Pastoral care of the family in the light of sound psychology

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Abstract

Moral philosophers and theologians argue that the human family is governed by natural law. While philosophers might rationally argue for this, theologians resort to revelation. In theologians' understanding human family is part of the plan of God. Can scientific psychology provide some empirical evidence for "the natural law" argument? If yes, how could psychology enhance the pastoral care of families today? The aim of the present conceptual paper is to offer some contemporary evidence from evolutionary psychology and neurobiology to suggest that, after all, the human brain may be hire-wired for the family. It will go on to reflect on the role of the family in the growth of a Christian in the light some emerging insights from psychology. The later part of the paper will focus on the association between individuals' relationship in the family and their faith-growth as Christians, in terms of their relationship with others and God. The paper will conclude by pointing out some pastoral implications flowing from the above considerations.

Introduction

Most theologians and some moral philosophers argue that the human family is governed by natural law. While philosophers might rationally argue for this, theologians resort to revelation. The implication of revelation is that the human family is part of the plan of God. Can scientific psychology provide some empirical evidence for "the natural law" argument?

The aim of the present conceptual paper is to offer some contemporary evidence from evolutionary theory and neurobiology to suggest that, after all, the human brain may be hire-wired for the family. That is, the family is natural to human beings, and it forms the basic ambient that enables human beings to become and be human.

The first two sections of the paper focus on insights from evolutionary psychology and neurobiology to show the significance of the family for human survival – as individuals and as a species, and to discuss the element of choice and rationality involved in the formation of human family. This implies that it is only right that human marriage and family are governed by certain moral principles based on human nature itself. The third part of the paper draws understanding from one influential theory in child development, namely, attachment theory. It further discusses how early childhood attachment could predict adult stability in relationships, including marriage. Hence marriage and family are tied up in an interrelated cycle: the family of origin provides the ambient for individuals to develop the attachment styles that will determine their relational behaviour in the families that they form as adults. Once again, this adds to the argument for the importance of the human family for individual and collective wellbeing.

The fourth section, the longest part of the paper, builds on the preceding premises to reflect on the role of the family in the growth of a Christian, including in their spirituality. This section focuses on insights such as how the individual's attachment to the caregiver has a direct influence

on their relationship with God, and how their image of God could be related to their parents' image of God.

Finally, the paper points out some pastoral implications that flow from the above insights from sound psychology. First we ask: What is sound Psychology?

0. Sound Psychology

Psychology is the scientific study of cognitive, affective processes and related behavioural processes, in individuals and groups, in humans and animals.

The question that opens our discussion emerges from evolutionary psychology: Have human beings evolved in such a way that they need the family to be fully what they can be: human?

1. Evolutionary Psychology: Is the human brain hardwired for the family?

Evolutionary psychology is an approach within psychology that examines human behaviour in terms of how that behaviour contributed to the survival of the human species.[1] In answering this question, evolutionary psychologists consider how a particular human behaviour was adapted by "natural selection." In what ways did those individuals with that behaviour have an advantage over others in the "survival of the fittest"? And if this behaviour was important in the hunter-gatherer society, did the human brain get hardwired for that behaviour?

In the context of our discussion on the family, we ask ourselves how family-life was vital to the survival of the human species. And if it was vital, then is the human brain hardwired for family life?

About 1.8 million years ago, the pre-human primates began to stand on their feet (*homo erectus*). This evolved as a result of these hominids stopping to use their forelimbs for locomotion and using them primarily to handle tools (*homo habilis*). From a psychological perspective this marked a watershed in "human" history. We became human – even if that was a gradual process: our brains became more and more complex; we became vulnerable in locomotion; and we became heavily dependent on members of our species particularly in the early years of life. This emerged around 200,000 years ago, with the appearance of the *homo sapiens*.

Let us look more practically at the implication of this evolutionary development. A calf of a cow is able to stand on its feet merely thirty minutes after its birth. You watch it the next day: it is all over the place, running uncontrollably. A duckling is able to swim the very day it is hatched. Even a calf of an elephant, big as it is, can stand on its feet within minutes of its birth, and eventually move with the herd.

