

CHAPTER IX

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE FAMILY

I. DECLINE OF THE FAMILY INSTITUTION IN THE WORLD

A. EQUALITY

Inspired by their own doctrines of the origin of society, the communists deliberately planned to replace the family with the commune. The communists pictured the ideal conditions of human life as those where people live in dormitories, eat in mess halls, and regard their offspring as children of the state. Although many communes were created, the communists soon realized that the collective method of personal organization is bound to fail, and the traditional family form continued to function. The state's assumption of so many of the duties usually undertaken by the parents towards their children out of love and concern for them has weakened the family bond. Today, there is hardly a foundation on which members of the family may build their relationship except the memory of dependence and company in childhood!

In Western Europe and North America, movement into the great urban concentrations in search of employment made everybody anonymous. Mixing of the sexes, loose morality, economic independence of women, a strong brand of individualism, and the traditional absolutization of nature within, have all contributed towards the erosion of the family bond. The licence and sexual promiscuity of the second half of this century express the sad state of affairs to which the institution of the family has sunk. Currently, more than half of all children born in the cities are illegitimate. The family has become animal, in the sense of lasting only so long as the children are physically helpless and need the constant attention of their parents. Once they reach adulthood, the material need

¹See, for instance, Norman W. Bell and Ezra F. Vogel, eds, *The Family* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960), chap. IV.

disappears and the family bond disintegrates. Nay, worse! the preoccupation of parents with work outside the home, their psychic exhaustion, and the pressure for them to seek emotional satisfaction outside the home, have weakened the family bond even when children are still at a tender age. The family as it has been known, is practically on its deathbed.²

Anthropologists have also contributed to the downfall of the family institution by teaching that other forms of human association are possible and have been successful among animals and primitives. Their constant reference to the animal world when considering the human condition have brainwashed the people that differences from the animals are unnatural; and their deluge of speculative theories that deviant forms of human association, such as matriarchy, polyandry, etc., were once the rule, have contributed towards the family's dislodgement from its traditional place of honor and necessity.

Throughout the communist world and the West, the institution of the family has undergone radical change. Today, it stands inextricably associated with the general decay of society. It is affecting and being affected by the decline of morals, of social cohesion, of the continuity of traditions through the generations. Regardless of which is cause and which is effect, civilization and the family seem to be destined for rising together or falling together. The Muslim world and the rest of the Third World, insofar as they preserve their identity from the onslaught of communism and Western ideologies, are the only societies left where the family still keeps its place of honor. The Islamic institution stands the better chance to survive because it is buttressed by Islamic law, and determined by its close relation to *al tawhīd*, the essence of Islamic religious experience.

II. THE FAMILY AS A CONSTITUTIVE UNIT OF SOCIETY

Fulfillment of the purpose of God for mankind requires that humans intermarry and procreate, as well as live together and thus provide the theater of relationships wherein the moral part of the divine will may be fulfilled by human decision and action. This theater can consist of

²William F. Kenkel, *The Family in Perspective* (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1973), chap. V, XII.

*This is your **ummah**, one, united and integral, and I am your Lord. Therefore, serve Me (21:92)... Let there be of you an **ummah** which calls men to the good, commanding good deeds and prohibiting the evil. Those are the felicitous (3:104).

*This is your **ummah**, one, united and indivisible. I am your only Lord. Fear Me. Nonetheless, people divide themselves into factions, each party rejoicing in its own position. But they will last in their delusion but a brief while (23:54)... The hearts of the unbelievers shake with frenzy and resentment, as in the days of **al Jahiliyah** (pre-Islam). But the hearts of Allah's messenger and the believers rest in quiescence and reassurance. "For they were worthy of it and the people for it. And Allah is aware of everything." Their position with which Allah has rightly charged them is the position of piety and righteousness (48:26).

dominating criterion in the Roman and Persian empires which preceded Islam, and to which Islam gave the *coup de grâce*. They were responsible for such evil in the affairs of men that they had to be uprooted.

That leaves the family alone as ultimate social unit, flanked by the individual on one side, and the universal *ummah* on the other. Its importance in the cosmic order has been emphasized in the Quran: "It is of the signs of Allah that He has created of yourselves spouses of one another, love and mercy."⁵ Islam does not condemn sex; it regards it as innocent, necessary and good; and it not only permits, but recommends that man and women seek their fulfillment in it.⁶ However, it does not recognize it alone as fulfilling the purpose of marriage. That marriage which is built purely on sex, the love syndrome of romanticism, it declares imperfect and incomplete.⁷ Marriage generates a wide complex of human relations which are the materials of a great part of the moral imperative. The duties of procreating, of loving, supporting, counselling, guiding, educating, helping, befriending, fall upon the person first toward the members of his family. The category *dhū qurbā* (kinship) figures very prominently in the social commandments of God in the Quran.⁸ In short, one can say that Islam regards the family as indispensable for the fulfillment of the divine purpose. And there can be no *al tawhīd* without such fulfillment, for to recognize Allah (SWT) as the One and only God means to recognize Him as He Whose will and commandment are the ought, the good and the purpose for man. To adhere to *al tawhīd* is to experience

