ask God for His mercy to bless the groom and the bride as He blessed Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Joseph and Asenath, and as He also blessed the wedding at Cana of Galilee by His gracious presence.

6. The Three Prayers

In which the priest asks for spiritual blessing and real unity for the couple, "That they may have happiness and keep the right faith, and enter into the mystery of joyfulness." He also prays that God would "Keep them in welfare, wisdom and the blessings of salvation" and grant them godly children, "For life O Lord comes from You, and the fruit of life from the womb."

7. Anointing With Oil

This is after a special prayer over the oil so as to bless it: "As a weapon for righteousness and justice; an anointing for purity and incorruptibility; radiance and beauty that will never fade; and a renewal and salvation for their souls, their bodies and their spirits." The deacons respond at the end of each section by singing a joyful 'Amen'.

8. The Chasuble & The Crown

The priest prays over the chasuble and the crown so that the couple may receive, "Crowns of glory and honor, blessing and salvation, joy and happiness, virtue and justice, strength

and stability." Thus, when the priest crowns the newly married couple, this means crowning them in spiritual glory in their new church. When the groom puts on the chasuble, this means that he has become the family priest. He is to present daily sacrifices, such as prayers, praises and offerings, on the altar of Christian love and the altar of the inmost heart.

As for the marriage rings, they are a mark of the covenant of love. That is why they are transferred from the right-hand to the left, which is closer to the heart.

9. The Presentation

The priest presents the bride to the groom with a special prayer. Then he covers both their hands with a Communion napkin that was originally given to them as a preparation for Holy Communion. It is now just to remind them that they should receive Holy Communion at their earliest convenience.

10. The Exhortation, The Blessings and The Absolution

Now the priest urges both bride and groom to take special care to nurture their love for each other and to cherish their family ties. After they have promised at the altar to keep the family altar, to have daily prayers and Bible-reading, he blesses them. Then he prays for forgiveness for their sins and sends them out with the congregation in peace. After this they should be regularly receiving Holy Communion and other sacraments.

This is how the prayers of the sacrament reach their climax: on a high point of spirituality and exhortation. Although the bride and groom will then be very busy with the photographs and social niceties, which are not that appropriate, we still hope that they will reflect on all the prayers of this sacrament, which are usually taped.

May the Lord keep our homes in purity, understanding and cohesion. May He make them model homes: models of witness to Jesus Christ, their Founder and Shepherd

YOUTH AND FAMILY LIFE
THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A CHRISTIAN FAMILY
(H.G. Bishop Moussa)

A Christian family has special traits that spring from the Christian concept of sacred marriage and the commandments of the Bible for the married couple about how to deal with each other and how to bring their children up.

The Definition of a Christian Family

The family in the Christian concept is a small church, for St. Paul says: "To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, and to the church in your house" (Phil 1:2). The family is an arena for experiencing the work of God in uniting the couple and sanctifying their offspring for Jesus Christ, and in radiating His light to those around.

Domains of Family Love

There are many aspects, such as:

1. The Family Altar

The family prays together and reads chapters of the Bible as a means of binding its members together spiritually, so that they may all receive the blessings of the Holy Spirit and the power to overcome every evil.

2. Taking Communion Together

It is when the whole family is gathered around the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist that the church - as a community - is best expressed. This gathering is a feature of our Orthodox church, for not only does it bring the individual into a relationship with God but it also nurtures the relationship of the group with God: "In the congregations I will bless the Lord" (Ps 26:12).

The Spirit of God endows groups with more than it endows individuals. This is why taking Holy Communion together, following repentance and confession, is a continuous source of renewal for the family.

3. Bringing Problems Before God

It is important to get our children used to lifting up their hearts to God when they face a problem. Besides the fact that this makes a way for God to intervene in our problems and make our hearts ready to cooperate gratefully, we find that this method builds up faith and fellowship so that we turn to God under all circumstances. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Ps 50:15).

4. Mutual Understanding

The pressures of life in our age, whether those put on the

exhausted husband, on the working wife, or on the stressed children who have their conflicts and worries about the future, demand that the family stay committed to settling disputes in a spirit of mutual understanding.

It is a great crime against the unity of the family and against oneself that a person puts his foot down and acts in self-centered individualism and stubbornness without consideration for others. We must learn to be understanding: to let go of our preconceived ideas and be open to one another.

5. Friendly Visits

It is a good idea for the family to pay friendly visits to other Christian families because this strengthens the spirit of love in the Christian community. It also nurtures and renews love among the family members.

It is important that the wife cares for the feelings of her husband's family and the husband for the feelings of his wife's family. Most of the problems emerge from neglecting those important feelings. The harmony between the two families is a strong support for a Christian family and an important basis for psychologically well-balanced children.

We warn against interfering in the family's affairs because such interference frequently causes problems, division and serious disruption.

6. A Spirit of Simplicity and Contentment

One of the most disruptive influences on a family is that of imitation and jealousy of other families who are trying to 'Keep up with the Jones'. However, the Christian soul that the Lord has filled with His grace sings in heavenly peace: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Ps 23:1).