Now look at a human baby: totally helpless at the time of birth. Curiously, some recent studies have suggested that a baby is able to imitate sounds within a few hours of its birth, but that is soon lost for some reason.[2] Otherwise, the only things that it is capable of doing are to hold someone's finger and suck the breast. In these twin capacities there is something of survival instinct (to be able to suck) and something typical human (holding the thumb against the rest of the fingers really makes us human – *homo habilis*). In a few days, the baby is able to see, but only as far as the face of the mother goes when the baby is held by the mother at the breast.

We take an average of eight to twelve months to crawl, to stand on our feet, and eventually to walk and run. Human baby produces its first real words at about 18 months of age. By the end of the second year of life, it is able to communicate with about 50 to 100 words. By three years of

[1] Buss, D. M. (2014). *Evolutionary psychology: The new science of the mind*. 5th ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. See also, Wright, R. (2010). *The moral animal: Why we are, the way we are: The new science of evolutionary psychology*. New York: Vintage.

[2] Reddy, V. (2008). *How infants know minds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

age, the vocabulary size grows exponentially to about 1000.[3] The speed with which the language skills will grow will depend directly on how the adults speak with the infant. In addition to this, consider the years we take to acquire full self-consciousness or 'rationality'. Consider the years we take for sexual maturity. After all, in most societies today legally someone is an adult only at the age of 18. In other words, until then a human child is vulnerable and dependent.

Why is the human baby so vulnerable? It is because of two related facts: the human brain is so complex, and because of its complexity, only about 40% its structure could be complete by the time of birth. On the other hand, a calf's brain could be about 80% complete by the time of its birth. If the human brain were to be as complete as a calf at the time of its birth, then our gestation period has to be doubled. Our mothers have to carry pregnancy up to 18 months instead of nine. Even if they were most willing to take on this responsibility, the baby will not manage to come out of the birth canal. We humans have the largest brain relative to body size of any species of animal on the face of the earth. Our brain is nine times larger than what would be expected in a mammal with our body size. And hence, the human child-birth is the most painful experience and most vulnerable moment for both the mother and baby in the whole animal kingdom.

In brief, given that our brain is not fully developed we are feeble and helpless at the time of our birth. We learn to be human in the company of other human beings. Hence an infant needs to be welcomed among a group of people. Not just any group of people, but the extreme vulnerability of the human baby, as it has been described above, calls for a group of adult human beings who will, not just look after the baby *ad hoc*, but support this baby for a prolonged period of time, and unconditionally with a certain commitment – despite its looks, its fussiness, its stubbornness. The support that the child will be offered requires sacrifice, and this is possible only within a structure that we call, 'family' that has a relatively prolonged relational structure, and that has some blood-ties. It is against this backdrop that we can argue that humans are hardwired for the family. The family structure ensures the survival of humans as individuals and a species.

Indeed, the family is the centrepiece of all human societies. Because of the family's enduring prevalence, some evolutionists also hypothesize that human survival was greatly aided by qualified monogamy - pair-bonding necessary for the prolonged care of the young. But no family would have survived the harshness of the hunter-gatherer life without additional support. And thus came the clan and the extended family built through marriages - that was created to systematically organise the exchange of partners with other families.[4]

If we are hard-wired to form families, are we not merely victims of nature? Arguing for the necessity of family from evolutionary perspective could imply such a conclusion. After all, what is the difference between animals that live in herds or even bees that live in colonies and we who live in families and clans? Is our inclination to form families mere outcome of instinct? What is so special about the human family?

2. Insight from Neurobiology: Humans can make a choice to form families

For many years, psychologists postulated much about the functions of the two hemispheres of the brain. Even management trainings spoke of left-brain thinking and right-brain thinking. In the recent years, however, this discussion has been largely discredited as not being supported empirically.[5] Actually, most of human cognitive processes involve the whole brain. Take the use of language, for instance. It is much of a whole-brain activity. Grammar and language-syntax

[3] Dunbar, R. (1998). *Grooming, gossip, and the evolution of language*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[4] Nicholson, N. (1998). Seven deadly syndromes of management and organization: The view from evolutionary psychology. *Managerial and Decision Economics*, Vol.19: 411-426.

[5] Kosslyn, S. (2013). *Top brain, bottom brain: Surprising insights into how you think*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

might be in one part of the brain and vocabulary might be in another part of the brain. Indeed, vocabulary related to emotions may be in one part of the brain and those related to conceptualisation may be in another part of the brain. Hence it is not meaningful to talk about the two hemispheres as distinctive functional entities.

