

The Upbringing of Children

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Introduction

The following sources were used: "The Religious upbringing of Children," by Archpriest Sergey Schukin; "The Orthodox Upbringing of Children in Our Days," by Bishop Gregory Grabbe; and other Orthodox articles.

All aspects of a man's life - his character, sense of responsibility, good and bad habits, ability to cope with difficulties, and his piety - are shaped primarily during his childhood. The bright memories of his childhood can strengthen and warm a man during trying times, and, contrarily, those who have not had a happy childhood can in no way remake it. When we meet an orphan who has never had parental affection, or a step-son or step-daughter whose broken spirits are a result of difficulties at home, or those left to the care of strangers, we can sense in them the imprint of painful early impressions.

The absence of a religious upbringing unfailingly manifests itself in a person's character - a sort of fissure can be perceived in his spiritual makeup. A child is extraordinarily receptive to religious impressions. He is instinctively drawn toward everything that opens up the beauty and meaning of life. Take this away from him and his soul will become dulled and he will feel lonely in an unfriendly and cruel world. Something similar happens with the physical appearance of a child. If he lives in dismal, damp surroundings, he will grow underdeveloped, ailing and without joy. In both cases of malady, physical or spiritual, the fault lies with the parents. On the other hand, when we consider prominent and successful people, people of great integrity and energy, we see that the majority of them came from large, hard-working families, brought up in religious traditions.

It may happen that in someone's later life immoral behavior may weaken the faith in God that a person acquired in childhood. He starts neglecting religion and the salvation of his soul without any apparent hope of recovery, but God will not abandon a person who carries the seeds of goodness deep in his heart. When something frightening befalls him, he begins to recognize his limitations and helplessness and starts to reflect on the purpose of his life. Long forgotten impressions and instructions revive within him, and the grace of God again touches his soul. This helps him to come back to God. Thus, the hallowed memories of childhood become very helpful. This is why it is so important for parents to make every effort to lay a spiritual foundation in their children. When they are adults, they will appreciate their parents' efforts.

In this pamphlet we will discuss the aim of a Christian upbringing and its main components. We will explain the importance of the family, of the church and of parochial school, and we will discuss some difficulties and errors in bringing up children.

Upbringing and the scholastic education

A Christian upbringing lays a **moral and spiritual foundation** in a child, while a scholastic education aims at developing his mental abilities. These are two different activities. There is no reason to think that scholastic education automatically facilitates the moral development of a child. Some people may be very educated but ill-bred and unspiritual. On the other hand, totally uneducated peasants can be highly spiritual and moral people.

Any upbringing, either within the family or the school, can only pursue temporary aims related to the needs of the family and society when divorced from religion. For instance, the aim of education in totalitarian countries is to make a person an obedient instrument of the government. In contemporary public schools in the USA and many other countries, the object of education is not a person's highest welfare or his spiritual integrity, but the material needs of the government and community. An Orthodox religious upbringing, on the other hand, is concerned with the moral development of the soul and is guided by **eternal spiritual principles**. Here the content does not change with political trends or new sociological ideas but is founded on **Divine revelation**. Parents should direct their child not according to fashion or society's needs but according to the Word of God.

The aim of a Christian upbringing

A Christian upbringing aims to give children proper spiritual direction, so that they will be able to withstand temptations and become good and religious people. For this, they should not only learn rules of behavior but also develop **integrity** and a clear distinction between **right and wrong**. This goal of Christian upbringing is revealed in the prayers of the sacrament of Baptism. The priest reads the following words, among others: "O Master, Lord our God, call Thy servant (name) to Thy Holy illumination ... Put off from him the *old man*, and renew him unto life everlasting ... That he may be no more a child of the body, but a child of Thy Kingdom." During Baptism, a person undergoes an important and substantial inner transformation: he dies to sin and is reborn spiritually. Here he receives all the tools for inner growth - the power to love God and to love everything that is good. These qualities liken him to the Incarnate Son of God Himself, as is sung during the procession around the baptismal font: "As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ" (from the epistle to the Galatians). The seed of the Holy Spirit is implanted; from now on, the responsibility for strengthening it and making it grow passes to the parents and godparents.

