

# The Letter of the Month

of St. Antonious and St. Mina Coptic Orthodox Church

---

Kiahk 1730, December 2013 (An English translation of the Arabic letter no. 21, dated Tout 1708, September / October 1991)

---

## The Family and the Handing Down of the Faith

Paul the Apostle's words to his disciple Timothy were very astonishing when he said, "...I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2 Tim 1:5). Can faith be inherited? The sincere faith existing in the son Timothy's heart is the same faith which was dwelling in his mother Eunice's heart and in that of his grandmother Lois. This is the faith that the family passes on to the children as a sacred heritage. Even though faith does not transfer through generations mechanically, the impact of "passing on" and "Christian upbringing" is undeniable.

This is the main and essential function of the Christian family: "handing down the Faith." We might pass on to our children a large earthly inheritance (such as money and property), which is acceptable, but the danger lies in the failure to convey to them the faith once received from the saints. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mt 16:26).

Hence, Paul the Apostle emphasizes the role of parents in the salvation of their children – especially the mother's role when he said about her: "Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control" (1 Tim 2:15). Therefore, her salvation depends on the manner in which she nurtures her children. Consequently, Saint Monica wept bitterly for her son Augustine's perversion; feeling the seriousness of her responsibility before God for the fate of her son. And thus she merited Saint Ambrose's encouragement to her: "Trust daughter... The son of these tears will not perish!"

So what are the channels through which our children receive the Faith?

### 1. Life of Worship:

This is the first and main channel through which our children receive faith. For standing in prayer before the icon of the Lord Christ or the Virgin carrying the Divine Child, no doubt, imprints in the mind of the child an indelible mark. Thus, he knows "the Lord Jesus" and "the Virgin Mother." Consequently, this conduct contributes – with baptism – to a new birth of the child from the Church's womb.

The child who feels that the church at home is an extension of the church he goes to with his family, more than once a week, will himself become a small church. In the future, his house will become a church too. We observe how the child turns the house into a church when he perseveres with his family to attend Divine Liturgy; that he imitates the psalmist, the deacon and the priest when he walks around with the censer or sprinkles water on the people.

How wonderful it is when a child becomes "Psaltos" or a youth becomes "Anagnostes" in the house of God! For the fingerprints of the altar on his life will not ever be erased. As the saints have said, "He who is withdrawn from the altar is deprived of the bread of God."

How beautiful it is for the "audio player" to run at home most of the day; creating an atmosphere of praise, hymns, liturgies, and sermons. How awesome when the "video player" turns into an instrument for viewing constructive religious movies.

### 2. Christian Education:

Christian education is a second channel for handing down faith; "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). Here, we should revive the grandparent's role to narrate the stories of the Holy Bible to their grandchildren; from creation, Babylon, the flood, the tribes... to the birth of Christ in the flesh, His Crucifixion, His Resurrection, His Ascension, and the establishment of the Church. Parents might be busier than grandparents, but the attention given to the stories of the Bible and the work of God's words are two important elements in raising children. Moreover, many parents became learned in the Holy Bible when they started telling some of the stories to their children. It is the greatest blessing to all generations, for the Bible is the finest school and constitution.

Furthermore, the parents' commitment to their children's attendance (in Christian education classes, liturgies, and partaking of the holy mysteries) is critical. These actions are all means by which the deposit of faith and education is increased for generations to come.

### 3. Peace within the Family:

“‘There is no peace,’ says the Lord, ‘for the wicked’” (Isa 48:22). Indeed, it is impossible for the couple that is distant from the Lord, that is self-absorbed or consumed with pleasures, to live in peace. On the other hand, a couple that is fastened to the Lord, that believes in His divine intervention throughout times of difficulty, that trusts in His wise leadership of the family, is in true peace. This peace – the fruit of their faith – is noticeable and loved by their children. It is an essential channel through which the children receive the spirit, the mind, and the meekness of Christ.

I will never forget when I was visiting a blessed Christian family; a relative came in complaining about her husband emotionally with tears and a loud voice which disturbed the tranquil atmosphere of the family – to the extent that a little girl coiled up in the lap of the hostess – her mother – and said, “Mom...make this lady leave from here.” Yes, surely she was not used to the hostility of contentions, but to the calmness of love.

### 4. Circumstantial Behavior:

There is no doubt that a Christian family with sincere faith easily transfers this faith to the children through their behavior in different situations. They are a **loving family** that treats everyone honestly and without hypocrisy, and the children notice and absorb this behavior. They are a **wise family** that resolves problems calmly and does not descend into quarrels and disputes which are not of the Spirit of God. They are a **serving family** that provides assistance to everyone around them in the joy of giving. They are also a **committed family** holding fast to the principles of Christ; “*He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets*” (Mt 12:19). Rather, they behave according to the commandments of the Lord, His love and His mindset.

How great is the destruction that affects children because of their parents' disagreements, whether internal or external to the family! How enormous is the responsibility placed on parents to give their children a righteous upbringing!

### 5. The Family Library:

It is acceptable that the family library includes daily newspapers or general magazines that are appropriate for chil-

dren and youth. However, it is exceptionally essential for parents to set up a small library for the children suitable to their age. What is more available than the Christian publications nowadays, including biblical stories, hagiographies, interpretations of the Liturgical rituals, or youth books that are suited for this stage!

Moreover, the family library must include the Holy Scriptures and exegetical books which stimulate the minds of the young people and load it with holy thoughts, leaving no opportunity for evil ones. As one of the saints once said, “Reading rectifies the wandering mind.” Therefore, we must focus on the role of books in the children’s lives, especially after the TV has weakened people's ability to read. They often sit in front of it captivated, occasionally absorbing some good programming, but mostly negative ones.

### 6. Educational Trips:

Visiting monasteries, Coptic museums and exchanging visits with churches inside or outside the region are all educational activities absorbed by child, toddler, and youth. They meet with monks who renounced the world, priests who present them with the mindset of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, or brothers and sisters who walk with them on the same road – the road of the heavenly kingdom. And thus, the young man grows and is found to be: in **spirit** committed to God, in **character** cheerful amongst the congregation, in **mind** developing in knowledge, and in **body** athletic and sportive. And he will have an integrated personality that does not stand out in one area while weak in another. Rather, its growth would be proportionate in all aspects.

These are some of the channels that could be used by the family in delivering the Faith to its children. May the number of the kingdom's children increase, and may they be saved from the judgment of the last day. May the Lord bless the lives of all to the glory of His name!

The Lord be with you. Pray for us.

*Fr. Athanasius K. Farag*

\* This article was first published in Arabic in the 21<sup>st</sup> issue of this newsletter (Sep / Oct 1991). It was translated into English in December 2013.



**St. Antonious and St. Mina Coptic Orthodox Church**  
 147 Park Avenue, PO Box 66  
 East Rutherford, NJ 07073  
 Telephone: 201.933.2226

Christian Education Center  
 220 Montross Avenue  
 Rutherford, NJ 07070

[www.stantoniousstmina.org](http://www.stantoniousstmina.org)