What is gathering interest among neuroscientists is the focus on the functions of the three major layers of the brain. The human brain has three major components with rather distinct functions.[6] At the base of the brain is the brain-stem or the reptilian brain; so called, because reptiles possess basically only this part of the brain. This part of the brain is responsible for raw survival instincts. The flight, fight, freeze reactions come from here. It controls the automatic functions of the body, such as the working of the heart and lungs. It controls our states of appetitive arousals such as hunger, thirst and sexual drive.

Over the basal brain is the limbic system. The limbic system is found only in mammals, hence it is also referred to as "the mammalian brain." This part of the brain is responsible for bonding – a character typical only in mammals. Simple forms of motivations and emotions also find their origin at this part of the brain. Hypothalamus, which is part of the limbic system controls our sexual response to particular stimulus.

The outer layer of the brain is the cortex. Sometimes it is referred to as neo-cortex because it is found only in primates. The intelligence of the member of the animal kingdom largely depends on the size of the cortex. It makes such functions as perception, memory and learning possible. What is really unique about human beings is to be found in the frontal part of the cortex, more precisely in the prefrontal cortex. This is the part, found just behind our forehead, which is responsible for our consciousness and rational choices. It is the prefrontal cortex that helps us create concepts such as time, a sense of self, and moral judgements.

Structurally, the prefrontal cortex forms the connecting base for the reptilian brain, the mammalian brain, and the rest of the cortex. This structure makes it possible for the prefrontal cortex to monitor and regulate the instinctive functions of the basal brain, and the emotional reactions of the limbic system. For instance, even when the basal brain reminds you that you are hungry, the prefrontal cortex might choose to fast; as a result of this choice certain gratification may be experienced in the limbic system.

Returning to our discussion on the family, the structure of the brain demonstrates to us that we human beings are not just reptiles such as snakes and tortoises that lay their eggs and walk away. We are not even just mammals that give birth to their young ones, and only care for them until the young ones could be on their own. We have the possibility to work out a very complex kinship. Moreover we have the possibility to make judgement and choices about our breeding habits (sexual activities) and the people we will relate to in the context of breeding!

The two points that have been argued for in the above sections could be summarised as follows: firstly, we have no choice in being born in a family - we are hardwired to be brought up by a family. But we can exercise our prefrontal cortex to choose our life partners in order to establish our future families. Our ability to form families is not just a response to instinct but involves a set of rational choices exercising our prefrontal cortex. This once again differentiates us from the rest of the animal kingdom. Secondly, given the function of the prefrontal cortex, our sexual behaviour is regulated by a moral responsibility towards those we enter into such relationship with, and to the human baby that could emerge as an outcome of that relationship. This responsibility is guarded within the structures of marriage, family and kinship.

Having argued for the necessity of family from the evolutionary and neurobiological perspectives that shed some light on the dynamics involved in the formation of the family and birth of the baby, now we turn to what could happen in the development process of the child within the context of the family.

[6] Siegel, Daniel J. *Mindsight: The new science of personal transformation*. Bantam Dell Publishing Group, 2010.

3. Development Psychology: Childhood attachment as a predictor for adult faithfulness

Development psychology is the branch of psychology that systematically studies the changes that occur in human beings over the course of their life-span. Originally concerned with infants and children, the field has expanded to include adolescence, adult development, aging, and the entire lifespan. Our focus here will be on the relationship between the caregiver and the infant and how it might affect adult relationships. This has been explored here within the framework of attachment theory.

Originally proposed by Bowlby,[7] attachment theory attempts to explain and predict social interaction between adults in terms of patterns in the childhood relationship with caregivers. After repeated experiments, Mary Ainsworth and others[8] have proposed three possible patterns of attachment: secure attachment, insecure-avoidant attachment, and insecure-ambivalent attachment. The secure attachment is present when the child uses the caregiver as a "secure-base" to explore the world, and is pained by separation from the caregiver, but easily gets reattached at the return of the caregiver. A child exhibiting avoidant style of attachment, on the contrary, is pained inconsolably by separation; shows anger at the return of the caregiver and subsequently might avoid the caregiver. In the ambivalent attachment pattern the child does not exhibit a consistency in the three aspects of attachment, namely, the ability to explore the world using the caregiver as the secure-base, expressing moderate pain at separation, and being open to attachment at reunion.

