

Family

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A term derived from the Latin, *famulus*, servant, and *familia*, household servants, or the household (cf. Oscan *famel*, servant). In the classical Roman period the *familia* rarely included the [parents](#) or the children. Its English derivative was frequently used in former times to describe all the [persons](#) of the domestic circle, [parents](#), children, and servants. Present usage, however, excludes servants, and restricts the word *family* to that fundamental social group formed by the more or less permanent union of one man with one [woman](#), or of one or more men with one or more [women](#), and their children. If the heads of the group comprise only one man and one [woman](#) we have the monogamous family, as distinguished from those domestic [societies](#) which live in conditions of [polygamy](#), polyandry, or promiscuity.

Certain anthropological writers of the last half of the nineteenth century, as Bachofen (*Das Mutterrecht*, Stuttgart, 1861), Morgan (*Ancient Society*, London, 1877), Mc'Lennan (*The Patriarchal Theory*, London, 1885), Lang (*Custom and Myth*, London, 1885), and Lubbock (*The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man*, London, 1889), created and developed the theory that the original form of the family was one in which all the [women](#) of a group, horde, or tribe, belonged promiscuously to all the men of the community. Following the lead of Engels (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, tr. from the German, Chicago, 1902), many Socialist writers have adopted this theory as quite in harmony with their materialistic interpretation of history. The chief considerations advanced in its favour are: the assumption that in primitive times all [property](#) was common, and that this condition naturally led to community of [women](#); certain historical statements by ancient writers like Strabo, Herodotus, and Pliny; the practice of promiscuity, at a comparatively late date, by some uncivilized peoples, such as the Indians of [California](#) and a few aboriginal tribes of [India](#); the system of tracing descent and kinship through the mother, which prevailed among some primitive people; and certain abnormal customs of ancient races, such as religious prostitution, the so-called *jus primæ noctis*, the lending of wives to visitors, cohabitation of the sexes before marriage, etc.

At no time has this theory obtained general acceptance, even among non-Christian writers, and it is absolutely rejected by some of the best authorities of today, e.g. Westermarck (*The History of Human Marriage*, London, 1901) and Letourneau (*The Evolution of Marriage*, tr. from the French, New York, 1888). In reply to the arguments just stated, Westermarck and others point out that the hypothesis of primitive communism has by no means been [proved](#), at least in its extreme form; that common [property](#) in goods does not necessarily lead to community of wives, since family and marriage relations are subject to other motives as well as to those of a purely [economic](#) character; that the testimonies of classical historians in the matter are inconclusive, vague, and fragmentary, and refer to only a few instances; that the modern cases of promiscuity are isolated and exceptional, and may be attributed to degeneracy rather than to primitive survivals; that the practice of tracing kinship through the mother finds ample explanation in other facts besides the assumed uncertainty of paternity, and that it was never universal; that the abnormal sexual relations cited above are more obviously, as well as more satisfactorily, explained by other circumstances, religious, political, and social, than by the hypothesis of primitive promiscuity; and, finally, that evolution, which, superficially viewed, seems to support this hypothesis, is in reality against it, inasmuch as the unions between the male and the [female](#) of many of the higher species of animals exhibit a degree of stability and exclusiveness which bears some resemblance to that of the monogamous family.

The utmost concession which Letourneau will make to the theory under discussion is that "promiscuity may have been adopted by certain small groups, more probably by certain associations or brotherhoods" (op. cit., p. 44). Westermarck does not hesitate to say: "The hypothesis of promiscuity, instead of belonging, as Professor Giraud-Teulon thinks, to the class of hypotheses which are scientifically permissible has no real foundation, and is essentially unscientific" (op. cit., p. 133). The theory that the original form of the family was either [polygamy](#) or polyandry is even less worthy of credence or consideration. In the main, the verdict of scientific writers is in harmony with the Scriptural [doctrine](#) concerning the origin and the normal form of the family: "Wherefore a man shall leave [father and mother](#), and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh" ([Genesis 2:24](#)). "Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh. What therefore [God](#) hath joined together, let no man put asunder" ([Matthew 19:6](#)). From the beginning, therefore, the family supposed the union of one man with one [woman](#).