It is important to examine oneself on this point and both parents are responsible to do that. St. Paul teaches us that: "Godliness with contentment is great gain... and having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition" (1Tim 6:6-9).

7. A Sound Upbringing

Parents should realize that the sound upbringing of children in their early childhood and the stages that follow is very important. When the parent is at one time tender to his or her children and on many other occasions strict, the child gets confused. The child does not understand what principles to follow nor what good behavior means. When the father is strict with his adolescent son or daughter while the mother treats the same one tenderly - ignorant of the nature of that stage and of the father's aim - the young person will go off the rails and neglect duties. There must be an agreement between both parents on a policy about how to deal with their children. The affections should be balanced during the process of upbringing.

It is important to watch the children's behavior with compassionate understanding. This must be done effectively and persuasively, so that they become capable of choosing good friends and steer clear of pit-falls.

8. The Family and the Community

Sometimes the parents are very lax with their children; they let them give way to peer-group pressure. After a while, it turns out that they are mixed up with the wrong kind of company and are up to their necks in trouble.

A positive and flexible Christian approach is to be open to people and deal with them in love and cooperation without getting involved in their aberrations. What is most harmful is being flexible to the point of laxity: letting our values, principles, and kids go adrift. The family should be careful when it comes to getting involved with other families. What some would consider friendly relations might end with critical problems.

9. The Family and the Mass Media

It is not wrong to have access to different kinds of media at home like T.V., radio, newspapers and magazines, but it is wrong not to help children, and even parents, to choose the right thing. All should learn to pick the appropriate method for improving their minds: the right program, a good book et. It is up to us to stop and ask ourselves if we are abandoning our children to trivialities or negative influences that will ruin their spiritual lives.

We hope for the day when the mass media puts across material that will build up the spiritual lives of our children - because life is not like a decadent play or a violent movie. Indeed, the mass media should elevate - not degrade - people's instincts. There are the fields of science, art, and sport and, even better, religious knowledge that fights atheism and spreads the principles of pure, genuine love. These are the subjects that we can watch or listen to on the mass media.

10. Serving Others

Christ taught us that He came not to be served but "to serve and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28). There is no doubt that the spirit of servanthood is the sign of a real Christian soul and the blessed testimony of what Christianity does in people's lives. We should get accustomed to serving others and teaching our children to do so.

The selfishness that we teach our children will cost us dearly unless we correct ourselves. We ask our children to be selfish and hate even their cousins, to be jealous and take advantage of others. All this creates a fractious community full of feeble and resentful people. Christianity requires from us self-sacrificial love: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not

rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1Cor 13:4-7).

Hence it is necessary to have the spirit of servanthood, to give part of our time, effort, money and talents to others, especially within the church which channels such donations to the needy. Be honest in giving your tithes to the Lord and you will know His blessings. "Bring all the tithes... and prove Me now in this.... If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it" (Mal 3:10).

Dear Friend,

The church trusts that you are going to respond to its appeal for family repentance - that you are going to pray and worship God together, take Communion together, glorify Jesus, and offer lively, fruitful service.

YOUTH AND FAMILY LIFE
PASSING ON FAITH IN THE FAMILY
(H.G. Bishop Moussa)

The words of St. Paul to his disciple Timothy were very strange, when he told him, "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 Tim 1:5).

Is faith inherited? The very genuine faith in the heart of Timothy the son, was the very same faith as that living in the heart of his mother Eunice and in his grandmother Lois. The faith that a family passes on to its children is a sacred inheritance. Faith cannot be transferred from one generation to another mechanically, but the effect of transmitting it and of Christian training in the home cannot be denied.

This is the most important function of the Christian family: transmitting faith. We could have our children a fortune - that is okay, but the danger lies in our failure to pass on to our children the faith we inherited from our holy fathers. "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mt 16:26)

That is why St. Paul confirmed the role of parents in the salvation of their children: "Nevertheless she (the mother) will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness, with, self-control" (1 Tim 2:15). So the outworking of the mother's salvation is conditioned by the way she brings up her children. That is why St. Monica cried bitterly when her son Augustine went off the rails, feeling her great responsibility towards God for her son. Her concern deserved St. Ambrose's encouragement: "Trust my daughter... the son of all of those tears shall never be ruined!"

Now, what are the channels through which our children will be given faith?

1. A Life of Adoration

This is the main channel through which our children receive faith. Standing to pray in front of an icon, depicting the Lord Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary holding the Lord, makes an indelible impression on the child's mind. For our first experience of such a vigil is associated with baptism - now new birth by the church.

2. Christian Education

This is the second channel which transmits faith, since "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). Here we should always remember the role of the grandparents when they tell their grandchildren stories from the Bible, starting from the beginning of the creation, the

flood, Babel, Moses and going on to the birth of Jesus by the flesh, His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension into heaven and the establishment of His church. Grandparents usually have more free time than fathers and mothers, but the stories of the Bible and the work of the Word are two very important issues for childhood education and upbringing. It is also worth mentioning that many parents have experienced the effectiveness of the Bible when they started to tell their children some of its stories. It is a glorious blessing to every age-group, as the Bible is the best school and the best law.

