



THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

*On Protecting Children From
Violence And Harmful Practices*



بطريركية الأقباط الأرثوذكس

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THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE
*On Protecting Children From
Violence And Harmful Practices*

A guide for priests and servants serving families and children

2016

Extracts from the Holy Book were reviewed by experts from Coptic Orthodox Church, Egypt,
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Preface by His Holiness Pope Tawadros II

A philosopher was asked: "Is there any evidence that God still loves people despite their many sins?"

He answered: "Certainly, and the evidence is that He creates for us millions of children every day being born among us".

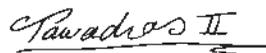
In fact, children are the flowers of our lives or the beauty of our lives. Without children life becomes dry. A proverb says: "Keeping close to children brings head aches and keeping away from them brings heart aches".

What do children represent for us in general?

1. The flowers, beauty, brightness and joy of life.
2. The representation of purity. We are invited to acquire the childhood spirit (Matthew 18:3).
3. Eternity standard for us to be entitled to get our share in Heaven (Matthew 18:4).

This thorough and adequate study is considered a guide for all those who work in the wide field of children including servants, teachers, educators, parents, priests and others. It should be used in connection with protecting children from all forms of violence and harmful practices in the most important three circles that contribute to the formation of the child's personality: the family environment; the school environment; and the social environment.

Let me express my deepest gratitude to those who participated with their experiences and efforts in making this manual a reference on this vital topic. I would like also to thank the UNICEF office in Cairo, which sponsored those efforts to provide more protection for our beloved children. May God compensate all!



Pope Tawadros II
Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the Holy See of Saint Mark

Foreword by His Grace Bishop Youannes

Lord Jesus Christ has paid due attention to children, and stressed protecting them from violence. In the Gospel of St. Mathew, he stated: “Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven'”. (Matthew 19: 13 -14)¹

He also valued their spiritual status as a model of innocence and purity of heart, without which no one would enter into heaven: “ ... Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven”. (Matthew 18:3). Further, he warned against any abuse to them, saying: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea”. (Matthew 18:6).

The Church pays to children the necessary care, protection and development inspired by Jesus Christ, as when St. Paul the Apostle emphasized parents' responsibility towards children, when he addressed them by saying: “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged”. (Colossians 3: 21) In his letter to the Church of Ephesus, he stated: “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord”. (Ephesians 6: 4) He also preaches to men to care for their families: “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”. (1 Timothy 5: 8) Today, many pastoral programmes in the Coptic Church involve comprehensive development of children and youth within the framework of various family service programmes.

¹ All quotations from the Holy Bible used in this publication are from the New King James Version of the Holy Bible, unless otherwise noted.

In fact, childhood is half of the present and all of the future, and any society cannot be developed without solidarity of all national efforts to protect children, as it is a current responsibility and investment in the future. Protecting children from all forms of deprivation, discrimination, violence and danger is one of the fundamental rights guaranteed by international conventions to which most countries are committed, such as the Convention on Rights of the Child, which has become reference for all the fundamental rights of children that should be respected, protected, and enforced. Egypt has been one of the leading States in drafting and supporting this convention through many national governmental and non-governmental institutions.

This manual, which has been prepared by a group of experts in the Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical and Social Services, revolves around the Christian teachings on protection of children from various forms of violence, from a child rights perspective. Therefore, the manual can be used by all those concerned with or actively involved in childhood, especially Christian clergy or priests as well as Church servants.

The manual discusses a number of topics that cover the various forms of violence against children, such as child labour, sexual abuse, children without parental care, domestic and school violence, armed conflicts and child trafficking, as well as violence through the media and the Internet. It also discusses harmful customs and traditions (such as gender discrimination, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), child and forced marriages). This manual clarifies the Christian and Biblical teachings on these topics and how to combat them, from a national and educational perspective, as well as giving short messages in the conclusion.

This work is the result of the fruitful cooperation and blessed partnership between the Coptic Church, represented by Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical and Social Services, and Al-Azhar University, represented by the International Islamic Center for Demographic Studies and Research in Al-Azhar University, in close collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in an unprecedented initiative.



We appreciate the efforts of all experts and partners who participated in this leading initiative, to deepen the concepts of peace, love and forgiveness encouraged by all divine religions, and which are needed in our countries for enhancing joint national and social work between two of the most inveterate institutions in our beloved country Egypt – Al-Azhar and the Coptic Church – for the protection, development and welfare of our most precious wealth, all Egyptian children.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Youannes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

H.G. Bishop Youannes
Bishop of Assuit and affiliated areas

Foreword by His Grace Bishop Yolios

In the name of God the Almighty,

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 18:10)

Dearly beloved, we need to be aware of and recognize the importance of childhood. Childhood is the phase of developing an integral and sound personality – physically, psychologically and mentally – in the family, in the community and in the Church.

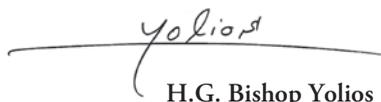
Childhood is a fertile time for the growth of everything that is wonderful and exemplary at all levels, and any deformation of this fruitful ground results in the loss of talents, potential and fruits that should delight the whole world.

Children are a gift that is consigned into all of our hands. We must rejoice in them and preserve them, as they are God’s gift to the Earth.

Finally, I thank His Grace Bishop Youannes, Bishop of the Parish of Assiut and its affiliated areas, who, during his episcopate of the social services, exerted wonderful efforts in the development of this important book. His valuable research has helped and led all those concerned with and working in the field of childhood to give every child a healthy and blessed childhood.

All gratitude to UNICEF for its continuous cooperation and support for this book. I also thank the Bishopric Program of Combating Violence against Children and Mrs. Nahed Talaat for their fruitful efforts in this field.

May the Lord reward and bless all who work for the glory of His name.



H.G. Bishop Yolios
Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical and Social Services



Introduction

The Christian perspective on childhood

“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.”(Mark 10: 14)

Humankind is the focus of the magnificent work of art produced by the Creator. We read in the Old Testament in Genesis, how God made man in a magnificent and exquisite form, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good.” (Genesis 1: 1-4) “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them... Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.” (Genesis 1: 27-28, 31)

The story of creation also tells us that man needs secure and stable relationships. "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him'... And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man'. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." (Genesis 2: 18, 23-24)

God established the mystery of marriage in the Garden of Eden and joined Adam and his wife together to live in a secure and stable relationship. After God created man He gave him the responsibility and gave him a clear order to “grow and multiply”. God did not only say “multiply”; He added “grow”, that is, develop your humanity and dignity – the dignity of marriage and the wife, and also of the offspring to come, because children are a gift from God. “Behold, children are a heritage of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward.” (Psalm 127: 3)

For this reason, the verb “to grow, to progress” was used in the Holy Bible, numerous times, to indicate the importance of bringing up children in a comprehensive manner from the spiritual, social and psychological points of view. In the First Book of Samuel, the boy

Samuel is described as having grown spiritually and socially. “And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favour both with the Lord and men.” (1 Samuel 2: 26) Saint Luke said of John the Baptist, “So the child grew, and became strong in spirit...”. (Luke 1: 80) He also described Jesus, saying, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men”. (Luke 2: 52)

From this verse we can discern the comprehensive approach to bringing up children:

“**To grow in wisdom**” refers to mental growth.

“**To grow in stature and grace**” refers to physical and psychological growth.

“**With God**” refers to spiritual growth.

“**With people**” refers to social growth.

Family, Church and society each have a role to play, in order to ensure together that children grow up in this integrated manner (mentally, physically, psychologically, spiritually and socially) at the various stages of their lives.

The Holy Bible believes in the dignity of man, whether young or old, male or female, rich or poor, because man is made in the image of God and in His likeness: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth”. (Genesis 1: 26) According to Christian thinking, man was created in God’s image in glory, dignity and freedom; he is invited to a life eternal that begins on earth and extends to heaven, in joy and happiness, not in misery and suffering. As Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”. (John 10: 10)

“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

John 10:10

The first child born on the face of the earth was mentioned in Genesis: “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, 'I have acquired a man from the Lord'”. (Genesis 4: 1) The Bible says, about Jacob’s meeting with his brother Esau after the time Jacob spent away with his maternal uncle Laban, “But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. And he lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children,



and said, 'Who are those with you?' So he said, 'The children whom God has graciously given your servant'. (Genesis 33: 4-5)

The birth of the child Jesus was a joyful occasion, and his mother expressed her joy at the announcement of his conception with an immortal hymn, "My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour". (Luke 1: 46-47) After the birth of the Messiah, Joseph the Carpenter was faithful in caring for the child Jesus; he obeyed the Lord's order to flee to Egypt, risked his life for the child's sake and protected him from Herod's oppression until he grew up and began his service.

One of the beautiful stories that is unique to Luke's Gospel about the childhood and boyhood of Jesus is described in Chapter 2: "And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, 'Son, why have you done this to us? Look, your father and I have sought You anxiously.' And He said to them, 'Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?' But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart." (Luke 2: 42-51)

This story refers to the kind of care which is characterized by giving space to the boy Jesus and keeping track of him. When his mother wanted to admonish him, she did so gently, without any violence or cruelty and the boy was submissive to both of his parents.

With the coming of Christianity, children were given a special status when Jesus Christ honoured the children and invited them in particular to come to him, "Let the little children come to me, and do

not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God". (Mark 10: 14) He also set them up as an example of purity and that is why he called on the faithful to emulate children when he said: "Assuredly I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18: 3) Christ also set children up as an example of perfection, so that when his disciples argued about which one of them was the greatest, Jesus called forth a child and set him in their midst and said: "Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18: 4-6). Jesus confirmed the value of the little ones in his view, pointing this out to his disciples when he said: "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven". (Matthew 18: 10).

If the verses above have indicated to us the importance of children and their status in the Church and in society, they have also shown us how to deal with children, how not to despise them, fool them or violate their rights, for whoever despises these children had better throw himself into the "depths of the sea".

Jesus was not content with drawing the attention of society to children, but also gave us an example of parenting and defined the responsibility of parents when it came to bringing up their children when he said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep". (John 10: 11) Saint Paul the Apostle confirmed the responsibility of parents towards their children and their care when he addressed parents, saying "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged". (Colossians 3: 21) In his Epistle to the church of Ephesus, he said, "And, you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord". (Ephesians 6: 4) Saint Peter confirmed the same meaning when he said, "For the promise is to you and to your children." (Acts 2: 39)

In spite of the teachings of the Holy Bible and the commandments directed at parents with regard to their children, the social and cultural circumstances affecting human societies have made some

"Let the little children to come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God."

Mark 10: 13

"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted, and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 18: 3



“When you care for your children, you are not breeding livestock, you are bringing up a pure and sacred soul, for God. There is a difference between you bringing up your children and a man who has a pen full of sheep he is breeding because they provide him with a certain product, valuable, meat producing sheep... As for you, you are not like that; you are bringing up souls to present as a gift to heaven, to society and to the Church.”

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.”

John 10: 11, 27

parents lose track of their responsibilities towards their children, violate their children’s rights and subject them to various forms of violent behaviour. Several forms of violence result from the methods of punishment used by some parents to control their children.

These methods include asserting parental strength by depriving children of what they desire or of certain privileges, or by threatening to do so. Some parents control children in this way by exploiting their weaknesses. They exercise control by withdrawing love, ignoring or isolating the child or expressing displeasure, all of which could be as harmful as corporal punishment. Some parents may feel important due to their children’s need for them. Their role then changes from one of care and protection and places the child in a position of dependency, with the parents exploiting this dependency to confirm their own existence at the expense of their children. Those parents continuously strive to reinforce and maintain this dependency because this excessive protection satisfies their desire to possess their children, however harmful to the children because it forces them into a dependent role, promotes a lack of self-confidence and could lead to an inability to live life in a normal way. Some parents may find that their children provide them with an opportunity to exercise control over someone weaker, to compensate for their own feelings of inadequacy, which could be a result of their own childhoods or professional or social circumstances. By exercising this control, the parents release the feelings of frustration that they harbour as a result of the way others treat them at work, or in a social setting.