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ ذَلِكَ لَا يَنْتَفِعُونَ بِالْعُورِ يَنْفَعُكُمْ وَنَ (الروم: ٢١)

⁵It is one of Allah's signs that He created out of yourselves spouses in whom to find quiescence, that He established between you and them love and compassion. For those who are rational, this is certainly a great sign of evidence (30:21).

يَسْأَلُكُمْ حَرْثُكُمْ فَأْتُوا حَرْثَكُمْ أَنْ يَشْفَعُوا لَكُمْ فِي ذُنُوبِكُمْ وَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنْ اللَّهِ وَعْدٌ بَلَدٌ وَبَشِيرٌ
الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (البقرة: ٢٢٣) ... وَتُؤْتُهُنَّ مِنْ حَرْثِ بَرِيَّتَيْنِ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لِمَنْ يَتَوَلَّى أَعْيُنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ...
(البقرة: ٢٢٨)

⁶Your wives are yours to enjoy in purity. Come unto them as and when you please, but do good deeds beforehand. Fear Allah and remember that you shall confront Him. Bring good tidings to the believers, O Prophet (2:223). And their husbands would do better to take them back in that case if they desire reconciliation. And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness (2:228).

⁷"Treat your women well and be kind to them, for they are your partners and committed helpers. Remember that you have taken them as your wives and enjoyed their flesh only under Allah's trust and with His permission" (Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, "Farewell Pilgrimage", p. 486.

⁸As witness the large number of verses carrying the term *qurbā* (2:77; 4:7, etc).

the command of God as obligatory, and to do so means to seek to realize the real-existent materials which actualize the values implicit in those commands. These are all logically linked up to, and inseparable from, one another. It is not possible to fulfill the one without fulfilling the others. God has indeed commanded not only the actualization of these values, but directed the method and specified the materials for doing so. These are the family and the relations to which it gives rise. The necessity of both can be established rationally. God's specification of them is a confirmation of their rational necessity. There can therefore be no *al tawhīd* without the family.⁹

III. CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS

A. EQUALITY

There can be no doubt that Allah (SWT) has made men and women equal in their religious, ethical and civil rights, duties and responsibilities.¹⁰ There are however a very few exceptions; and these pertain to their functions as fathers and mothers. On the religious level, Allah (SWT) established their equality in the verses 3:195, 9:71-72 and 16:97. The same verses establish their ethical equality. Their civil equality is the subject of verses 60:12, 5:38, 24:2, and 4:32. As to the claim that Islam stands for inequality, on the basis of verse 4:34, the matter does not stand any scrutiny. Firstly, it concerns the domestic relation only. The proof for this lies in the remainder of the same verse which concerns itself with the conditions of application of the first part, all of which pertain to the domestic relation. This other half of the verse is usually omitted from the argument in order to make way for the unwarranted generalization. In this relation, men are certainly prior insofar as patriarchy is the only form of family life mankind has tried and observed

⁹The family is the single area which the Qur'anic revelation saw necessary to regulate with general principles as well as with the most detailed prescriptions, as witness the Qur'anic laws of marriage, divorce, and inheritance. In other areas (i.e., the political, the economic), the Qur'an provided general principles but little or no prescriptive detail.

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنَّىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (الزل: ٩٧)

¹⁰Whether male or female, whoever in faith does a good deed for the sake of Allah will be granted a good life and rewarded in proportion to the best of what they used to do (16:97).

since creation. The family is a home which requires defence and for the substance of which full-time struggle outside the home is a necessity. Men are evidently better disposed for discharging this duty than women. Secondly, to interpret this verse in the fashion of the advocates of inequality is to make it run counter to all the other verses cited above which establish equality on the crucial levels of religion, ethics and civil life.

B. DIFFERENTIATION OF ROLES

Islam regards men and women as created for differing but mutually complementary functions.¹¹ The functions of motherhood, of home-care and children's upbringing, and those of fatherhood, home protection, livelihood-earning and overall responsibility call for different physical, psychic and emotional constitutions in men and women. Islam blesses this differentiation as necessary for self-fulfillment of both sexes.¹² Role differentiation is a far cry from discrimination or segregation. Both roles are equally subject to the religious and ethical norms; and both require all the intelligence, talent, energy and self-exertion that the subjects can muster. Equally, this role differentiation says nothing about the areas of activity where men's and women overlap, nor about those other areas where no overlapping is in question. Where natural aptitudes make it desirable, or necessity makes it expedient, men's and women's activities may cross into each other's realm without prejudice to the main role differentiation established by God in nature. Otherwise, the Quran would not have granted to women the full civil rights it did, and which nobody questions.