Also, parents should give more attention to the regular attendance of their children at Sunday school, at services and at the Communion table. All these build up a store of faith and education for succeeding generations.

3. The Family Peace

"There is no peace", says the Lord, "for the wicked" (Is 48:22). This is true: when the husband and wife who are away from the Lord and each of them is either self-centered or even worse sin-centered, they never live in peace. On the other hand, the husband and wife who are close to the Lord, who believe that He is with them in all their problems and guides their family wisely, live in true peace. That peace - the fruit of their faith - is noticed and appreciated by their children. It is a vital channel through which the family can know the Spirit of Christ, His mind and His forbearance.

I could never forget, that once when I was visiting a godly and blessed Christian family, a relative came around in tears, all worked up, and raised her voice as she complained against her husband. It really disturbed the quiet and friendly atmosphere of the family. A little girl leapt into her mother's arms and cried out: "Mum, let this lady leave." Yes, because she was not used to loud disagreement but to the calmness of love.

4. Dealing With Difficulties

There is no doubt that the Christian family which has real faith can easily pass it on to its children, through the way it handles various situations. As it is a loving family that bears genuine love for everybody, children notice and absorb that spirit. It is a wise family, because it handles its problems quietly and avoids getting itself into fights or quarrels that are not from the Spirit of God. It is a serving family, since it serves everybody happily, in the joy of giving. It also follows all the principles of the Lord Jesus Christ of Whom Isaiah prophesied, "He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will any one hear His voice in the streets" (Mt 12:19). Such a family models itself on the commandments, love and mind of the Lord.

What ruins the children more than to see their parents fall out with others, whether family members or not? How great is the responsibility the parents must bear for bringing up their children properly!

5. The Family Library

It is perfectly okay for the family library to include daily newspapers, magazines and general publications suitable for children and young people, but it is also important that parents organize a small library suitable for their children according to their ages. You can find many constructive Christian publications, whether stories from the Bible, or lives of saints, or explanations of the liturgical services, or other suitable books for young people. Reading edifies the wandering mind, said one of the saints. That is why we have to concentrate on the role of books in the children's lives, especially since TV and other audio-visual aids have weakened people's ability to read, as most people just sit passively in front of the box, accepting whatever comes on. Some programs are good, but most of the others would have negative results.

The family library should also include the Bible and books to help young people interpret it. These books can re-activate young people's minds and recharge them with spiritual ideas, giving no chance for evil ones to get a grip.

6. Educational Trips

Such as visiting monasteries, or exchanging visits with churches in or outside your area. All this is education that children and young people can absorb as they meet with monks who have given up the world, with priests who can give insight into the mind of Christ and the works of the Spirit, or with brothers and sisters that are following the same path as they are - the path of eternal life. This is how a young person can grow spiritually in a relationship with God, psychologically at ease in a social group, intellectually increasing in knowledge and physically building up the body through training and sports.

Those are some of the channels that the family can use to pass on the faith to its children - to increase the number of those who are to dwell in the eternal kingdom and are free from condemnation on the last day.

YOUTH AND FAMILY LIFE
THE FAMILY & A SOUND UPBRINGING
(H.G. Bishop Moussa)

The personality of an individual is the final outcome of two sets of essential factors. The first set is made-up of the innate qualities inherited from the family. The second set is acquired from different contacts - such as family and school-life. But the family is the most important environment.

The family plays a key role in building the personality for it gives all hereditary qualities and provides the most important environment. You can easily tell the difference between a person born and bred in a poor family in a slum and another from a rich family and a cultured neighborhood. The difference lies not in morality but in behavior: in patterns of thought; aspirations; ways of dealing with others; expression of feelings; habits; attitudes and norms.

The first features of personality are formed between the ages of three and five. There is a difference between the wanted child and the unwanted child within the family, and also between an only child and one with many brothers and sisters. A child who is kept at home will not have a personality like one who's been encouraged to go out and make contacts with many other families.

So it is a must to know some important principles in sound pedagogy:

1. Setting an example
2. Understanding each Phase
3. Being even-handed

1. Setting An Example

This point imposes itself as a primary principle, not just because we are handling the subject from a religious or moral viewpoint, but also because we are looking at it from a scientific and practical one. The child imitates everything, picking up behavior from parents, relatives and neighbors.

So we should be prudent in the way we speak and act. We should avoid bad behavior, such as abusing, slandering, or being harsh with others. We should also keep an eye on anyone who helps in the home in case they spoil or maltreat our children. Moreover, we should know what services the kindergarten provides for our children and what effect it has on the child's personality.

The parental model is very important. There is a real difference between a child who sees his parents living in peace and happiness and another who sees the reverse. The first will be calm and the second will be very nervous. Moreover, the second child may reject the idea of marriage in the future or deviate, according to psychologists.