Since our nature is two-fold, consisting of body and soul, every child needs not only physical but also **spiritual nurturing**. If the parents only nurture the child physically, while neglecting him spiritually, he will grow up a "child of nature" and a slave of carnal desires. St. John Chrysostom says the following about this: "To educate the hearts of children in goodness and virtuousness is the sacred duty of parents. The violation of this duty makes them guilty of spiritual infanticide ... There are parents who spare no efforts to make their children happy and wealthy; but for their children to be good Christians - for such matters the parents have little need. This is a terrible shortsightedness! This is the very reason for the problems from which society groans ... If the

fathers strove to give their children a good upbringing, there would be no need for laws, or courts, or punishments. Prisons and executioners are necessary due to the lack of morality."

The Gospel teaches that the principal thing in a man's life is the **proper state of his heart**. One should understand "heart" as the center of one's spiritual life, wherein all the feelings and desires are concentrated. Here is the location of the origin of a person's behavior and moral attitude. If, according to the Savior's words, "*out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries...*" (Matt. 15:19), then it should become evident that the main task of rearing a child is to give a proper direction to his heart. Because temptations are unavoidable, it is important to educate a child to distinguish unambiguously between right and wrong, to choose virtue and to despise immorality. Parents should nurture in their child a deep love of God from a very early age, before he loses his sensitivity and receptiveness.

When should the upbringing begin?

There are differing opinions regarding the best age to begin the spiritual upbringing of a child. Some parents think that in the first several years a child needs only external care, and consider him like some amusing kitten, unreceptive to spiritual influence. Such an opinion contradicts Christian teaching and experimental evidence. Psychology has established that a child is receptive to many external influences right after his birth. A certain scholar compared the subconscious process of a child to that of a movie strip, which records all perceptions non-stop. A child may as yet lie in the crib, but his soul already amasses impressions, picks up sounds, follows movements around him with his eyes, discerns voice intonations and even the mood of his parents. From all these non-stop impressions the child's personality is formed, and after they sink into his subconscious, they cannot be blotted out by any means.

Besides, modern psychology has established that the impressions of early childhood play a decisive role in the subsequent development of men. For instance, some bad habits and infirmities in adults can be traced to negative impressions from early childhood. That is why parents should give the greatest care to the early impressions of their infant. Right from birth they should begin to develop not only the body but the child's soul as well.

This is precisely what our faith teaches us also. In the Gospel we read that when some children were carried to Jesus, the disciples forbade the parents to approach, not wanting to disturb their Master. Seeing this, Jesus became indignant and said to the Apostles: "*Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God.*" And embracing the children, He placed His hands on them and blessed them" (Mark 10:13-16). Take note that these children were not led to Christ but were carried to Him, which means that they were too little to walk by themselves. The disciples did not permit such little ones near Christ, thinking, as many contemporary parents do, that infants are unable to assimilate spiritual things. How did the Savior react to this? He became indignant. We know that the merciful Christ became indignant only when truth was suppressed by delusion; for instance, at the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the desecration of the temple by the moneychangers, etc. That is why He said to the disciples: "*Suffer the little children to come unto me...for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.*" It turns out

that children are more receptive to goodness and Divine grace than adults. They instinctively strive toward God.

Following the instructions of Jesus Christ and His Apostles, the Church teaches that a religious upbringing should begin at the earliest age. The Church's wisdom and experience in connection with the upbringing of children is reflected in its services and customs. From his very birth, the Orthodox Church welcomes a child with several prayers: on the first day (the day of his birth), on the eighth (at the selection of his name), and on the fortieth (his introduction into the temple). These prayers contain petitions for the child's physical and spiritual well being and for his sanctification by Divine grace. Following Baptism, the church prescribes bringing the child to the temple and taking him to Communion as often as possible, having him kiss the Cross and the Holy icons and drink Holy water. All these would be in vain if children were unreceptive to spiritual impressions.

Thus, the most proper time for the enlightenment of the soul is early childhood. In fact, the ethical foundation of a person is laid during this period. The soul of a child, until six to seven years of age, resembles clay, from which one can mold his personality. After that age, the main characteristics have been established, and it is almost impossible to change them. A mother does the right thing when she brings her child to the icons, when she blesses him with the sign of the cross, when, overcoming her tiredness, she holds him in her arms during church services, and when she prays over his crib. With all of these actions she prepares him to be a good Christian.

The struggle with bad inclinations

Parents make a mistake when they consider their child to be completely free from evil. Experience shows that a child comes into the world not only with good tendencies but with bad ones also. Science calls them inheritances, and the Church, the seeds of original sin. Everyone is born with his nature partially corrupted by sin. That is why the education of a child should include some basic training on how to struggle against bad inclinations. Without this, the child will grow unarmed against temptations. When a child is abandoned to his own desires, then, no matter how talented he might be, his good qualities may become completely overwhelmed by his evil inclinations.