Fathers and mothers may see their children as a way to fulfil aspirations they were unable to achieve for themselves. They try to make their children achieve what they have failed to achieve, ignoring their children’s personalities and the fact that they are not carbon copies of their parents and therefore may not have the same aspirations. Parents may use their children as a way of ensuring their continued existence on earth, their immortality, in confirmation of the proverb, “Whoever has a child does not die”. When this attitude takes on an exaggerated form, it forces the children to become duplicates of their parents, depriving them of the blessing of being themselves, ignoring all that is unique in their personalities and forcing them to give up the freedom to express themselves in a new way that suits their own characters and lives. The great poet Gibran Khalil Gibran has expressed this in his wonderful work 'The Prophet':

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you.

And though they are with you,

They belong not to you.

Violence against children may include what happens to youngsters whose parents are outcasts, have an unsound marital relationship or are lacking in culture, education and moral values. In such situations, the children are neglected and they become victims of their parents' circumstances.

Modern life has led to other forms of violations, in addition to the more common ones exercised against children by their parents. These types of violations have been imposed by contemporary life and include unsupervised exposure of children to the media and not monitoring their use of the computer. This results in the children being exposed to cultures, ideas and types of behaviour that are inconsistent with their sound psychological, behavioural and social development.

Violence against children and violations of their rights are not limited to what happens within the family when parents abandon their responsibilities, do not care for their offspring or bring them up in the wrong way, thinking that this is for their own good. This violence and these violations have spread to the rest of society which, as a result of changing social circumstances, now exercises various other forms of physical, psychological and moral violence through its various institutions. Violence is directed against children at school, in the street, at work, through the media and through the various forms of socialization to which they are exposed and which deprive them of their beautiful innocence and natural right to grow up as balanced individuals who are a reflection of a balanced society and capable of building its future.



Chapter I. The Christian position on violence

Violence is a social phenomenon. As the Holy Bible has demonstrated to us in the Book of Genesis, violence is to be found in any human community as a result of the fall of humankind and its becoming tainted with sin. This is further demonstrated by the history of human society before God gave it His Ten Commandments so that humans could live in peace and security, reject all that contradicts God's will for humanity to live in peace, love and tolerance, and observe all the other values that protect society and its members, defend their rights and allow them to further their own interests, within the framework of the general principles agreed upon by all members of the community. However, violence has been and still is one of the main tools used to violate the principles that support society, threatening the peace on which human prosperity depends and having a negative effect on the lives of individuals and communities.

The story of Cain's killing of his brother Abel – which began with jealousy and hatred, jealousy and hatred of a brother that led to murder, the height of violence – illustrates to what extent it is possible for humans to lose the sense of peace and security that is the aim of human development, and to live in misery and suffering. When Cain killed his brother, he heard the voice of God saying, "The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth." (Genesis 4: 10-12). The guilt Cain felt was so great that he beseeched God saying, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Surely, You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me." (Genesis 4: 13-14).

God gave Moses the Tablets containing the law, the Ten Commandments which are the principles that humanity should follow, not only because they are ordained by God, but because

they protect the rights of humankind and uphold our duties towards our fellow humans, promoting our survival and our peaceful relationship with God, with ourselves and with the other members of the community in which we live.

On the other hand, the Ten Commandments constitute the will of God to which humanity should adhere, in order to live a life of goodness, love, peace and security, and reject violence and all that conflicts with God's plan for humanity.

Despite the fact that all the commandments mention the rejection of violence in all its forms, the Fifth Commandment, **"You shall not murder"**, refers directly to the rejection of violence, for killing is not only abuse of a person and his life but also murders the person who has done the killing. This crime is considered to be a sin because it affects the life of man which does not belong to an individual but belongs to the King who holds the key to life and death. Therefore, when Cain killed his brother, God said to him, **"The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground"**. (Genesis 4: 10) Abel did not protest but divine justice called for his rights, because God does not allow blood to be shed unavenged.²

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, in explaining the commandment, **"You shall not murder,"** says that there are various types of killing: physical killing and killing by intention; moral killing; killing of the soul and the spirit; and other forms of killing that are a violation of the body, the soul and the spirit together and which coincide with the modern concept of violence. On this subject, our teacher John the Apostle says, **"Whoever hates his brother is a murderer."** (1 John 3: 15). Christ introduced anger into the question of murder when He said in the Sermon on the Mount, **"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder', and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment"**. (Matthew 5: 21-22) So the concept of "murder" in the commandment is the same as the concept of "violence" in the modern terminology regarding violence. Cruelty is violence, torture and mutilation are violence and abuse is violence, since it kills some part of a human being and the killing of a human being, or part

1 Pope Shenouda III, *The Christian Concept of the Ten Commandments*, Cairo, Management of the Evangelical Magazine, 1977, page 40 onwards.



of him, is “murder”, which is the ultimate form of violence and is subject to judgment, as stated in the Holy Bible.

Jesus’ position on violence

Jesus gave an example of 'love that rejects all violence', and this changed many religious and social practices. At the time that Jesus Christ was physically present in the world, He set an example – through His life, actions and dealings – of humility, the rejection of violence, gentleness, forgiveness and true and generous love, so we could follow His example and do the same. In the image that Christ presented of Himself, we see a gentle teacher, modest at heart: “... learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11: 29). He also taught, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”. (Matthew 5: 5). It was said of Him, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation; lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey”. (Zechariah 9: 9).

Jesus set the example of a complete human being, one who rejects any kind of violence, whether physical, verbal or moral. Christ wanted to wipe out all violence and uproot it. In His Sermon on the Mount, he said, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder'", and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.” (Matthew 5: 21-22) He also said, “You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth'. But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If any man wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.” (Matthew 5: 38-40)

In the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, we see the concept of love in its profound, heavenly sense. “You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven; for

he makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5: 43-48)

The method used by Jesus Christ became the method used in apostolic teaching by all the Church. Saint Peter says in his first epistle, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth'; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously”. (1 Peter 2: 21-23)

Jesus asked his children to forgive those who trespass against them. He asked us to recite the Lord’s Prayer, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”. (Matthew 6: 12) He even called on his children to provide forgiveness without limits. In reply to a question by Saint Peter, “'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven’”. (Matthew 18: 21-22)

When the Jews brought him a woman who had been caught in the act, asking for her to be stoned according to the law, Jesus gave the woman another chance to repent and told them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” (John 8: 7) When two of His disciples (James and John, sons of Zebedee) asked Him whether they should react to the Samaritans who had not received Him, by commanding fire to come down from heaven to consume them, He turned and rebuked them, and said, “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.” (Luke 9: 55-56) In the story of the good Samaritan, Jesus presented the Christian concept of 'who is close to Me': the Samaritan performed an act of love and mercy for an injured Jew, despite the enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans; this signifies the acceptance and service of others, regardless of any differences.



Christ did not accept resisting violence with violence. He did not accept that those who were with Him, at the time He was arrested before the cross, should defend Him by using force. He even went as far as healing his enemy. “When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, ‘Lord, shall we strike with the sword?’ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear.” (Luke 49-50) “But Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword’”. (Matthew 26:52) “... ‘Permit even this.’ And He touched his ear and healed him.” (Luke 22: 51) He provided the greatest example of forgiveness when He pardoned those who crucified Him saying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23: 34) For this reason, His sayings and actions are at the heart of all the values for which we work today.

Jesus Christ’s attitude to violence against children

Jesus’ position is clear regarding violence against children: He rejects any ill treatment of children. He does not even want them to be rebuked. The Gospel of Saint Matthew says, “Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 19: 13-14) He set up children as an example of humility and innocence when he called a boy and placed him in their midst and announced, “Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18: 4). Saint Mark’s Gospel conveys the scene in more detail: “Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them and [took] him in His arms...”. (Mark 9: 36)

Jesus was expressing the protectiveness, tenderness and affection with which children should be treated. He was aware that there were those who would cause children to sin through their abuse of them, so He warned, “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea”. (Matthew 18: 6)

From the time it was first established and up to the present day, the Church has followed in the footsteps of Christ. The Holy

Bible defines the relationship between parents and children in the following way: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother', which is the first commandment with promise; 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth'”. (Ephesians 6: 1-3). Children should joyfully obey their parents and not rebel against them. Jesus Christ gave an example to every child of obedience and submission to his parents (the Virgin Mary, His mother and Joseph the Carpenter), “Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart.” (Luke 2: 51) According to Saint Paul the Apostle, “... if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God”. (1 Timothy 5: 4)

Saint Peter the Apostle says, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble'”. (1 Peter 5: 5) Parents should provide love, discipline, supervision and guidance, while satisfying their children’s need for affection. They should not ask their children to do something that is against the Ten Commandments: “We ought to obey God rather than men”. (Acts 5: 29)

Our teacher Paul the Apostle says, “And you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord”. (Ephesians 6: 4) He also says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged”. (Colossians 3: 21) We see that in the matter of rearing children, Saint Paul the Apostle calls for a sound approach based on understanding, justice and leniency. He urges parents to care for their children and to guide them on life’s path by teaching them the fear of God.

The human heritage in fighting violence

The revealed religions have all striven to promote the rejection by humankind of jealousy, hatred, selfishness, cruelty and all forms of violence, and its embracing of coexistence with others in peace, harmony and dignity, based on justice, equality and communal peace. Throughout its long history, and in every way possible – starting with the old societies which provided examples of ideal

“Rules for disciplining children:

Not to be quick to punish, to avoid mistakes.

To show love, even when imposing disciplinary measures, so the child can accept them without protest.

To establish the truth before imposing the punishment.

The disciplinary measure should not be extreme and should not involve any kind of violence.”

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III



communities adhering to ideal values that lead to a stable society which is organized and free of all forms of violence, and continuing to contemporary societies that have upheld these values through the modern human rights principles that have been confirmed by the international agreements and charters drawn up in reaction to the various forms of violence to which modern societies have been exposed – humanity has tried to establish the values that are conducive to returning social life to its original form, especially after humanity’s exposure to violations that have surpassed all the usual forms that arise when humans come together.

Violence has become a serious social problem born out of the changes in modern society, in spite of the fact that this society has stressed the rights of humans to freedom, dignity, social justice, security, prosperity and other positive values that have been confirmed by the globalization rhetoric and which international human rights organizations have strived to establish. However, a contradiction has occurred. Instead of humans being treated fairly and living a dignified and secure life, free from violations and violence, they are facing more acute social problems. Unemployment has increased, as have poverty and misery. Dignity and freedom have been eroded and violence has grown and taken on numerous forms directed at the body, the spirit and the soul. This violence, which is exuded by the social, economic and cultural framework of modern life, has entered into the daily lives of individuals and become an integral part of their routine, not only within the family, but also in the street, at school and at work.

Violence within the family has taken various forms including beating, abuse, sexual harassment, child trafficking, forced labour and sale of children in systems akin to slavery. Poor families are usually more vulnerable to this kind of violence. Their children tend to be more exposed to suffering and deprivation instead of growing in the havens of protection and care their families should offer.

In addition to family violence, there is social violence, that is, the violence produced by the social environment. There is economic violence resulting from poverty, unemployment and bad living conditions; there is educational violence resulting from the lack of educational opportunities, or the violence that is practiced against children in educational institutions; there is health violence which is

related to the lack of health services or the inability to obtain them; there is legal violence resulting from the lack of a legal framework to support human rights; and there is cultural violence, which is practiced by social institutions on the pretext of preserving cultural patterns and prevalent traditions and customs, even if they are against human rights. Examples of this kind of violence include: beating children on the pretext of correcting their behaviour or training them in using violence as an initiation rite that is necessary to the transition from childhood to adulthood; families sending their children out to work, claiming that this will teach them how to shoulder responsibility and also contribute to easing the family's economic burdens; circumcising females (genital mutilation/cutting), on the pretext of preserving their chastity and honour; and using beatings to correct the behaviour of wives and daughters.

The strength of these patterns of behaviour and how deeply embedded they are in society is illustrated by the way that many victims themselves defend this type of violence, especially the women who justify their husbands beating them by quoting popular sayings and religious justifications perceived as supporting such practices.