There is a difference between the child who sees his parents really involved with the church and takes part with them in prayer and receiving the Holy Communion, and another who misses out on all these things, living in a atmosphere of continuous disturbances: the parents shouting, the TV turned up and the telephone jangling.

Again, the child who gets to see short films and slide presentations about Christ and the Bible and finds somebody keen on helping him or her find out more about these matters, is different from the one who spends his or her time watching films on TV, playing football or going dancing. The former grows up with a spiritual awareness within him or her, while the latter grows up with a worldly heart distracted from the spiritual path.

2. Understanding Each Phase

The parents should study carefully the characteristics of each stage of growth. There are five stages: the two years in the cradle, the early childhood (3-7), the late childhood (8-12), adolescence (13-18), and maturity (19-25).

Each stage has specific characteristics and needs special handling:

- From the cradle, the child learns to walk and talk, and discovers the surrounding world. Both boys and girls are nervous because of teething, so need kindness and compassion. There is no substitute for these qualities.

- In early childhood, the child is imaginative and imitative. He or she moves around inside and outside the home, asks many questions and wants to know many things. This stage is a period of learning and forming impressions, so icons, spiritual music and church hymns will have a lasting impact.

- In late childhood, the child has unbounded and untiring energy. He becomes sociable, wanting to know people and places.

- Adolescence is the most critical stage. The teenager starts to feel attracted towards the opposite sex, and wants to find out about sex. This is not wrong, but the problem stems from where he or she gets this information. So the teenager needs parents and older friends to listen carefully and openly without restraint of rebuke. Then they can give him or her advice.

- The final stage is maturity. The young adult needs to know the best way to choose the life-partner in order to avoid being hasty in making the choice while still not ready for the financially and not quite mature enough spiritually and psychologically. Dialogue is the most appropriate way to help our sons and daughters at this stage so that they don't react with the kind of stubbornness that could ruin their future prospects.

3. Being Even-Handed

The parents' treatment of the children should be balanced, neither terribly severe nor extremely fond. Love and firmness should go hand in hand. There must be no discrimination between girl and boy or one child and another. Lack of love and compassion may create delinquent or hardened youths.

These are some principles of a sound upbringing, but the most important is a close walk with God.

YOUTH AND FAMILY LIFE
THE FAMILY AND MONEY
(H.G. Bishop Moussa)

Although money is a gift from God and has an important role in our lives, yet it is a root cause of all the recent conflicts at the individual, family, and international levels.

For this reason the Bible established basic principles for using money to promote human happiness and serve mankind. These principles have been defined to prevent us from making money into another god and worshipping it. So what are these principles?

1. Money Is A Gift

"God ... gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1Tim 6:17). So whatever the material income we have may be, it is a real gift from God. In fact, if God hadn't given us life we would not have received that money and unless He had given us scientific, practical and technical abilities we couldn't have gotten anything. Not only that, if He hadn't given us health we couldn't have used the different parts of our bodies in producing what brings money to us: for example a painter uses hands, an engineer uses eyes, a player uses feet and so on.

Therefore, the Bible teaches us to talk to God when we offer alms for helping the poor or the church, saying: "All things come from You, and of Your own we have given You" (1Chron 29:14).

2. Money Is Not Essential For Life

God said: "One's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Lk 12:15), and He also said "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4). "For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Hence life - and health too - is a gift from God. Therefore, whatever we spend or however far we travel, our own efforts to enjoy a good life and good health will end in failure - because life is His and health is His too.

3. Money Is Not Essential For Happiness

"Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife" (Prov 17:1). Happiness is a spiritual and psychological quality which comes from a living relationship with God: a soul at peace, a mind at rest, knowing God's forgiveness, and genuine love of all people whoever and whatever they may be.

From this logical concept we can see how hard it is to buy happiness with money: in fact money has brought sadness to those who have a great deal of it. They rest all their

hopes on investing or keeping it, but sometimes they destroy themselves by chasing a false happiness.

4. Money Is Transitory

St. Paul says: "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God" (1Tim 6:17).

This verse is true: money is uncertain. It may come today and go tomorrow. You may get a fortune today and lose it very quickly again when circumstances change. Money is a dynamic thing. So we must be cautious of it: depending on it could cause a nervous breakdown.

5. Money Is A Talent

The Bible commands those who are rich to "Do good, that they may be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come" (1Tim 6:18-19).

So what is required is to invest money for the glory of Jesus Christ and the comfort and salvation of fellow human beings, especially those who share with us in faith. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). The more we give, the more we are increased in blessings. "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself" (Prov 11:25). In fact some who are rich have also been rich in faith and offered great service to mankind.