Every child bears some resemblance to his parents and relatives. Together with their physical characteristics, he assumes some of their spiritual qualities as well, which in general are a mixture of good and bad. The problem is that the bad predispositions often develop and strengthen much faster than the good ones. For example, in the herbaceous world, weeds are more robust and aggressive than garden and vegetable plants. In order to grow something worthwhile, one must constantly fight weeds.

Observing a child carefully, one can notice in him some germinating negative characteristics: occasionally he is capricious, or becomes angry, or may insist on doing something forbidden. At an early age children become lazy, are prone to slyness and deceit, and manifest greed and cruelty toward other children. At five years of age one can already see hints of his future character. If the parents do not teach him to overcome his bad inclinations, these may grow into

passions and vices. Sometimes parents occasionally lament about their children: "Where does he get such stubbornness, capriciousness, and inclinations toward the forbidden? He does not see any of this in us." Actually, there is no need to teach a child evil - it is already rooted in him. A mother observing her child said, "He clearly manifests the negative characteristics of his father." Unfortunately, the good qualities are acquired with effort and constancy, while their opposites, as weeds, flourish on their own.

Young parents tend to underestimate these "weeds," considering them mere signs of immaturity: "Let him grow a little, and he will realize by himself what is good and what is wrong." Hoping that this will happen automatically, they leave his bad inclinations unattended and fail to teach him how to struggle with them. Some parents prefer to appease every capricious inclination of the child, adopting the attitude: "Anything for a quiet life!" Psychology and religion, on the other hand, teach that it is better to nip any manifestation of evil at its root before it takes hold. Failing to do so will allow it to become a habit. Afterwards parents will bitterly repent that because of undue mildness, they failed to discipline their child. St. John of Kronstadt writes the following: "Parents and educators, guard your children against capriciousness. Otherwise, they will infect their hearts with malice, losing their early holy love, and will bitterly complain at reaching adulthood that in their youth they were indulged in their whims. A whim is a germ which corrupts the heart."

A child should always know what is permissible and what is not. **Sensible prohibitions and light punishments are absolutely necessary.** On understanding that the violation of imposed rules results in unpleasant consequences, the child will avoid the forbidden. Thus a healthy foundation will be laid in him, and his will, which is just beginning to form, will be prepared to submit to God-established moral laws.

The spiritual foundation

By nature, children are gentle, compassionate and sincere. These valuable qualities are as yet weak in them and have to be **directed and strengthened**. While the child grows, parents should strengthen in him a disposition to struggle automatically against any temptation as soon as it appears. Fortunately, every human being possesses a wonderful quality known as **conscience**. The task for parents is to develop and strengthen in their child a discerning conscience and to accustom him to listening to its voice. This task should be approached not abstractly, but from the religious standpoint, i.e., referring to God, whom we should love and obey. We are all responsible before him for our actions. Without such a religious foundation, an upbringing will be shaky and unconvincing.

Some think that the notions of God, of good and evil, etc., are too abstract and complicated for a child. Nevertheless, experience shows that, at three to four years of age, these concepts are accessible to a child when they are presented to him with **visual support** such as a holy pictures, the sign of the cross, simple prayers, religious music, and so forth. The pure child's soul associates these first religious impressions with the voice of conscience, and thus a simple and healthy piety is formed within him. For those who would question the reality of childhood piety, we note that faith in God is an inborn human quality. Therefore, it is available to all, regardless

of their age or mental development. The lowliest uneducated man as well as the highest scholar are both capable of believing in God. Each person comprehends and experiences the faith to his degree of development.

Because the Christian faith is so natural to human nature, it can be successfully rooted in little children, and their upbringing can be built upon it. One can only be amazed at how **easily and deeply** children accept faith in God and what a **beneficial influence** it has on them. Faith in God not only helps a child to fight bad inclinations, but it also helps him to understand many fundamental questions which are inexplicable in human terms regarding the nature of good and evil, the appearance of the world, the aim of life, etc. The main point is that faith in God is the key to the development of all the positive qualities in a child - piety, love, compassion, sensitivity, repentance and the wish to improve.

Every parent from his own experience may be convinced that the notion of God provides him with a powerful tool for the rearing of children. When we speak of God as the origin of every goodness and the Supreme Judge of mankind, we bring true notions of right and wrong into a child's consciousness. We do this not with formal rules, but by helping him to perceive the **Living Person** Who stands over the world, and before Whom we all are accountable. This Supreme Being draws us toward good and repels us from all that is perishable. Thus a child recognizes sin as something shameful, harmful and subject to punishment. This notion of sin is not totally alien to a child because the feeling of fault, shame, and an elementary distinguishing between right and wrong is part of his nature. The Christian faith only clarifies and strengthens in him these deeply rooted notions.

