

## Introduction

Whenever we pursue the problem of morality or ethics,<sup>۱</sup> we face the question of values and their application in human life. Likewise, in a religious context, the observation of values requires a specific consideration under which one may conceive and interpret them in the realm of moral theology. Now, the most important question is: what is the relationship between religion and life values? Is there any specific moral system which is only based on religious values?

In the case of family<sup>۲</sup> and the characterization of moral values in its foundation, the question today has received a more critical examination. Is there any room for morality in the foundation of family? To what extent do moral rules and virtues conflict or accommodate with legitimate rules and disciplines? If they are adjustable, how and by what criteria would the function of moral virtue(s) be evaluated? And if they are in a practical conflict, which of them has the priority for application? And finally, what is the role of religion (Rizvi, ۱۹۹۶, p. ۱-۳)<sup>۳</sup> in all the above perspectives? These questions and some other related ones have urged modern thinkers (in different fields such as theology, sociology, political sciences, and social sciences) to pay more attention to the function of “social ethics” in general, and to the application of morality and moral virtues in “the family” in particular.

It is obvious that the questions of morality and values dealing with the position of the family in the wider society, both traditional and modern, are fundamental in any discussion on family relationships. Moreover, in his discussion on family, one has to consider the connection between these values on the one hand, and the conduct of family members toward one another, their rights, and responsibilities, on the other. In this consideration, religion in general seems to play a significant part, especially, although not exclusively, in the case of Islam and Christianity.

The family acts as a principal/important focus for any divine religion and moral theology, not in the sense of being the “bedrock” of society, but because the kind and form of family understood and created by a divine religion is one of

## Moral Virtues and Family Crisis

### The Application of Moral Virtues in the Foundation of Family A Comparative Survey in the Context of Moral Theology\*

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#### Abstract

This paper makes an attempt to determine the current family crisis, recognizing its inaugurations and instigates. This attempt directs the reader’s attention by realizing some expositions of the problem and finding a solution for the crisis within the context of moral theology. The family crisis, as we will observe, is on the loss of the moral functions of the family. Today, the lack of moral virtues in the family is one of the greatest threats to the family and is indeed weakening its foundation progressively. Following certain directions of religious teachings, observing moral obligations, and returning to spirituality are some of the solutions examined and scholarly recommended in this research.

**Key words:** family foundation, family crisis, moral virtues, religious obligation, spiritual directions

to both classical and modern texts within the realm of ethical sciences and moral theology. To examine these two methodological approaches in the context of modern development, I will hopefully overlook some of the contemporary writings about the related issue.

I will organize the theme of my discussion in this research in the following order: First, I will examine the definition and typology of “moral virtue,” then I will approach the term “family” and its related points; thirdly, the notion of morality and family, as well as their relationship will be examined. Finally, in conclusion, I will comment on some conclusive points and raise some related questions for further developmental research in the area of moral theology.

## I. Moral Virtues

### The Concept of Moral Virtue

According to the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, the origin of “virtue” comes from the Latin *virtus* (manliness), paralleling the Greek term *arete* (excellence). Recently, *virtue* and *vice* have been largely replaced: in the singular by “good” and “evil,” “right” and “wrong;” and in the plural by “values” and “disvalues” (Reese, ١٩٨٠, p. ٦١٣; Oxford, ١٩٨٧).<sup>٥</sup>

In a historical approach, the variety of linguistic observations of a single technical term has to be highly considered and well understood. For instance, the usage of ethical terms in general and the word ‘virtue’ in particular has been developed within linguistic domain and cultural context. In his *Preface to Logic* (Cohen, ١٩٤٦, p. ١٦), Cohen points out the danger of relying on the too easy equivalence of the Greek word *areté* with ‘virtue’ in discussing Aristotle’s view of the ‘virtuous’ man. He remarks that the English word ‘virtue’, which is used almost exclusively as the equivalent of *areté*, is very misleading; *areté* would be more accurately rendered as ‘excellence’, the object of admiration.

A historical analyst has to keep in his mind that if the view of what it is ‘to do good’ varies from society to society, from culture to culture, and from time to

the most outstanding characters of the religion’s social significance. On the other hand, one may not neglect and disregard the influence of religion and religious matters on family life and family values, even in the modern and post-modern societies (Morgan, ١٩٩٦, pp. ٣٧١-٣٧٤).<sup>٤</sup> These two remarks could be the reason why the relationship between religion and family in different fields, including morality and values, has received certain considerations and stimulated certain developments (c.f: Morgan, ١٩٩٦, pp. ٣٧١-٣٧٤).

Now it is the time for religion, or specifically moral theology, to first clarify the notion of family and, secondly, to particularize the role of moral elements in its foundation. If we accept that, for instance, the religious terminology of the family is understood as an intergenerational institution, it would contrast with the current understanding of the family as an interpersonal association between individuals. Consequently, we might face new approaches to the nature and significance of family which could affect the application of morality and moral virtues in the family.

Based on these introductory points, what I am pursuing in this paper is a comparative approach to the question: what does religion (mainly Islam and Christianity) offer as the moral basis for the family and family relationship? In other words, in this comparative research, I am looking for those similar or different moral elements that have been propounded and advised by the two religions as the noble bedrock of the foundation of family. What would be the moral principles the members of a family have to observe and develop if they want to remain religious, and desire to keep and promote their family, as well as their society, in a religious context?

Methodologically speaking, I will employ a descriptive method by which I would be able to explain and characterize the conceptual aspect of the study. In my analysis and critical observation, I mainly prefer to rely on a set of methodological diversity, including some analytical and critical examinations. With regard to the sources and documents on which this study relies, I will refer

ancient Greeks became known as the cardinal virtues. Medieval thinkers (mostly theologians) added to these the theological virtues which appear in the New Testament: faith, hope, and charity (Reese, ١٩٨٠, p. ٨٠). Virtues were the mainstay of St. Thomas's moral teaching. For St. Thomas, as for the ancients, virtue was the noblest of human, moral qualities. The virtues, for St. Thomas, are multiple: intellectual, moral, and theological (Pinckaers, ١٩٩٥, p. ٢٢٥). Following Aristotle's ethical theory, Aquinas holds that the virtues which one gains by an Aristotelian analysis must be complemented by the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love (Reese, ١٩٨٠, p. ٢٤).

