

A LETTER TO PARENTS

BY REV. ROBERT NASH, S.J.

DEAR FATHERS AND MOTHERS,— The post has just brought me the current issue of the “Irish Monthly.” A masterly article on St. Ignatius Loyola opens with a sentence which I would like to quote for you. “God,” writes Jose Maria Peman, “makes use of the saints to reincarnate Himself in them...” It is a very happy phrase, and it is true not only of the saints, but of ourselves, common mortals. Perhaps it has a particularly apt application to those concerning whom this letter is to be written—the child or the children of whom you are the parents.

God designs “to reincarnate Himself” in that child of yours. What does this mean? When you hold that little child in your arms, when you watch your child at play, when you send those youngsters off to school in the morning, do you ever pause to think of the *supernatural* life which they possess?

THE SOUL OF A CHILD

On the day your child was baptized an event took place in which God is more concerned than He is concerned with the work of controlling the planets and constellations. On that day God’s priest stood by the side of your child and pronounced these sublime words: “Depart, unclean spirit, out of this creature fashioned of God. God has designed to call this child into his holy temple to make him a living temple for himself to dwell in.” Then the waters of holy Baptism were poured and the soul of that child became God’s own dwelling-place. God actually shared His own divine life with that unconscious little baby.

What a treasure you are holding now, enriched beyond the power of words to express! For God is living in your child’s soul. He is like a living ciborium. He has become, as has been said so beautifully of St. Bridget, a consecrated casket for the containing of the Sacred Species.

LIVING CIBORIUMS

That is one of the reasons why Jesus loved little children. He looked upon them and wanted them near Him because His gaze penetrated into the immaculate purity of their souls. “Let the little children come to Me and forbid them not, for such is the kingdom of heaven.” “Unless you become as little children you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus saw very clearly, indeed, into the beauty of their souls. Fathers and mothers must see it also, and, seeing, be filled with gratitude to God and reverence for the child of God. Hence this letter to them.

As your child grows up, God’s concern increases. The seed of divine life has, indeed, been planted in that soul, but there is grave danger lest an enemy sow tares. So God proceeds to strengthen your little one by His Sacraments. Holy Communion to inflame that pure heart with divine love, Confirmation to impart God’s own strength against the wiles and false maxims of Satan and the world conspiring to uproot the divine seed, Penance to restore the life again in case human frailty bearing so precious a treasure in earthly vessels should lose it—these are further proofs of the anxiety of a God about the dwelling-place He chose for Himself on the day your child was regenerated in the waters of Baptism.

THE ELDER BROTHER

Perhaps you do not think much about all this. God does. His thought about your child does not end even here. For, in order that that life of grace may develop, He holds up for your child to gaze upon the fascinating Model, His own Son, Jesus Christ. Grace makes your children sons and daughters of God. They are admitted into the great family of God, and therefore Jesus Christ becomes their elder Brother, “the first-born among many brethren.” God longs very much to see your child reproduce as faithfully as possible a resemblance to his elder Brother. Christ is the Son in Whom the Father is well pleased. The more close the likeness becomes between your child and his elder Brother the more secure will be the seed of divine life in the soul and the more abundantly will it fructify.

So your child’s task now resolves itself to this—that he model himself or herself upon Jesus Christ. Hand in hand they

go through life—Jesus the Son of God, and your child, who is also a child of God. The elder Brother will show your child the example of a perfect life. He will share your child’s disappointments and difficulties. He will speak a word of warning in due season, for he knows the dangers that lie in the path of the one so dear to Him. Above all, He will instruct your child about the beauty and destiny of his immortal soul, and He will insist that everything else in this world must be subordinated to God’s marvellous plan for that soul. And that the more docile a pupil your child proves himself to be in the school of Christ the more will God make use of him “to reincarnate Himself” in the soul. Jesus is God-made-man in order to draw your child up into the life of God.

Learned people will tell you that the soul is “naturaliter Christiana.” I think they mean that there is a natural hunger or an innate tendency in the child’s soul for Christ and the things of God.

SOUL-HUNGER

You have often seen it, I’m sure. Some time ago a priest was addressing a group of First Communicants. Not a sound was heard except the priest’s voice. There they sat, every tiny child of them, with hands clasped and their eyes riveted on the priest’s face. This was what they wanted, you would say. This is what they longed for, God-hungry, Christ-hungry little souls. Their sinless hearts were thirsting for God, and here was this saintly priest opening up for them the plenteous fountains. They drank in every word. Unspoiled, pure themselves, they had fallen in love with the crystal purity of their elder Brother, and all they wanted was to hear about Him and to be allowed to love Him and imitate Him.

And that was all the elder Brother wanted, too. “Allow the little children to come to Me.” Let these little ones become Christlike, and the divine seed deposited in their souls will expand and bring forth fruit in very much the same way as the trees and the flowers of the field become clothed with splendour under the rays of the summer sun.