We are stewards over "unrighteous mammon" (Lk 16:1-15). This means that money is not ours, but a gift from God. Think of the unjust steward who used worldly wealth to make friends. Although this money was not his, but his master's, he used it to win friends and influence people. The unjust steward's behavior was wrong in that he had used what he did not have, yet God orders us to learn from "the people of this age", to invest the money which He has given us for the purpose of having prayerful friends. God has entrusted us with our money so we must use it conscientiously. We use what we need and leave what we don't to the will of God, Who may use it in coping with an emergency.

Therefore, God warns us about being wasteful: "The drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty" (Prov 23:21). He encourages us to take up the pieces left over to serve others (Mt 15:37).

6. Don't Depend On Money!

Depending on money is a denial of God. The Lord said: "How hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mk 10:24), or as Job said: "If I had made gold my hope, or said to fine gold 'You are my confidence' ... I would have denied God Who is above" (Job 31:24-28).

So the problem lies in considering money as a pillar of life

and a support for the future. Yet this doesn't mean we don't save, as saving is different from depending on money. Saving means keeping the money we don't need and offering it to God to use it according to His own will either for service or for unforeseen circumstances.

So we must believe that God is essentially our sole Supporter, but money is not: "He who trusts in his riches will fall" (Prov 11:28).

7. Don't Crave For Money!

Those who love money fall into a lot of evils, such as theft, embezzlement, and illegal practices, because they want to be rich. "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (1Tim 6:9-10).

So when God said: "No servant can serve two masters ... you cannot serve both God and mammon" (Lk 16:13), He meant that the love of money is opposed to the worship of God.

8. Enough Is Enough!

People are always trying to improve their personal income. They keep changing jobs looking for a higher income, but the main aim must be to have enough, not to live in luxury. There is really a great difference between the two: "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1Tim 6:6); "Be content with such things as you have" (Heb 13:5). "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, have an abundance for every good work" (2Cor 9:8).

Satisfaction should be the norm: "Give us this day our daily bread." This is what makes for a contented life lived for the glory of God. God does not want us to be miserable, but to be happy. He gives us the right to be satisfied. But as for pleasure: "She who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives" (1Tim 5:6).

And as for what people admire and run after: "All that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it" (1Jn 2:16-17).

9. Planning The Budget

A Christian must plan the budget for the family. A couple must honestly collect their money together and budget for their needs according to their priorities:

For God: the 'firstlings' or the first portion of everything we produce, the tithe or tenth, and the vows.

For each partner: a suitable sum of money for personal expenses.

For the family: its daily and
monthly expenses.

For the children: a family must plan a
better future for its children.

For the parents: when they have a
special need.

For savings: we must allow God to
act according to His will either for the
family or for others.

The spirit of understanding, love, justice and righteousness
must prevail among us. There's no doubt that a lot of
families break up because of money, even though it should
not carry so much weight in our lives.

YOUTH AND FAMILY LIFE
THE FAMILY AND THE MASS MEDIA
(H.G. Bishop Moussa)

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ... For you are the temple of the living God" (2Cor 6:14-18).

There's no doubt that the world has witnessed rapid progress in the field of the Mass Media. Over a small number of years, we have witnessed the progress of T.V. from black and white to color, then the development of video which we use to record movies to watch whenever we like.

There have also been developments in broadcasting. The French are angry because of the tyranny of American T.V. programs that come to France clearly spreading ideas, culture and negative aspects of American society. They are afraid of losing the French identity, despite its culturally distinguished heritage.

Because of all this, we need to study with an open mind the effects of the mass media on the Christian family and how to overcome them.

First: The Effect Of T.V. On The Family

1. The Spiritual Aspect

T.V. affects the family in - at least - two ways:

a. There is no doubt that T.V. keeps the family from important matters that are basic to the salvation of its members. To be forced sometimes to reschedule the hours of Sunday School and youth meetings to avoid the viewing time of a movie or a football match is proof enough that T.V. takes up a lot of our time and attention. This definitely affects our spiritual life whether individually, as a family or as a society.

b. Some T.V. programs cause stumbling blocks because they include unsuitable subjects for a Christian. Their moral values are opposed to the sublime standards of Christianity, and their principles contradict those of the Christian faith. They titillate the senses in a way which flies in the face of Christian integrity and faithfulness.

2. The Social Aspect

The T.V. presents social issues and offers the opinions of famous writers and thinkers about family and public affairs. It also shows various types of delinquency, disloyalty, theft, and violence, and divorce for reasons like falling in love with someone else etc. All these have their effect on us. We get used to all these and they become accepted moral

values although they are as far as can be from Christian purity. Maybe the adults can resist such effects because of their firm upbringing, but the young may imitate what they see and take things for granted. Current trends in hair-cuts, smoking, styles of dress, even catch-phrases prove the effect of T.V. on people.

3. The Cultural Aspect

Thinkers and writers complain bitterly about the triviality of the ideas presented by T.V. TV has weakened the faculty of reading. People sit waiting to watch TV programs. When we study the TV programs, it is surprising to find that there is a lack of humanitarian subjects and social advice. Nothing but trivialities are presented most of the time. Children memorize many of the advertisements, songs and words broadcasted on TV. Why doesn't the TV handle religious, cultural, scientific, and patriotic topics?