The concept of right and wrong opens to the child the path of moral choice and an awareness of his **responsibility** before God. Now the child becomes aware that his bad actions not only transgress the requests of his parents but also the order established by God. He may be punished for his sins not only by them but also by his Heavenly Father. Furthermore, all spiritual and material welfare comes to him not only from human efforts, but also from the Lord Who provides for us. Holy Scripture designates such a spiritual state as the "**fear of God**" and teaches that it is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10).

The expression "fear of God" requires some explanation. It is far from that primitive fear which savages experience before the raging forces of nature. In accordance with the Gospel, our relationship with God must be expressed in filial love, and true love never pains its subject. For instance, a good son obeys his father not because he fears punishment, but out of love for him and unwillingness to distress him. Likewise, in the Christian faith, "God-fearing" is linked with the thought of God the Father, whom we do not wish to offend. Hence, "fear of God" is a disposition to venerate God and is a healthy feeling which should be experienced by every Christian. Religious upbringing demands the incorporation of this feeling into a child from the earliest age.

Domestic aspects

As mentioned above, while a child is small, he assimilates preeminently through his feelings. His will and intellect have yet to develop, together with his physical growth. Because an individual lives mainly by impulses and desires in the early stage of his development, it is important not to burden a child with moral admonitions and logical proofs. Upbringing begins with **obedience**, and the sooner a child becomes used to following the parent's requests, the easier it will become later to instruct him. At first, some interdictions are necessary, like: "Don't do that ... You must not act like that ... This is good." As the child grows, positive direction and instruction should follow as well. Here some difficulties may arise, since words alone are not always sufficient to inculcate in a child the rules of conduct. Occasionally, one may meet with stubbornness and refusal. In order to overcome this, parents sometimes might have to resort to stronger actions.

There are two approaches: physical punishment and religious influence. Of course punishment is sometimes indispensable, but if it is applied too frequently, it may bring negative results. The child gets used to performing his duties "by the rod" and does not learn to follow his own good intentions. Besides, frequent punishment tends to make the child irate, secretive and distrustful, and leaves a painful imprint on his character.

A religious upbringing gives more successful results. There is almost no need to resort to corporal punishment when parents impress upon the child **not their own rules, but those demanded by the Lord**. A Christian mother may say to her child: "Don't do that - the Good Lord does not like that ... This is not allowed - the Good Lord does not allow that." Or: "If you do this that way - God will punish you!" And if a child hurts himself because of his disobedience (like burning his finger), the mother may say: "See, God punished you because you disobeyed Him."

Thus, step by step, the parents inculcate in their child the feeling of **dependence on God**. If he does something forbidden secretly, they can tell him: "Don't think that the Good Lord cannot see what you are doing while I'm away! God sees everything," - and while saying this they point to the Holy icon in the corner. One youngster wanted to steal some candy from the sideboard; he climbed up and turned the icon towards the wall "so the Good Lord would not see," and his mother explained to him that God is everywhere and that it is impossible to hide from him.

It is not only prohibitions that should be admonished on religious grounds. Most importantly, **positive requests** to a child should be based on Divine authority. It must be explained to him that God is our Creator, the Source of life and happiness, and that He will help him to succeed in good actions. The child must understand that **he can attain nothing without God's help**, and that the main tool for obtaining God's help is **prayer**. Besides, it is necessary to teach the child to thank God for everything he has - life, health, food, happiness, for all material and spiritual things - and also to pray for his parents. From the earliest age the child should perceive God as his Heavenly Father, Who loves him and cares about his well being. For instance, when a child stays home alone or is among strangers, the mother may console him: "You are not alone, the Good Lord always watches over you." Also it is beneficial to explain to the child about the

Guardian Angel, who accompanies and protects him. This will free him from the fear of darkness and being alone. To love God with the whole heart should be the ultimate goal of upbringing.

In order that these instructions not remain abstract, they must be reinforced with **vivid illustrations and specific actions**, like making the sign of the cross, attending services in Church, kissing icons, lighting candles, looking at biblical illustrations, common familial prayer, drinking Holy water, receiving Holy Communion, bowing the head, etc. Thus the child becomes habituated to following religious rules, and his will becomes used to submissiveness to the supreme will of the Creator. As the child develops, parents must direct his actions toward strengthening in him Christian piety. Its main characteristics are sincere faith, truthfulness, modesty, kindness, diligence, steadfastness, readiness to forgive, etc. If one adds to that the habit of the observance of important fasting periods and holy days, then there will be established for the child a favorable environment, which will make unnecessary any physical punishment.