In this way, the concept of violence spreads and more sectors of society are subjected to it, mainly children and women. Children are most in need of care since they are God's legacy to humankind and the trust He has placed in its care. They are most in need of stable family relations because they reflect society and are the makers of its future.

In view of the various forms of violence to which children are exposed throughout the world and which violate their rights, the Convention of the Rights of the Child was drawn up as an international legal charter which guarantees universal recognition and protection of the rights of children, since children need special care that adults do not need. The Convention includes 54 articles and three optional protocols which explain the basic human rights which all children should enjoy without discrimination. These are: the right to survive, grow and develop, to the fullest extent; the right to protection from what is harmful, from abuse and exploitation; and the right to full participation in family life and cultural and social life. The four main principles of the agreement can be summarized as follows: no discrimination against the child; combined efforts in service of the

best interests of the child; the right to life; the right to survival; the right to growth; and the right for her/his opinion to be respected.

The United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children (2006), which drew on the World Health Organization's definition of violence³ defined violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against any child, by any individual or group that results, or is likely to result, in actual or possible harm to the health of the child, his/her survival or growth, and to their dignity”.

The role of the Church in fighting violence against children

The Church calls for great care and attention to be paid to children, both before and after their birth; it absolutely forbids all forms of violence against children.

The Church takes great care of the child's family from the time it is formed and following it up spiritually, so as to ensure that it provides a sound environment in which to bring up children. The Church makes sure that the parents are fit to care for and raise their children in a Christian family environment, filled with faith and mutual love, which rejects any injury or violence, whether physical or psychological, and which feeds and nurtures personal relationships between the members of the family.

The Church also teaches families to bring up their children through dialogue and by example, avoiding any kind of violent punishment. Children are then able to grow in an atmosphere of tenderness, forgiveness, respect, generosity and safety.

After a child is born, the priest visits the child and her/his family, to pray for the newborn, to express joy at the birth and to announce that the Church is waiting for the infant to receive the Sacrament of Baptism and to become a member of the Church. From the time of birth, the Church invites the child to enjoy its sacraments, just like the adults, as a living member of the Church.

The Church charges children's parents or guardians with keeping them safe, caring for them, imbuing them with true faith and

³ World Health Organization, *World report on violence and health*, Geneva, 2002.

bringing them up in the fear and love of God. The Church can be a source of spiritual satisfaction and joy, and a starting point for them. Through the Church, they can become familiar with God, the tender caring Father, and with all the stories and teachings of the Holy Bible. They should be given useful Scriptures to read, especially those that nurture holiness, provide sound guidance and answer all their questions.

The Church provides children with spiritual activities of a social and educational kind, such as outings, conferences and celebrations, which are aimed at:

- ❖ **Discovering the child's personality and real talents, so that each child can make use of his/her abilities and gifts.**
- ❖ **Noticing wrong behaviour so as to enable wise parents to guide their children.**
- ❖ **Developing in the child a sound attitude to the homeland, the world and the family.**

The Church also helps the child to establish sound concepts regarding the self (acceptance, nurturing); the family (love, respect, service); the homeland (pride in belonging to it, positive participation in its service); others who are different (true Christian love, open and positive cooperation); sex (awareness that sex is not evil or unclean, but is sacred, that promiscuity does not provide true satisfaction and real satisfaction resides in life with God, according to His Commandments); and marriage (awareness that it is a Sacrament, being loving and giving to one's partner, so as to live a life full of happiness and joy).

We all have a duty to implement this kind of thought in raising children: the parents at home; the teachers at school; care providers in welfare homes; and ministers in the Church. Everyone is responsible for the child's mental and cultural education and preparation for the future. It is up to all of us to provide the children with an atmosphere of love, openness and freedom. There is no place for physical or verbal punishment and discipline, but there is a place for sound guidance, advice and a good example.



The Church calls for great care and attention to be paid to children, both before and after their birth; it absolutely forbids all forms of violence against children.

"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward." Psalm 127: 3

"Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them." Mark 10: 13

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven." Matthew 18: 10

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6: 4

Chapter II. Child marriage and forced marriage

Introduction

Child marriage is one of the most dangerous phenomena facing society, especially as it is considered to be a flagrant violation of the child's rights, whether the child is male or female. This phenomenon also involves direct violence against and trafficking in children, especially girls. It deprives females of their basic rights such as the right of choice, expressing their opinion and enjoying their childhood and the care that is their due as children.

The justifications presented for this kind of marriage are cultural, moral (to preserve chastity, honour, for protection, fear of the 'stigma of spinsterhood'), for the continuation of the paternal line, for economic and family reasons or other pretexts. However, there is another kind of marriage, which is a form of sexual exploitation of underage girls and which is called 'forced marriage', that is, marriage that is forced upon a girl against her will, in most cases. It is sometimes called a 'marriage deal' (transactional marriage) since it is performed as part of a deal between a rich man, local or foreign, in the presence of a professional broker, against a sum of money that is agreed upon in front of the broker. This kind of marriage exposes the girl to being treated like a slave and unable to reject this treatment or express an opinion, in view of the large amount of money paid to her family. This type of marriage is thus a form of human trafficking.

Child marriage may be found in rural areas and among poor families in urban areas, for the aforementioned cultural reasons. It involves various forms of violence against the girls. In addition, their health, and that of their children, is threatened by early pregnancy. Child marriage exposes the girls to violence due to their lack of maturity and their inability to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and raising children.



The Christian concept of marriage

“Marriage is honourable among all.”

Hebrews 13: 4

In Christianity, marriage is a holy sacrament which has a spiritual dimension. The Apostle Paul describes the sanctity of marriage using two important expressions, “**This is a great mystery.**” (Ephesians 5: 32) and “**Marriage is honourable among all.**” (Hebrews 13: 4). In this way, Christian marriage transcends the flesh to be a coupling of souls, through prayer. Since the beginning of creation, there have been 'marriage rites', 'agreements by two parties' and 'social manifestations' that differ from one society to another, but in Christianity it is “God’s work in this mystery”, that “turns two people into one”, that is why Jesus Christ said, “**So then they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.**” (Matthew 19: 6)

Christian marriage is characterized by certain features, some of which are:

1 Monogamy

Christianity does not allow marriage to more than one partner. Monogamy is a definite principle in Christianity and is established in the Holy Bible. It is enough for us to mention here the words of the Apostle Paul: “**... let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband**” (1 Corinthians 7: 2) and “**For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.**” (Ephesians 5: 31)

2 Oneness

Christian marriage is not a contract between two people, with each one remaining separate, with their own 'ego'; it joins the two parties to make 'a new entity'. The Lord God said: “**For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.**” (Matthew 19: 5)

This expression is very accurate, since one body has several members, but they are connected in love, generosity, selflessness and harmony. The one body is governed by a single network of sensitivity, feeling and willpower. Therefore a true Christian husband turns the home

into a new heaven and his family into a sacred church, making one entity that is integrated at every level.

That is why we call for 'individuals' to become a 'couple' and we call on the 'couple' to become 'one'. The truth is, the two have united in God and each holds their partner within the depths of their being.

3 Continuity

This is a third, important characteristic of Christian marriage. When the Jews asked God about divorce, they said, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?’ And he answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female’, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man separate’”. (Matthew 19: 3-6)

Therefore, marriage is meant to continue, not to end in divorce. God did not allow divorce except in the event of adultery. This is because adultery breaks the original bond, since the adulterer unites with another partner. In spite of that, if the original, innocent partner allows the marriage to continue and accepts the partner’s return, the original marriage continues, once the adulterous party has repented and kept to the first pledge. However, in the event of cheating, incapacity or any other reason approved by the Church, it is essential to annul a marriage.

A Christian marriage has three aims:

1 Sacred union (cooperation and sharing)

"And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.'" (Genesis 2: 18) It is a pure and sacred union of love in God. This cooperation, harmony and psychological and spiritual sharing is completed by union in one body. “For this reason shall a man leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” (Ephesians 5: 31)



2 Procreation

God blessed Adam and Eve and told them, “Be fruitful, and multiply; fill the earth...”. (Genesis 1: 28) The married couple takes part in the creation process, with God, and this is great glory for humankind. These are not simply sensory matters, but are part of the task of preserving the human species. God gave humanity paternal and maternal feelings to ensure the continuity of man on earth and to increase the number of God’s children, who enjoy His love.

3 The road to salvation (maintaining a pure life)

The Holy Bible says, “but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion”. (1 Corinthians 7: 9) That is, the road to salvation for most humans is marriage. Within marriage, there is a sacred use of instincts in a framework of purity, chastity and discipline. “Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 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. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.” (1 Corinthians 7: 1-6).

Christianity confirms that each party in this sacred relationship should view the other with love and honour. Each should honour the other, in a relationship in which each of them knows their duties and their limits well. The first of these duties and limits is to be giving and to put the other party before oneself. There is no doubt that such a relationship requires a mature person who is capable of realizing the nature of the relationship and its essence.

The maturity required for marriage

1. **Physical maturity.** The body has a cycle in married life. Marriage should not take place before making sure that the body has matured, is sound and free of diseases that threaten married life.
2. **Psychological maturity.** At the start of young adulthood, people go through a stage, when they begin to be aware and to notice certain aspects of one person or another. They admire one person for one reason and then move on to another for another reason. Emotions and the body are in conflict over this rapid transfer of admiration. So when one party or another thinks that their feelings mean that they have truly chosen their partner in life, they are often mistaken. They should wait a little until they go beyond that stage, in which a young man or woman understands the concept of marriage, since marriage is not simply pleasure and an exchange of love and admiration. Above all, it is a responsibility. The young man or woman will have moved from the stage of taking, to the stage of giving and of paying attention to what they can do to make their partner happy.
3. **Mental maturity.** Both parties should be of sound mind, reasonably intelligent and capable of thinking and making sound decisions.
4. **Spiritual maturity.** The young man or woman should have tasted the beauty of closeness to God, and should be capable of resisting their self and its whims and desires, since a pure and chaste life protects young adults from slipping and from the deception that is driven by lust, in a human being's life. The more of a true, spiritual life the young man or woman has, the more confident he or she will be that the inner call and intuition pulling one towards the other is true love. God alone is capable of sanctifying these emotions, thoughts and feelings and to prepare the young woman or man for a marriage that is blessed and successful.



The position of the church on child marriage and forced marriage

From the above, it is clear that the Church does not agree to child marriage, because at that stage, young men and women have not matured enough physically, psychologically, mentally and spiritually to choose a suitable partner for life. Such marriage will run into many problems which might destroy the family, especially health problems for the wife, as a result of the harmful effects of early pregnancy. Young people are prone to mood swings, temper outbursts and reckless behaviour and their marital disputes are magnified. What they need at this age is care, rather than responsibility, as exemplified in the work of managing a family in the true spirit of marriage, and of fatherhood and motherhood.

Therefore it is wrong for marriage to occur between two people who are not capable of shouldering the responsibility of bringing up a new generation. The married couple must be resourceful and aware.

This needs maturity and the ability to shoulder life's burdens and to face every event, surprise, change and development that it brings. This means that underage marriage harms not only the husband and the wife, but also their offspring.

Marriage needs to be built on a basis of compatibility and consent. Married life is made up of two people living together in one house. They live together for life, so they must be completely compatible. They are like two horses pulling one carriage and they cannot do so without moving in one direction at the same speed and with the same strength. They move together, stop together and aim for the same objective, without either of them putting any pressure on the other. There is an old proverb that says, "Consent is the rule for companionship".

The married couple must be compatible religiously, spiritually, intellectually and culturally. They must share the same principles, traditions and way of life. Lack of compatibility between the parents has an effect on the children, since they wonder which path to follow and which role model to emulate. The children are then faced with contradictions in the lives of their parents and differences in their parents' conduct.

The role of mothers and fathers, when their daughters or sons become engaged to be married after they have reached the required age and maturity, is to offer advice and to express opinion without any imposition or use of force. However, some parents impose a fiancé by force and by exercising control, or by affecting sadness, anger or illness. They force their son or daughter to accept the engagement out of worry about the health of their father or mother. The parents could also impose a certain person by way of continuous nagging. A father or mother might impose one of their relatives or friends, or a rich person so they would not have to pay anything towards the marriage, or someone whose job or culture appeals to them.