So far, we have seen a variety of definitions, content, and numbers for the notion of virtue, while one may argue that the above mentioned perspectives are derived from the same origination. This general understanding of virtue, which is derived from its Greek origination, has had a great influence on both Islamic and Christian ethical system. However, with the waning of the Middle Ages and the rise of the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, and Enlightenment thought, the influence of Aristotle's virtue ethics declined.

Now, by reviewing the historical development and observing the variety of examinations of the term "virtue," it is the time to have a glance on the definition, scope, and content of the term in the religious context. Islam and Christianity, the two largest world religions, have their traditional and historical observation about the issue.

The issue of moral virtue could be examined in different areas (such as traditional, historical, theological, and philosophical) and from several perspectives within the realm of each religion. In a comparative survey, one may approach the notion of virtue in the tradition of two religions: Islam and Christianity.

### **Religious Approaches to the Notion of Moral Virtue**

In Christian development of the notion of "virtue," one has to consider the fundamental ground of the moral theology from which the notion of virtue has

time. Therefore, the semantic structure of the word 'good' itself must, of necessity, be different in each case.

It seems that for an accurate understanding of the technical term "virtue," one has to consider its historical development as well as the variety of observations which have been made in different contexts.

### **The Historical Development of Moral Virtue**

The notion of virtue has received a diversity of perspectives through the history of philosophy and ethics. For Plato (٤٢٨-٣٤٨ B.C.), there is a close relation between virtue and knowledge to the extent that "virtue is knowledge." Maintaining the four Greek cardinal virtues (i.e., wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice), Plato, in comparing virtue and vice, holds that "virtue is the health, and beauty, and well-being of the soul, and vice the disease, and weakness, and deformity, of the same" (Plato, ١٩٦٧, p. ٦١).

However, Aristotle (٣٨٤-٣٢٢ B.C.) distinguishes between theoretical and practical reasoning and places morality under the category of practical reasoning. He describes virtue as "a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it" (Aristotle, ١٩٦٧, p. ١٠٦). Elsewhere, according to Aristotle's definition: "moral virtue is a mean between two vices" (Ibid, p. ١٠٩). A virtuous life means doing the right thing in the right way to the right person to the right degree; that is, it involves the ability to determine the golden mean, and this is the mean between extremes (Reese, ١٩٨٠, p. ٣٢).

It is easy to observe that, in the Aristotelian language, virtue is classically called a *habitus*. Thus, it is by the repeated experience of good actions that we acquire the art of applying virtues in the moral order. Indeed, he stresses the importance of moral virtues; and finally, moral virtues, according to Aristotle, involve the rational control of human desires (Ibid., pp. ٣١-٣٢).

In medieval discussions, the particular virtues described by Aristotle and the

Here, St. Thomas explains several kinds of virtue. He holds together with the four cardinal virtues the three theological virtues, especially with Divine charity, the virtue which informs, baptizes, and consecrates, as it were, all other virtues; which associates and unifies them into one powerful effort to participate in the Divine life.

As charity stands at the summit of all virtues, so faith stands at their foundation. For by faith God is first apprehended, and the soul lifted up to supernatural life. Faith is the secret of one's conscience; to the world it is made manifest by the good works in which it lives, "Faith without works is dead" (James, ii, ٢٦). Such works are: the external profession of faith, strict observance of the Divine commands, prayer, filial devotion to the Church, the fear of God, the horror of sin, penance for sins committed, patience in adversity, etc.

In a traditional understanding of charity, one finds that charity inclines man to love God above all things with the love of friendship. The perfect friend of God says with St. Paul: "With Christ I am nailed to the cross. And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me" (Gal., ii, ١٩-٢٠). For love means union. With the commandment to love God above all Jesus coupled another: "And the second is like to it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark, xii, ٣١).

Justice as a moral virtue accepted by Christian tradition, which gives everyone his due, is the pivot on which turn the virtues of religion, piety, obedience, gratitude, truthfulness, friendship, and many more. Jesus sacrificing His life to give God His due, Abraham willing to sacrifice his son in obedience to God's will, these are acts of justice.

It is remarkable that almost every act of virtue proceeding from the Divine principle within us has in it the elements of all the virtues; only mental analysis views the same act under various aspects (Hauerwas, ١٩٨١, pp. ١١١-١٢٨).<sup>٦</sup>

On the other hand, we may mostly find the same elements and foundations of moral virtue in the Islamic tradition. Faith and love are two elements of moral

been derived. It is traditionally clear that the foundation of ethics, in general, and moral virtue, in particular, is based on two elements: faith and love. In this regard, St. Thomas says:

**“Virtue consists in the following, or imitation, of God. Every virtue, like every other thing, has its type [exemplar] in God. Thus the Divine mind itself is the type of prudence; God using all things to minister to His glory is the type of temperance, by which man subjects his lower appetites to reason; justice is typified by God's application of the eternal law to all His works; Divine immutability is the type of fortitude. And, since it is man's nature to live in society, the four cardinal virtues are social [politicae] virtues, inasmuch as by them man rightly ordains his conduct in daily life. Man, however, must raise himself beyond his natural life unto a life Divine: 'Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matt., v, ٤٨). It is, therefore, necessary to posit certain virtues midway between the social virtues, which are human, and the exemplary virtues, which are Divine. These intermediate virtues are of two degrees of perfection: the lesser in the soul still struggling upwards from a life of sin to a likeness with God – these are called purifying virtues [virtutes purgatoriae]; the greater in the souls which have already attained to the Divine likeness – these are called virtues of the purified soul [virtutes jam purgati animi]. In the lesser degree, prudence, moved by the contemplation of things Divine, despises all things earthly and directs all the soul's thought unto God alone; temperance relinquishes, as far as nature allows, the things required for bodily wants; fortitude removes the fear of departing this life and facing the life beyond; justice approves of the aforesaid dispositions. In the higher perfection of souls already purified and firmly united with God, prudence knows nothing but what it beholds in God; temperance ignores earthly desires; fortitude knows nothing of passions; justice is bound to the Divine mind by a perpetual compact to do as it does. This degree of perfection belongs to the blessed in heaven or to a few of the most perfect in this life.” (I-II:٦١:٤)**