The implication of attachment theory is that the character of a person's early attachments is a significant predictor in the formation of adult styles of interpersonal relationships.[9] Of course attachment patterns could change over time during childhood in the first two to three years, particularly if the caregiver is able to change their style of relating to the child. However, by four years of age, a pattern of attachment style begins to be consistently exhibited. For instance, in one study, boys who had been identified as anxiously attached to their mothers at one year were more likely to be identified as at risk for behavioural problems at age six than those who were securely attached, though this pattern could not be discerned for girls.[10]

What is better established is how the infant and care-giver attachment styles predict romantic relationships as young adults and later in marriage. To begin with, people who had experienced a secure attachment in childhood consistently believe and develop an attitude that permanent romantic relationships are possible, hence also attempt to be faithful in such a relationship.[11] Consistent with the attachment theory, people with avoidant style did not believe that a faithful relationship is possible. More interestingly, the people with ambivalent style claimed to be lonely, indicating that while they had a desire to enter into deep relationships they are not able to establish such relationships. Other studies have consistently supported these findings and have further shown that attachment styles go beyond belief and attitude to real life struggles.[12]

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[7] John Bowlby, "The Nature of the Child's Tie to His Mother." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 39, no.5 (1958), 350–73.

[8] Mary D. Ainsworth, M.C. Blehar, E. Waters and S.Walls, *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1978.

[9] Ainsworth, M. D. (1985). Patterns of infant-mother attachments: antecedents and effects on development. *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, *61*(9), 771–791.

[10] Lewis, M., Feiring, C., McGuffog, C., & Jaskir, J. (1984). Predicting psychopathology from early social relations. *Child Development*, 55, 123-36.

[11] Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *52*(3), 511-524. See also, Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. R. (1994). Attachment as an organizational framework for research on close relationships. *Psychological inquiry*, *5*(1), 1-22.

[12] Miller, Judi Beinstein, and Tova Hoicowitz. "Attachment contexts of adolescent friendship and romance." *Journal of Adolescence* 27.2 (2004): 191-206. See also, Knobloch, Leanne K., Denise Haunani Solomon, and Michael G. Cruz. "The role of relationship development and attachment in the experience of romantic jealousy." *Personal Relationships* 8.2 (2001): 205-224.

The implication of this discussion is that the type of relationship enjoyed by the infant with its care-giver in the first few months of its life seems to play a key role in their behaviour in terms of adult relationships. The stable family structure, therefore, will be able to provide the secure base for the child to reach out and explore the world, and return back to it when threatened by its environment. In the light of urban transitions that have greatly affected contemporary family life, the care-givers might be absent, or being changed too often, and as a result the child might lack a bonding figure. This might drastically affect future relationship styles. It can be hypothesised that the sharp increase in divorce among married couples in urban societies is significantly related to the lack of secure attachment figures in their early childhood.

On a related plane, it is commonly agreed that our own relationship with God is an analogy of human relationships, particularly the one between the child and parent. So, is not the strained relationship with the parent-figure likely to affect the child's relationship with God?

4. Psychology of Religion: God-human relationship mirrors Child-Parent relationship

Since the 1990's the influence of parents on children's image of God has largely been explored within the theoretical framework of attachment theory. Lee Kirkpatrick and Philip Shaver[13] have argued that attachment theory offers a meaningful framework for the psychological exploration of religious schema and behaviour of people. Kirkpatrick and others extend attachment theory to one's relationship with God and religion. God (or other deities/saints) may act as an attachment figure to a believer either as an extension of, or as a substitute for, the relationship with parent figures.

Elsewhere, Selvam[14] carried out a systematic review of psychology literature related to the triad of parents-children-God relationship. Several interesting themes emerged from the selected literature. In the present paper only the relevant outcomes are summarised.

4.1. Parent-Child Attachment and God-Human relationship

There are several studies that focus on the relationship between parents and children and how that acts as a moderating factor in the relationship between children and God. Based on the attachment theory two possible models are posed to explain attachment to God: correspondence and compensation.[15] Correspondence hypothesis presupposes that the relationship with God will be a continuation of individual's secure attachment with the caregiver or the parent. Compensation hypothesis presupposes that their relationship with God would be an attempt to compensate for the avoidant caregiver.

