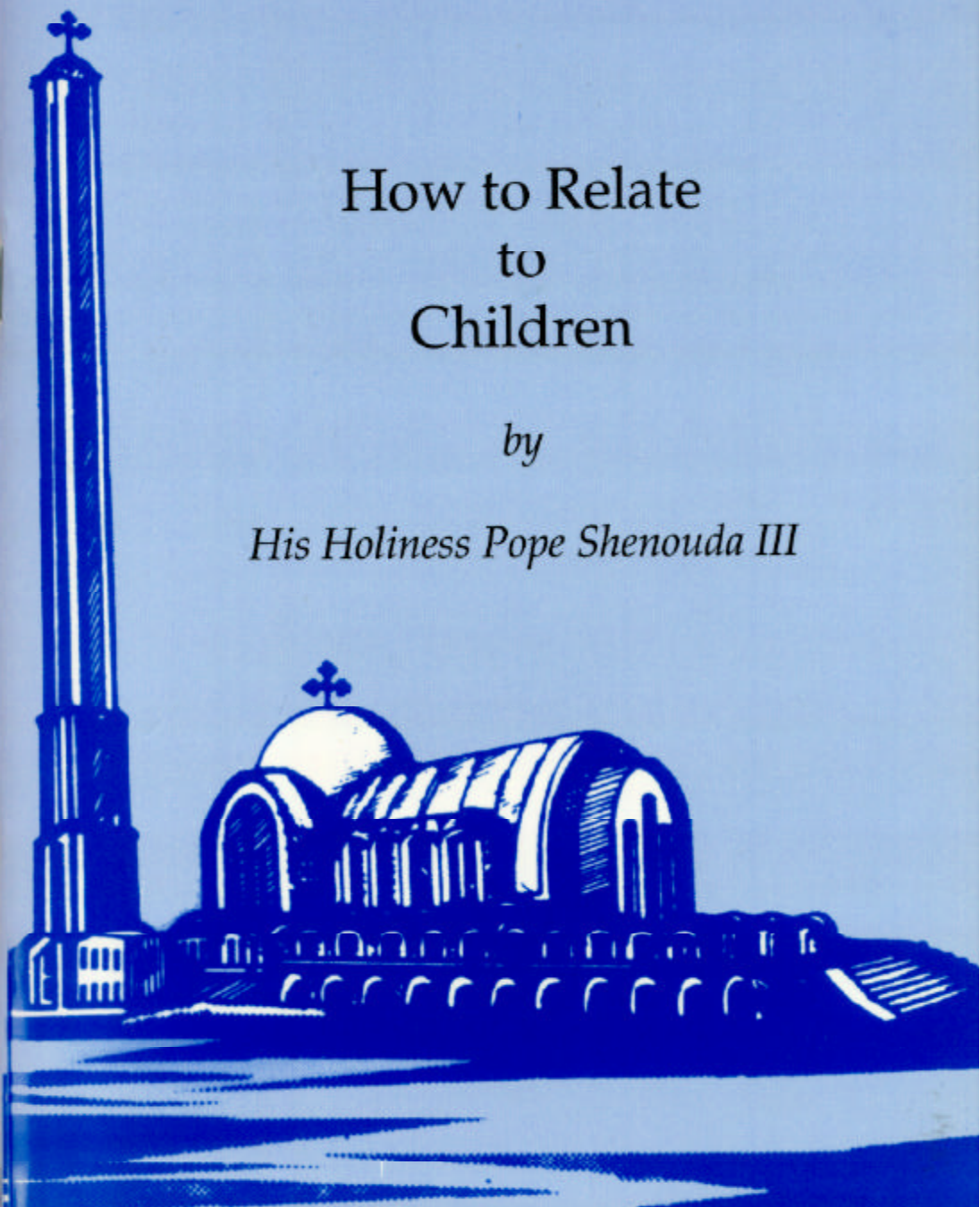


How to Relate  
to  
Children

*by*

*His Holiness Pope Shenouda III*





**COPTIC ORTHODOX  
PATRIARCHATE**



*See of St. Mark*

**How to Relate  
to  
Children**

**BY**

**HIS HOLINESS POPE SHENOUDA III**

How to Relate to Children

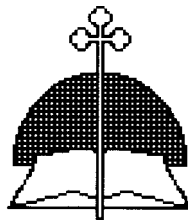
Copyright © 1995 by C.O.P.T.  
Coptic Orthodox Publication and Translation  
Postal Address:  
P.O. Box B63  
BEXLEY N.S.W. 2207  
SYDNEY AUSTRALIA

All rights reserved.

Title: How to Relate to Children  
Author: His Holiness Pope Shenouda III  
ISBN: 0 908000 26 X  
Translated by: Mr Emile Bassilious  
Edited by: C.O.P.T.

Printed in Australia by  
Westend Press  
Ingleburn NSW 2565  
First Edition 1995

Published by



**C.O.P.T.**



*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of  
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*

**How to Relate  
to  
Children**

was printed  
on the occasion of the

**Papal Visit  
Australia 1995**

by

**His Holiness Pope Shenouda III**  
Patriarch of the See of St Mark

# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

### Part One-Stage of Early Childhood

GO DOWN TO HIS LEVEL  
HOW TO BEGIN  
THE IMPORTANCE OF HIS SENSES  
ANIMALS AND BIRDS  
PLAYING  
LAUGHTER  
MOTION  
THE LOUD VOICE  
PRAYER  
IMAGINATION  
MOTION AND TUNE  
HATES PROLONGATION AND LOVES REPETITION  
IMITATION  
THE LOVE FACTOR  
JEALOUSY  
OWNS EVERYTHING  
THE TRUTH  
COLOURS  
LOVE OF CHANGING  
PRAISE & ENCOURAGEMENT  
INTIMIDATION  
CHILD'S CONCERN  
GIVING  
ABILITY OF MEMORIZING  
RITUALS  
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHILDHOOD

## **Part Two-Stage of Late Childhood**

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE TWO STAGES

DIFFERENCE

BROADER SOCIETY

SUNDAY SCHOOLS

DELIVERY HAND OVER

THE PROPER LESSON

THE CHILD IS A BELIEVER

THE STORIES

HOW TO NARRATE THE STORIES OF MARTYRS

PUNISHMENT AND REWARDS

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many write for adults and few are those who write for children. Also, many occupy themselves talking with adults, but rare are those who love to talk to children.

So, sometimes children feel they are not the core of attention and respect of adults, and accordingly they try to draw their attention by many ways, perhaps by outcry or stubbornness or (naughtiness).