However, the most important part of knowledge here is one's awareness of his/her self and his/her nobility. It is quoted from Imam Ali (p.b.u.h.) that "whoever maintains his own respect in view, his desires appear light to him" (Imam Ali, ۱۹۹۶, p. ۳۲۳). He also says "Learned is he who knows his worth. It is enough for a man to remain ignorant if he knows not his worth" (Ibid., p. ۶۹). Quoting these traditions, Amini argues that if man identified his true human personality, then good morals and ethics become alive and dominate over the moral vices (Amini, ۱۹۹۷, p. ۳۴). However, he did not clarify how this awareness helps man to establish the moral virtues and overcome the moral vices.

With regard to acquiring *ilm* and knowledge, apart from the sense and the faculty of thinking, the Holy Quran equally recognizes piety and purity of the soul as the means of acquiring knowledge. This point has been mentioned in many verses implicitly or explicitly:

**"O believers! If you fear Allah (God), He will give you power to distinguish between what is good and what is bad." (Chapter Al-Anfal, ۸/۲۹)**

*Taqwa* (Amini, ۱۹۹۷, pp. ۱۶۸-۱۸۹)<sup>۸</sup> or piety also has a main role in the Islamic moral system. Imam Ali says, "piety (fear of Allah) is the chief trait of human character" (Imam Ali, ۱۹۹۶, p. ۳۱۸). The Holy Quran says, "*Lo! The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah is the best in conduct.*" Chapter Al-Hujurat, ۴۹/۱۳. Piety is regarded as the source of all benevolence and goodness when Imam Ali (s.a.) declares, "I advise you, O' creatures of Allah, to have fear of Allah, for it is the rein and the mainstay (of religion). Hold fast to its salient points, keep hold of its realities. It will take you to abodes of ease, places of comfort, fortresses of safety and houses of honor" (Ibid., p. ۱۶۹).

Furthermore, achieving God's pleasure and satisfaction is considered as the aim of moral deeds and a high standard for moral evaluation in the Islamic ethical system. To achieve this aim and reach the high moral standard, one has to observe the two fundamental elements of morality, that is, *ilm* and *Taqwa*. The Holy Quran says:

virtue in Islam. However, in a traditional approach, we find two more fundamental elements for moral virtue: *ilm* (knowledge or learning) and *Taqwa* (piety or fear & love). These two elements are highly considered by the Holy Quran as a basis for moral relationship between man and God, man and man, and man and himself. In this regard, a clear definition for righteousness is given by the Holy Quran:

**"It is righteousness to believe in God and the last Day and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask; and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayers, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you made; and to be firm and patient in pain (or suffering) and adversity and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God fearing." (۲/۱۷۷)**

As we see here, righteousness and virtue is a mixture of both belief and practice. A virtuous man is he whose faith should be true and sincere, who is prepared to show it in deeds of charity to his fellow-men, is a good citizen, supporting social organization, and his own individual soul must be firm and unshaken in all circumstances.

*ilm* (Al-Nadwi, ۱۹۸۳, p. ۴۳۰)<sup>۹</sup> or knowledge plays the first role in Islamic moral system. Islam has followed such a way to make sound moral awareness for each behavior man practices in order that he may know its value, results, and reward. From the Islamic point of view, Mutahhary argues that it is possible to identify the truth and obtain *ilm* (knowledge). Then, he explains the different sources of knowledge, including the world, man himself, and reason (Mutahhary, ۱۹۹۷, p. ۱۸۵). The human being has the means to obtain this kind of knowledge; the Holy Quran says:

**"By the soul and Him who perfected it and inspired it with the consciousness of what is wrong for it and what is right for it." Chapter Al-Shams, ۹۱/۷-۸.**

they are basically alike in observing faith and love as the basis for moral theology. However, one may recognize some differences between the two religions in the foundation of moral theology as well as moral virtue.

In Christianity, love and faith are considered as the fundamental elements for shaping the legitimate moral behavior whereas, in Islam, *ʿIlm* (knowledge) and *Taqwa* (love and fear) are those fundamental elements which form the foundation of Islamic moral system and according to which it operates. Besides, in Islamic perspective, there is a centrality for God's pleasure and satisfaction with regard to all moral actions and behaviors while, on the contrary, one may not find this high consideration in the Christian moral system.

Bearing in mind this comparative survey, we attempt to now understand the application of moral virtue in the context of family. Before engaging in any discussion, let us have a look on the notion of family and its terminological development.

## II. Family

### The Notion of Family

The notion of family could be differently understood and defined with regard to the field and context in which its traditional and historical structure has been observed. It is not easy to pursue a single definition by which one may semantically understand its full meaning and be able to elaborate the family's foundation.

