

Gen 1:27; Tob 6:1–8:24) had the effect of producing an equality of the sexes in marital as well as in property questions (see “Marriage”). With the married union as the basic unit of the family, the relationships of other family members to each other were also classified in terms of equality. The baptismal formula in Gal 3:26–29 lent this principle further weight. Since God is the Father and Lord of all human beings, and since all human beings are brothers and sisters in God, then all family members are considered to be equal. Sons and daughters to a great extent were entitled to inherit in equal measure; consent was required of both to marry. God’s role of caring Father was assumed by the father of the house in the first centuries of the Middle Ages, then later also by the mother of the house. In accordance with the Pauline domestic codes (Col 3:18–4:1), parents had to care considerately for all family members (the respective spouse, sons and daughters, relatives, but also *servi*, bondspeople, maids, and male servants). Parents were responsible for food and clothing, for passing on possessions, and for giving offspring in marriage. Parents were also charged with catechizing all members of the family (including dependants), enforcing Sunday church attendance, instructing in the confession of faith and in the Psalms, and mediating the sermon. In compliance with the domestic codes and the Decalogue, children had to respect and honor their parents, and were subject to their guardianship – as long as they were not of legal age. The bondspeople or servants, too, had to submit themselves obediently to their master or mistress. At the same time, the servants’ proximity to the head of the family enabled them to testify as a witness in court or to function as witness to a marriage agreement. The command to respect and honor the parents extended throughout their entire life and obligated the children to care for their parents in old age.

What applied to members of the household was true also of the extended family. Because the man and the woman became one flesh (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5–6), members from both families involved in the marriage were also considered to be of one flesh, so that the kinship relationship in the Middle Ages developed into a trilateral cognatic relationship. Under this system, not only the paternal and maternal relatives but also relatives acquired through marriage, stood on equal terms with one another. Godparents involved in baptism and confirmation also were included by virtue of the idea that spiritual parenthood ranks as a familial relation on par with blood and conjugal relatives (see “Incest”).

In all areas of family life, these biblical justifications had an effect that was unifying and creative of community for all members of the household, the family, and the extended family relations. Because all human beings are children, heirs, and

### B. Medieval Times and Reformation Era

The early Middle Ages understood the nuclear family within the larger context of the household and domestic servants, court society, and the larger group of familial relations. Latin lacked a term for the latter institution. While the term *familia* was used for the association of persons within the manorial system, the monastery, and episcopal government, it did not apply to the nuclear family or the extended household family. Nonetheless, this final group, with all its members (e.g., father or husband and mother or wife, sons and daughters, slaves, bondspeople, servants or farmhands and maids, their relations, as well as their friends) represented a distinguishable unity even without a specific name for it. The integrity of this unit lies in its religious roots. Biblical terms established the solidarity among family members, their placement in an order relative to each other, and their individual radius of operation, so that the social, emotional, and structural spheres were all interpreted religiously. The equality of man and woman as laid down in the story of creation (Gen 2:18, 21–24;

slaves of God, all family members had to heed basic Christian rules. Household government was a superordination, but also a responsible one, and the subordination of the family members was not exploitative. On the contrary, each individual would have to answer at the judgment for his or her conduct as a Christian. This ethic of a good Christian life, resting upon biblical-religious credentials, eventually had a lasting influence beyond the Middle Ages and the Reformation upon the Christian ideal of the family. This ideal, in its turn, lay at the root of the *familia* of the manorial system, the monastery, and episcopal government, as well as oath-based unions, guilds, and communes. The above ideal also shaped the responsibility of the Christian ruler, whose image as a caring father and household head was based upon biblical passages about the family.

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