In this book, we need to talk about the child, his mentality and how to relate to him and gain his love, and to serve him spiritually, socially and culturally.

Because the child is the first cell of the society and the church, if we gain him, we win an entire generation, and if we lose him we lose the future of the generation we live in, and consequent loss of the other generations.

I personally love children and love to joke, play, talk and make friends with them. In childhood I find innocence, truth and openness, as well as the quick response which we lack in adults.

This book is not the outcome of a study of books of psychology and education, but the result of personal experiences with the children in Sunday School or at the numerous meetings at the Church, and with families, kindergartens, clubs, etc...



I offer this book as a present to those responsible for education at church and also at home and those concerned with children. I gave many lectures on this subject; the most recent was at St. George's Church, Sporting, Alexandria in August 1992, at the "Week of the Child" prepared by Rev. Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty, may God bless his sincere efforts to serve the stage of childhood.

**Pope Shenouda III**

# **Part One**

## **Stage of Early Childhood**

Covers the first years of the child, from birth to kindergarten.

## **GO DOWN TO HIS LEVEL**

The stage of nursery and early childhood has distinctive qualities which we ought to know in order to relate to a child... we relate to him with what is suitable to the level of his mentality.

If we fail - to a great extent - such failure returns to us, we must have misunderstood him or used the wrong means to attract him.

In the first place and before everything, we must go down to the level of the child and not talk to him from above.

You must know what he likes and does not like. To understand his nature and go along with it, not to compel him to submit to your nature.

Make him feel that you are on his side, and you are a friend. This is the basis of dealings.

Remember the saying of St. Paul the Apostle, *“To the Jews I became as a Jew that I might win Jews. To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak.”* (1 Cor. 9: 20 & 22).

So, to the child you have to become a child that you might win the child.

## **HOW TO BEGIN**

If you meet a child for the first time, or see him during your visit to his family, do not hasten to hold him on your shoulder or jest with him. Perhaps, he might repulse you and this will affect you and so you might ignore him and thus you lose your relation with him.

But it is the nature of the child when he meets a stranger, he first examines, looks and stares at him then he determines his relation with him.

He wants to make sure that this new person is no risk.

We forgive him for that because he is entering a new world and a new relation; he has to feel confident first.

He builds his confidence on the figure of this person, his voice, features, movements and friendliness.

He might fear a certain figure: a man with a beard if he has not seen a bearded man before, or a man with bulging eyes or a lame person.

He might fear a touchy person, or one with a loud voice, or with frowning features, or who rebukes another child in front of him.

He will avoid such a person and might run away from him.

But he will like you if he sees you smiling, laughing, happy faced and kind-hearted.

So if you visit a family and sit among its members - which include a child or some children, beware of what may make them fear you. Respect their feelings and try to be nice in front of them. If you have to say a strong word, say it with no facial features.

A child might not understand the meaning of the word, but he definitely comprehends what the features show.

So begin with a peaceful, happy face, free from nervousness.

For a mother who rebukes her child harshly, and threatens him severely, the child probably cries in fear and appeals for help; not because of his mother's words or threat- for he might not understand her words - but because he is preoccupied with something more serious . What is this thing? It is the features of the mother in her anger. Her looks and features might frighten him and so he cries. He sees unbearably horrible images, and it is quite easy that such images leaves him with a complex or causes him to have nightmares.



And what about the qualities of a kindergarten child?

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF HIS SENSES**

At this stage he uses his senses more than his mind, that is , he interprets his surroundings through what he sees, hears, feels & tastes, more than what he can interpret mentally.

At this age, it is meaningless to give him detailed stories & explanations, because he will not be able to comprehend, but rather, if he asks you a question, answer him in simple, short, understandable words.

The use of audio & visual aids is most useful at this age, for children like pictures more than information.

I remember in 1963, I was invited to give a talk at a servants meeting at Anba Rewais Church in Cairo. Suddenly a child entered and I wanted to simply converse with him, so I asked him about the lesson he had at Sunday School. He thought a little, hesitated and said, “the lesson of the dove”. I was surprised at his answer because I had compiled the Sunday School programme of the primary school years, and there was no lesson about the dove.

At this point one of the servants interfered and asked the child to show her the picture given to him at Sunday School. The picture was of the Holy Family and there was a dove in one corner. The child was not interested in the whole lesson but the dove occupied all his thinking and that is why he said the lesson of the dove!!

## **ANIMALS AND BIRDS**

The child in this age loves animals and birds and sees them as talking creatures. He might embrace a live cat, or a stuffed toy (a dog or a cat) and speak to it as if it is a living being.

At this age we can teach the story of Balaam's donkey and the child will accept the story more than a high school student. Everything before him is alive, not only the statues and toys, but pictures too.

These pictures, statues and toys - in his sight - can move, talk and become living characters that can work with him and listen to him!!

I remember in the sixties when I was a bishop, I never attended a marriage ceremony at a church (I still don't) . But I used to go to the church and wait in the reception room, then congratulate the couple after the marriage.

While I was among the guests waiting, a child (son of a priest) came to me and innocently said, "Do you remember when we were playing with the rooster?".

I smiled and replied lovingly, "Yes I remember". Those who were present were amazed, who is this child with whom the bishop plays! and when did it take place?

I explained the matter to them: once I was visiting his father (the priest) and in the reception room there was a carpet with woven pictures of roosters and birds. I pointed at one of the





roosters and said, “I’ll take this one”, but he said, “I’ll take it”, and we continued playing this game, to which he remembered almost one year later .

At this age, animal stories satisfy the child’s imagination and suit his age. When they have an objective, the more beneficial they are. The child likes Mickey Mouse stories; they are entertaining, amusing, make him laugh and keep him calm.

Showing such stories on video tapes is much better than allowing them to watch television, because firstly we cannot guarantee how safe the TV programs are, and secondly, we cannot control the time of the TV program. However, we have a wide choice of what videos we can show children.

## **PLAYING**

The child loves playing, in which he finds his amusement and enjoyment. He also loves the person who gives him toys and who play with him.

We have to provide the games which he likes, not what we like. There are many games not only for amusement but contain intellectual stimulation and skill exercises, such as the use of different materials of various colours & shapes, like blocks, plastic, and so on, to design or construct things. He can also use these materials in assembling and dismantling.

Sometimes the child likes to play with his cat or dog or with other children. He loves the kindergarten because of the many

games there as well as the spacious grounds where he can run and play.

In his play, he likes to try many things: climbing a tree, jumping from one place to the other, or riding a wooden horse or car.