"Family" is "a term derived from the Latin, *famulus*, servant, and *familia*, household servants, or the household. In the classical Roman period the *familia* rarely included the parents or the children. Its English derivative was frequently used in former times to describe all the persons of the domestic circle, parents, children, and servants. Present usage, however, excludes servants, and restricts the word *family* to that fundamental social group formed by the more or less permanent union of one man with one woman, or of one or more men with one

**"The most honorable among you in the sight of God is the one who is most God-conscious." (Chapter Al-Hujurat, ٤٩/١٣.)**

Islam seeks to firmly implant in man's heart the conviction that his dealings are with God who sees him at all times and in all places; that he may hide himself from the whole world but not from Him; that he may deceive everyone but cannot deceive God; that he can flee from the clutches of anyone else except God. This is what comes through *ʿIlm* and insight, and prepares the ground for fear and love (*Taqwa*) (Golshani, ١٩٩٧, pp. ١٧٥-١٧٨).<sup>٥</sup> It provides a sanction to morality in the love and fear of God, which will impel man to obey the moral law even without any external pressure. Through belief in God and the Day of Judgment it, furnishes a force which enables a person to adopt the moral conduct with earnestness and sincerity, with all the devotion of the heart and soul.

In a summary, one may present the Islamic view of moral virtue in a prophetic tradition where the Holy Prophet says: "The Lord has recommended nine things to me: Sincerity, secretly and apparently; observing of justice and equity in contentment, consent and anger; acting moderately in poverty and wealthy conditions; forgiving the one who committed excess upon me; granting that person who deprived me; and to join and connect with the one who got separated and denounced relations with me; and meditating while silent; and remembrance of Allah while conferring; and taking lesson while seeing" (Iqbal, ١٩٩٤, p. ٣١).

This tradition has been understood and interpreted by Muslim thinkers within the theory of virtue and moral behavior in the religious life. The good and acceptable life is obtained by the combination and interaction of both a virtuous individual and a virtuous society. A virtuous individual is the one who, as we have seen above, observes the required values, both in belief and practice.

Following the brief comparative study we have done between the Christian understanding of moral virtue and the Islamic perspective, we may conclude that

۱۹۹۷, pp. ۱۷-۱۸). This traditional definition and understanding of family has been more or less accepted by religious cultures and societies.

Relying on a traditional observation of family, Amini defines the term “family” in the following way: “It is a number of individuals related to each other by blood, or by marriage between a man and a woman, pledged under marriage covenant, living together in the same household and assisting each other in management of the house” (Amini, ۱۹۹۶, p. ۱). It seems that Amini’s definition here includes some obligations and duties of the family members that may not be considered as a part of the definition. However, I agree with him in the other parts of his definition.

Based on what we have had so far, one may hold that the most clear and acceptable model for the term family is a group of people which includes wife, husband, and children. The term family, however, is not restricted to this pattern. In some cases it is defined in a broader meaning and includes not only the two spouses and their children, but also parents, grandparents, grandchildren, sisters, brothers, paternal and maternal aunts and uncles, and their children. This extensive meaning of family along with the traditional and modern observation of family will be kept in mind in the following chapter when we will discuss the issue of morality in the structure of family.

### **Religion and Family**

The study of family in the context of religion deserves our close attention for the specific understanding of family which religion gives us and the variety of collective and individual values that moral theology provides and recommends for religious families. The relationships between religion and the family have received close attention from both theological examination and social studies. In addition, religion and family are considered as two important bases for individual identification (Morgan, ۱۹۹۶, p. ۳۷۲).

or more women, and their children. If the heads of the group comprise only one man and one woman we have the monogamous family, as distinguished from those domestic societies which live in conditions of polygamy, polyandry, or promiscuity” (Herbermann, ۱۹۱۳).

In a legal context, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops teaches that family “is an intimate community of persons bound together by blood, marriage or adoption for the whole of life” (Washington: USCC, ۱۹۸۸, p. ۸). In this definition, family is not merely a collection of individuals who have desired to live together; yet family is based on blood and/or law. On the contrary, the majority of American population, in a recent study of family in ۱۹۸۹, prefers a definition based on love, care, and nurture. In their opinion, family is “a group of people who love and care for each other” (CUA, November ۱۹۹۷). In this sense, there is no need to have a blood or legal relationship between the members of a family. Just being together as a group, loving one another and caring for each other is enough to form the foundation of family. In spite of its bright and attractive atomic words, this sort of expansive definition leads us to a kind of complexity and ambiguity which may not be appropriate in order to give us a specific definition.

According to the last understanding, the notion of family embraces two-parent families, blended families of remarriages, single-parent families, and groups of unmarried people who have adopted one another in the sense that they have chosen to live together and love and care for each other, whether their adoption has been legally sanctioned or not. The term family includes all such groups shaped on the basis of love, care, and nurture.

Based on a traditional sense which could be found in different cultures and societies, family initially consists of parents (both father and mother/ husband and wife) and children. In these kinds of families, the father earns the family living and the mother stays home to nurture children and the family (Lawler,

However, Lawler believes that traditional, nuclear family is neither natural nor biblical (c.f: Lawler, ١٩٩٧). He indicates that there is a difference between marriage and family in the Bible and in the contemporary Western cultures. For him, marriage and family in their traditional and biblical sense used to be shaped by blood relationship whereas in their contemporary American are formed by a romantic feeling which create between the family members a legal not a blood relationship (Lawler, ١٩٩٧, pp. ٧-٩). The main question now is what does the Bible (Clapp, ١٩٩٣, p. ١٥) actually tell us about family?

The Old Testament story of Israel's families is a story of taken-for-granted polygamy. There are certain stories in the Bible (Gen., ٢٩; Judge, viii, ٣٠; xii, ١٤; ١ Chron, iii, ١-٩; ١ Kings, xi, ٣) in which the traditional extended families include husband, wife/wives and children. In the New Testament, the notion of family is occasionally used to show a nuclear family which includes wife, husband (parents) and children. First of all, speaking of the Holy Family, Joseph, Mary and Jesus, is traditional among Catholic Christians (Lawler, ١٩٩٧, p. ١٢). From several statements such as Luke, ix, ٥٧-٦٢ we understand a basic meaning for the notion of family which indicates the nuclear, traditional family. However, in some cases like Mark, iii, ٣١-٣ and Luke, xiv, ٢٦, the members of a family are not only spouse and children, rather, the family members include parents, sisters and brothers.