4. The Behavioral Aspect

There is no doubt that the violence that dominates our TV and cinema screens is reflected in people's behavior. The chief of Los Angeles police has realized that the rate of certain types of crime increases after a film shows them on TV. The cinema, now that TV has attracted much of its audience, survives on two types of movies: violence and sex. It degrades us by exploiting these two instincts to take our money.

A novelist once wrote about a man who committed all kinds of sins, then felt it did not satisfy him, and so repented. However, the producer who made a film based on the book took only the first part. He made a lot of effort to demonstrate the man's sins and canceled the part about repentance. The film was shown all over the world bearing the name of the wronged writer.

Second: How To Face These Effects

We can face them in three ways:

1. The Spiritual Fullness

There is no doubt that "A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb, but to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet" (Prov 27:7). When our children find their satisfaction in Jesus Christ, the Bible, the lives of saints; in church, hymns and spiritual readings; in serving in the city and the village, it will be easy to take them away from watching TV. It also makes it easy to overcome the negativism in TV programs. Jesus is a great power Who saves us from the power of the flesh, the world and the devil and gives him the victory over evil in all its forms. He can enable us to reject sexual immorality no matter how tempting it may be. We have to restore the family altar, gather with our children to read the Bible, sing hymns, pray and go with them to take Holy Communion and to attend meetings at church. We should watch their spiritual progress closely. Then it will be easy for them to make the right choices.

Inner emptiness is the reason behind being attracted to TV, but the person filled with God's grace will watch the little that is useful, leaving the much that is useless.

2. Cultural Fullness

We used to have a big library at home that was full of books on different subjects. The parent used to read a book and then give it to his or her son or daughter to read; later, they would discuss it together. Now, we rely on the cultural triviality of newspapers, magazines, and TV.

We need a push to read, to activate the mind and fill life with sacred enthusiasm, leaving us with no spare time for any delinquency. A cultured person is capable of choosing useful books, programs etc., choosing what is upbuilding.

3. The Constructive Selection

When the heart is filled with Jesus Christ and the mind with culture, it is easy for us to choose the best programs, the right friends, good books and magazines which will be fruitful in the home - and leave out those that are unfruitful.

As Christian believers we have some inner enlightenment bestowed by the God Who made us. "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1Thes 5:21). We should weigh matters in the light of three verses:

- + "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful" (1Cor 6:12).
- + "All things are lawful for me, but all things do not edify" (1Cor 10:23).
- + "All things are lawful for me ... but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1Cor 6:12).

We live in inner freedom: whether reading, studying, discussing, watching, or travelling. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us" (Rom 8:37).

Let's live with our children a spiritually satisfying life, a life that builds them up culturally. Let's enter with them into a dialogue that will build their consciences through Jesus Christ. We will not leave them to go adrift. Instead, they will be filled with God, live a life of faith and holiness, and be witnesses for the Lord Who saved us.

YOUTH AND FAMILY LIFE
THE FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS
(H.G. Bishop Moussa)

The Christian family has two types of belonging: one to the church or the secret body of Christ, and another to society or the country. Each of them has its own rights and duties. The family is really the fundamental cell from which the church and country are built up.

There is no contradiction at all between these two types of belonging. Christianity calls us to be good neighbors. It commands us to acquire good and honest behavior that can testify for Christ Who dwells within us: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see Your good works and glorify Your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16). Moreover, Christianity commands us to submit to the governing authorities, being confident that God is above all: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it whenever He wishes" (Prov 21:1); "There is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God" (Rom 13:1).

The Christian family is asked to be Christian in reality and not just in name. It is to be firmly connected by the Holy Spirit and bonds of love, to be concerned with bringing up its children in the fear of God and love for all. Then the family will remain a model for the holiness and continuation of Christian marriage and be ready to play its part in both church and country.

1. The Relationship With God

It is the first and essential relationship. The Christian family sometimes hangs an significant sign in the dining room. It says: "Christ is the head of this house, the unseen guest at every meal, and the silent listener to every conversation." If the family follow this watchword, it may be converted into a real church and a holy sanctuary where it can offer the oblations of glorification and thanksgiving.

In the past the Christian family took care to set aside a place for prayer. This place contained a compartment for the Holy Virgin carrying Christ, and in front of it there was an oil lamp symbolizing the light of the God's Word, or candles to symbolize the deepest source of self-sacrificial love that the family had. In front of such an east facing compartment a daily prayer has to be offered - we suggest it should be once a day in the evening. The family may pray a short prayer - we suggest the prayer of thanksgiving, Psalm 50 (Have mercy on me, O God), and the Compline absolution. One of the children may read a chapter of the Bible, then the prayer should be ended by the concluding prayer (Have mercy upon us O Lord, have mercy upon us) and the Lord's Prayer.