If we compare this method of upbringing to others that exclude the Christian faith, we see that some parents resort to shouting, beatings, tedious lecturing, etc. This, of course, fails to elevate the child's feelings. At the opposite extreme, there are parents who favor undisciplined and capricious behavior, which promotes all sorts of passions and bad habits. Both of these approaches can but only cripple a child. Is it not because of such diversity in upbringing that children differ so drastically in their characters: some are gentle, trusting, sensitive to all good and compassionate; others, on the contrary, are peevish, distrustful, heartless and capricious? A purely worldly upbringing robs the child of the most precious and highest human qualities.

Certainly, in an upbringing, the greatest influence comes not from words alone but from **personal example**. The behavior of those close to a child has the greatest influence on him. Children come into contact with two groups of people: with their own family and with outsiders - schoolmates, friends and neighbors. While parents may do their best to give a good example to their child, schoolmates and neighbors often influence him negatively. That does not mean that he should be isolated from people, because this would deprive him of the necessary preparation for life. Rather, parents should make sure that their child meets with good friends, attuned to Christianity, and that the influence of the family predominates. Here we summarize the main qualities that Christian parents should possess:

- 1) Love of God above all,
- 2) Love of their children in the Christian sense,
- 3) Fairness to them and
- 4) Consistency in their actions.

It is heartwarming to see how young couples, while striving to raise their children, pull themselves up, educate themselves and become better Christians. So it happens that not only the parents bring up their children, but the children educate their parents as well. It is desirable that both parents belong to the same Church. In the case of a mixed marriage, an agreement should be made between the couple (preferably prior to the wedding) that their children will be baptized and brought up in the Orthodox Church. Divergence of opinion regarding faith, and especially quarrels between parents, cause a rift in a child's consciousness and causes great harm. Besides, when parents criticize or abase each other in the presence of the children, they undermine their authority.

In general, parents should be very careful about what they say in the presence of a child. Some may think that the child is too small to understand. But not being able to discern most of the details, the child nevertheless grasps the main direction and moral value of the discussion, and this can leave an unfavorable impression in his subconscious. This can later evoke some questions on his part that the parents will be unable to explain and raise doubts difficult to dispel. It is best to completely avoid mentioning some problematical subjects in the presence of children and also to avoid mocking others or showing disrespect to things which should be regarded as sacred. "*Woe unto him, who shall seduce one of these little ones,*" said Christ, "*it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea*" (Matt. 18:6).

Coercion

In some countries the theory of a "liberal upbringing" of children has gained popularity. This theory rejects all constraint and punishment and insists that a child must be left to himself so that he may freely express and develop his individuality. Can a Christian embrace such an approach to upbringing? Hardly, if he accepts what the Bible teaches concerning original sin and the corruption of human nature. Scripture unambiguously teaches that "*the thoughts of man's heart are evil from his youth*" (Gen 8:21). Without spiritual guidance a child will learn to pursue only his egotistical interests and to reject any moral obligations. With time his conscience will become completely indifferent to the means of reaching the desired goal.

The Church, on the other hand, teaches that a child from a very early age must learn to discern between what is allowed and what is forbidden. The parents must guide their child's actions so as to prepare him for an independent life based on spiritual and moral values. This guidance should begin as early as possible. At 10 to 12 years of age, it may be too late to correct shortcomings already acquired. In order to recognize the importance of constraint in upbringing, one should consider the following: (1) A child's mind is not fully developed to understand unmistakably in all circumstances what is right and what is wrong. (2) Even when he understands, his will is too weak to withstand all temptations and to direct his actions toward good but difficult tasks. (3) A child becomes used to being responsible when he is asked to perform feasible things. (4) A sensible and moderate combination of guidance with punishment imprints on a child's character a sense of moral responsibility and good habits.