One example of correspondence model is a study by Gnaulati and Heine involving 207 college students of various ethnic backgrounds in the U.S (whose mean age was 20 years): "Results suggest that perceptions of God may be modelled after maternal perceptions: participants who had difficulties accepting maternal imperfections and who reported having overprotective and highly nurturant mothers, tended to perceive God as an omnipotent provider and protector." [16] In contrast, an example in literature where compensatory model was operative was in a study carried

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[13] Lee A. Kirkpatrick and Philip R. Shaver, "Attachment theory and religion: Childhood attachments, religious beliefs, and conversion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 29 (1990),* 315-334; Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "God as a substitute attachment figure: A longitudinal study of adult attachment style and religious change in college students. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 24, (1998)* 961-973.

[14] Selvam, S.G. (2014). "Influence of family on youth's relationship with God: A systematic review of psychology literature." In S. Fernando & J. Pudumai Doss (eds.), *Youth and family in today's India* (pp.65-80). Chennai: Don Bosco Publications.

[15] Angie McDonald, P. Beck, S. Allison, and A. Norsworthy, "Attachment to God and Parents: Testing the Correspondence vs. Compensation Hypothesis," Journal *of Psychology and Christianity* 24, no.1 (2005), 21-28.

[16] Enrico Gnaulati and Barbara J. Heine, "Parental bounding and religiosity in yound adulthood." *Psychological Reports* 81, no. 3 (December 1997), 1174.

out by Eshleman and colleagues: children (aged from 4 to 10) whose parents were less involved in their lives perceived God as closer; when children perceived God as male, boys perceived God as closer; when children perceived God as female, girls perceived God as closer.[17]

However, these effects seem to be levelled as people grow into adulthood. When people enter into young adulthood there is an attempt to evolve a personal spirituality and relationship with God. Though some times this attempt could exhibit exaggerated tendencies as in sudden conversions when childhood God-image has not been healthy. Often there is an evolution of individual spirituality with a corrective and reparative role attributed to correspondence and compensatory processes, in such a way that emerging adults with low parental security articulated reciprocal experiences of secure, intimate attachment with God.[18]

4.2. Attachment Styles and Conversion

Another area of interest in psychology of religion is religious conversion among adolescents and young adults. Psychologists make a distinction between gradual and sudden conversion. While gradual conversion is marked by a balanced growth towards spiritual maturity, sudden conversion could be of unpredictable extreme types. Childhood attachment style seems to be a predictor for the type of conversion one is likely to experience.

Respondents who had experienced secure attachment with parents report an increase in importance of their religious beliefs during adulthood. On the other hand, insecure respondents whose parents had expressed low level of religiosity tended to isolate themselves from their parents and compensate their childhood experience by building a closer relationship with God; they expressed more theistic beliefs, and reported a higher level of religious change during adulthood. However, if parents had been highly religious, secure respondents generally expressed correspondence of higher level religiosity as compared to insecure respondents.[19] In other words, religiosity of children depend only on the level of religiosity of parents but also on the attachment between the children and the parents.

A study by Granqvist and Hagekull further adds that people with insecure childhood attachments exhibited emotionally-based religiosity, sudden religious conversions, and intense and exaggerated religious changes in early adulthood. In contrast, gradual religious growth was seen among people who had experienced secure attachments.[20] Moreover, at least two reported studies by Granqvist and colleagues suggest that parental rejection during childhood was highly associated with sudden and intense religious changes particularly during life situations of crises. These individuals were more susceptible to be attracted to New Age spirituality. On the contrary, children who had experienced their parents as loving people were likely to express more socially based religious-spirituality.[21] These conclusions were further confirmed by the findings of a longitudinal study by the same research team.[22]

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[17] Amy K. Eshleman, et al. "Mother God, Father God: Children's Perceptions of God's Distance," *International Journal for The Psychology of Religion* 9, no. 2 (February 1999), 139-146.

[18] Cynthia N. Kimball, et al. "Attachment to God: A Qualitative Exploration of Emerging Adults' Spiritual Relationship with God." *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 41, no. 3 (Fall 2013), 175-188.

[19] Pehr Granqvist, "Religiousness and Perceived Childhood Attachment: On the Question of Compensation or Correspondence,"*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 2 (June 1998), 350-368.