Moreover, the notion of family in Christianity, according to the New Testament, is not restricted to the extended biological or blood family. Created by belief in Jesus and loyalty to God, family transcends the biological structure and includes those who follow Jesus. The believers and followers are his real family, sisters, brothers and mother:

*“Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? (Looking around at those who were sitting in the circle about him, he said) Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my brother, my sister, my mother.”*  
Mark, iii, ٣١-٣٣.

Methodologically, when we approach the issue of family in the context of religious tradition, we have to examine a language by which we would be able to learn and understand the contextual definition of family. This language will help us to first clarify the experience of the family and the loyalties it represents. Second, such a language will determine how we understand ourselves and our society, since the family is integral to the entire culture. Such a language should denote how our moral lives are based in particular loyalties and relations.

It is obvious from both religions Islam and Christianity that the moral authority, as well as the sources of moral values, is neither in society itself nor in the individual; it is in God.<sup>١٧</sup> When we approach the problem of family, particularly in the field of ethics, with respect to its religious context, we have to recognize this divine authority and theological framework from which the moral values are derived and by which the ethical system is shaped.

In Christianity, the term family has received certain recognition and definition within traditional and modern development. The family is holy inasmuch as it is to co-operate with God by procreating children who are destined to be the adopted children of God, and by instructing them for His kingdom. The union between husband and wife is to last until death (C.f: Matt., xix, ٦ sq.; Luke, xvi, ١٨; Mark, x, ١١).

There is a historical and traditional effort to designate a semantic link between the notion of family and the doctrine of church. The description of family as domestic church is the general demand made of all Christians specified to Christian spouses and their families (Lawler, ١٩٩٧, pp. ٢-١٦).<sup>١٨</sup> The end and the ideal of the Christian family are likewise supernatural, namely, the salvation of parents and children, and the union between Christ and His Church. In this regard, St. Paul says: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and delivered himself up for it," says St. Paul (Eph., v, ٢٥) (The Catholic Encyclopedia, V.٥, p. ٧٨٣).

The following verses from the Holy Quran are some examples for the extensive meaning of family: “And give to me a helper from my family: Haroun my brother.” TaHa ٢٠/٢٩-٣٠.

In this verse, Musa (Moses) is asking Allah (God) to give him a helper. Then he is naming his brother Haroun (Aaron), as a member of his family, to be his aid. So, family here includes brother, too.

“*And if you fear a breach between the two (wife and husband), then appoint a judge from his family and a judge from her family; if they both desire agreement, Allah will effect harmony between them; surely Allah is Knowing, Aware.*” Chapter Al-Nisa ٤/٣٥.

Here again the notion of *Ahl* (here means family) is used broadly. It includes both paternal and maternal relatives from both sides. Following the same argumentation, Amini maintains that *Ahl* means “the nearest relatives living together in the same household and work and cooperate with each other” (Amini, ١٩٩٦, p. ٤).

At this point we are able to conclude that the Islamic and Christian terminology gives us a broad meaning for “family” to the extent that it includes not only wife, husband and children, but also parents, brothers and sisters. In other words, family is the people who are relatives in the sense that they are blood related and share certain aspects of life. Moreover, we can find a broader usage for the term family in the religious language (viz. traditional and textual sense) which transcends the biological sense and indicates all spiritual and faithful members.

### III. Morality and Family

#### Religious Foundation of Family

Both religions, Islam and Christianity, have traditionally and historically determined certain moral grounds for individual behavior, family formation, and social construction. For both religions, virtue is the central concept for moral

What we understand from these verses is Jesus’ demand for a radical extension of the notion of family from an exclusive to an inclusive group, from a biological structure to a divine, spiritual construction.

In Islam, there is a diversity of semantic usage for the notion of family. In some cases, family is a group of people which includes wife, husband and children. The usual word for this traditional sense is *Ahl* which frankly means family including wife and children.<sup>١٧</sup> However, the same term *Ahl*, in some uses, is carrying a broader meaning than the traditional one (E.g. Al-Maeda: ٣٥, and Yusuf: ٦٥). Accordingly, the notion of family in Islamic terminology carries a broader meaning which includes not only the parents of both sides and their children, but also their paternal and maternal aunts and uncles, as well as their children. In his essay on family, Ahmadi has presented family in two categories: ١. Two spouses, parents, ancestors, children and grandchildren; ٢. Sisters, brothers, paternal and maternal aunts, uncles and their children (Ahmadi, ١٩٩٧.) Nowadays, these two categories of family, which is more or less based on traditional understanding, have been mostly accepted by the Muslim societies.

Besides *Ahl*, there are several words in Islamic terminology, particularly in its legal usage, that show this broad meaning of family: *Qurba*, *Aqraboon*, *Ashirah*, *Aal*, *Ahlulbayt* and *Arham*. (In the *Holy Quran*, the term *Qurba* is used ١٦ times to show the vast meaning of family: Al-Baqara: ٨٣; An-Nisa: ٨; Al-Maeda: ١٠٦. The term *Aqraboon* is used ٧ times: Al-Baqara: ١٨٠; An-Nisa: ٧; Al-Shura: ٢١٤. The term *Ashirah* is used ٣ times: Al-Tawba: ٢٤; Al-Shuara: ٢١٤; Al-Mujadila: ٢٢. The term *Aal* is used more than ٢٠ times mostly in the vast meaning of family: for example Al-Baqara: ٢٤٨; Al-E-Imran: ٣٣; The term *Ahlulbayt* is used two times: Hud: ٧٣; As-Sajda: ٣٣. The term *Arham* is used ٤ times: Al-Anfal: ٧٥; Al-Ahzab: ٦.) These words are used in several places to show a group of people who have a kind of relationship together and accordingly have to observe some legal and moral obligations.