Such a family altar will mean that the Lord will keep an eye

on us and His love and personal presence will be with us. His Word will be heard in the ears of both young and old. It will be a reason for renewed calm repentance, its prayers will be an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to renew, sanctify, direct and win hearts to goodness and constructiveness.

No doubt this altar will be a chance for good family ties on both the spiritual and emotional levels. The family will never be divided against itself, neither the parents nor the children. All will behave later with a spiritual and enriching love. They will not be trapped in psychological self-centeredness.

2. The Relationships Within The Family

Educationalists talk about the generation gap and the inability of the parents' generation to understand the psychology and circumstances of their sons' and daughters' generation. On the other hand, young people have difficulty in communicating with their parents and imagine that agreement between their generation and their parents' is impossible. This is a natural thing to happen among people of the world but not among the sons and daughters of God, who have got rid of their stubbornness and selfishness and overcome their materialism. It will be easier for them to meet intimately and agree gracefully. In an atmosphere of warmth and affection, they should be able to give firm guidance, free from enfeebling favoritism or undue severity.

Keeping the balance of expressing feelings and offering advice is essential not only for the peacefulness and cohesion of family ties but also wholesome spiritual, psychological and practical life for its members.

A lot of young families have been torn apart because of the strong emotional ties between the parents and their sons and daughters. Because of the impossibility of the young person being emotionally weaned from the parents he or she cannot be united to a partner. Such a strange emotion between the parents and the new couple is not love at all but only a counterfeit image of love. It springs from an unwholesome selfishness and self-centeredness, which causes psychological troubles for both the young man and the woman and makes an illness all too likely in the long run.

In fact, spiritual and rational love is needed. It is essential because we don't want young men and women to grow up with an emotional deprivation that leads them to be trapped by the first false emotion. Spiritual love is essential, but emotional love is not sufficient. Emotional weaning is needed and a balanced upbringing is essential too. We suffer from the disparity between the father and mother in the way they bring up their children. One uses cruelty and the other spoils a child so that the son or daughter grows up with a damaged, psyche which rapidly develops into a corrupted manner and spirit.

3. The Relationships Outside The Family

These must have principles and boundaries. For example, the

spirit of love between a couple and their families must always be evident. The parents' intervention must be limited to what will benefit the couple and build them up. Each partner must not allow the other partner to be closely tied only to his or her family: they must be linked with each other's families. The two families must not let destructive curiosity or feelings of resentment interfere in the life of the new family. Intervention is needed only for the benefit of the new couple, but they must have time to know each other intimately and become united. Each of them must give up some of habits and mood. Within this period of time, some minor differences or even disputes take place but, because of the spirit of understanding, Christian love and the earnest direction of parents they will calm down. But if the parents take the opposite course, i.e. favoritism and destructive attitudes, the new family may be torn apart.

Outside the two families there are the relationships with colleagues, friends, and neighbors. Such relationships must have manners and spiritual rules, because we suffer from these types of relationships. They bring bad thoughts into the family, involve them in resentful relationships and push them into abandoning constructive, vital principles. This is the last of the negative consequences which come from a home with no protective walls around it. Visits must be limited, relationships must be set up after suitable vetting and sons' and daughter's friendships must be under compassionate control.

Hence, every family must keep an eye on its sons and daughters to be able to say to the Lord on the Last Day: "Hence I am and the children whom God has given me" (Heb 2:13). The mother "Will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness, with self-control" (1Tim 2:15).

The watchword of us all must be: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh 24:15).

YOUTH AND FAMILY LIFE
FAMILY AND BEARING WITNESS FOR CHRIST
(H.G. Bishop Moussa)

Bearing witness to Jesus Christ is not just the duty of the family, but also of every believer. For what Jesus Christ has done for us deserves our gratitude, dedication and active efforts for Him. Therefore, the Christian family is expected to bear witness to Christ, Who loved it and shed His blood for its sake. We bear witness to Christ not only because we are thankful to Him for saving, blessing and choosing us as His children, but also out of love for humanity that needs the Good Savior. We need to determine the ways that the Christian family should follow.

Bearing witness means demonstrating these divine characteristics with consolidation and depth in our Christian lives. Being positive in one's Christian life is a blessing to oneself and to others, as Solomon said: "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself" (Prov 11:25).

There are many areas where the family can bear witness to Christ Who protects and saves it:

1. The Area Of Personal Holiness

What proves that Jesus works in us is His ability to make us holy. Holiness is not based on sinlessness, but on "freedom from condemnation." It is impossible for man to be sinless. As long as we are in our weak body we groan under the same burden as the Apostle's saying: "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24). Even we who "have the first fruits of the Spirit, ... groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Rom 8:23). We may stumble, but we refuse to be enslaved to sin.

In spite of our struggles and efforts, our weakness still leads us to sin - this is natural, but our faults are caused by carelessness or overconfidence in the face of temptation. We should not try to test ourselves out. Such a reckless attitude must be changed. It is possible for a certain kind of person to rise to his or her feet when fallen. This person changes his or her ways and is not condemned. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:1).