These types of marriage cannot produce a successful union. A successful marriage is built on compatibility, acceptance and love. Parents should remember that they must not choose what suits them, but instead what suits their son or daughter, since it is their life, not the life of the parents doing the choosing, that is involved. **“Marriage is honourable among all.”** (Hebrews 13: 4)

The role of the church in combating child marriage and forced marriage

The Church pays a great deal of attention to this matter, even in the pre-marriage stages, through programmes to prepare engaged couples psychologically, morally, culturally and spiritually. At the same time, these programmes explain the importance of choosing a partner for life in terms of compatibility and age, as well as socially, intellectually, culturally, etc..

In fact, there is a need for more such programmes, especially in the rural areas and the slums, where the phenomenon of child marriage is widespread. Therefore, it is vital to pay attention to the family counselling programmes, especially those related to the choice of husband or wife, as a way of protecting the family unit and guaranteeing that none of its members is exposed to violence.



Christianity does not accept child marriage, forced marriage or the marriage deal (transactional marriage) such as 'summer' marriage, because of the nature and sanctity of Christian marriage and the significantly adverse effects such practices have. Therefore the age of marriage should be after the age of 18 years.

"It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Genesis 2: 18

"The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?' And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female', and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.'"

Matthew 19: 3-6

"Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Hebrews 13: 4

"Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband."

1 Corinthians 7: 2-3

Chapter III. Female circumcision (female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C))

The records and documents that recount the history of peoples and their cultural practices are full of the various forms and methods they use to mutilate their bodies for tribal, religious, cultural, aesthetic, sexual or therapeutic reasons, through cutting, splitting, scarification or modification of parts of the body. One of practices is the mutilation that is performed on the genitals of females, known as female circumcision or female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)

FGM/C in Christianity

FGM/C is one of the forms of physical mutilation which is in keeping with some of the cultural beliefs and concepts that are prevalent in some societies and especially with traditions that contribute to the social values and controls that apply to the conduct of individuals. This harmful practice has absolutely no basis in Christianity and there is not a single verse in the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible that refers to FGM/C.

FGM/C and cultural concepts

The custom of FGM/C is linked to cultural concepts of masculinity and femininity. These concepts are deeply rooted in the cultural structure of society and are responsible for the conditions of women and men in society. They have given women an inferior status to men, which made it necessary to impose restrictions on them to ensure that women adhere to values and manners. There is some evidence of the continued application of masculine values, and the living conditions of men and women reflect the fact that relationships are still being based on masculine superiority and the status of men within the family. In order to understand why this custom has survived, we can discuss some of the cultural justifications that are considered to be responsible for its continued observance and the constant insistence on maintaining it.

The justifications that are used are that FGM/C is a rite of passage into puberty, preserves chastity and honour, pertains to a certain culture and is in keeping with popular belief. The Church strongly rejects these justifications.



1 FGM/C and chastity and honour

The culture of any society includes a set of values and criteria that define the status of its individual members. Women are surrounded by numerous moral restrictions to control their conduct and to determine their relationships with men.

The values of chastity and honour and all the supportive practices that are connected to them, foremost among which is FGM/C, are at the top of the ethical system in paternalistic societies. This is because they are linked to women's morality, which is of concern to their relatives and to the local and wider community. Maintenance of these values is regarded as an indication of the strength of the community, which in turn is a sign of social cohesion. Disappearance of these values is regarded as a sign of corruption and social decay.

The values of chastity and honour are deeply rooted in cultural heritage, which contains numerous elements that enhance and maintain these values across time and place. Many women live in an environment that judges their conduct and actions to ensure compliance with social rules such as chastity and honour.

The cultural heritage abounds with customs and rites that increase the importance of chastity, foremost among which is the practice of FGM/C, since it is believed that this custom will guarantee that the female will remain chaste and that it will ensure the cohesion of the cultural structure of society. For this reason, culture, and especially religious culture, was used to protect this value and to impose severe penalties on those who do not conform.

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”

1 Corinthians 3: 16

In spite of the deeply rooted nature of these practices in Egyptian culture, Christianity believes that maintaining chastity of the heart and the tongue has priority over maintaining it for the body. The body is the temple of God. *“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”* (1Corinthians 3: 16) *“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.”* (Matthew 12: 35)

2 FGM/C as a sign that a girl has reached puberty

One of the reasons that the practice of FGM/C is preferred and maintained is that it is considered a rite of passage that turns a girl from a child into a woman and allows her to move from a state of no responsibility to one of responsibility. That is, she becomes capable of learning the facts of life. At this point, FGM/C is performed on her, controlling her sexual life and reshaping her body to suit the cultural values that are prevalent, especially those values that support masculinity, out of fear of the sexual power of women. At this stage, the need arises to control and to subjugate a woman and sometimes to reshape her body so it responds in a way that complies with paternalistic values. The social upbringing process has an important part to play in establishing these concepts, especially at puberty. The mother and other women begin to give the girl advice and instructions, directly or indirectly, and to formulate a collection of behavioural taboos, on the assumption that the girl has grown out of childhood and has begun the stage of womanhood and maturity. They require her to adhere to a new set of rules regarding her behaviour.

3 FGM/C and the social status of women

Christianity has a different view of FGM/C, which it rejects because it is a source of discrimination and violence against women, and is connected to a system of traditions and customs that demeans the dignity and humanity of women while recreating the stereotypical model of the relationship between men and women, which enshrines the superiority of men. That is why the Church is contributing to upholding the value and dignity of women while at the same time fighting all the practices that degrade them or that treat them as though they were a body and not a human being with all the same rights and duties as men.

When God made man, He said, “Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness ... So God created man in His own image; in the image of God created He him; male and female He created them”. (Genesis 1: 26, 27) “And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to

“A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.”

Matthew 12: 35



him.' ... And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man'." (Genesis 2: 18, 21-23)

The verses demonstrate that woman has the same status and dignity as man since God made her in His image, just like man. The Holy Bible says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her". (Ephesians 5: 25)

4 FGM/C and popular misbelief

FGM/C is related to popular beliefs that have a status similar to religious beliefs, which is why numerous peoples maintain them and it is extremely difficult not to conform to them. There is a belief about the idea of being unclean, of being filthy, and this is applied to uncircumcised women, to the extent it is said that no one should eat the food that they serve and no one should marry them since they are a haven for the devil, or a friend of Satan. Therefore these women's chances of marriage decrease. The residual effects of this popular belief can still be discerned in rural culture, since the word 'circumcision' is connected with the concept of 'purity' and people believe that circumcision rids the body of what defiles it, as though the part that is removed is the source of defilement and getting rid of it cleanses the body.

FGM/C is connected to some popular beliefs that are meant to motivate the girl to accept undergoing the process and bearing the pain in order to fulfil her hopes and aspirations. Often, girls are brought up to believe that circumcision will make their body more beautifully feminine, they will become more desirable, their health will improve and they will become stronger and more beautiful.

These faulty cultural justifications turn FGM/C into an important part of the identity, not only of the female but of her family as well, since it is a source of pride for her family, an upholding of the values of chastity and honour and a rite that ushers a girl into adulthood. It gives little girls a feeling of conforming to the culture of the

community and its traditions, which increases the respect due to them and to their families. This feeling of fitting in with the culture reaches the point where girls who have not been cut are stigmatized and considered not to belong to the feminine world. The culture has laid down a rigid framework from which it is still difficult to escape.

FGM/C: multiple forms of violence

❖ Physical violence

Circumcision is a form of violence against the body of a girl, through the cutting of a part of her genitals, and as a result of complications that often develop later, affecting her urinary tract and reproductive organs and making sexual intercourse painful for her after marriage.

❖ Psychological violence

As a result of FGM/C, the girl might suffer from emotional shock, the effects of which could remain with her for life. This might affect her relationship with her husband and her family, to the point that she could develop a permanent feeling of fear, mistrust, shyness and introversion.

The role of the Church in combating FGM/C

The Church does not restrict itself to condemning FGM/C and saying it is wrong and a sin, but is also working hard to spread knowledge of how dangerous the custom is. The Church provides awareness programmes for parents and girls who are at the age when they are circumcised, and makes available leaflets and booklets or training programmes to be taught at Sunday School as part of a comprehensive sexual education programme from a Christian perspective.

The Church plays an important role in this field through various educational programmes including sexual education (reproductive health). Issues related to purity of the body and mind are also addressed, so as to bring up a generation that rises above carnal desires. Christianity believes that education cannot be achieved through violence in any form; it can, however, be achieved through a balanced Christian approach, which addresses the mind, the soul, the self and the body.



The Church has also introduced family counseling programmes to its educational programmes, at the level of the churches and their affiliated institutions such as the Orthodox Church's Bishopric of Social Services, the Services Council of the Evangelical Church and the numerous Catholic development organizations. These institutions are combating FGM/C and spreading awareness of its dangers by holding workshops, giving lectures and engaging in various other awareness and human rights activities.

Despite all the efforts of the Church through its service institutions, there is still an urgent need to increase the reach of these efforts, especially in rural and slum areas, which have high rates of illiteracy and where popular traditions and beliefs still exert tremendous influence in keeping the custom of circumcision alive.

For Christianity, there is no religious justification for FGM/C, according to the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible. The Church considers FGM/C to be one of the worst forms of violence against girls and a source of discrimination against them which undermines their dignity and humanity.

Nothing is mentioned in the Holy Bible about FGM.

Chapter IV. Discrimination among children

The idea of the universality of human rights and the fact that every human being is entitled to these rights is intrinsically linked to the principle of equality. Every individual, everywhere is born with the same human rights, in spite of perhaps not having the same ability to enjoy those rights. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”. Therefore, discrimination against humans in general, and against vulnerable groups in particular, hinders a whole series of development goals, starting with respecting human rights and going on to attempting to end the poverty that contributes to the suffering, deprivation and violence to which women and children are exposed.

The status of women in Christianity

Christianity has a special point of view regarding discrimination. It believes that God is the Creator of man, every man, starting with Adam and until the end of time. He created him in His image, in that man is a rational creature, capable of speech and interaction. He gave him life and freedom and distinguished him from all His other creatures. Even when He made a difference between male and female, both of them were made in the image of God and He made them equal and gave them both all the gifts and powers. “... let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air and over the cattle, over all the earth and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” (Genesis 1: 26) Both sexes, male and female, bore the responsibility of the work that God ordered them to do: “Be fruitful, and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it...”. (Genesis 1: 28)

Therefore, there were two genders to creation, so they could complement each other, cooperate and be partners. This is confirmed by the following text, which recounts the rest of the events related to the creation of man:



“And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.' Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and brought her to the man. And Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man'. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (Genesis 2: 18-24)

In the New Testament, the teachings of the Apostles confirm that woman is equal to man, as our teacher says, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”. (Galatians 3: 26-28).

The Holy Bible is full of examples of women who performed roles that were no less than those performed by men and these roles were appreciated. In the Old Testament we find:

- ❖ **The Leader**, Miriam the Prophetess, sister of Moses and Aaron, whom Micah the Prophet says helped to liberate the people: “For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.” (Micah 6: 4)
- ❖ **The Judge**, Deborah, who led the people of God to freedom from the control of Jabin, King of Canaan and his military commander Sisera: “Now Deborah, a Prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.” (Judges 4: 4-5)

- ❖ **The Queen**, Esther, who with her wisdom and faith, saved her people from the plot laid by Haman, the evil vizier: “The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.” (Esther 2: 17)
- ❖ **The Woman Strong in Faith**, the Canaanite whose faith Jesus Christ praised: “Then Jesus answered and said to her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour.” (Matthew 15: 28)
- ❖ **The Righteous**, Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist: “There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” (Luke 1: 5-6)
- ❖ **The Virgin**, Mother of Light, Who bore Jesus Christ the Saviour and deserved to become His mother through a divine pregnancy, with her virginity intact:

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, 'Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!' But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.' Then Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I do not know a man?' And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that holy one who is to be born will be called the Son of God'.” (Luke 1: 26-35)



*"That our daughters
may be as pillars."*

Psalm 144: 12

There is a reference to an important issue related to the mistreatment of children, namely, discrimination in the treatment of males and females, or what is known as discrimination based on sex. This is established through social upbringing, especially in societies which prefer to have sons for social and cultural reasons, and this leads to the continuous neglect of girls, whether hidden or obvious. This has an effect on the girls' awareness of their human rights, since they are often treated as inferior and their social upbringing places them at a lower level. Discrimination and neglect in childhood lead to growing deprivation and distancing from social life in the future.