ACCORDING TO PATTERN

Jesus will tell your child: “No man comes to the Father but through Me.” “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” “I am the light of the world; he that follows Me does not walk in darkness, but has the light of life.” When your little girl is learning to write, she looks up at a headline and tries to copy it. When your young son becomes the proud possessor of a bicycle, he learns to ride it by watching others and copying their movements. In exactly the same way Jesus Christ comes to your child, takes him or her by the hand and says: “Copy Me. Be like Me. Do the kind of things I do. Think the kind of thoughts that I think. Speak—like Me. Be obedient—like Me. Pray—like Me. Play—like Me. Labour—like Me. I have done all these things before you in order to show you how to do them yourself in the most perfect way possible.

“GOD REINCARNATE”

This is much, indeed, but, in order that God may become “reincarnate” in your child, even more is required, and even more is bestowed by the generosity of God in His divine eagerness about His plan for the soul. For Our Lord is not an *external* Model merely for your child. He is that, but He is much more. He acts effectively, too, by the grace on the very soul itself. He inflames the child’s heart with love of divine things. He acts on the mind, the seat of thought, and fills it with an esteem for everything that He loved and esteemed and a contempt for whatever He held in contempt. The child’s interior faculties, too, thus come under the influence of the transforming action of Our Lord. He seizes upon these and uses them as His own and for His own purposes. The divine life sown in Baptism thus develops interiorly and exteriorly, and the Christian becomes, in very truth, another Christ. This is the teaching you find on every page of St. Paul. “I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me.” “To me to live is Christ.” This is how your child, too, is to become Christ “reincarnate.”

It will repay you dear fathers and mothers, often to allow your mind to dwell upon this wondrous dignity to which God has raised that child of yours. Think the high thoughts of God about those children when you stand together watching them asleep in the cot. Try to look upon them with some of the reverence you direct to the Tabernacle, when you see them romping happily in the country or playing at the seaside. Often remember God’s splendid designs for them when you are listening to their childish prattle at table, or when they pore over their lessons, or gather with you both to say the family

rosary at night.

NEWMAN'S PRAYER

It may well happen that you catch in your child's heart an echo of Cardinal Newman's exquisite prayer. Who has a better right than your child, I wonder, to make it his own? "Dear Jesus, help me to spread Thy fragrance everywhere I go. Flood my soul with Thy spirit and life. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may only be a radiance of Thine. Shine through me, and be so in me, that every soul I come in contact with may feel Thy Presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me—but only Jesus!"

God makes use of your children to "reincarnate Himself in them". Yes, but only on certain conditions. Does the plan seem to you to be working out? If you had the inestimable privilege of having Our Lord in your home as a Child and mixing every day with those boys and girls of yours, do you think His conduct and theirs would be rather similar? Would their thoughts and tastes be very much in line? And you have to think that there would be many differences, what is the explanation?

Side by side with the seed of the supernatural life in the soul there lie also the seeds of another life—the life of selfishness. And very early in its career the child begins to show signs of this selfish life. While the divine life is hidden, the selfish life makes progress visibly, and is imperious in its demands for attention and satisfaction. Little children want to lay hands on whatever they see, and we say very truthfully that that is "only natural." They have the seeds of selfishness in them, and these show themselves in bad temper in a tendency to disobey, to be lazy, or untruthful, or vindictive.

"ONLY NATURAL"

True order demands that they learn to subject the life of selfishness to the life of grace, or, if you prefer, the love of self to the love of God. Very true that it is "only natural" for them to develop the life of selfishness and to ignore the divine life planted in their souls. The appeal of the senses is very strong and selfishness means the inordinate satisfaction of those senses. No blame to the child if he clamours for this satisfaction. It is only natural that weeds should grow. The child has to be *taught* to keep the lower life in a state of submission to the higher life. The little character has to be taken in hand by somebody, and the child shown how to mould it, if God's life in the soul is to come to maturity.

And that brings me to your vocation as fathers and mothers. God actually makes Himself dependent upon you for the accomplishment of His plan. If you co-operate with Him and train your child on the lines shown you in Jesus Christ, your child will gradually become more and more the sort of child God intended him to be. This is what is meant by education. "The proper and immediate end of Christian education," writes the late Holy Father "is to co-operate with divine grace in forming the true and perfect Christian—that is, *to form Christ Himself in those regenerated by Baptism*, according to the emphatic expression of the Apostle: 'My little children, of whom I am in labour again until Christ be formed in you..'"

THE ORDING OF LIFE

That is part of your glorious vocation to the married state. Fathers and mothers are to train their children in such a way that God may make use of those children "to reincarnate Himself" in them. The union between man and wife is compared by St. Paul to the union between Christ and His Church, for, like Christ and the Church, they are to foster, not only the child's natural life of the body, but also, what is of immeasurably greater importance, the supernatural life of the soul. They are entrusted by God with the sublime task of fashioning souls destined to increase in the divine life here and to be irrevocably established in that divine life hereafter. On them God depends to train the child, even from its earliest years, to keep due order. The life of the body and of selfishness must learn to be subject to the higher life—the life of God in the soul. And on parents primarily devolves the sacred task of instructing the child in this plan of God.

Such a vocation requires much help from God, so Christ has raised the union of man and wife to the dignity of a Sacrament. Marriage thus becomes the channel of communicating to the souls of father and mother the graces they need to train their children as God would have them to be trained.