And because we do not provide for him the necessary games, he could make noise or cause damages to what he plays with at home.

Some families have a special games room for the children, while some arrange for their children to join the church's club or other public clubs - with good reputation - or kindergartens.

Very often the children do wrong things because they lack attention by adults, and thus we fail to provide the means by which they can use their energy or occupy their time. I put this important question before the fathers, mothers and those looking after Sunday Schools (church education):

How can the children occupy their time ?

What have we offered to them in this area?



A small child can play with anything, he can hold anything - which could be harmful - and put it in his mouth. Many medicines have labels "Keep out of reach of children". Also, he can throw things and cause it to break, or tear paper, or play

with something precious or fragile, or pour liquid out of a bottle.

For such damages, parents might become annoyed and hit or punish the child. They are to be blamed for not giving attention to these things, and the child who does not understand.

My advice is to keep away from your children the things which you consider to be of great value or price and do not leave it before them and then punish them if they are damaged.

Keep it in mind that you are dealing with a child who behaves in such a manner because he does not know any better.

Do not think that his play is rebelling against obedience and calmness.

If you want to be obeyed, ask what is possible. Do not command him with something which does not agree with his nature, then order him to obey.

Do not make his obedience to you a restriction on his freedom, for if this is misused it should not be treated with harshness.

## **LAUGHTER**

A child likes what makes him laugh. We might even find that a child can laugh for no reason at all.

Certainly, there must be a reason which agrees with his mentality as a child or something strange or unusual, a certain scene, a specific motion, a repeated or tuned word.

By laughter he expresses his pleasure or his happiness. His association with a certain person may please him, make him laugh or smile. He delights in the cheerful person who makes him laugh.

## **MOTION**

In the nature of a child is his continual motion he has energy that he uses in movement. We cannot seat him in a place with his hands tied up and keep him silent neither talking or moving..!! If we did not provide a suitable moving area, he will move in a way which we might consider disturbing, then we rebuke or punish him. The blame is not his but ours.

Children might be pleased with a Sunday School teacher who teaches them a hymn with motion. Or during the lesson, he asks questions and they raise their hands or stand up to answer. They are kept busy by standing up and sitting down, or reciting, under the supervision of the teacher.

A motion-loving child could not stay at church for two to three hours during Mass without movement. A “Psaltos” child, who wears a tunic and serves at Mass, finds himself moving with the priest, or holding a candle during the Gospel reading, he kneels, worships and stands up during prayer. We make him use his energy.

I remember a family visited me at my office in Cairo and they had a child with them. As the office was spacious, he started to run and play. The mother rebuked him saying, “Boy, come here, sit down and be silent, stop running otherwise His Holiness will be displeased with you”. But I said to him, “Play as you like”. The child felt confident and continued his running in the office until he became tired, then he sat down calmly.

Do not ask a child to sit down and be without movement, as this is against his nature; and do not force him by rebuke or threat.



Do not ask a child to act as adults. Remember the saying of St. Paul the Apostle, “*When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things*”. (1 Cor. 13:11). Do not ask from a child any actions not in line with his age, or demand maturity above his level.

## **THE LOUD VOICE**

Naturally, a child has a loud voice, his larynx has not been strained yet. It is difficult for him to speak in a low whispering voice. Very often we rebuke him because of his loud voice if it disturbs others.

A kindergarten child has no words to express what he wants, so he screams and cries as means of expression. This annoys

people, especially at church and during Mass, in the reverence of prayer, or when listening to the sermon.

Therefore, in some churches overseas, there is the “Glass Room” - sometimes called “Crying Room” where mothers stay with their children and listen to the Mass through loud speakers and see everything through the glass. The children’s voices, screams and crying will not be heard or interrupt the prayers because the glass room is sound proof.



There are other means of helping children occupy their time, which we experienced in the sixties.

I used to give a lecture every Friday at St Mark’s Hall in Cairo. Some families used to attend the meeting with their children. One of the beloved servants volunteered to take all the children into classroom outside the hall and give them a lesson or tell them a story or sing some hymns, keeping them busy during the lecture.

## **PRAYER**

We must teach our children to pray and raise their hands in prayer, kneel and worship.

We repeat prayers with them until they can memorise them on their own. The principle of memorising prayers was given by

the Lord - even to adults - when He said to them, “*When you pray, say : Our Father in heaven...*” (Luke 11:2). Also, this principle is explicit to us when we read: “*...Whenever you come together, each of you has a Psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation...*” (1 Cor. 14:26).

The people used to pray the Psalms of Ascents, on their way to the House of the Lord. If the adults are using the memorised prayers, it is important for the children to memorise them as well.

The family prayers have its effect on the child. His seeing the adults pray, gives him a good example to follow. Also, the existence of a place at home for prayer, with an icon, cross and a night-lamp (or electric light), all this encourages him to pray. It also, teaches him - when he grows up - to resort to God in prayer to answer our requests, solve our problems and heal our sicknesses.

## **IMAGINATION**

A child has a broad imagination by which he can write stories and imagine incidents that never happened, believe and tell them. Do not say to him, because of his imagination, that he is a liar !

He does not mean to lie, but he relates his imagination as if it is true. You can keep pace with him and see how the story will end, or correct its line of direction - which he will accept from you and consider you co-author of the story!

It happened some fifty years ago that a man was reading by the light of a kerosene lamp - electricity was not yet connected to this house. Beside him there was a child playing and making noise and hindering him from reading. He said to the child jokingly and warningly: “What would you do if I put you inside this lamp”?!

The child smiled and said jokingly, “I would climb the wick”!!!

## **MOTION AND TUNE**

A child loves movement and so he likes songs accompanied with motions. He memorises and performs it more cleverly if his hands, head or features move to express the meaning of the words. Such movements please him and agree with using his stored energy.

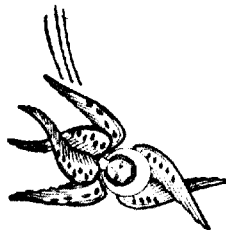
The servant who uses the motion system with the children at Sunday School, spares them the wrong movements by which they annoy each other.

Besides, the information in which more than one sense contributes, is more established.

Children like the tuned expressions. Some teachers make them memorise the names of the books in the Holy Bible which they put in tuned words. They also memorise some Bible stories as well as the letters of the Coptic language.

It is a chance to make them memorise some tunes and hymns.





## **HATES PROLONGATION AND LOVES REPETITION**

A child cannot concentrate on long speech and if you did so, he will turn away and keep himself busy with something else!!! He likes brief messages which he can pick up and understand easily.