God made human beings equal and He did not want to discriminate between one human and another because of colour, race or sex, but humans, throughout their history, have tried to discriminate between themselves for social and cultural reasons. In order to wipe out these forms of discrimination, the whole of humanity in every part of the world must believe that the reason for variety is for us to be able to complement each other, to cooperate and to support each other and even to unite. This will only happen if we respect the teachings of the religions and all the international charters and agreements on human rights in general and those of vulnerable groups in particular, against whom some form of discrimination is practiced on the basis of sex, class, colour or religion.

The role of the church in combating discrimination

The role of the Church is to combat all kinds of discrimination against children. The Church is careful to encourage parents to pay attention to the way they bring up their male and female children, without any discrimination. To this end, the Church provides various activities such as:

- ❖ General meetings.
- ❖ Meetings for women and newly married couples.
- ❖ Educational seminars for parents and guardians of Sunday School children of all ages from nursery to secondary school.
- ❖ Special training courses for those who are about to get married.
- ❖ Family conferences held during feast times and official holidays.

All these activities are aimed at increasing the congregation's awareness of parental responsibility and the need not to discriminate between children, so that the next generation grows up respecting diversity and others.

Christianity rejects all forms of discrimination since God made human beings equal and He did not want to discriminate between one human and another because of colour, race or sex.

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
Galatians 3: 26-28



Chapter V. Child labour

The concept of 'child labour' indicates putting children to work at hard and dangerous jobs for long hours, violating their rights to education, care and a family life that guarantees them a calm and safe existence. Child labour includes any work or activity which threatens the physical, psychological and mental health of a child and which is known to be one of the worst activities because of the nature or conditions of work. This includes work in places like industrial workshops, agricultural fields, mines, quarries, foundries and fireworks factories.

This phenomenon is therefore considered a social problem that must be confronted, especially as it has recently been linked to human trafficking crimes, and is fraught with social, economic and political dangers because it violates all the human rights endorsed by all revealed religions and stipulated in all international conventions and agreements. For this reason, the international organizations concerned with children have differentiated between work that does not harm their health and personal development and work they perform by force or necessity.

Adverse work conditions include long working hours and exposure to harsh weather conditions and the hazards of garbage collection and similar occupations. In addition, there are the worst possible forms of labour, those linked to illegal activities known internationally as forms of slavery, such as child prostitution and pornography as well as forced conscription.

Therefore, child labour not only exploits children physically but also exploits them morally by depriving them of their basic rights to education, play with their peers, family life and leisure time, etc..

The practice of putting children to work, with or without pay, is a social phenomenon connected to the economic activities of numerous communities, especially agricultural ones, in which farm work is shared between parents and children, reflecting family solidarity in joint labour. These activities include ploughing, sowing, harvesting and caring for livestock and poultry. Throughout their history,

these communities have striven to involve children in work that is suited to their age, without force or pressure and without affecting their mental, physical or psychological development, to allow them to learn the principles of cooperation, shouldering responsibility, sharing of work and other positive values which teach children how to assume their roles as adults.

The Holy Bible has given us examples of children who have performed these roles as part of the life they led in their communities. Samuel the Prophet served in the Temple when he was a small child, “But Samuel ministered before the Lord, even as a child, wearing a linen ephod.” (1 Samuel, 2:18) Despite that, “the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favour both with the Lord and men.” (1 Samuel 2: 26) David the prophet was also a shepherd when he was a boy, then he became a king and a commander of the army and God said of him, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.” (Acts 13:22) The child Jesus used to help his father at work, (but not at the expense of his physical, psychological and mental development). The Holy Bible has mentioned how He was brought up in a balanced way, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men”. (Luke 2: 52) Here, the verb refers to “increase” in growth and excellence. Jesus was increasing in three areas. The first was wisdom; He was growing in knowledge and culture, which was demonstrated when he addressed the elders in the Temple, where He learned to read and write. He also obtained knowledge from the teachers in the synod and in the Temple and from the peasants, and that is why He gave us theological teachings in the form of parables, such as the parable of the sower. The second area was stature; He was growing physically. The third was grace; He was growing spiritually and socially. Jesus Christ thus was developing in a balanced way, despite helping His parents with their work.

Therefore, giving children some simple tasks under suitable conditions, while making sure the performance of these tasks does not interfere with their studies or any other activities, is essential to developing their mental and social skills and teaching them to help other members of the family, which is an important part of life in many communities.



Reasons for child labour

Development

The three entitlements in the Human Development Report are: to live a long and healthy life, to gain knowledge and to have access to the resources needed to sustain a suitable living standard. But human development does not stop at that level; it goes beyond it to other entitlements including economic, political and social freedom and the availability of production opportunities.

1. **Family poverty resulting from acute economic and financial recession, especially in the countries undergoing political change and a restructuring of the economy.** This has affected the poorer families and their members, especially the children, who are paying the biggest price for this economic restructuring. As a result, the small income provided by a child to his poor family is a life saver. Studies involving poor families have confirmed that the economic element is an important factor in the increasing child labour phenomenon in poor families, especially in the absence of an economic and social umbrella to protect children.
2. **The decline in educational standards.** International reports and studies have confirmed that there is a strong connection between the quality of education and children dropping out of school and going to work. Dropping out and working are also linked to the economic crises to which the poorer countries have been exposed and which have decreased expenditure on education and increased the number of child workers.
3. **Family crisis.** This is considered to be a catalyst to the emergence of the child labour phenomenon. When parents divorce or when one of them dies, this can drive children into the labour market, as confirmed by numerous studies.
4. **Increased demand for child labour.** Employers prefer to hire children because they can pay them low wages; children are able to perform certain jobs more easily than adults; children are less aware of their rights than adults; are less likely to cause problems; and enjoy fewer social and legal benefits than adults.

International reports indicate that there are 215 million child labourers in the world and that over half of them are doing hazardous work.⁴

⁴ International Labour Organization, *World Report on Child Labour: economic vulnerability, social protection and the fight against child labour*, Geneva, 2013.

The Holy Bible and family welfare

The Holy Bible advises men and women to take care of their families. Saint Paul the Apostle says, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”. (1 Timothy 5: 8). The family’s responsibility towards its children does not stop at birth, even though procreation is one of the aims of marriage, neither does its role in their lives end. The most important aim is bringing up sons and daughters and providing them with material resources; this means that a balance must be struck between a family’s income and the number of its members. If this balance is disturbed, a series of crises occurs.

Managing the affairs of a family requires a sense of responsibility and knowledge of what it entails. In the words of Jesus Christ: “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him”. (Luke 14: 28-29)

Proper planning for the future and family planning are not inconsistent with faith and trust in God. Some people may erroneously think that God will provide for every new child and every child brings his bounty with him/her. To those people we say that there is a difference between trust in God and passive dependence on God. Trust in God is a positive, dynamic and responsible activity, with people using all their abilities and potential, facing every challenge with all the experience and intelligence at their disposal, while complementing this effort with more positive action in the form of prayer, so that God may bless their efforts and they may succeed and so that God may supplement these efforts in ways that are beyond the limited capacities of humans. Religion rejects dependency and negativity and encourages trust in God. Therefore, promoting family planning does not mean lack of faith in God’s power to meet the needs of humans.

Families must meet the psychological and educational needs of children as well, so as to bring them up as balanced individuals. Everything in this world has limits. The psychological energy of humans is limited. If family warmth is distributed to a limited



number of family members, each one of them will feel the warmth; but if the number of children increases, this feeling may decrease and with it the feeling of tenderness and kindness.

Everyone agrees that the proper care of children is a basic role of families and affects the way they are brought up, their future and the future of the whole of society. Therefore, the role of the Church is to ensure that the family is completely aware of its responsibility towards the children and their upbringing and that it is truly performing this role in the best possible way.

Families which find they are unable to provide the best care and upbringing for the children they have already, whether for economic, social, health (physical or psychological) or spiritual reasons, must think of how many children they should have. Having fewer children and providing them with most of their needs at every level, is better than having more children whose needs are not met.

Scripture tells us in the Book of the Wisdom of Joshua son of Sirach, also known as Ecclesiasticus, “Rejoice not in ungodly children, if they be multiplied: neither be delighted in them, if the fear of God be not with them”. Also, “For better is one that feareth God, than a thousand ungodly children. And it is better to die without children, than to leave ungodly children. By one that is wise a country shall be inhabited, the tribe of the ungodly shall become desolate”.⁵

Because children absorb the love of God, the Church and society with their mothers' milk, the family must present God to its children with simple faith, since He is our heavenly Father who loves us, His creation, and grants us peace and security. That is how our homes should be what we pray for in church, “homes for prayer, purity and blessings”. We hope that the citizens of the future will develop in this sound social, psychological and spiritual atmosphere, because the Church and society will depend on them.

⁵ The Book of the All-Virtuous Wisdom of Joshua ben Sira also known as the Book of Ecclesiasticus, 16: 1-4. This book is not included in the New King James Version of the Holy Bible but is included in some other editions.

The role of the Church in combating child labour

While Christianity confirms the importance of work, the Church rejects the exposure of children to any form of deprivation, violence or exploitation and any type of work that affects their spiritual, psychological and physical development; and so the Church does have a role to play. As a child, Jesus Christ worked with Joseph the carpenter and David was a shepherd when he was little. Paul the Apostle worked as a tent maker and Peter, Andrew, Jacob and John worked as fishermen. They all did work that did not interfere with their spiritual, psychological or physical growth. Their work was a natural part of the economic and social life of their communities.

The Church has an important role to play regarding the groups that are deemed to need more care or that are more deserving of attention, in keeping with Christ's words, **"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick"**. (Matthew 9: 12) Since working children face a great deal of suffering and hardship because they bear a burden that is beyond their capacities and because they are poor, they deserve to be taken care of by the Church. The Church does give special care to this group, not only through Sunday School which provides spiritual care, but also through the individual health, psychological and material services provided to these children and their families. Some churches provide special services to this group of children, especially in areas which have a large number of working children.

Despite the fact that caring for and protecting children is the primary responsibility of the family, the Church, as one of the most important institutions concerned with social upbringing,⁶ has a role that is not restricted to spiritual care. It extends to material, psychological and moral care, since the Church shares the family's role. Although the Church is a religious and spiritual establishment, it is by no means separate from society. It has the responsibility of bringing up good citizens who are aware of their rights and duties and who have rational, creative and critical minds. It is responsible for bringing up generations of young people who believe in their ability to progress and in their capacity for self-criticism. The Church is a partner to society and the family, especially when they are exposed to any

⁶ The Church plays this role through Sunday Schools and various services catering to children such as nurseries, recreational clubs, educational and developmental activities which all contribute to the physical, psychological and emotional formation of children.



form of suffering or hardship and any related violence, apparent or hidden. Its role is not limited to spiritual care, through teachings that would enable individuals – especially children – to adapt to their conditions and to accept them, but extends to empowering those children so that they are able to realize their rights and social entitlements.

The Church also provides material support for the parents through financial assistance to help care for the children and to prevent them from being forced into work, and it provides moral support by increasing parental awareness of the importance of educating children, promoting their survival and not forcing them into work that exposes them to danger. There is a role for the Church in human and social development (serving every human being, for every human is made up of spirit, self and body) through early development programmes for children (nurseries); economic development for poor families (mini and micro projects); community leadership development (setting up societies for developing the local community); and health care and primary health care development (health awareness and referral to government family health units). All these activities are undertaken by some of the churches and Christian institutions, in cooperation with the government institutions concerned and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as part of the social and national role of the Church.

Child labour exploits children physically and morally and it deprives them of their basic rights. Therefore, the Church rejects child labour and supports families in protecting their children from all kinds of exploitation.

