

The importance of children in Orthodox Tradition (Protopresbyter Vasileios Kalliakmanis)

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In the Old Testament, children are considered to be a blessing from God and are called ‘the crown of the aged’ . Sons are called ‘young olive plants around the table’ of their fathers. In the New Testament, Christ blesses the children and appears to highlight the trust of children in their parents as a model of the Christian life and a condition of entry into the Kingdom of Heaven: ‘And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them 3 and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’ . At the same time, he called upon people to accept the Kingdom of Heaven as if they were children , with a guileless and pure heart. And this was said in an era in which, in the pagan world, and particularly in military nations- the Greeks, Romans and others- pederasty in a variety of forms was an established practice as a principle of training young men to be brave warriors.



Christianity unequivocally condemned these degenerate phenomena and put an end to them, emphasizing restraint and control over the body. At the same time, children were recognized by the Church as complete psychosomatic entities from the time of their conception . Even children with some form of bodily impediment were accepted by Christians, instead of simply being done away with. By the same token, abortion was condemned from the beginning by the Fathers of the Church and equated with murder. Even before the establishment of infant baptism, the children of Christian parents were baptized, had pride of place in the congregation and were closest to the altar. They took part in the service singing 'Kyrie eleison' all together.

The Church, therefore, recognizes children as unique individuals and is interested in them. Newly-born infants aren't just creatures of flesh and blood, but also have a spiritual persona. A couple has the special blessing of contributing to the creation of new people who are prospective citizens of the Kingdom of God. These children aren't merely future adults, but are also spiritual beings who belong to God as well as to their parents. They need to grow up in a family atmosphere of prayer and a pure spiritual life in general.

(to be continued)