If you are compelled to tell a long story, try and make it in parts, a series of short stories, each independent of itself, prolongation causes boredom to the child.

Also, he loves the repeated phrases. Whenever you tell him a story in which a phrase is repeated from time to time as the refrain in a hymn, he gives it more attention and says it because of his joy in repeating it, it is like a rhyme.

## **IMITATION**

A child in kindergarten and primary stages is fond of imitating. He copies the movements of hands, head and features. He also imitates the walking and voices, he tries to absorb the characteristics of others and imitate them.

Sunday School teachers and family members of the child have to be watchful otherwise he will imitate something bad of them.

If a mother discovered that her child says a strange word or does a queer movement, she must understand that he picked it

from others, maybe the neighbours, the visitors, a family member or the television.

Here, we have to safeguard the child's environment as much as possible.

Before he leaves home (when he is older) to join the wider world, we must establish in him good principles which make him reject what he sees or hears contradicting such principles.

When he does wrong, we do not rebuke him with a bad word, for fear that he picks it up and uses it with others.

Here too we find the danger of domestic disputes between married couples, the language they exchange and the wrong actions in front of the children. It is either they pick up the same wording and use it, or their parents' ideals are no more a source of their education.

Sometimes adults talk in front of children assuming that they do not understand!!

If a baby cannot understand, undoubtedly a child who starts talking, expands his comprehension day after day. Even if he does not understand all what he hears, he grasps from the features and intensity of sound for example and then draws a conclusion. He might imitate what he hears or sees even without understanding.

Comprehension is not important to him, but the sight.

A child imitates his mother in all that she does. She enters the church, stands up to pray and makes the sign of the Cross, and he does the same. If she kneels before the altar or greets the priest and kisses his hand, he does the same.

He imitates his mother and his father if he enters the church with him.

If the parents are religious, he will pick up their piety. Here we see marriage is a responsibility and not just a mere relationship between a couple. It is an educational and spiritual mission for the children - whether from the point of education or the good example.

Therefore, for those intending to get married, they must be spiritually and educationally qualified for being a role model for future generations.



A child does not forget what he hears, but frequently he recalls and repeats it, even in front of visitors, or other members of the family, and tells whoever he meets “Dad said so. Mum says so” or he may even recall an event eg. Dad hit Mum!

A child does not keep a secret.

Beware of any secrets said in front of him assuming that he does not hear it because he is asleep, while he is not.

## **THE LOVE FACTOR**

If you love a child, you can control him, because the child follows who loves him and obeys him as he feels assured and trusts in him. On the contrary, he dislikes whom he does not perceive his love. He might behave stubbornly with him and might think of hurting him. !

When I was young, I read a story about a piper, it is a well known story, perhaps all of you have read it, this piper entered a village and began to blow his pipe and the children gathered around him. He moves from one lane to the other and the children behind him and other groups join him, moving from place to place in joy and pleasure.

Then, try to love the children because they like those who play with them. After you gain their love, you can teach them what they need to know or what is suitable for them . They will accept your teaching and repeat it after you, especially if it is a song or rhyme, or in short phrases accompanied with motion.

## **JEALOUSY**

If you play with children or praise them beware of jealousy.

A child becomes very jealous if another child receives love or praise from you which he did not get, or if you played with another child and ignored him, or if you gave to one and did not give to him, he will be hurt from your lack of affection

towards him. He might take revenge on the other child, punch him or hurt him even at a later time.

The brothers of the righteous Joseph became jealous of him because of his dreams and because of the love of his father toward him more than them, and the tunic of many colours which he made for him. Their jealousy reached the point that they wanted to get rid of him and so they sold him as a slave (Gen. 37:3). How much more the small children, whose jealousy is greater than the adults?!

So try to be fair with children, and do not make them hate each other because of you.

Do not let two children quarrel over a toy; use double instead of single games or give each of them similar toys.

## **OWNS EVERYTHING**

A child feels he has the right to take everything!

He owns everything, his mind will not accept that such thing belongs to the father or mother or brothers or visitors, but he takes it without hindrance or restraint. If you want to take it from him he cries and screams and protests, as if you are wrong to recover it and he is not wrong to take it!!



Do not accuse him of being a thief or a robber!! These are new words to him, which he does not understand or accept, and therefore it is as if you are teaching him swear words which he unknowingly will use them when talking to others..

Also, do not rebuke, smack or be harsh on him if he took something which does not belong to him . In this case, you can hide the important items which you fear he can take and spoil. Do not put things within his reach especially medicines, which he can take and put straight into his mouth. You can distract him with something else so that he leaves what is in his hand - which you want to take - especially if you make the substitute attractive, such as a beautiful toy or something which makes a sound, so that he can forget what he was preoccupied with.

## **THE TRUTH**

A child is a small human being entering a new society. He does not know how this society will treat him, and who is trustworthy. He has confidence in you through your love and gifts.

Also, he will trust you if you are truthful with him, whether in the information or dates you give him.

Beware of lying because he has enough openness to say to you that you are lying (if he knows this word) or at least to tell you that “you are making fun of me”, or will not believe all you say to him in future.. By this, you have introduced doubt into his mind about you and caused him to lose some of his simplicity



and can therefore lead him to confusion. Also, if he realises that you have tried to trick him or deceive him in order to reach your aim, you will cause great harm in teaching him lying and deceit.



A child loves nature in detail: trees, flowers, seas, roses, birds, fish and is pleased when his clothes have such pictures on them. He also likes to draw and look at pictures. When we teach him to read, we make use of such points, we say to him “A” for Apple, “B” for Ball, “C” for Cat, to help them with their pronunciation through the use of illustrations.

## COLOURS

A child loves colours and its variety. He likes butterflies and fish for their many colours. When you consider his clothes, he is not concerned about its material, or its price, but the colour of the garment which he considers important.

We notice that our father Jacob when he wanted to please his young son Joseph, “... *made him a tunic of many colours*” (*Gen. 37:3*) which proved, “he loved him more than all his children.”.

When I give out chocolates to children, I choose from those with colourful wrappings, although all are one kind, saying to the child, “This is the green, this is the yellow and this is the blue.” The child will be happy with this and might say, “I want

the red too”. Here the interest in colour is more than quality. The interest in quality comes later when he tastes it. Nevertheless colours are what matters most to children.

Hence, colours are entertaining for a child. You give him two sheets: one with a pattern in colours and the other in just lines with no colours. He would then take from the colouring material and paint each part similar to the corresponding pattern.