Love and justice are the moral elements that the Christian family is to be formed on and to work hard to achieve them in its entire life. The whole family is to provide “active hospitality” and to “promote justice” (Lawler, ۱۹۹۷, p. ۱۸). The Christian family is to manifest Christ’s presence in the world “by the mutual love of the spouses, by their generous fruitfulness, their solidarity and faithfulness, and by the loving way in which all the members of the family work together” (Lawler, ۱۹۹۷, p. ۱۹). It is obvious that the sweet fruit of this love is a mutual understanding, mutual care, and mutual respect among the members of the family.

In almost the same recognition, but with different terminology, Islam insists on the moral virtues as the fundamental elements for the Muslim family. The spiritual and religious foundation of family in Islam is based on three elements: *mawaddah* (love), *rahmah* (Al-Nadwi, ۱۹۸۳, pp. ۲۱۶-۲۱۷)<sup>۱۴</sup> (mercy, blessing), and *Taqwa* (piety). The result of this establishment would be a spiritual and physical rest and tranquility. The Holy Quran says:

*“And among His signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect.”*

Chapter Rum ۳۰/۲۱.

Referring to this verse, Damad holds that the family is based on three principles: tranquility, passion, and mercy. He adds that the social relations within the family have been pointed out by this statement. Damad argues that on the basis of such relations, friendship, mutual understanding, and cooperation mingle with love (Damad, ۱۹۹۶, p. ۱-۲). It is practically true that when love and passion combine with mutual respect and mutual recognition, the result would be rest and tranquility.

Rest and tranquility are found in the normal relations of a father and mother dwelling together and bringing up a family. This normal relationship could be, in the Quranic teachings, achieved only through the observation of the moral

reflection and ethical system (C.f. Rizvi, ۱۹۹۴; Morgan, ۱۹۹۶, pp. ۳۷۱-۳۷۲). It is traditionally and theoretically accepted that the consideration of morality begins with descriptions of the virtuous life. So when we are going to talk about the moral foundations, we have to bear in mind the centrality of moral virtue and virtuous regulations. Now we may ask, what is a true Christian family? What is a true Muslim family?

Love and grace are two fundamental characteristics for the Christian family (Wayne, ۱۹۳۶, chapter ix).<sup>۱۵</sup> Moreover, we probably can best appreciate the characteristics of a genuine God-fearing family by picturing it in operation in a representative home. As Richard Cardinal Cushing of Boston has inspiringly described it: “The worthy Christian home finds a true Christian family abiding therein and growing in love and care for one another. This home is not constructed in prefabricated fashion in a few weeks or a few years—for it is not purely material. Indeed its true character is achieved not through plaster and paint and sanitary plumbing, but through love and sweat and tears. It is a framework trimmed with remembered moments of joy; cemented by hours of suffering. It is a reflection of the personalities of those who dwell therein, an expression of their likes and dislikes. The true Christian home is an altar of sacrifice and a theater of comedies and drama; it is a place of work and a haven of rest” (c.f. Kelly, , ۱۹۵۹).

Based on the Christian perspective, family and particularly marriage is grounded on and derived from grace. The family works with Christ for the redemption of its members and the world. For when the Lord made marriage a sacrament, He established the family as a basic means through which His grace could be given to men. The husband and wife channel grace to each other and to their children and vice versa. If these graces do not come to us in this way (through another member of the Mystical Body), they do not come at all. Therefore, it is most important that parents and children live in the state of grace, and that the Holy Spirit continually dwell in their souls (Ibid).

for the sake of social and political discipline, man has to observe rules and obligations through which he has to carry some duties and responsibilities.

These rules and duties have been divided into two major sets, legal and moral. It is beyond the scope of this paper to thoroughly discuss and investigate the traditional, historical, and philosophical development of each of them (c.f. Rorty, ۱۹۸۰). However, my aim in this research is a comparative glance on the moral elements, within religious context, which form and strengthen the foundation of family, particularly religious family.

The family, rather than the individual, is the social unit and the basis of civil society in the sense that the State is formally concerned with the family as such, and not merely with the individual. The family is the basis of civil society, inasmuch as the greater majority of persons ought to spend practically all their lives in its circle, either as subjects or as heads. Only in the family can the individual be properly reared, educated, and given that formation of character which will make him a good man and a good citizen. Hence, there are some legal and moral obligations that should be observed by the family members to achieve the formation of characters. Now, we may ask what are the major duties and responsibilities for the family members in order to elaborate the moral characters?

The ethical perspective of human relationship, particularly in family context, has had its difficulties in both secular and religious societies. In a comparative approach between the contemporary, secular sense of family and the traditional, religious understanding of it, one might witness that religious generations may have been able to approach those difficulties with more settled moral assumptions. In this research, I have attempted to identify those moral elements that have been recommended by religion as the bases of family. Then, it would be the task of individuals, as well as the community, to observe and develop them to the extent that they may overcome the family crisis.

virtues, namely love and mercy. Muslim scholars have mostly interpreted this verse in the sense that these two elements are considered as the two moral bases for the family life and values (c.f. Rizvi, ۱۹۹۴).

With regard to the third element *taqwa*, when Allah (God) is talking in the Holy Quran about the formation of family, He starts and ends with the notion of *Taqwa* (piety):

*“O people! Be careful of (your duty to) your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same (kind) and spread from these two, many men and women; and be careful of (your duty to) Allah, by whom you demand one of another (your rights), and (to) the ties of relationship; surely Allah ever watches over you.”* Chapter Nisa ۴/۱.

In essence, the Creator in this verse is giving us the idea of the formation of family and informing us the criteria and manner by and through which one has to look on and evaluate the rights and values in the family. Indeed this criteria is *taqwa* (piety). Here, Dr. Hashim explains that Islam views a person of *taqwa* as one for integrity, honor, decency, and propriety. *Taqwa*, for him, is the foundation upon which rests the family structure (Hashim, ۱۹۹۷, p. ۳). It seems that the same understanding and interpretation could be found in other Muslim scholars in terms of understanding the above recited verse.