وَلَا تَنَّمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا اكْتَسَبُوا وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا
اَكْسَبْنَ^١ وَسَعَلُوْا اللّٰهَ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ؕ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ كَاَنَّهُ يَكُلُّ مِمَّنْ عَلَيْهِمُ (النساء: ٣٢)

¹¹Do not enviously wish for that which Allah conferred on some and not on others. Men and women, to each belong the deeds they have personally accomplished. Ask Allah to give you of His bounty. He is knowing of all things (4:32).

فَاَسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ اِنِّي لَا اُضِيعُ عَمَلًا عَمِلْتُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ اَوْ اُنْثَىٰ بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ... (آل عمران: ١٩٥)

¹²Their Lord responded to them that He will never permit any of their good deeds to be lost, whether done by males or females. They proceed one from another (3:195).

C. EXPOSURE AND INSULATION

There can be no doubt that Allah (SWT) did not intend the Muslim woman to insulate herself from society behind a veil or within the walls of a harem. The evidence is Islam's recognition of her right to participate in government as in 60:12, in public life as in 9:71-72, or even in war as in 3:195. Obviously such participation runs counter to insulation and veiling, and is unthinkable with them. What Islam is most careful to avoid is that kind of exposure which leads to immorality and fornication.¹³ Here, there are two commandments, one general, addressed to both men and women with equal emphasis, if not more for men since the verse mentions them first.¹⁴ The second concerns women, and is found in the same verses as the aforementioned, namely, 24:30-31. True, the Quran did ask women to cover themselves; but it has expressly excepted those parts which custom would have exposed if women were to fulfill her career and destiny as prescribed by Islam. Deliberate exposure of feminine beauty and ornament does lead to temptation, and is therefore prohibited except to minors and those adults who can have no sexual relations with the person in question, like her father, brother, son or uncle.¹⁵ Avoidance of temptation is a high ethical ideal. It has nothing to do with woman's fulfillment of her Islamic duties in society. After all, women have been seen with uncovered faces, hands and feet performing these Islamic functions uninterruptedly since the Prophet's days, and in the Holy Sanctuary of Makkah itself.

...وَلَا تَبْرُجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ... (الأحراب: ٣٣) قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ
ذَلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ
زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ... (النور: ٣٠-٣١)

¹³[O Women], Do not display yourselves as women of pre-Islam used to do (33:33)... [O Muhammad], Command male believers to lower their gazes to keep their chastity. That is the pure way befitting them. Lo! Allah is aware of what they do. Command female believers to lower their gazes as well, to keep their chastity, and not to display of their adornment save that which is (per force) apparent (24:30-31).

¹⁴Ibid.

وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ (النور: ٣١)

¹⁵Women shall not display their beauty and ornamentation except to their husbands, or their parents (24:31).

D. MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

It is religiously and ethically imperative for all men and women to marry.¹⁶ High dowries, lack of housing, education and employment should constitute no impediment to the marriage of either sex. These have become impediments in the West because of the high premium the West puts on material achievement and the little concern Western people have for sexual virtue. The family unit being nuclear, it is necessary for the protective spouses to achieve economic independence before marriage. The Islamic family, *per contra*, is the extended model which includes parents, grandparents, males and their wives and offspring. Since women are entitled by the *sharī'ah* to support by their husbands or those of whom they are the dependents, and since Islam, in accord with the patriarchal system, lays it upon the adult male to support the female, most Muslim men and women have married young. They regarded the ability of the male spouse personally to achieve economic independence before marriage as irrelevant to the question of marriage. Unfortunately, Muslim youth are being Westernized at an alarming rate, with the result that it has become very popular among them to seek personal economic independence and thus to postpone marriage until after achievement of that independence. This is sad and tragic development. Firstly, personal economic independence is by itself not evil; but the criterion of value behind it may well be. Subscription to it as a necessary ideal is a presupposition of a materialist worldview, and adherence to it means a preference for the nuclear family over the extended. This in turn is the result of an exaggerated individualism and subjectivism. Personal economic independence is more often than not the prerequisite of the undisciplined and undisciplinable. Secondly, postponement of marriage exposes both sexes to temptation. Marriage is a shield for virtue. Thirdly, in the extended family, early marriage does not make impossible demands upon spouses. It is possible for both of them to attend school or work, since there would always be loving relatives at home to run the household and bring up the children. Islam, then, would recommend to all Muslims

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¹⁶It is one of His signs that He created of yourselves spouses in whom to find quiescence, that He established between you and them love and compassion. To those who are rational, these are significant signs (30-21).

to marry, to do so at an early age, and always to opt for living in the extended family.