Another kind of person, however, not only falls but with his or her free-will keeps on falling and fully chooses to do so. Someone like that really needs to be shaken up inside and have his or her conscience aroused so as to change his or her whole direction in life.

"Holiness" in Greek is "Agios", which means "set apart for God" or "chosen for God." Just as tithes, or tenths, are "set apart for God" and the vessels of the altar are "consecrated for service", so a priest of the old covenant would have a sign on his forehead saying, "Holy to God." In Holiness we set ourselves apart from the natural walk of the people of this world, and dedicate the innermost sanctuary of our hearts to the Lord. We

struggle to devote all our love to Christ.

This personal holiness is based on the grace of God working with our struggles. This is the most important area of witness to Christ, for people "May see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16). What will have most impact are not our untiring efforts as God's servants, nor our profound studies: what really counts is being a model or a demonstration of God's handiwork, an icon that expresses the work of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Area Of Family Cohesion

The Christian family is to be an example which bears witness to Jesus' love. This love can link the family members together in one body. When talking about steady, consistent marriages people used to call them "Christian Marriages." What is needed now from our Christian families is a living witness to Jesus Christ Who is dwelling in them with all His love. What we don't need is trouble, selfishness, hatred and divorces.

People nowadays think of divorce very quickly and at the first misunderstanding, despite the fact that divorce is completely rejected in the New Testament except in the case of adultery or abandoning the faith. God told us in the Old Testament - under the age of Law - that He hates divorce: how much more in the age of the Holy Spirit and redemption? People think nowadays of cutting off marriage ties because they have no children (mainly a Middle Eastern phenomenon). Or they may think of splitting up because their characters differ, instead of coping with each other in true Christian love. Or they may get divorced in the face of sickness instead of looking after one another. None of these reasons spring from the mind of Christ or the Spirit of God.

The family will disintegrate and the children will lose their way and will face spiritual and psychological suffering. Yet the one who is causing all this thinks he or she's doing nothing wrong. As the days go by, the one who has said an angry word will sense that he or she has done something which didn't please God.

Let God speak into our hearts! Let Him arouse our sleeping consciences. Let Him unite our disintegrated families for the sake of bearing true witness to Christ, Who suffered by the whips which cut His shoulders for our sakes. We must watch out for God will bring peace into our disintegrating families and give repentance to lost souls. Otherwise, what a great crime we are committing against our children, not only in this age but in eternity as well!

3. The Area Of Service In The Church

This is the natural area in which the family should bear its witness to Jesus Christ. We are to exert continuous service for the church and to serve with our tithes and not to deny them to their real owner, Who is the key of blessing. Giving tithes is a blessing to oneself. We must contribute our talents: the father, as a teacher, a doctor, a lawyer or an engineer: the wife in her work or in any job which may suit her. She can make food, clothes, and share in outreaches for charity. The sons can share while still young in serving the altar and then in Sunday Schools

in the church. Or they can join in with working camps and various social activities. The girls can also serve in suitable areas maybe in teaching classes, looking after the creche, or serving in needle-work, knitting, and so on. Serving in the church is a natural thing for every Christian family, because the family is the basic cell for forming the church. It is an inseparable part of the church and a vital organ in it.

Serving the church will also show the sons and daughters to be a vital branch in Jesus' vineyard. They can't go astray from the way of eternity. They achieve a sense of belonging and give their efforts to God's house.

4. The Area Of Sacrificial Love

This is the deepest and most profound area of bearing witness, where the family comes out of its shell and directs its attention towards others: friends, neighbors, and everyone, with love untainted fanaticism. For Jesus Christ has never known fanaticism, but on the contrary, He fought fanaticism in His disciples. When the Samaritan village refused to accept Jesus, two of His disciples thought of asking for a heavenly fire to come down and burn up the Samaritans. At that point Jesus rebuked them saying: "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Lk 9:55, 56). And it actually happened that these two disciples were inwardly changed and went to minister in all areas, without discrimination between Jews and Gentiles.

Christ wants us - His children - to excel in opening our hearts, spreading love and presenting our service with a highly positive spirit. When a Pharisee, in order to justify himself, said: "Who is my neighbor?", the Lord gave him the example of the Good Samaritan that served the wounded Jew. He declared to the Pharisee that the one he ought to show compassion to is the true neighbor, not the one who belongs to the same sect or race.

Christianity is pervaded with the concept of love from the first moment of creation till the end of the world, from the first chapter of the Bible till the last. It is enough to know that the most favorable way of describing God to us is that He is love. That is why when hatred enters a person's heart God departs from it that very moment. But when God possesses a person's heart He widens its boundaries, till he or she loves the whole world without being tainted by its lusts.

An elderly monk once said: "If you've shut yourself away to be alone with God and haven't found consolation, get down to the street, since you will find the image of Jesus in the first person you meet."

Let's serve with all our love and energy, without expecting praise or anything in return. For this we'll have praise from God and that will satisfy us.

God bless our families for the glory of His Name. Amen!

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