## **LOVE OF CHANGING**

A child becomes bored with the one thing, he likes variety and therefore likes change.

The same toy does not satisfy him, but a change in the kind of toys, its shape and motion will. He does not find much joy in a motionless toy but likes a moving one, especially if - at the same time - it has sound effects. But if he plays with it for a long time, he will get bored and leave it and search for another thing.

He searches for a new world where he can increase his knowledge with new things. He knows all this by his senses, and then as he matures, uses his mind more than his senses.

From here comes the importance of the demonstrative means for Sunday School children. The organisations which use the audio-visual aids can attract the child more. We must not ignore such means and the scenes which attract the children,

then blame those who used them or blame the television for having influence on children.

We must present the alternative to the child.

## **PRAISE & ENCOURAGEMENT**

A child in kindergarten or primary school tends to like praise which he interprets as a sign of love.

Do not say: “I worry about him becoming too proud or vain, and I want to teach him to be humble, and says about himself that he is a sinner”.

Such logic does not suit the child at all. But by praising and encouraging the child will trust in the rightness of his actions.

The mature age is when a person knows good and truth by himself. He comprehends this intellectually or through enlightenment and education. But at the age of childhood, he knows that such action is good because they praise or encourage him for it, or knows it is wrong because they forbid him from doing it.

By praising, you gain the child. By praising, you show him your love and also encourage him to perform good deeds.

For example, if the mother says, “Dad loves good children who sit quietly and are not naughty”, you will find the child saying, “Mum, I’m quiet, I’m not naughty.”

If the mother says, “God loves the good children who love and play with their younger brothers and sisters”, he will say, “Mum, I love my little sister and play with her.”

And so, praising sometimes carries a kind of inspiration which induces him to do good.

A child deserves praise, for the child is sensitive and can distinguish between the things which will give him praise and those which cause punishment..

But if he does something wrong, ignore it so he will understand he will not receive praise. If you rebuke him over it, do not use a wrong word which he might pick and use with others.

Be aware that you are facing a sensitive device that listens and copies.

Dealing with children teaches us adults how to select mannerly words so that we do not utter a bad word which they can learn from us. Undoubtedly this is the responsibility of the parents, relatives and church servants.

A child is keen over his dignity, and does not like to be humiliated because of his mistakes. Also he does not like to lose the love or praise of those who encourage and commend him.

You can say to him, “No my dear, don't do that, it is not right.”

Be very cautious of the words of rebuke.

Thank God, in the Coptic language, there are no particular words of insult. But vice is the opposite of virtue, and so words of offence are made out in a compound way and not with a special word, for example, the word “talkative” comes in a constructive word (much talk). Therefore you can teach a child the good things and moral qualities in a positive way.

## **INTIMIDATION**

Also, beware of being intimidating. Do not cause him to be afraid of God and the church fathers.

Do not say to him “God will get angry with you”, “God will not love you if you do that”, or “If you did that, God will send you to hell” .

Do not make the image of God fearful to the child, and that God is waiting to punish him, or that God is always against his freedom and his wishes, or that God is not forgiving , or that the child is liable to lose God’s love for him for any reason, or that his relationship with God goes through a lengthy chain of threats.

I shall tell you a true story to prove the gravity of this matter .

I remember before becoming a monk, we had a neighbour who was sick on his deathbed. He had a child who was sent away to some relatives in order not to see his father at the time of his death. The child returned home two weeks after his father died.

When the child asked about his father, they told him “God took him”.

He was angry with God for a very long time!!! How can God take his father away from him and deprive him of the father he loves?!

The way the child was told of his father’s death was totally inappropriate. They could have said, “Your father went to heaven .”

## **CHILD’S CONCERN**

I encountered an incident which produced a great effect on me. It proved to be a very useful and practical lesson, presented a basic method in my dealings with children.

One day a family with a child visited me. The mother wanted to show me how clever her son is in memorising. She kept urging him, “Say to His Holiness ‘Our Father who art....’ Sing ‘Agios...’” But the child looked at me in innocence and joy and said, “Have you seen my new red shoes?”

The child was very proud of his new red shoes and all his thoughts were concentrated on it. He wanted everyone to share his happiness by drawing their attention to the new shoes he is wearing, while the mother wanted to move him to another spiritual atmosphere which he was not ready for.

From that time, whenever I see a child I firstly praise his beautiful clothes, its shapes, designs and colours. In the case of a girl, I praise her earrings or the bow in her hair or the toy in her hand, or praise and endear children in general by calling them “honey”, “beautiful”, giving them chocolates, candies or presents.

After satisfying them with this, we can go into “Our Father” and “Agios”. The child is now ready to recite what he has learned, after he felt the love of those around him .

With children we must not take the approach of an “inspector” or “examiner”, for this is a wrong action. It was said, “*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.*” (Prov. 25:11)

## **GIVING**

A child at this age does not know the philosophies of love, but love to him means giving.

God loves us, so He gives us everything, even mum and dad are gifts from God to us. When you express your love for a child, you give too.

Giving differs according to the child’s preference.

We give him what he likes with variation, some sweets, a toy, or a religious picture or icon or a cross, or at least give him a smile, affection and encouragement.

As the child rejoices in our giving to him, we must also teach him to give. If his whole life is just taking, this is not good for him. Therefore, we first must teach him to give. There are many examples:

✠ When you have visitors, instead of you distributing the sweets, ask the child to do this, saying, “Take and give this, to so and so...” He will be pleased with this as it makes him feel that he is the host who gives.

✠ The same can be applied at the dining table.

✠ We can encourage him to give in his dealings with his brothers and sisters.

✠ Or the mother can say to him, “Keep this, for dad until he comes and you give it to him; he will be pleased with you and thank you.”

✠ Every time he gives something to others, we should praise and encourage him.

✠ Also, we can tell him stories about giving; there are many in the Holy Bible or in the life of the saints.

I remember an incident which happened to me in 1967:

The Theological Seminary was in severe financial straits which obliged the Head of the Papal Bureau to send out letters announcing the suspension of expenditure on the seminary and other religious institutes.

We celebrated Liturgies for this purpose. At the end of one of the Holy Masses, many came and presented donations for the Seminary. A child saw those who were coming and giving, he



came to me, put his hand in his pocket and gave me a candy, another child then came and also gave me a candy and said a few kind words.

## **ABILITY OF MEMORIZING**

A child learns fast and enjoys a very good memory, a new memory not filled yet, like a computer's memory which can accommodate 50,000 words, and only recorded 100 words.