Punishments that are not so much direct and corporal but are indirect and yet no less effective include: leaving meals without dessert, depriving him for a time of the usual games and TV, denying visits of friends and other pleasures, performing additional tasks, etc. One way or another, when words are found to be insufficient, one must exert influence on a child with a more productive method. (The saying, "Waste not words, when authority is required!" from Krylov's fable, "The Cat and the Cook.") Since every child is born not only with good, but also with bad predispositions, one must struggle with the latter from the very beginning. What kind of struggle can take place without restrictions and punishments? Remember your own childhood, and you will be convinced that knowledge and good habits did not come automatically but were obtained with struggle, persistence and sometimes with tears. St. Paul says: "*No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable*

fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11). Hence, let too sentimental parents not be afraid to cause grief to their children when the situation demands it.

The significance of the Temple

Because the primary objective of the Church is to lead people towards faith and righteousness, the temple with its services and educational means can be a big help to parents in bringing up their children. Amidst surroundings of wantonness and disbelief, the temple stands as a spiritual lighthouse, an island of sanctity for adults and the young. Its setting and its divine services have a special beneficial influence on a child. The candles, the icons and frescoes, the smell of incense, the singing of the choir, the sound of church bells - all leave bright impressions on a young soul. When parents bring their child to church often, he becomes used to it and learns to love its inspiring services.

The Orthodox faith is rich in feast days, magnificent services and noble customs, which produce a steadfast influence on Christians. Bring to mind Palm Sunday, Passion Week and the procession with the Holy Shroud, the Easter service (which no one celebrates as joyously as the Orthodox), our blessing of the waters on Epiphany, the celebration of the Holy Trinity with its abundance of flowers and greenery, the bringing forth of the Holy Cross, the blessing of the fruits of the harvest on the feast of the Transfiguration ... what a rich nourishment for the child's soul! For their children's sake, parents should make no excuses to skip church services.

The house of an Orthodox family is supposed to complement the holy environment of the temple. Of particular significance are common prayers, the beautiful corner with its holy images and glowing lamp, the first meal after Lent, memorial days, the blessing of homes and other religious celebrations. Because the religious upbringing of a child is attained not so much by means of the intellect as through feelings, children who attend church services and participate in family prayer become like a ploughed up field, receptive to the seeds of goodness, which in due time will bear fruit.

The first Confession at the age of seven comes as an important milestone in the life of a youngster. After Confession a person becomes as holy and chaste as after Baptism. It is vital that parents have taught their children by this age to note their shortcomings and to repent sincerely in what they have said or done wrong. His first Confession indicates to a youngster that he is becoming mature enough to begin consciously to strengthen his faith and to take responsibility for his actions. Formerly the sacrament of Communion nourished him through the parental faith. Now he approaches the Holy Chalice with personal conviction. So, the preparation of a youngster for the proper partaking of his first Confession and first conscious Communion is a major accomplishment in the spiritual development of a child.

Starting from this age, or perhaps a little later, boys may begin to serve as altar boys, and girls to sing in the church choir or to assist in removing candle stubs in front of icons. This will accustom them to participation in divine services. Active involvement in the Liturgy and close contact with the priest draws a sensitive child toward the Church and toward spiritual life. This

will broaden his horizons to understand that his earthly life is only the first step in his existence and that it has an important purpose.

The parish school

Public schools are often unable to stand against the ungodly and corrupting influences in society or to prepare children to choose properly between right and wrong. There are many internal and external factors that push the family toward disintegration and society toward moral decline. Noteworthy among these factors are the media and the movie industry, which swamp children with low-grade movies saturated with scenes of violence and sex.

To counterbalance the materialistic and antichristian environment which surrounds children, the parish school should give the children religious knowledge, which strengthens their faith and teaches them a proper way of life, including the means to resist temptations and to become true Christians. The purpose of the parish school is to deepen and enhance the religious fundamentals acquired at home. During catechism lessons, children systematically receive important knowledge: they memorize prayers, become familiarized with the sacred history of the Old and New Testament, and study the foundation of the Orthodox faith, the commandments of God and the content of the divine services. In the senior classes, we are behooved to familiarize the students with the particulars of heterodox denominations and with the proper approach to contemporary moral problems.

The parish school assists the family in the matter of religious upbringing, and the parent's care of course goes much further than the school's. The school gives theoretical religious knowledge, while the **application of this knowledge** is achieved within the family. Without a Christian atmosphere at home, all the information received at school will remain a theory that children will forget in the course of their years.

In conclusion one must note that neither the family, nor the school, nor the Church, can independently bring up a child. This is feasible only by a **combined** effort of these institutions. That is why the more there is interaction and mutual assistance among them, the more successful the upbringing of the children will be in their care.

Family structure

The Orthodox Church always regarded the family as the main source of the Christian enlightenment of children. The Apostles used to call the family the "**domestic church**" and taught spouses to strive conjointly for a spiritual life.