While monogamy was the prevailing form of the family before Christ, it was limited in various degrees among many peoples by the practice of [polygamy](#). This practice was on the whole more common among the [Semitic](#) races than among the Aryans. It was more frequent among the [Jews](#), the Egyptians, and the Medes, than among the people of

India, the Greeks, or the Romans. It existed to a greater extent among the uncivilized races, although some of these were free from it. Moreover, even those nations which practised polygamy, whether civilized or uncivilized, usually restricted it to a small minority of the population, as the kings, the chiefs, the nobles, and the rich. Polyandry was likewise practised, but with considerably less frequency. According to Westermarck, monogamy was by far the most common form of marriage "among the ancient peoples of whom we have any direct knowledge" (op. cit., p. 459). On the other hand, divorce was in vogue among practically all peoples, and to a much greater extent than polygamy.

The ease with which husband and wife could dissolve their union constitutes one of the greatest blots upon the civilization of classic Rome. Generally speaking, the position of woman was very low among all the nations, civilized and uncivilized, before the coming of Christ. Among the barbarians she very frequently became a wife through capture or purchase; among even the most advanced peoples the wife was generally her husband's property, his chattel, his labourer. Nowhere was the husband bound by the same law of marital fidelity as the wife, and in very few places was he compelled to concede to her equal rights in the matter of divorce. Infanticide was practically universal, and the *patria potestas* of the Roman father gave him the right of life and death over even his grown-up children. In a word, the weaker members of the family were everywhere inadequately protected against the stronger.

The Christian family

Christ not only restored the family to its original type as something holy, permanent, and monogamous, but raised the contract from which it springs to the dignity of a sacrament, and thus placed the family itself upon the plane of the supernatural. The family is holy inasmuch as it is to co-operate with God by procreating children who are destined to be the adopted children of God, and by instructing them for His kingdom. The union between husband and wife is to last until death (Matthew 19:6 sq.; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11; 1 Corinthians 7:10; see MARRIAGE, DIVORCE). That this is the highest form of the conjugal union, and the best arrangement for the welfare both of the family and of society, will appear to anyone who compares dispassionately the moral and material effects with those flowing from the practice of divorce. Although divorce has obtained to a greater or less extent among the majority of peoples from the beginning until now, "there is abundant evidence that marriage has, upon the whole, become more durable in proportion as the human race has risen to higher degrees of cultivation" (Westermarck, op. cit., p. 535).

While the attempts that have been made to show that divorce is in every case forbidden by the moral law of nature have not been convincing on their own merits, to say nothing of certain facts of Old Testament history, the absolute indissolubility of marriage is nevertheless the ideal to which the natural law points, and consequently is to be expected in an order that is supernatural. In the family, as re-established by Christ, there is likewise no such thing as polygamy. This condition, too, is in accord with nature's ideal. Polygamy is not, indeed, condemned in every instance by the natural law, but it is generally inconsistent with the reasonable welfare of the wife and children, and the proper moral development of the husband. Because of these qualities of permanence and unity, the Christian family implies a real and definite equality of husband and wife. They have equal rights in the matter of the primary conjugal relation, equal claims upon mutual fidelity, and equal obligations to make this fidelity real. They are equally guilty when they violate these obligations, and equally deserving of pardon when they repent.

The wife is neither the slave nor the property of her husband, but his consort and companion. The Christian family is supernatural, inasmuch as it originates in a sacrament. Through the sacrament of matrimony husband and wife obtain an increase of sanctifying grace, and a claim upon those actual graces which are necessary to the proper fulfilment of all the duties of family life, and the relations between husband and wife, parents and children, are supernaturalized and sanctified. The end and the ideal of the Christian family are likewise supernatural, namely, the salvation of parents and children, and the union between Christ and His Church. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and delivered himself up for it", says St. Paul (Ephesians 5:25). And the intimacy of the marital union, the identification, almost, of husband and wife, is seen in the injunction: "So also ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself" (Ephesians 5:28).

From these general facts of the Christian family, the particular relations existing among its members can be readily deduced. Since the average man and woman are not normally complete as individuals, but are rather the two complementary parts of one social organism, in which their material, moral, and spiritual needs receive mutual satisfaction, a primary requisite of their union is mutual love. This includes not merely the love of the senses, which is essentially selfish, not necessarily that sentimental love which anthropologists call romantic, but above all that rational love or affection, which springs from an appreciation of qualities of mind and heart, and which impels each to seek the welfare of the other. As the intimate and long association of husband and wife necessarily bring to the surface their less

noble and lovable qualities, and as the rearing of children involves great trials, the need of disinterested [love](#), the ability to sacrifice self, is obviously grave.