Whenever the child grew, mixed in society, entered school and various information added to his mind and memory, as well as words from different languages, by then the memory, at this mature age, will not be able to accept everything, and might forget, contrary to the child who is born with a virgin memory.

As one educationalist said: A child, in the first five years of his age, can memorize a dictionary. He is born without knowing one word of the language, then he learns and memorizes words of conversation and names of things before him. We take advantage of such ability to make him memorize what is beneficial to him.

We make him memorize verses, hymns and tunes, as well as stories from the Bible and if the saints.

Make him memorize prayers- although he does not comprehend; the time of understanding and thinking will come later. we make the children memorize the "Creed", "Our

Father” and other prayers and leave the understanding to the future stages of maturity.

A Sunday School teacher who neglects teaching the children to learn by heart, truly he fails to make use of the advantages of such stage of their lives.

We say the same direction to the parents who ignore making their children memorize and forget the Lord’s commandment in which He said, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart, you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house.”

You all be sure, if you did not fill the minds of the children with useful information, it will be filled with other things.

If it is not filled with hymns and church tunes, it will be filled with songs from other sources.

If it is not filled with the stories of saints and personalities from the Bible, it will be filled with many trivialities and perhaps harmful information.

I wish we work out a children’s program for home or for Sunday school.

Also, we can hang framed verses in our homes, so that the children can memorize and the adults as well.

The being of a child in a home becomes a spiritual blessing for the whole family. Because of him they memorize verses and

hymns and also because of him they watch their language and use proper and decent words and grow spiritually with him..

## **RITUALS**

How beautiful are our churches which contain all what satisfy the senses of a child, such satisfaction transforms to his soul too.

Consider what is found in the church: icons, pictures of angels and saints, the hymns, music and incense. In addition there are the priestly garments, the movements of the priest and deacons. The candles they hold during the reading of the gospel and around the altar, kneeling and worshipping. All these rituals satisfy a child's mind and attract him to the church.

So a child who is ordained a deacon when he is young and gets used to coming to church and sharing in its sacraments becomes more deeply rooted in his spiritualities.

Also these rituals implant faith in the child deeply so he shall not deviate from them when he grows older.

A child rejoices when he wears a tunic and enters the sanctuary, holds a candle in his hand or repeats some verses after the priest, and finally partakes of the Holy Sacraments.

Here, the rituals do not become mere rituals but include faith, dogma, spiritualities, practice and knowledge.

A child can receive all this while he is at an age of submission, before he gets older and enters the stage when the mind has a

dominant influence over everything, and tries to debate and argue with all he takes in.

Therefore if a child receives the dogma and faith in his childhood, when he goes into the stage of mental maturity, the mind will help him to understand and not to doubt. Also we do not forget the grace that works in him through the divine sacraments.

But those who say: “We baptise only when the child matures and believes”, truly deprive him of the association of the church in his childhood. We do not know, when he grows up, what would become of him? And what barriers against faith could have entered into him.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHILDHOOD**

Once a Catholic Pope said: “Give me the children of the world and I will make the whole world Catholic.” You take the children and make them Orthodox. The things that imprint in the mind of a child have a great effect on his whole life. Accordingly psychologists are presently trying to attribute all man’s characters and emotions, his strong or weak personality, to his childhood. Any complexes in him they refer it to what was settled in him during his childhood, or what is in his character: bravery, cowardice, hesitation or how his dealings with people are marked: with confidence or with suspicion .

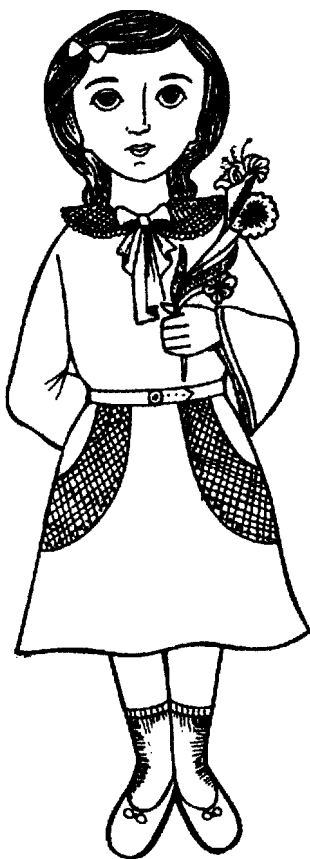
Childhood is the foundation on which you build all his life.

So pay attention to early childhood. Possess knowledge and technique, and fill your hearts with love and affection.

## Part Two

### **Stage of Late Childhood**

Covers the five consecutive years of the child.  
(Approx. the Primary education period)



## **THE RELATION BETWEEN THE TWO STAGE**

As a preface, we cannot place dividers or definite boundaries between one stage and another.

In respect of all children, we cannot certainly say that the stage of early childhood ends at such age, then the stage of late childhood begins at such age, as overlapping could happen with many children.

The situation differs from one child to the other, according to his level of intelligence, state of mind, how he is brought up, and what hereditary qualities he acquires. All these matters affect him and create differences between one child and the other, but in our explanation, we speak about general rules.

Also, change from one stage of a child's life to the next occurs gradually, the child matures in his mind and personality, such maturity could be fast with one child and slow with another.

In addition, we do not forget the various kinds of qualities; one child may be cheerful by nature, one can easily mix with others, while another child may be unsociable and can not make friends easily.

The stages of both early and late childhood may share in some qualities but differ in the level of maturity. They share in the ability of memorizing, and in the love of imitating, and loving those who give love, joking, etc... each is a stage of submission.

## **DIFFERENCE**

During primary school years, a child believes everything he hears, but when he grows up, he accepts some things, questions others and may reject certain thoughts as well. For him, some of these points need to be explained.

In the earlier stage, he considers that everything belongs to him, he takes what he wants as if it is his right.

But here he starts to differentiate between what he owns and what others possess. If he takes something which belongs to others, he feels he is doing wrong and tries to cover up. And if he was asked about things he took, he might lie. Here, lying is a lie not a fantasy as it was in the earlier stage. If they retrieve what he took, he might resist, say nothing or give up and cry.

## **BROADER SOCIETY**

In this stage, he moves to a new society, broader than just the family, it is outside his home.

In this society he meets a variety of people who can affect him, and influence his thinking, apart from his parents and family: teachers and schoolmates. He is then exposed to unfamiliar characters and actions.

It is our duty therefore to give him the necessary attention and protection.



While he is in the family environment, before mixing in society, we must either implant in his mind and heart some principles so that whatever he finds unusual to him, he avoids willingly, or we must watch him carefully and correct the wrong he receives from outside.