To bring a Christian environment to the house, all members of the family should pray together. The best times for this are mornings and evenings. When possible, they should pray before and after meals. Combined prayer joins and strengthens the family. On Sundays all must attend church, observing the fourth commandment: *"Remember the Sabbath day [day of rest], to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the day of the Lord*

your God" (Exod. 20:8). Giving us six days of the week, God kept one for Himself, but those Christians who devote the seventh day for themselves, "rob" the Lord of what belongs to Him and break their covenant with Him.

Discussions of spiritual topics and the reading of the Holy Scriptures, as well as the lives of the Saints and other edifying books, have a beneficial effect on the whole family and create a conciliatory atmosphere in the house. One cannot disdain the fast-days, which are periods set by the Church for the development of self-discipline and religious firmness. The Lord Jesus Christ, as well as His disciples and the first Christians all fasted on certain days. For instance, from the first century of Christianity, it became the norm to fast twice a week: on Wednesdays and Fridays. At that time the Great Fast, also known as Lent, was established for the period prior to Easter.

In the absence of a parish school, the job of catechismal instruction falls on the parents. It is certainly very helpful to this end that the children get used to reading a children's Bible and other religious books on their own. Later they retell to the parents what they have read and learn how to apply what they have learned. These readings and conversations should be carried out on a regular basis because without consistency it is difficult to achieve lasting results.

Difficulties

One of the main contemporary problems is the preservation of the family. When families split, the whole society disintegrates. The statistics regarding the number of divorces and crimes among young people are alarming. What are the reasons for this social crisis? We think that the main reasons are the weakening of faith in God and the straying from Christian moral principles.

In order to preserve the family and to bring up children properly, it is imperative for parents to build the family on a Christian foundation. **God and the salvation of the soul must take first place, and material goods second.** Of course, this is not easily achieved in the present conditions of a sped-up pace of life and growing economic difficulties. If some years ago a typical family could exist on the earnings of one working person, usually the father, today it becomes necessary for both spouses to work. Thus parents become overworked and too busy to spend time with their little ones. When children feel lonely, they start meeting with neighbors and friends, who may be undesirable companions from a Christian standpoint. Sometimes tired and nervous parents start to quarrel between themselves, raise their voices and even insult each other. This creates an unhealthy atmosphere at home, which harms the spiritual development of the children.

In order to avoid this situation, it is necessary for parents to **slow down** their lives. It is preferable to lead a more modest life than to strive for abundance with bitterness and disagreements. According to statistics, persisting economic problems and the pursuit of wealth often lead to divorce. Common prayer with children (to be said in the morning and evening) helps parents to find a balance in their everyday cares and draws God's help to them.

Of course errors and misunderstandings are inevitable even in the healthiest and most religious family. Spouses must resolve their problems in frank and friendly discussions. It is good to adopt the rule of having **amicable** discussions of common concerns on a regular basis, supplementing them with prayer and the reading of Holy Scripture. This will attract Divine guidance and help. Both parents should learn to listen patiently to each other's arguments and to respect each other. Never should one raise one's voice, insult or abase another - especially in the presence of children. One must ask forgiveness before going to bed, even when one feels he or she is in the right. The Apostle Paul instructs spouses: "*When angry, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil*" (Eph. 4:26). If a couple neglects this advice, anger will accumulate more and more in their subconscious, and they will gradually become alienated from one another.

Parents must pay attention to what constitutes home entertainment, namely **television and music**, which have such a strong influence on children. Television would be an excellent invention if suitable programs were selected and it were used in moderation. In practice, television has an adverse effect on children. Occupying the most preeminent place in the home, like an idol in a pagan family, it not only devours a lot of time but also habituates children to a passive diversion of no educational value. Many studies report that TV programs as a rule are permeated with violence, triviality and even profanity. This is the most dangerous form of pollution. Besides, children who spend much of their time watching television have a poor learning record. They become willful, rude and begin to manifest objectionable behavior early.

It has also been noted that television has a hypnotic and obsessive effect. People who regularly watch TV develop such a passionate fondness for it that they can no longer live without it. In this regard it becomes similar to the habit of smoking or drinking. Television gradually takes away any desire to read, meditate, pray or do something worthwhile. Therefore, parents who, for the sake of their children, abstain from acquiring a television or keep it under strict control, do the right thing.