"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." 1 Timothy 5: 8

**"...the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favour both with the Lord and men."
1 Samuel 2: 26**

Chapter VI. Sexual abuse of children

God gave sexual energy to humans to enrich their lives. He created sex in humans to allow love to enter their lives and to end their internal isolation, opening them up to others and freeing them from self-absorption. Setting up a family is a demonstration of love, unity, partnership, generosity and tenderness.

“The Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him'. Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. And Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. The rib which the Lord God had taken from man, He made into a woman, and brought her to the man. And Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (Genesis 2: 18-24)

That is why the Church has sanctified sex and has codified its practice through the mystery of marriage, which is blessed by the Church. “This is a great mystery”. (Ephesians 5: 32) “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” (Hebrews 13: 4) Because Holy Matrimony promotes a pure life, any violation of this sacred framework for sex is rejected by the Church and comes under adultery, which God forbade in the Old Testament, in the commandment, “You shall not commit adultery”. (Exodus 20: 14 and Deuteronomy 5: 18). In the New Testament, the concept of adultery is expanded to encompass lust, or mere thinking about adultery. Christ says in the Sermon on the Mount, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in



his heart.” (Matthew 5: 27-28) The sin of adultery becomes even uglier when it is incestuous or against nature, as explained by Paul the Apostle in his epistle to the Romans.

Sexual abuse is any inappropriate sexual behaviour with a child of the opposite or same sex, such as touching the child's sexual organs or forcing her/him to touch the sexual organs of an adult. The inappropriate behaviour includes sexual intercourse, incest, rape or sexual exploitation. Sexual abuse also includes the use of force, or bribery, threats, pressure, or deception to force the child to participate in sexual activity. It occurs when an adult or another child uses a little child to achieve sexual gratification.

Sexual abuse of children takes various forms such as:

1. **Exposure of the genitals:** when someone touches their genitals to a child in order to satisfy a personal sexual need, whether or not they are a member of the family.
2. **Exposure of a child to pornographic material.**
3. **Sexual molestation:** when someone having a sexual motive to touches any part of the child's body, directly or by using an object.
4. **Sexual assault or rape,** using force, deception or threatening the child with weapons or by other means, in order to frighten the child and implicate her/him in sexual acts.
5. **Child prostitution:** forcing a child to perform sexual acts with a third person for material gain. This form of sexual abuse has become widespread in recent decades, to the extent that child prostitution has become a global phenomenon.
6. **Incest:** sexual abuse of a child by a parent, blood relative, foster parent, guardian or protector.
7. **Sexual harassment:** Any type of inappropriate language or behaviours of a sexual nature directed at children such as gestures or comments. This violates the commandment of, “You shalt not commit adultery”. Therefore it is a sin, a crime and a social problem that has a serious effect on both the victim and the perpetrator.

The effects of sexual abuse of children

Sexual abuse has multiple short- and long-term physical, psychological and social effects on children, including social relationships with members of their families or communities.

The main direct consequences can be classified as physical and psychological effects as described below.

❖ Physical effects

The child is exposed to physical harm if sexual intercourse takes place, whether anally or vaginally, since sex between an adult and a child can lead to rectal or vaginal rupture, loss of bladder control, anal or vaginal cuts and tears and especially to contracting sexually transmitted diseases which may not be discovered for years, since they do not usually afflict children. Adolescent girls are in danger of becoming pregnant. In addition, sexual abuse is often imposed by force, and in such cases, the child also suffers beating and other forms of physical violence, resulting in pain, injury or even death.

❖ Psychological effects

The seriousness and severity of the child's reaction is directly linked to his/her relationship to the aggressor, how many times the assault was repeated, its frequency, how long it lasted and the nature and type of the abuse. Most children who have been exposed to sexual abuse experience the following emotions:

1. **Guilt:** When children expose the abuse, they feel they have 'betrayed' the perpetrator and have been unfaithful to him/her, uncovering 'their secret'. They also feel that they have caused chaos and upheaval within the family, disturbing relatives and friends and making them sad and anxious.
2. **Shame:** Children feel in some way responsible for taking part in sexual acts, and consequently feel responsible for the sexual abuse of which they have been victims.
3. **Self-hate and poor self-esteem:** Children feel that they deserve the sexual abuse of which they have been victims, since they think they are very bad and repulsive people.



4. **Feeling confused and lost:** This is a result of the circumstances surrounding the children and the questions to which they can find no answer.
5. **Drug or alcohol use,** in an attempt to stop the painful thoughts and to detach themselves from reality and the pain of daily life.
6. **Adopting self-injurious behaviour,** such as cutting or burning parts of the body.
7. **Changing eating habits,** which results in eating disorders and chaotic eating, such as overeating or abstaining from food.
8. Other effects include poor performance at school, aggressive behaviour and lack of trust in others.

The role of the Church in combating sexual abuse of children

Sexual abuse affects the lives of children even after they have reached adulthood; the feeling of having been abused may last throughout their lives, with memories flashing through their minds from time to time, to disturb them and fill them with pain and sadness.

Sexual abuse goes beyond breaking the commandment and committing the sin that has been forbidden by both the Old and the New Testaments. Such acts destroys the self, the soul and the body in various ways and that is why the role of the Church is not limited to rejecting these practices or reporting cases to concerned authorities. The Church is constantly working to increase people's awareness through various methods which help to limit the spread of such actions and protect children. These include:

- ❖ Providing family counselling programmes in all the churches and their affiliated educational centres, so as to present the Christian concept of sex and offer positive guidance that will help the children live the pure life that is the essence of Christianity.
- ❖ Supporting the provision of rehabilitation assistance for children who have been exposed to sexual violence, to enable them to recover from abuse, develop their skills and talents and realize their potential in society.

- ❖ Increasing awareness of the negative effects of illicit sexual relations, through briefing the ministers (family ministers in particular) on this matter, or providing training sessions so help can be provided to children who have been sexually abused, whether within or outside the family.

Christianity rejects and strongly condemns sexual abuse of children as a violation of the sanctity of the human body and family life, and as an act that has serious detrimental physical and psychological effects on children.

"You shall not commit adultery." Exodus 20: 14

"Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Hebrews 13: 4

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites ... will inherit the kingdom of God."
1 Corinthians 6: 9-10



Chapter VII. Absence of family care and children living on the street

The phenomenon of 'street children' is one of the major social problems to emerge in developing societies in general, because of the migrations that have resulted from the structural changes witnessed by these communities. These changes have led to economic, social and political crises which in turn have resulted in a deterioration of the conditions of some social groups and sectors and has impoverished them, hence the emergence of symptoms similar to the 'street children' phenomenon.

'Street children' are known as the children who live on the street all the time, or most of the time, due to a family connection which is irregular, broken or non-existent; they are also defined as children who work on the street all day and go back to their families to sleep.

Some of these children belong to a family that lives on the street, who could be immediate family or relatives. Children living on the street do not go to school, and beg or sell goods for others in the informal sector. Some of the children are exposed to sexual abuse or are made to carry out criminal activities, such as theft.

Causes behind the phenomenon of 'street children'

The Christian view does not stop at charity and compassion, but extends to action. As our teacher John the Beloved says, "My little children, let us not love in word, or in tongue; but in deed and in truth."

1 John 3: 18

The causes of this phenomenon can be attributed to three main factors: society; the family; and the child herself/himself. The social policies adopted by some states have led to an increase in poverty and unemployment, coupled with deficiencies of social services accessible to poor families, especially in the spheres of health and education.

Family dysfunction, domestic violence and poor parenting practices, as well as low educational levels, play an important role in driving children into the street. This is especially true for large families that cannot provide for their children's education, material, health or emotional needs.

The above factors contribute to children developing a sense of fear, deprivation and insecurity that may force them to end up on the street. There, they expect to earn some money and find substitutes for the lack of family care.

Studies confirm that children living on the street are exposed to problems and dangers such as sexual assault and harassment, continuous insults, daily fights, theft, confrontations with the police, including the possibility of being arrested for vagrancy and of being mistreated at police stations, the danger of becoming addicted to drugs, malnutrition and illiteracy.

The state has an important role to play in preventing and responding to the phenomenon of children living on the street by ensuring their needs and rights are met as per the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Christianity's position with regard to the phenomenon of children living on the street

The Church calls for love and mercy to be shown to vulnerable and impoverished groups, especially the poorest, such as the orphans, the needy, strangers and those who have gone astray. God tells His people after their exodus from Egypt, "If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you". (Leviticus 25: 35) Isaiah the Prophet says, "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out? When you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide not yourself from your own flesh?" (Isaiah 58: 7) The Holy Bible is full of verses, teachings and parables which call for mercy and compassion. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Matthew 5: 7) "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." (Luke 6: 36)

The role of the Church in combating the phenomenon of children living on the street

The Church has an important role to play regarding children living on the street who have no shelter. It is working hard to rehabilitate these children and to integrate them in the Church and in the community. It also tries to reunite them with their families, if possible, and to create job and education opportunities for them and their families, so the children can be cared for and obtain their natural rights, grow up in a healthy environment and be brought up in a balanced way in terms of material needs, education and entertainment. Ministering

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."

Matthew 5: 7

"Therefore be merciful, just as as your Father is also merciful."

Luke 6: 36

Isaiah the Prophet says, "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out? When you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?"

Isaiah 58: 7



to these children begins in Sunday School, which strives to integrate all the children, especially the most needy, in keeping with Christ's words, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick". (Matthew 9: 12)

The role of Sunday School does not stop at providing spiritual services to children, but extends to individual and family services provided by the Sunday School ministers to those children. Through individual services, these ministers can meet the material, moral, psychological and entertainment needs of the children. The various developmental organizations of the Church, through various projects supported by the Episcopal Church and the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services, provide assistance to the 'orphanages' that are affiliated with the Church and which cater not only to children who have lost their parents but also to children living on the street.

There is a dire need for more programmes and assistance for these children and their families, focusing on urban areas where the phenomenon is concentrated. The programmes should cover rehabilitation, training and education, so as to reintegrate the children into society and to help them obtain their social entitlements.

'Street children' are children who do not enjoy the protection and care of their families, are exposed to serious risks and are among the most vulnerable children in our societies.

Christianity places emphasis on helping the most vulnerable. The Christian view does not stop at charity and compassion, but extends to action.

“Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall obtain mercy.”

Matthew 5: 7

“Is it not to share your
bread with the hungry, and
that you bring to your house
the poor who are cast out?
When you see the naked,
that you cover him, and not
hide yourself from your own
flesh?” Isaiah 58: 7

“But if anyone does not
provide for his own, and
especially for those of his
household, he has denied
the faith and is worse than
an unbeliever”.

1 Timothy 5: 8

“My little children, let
us not love in word or in
tongue, but in deed and in
truth.” 1 John 3: 18



Chapter VIII. Domestic violence against children

Domestic violence against children refers to violence taking place within the family. This may begin with words and shows of temper which at first might seem mild but can progress to frightening, threatening and on to beating or burning the child. These are forms of abuse, as they affect the children psychologically, disturbing them and making them fearful and anxious. This could affect the formation of their personalities and their self-esteem. These forms of abuse against children can be divided into four main types:

- ❖ **Emotional abuse.** Emotional violence can take the form of insult, ignoring, isolation, rejection, threats and emotional indifference. Witnessing domestic violence can also be classified as exposure to emotional violence.
- ❖ **Neglect.** This is the failure to provide the child with physical and emotional basic needs, when the parents have the means to do so. There can be material neglect, educational neglect or emotional neglect. Material neglect includes not providing enough food, or suitable clothing, or the necessary medical care, protection and supervision. It can also include abandoning the child. Educational neglect includes not providing suitable schooling, or special needs education, or allowing the child to be absent or to play truant. Psychological neglect includes not providing the love and emotional support that the child needs and failing to protect the child from abuse and various forms of exploitation, and other threats such as drugs and alcohol.
- ❖ **Physical abuse.** This includes shaking, shoving, burning, beating, punching, kicking or any other form of physical harm directed at the child. These actions are considered to be a form of abuse, even if the adult party did not intend to harm the child.
- ❖ **Sexual abuse.** This refers to any inappropriate sexual behaviour with a child of opposite or the same sex, such as touching the sexual organs of the child, or forcing her/him to touch the sexual organs of adults. The inappropriate behaviour includes sexual intercourse, incest, rape, or sexual exploitation. Sexual

abuse also includes the use of force or bribery, threats, pressure or deception to force the child to participate in sexual activity. It occurs when an adult or another child uses a little child to achieve sexual gratification. Sexual abuse is regarded as abuse of power over the child.