Here we need to become friends with the child so that he does not hide anything from us. If he, in his past experience, fears the family and its punishment, definitely he will conceal from them any new developments - all he learns of words and actions - lest he faces beating, rebuke or threat.

But, if we become friends with him and make him feel secure and that his mistakes will receive attention and sincere guidance without harm, then he will reveal everything to us and we can treat matters from the beginning and explain to him how to deal with society, because he will tell us all things without fear.

## **SUNDAY SCHOOLS**

During the primary school years he enters Sunday School where he receives his religious teaching. Some families completely depend on Sunday School and hold them responsible for the religious education of the child. This is wrong because the parents have responsibility over their child whether it is for their religious education or in the supervision of such education.

Then, we ask what is the parents duty of supervising their child's religious education:

How easy it is for the child to go to Sunday School and not pay attention to the lesson and leaves not understanding it or remembering anything of it.

Frequently I used to meet some children and when I asked them about the last lesson at Sunday School, the answers are: I don't know or I don't remember or I didn't attend last week.

Of course, the Sunday school teacher must go over the lesson with the children to make sure they had comprehended it.

Also, the mother must ask her child - when he comes back from church - about the lesson he received. And when the child knows that he will be asked about the lesson, he will definitely pay attention so that he will not be embarrassed and say: "I don't know!"

Also, the parents have to give the child other lessons so his knowledge may increase and in the meantime feel that his parents are religious people. He will respect them and refer to them when he lacks information about the Bible and other spiritual matters.

To a child, religious education is easy because he is at the age of receiving and teaching. He does not doubt anything because he has not yet reached the stage of suspicion.

## **DELIVERY HAND OVER**

A child is always prepared to receive many things, he accepts the information we give to him and does not object, unless it was something funny or unacceptable so he considers the conversation to be a joke .

This is the proper time to implant beliefs, but through delivery not through explanation and education. He, for example, accepts the doctrine of the Trinity. If you train him to make the sign of the cross, he will do it: If you say “In the name of the Father , the Son and the Holy Spirit” he will repeat it after you without questioning. Also when you give him the “Creed”, he will receive it without discussing its contents and without asking about the meaning of its words. If you try to explain to him, you will confuse him, for his mind is not yet mature enough to understand its meanings in depth.

## **THE PROPER LESSON**

My advice to a Sunday School servant is to make the lesson suitable to the age, mentality, circumstances and ability of the children he is serving.

I remember in 1943, I was chosen to teach a class of grade six primary (A nation-wide certificate at that time). I liked this age because it is a transition from childhood to the threshold of adolescence, or approaching it , and so suitable to implant principles. It was Easter and I talked to them about the women

who went very early to the tomb. I wanted the lesson to be practical, so I concentrated on the necessity of going early to church. I talked and explained at length, and then asked, “Are you convinced?” to which they all agreed. Then came my question, “Are you going to come to church early next week?”

Regrettably, they all said they can not. I was embarrassed by such failure and put together the remnants of my state of mind and asked for the reasons. One stood up to express the views of a group of five children and said, “We are not at the end of the school year and we are getting ready for the exams, we stay up late at night studying and so we can not get up early to go to church.”

This group was right and the lesson was not fitting in its time, at the end of the school year and close to the exams.

Another student, representing a group of five or more said, “I go to church with my father who goes late”. For this group too, I found they had an excuse because they are children who have no authority in their hands and cannot go to church without the company of their parents.

Another student stood and said, “I cannot go to church early because every morning I go to buy breakfast for the family”. In fact people must go to church fasting, but not all people do so. If they wanted to have breakfast and they have no servant, they might send this child to buy breakfast from the nearest shop to their home.

The reasons were many and I knew the lesson was mentally convincing but a complete failure from a practical view point.

This failure left a great effect on me and had positive results in my way of teaching. The subject I teach is divided into four parts:

1. Explain the subject and find out the spiritual lessons in it.
2. Apply such lessons in our practical life.
3. Know the obstacles and disadvantages and how to overcome them.
4. Revision, questions and discussion on the subject.

## **THE CHILD IS A BELIEVER**

The child is a born believer. Faith is an instinct implanted in him. You speak to him about praying, he will not object. You teach him words to say to God in his prayer or you tell him say “O’ Lord”, he will not ask you: “Who is God?” or “Who is the Lord?” “Where is He?” or “With whom am I talking....”

Those who say “We wait until the child himself believes”!! forget completely that the child is a believer and faces no obstacles in faith.

This period of time is good to implant the belief of God's love and care for us. You can teach that God is the source of every good around us. He is the one who gave us nature: the sun, the moon and stars, the trees, grass and flowers, the birds and animals ... everything . He is the big loving heart .

Also, He gave us the light and the eyes to see and ears to hear. He gave us the night to sleep and rest .

This age is also good to talk about the might and majesty of God. God, the Almighty, existent everywhere, who sees all what we do and hears all what we say.

The child in his early years thinks that his father is able to give him everything. He might say to his father- while they are walking together- "I want you to buy me this car or building and perhaps this aeroplane (if he saw it in the sky)." His father may joke with him and say, "Yes dear, on our way back I will wrap it for you". The child laughs at the joke and forgets what he asked for.

If the earthly father can do many things, how much more so with the Heavenly Father.

Also, at this age, you can tell him some miraculous stories like: The five loaves and two fish, A man born blind receives sight, The Red Sea Crossing, the Ascension of Jesus to Heaven on a cloud, and Elijah ascends to Heaven on a chariot of fire.

These are true historical stories which are much better than the world's fairy tales, of witchcraft and magic carpets .

## **THE STORIES**

At this age, the child loves stories very much. His mind accepts more than that of his early childhood. He will not get bored or tired of listening even if you spend a long time telling him stories. Probably, every time he sees you, he will ask you for more stories.

I remember in 1963, I attended a Sunday School Conference at El-Mansoura, some children surrounded me and I told them a story. When I visited El-Mansoura the following year, they again gathered around me and asked me to tell them a story as I did last year. If a child went to Sunday school and did not hear a story, it is considered as if he did not receive any teaching. He likes stories and loves those who tell them. Sometimes, he loves his grandmother with whom he stays up late listening to her stories. Therefore, you must know many stories so that the children may love you: stories from the Holy Bible, the lives of saints, the history of the church, even stories of animals and birds or imaginary tales with good objectives.

Believe me, adults too love stories, as long as they are new to them, even in sermons and lectures, but if a story appealed to a child, he may ask you to re-tell it again, especially the stories that show intelligence or fun and laughter. These two kinds appeal to him, so he tries to tell them to his friends.