[20] Pehr Granqvist,and Berit Hagekull, "Religiousness and Perceived Childhood Attachment: Profiling Socialized Correspondence and Emotional Compensation," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38, no. 2 (June 1999), 254-273; See also Pehr Granqvist and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Religious Conversion and Perceived Childhood Attachment: A Meta-Analysis," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 14, no. 4 (October 2004), 223-250.

[21] Pehr Granqvist et al. "Examining Relations among Attachment, Religiosity, and New Age Spirituality Using the Adult Attachment Interview," *Developmental Psychology* 43, no. 3 (May 2007), 590-601.

[22] Pehr Granqvist, Mari Fransson, and Berit Hagekull, "Disorganized Attachment, Absorption, and New Age Spirituality: A Mediational Model," *Attachment & Human Development* 11, no. 4 (2009), 385-403.

4.3. Parenting Style and Children's God Image

Related to the attachment theory is the concept of parenting styles. Way back in 1967, Diana Baumrind[23] suggested three parenting styles. In the authoritarian style of parenting, the parents demand highly from their children while offering low level of support (also referred to as being responsive). These parents are rigid, harsh and may be abusive. Authoritative style of parenting is characterised by high level of demandingness and equally high level of responsiveness. The authoritative parent is responsive to the child's needs but not indulgent. The permissive or indulgent parent shows low demandingness with high responsiveness towards the child. More recently, Maccoby and Martin have added a fourth style to this list: the neglectful parent who neither demands from, nor shows adequate response to the child.[24] In the context of the present discussion on the family, what is the impact of parenting style on the relationship of children with God?

A study carried out in Pakistan among a small sample of youth (n=50; aged from 20 to 25 years), showed varying effects of parenting styles on male and female participants' relationship with God. Perceived paternal authoritative parenting was positively related with friendly perception of God in males and perceived maternal permissive parenting was negatively related with protective perception of God in males. Further, perceived parental neglect by both mother and father was negatively related with benevolent and protective perception of God.[25]

There are studies that report the effect of parenting style on children's relationship with God, but these studies have adapted or twisted the model suggested by Baumrind. For instance, Rito Baring[26] reporting a study carried out in the Philippians suggests that when parents exhibit a confrontational style in matters of sin, God is imaged by children as sad but forgiving. In another study,[27] children aged from 4 through 11, who perceived their parents as nurturing and powerful also perceived God as both nurturing and powerful. This finding has been repeated for a young adult population (18 to 22 years) in a study by the same team of researchers. [28] On the other hand, the study by McDonald and colleagues[29] examines the impact of home ambient rather than the parenting style. American young adults (aged from 18 to 27) coming from homes that were emotionally cold or unspiritual exhibited higher levels of avoidance of intimacy in their relationship to God. Similarly, overprotective, rigid, or authoritarian homes were associated with higher levels of both avoidance of intimacy and anxiety over lovability in relationship to God.

4.4. Parental Marital Discord and Spirituality of Children

Religiosity and Spirituality are much discussed and differentiated constructs in the study of religion.[30] While spirituality is related to "a search for meaning, for unity, for connectedness, for

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[23] Diana Baumrind, D. (1967). "Child Care Practices Anteceding Three Patterns of Preschool Behavior," *Genetic Psychology Monographs* 75, no.1 (1967), 43-88.

[24] Eleanor E. Maccoby and J.A. Martin, "Socialization in the context of the family: Parent–child interaction," In P. Mussen and E.M. Hetherington (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology*, Vol. IV. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1983, 1-101.

[25] Najma Najam and Sidra Batool, "Relationship between Perceived Parenting Style, Perceived Parental Acceptance-Rejection (PAR) and Perception of God among Young Adults," *Journal of Behavioural Sciences* 22, no. 1 (March 2012), 83-99.

[26] Rito Baring, "Children's Image of God and Their Parents: Explorations in Children's Spirituality," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 17, no. 4 (November 2012), 277-289.

[27] Jane R. Dickie, et al. "Parent-Child Relationships and Children's Images of God," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, no. 1 (March 1997), 25-43.

[28] Jane R. Dickie, et al. "Mother, Father, and Self: Sources of Young Adults' God Concepts," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45, no. 1 (March 2006), 57-71.