Considering the magnitude of the number of children exposed to harm and abuse all over the world, all the international conventions and national laws stress the importance of the family in caring for children and the right of children to live in the bosom of a family, enjoying all their rights to care, protection and education.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasize the role of the family in caring for children. They describe the family as the place where the child's capabilities develop under the care of the parents, who provide protection, nurturing and safety for the child.

The main aspects of these rights can be summarized as follows:

- ❖ The child's right to life, survival and development within a united, solid family, and the right to benefit from all the measures that can be taken to protect him/her from harm and all forms of violence or abuse, whether physical, psychological, moral or sexual; and to protect her/him from neglect or any other abuse, mistreatment or exploitation.
- ❖ Protecting children from any form of discrimination, on the basis of place of birth, parentage, sex, religion, race, disability or for any other reason and guaranteeing real equality between them in enjoying all their rights.
- ❖ The right of a child to form her/his own opinion, to obtain the information he/she needs to come to her/his own conclusions, to express them and to be heard, whenever she/he talks about anything that concerns him/her, including during legal and administrative proceedings, in accordance with the procedures defined by law.

The position of Christianity on domestic violence against children

“Do not ask a child to sit still and not move, since this is against her/his nature. Do not force him/her to do so by shouting at them, beating them or threatening them, because that will give them a complex against authority and the way it is wielded and they will want to be rid of it; and when they get the chance, they might behave very badly.”

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

The Holy Bible is full of teachings on this subject and it calls for all the rights that are stated in international conventions. In the Book of Psalms, we read, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it.” (Psalm 127: 1) “They labour” refers to the parents who shoulder the responsibility of bringing up their children and providing for their material and moral needs with forbearance and patience, praying for God’s help. When the Holy Bible calls on parents to raise their children, it says, “Bring them up in the training and the admonition of the Lord”. (Ephesians 6: 4) This means in keeping with the Lord’s way and in order to implement His commandments, to correct her/his behaviour in the Lord’s way, so that punishment is not given without a prior warning. The issue must be defined and explained convincingly. That is God’s way of discipline and warning. The Holy Bible also says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it”. (Proverbs 22: 6) The Bible did not say bring up the child in 'your way', as do all parents, so that the child may follow their path and fit into the mould they think is most suitable for her/him; it said, bring up the child in 'his way', the way he/she chooses freely. These are the same principles stipulated in the treaties and laws concerned with children’s rights.

The Holy Bible confirms the need for a sound relationship between parents and children which takes into account the rights and duties they owe each other. Paul the Apostle says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise. That it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth”. (Ephesians 6: 1-3) Saint Paul confirms this in his epistle to his disciple Timothy when he says, “But if any widow have children or grandchildren, let them learn first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God”. (1 Timothy 5: 4) In return for the obedience of their children, parents should provide love and kindness with discipline and guidance, not with violence and cruelty. Therefore Saint Paul addresses parents as follows, “And you, fathers, do not provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in training and admonition of the Lord”. (Ephesians 6: 4) He also says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged”. (Colossians 3: 21)

Christianity calls for a sound relationship between parents and children which takes into account the rights and duties they owe each other. The Church rejects all forms of violence against children within the family as it negatively affects their emotional, physical and psychological development.

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Ephesians 6: 1

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6: 4

"Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction."

Proverbs 19: 18

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22: 6

"A horse not broken becometh stubborn, and a child left to himself will become headstrong."

Joshua Sirach 30: 8

"That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as pillars, sculptured in palace style."

Psalms 144: 12



Chapter IX. Violence at school

After the family, school is the second most important socializing institution for children, where they grow physically, mentally and psychologically. Their selves develop in a framework of positive values, based on forgiveness, peace, dialogue, acceptance, sharing and other values that make up a good citizen and a balanced character. This only happens through the use of approaches to upbringing, based on dialogue and acquiring the skills and pedagogical methods that can change conduct and encourage the desired behaviour, and not the methods based on violence, beating and intimidation commonly used in many schools. Such methods have a negative effect on the children who are victims of this violence and on others. It makes them feel that the world in which they live is an aggressive place and as a result, they respond to the people around them with violence, since violence breeds violence. In such cases, instead of the school contributing to the children's mental, physical and social development, it may entrench in them withdrawal, low self-esteem, extremism, fear and violence.

As we have seen above, these methods are various forms of abuse and violence against children, which have gone beyond the purpose of correcting behaviour. The danger here is that this treatment inhibits the children's ability to learn and leads them to dislike school, or to lose interest in going to school and in learning. This may lead to more beatings and other forms of violence, producing more anger and rebelliousness.

Both physical and psychological violence are found in schools and the two usually occur together. They are committed by teachers and other school employees and children themselves. These forms of violence include corporal punishment and cruel and humiliating treatment, sexual violence and gender-based violence, intimidation and bullying. Violence within schools is practiced not only by teachers towards students, but also by students towards teachers, or between students.

This takes various forms:

1. Teachers towards students:

This includes physical violence used to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, as well as emotional violence in the form of insults, ignoring, isolation, rejection or threats.

2. Students towards teachers:

This includes threats, intimidations, attacks and insults targeting teachers or other school staff as well as destruction or damage of their personal belongings.

3. Students towards students:

- ❖ **Hitting**, punching, slapping, kicking or using an implement to cause harm. The child who is the victim is usually weaker and cannot stand up for herself/himself, especially if she/he is being attacked by more than one child.
- ❖ **Intimidation** through the threat of a beating, if the aggressor is stronger or if a group of strong children is doing the intimidating.
- ❖ **Humiliation** on the grounds of being a stranger, being weaker physically, having an affliction or a disability or having a relative with a bad reputation.
- ❖ **Name calling** and giving a child nicknames mocking his/her physical appearance, such as being tall or short, or to do with the pupil's origins or religion.
- ❖ **Insults, verbal abuse**, spreading rumours and exclusion from group activities.

Violence at school could be directed at the school establishment itself, as a way of expressing frustration with and resentment of the ill treatment received at school. Anti-school violence takes the form of breaking windows, doors and benches, scratching the walls, tearing up the books and damaging the other teaching aids.

Psychological studies have confirmed that beating is a negative method of disciplining children and produces negative results. Beatings are humiliating, insult a child's humanity and injure her/his dignity and can lead to negative behaviours, whether submissive or violent.



No matter what types of violence are to be found in schools and the reasons for them, they must be resisted by all means. This could be done through preventive measures such as awareness-raising, spreading the culture of forgiveness, rejection of violence and respect for human rights, all of which help develop the values and morals of the students. The school administration must provide training for the teachers in dealing with the various age groups in effective communication skills and non-violent disciplinary methods.

In addition to preventive measures, support should be provided to address violent behaviour. This can be done through counselling and referral as well as enforcement of relevant legislation and regulation protecting students and school staff.

The position of the Church on violence at school

The Church rejects all forms of violence in schools. It confirms the importance of dialogue and persuasion in the educational process, and shares with the school the task of preparing each generation to face the future. It does so through its role in providing educational, cultural, recreational and health services, in developing skills and capacities, and in correcting the inappropriate behaviour that could have been engendered by the methods of upbringing used within the family or at school. The Church provides an atmosphere of love, openness, freedom and forgiveness. It is an environment where there is no place for corporal punishment or verbal abuse. There is only guidance, advice and a good role model.

Some churches are active in partnering with schools through developing teachers' skills and briefing parents on their educational role and how to deal with students, through seminars and workshops.

The Church believes that schools should be places of safety where children can learn or develop to their full potential. This can only be done in an environment free from violence. The Church firmly condemns all forms of violence and abuse in schools.

"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward." Psalm 127: 3

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."

Matthew 18: 10

"Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." Luke 6: 36



Chapter X. Children in armed and other conflicts

At a time when the international community has adapted human rights principles such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, armed conflicts continue to have devastating effects on children.

According to various studies, the nature of armed conflicts has changed. While there is a decline in direct conflict between countries, an increasing number of conflicts take the form of rebellions, civil wars and secessionist movements, among others.

Civilians, especially children, are the main victims of such conflicts. They are exposed to violence and human rights violations which are perpetrated by parties to the conflict including state and non-state actors.

As a result of such conflict, children are killed or witness killings, are injured and suffer the loss of loved ones or separation from their parents. They are also exposed to recruitment by armed groups as well as to physical, sexual and psychological violence which have long-lasting effects on children.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

Armed conflicts displace millions of people and make large numbers of children and their families’ homeless, which also results in increased poverty and deprives children of their fundamental rights to education, health care and protection.

Matthew 5: 9 The position of Christianity on armed conflicts

Christianity renounces wars and conflicts, since it is a message of peace. Christ promised to leave us peace: *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give I to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”*. (John 14: 27) Our teacher Paul the Apostle says, *“and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”*. (Philippians 4: 7)

The Holy Bible confirms the renunciation of violence and cruelty since the beginning of creation. When Cain slew his brother Abel, God said to Cain: "Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?' And He said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth'." (Genesis 4: 9-12)

The Holy Bible shows us that God defends the victims of the injustice of humans. The Book of Psalms says, "Let not a slanderer be established in the earth; let evil hunt the violent man to overthrow him. I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and justice for the poor". (Psalm 140: 11-12) David the Prophet also sings of God who hears the screams of the weak and defends them, when he says, "The Lord's throne is in heaven; his eyes behold, his eyelids test the sons of men. The Lord tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one that loves violence His soul hates". (Psalm 11: 4-5) "For the Lord God of Israel says for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit that ye deal not treacherously'." (Malachi 2: 16) The Book of Psalms says, "He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support". (Psalm 18: 17-18)

Therefore, Christianity rejects wars and conflicts and condemns involving vulnerable people, especially children, in wars. When the people of Israel fought the Philistines, at the time of King Saul, Jesse the Bethlehemite sent his older sons to war and not his little son David, the Prophet, at that time because he was too young. "Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, whose name was Jesse, and who had eight sons. And the man was old, advanced in years, in the days of Saul. The three oldest sons of Jesse had gone to follow Saul to the battle. The names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab, the firstborn, next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. David was the youngest. And the three eldest followed Saul. But David occasionally went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem." (1 Samuel 17: 12-15)



One story that the Holy Bible recounts to us about wars and armed conflicts and their effect on children is in the Second Book of Kings. “Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?' So he answered, 'Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than who are with them'. And Elisha prayed, and said, 'Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see'. Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” (2 Kings 6: 14-17)

The Church supports families and children who lose their homes, through the services it provides to the homeless and refugees via its various institutions and other NGOs affiliated to the various Egyptian churches.

These organizations run programmes that care for the victims of armed conflicts, especially children and women, since they are the most vulnerable groups and so are most in need of assistance.

Armed conflicts have devastating effects on civilians, especially women and children. Christianity rejects armed conflicts and strongly condemns any form of victimization, use, abuse and exploitation of children by parties involved in such conflicts.

"Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, whose name was Jesse, and who had eight sons. And the man was old, advanced in years, in the days of Saul... David was the youngest [son].. And the three oldest followed Saul. But David occasionally went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem."

1 Samuel 17: 12, 14-15

"Blessed are the peacemakers, or they shall be called sons of God." Matthew 5: 9

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." John 14: 27



Chapter XI. Child trafficking

In spite of international treaties and conventions, especially those calling for the rights of women and children, the phenomenon of human trafficking in general and trafficking in children and women in particular, is still of grave concern. Human trafficking in many instances can be considered as modern slavery and its magnitude is not only a threat to humanity, but also a threat to societal and national security.

According to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, human trafficking is defined as:

“... recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery, or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs ...

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered 'trafficking in persons' even if this does not involve any of the means set forth [above].”

Factors that increase children’s vulnerability to exploitation and child trafficking in particular include discrimination (on the basis of cast, gender, religion, etc.), lack of opportunity, natural disaster, war and civil strife.