Now, by understanding the main moral elements for the foundation of family in both religions, Islam and Christianity, we come to this question, what would be the main duty and responsibility for the members of a religious family?

### **Duties and Responsibilities**

Holding the idea that man is a political animal; and virtue must be exercised as a citizen, Aristotle regarded the family as the basic unit of the state (Reese, ۱۹۸۰, p. ۳۲). This actually leads him to stress the importance of the family in his elaboration of the political doctrine. It is also understood from his political philosophy that,

behalf of their husband or family. Many husbands, too, have mentally divorced themselves from their high calling as teacher and ruler of their young ones; as a result, their homes are in a state of anarchy or matriarchy. Thus the marriage bond in many instances has ceased to be moral and spiritual. Instead it has become sensual, social and esthetic (c.f. Kelly, ١٩٥٩).

Now, I don't want to blame any of these new approaches to the family, neither do I judge any of these characters as a disease for the modern families. However, I would like to remark the reason by which the families have been led to the current situation.

In spite of various positive opportunities created and developed by modernization, one may hold that the secularism and non-religious and non-spiritual culture are certain characters of the modern and post-modern civilization. The blame for those blights on modern happiness can be laid squarely on the secular culture which equates happiness with the pursuit of private pleasure and denies the existence of spiritual goals and values. The lack of religion, the encouraged agnosticism of public institutions, particularly the schools, and the denial of the authority and rights of parents are all related to secularism (Ibid).

Now we reflect on a specific moral duty which has been recommended to the members of a religious family in both religions, Islam and Christianity. First of all, it should be noted that the family we are talking about is assumed to be formed and founded on the abovementioned moral elements such as love, trust and grace in the Christian sense, and *ilm* (insight), *taqwa* (piety), and *rahmah* (blessing) in the Islamic recognition.

Education is and should be the first duty and responsibility for the entire members of a religious family. This education has different manifestations and might be elaborated in several perspectives. Nevertheless, in the training of children for effective religious living, none can fully take the place of parents. If the home fails to measure up to divine ideals, the Mosque/Church

The notion of marriage, the feeling of having children, the sense of one's relation to others within the family, and the duties and responsibilities one has to recognize and respect with regard to the whole family, are from those items that have been defined and understood differently in the two approaches. For instance, in a religious context, marriage is morally understood to be a lifelong commitment between a woman and a man. Sexual intercourse is to be restricted to marriage. Children are to be welcomed into the family and cared for, educated, and disciplined until the age of emancipation. Whereas these moral assumptions are relatively stable in religious families, they are no longer observed and respected in some modern societies (Philip Wogaman, ١٩٨٩, p. ١٥٤-٦).<sup>١٥</sup>

What modernization has brought for family life, as Shorter expresses, is "a soaring divorce rate" (Shorter, ١٩٧٥. P. ٧).<sup>١٦</sup> Among certain reasons, he argues that this new instability is the result of replacing property first with sentiment and then with sex as the bond between man and wife.

It is obvious that the family life requires certain kinds of moral assumptions in order to exist that seem lacking in our society. According to the modern definition of freedom, to be free means to have no ties. The free person is not and should not be dependent on the past or upon others (Taylor, ١٩٩٥, p. ٢٧).<sup>١٧</sup> In human relationships, we have duties to one another as strangers rather than as friends or kin. In fact, all family relations, such as husband-wife, parent-child, or brother-sister, are seen as ethically anomalous. It is noted that "the family, in spite of all the attempts to make it one, is not a contractual social unit" (Hauerwas, ١٩٨١, p. ١٧١). Hauerwas argues that the family in our society appears morally irrational. It is simply part of the necessities of our life, he adds, that the free person should learn to outgrow.

There are some changes in the goals and characters of the family we see in our daily life. Many modern wives have forgotten, or do not want to know, that their first purpose is motherhood and that making a home is their most worthwhile career. They have emancipated themselves from serious self-sacrifice on

family. In this regard, Imam Sajjad (pbuh) says:

**“The right of your child is that you should know that he is from you and will be ascribed to you, through both his good and his evil, in the immediate affairs of this world. You are responsible for what has been entrusted to you, such as educating him in good conduct, pointing him in the direction of his Lord, and helping him to obey Him, so act toward him with the action of one who knows that he will be rewarded for good doing toward him and punished for evildoing.”** (Imam Sajjad, ۱۹۸۸, p. ۲۸۸)

At this point, we reach the highest level of moral treatment, the level of action. In education and moral training, the most powerful part of the process is how and to what extent you act according to your words. You have to show the stability and truthfulness of your words by your action, for your words to your child, as well as to the other members of your family, are meaningless unless your own actions confirm them. The Holy Quran strongly warns and says, “O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? It is most hateful to Allah that you should say that which you do not do.” (Chapter Al-Saff, ۶۱/۲-۳.)

#### IV. Conclusion

What is the crisis of family? What is actually weakening the foundation of family? Above all social, political, and economical problems, I believe that the crisis of family today is on the loss of the moral functions of the family. The lack of moral virtues in family today could be one of the greatest threats to the family. Indeed, this threat may destroy the foundation and solidarity of family and finally devastate the order and fraternity of the society.

To solve the family crisis and overcome the threat which leads to social diseases, one may follow certain directions and recommend several resolutions. One of the best solutions, in my opinion, is returning to religion and moral obligations which is derived from and based on it. These obligations have been clearly described and examined throughout the history of religions, particularly

and school labor with impaired fruitfulness. As a moral responsibility, parents must have the competency to render their children capable of fulfilling their responsibilities. Hence, Muslim/Catholic parents should deem it a sacred duty to prepare themselves properly for the arduous work of educating the new generation. We learn this moral obligation from both traditions. It is obvious from both textual traditions that all members of the family should first educate themselves and educate the others inside and outside the family.