[29] Angie McDonald, et al. "Attachment to God and Parents: Testing the Correspondence vs. Compensation Hypotheses," *Journal of Psychology & Christianity* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 21-28.

[30] Sahaya G. Selvam, "Towards Religious Spirituality: A Multidimensional Matrix of Religion and Spirituality," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 12, no.36 (2013), *129-152.*

transcendence, and for the highest of human potential,"[31] religiosity can be understood in terms of religious behaviour that include belonging to a community that shares a common set of religious beliefs, participation in worship, reading the scriptures. In general, God-image and religious behaviour are both significantly associated with the family values among Catholic and protestant population.[32] For instance, a study conducted among adults (aged from 18 to 84 years) in France has suggested that children who hold the image of God as forgiving, and have also experienced an ambient of forgiveness in the family of origin, show a high level of personal willingness to forgive others.[33]

A very enlightening study by Christopher Ellison involving a large sample of 1500 young adults (aged from 18 to 35) confirmed that persons raised by parents in intact, happy, low-conflict marriages tend to score higher on most religious and spiritual outcomes such as frequency of attendance in religious prayer, interest in religion as a source of truth and meaning, and report positive experiences of God. However, young adults raised by parents in unhappy, high-conflict relationships have relatively low scores on most religious and spiritual outcomes.[34]

Moreover, even though several studies have suggested that children of divorced parents enjoy better psychological wellbeing as compared to children in families with constant conflicts, according to the study by Ellison, "some children of divorce seem to fare ''worse'' religiously and spiritually than those whose parents endured high-conflict unions."[35] This could be attributed to the phenomenon that children in families with high level of conflicts might turn to God in prayer for the reduction of conflicts, and those of the divorced parents might find the behaviour of parents as being contrary to the religious tradition that they profess, which then forces the children to be sceptical of the religious tradition itself.

5. Concluding Remarks

What I have attempted to show in the first part of the paper is how the very nature of the human beings, particularly given the vulnerable yet complex product that we are of evolution, the family has also naturally evolved. Our development as human beings necessitates the ambient of the family. Flowing from this premise, it has also emerged that early childhood in the context of the family is directly correlated to our adult behaviour in terms of our relationship with other human beings and the way we relate to God.

Therefore, it is plain that the ministry of the church in the process of evangelisation and catechesis of the Christian has to target the formation of people in and to the family. Young adults and adult Christians themselves need to be accompanied towards creating their families as the haven for each other and the children to become fully human.

In the light of the discussion above, it might be apt to end the paper stating that the best means of evangelisation, aimed at building a strong covenantal relationship between God and human beings, is to pay attention to building strong bonds within Christian families. Pope Benedict XVI rightly acknowledged this link between evangelisation and the family, at the opening of the 13th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme of New Evangelization:

> The Synodal Assembly which opens today is dedicated to this new evangelization, to help these people encounter the Lord, who alone fills existence with deep meaning and peace;

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[31] Robert A. Emmons, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns: Motivation and Spirituality in Personality*. New York: Guilford Press, 1999, 5.

[32] Cameron Lee and Annmarie Early, "Religiosity and Family Values: Correlates of God-Image in a Protestant Sample," *Journal of Psychology & Theology 28*, no.3 (2000), 229-240.

[33] Marianne Akl and Etienne Mullet, "Forgivingness: Relationships With Conceptualizations of Divine Forgiveness and Childhood Memories," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 20, no. 3 (2010), 187-200.

[34] Christopher G. Ellison, et al. "The Effects of Parental Marital Discord and Divorce on the Religious and Spiritual Lives of Young Adults," *Social Science Research* 40, no. 2 (March 2011), 538-551.

[35] Ellison, et al. "The Effects of Parental Marital Discord", 548.

and to favour the rediscovery of the faith, that source of grace which brings joy and hope to personal, family and social life. … The theme of marriage… invites us to be more aware of a reality, already well known but not fully appreciated: that matrimony is a Gospel in itself, a Good News for the world of today, especially the dechristianized world… There is a clear link between the crisis in faith and the crisis in marriage. And, as the Church has said and witnessed for a long time now, marriage is called to be not only an object but a subject of the new evangelization.[36]

[36] Pope Benedict XVI, "Opening of the 13th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme: The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith," (October 7, 2012).