The [obligations](#) of mutual fidelity have been sufficiently stated above. The particular functions of husband and wife in the family are determined by their different natures, and by their relation to the primary end of the family, namely, the procreation of children. Being the provider of the family, and the superior of the wife both in physical strength and in those [mental](#) and moral qualities which are appropriate to the exercise of authority, the husband is naturally the family's head, even "the head of the wife", in the language of [St. Paul](#). This does not mean that the wife is the husband's slave, his servant, or his subject. She is his equal, both as a human being and as member of the conjugal [society](#), save only that when a disagreement arises in matters pertaining to domestic government, she is, as a rule, to yield. To claim for her completely equal authority with the husband is to treat [woman](#) as man's equal in a matter in which nature has made them unequal. On the other hand the care and management of the details of the household belong naturally to the wife, because she is better fitted for these tasks than the husband.

Since the primary end of the family is the procreation of children, the husband or wife who shirks this [duty](#) from any but spiritual or moral motives reduces the family to an unnatural and unchristian level. This is emphatically [true](#) when the absence of offspring has been effected by any of the artificial and immoral devices so much in vogue at present. When the conjugal union has been blessed with children, both [parents](#) are charged, according to their respective functions, with the [duty](#) of sustaining and [educating](#) those undeveloped members of the family. Their moral and religious formation is for the most part the work of the mother, while the task of providing for their physical and [intellectual](#) wants falls chiefly upon the father. The extent to which the different wants of the children are to be supplied will vary with the ability and resources of the [parents](#). Finally, the children are bound, generally speaking, to render to the [parents](#) implicit [love](#), reverence, and obedience, until they have reached their majority, and [love](#), reverence, and a reasonable degree of support and obedience afterward.

The most important external relations of the family are, of course, those existing between it and the State. According to the [Christian](#) conception, the family, rather than the individual, is the social unit and the basis of civil [society](#). To say that the family is the social unit is not to imply that it is the end to which the individual is a means; for the welfare of the individual is the end both of the family and of the State, as well as of every other social organization. The meaning is that the State is formally concerned with the family as such, and not merely with the individual. This distinction is of great practical importance; for where the State ignores or neglects the family, keeping in view only the welfare of the individual, the result is a strong tendency towards the disintegration of the former. The family is the basis of civil [society](#), inasmuch as the greater majority of [persons](#) ought to spend practically all their lives in its circle, either as subjects or as heads. Only in the family can the individual be properly reared, [educated](#), and given that formation of character which will make him a good man and a good citizen.

Inasmuch as the average man will not put forth his full productive energies except under the stimulus of its responsibilities, the family is indispensable from the purely [economic](#) viewpoint. Now the family cannot rightly discharge its functions unless the [parents](#) have full control over the rearing and [education](#) of the children, subject only to such State supervision as is needed to prevent grave neglect of their welfare. Hence it follows that, generally speaking, and with due allowance for particular conditions, the State exceeds its authority when it provides for the material wants of the child, removes him from [parental](#) influence, or specifies the [school](#) that he must attend. As a consequence of these concepts and ideals, the [Christian](#) family in history has [proved](#) itself immeasurably superior to the non-Christian family. It has exhibited greater fidelity between husband and wife, greater reverence for the [parents](#) by the children, greater protection of the weaker members by the stronger, and in general a more thorough recognition of the dignity and [rights](#) of all within its circle. Its chief glory is undoubtedly its effect upon the position of [woman](#). Notwithstanding the disabilities--for the most part with regard to [property](#), [education](#), and a practically recognized double standard of [morals](#)--under which the [Christian woman](#) has suffered, she has attained to a height of dignity, respect, and authority for which we shall look in vain in the conjugal [society](#) outside of [Christianity](#). The chief factor in this improvement has been the [Christian teaching](#) on chastity, conjugal equality, the sacredness of motherhood, and the [supernatural](#) end of the family, together with the [Christian](#) model and ideal of family life, the Holy Family at [Nazareth](#).

The contention of some writers that the [Church's](#) teaching and practice concerning virginity and [celibacy](#), make for the degradation and deterioration of the family, not only springs from a [false](#) and perverse view of these practices, but contradicts the facts of history. Although she has always held virginity in higher [honour](#) than marriage, the [Church](#) has never sanctioned the extreme view, attributed to some ascetical writers, that marriage is a mere concession to the flesh, a sort of tolerated carnal indulgence. In her eyes the marriage rite has ever been a sacrament, the married state a holy

state, the family a Divine institution, and family life the normal condition for the great majority of [mankind](#). Indeed, her teaching on virginity, and the spectacle of thousands of her sons and daughters exemplifying that teaching, have in every age constituted a most effective exaltation of chastity in general, and therefore of chastity within as well as without the family. Teaching and example have combined to convince the wedded, not less than the unwedded, that purity and restraint are at once desirable and practically possible. Today, as always, it is precisely in those communities where virginity is most [honoured](#) that the ideal of the family is highest, and its relations purest.