Together with trafficking in drugs and arms, human trafficking is one of the main forms of organized crime at national and transnational levels.

All forms of trafficking have devastating effects on children's physical and psychological well-being. They violate their fundamental rights to health care, education, job opportunities and other social and political rights.

The position of Christianity on child trafficking

Christianity strongly rejects and condemns any form of child and human trafficking. This is based on the dignity accorded to the human body, for God made man in His own image and likeness. He gave him freedom, immortality and a brain and combined in one being, the material body and the soul that he received from God **“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”** (Genesis 2: 7) Thus, the body acquired a special dignity, which is why Christianity rejects the idea of tormenting and humiliating the body and also rejects trading in it. **“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just even as the Lord does the church.”** (Ephesians 5: 29)

Christianity calls for refining the body so it will be amenable to the soul. It confirms that fundamentally, the management of human conduct is effected when control is in the hands of the soul, which follows God's commandments, rather than in the hands of the body, which follows its needs, instincts and desires. **“For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”** (Romans 8: 13)

The tale of Joseph the Righteous, told in the Book of Genesis, shows us clearly that man can control his bodily instincts and needs, depending on his spiritual and religious status. Joseph strongly rejected the seduction of the wife of Potiphar (the head of the Police), who was his master. **“And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, 'Lie with me.' But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or be with her. But it happened about**



this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside." (Genesis 39: 7-12)

Christianity sanctifies the body since the Holy Spirit lives within it: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3: 16) and "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost who is in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6: 19)

Therefore, Christianity rejects the harming of the human body in any way, whether by abusing or exploiting it, or using it to commit sin: "If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." (1 Corinthians 3: 17) and "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a harlot? Certainly not!" (1 Corinthians 6: 15)

From its beginnings, Christianity rejected the heresy that claimed that the body was evil and should be neglected. This heresy was known as Gnosticism and was fought by Saint John the Beloved, disciple of Jesus Christ, who lived until the end of the first century.

The Church rejects trafficking in children or their body parts as a form of modern slavery, since the children are turned into goods that are bought and sold. The Church agrees to and blesses organ transplant operations, since they save human lives and do not conflict with religion in any way and using knowledge to serve human life absolutely does not go against religion. However, the Church does not condone trafficking in human organs.

Knowledge itself is a gift from God, as is the human mind, and scientific progress in this sphere is the fruit of the mind and thus bounty from God, for God gave man a mind to use for his own good!

The ultimate form of love is to give of oneself to others. Although people should not sell their body parts for money, if they donate an organ to save the life of a sick person, this is a very noble deed, "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3: 18)

It is not permissible to exploit the material want of some families and pressure them into selling their children or their organs.

Christianity sanctifies the human body as a creation of God, since the Holy Spirit lives within it. Therefore, the Church rejects the harming of the human body in any way, whether by abusing or exploiting it, or using it to commit sin.

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." Genesis 2: 7

"If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." 1 Corinthians 3: 17

"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" 1 Corinthians 6: 19

"For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church."
Ephesians 5: 29



Chapter XII. Violence against children on television and on the Internet

Christianity is in favour of in recent developments that have swept the world, especially in the field of communication technology, which makes possible the exchange of large volumes of information at an amazing speed and promotes human communication through text messages (SMS), e-mail services and social media, among others. Communication technology makes the world a global village, so that what happens in the smallest village can potentially resound all over the world. This brings human beings closer together through a globalizing culture that allows people to share ideas and behaviours as so-called global citizens.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Romans 12: 2

In spite of these positive factors, these developments pose numerous challenges to societies in general and some communities in particular, with children particularly vulnerable to the new technologies. Children are greatly influenced by communication technology, which can have a negative effect on their social and spiritual life if the amount of time they spend online and the content they access are not supervised adequately by parents or caregivers. Over-utilization of these means of communication can separate children from their families and friends, making them live in a state of isolation and loneliness instead of interacting directly with other human beings. This can distance them from their culture, especially the spiritual aspects, particularly religion and values. This might also separate them from their identity and their history.

The threats facing children on the Internet and through the new communication technology include violent videos and games and material containing scenes of sexual violence, sexual abuse of children and pornography. These images can invade the minds of children and, if not properly handled by parents and other caregivers, could overpower the traditional upbringing they receive from family, Church and society. This has given rise to the term, 'oblivious parents', used to refer to parents who are unaware of or choose to ignore this phenomenon.

Other emerging risks to children include cyberbullying, which is using social media to harass children by disclosing personal information, spreading rumors or distributing inappropriate photos or videos to their image and reputation. Children can also be at risk of coming into contact with sexual predators and other dangerous people who are looking to lure children into dangerous situations such as sexual abuse, exploitation and extortion. There is also the risk of exposure to images of extreme violence which can be distressing and harmful to children and also contribute to the normalization of violence.

The position of Christianity on using the Internet

Christianity, as mentioned above, does not reject this new world in all its aspects, but does confirm that it presents challenges and calls on children and young people, who characterize this age, which has been called 'the century of the adolescents', to strive to face its challenges. As Bishop Moussa, the 'Youth Bishop', says, "Become salt that spreads and melts with love, a light that vanquishes the last vestiges of darkness, the yeast in which divine life is dormant, a sweet aroma, the aroma of Christ, the epistle which is known to all and read by all, become an ambassador representing God everywhere you go, clean, pure and holy". In his books for children, Bishop Moussa writes, "My dear ones, you are the munitions of the future, for the family, the Church and society... therefore you provide hope of a holy and happy life, because you possess energy and a dream. All that we ask of you is that each one of you should develop an integrated Christian personality. When your souls become saturated with Christ, when the Gospel enlightens your mind, when your souls are regulated by the Holy Spirit, when your bodies become fit with sport and with avoiding smoking, drinking alcohol and all that is profane; then will you be influential and successful members of the Church and of society. As the Holy Bible says, 'You are the light of the world, the salt of the earth.' If the salt is ruined, what can take its place?"

The Church believes in its role regarding children and youth, and knows how dangerous are the challenges imposed by the nature of modern life and the effects of the modern information media and communication technology. Through the child and youth festivals, the Church strives to bring up the new generations in the spirit of



the age, while maintaining the authentic spiritual and social values. The Church does this through giving the young training in spiritual, artistic and sports exercises, to get rid of excess energy by way of being creative and being involved in positive and useful activities.

In every bishopric, there is a children's committee which is in charge of children's affairs and which organizes conferences and festivals for the children in general and for creative children in particular. These committees undertake to publish the outstanding results achieved in various fields by the children at these festivals and they display the creative works that they produce. The committees issue cultural magazines and produce various educational materials, which are aimed at bringing up generations of young people who have the spirit of the age while retaining the spiritual and social values of Christianity.

Christianity rejects all forms of violence against children on television, and rejects the improper use of the Internet.

**"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."
Romans 12: 2**

Chapter XIII. Summary of key messages

The Christian position on violence

The Church calls for great care and attention to be paid to children, both before and after their birth; it absolutely forbids all forms of violence against children.

"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward." Psalm 127: 3

"Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them." Mark 10: 13

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven." Matthew 18: 10

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6: 4



Child marriage and forced marriage

Christianity does not accept child marriage, forced marriage or the marriage deal (transactional marriage) such as 'summer' marriage, because of the nature and sanctity of Christian marriage and the significantly adverse effects such practices have. Therefore the age of marriage should be after the age of 18 years.

"It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Genesis 2: 18

"The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?' And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female', and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.'"

Matthew 19: 3-6

"Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Hebrews 13: 4

"Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. "

1 Corinthians 7: 2-3

Female circumcision (female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C))

For Christianity, there is no religious justification for FGM/C, according to the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible. The Church considers FGM/C to be one of the worst forms of violence against girls and a source of discrimination against them which undermines their dignity and humanity.

Nothing is mentioned in the Holy Bible about FGM.

Discrimination among children

Christianity rejects all forms of discrimination since God made human beings equal and He did not want to discriminate between one human and another because of colour, race or sex.

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
Galatians 3: 26-28



Child labour

Child labour exploits children physically and morally and it deprives them of their basic rights. Therefore, the Church rejects child labour and supports families in protecting their children from all kinds of exploitation.

"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." 1 Timothy 5: 8

"...the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favour both with the Lord and men."
1 Samuel 2: 18, 26

Sexual abuse of children

Christianity rejects and strongly condemns sexual abuse of children as a violation of the sanctity of the human body and family life, and as an act that has serious detrimental physical and psychological effects on children.

"You shall not commit adultery." Exodus 20: 14

"Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Hebrews 13: 4

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites ... will inherit the kingdom of God."

1 Corinthians 6: 9-10



Absence of family care and children living on the street

'Street children' are children who do not enjoy the protection and care of their families, are exposed to serious risks and are among the most vulnerable children in our societies.

Christianity places emphasis on helping the most vulnerable. The Christian view does not stop at charity and compassion, but extends to action.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”
Matthew 5: 7

“Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out? When you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?” Isaiah 58: 7

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”.
1 Timothy 5: 8

“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” 1 John 3: 18

Domestic violence against children

Christianity calls for a sound relationship between parents and children which takes into account the rights and duties they owe each other. The Church rejects all forms of violence against children within the family as it negatively affects their emotional, physical and psychological development.

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Ephesians 6: 1

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6: 4

"Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction." Proverbs 19: 18

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22: 6

"A horse not broken becometh stubborn, and a child left to himself will become headstrong." Joshua Sirach 30: 8

"That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as pillars, sculptured in palace style." Psalm 144: 12



Violence at school

The Church believes that schools should be places of safety where children can learn or develop to their full potential. This can only be done in an environment free from violence. The Church firmly condemns all forms of violence and abuse in schools.

"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward." Psalm 127: 3

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."

Matthew 18: 10

"Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." Luke 6: 36

Children in armed and other conflicts

Armed conflicts have devastating effects on civilians, especially women and children. Christianity rejects armed conflicts and strongly condemns any form of victimization, use, abuse and exploitation of children by parties involved in such conflicts.

"Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, whose name was Jesse, and who had eight sons. And the man was old, advanced in years, in the days of Saul... David was the youngest [son].. And the three oldest followed Saul. But David occasionally went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem."

1 Samuel 17: 12, 14-15

"Blessed are the peacemakers, or they shall be called sons of God." Matthew 5: 9

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." John 14: 27



Child trafficking

Christianity sanctifies the human body as a creation of God, since the Holy Spirit lives within it. Therefore, the Church rejects the harming of the human body in any way, whether by abusing or exploiting it, or using it to commit sin.

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." Genesis 2: 7

"If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." 1 Corinthians 3: 17

"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" 1 Corinthians 6: 19

"For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church."
Ephesians 5: 29

Violence against children on television and on the Internet

Christianity rejects all forms of violence against children on television, and rejects the improper use of the Internet.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."
Romans 12: 2



Epilogue

The focus of religion is humankind. Religion is not limited in its mission to saving the soul and disciplining human impulses. It takes care of human beings as a whole and liberates them from all the bonds that shackle and restrict them. If this has been the role of the Church throughout the ages, to advance and refine society, then this role has grown bigger with the violent changes that are taking place in the world and the various forms of violence and oppression that are being used against people, and the frustrations they face.

Since the family is the nucleus of society and the source of love, the love that binds parents and children, it is up to society, with all its institutions, especially the religious ones, to take care of the family in every way – materially, spiritually and culturally – so that it can perform the function and the role for which it was made, which is to provide care, protection and love for all its members.

Teaching family members to perform their duties before demanding their rights cannot be achieved without bringing up children in a sound manner and providing them with what they need.

Children are a gift from God and a trust in the care of parents. It is up to the parents to prove they deserve this trust and to present the children to God and society, as good citizens who are pleasing to God and their society.

Attention must be paid to developing children's mental, social and physical capacities, so they can advance themselves in every field, just as Jesus Christ was advanced in wisdom, stature and grace, with God and with people.

The marital love which children see, in real life, between their parents, the equal treatment of all the children by the parents and the lack of discrimination between them, allow children to develop a sound impression of relations between women and men and a positive and enlightened view of sexual matters and the marital relationship.

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