Music, as all art, should bring out in an individual elevated and noble feelings. There is a broad selection of good classical and folk music. Unfortunately, one cannot say the same about contemporary music, such as rock-and-roll or "heavy metal," which brings out in the listeners stormy, erotic and wicked feelings. Some of these contemporary songs even contain anti-religious and occult language. Christian parents have the responsibility to protect their children from such pollution.

It may seem to some parents that many of the self-limitations imposed by our faith are too severe and unnecessary in our days. But they must remember the words of the Gospel regarding the perils of a wide road, followed by the majority, and of the narrow road leading to salvation. In these pre-antichrist times, Christians should realize that the world is wrapped in evil, and that, as Jesus said, the "*prince of this world - is the devil*" (1 Jn. 5:19; Jn. 12:31, 14:30).

Some families suffer from a halfhearted and superficial approach toward Orthodoxy. For instance, in pre-revolutionary Russia, many people, especially the intelligentsia, were mindful of church only during great feasts and main family events, like baptisms, weddings, and funerals. The remainder of their lives passed without any relation to the Church or attention to its

requirements. It is natural that these people, who had such a scornful attitude toward their faith, passed it on to their children. That is probably why the Russian revolution took such monstrous dimensions, and why Christians were so passive during the destruction of churches, the extermination of relics and the persecution of the clergy.

The struggles and difficulties that parents go through in the upbringing of their children have a positive aspect. Striving to direct their children to the righteous path, they simultaneously strengthen their own faith and grow spiritually. According to the Creator's plan, this is the very object of the family. To teach others we have to learn first, and by saving others we save ourselves. When parents, realizing their ineptness and weakness in the task of bringing up their children, turn to God for guidance and help, God truly assists them, and family life flows safely under the shelter of the Almighty.

Conclusion

Thus, within the family, a person receives the foundation of faith, moral direction and the sense of duty. From the first days of his cognizant life, the new member of the family learns to appreciate the care and love of his parents. Hard work and even a kind of austerity are useful ingredients to a family's environment: they strengthen the children's characters, accustom them to work, and confer a sober outlook on life. The family is the guardian and disseminator of Christian tradition. Here a child receives his first spiritual impressions. Here is laid the foundation of faith, prayer and good deeds.

Child psychology teaches that toward the third year a child starts to realize his individuality and begins to say "I." At this time parents should start to train him to be obedient. During the first several years of his life a child acquires approximately one third of the notions of an adult. After this, a person mostly broadens and deepens that which was imprinted on his soul during childhood.

From infancy, a child must learn what is permissible and what is not. This knowledge should be imparted to him not abstractly, but by putting it on a religious foundation - on faith in God and our relationship with Him - with love, thankfulness, and hope in His help. The notion of right and wrong gives a child a sense of responsibility. Now he realizes that any bad behavior breaches not only the demands of his parents, but also the natural order directed by God, Who may punish him for disobedience.

Simultaneously, parents should give to their child an **example of Christian life**. If they try only to stuff his head with dry rules, he will regard them as useless theories. A good example has a determining role in a child's development. To this end, all the members of a family must strive to respect and love each other, to pray together, discuss religious topics, attend Church, take Communion often, observe fast days, and help the needy.

Failure in a child's upbringing may evolve from the parents' weak faith and engrossment in the material side of life. It may come also from their irritability and anger, which in turn are the

results of selfishness and a lack of discipline. The irritability of parents summons a responding irritability in children.

Children must be protected from temptations, which usually seep into them through television and voluptuous music. If the parents insist on having a television in their home, they must restrict the amount of time that they spend in front of the TV and also check the contents of what they watch.

It is crucial to remember that good results in rearing children are unachievable without a **religious environment at home**. The Church with its instructions, prayers and sacraments can only help parents in the process, and so mothers and fathers must strive to have the grace of the Lord in their home. This grace will guide and save their whole family.

A prayer for our children

O Lord, Our Heavenly Father, have mercy on our children (names), for whom we humbly beg Thee, and whom we entrust to Thy care and protection. Instill in them the true faith, teach them to be reverent before Thee and deign them to love Thee dearly, our Creator and Savior. Direct them to righteousness, so that they do everything to Thy glory. Teach them to lead a pious and virtuous life, to be good Christians and worthy people. Give them spiritual and physical health and success in their endeavors. Protect them from the wily snares of the devil, from many temptations, from bad passions and from all godless and disorderly people. For the sake of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, through the prayers of His most Holy Mother and all the saints, bring them toward Thy calm refuge and Thy everlasting Kingdom, so that they, with all the saved, may forever thank Thee with Thine only begotten Son and Thy life-giving Spirit. Amen.

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