Dangers for the family

Among these are the exaltation of the individual by the State at the expense of the family, which has been going on since the [Reformation](#) (cf. the Rev. Dr. Thwing, in Bliss, "Encyclopedia of Social Reform"), and the modern facility of [divorce](#) (see [DIVORCE](#)), which may be traced to the same source. The greatest offender in the latter respect is the [United States](#), but the tendency seems to be towards easier methods in most of the other countries in which [divorce](#) is allowed. Legal authorization and popular approval of the dissolution of the marriage bond, not only breaks up existing families, but encourages rash [marriages](#), and produces a laxer view of the [obligation](#) of conjugal fidelity. Another danger is the deliberate limitation of the number of children in a family. This practice tempts [parents](#) to overlook the chief end of the family, and to regard their union as a mere means of mutual gratification. Furthermore, it leads to a lessening of the capacity of self-sacrifice in all the members of the family. Closely connected with these two evils of [divorce](#) and artificial restriction of births, is the general laxity of opinion with regard to sexual immorality. Among its causes are the diminished influence of religion, the absence of religious and moral training in the [schools](#), and the seemingly feeble emphasis laid upon the heinousness of the [sin](#) of unchastity by those whose moral training has not been under [Catholic](#) auspices. Its chief effects are disinclination to [marry](#), marital infidelity, and the contraction of diseases which produce domestic unhappiness and sterile families.

The idle and frivolous lives of the [women](#), both wives and daughters, in many wealthy families is also a menace. In the position which they hold, the mode of life which they lead, and the ideals which they cherish, many of these [women](#) remind us somewhat of the *hetærae* of classical Athens. For they enjoy great freedom, and exercise great influence over the husband and father, and their chief function seems to be to entertain him, to enhance his social prestige, to minister to his vanity, to dress well, and to reign as social queens. They have emancipated themselves from any serious self-sacrifice on behalf of the husband or the family, while the husband has likewise declared his independence of any strict construction of the [duty](#) of conjugal fidelity. The bond between them is not sufficiently moral and spiritual, and is excessively sensual, social, and æsthetic. And the [evil](#) example of this conception of family life extends far beyond those who are able to put it into practice. Still another danger is the decline of family authority among all classes, the diminished obedience and respect imposed upon and exhibited by children. Its consequences are imperfect discipline in the family, defective moral character in the children, and manifold unhappiness among all.

Finally, there is the danger, physical and moral, threatening the family owing to the widespread and steadily increasing presence of [women](#) in industry. In 1900 the number of [females](#) sixteen years of age and over engaged in gainful occupations in the [United States](#) was 4,833,630, which was more than double the number so occupied in 1880, and which constituted 20 per cent of the whole number of [females](#) above sixteen years in the country, whereas the number at work in 1880 formed only 16 percent of the same division of the [female](#) population. In the cities of America two [women](#) out of every seven are bread-winners (see Special Report of the U.S. Census, "Women at Work"). This condition implies an increased proportion of married [women](#) at work as wage earners, an increased proportion of [women](#) who are less capable physically of undertaking the burdens of family life, a smaller proportion of [marriages](#), an increase in the proportion of [women](#) who, owing to a delusive [idea](#) of independence, are disinclined to [marry](#), and a weakening of family bonds and domestic authority. "In 1890, 1 married [woman](#) in 22 was a bread-winner; in 1900, 1 in 18" (ibid.). Perhaps the most striking [evil](#) result of married [women](#) in industry is the high death-rate among infants. For infants under one year the rate in 1900 over the whole [United States](#), was 165 per 1000, but it was 305 in [Fall River](#), where the proportion of married [women](#) at work is greatest. As the supreme causes of all these dangers to the family are the decay of religion and the growth of materialistic views of life, so the future of the family will depend upon the extent to which these forces can be checked. And experience seems to show that there can be no permanent middle ground between the materialistic ideal of [divorce](#), so easy that the marital union will be terminable at the will of the parties, and the [Catholic](#) ideal of marriage absolutely indissoluble.

Sources

In addition to the authorities cited in the text, the following deserve particular mention: DEVAS, Studies in Family Life

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