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Family Life in Christ

By Gary Shirley

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God ordained the Christian family to have a specific design – a man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children. The family is called the domestic church because it is a community of faith, hope and charity. Within the family, we first learn to respect the sanctity of life from conception to natural death. This means welcoming children into the marriage through birth or adoption but also learning to show reverence for the life of others such as the elderly, the infirm, the poor, the disabled, and the imprisoned.

Every member of the Christian family has a God-ordained function. Though equal in the sight of God, men and women have entirely different responsibilities. As stated so clearly in the Catechism: "Divine fatherhood is the source of human fatherhood..." which reaffirms the importance of man's function as the head of the family. Though equal (as God) to the Father, Christ himself lived and died in supreme obedience to the will of the Father. Throughout faith history, men have been called to leadership roles by God, from Adam to Noah to David to Moses to Paul to Peter. This call to leadership does not necessarily infer perfection, capability or skill, but the call is nonetheless intrinsic to manhood. Pervasive gender-role confusion in our society today makes it is easy to dismiss or compromise this primordial function of men to lead their families to God.

To carry out their responsibility, men are to be servant leader of all in their charge. Leaders provide a clear vision, set a solid example, and help others in their pursuit of holiness. Fathers must ensure that their children are brought up in the faith, the beginning of which is their own life being one of Christian holiness. Men who abdicate their leadership responsibility under some mistaken notion of "sensitivity" bring disorder into the family and the society. A simple review of crime statistics in our land reveals the terrible impact of fathers who ignored or minimized their prescribed role.

Woman's role as wife and mother differs from but complements that of the man. St. Paul reminds us of God's intent to provide a helpmate and partner to man, "For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man."(1 Cor 11: 8-9).

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Modeling themselves on the Blessed Mother, women are called to support and honor their husband's role as leader of the family. In her function as wife and mother, a woman brings wonderful attributes such as nurturing care, tenderness and compassion to family life. As with her husband, a wife is called to a life of holiness and Christian example.

Children are called to proffer respect for parents out of gratitude for having given them the gift of life (CCC #2216–2218)*. Respect is shown by docility and obedience to parents during one's childhood. Obedience ceases with emancipation, but respect does not. Grown children are reminded to assist their aging parents as much as possible with material and moral support, as well as in times of illness, loneliness and distress.

Sacramental marriage is the foundation of the family. It is the gift of self, a gift that is freely given and total in nature. The perpetual and exclusive bond of marriage creates the sanctuary wherein the

security of the family rests. The sacred covenant finds its physical manifestation in the sexual intimacy of the marriage act between man and wife (CCC #2360; also Tob 8: 4–9). Reflecting this covenant, the spouses' physical union honors the twofold end of marriage, which is to serve the good of the spouses (the "unitive") and to be open to the transmission of life (the "procreative").

Children are the supreme gift of marriage, in contrast to our societal view which considers them a "right." In our zeal to conceive a child at all costs, medical science offers us numerous techniques that attempt to produce a child by the disassociation of husband and wife or the involvement of a third party (such as donation of sperm or ovum, surrogate uterus, or in-vitro fertilization). These actions violate the child's right to be born of a loving act of father and mother. All such techniques are morally unacceptable (CCC # 2376–77). It is impossible to live the sacramental life while engaging in such practices, for we knowingly introduce other persons and processes into the loving act of procreation, an act that belongs rightly to husband, wife and God.

The intentional spacing of children, if undertaken for just reasons, also demands that we observe moral norms. Periodic continence (methods based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods, such as Natural Family Planning) respects the individual spouses and offers a mutually supportive, natural means of spacing. On the other hand, artificial birth control or any action which frustrates or thwarts the normal outcome of the procreative act defrauds God and falsifies the marital act. All such methods are morally unacceptable (CCC #2370).