Take advantage of such interest to tell him useful stories.

It has been a long time since I made a request that you collect as many entertaining and meaningful stories, even through a competition with prizes.

## **HOW TO NARRATE THE STORIES OF MARTYRS**

At this age, the stories that recount the sufferings and torments of the martyrs, are totally unsuitable.

We do not want to scare the child with the stories of flogging, dragging, stoning, severing of organs and all various kinds of torture, so that they do not relate following God and striving to be Christian, with fear for this will frighten him. We must keep fear away from him.

But, we can tell him about the courage of the martyrs, and how they faced the threats of the rulers without fear, like St George when he tore up the orders of Diocletian, or their courage defending their faith during the trials, or their chanting and praising on their way to martyrdom, and their courage in prisons.

They consider their martyrdom as meeting with Christ, moving to paradise and mixing with the angels and saints. The visions and holy apparitions which the martyrs saw, strengthened, encouraged, healed the wounds and restored them sound and unharmed. And so we tell them about the miracles associated with their sufferings such as: a cup of poison given to St George, he makes the sign of the cross on it, drinks it and suffers no harm. The fire by which they wanted to burn St



Polycarpus and it did no harm to him. Also, all the tortures which St John the Evangelist was subjected to.

By this, they find out about God's power which supported and strengthened the martyrs till they completed their struggle and received their crowns.

Also, we can tell them about the miracles of the martyrs after their departure. For example, on St George's Feast, it is not essential that you tell the story of his martyrdom and tortures, but we can narrate some of his miracles so the child acknowledges the power of the martyrs, their intercession and how they are honoured by God. Also we must not forget the Feasts of St Mina, Amir Tadros or St Abanoub and others.

Beware of telling young children about slaying and stripping off the skin.

They have not yet reached the level which understands and appreciates endurance and self-sacrifice, but when they reach such a spiritual level, we can tell them how much the martyrs endured for the sake of their love towards the Lord and steadfastness in faith.

## **PUNISHMENT AND REWARDS**

To love a child does not mean to pamper him in a harmful way.

We must reward him for any good work he does, and gently rebuke him for any wrong doing, especially if it brings harm to others or if it is something unsuitable.

On the other hand, pampering a child and responding to all his requests could teach him selfishness and the insistence to carry out his intentions even if they are wrong. He might reach such a stage of dominance, and threaten you by crying and screaming; even breaking some house contents!!

Here, he must be punished, and do not worry if he cries. It is good for him to suffer in order to give up his state of affairs, for we must remember the saying of the Bible: *“For whom the Lord loves he chastens...”* (Heb. 12:6)

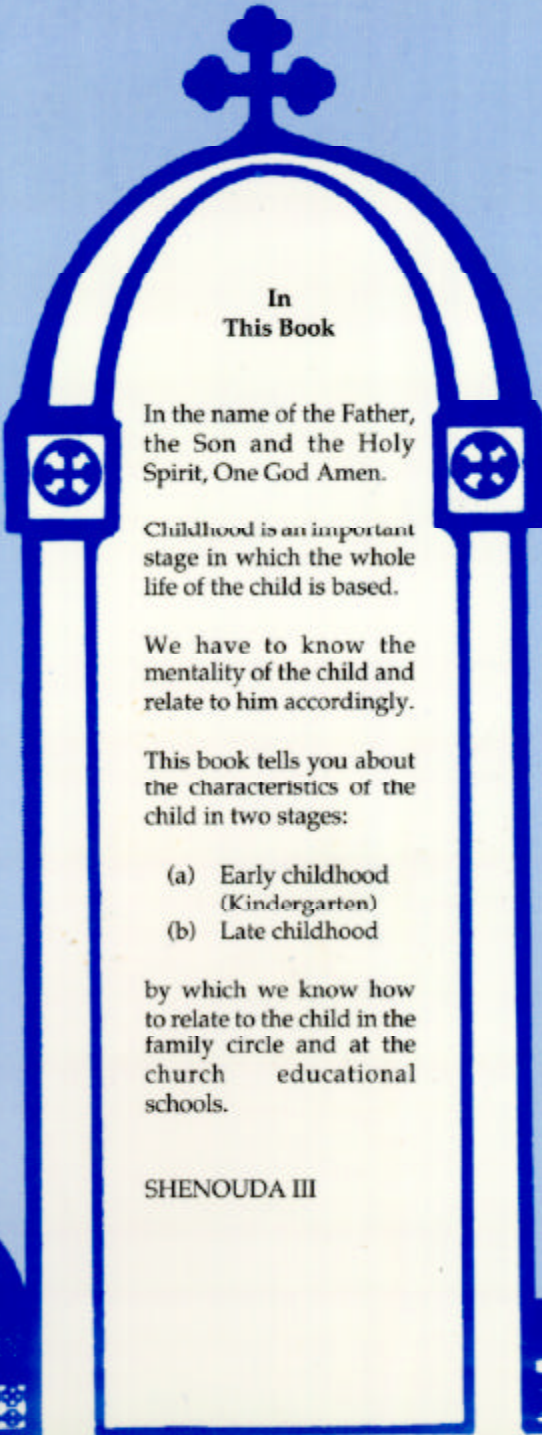
If God - the source of all love - chastens, and this does not contradict with His love, we too must chasten our children. We must discipline them by teaching, but not harshly.

After discipline we show them affection once more so that they know that such discipline was not a change in our feelings towards them, but a change in their actions, and remember that the Lord punished Eli the priest because he did not restrain his sons (1 Sam. 3: 13)

As we implant in them the dogmatic beliefs, we also infuse into them the love of discipline, charity and obedience to elders and acceptance of their rebuke.

Discipline is wrong if it is given in a non-spiritual, inhumane or harsh way, regardless of if it is a small mistake which needs rebuke or a big mistake that needs punishment.

Parents should have compassion in the way they relate to their children, for harsh punishment is to deprive the child of such affection so that he feels he has lost their trust and love. (This is particularly prevalent in later childhood years).



**In  
This Book**

In the name of the Father,  
the Son and the Holy  
Spirit, One God Amen.

Childhood is an important  
stage in which the whole  
life of the child is based.

We have to know the  
mentality of the child and  
relate to him accordingly.

This book tells you about  
the characteristics of the  
child in two stages:

- (a) Early childhood  
(Kindergarten)
- (b) Late childhood

by which we know how  
to relate to the child in the  
family circle and at the  
church educational  
schools.

SHENOUDA III