E. THE EXTENDED FAMILY

Allah (SWT) has established the family in its extended form. The *sharī'ah* has girded it with legislation specifying the dependents whose support is obligatory and the distribution of inheritance rights among them.¹⁷ Generally speaking, any relative is a dependent, however remote his kinship may be, provided he is in need and there is no capable adult male relative closer to him than the relative in question. Grandparents and grandchildren, uncles, and their offspring, have priority. Agnate relations are prior to cognate ones. In practice, the Muslim family is composed of some twenty or so persons and living in a many-centered compound with one kitchen and one *dīwān* (court) where all members gather around the elders and guests are received.

The Muslim family suffers from no generation gap as three generations live together. Thus, the socialization and acculturation of the young is always complete, guaranteeing the transmission of tradition and culture with as little adulteration as possible. Here, the past is genuinely in touch with the present and the future. Another crucial advantage of the extended family is that it provides its members with instant company whenever he desires it. And there are usually enough to choose from, according to the prevailing mood. There is always somebody ready to play with, to joke with, to discuss with, to contemplate with, to cry with, and to hope with. This is a crucial prerequisite for mental health. The extended family never lacks a child element, an adult element, a feminine element, a masculine element, an elderly element wiser and more experienced than all the others.

True, the extended family does impose upon its members discipline and mutual sacrifice. It may, at times, reduce their privacy. But life and this world do not permit us to carry on with our lives without discipline or sacrifice, as if the world was made for the individual person. Certainly, it is good to have to discipline oneself and to sacrifice altruistically for the others. It is best for us that we learn how to discipline ourselves

¹⁷Consult any text of the *Shari'ah* (e.g., al Jaziri's *Al Fiqh 'alā al Madhāhib al Arba'ah* for details of the Islamic laws of inheritance.

at home, at the hands of those who love us and whom we love, rather than at the hands of strangers.

F. THE CAREER WOMAN AND THE ISLAMIC WORKER

So many Muslim women are copying the West in seeking a career through which to achieve economic independence and personal freedom, that something must be said about Islam's position on the problem.

As far as the overwhelming majority of Muslim women are concerned, there is little or no doubt but they are moving towards a full-time permanent career as housewives and mothers. It is needless to point out that such career demands as much or more training as any career outside the home. It is to warp that noble career to describe it in terms of cooking and domestic chores. It involves taking care of humans, old and young; and that is the most difficult job on earth. It requires all the mature wisdom, intelligence, artistry, creativity, ready wit and experience the person can have. Training is certainly in order for all the time that the person can spend in it, whether in the discipline of homemaking, or those of education, of literature and the arts, of history, psychology and culture.

Although homemaking, childbearing and childrearing are a universal career, it remains true that it does not exhaust the energies of a woman throughout her life. Her membership in the extended family, whether on her side or on that of her husband, will provide her with assistants and therefore with more leisure. Her childbearing cares may not last beyond two or three decades at the longest. Her life may be three whole decades longer. Is it right that Muslim women waste this valuable time on family gossip when they could be helping the *ummah* with their talents and energies? There are women equally who may not be fortunate enough to marry at all, or to have children or even to live in an extended family. How does Islam perceive their life to be?

Every woman, like every man, must carry the burden of serving Allah (SWT) and benefitting the *ummah*, according to his or her talents and best disposition. This task is doubly imperative today because of the decay and dormancy of the *ummah*. Nobody can and should be spared. Our present circumstances demand that every woman be a career woman at least during some portion of her life. This could be during her stu-

dent days, or during her motherhood period if she lives in a large extended family, or after her motherhood period.

Her first task is to undergo training as an Islamic worker, to awaken her mind to and nourish it with Islamic wisdom, to discipline and exercise herself in Islamic work, and to prepare herself for such work as the Islamic movement may assign to her. She ought to have acquired the skills to awaken and teach other Muslims, and to mobilize them in service to the divine cause. And she ought to develop the skills required by social work in city and village. Through her social work she should awaken the people to their Islamic duty and help them through teaching and good example to render the services Muslims owe to Allah (SWT) and the *ummah*. Practically every field of activity is open to and needs her. There are whole professions which she can monopolize; but Muslim society has far more need for the Islamic woman worker than any mobilization of women can bring in this generation.