It is impossible to live the sacramental life while actively engaging in any contraceptive practices, for we knowingly defraud God of the result of a loving act due to our selfishness and sinful pride. Upon assuming the role of parents, we must remember that we have the "primordial and inalienable" responsibility for the education of our children (CCC #2221–23). While we can delegate certain educational duties to a formal school, we cannot delegate responsibility for oversight of our children's education. The term "education" means more than just secular studies, for home must be the place for evangelization and catechesis. First, we must give our children a solid grounding in the virtues. Second, we must offer apprenticeship in self-mastery, self-denial and sound judgment, so they can learn to forego pleasures in the spirit of Christian discipline. This helps widen their focus outside of the family in order to see the needs of others. Third, education in the Catholic faith means creating an

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environment of personal and family prayer, participating in devotions (such as Enthronement, Adoration, Novenas, Stations of the Cross and the Rosary), attending Parish Missions, and ensuring thorough Sacramental preparation. Fourth, we must guide children in exploring potential vocations, especially being open to God's call to the priesthood or religious life. All of these efforts point to the only true goal in the education of our children – to make them holy people.

All of this responsibility may seem daunting to the average Catholic parent. Like any task, however, we can create hope by building a strategy for success. Consider the following as a guide:

A. Set and Honor Priorities – Make it known that God is first in your life and let your decisions consistently reflect God's preeminent place. Ensure that the family's choices regarding books, magazines, entertainment, and clothing all reflect proper Christian values. Ensure that attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days (and especially while on vacation) is a family priority. Let the family home proudly exhibit signs and symbols of our faith.

B. Distinguish between Vocation and Occupation– Understand the distinction between "what we are" versus "what we do." Success in our vocation (married, single or priest/religious) is our life's goal. Our occupation, on the other hand, is merely what we do to pay the bills. God cares deeply how we

embrace our chosen vocation, whereas it matters little to Him what field we choose to earn our daily bread. As any committed Catholic parent will affirm, it is infinitely harder to live one's vocation than it is to succeed at a chosen occupation. Why? Because our vocation demands that we give everything of ourselves, a notion that runs contrary to our culture. Does the next rung of the career ladder undergo prayerful scrutiny for its impact on our chosen vocation or is it weighed solely for its occupational benefits?

C. Embrace a Vigorous Sacramental Life – Continue to foster a love of the Sacraments in your children once they initially receive by having the same level of commitment yourself. Demand of yourself an ever-higher standard of Christian behavior rather than simply remaining at the same level year after year. Start a relationship with a spiritual director.

D. Surround Yourself with Committed Catholic Families – Americans love "support groups," so why not as part of our faith journey? Have the courage to discontinue relationships if certain friends do not support your moral values. Make an active effort to be involved in parish life beyond the Sunday "obligation." Be willing to be challenged by others more advanced in the faith to delve deeper into its mysteries.

E. Continue Your Education in the Catholic Faith – Consider the last 10 books you have read. Did they support or conflict with your faith values? Ensure that your faith education includes doses of Scripture, Catechism, Lives of the Saints, Papal Encyclicals, Council Documents and works of Spirituality.

F. Actively Demonstrate Christian Service – Remember that, "...a contented Christian does not exist." We are called to mix it up with society and fearlessly speak out against injustice, poverty and wrongdoing. In short, being Catholic means being countercultural, just as Jesus was countercultural. Our family life must reflect the admonition of St. James that, "...Faith without works is dead." (Jm 2:14)

and render Christian service in a truly selfless way. Sincere actions will instill in our children the importance of a life focused on service to others.

"We are not called to success, just faithfulness."

Mother Teresa

*Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition.

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Christ and Covenant

By Aleck Cartwright

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The Covenant and Christ

All are under sin, whether under the law or barbarians, and apart from the Law we are all in need of righteousness. Not one of us can stand before God righteous apart from Christ in us as our righteousness. God does have a covenant with Israel as His chosen race and we as believers are grafted onto the chosen race by grace. This is where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free for we are all in Christ, and there is a level playing field for all mankind who are made partakers of divine nature.

We as Gentiles never become Jews, except in the spiritual sense we become circumcised in our hearts having the law of God written on our hearts and in our minds. In Christ we realise the fulfillment of the law in our lives. We cannot attain to it and neither can the Jew, so whether we are under the law or not, we are all facing the wrath of God towards sin. Where God will judge us for what we have done according to Paul's gospel, which is Christ in us, the hope of Glory.

We as gentiles do by nature that which is required by the law because we have Christ the fulfillment of the Law at work within us. What a wonderful position to be in before God. Israel is still God's chosen people and as such they have the protection and covenant of God.

Sin is what all men have and righteousness is what all men need.

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Aleck is a missionary and author, to learn more go to www.god-life.com.



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