Furthermore, one of the most important responsibilities that man has toward his family is religious guidance and educational treatment. Although this kind of guidance is obligatory at the level of education which is a legal responsibility, it is a moral obligation when it deals with religious tasks. Since man is free to choose any religion that convinces him, the educator should morally show him the way(s) of good and evil, and guide him towards the truth. In the Holy Quran we recite:

**“O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is men and stones.”** Chapter Al-Tahrim ۶۶/۶.

**“And admonish your nearest kinsmen.”** (Chapter Al-Shuara ۲۶/۲۱۴.)

There is a great responsibility to start education from the home and to admonish the nearest kinsmen. Everybody is in charge of salvation, that is, to save himself or herself, and to save others including his/her family. We have to avoid evil and wrong deeds, and educate our family to understand good and evil, distinguish between them and finally observe the good and avoid the evil. We have to pray for that and ask God’s help:

**“O my Lord! Deliver me and my family from such things as they do! So We delivered him and his family-all.”** (Chapter Al-Shuaraa ۲۶/۱۶۹-۷۰.)

Yes, it is true to hold that, as the Second Vatican Council reintroduced the metaphor of domestic church (Lawler, ۱۹۹۷, p. ۱), home and family is a little mosque/church. This is the reason that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) and his successors used to emphasize on education as a moral responsibility within the

### Endnotes

\* "The 7th Shi'ite Muslim & Mennonite Christian Dialogue", May ۳۰- June ۱, ۲۰۱۴.

۱. Technical definition of the two terms: ethics and morality are very close. It is said that ethics is the explicit, philosophical reflection on moral beliefs and practices. The difference between ethics and morality is similar to the difference between musicology and music. Ethics is a conscious stepping back and reflecting on morality, just as musicology is a conscious reflection on music. Morality refers to the first-order beliefs and practices about good and evil by means of which we guide our behavior. In contrast, ethics is the second-order, reflective consideration of our moral beliefs and practices.
۲. Later on I will have a more terminological approach to the notion of family.
۳. I mean by "religion" here a more general sense of theological rules and principles that might be found in most divine religions. In this paper when I use the term "religion" in a general sense, I mostly mean the two Abrahamic religions: Islam and Christianity. However, there are other approaches to the notion of religion, at least in the case of Islam, such as Rizvi's understanding when he says: "...religion in Islamic definition is a complete system of life." For more details.
۴. It is held that this influence is by no means straightforward or predictable. This statement could be true in some cases such as Western or Christian societies. However, one may say that this is not generally applicable in every religious society..
۵. The term "virtue" is usually defined as moral excellence, uprightness, and goodness. It is also identified as a particular moral excellence, chastity, good quality or influence, efficacy.
۶. In his book, Hauerwas has dedicated one chapter to the discussion of the virtues. Examining the past and current status of the virtues, he has fairly considered the relationship between the virtues and the human nature. For a full discussion.
۷. The Arabic word *`ilm* has received several meanings in technical dictionaries. It has been translated as knowledge, learning, and information.
۸. The Arabic word *taqwa* is derived from the root *waqaya* which means protection and defense. Piety means self-restraint and self control. In the religious terminology, *taqwa* has been frequently translated as God-fearing. For more information about the term *taqwa* and its related issues.
۹. There is also a good relationship and interaction between *`Ilm* and *Taqwa*. For a fair discussion in this regard.
۱۰. In spite of this traditional understanding of religious authority, the Enlightenment assumption of the autonomy of man has increasingly become the more prominent. In a modern and postmodern sense of human authority one may see less room for a divine partnership to shape an authentic system of social values.
۱۱. Stating this point, Lawler remarks two problems, both are problems of definition, first of church, second of family, both biblical and contemporary. For details.
۱۲. In the Holy Quran, the term *Ahl* is used more than ۳۰ times in the traditional meaning of family which includes wife, husband and children.

Abrahamic religions such as Islam and Christianity.

We have, so far, understood in this research that the foundation of a healthy family, as a basic part of society, has to be firmly established on moral virtues and spiritual elements. We have seen that moral virtues such as love, trust and grace in Christianity, and *`ilm* (insight), *taqwa* (piety), and *rahmah* (blessing) in Islam brightly illuminate the path of success and prosperity.

If the religious family (either Muslim or Christian) was founded on the above-mentioned elements, it would hopefully overcome the family crises. Moreover, if the family examines the spiritual development which is also derived from and based on religion, it would be expected to cure the family diseases and observe a hale and healthy family which leads us to a safe and sound society. Furthermore, it is the task of family members to strengthen and develop the moral elements on which they have established their small religious society (namely, family). The way of practical observation of the moral elements and the method of fulfilling the above-mentioned task is outside the scope of this paper and deserves a scholarly study and research. However, the clarification of moral elements in the family that has been presented by this comparative research could be assumed as a starting point for any new attempt to re-establish and/or develop the fundamental moral virtues in family and family life.

Finally, I would like to close my paper with a very beautiful statement of Imam Ali, the Prophet's son in law, (peace be upon them):

*"Certainly piety is the medicine for your hearts, sight for the blindness of your spirits, the cure for the ailments of your bodies, the rectifier of the evils of your breasts, the purifier of the pollution of your minds, the light of the darkness of your eyes, the consolidation for the fear of your heart, and the brightness for the gloom for your ignorance."* (Nahjul Balaghah, sermon ۱۹۸.)

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- ۱۳ For a full discussion on the issue of love and grace in the foundation of Christian family.
- ۱۴ The Arabic term *rahmah* is translated as mercy. There are two well-known divine attributes derived from this root: *Rahman* (compassionate) and *Rahim* (merciful).
- ۱۵ In this regard, Wogaman compares the earlier generations with the modern time and examines moral difficulties.
۱۶. He adds that "one in every four marriages now being constituted in North America will end in divorce, a likelihood that contrasts with a virtually non-existent divorce rate in traditional society."
۱۷. His explanation of freedom is that "it is the idea that I am free when I decide for myself what concerns me, rather than being shaped by external influences."

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