SLAUGHTER OF INNOCENTS

This is the Christian teaching on marriage and the Christian teaching on the dignity of your child. You can see at once how degrading by contrast is the modern pagan doctrine which regards your child merely as a little animal. You can understand why the Church must come down so ruthlessly on those who propagate and indoctrinate others into the detestable practice of birth control and race suicide. You read in the paper the declaration of M. Petain on the capitulation of France. "Too few children, too few arms, too few allies—there is the cause of our defeat. . . . Since the spirit of pleasure has prevailed over the spirit of the sacrifice people have demanded more than they have given. They have wanted to spare themselves effort, and to-day misfortunes come." Race-suicide is tersely described by Pius XI as another slaughter of the Innocents.

ARE WE OUT-OF-DATE

Even Catholic parents can easily enough become tainted with this pagan poisonous mentality. "No more children for us," declared, without a blush, a Catholic mother of one child lately, "and I would not have had Sheila (this was not the child's name) if I knew what a tie she was going to be to me!" Now, consider the complacent ease with which that Catholic mother lays down conditions to Almighty God. Man and wife have the sublime vocation which we saw. God entrusts them with a sacred power to be used only in accordance with laws which He has clearly defined. Man and wife are permitted to co-operate with Him in calling into being a child who is destined to be a living ciborium, in whom Christ will "reincarnate Himself."

But your Catholic mother cannot, be bothered with all this. "Allow little children to come to me," says Our Lord. "But they are such a tie," object the parents. "If we have more than one or two children, what is going to happen about our golf, our cocktail parties, our card parties, our whist drives, our trip in the summer?" So the Lord is placidly told not to interfere. He is politely informed that, all things considered, in view of the needs of modern life and the advance of modern thought, His laws have become obsolete. They need revision rather badly, and there are to be found Catholic married couples quite willing to lend assistance to the Lord in the task of re-drafting them!

"A GOOD TIME"

The high cost of living is the excuse most often advanced for the one or two child family. But it is notorious that wealthy parents are the greatest offenders. The truth is that our Catholic fathers and mothers are eaten up by the prevailing craze for pleasure. For the sake of a "good time"—a few years of added youth, dancing, hiking, sport, the admiration of somebody else's husband or wife—for such things as these they will shirk the sacred responsibility imposed on them by the duties of their state of life. Life becomes an unending effort to escape from home—and boredom.

Especially saddening is the life of a mother of this sort. She will race around in her whirlpool existence, always looking for something new which is no sooner attained than it begins to pall. She grows restless, dissatisfied, and at times (if she allows herself to think at all) she is filled with a crushing sense of failure. She sees the insincerity of her so-called friends and the silliness of the mannerisms and conventions. But she will not pursue this line of thought. She will rush away from it and try to forget.

However, old age comes, and then at last thought and reflection force themselves upon her weary mind. What a pitiable sight is the aging woman who has deliberately thwarted God's plan! She sits, with empty heart and empty hands, lonely and sorrowful and childless, amid the ruins of a wasted life. Her place all these years was with her children and in her home. That is the place for which she is fitted by her vocation and by the God Who gave her that vocation. But she has raced from it with the speed of a prisoner fleeing from goal. Bitterness sets in. She hardens against God, against her husband, against her friends, against herself. She dies unwanted, unloved, unmourned.

A QUOTATION

Very pertinent here in our letter comes a quotation from the Cape Town "Southern Cross" for 10th September, 1930. M. H. Donovan writes, in an article called, 'The Discovery of the Child': "It is children who keep life from going

stagnant, who keep it alive and sweet. They may mean anxieties and worries and cares, and deprivations. But they make life real. They give married life its meaning. They help to keep the institution of marriage sound and enduring. You can't worry about fancied slights and infidelities in a husband when you have a large crowd of children to care for. And a husband is much less likely to find his distraction and interests outside the home when he has a tribe of jolly youngsters scrambling over him, waiting to be played with or helped with home lessons, than when he comes home to an empty, silent home! You can't stagnate where children are. You can't concentrate on self. They stir up the depths of life in you and keep it wholesome and sweet and good. . . . It is children who provide the blaze in life before which we who are growing old may warm ourselves and bring back into our lives a semblance of the youth we have lost."

A GOOD CONSCIENCE

If our Catholic parents are to exorcise themselves of the demon of this pagan practice, they must get back to the gospel. Their state of life demands sacrifice. Let them cast off the burden of responsibility and they find they have to shoulder another burden—one that at first indeed seems a happy exchange, but presently it begins to gall, and it ends by becoming intolerable. On the other hand, let them face up generously and conscientiously to their duty and they find at first perhaps (almost certainly) a sense of regret for the life of enjoyment that they have had to curtail. Very quickly, however, this is replaced by a deep and a more lasting satisfaction coming from their realization of having co-operated with the divine plane as God intended they should co-operate when He blessed their union and made it a sacrament. Acting up to your conscience may mean taking up the knife and performing a painful operation, but in the happy results of that operation you taste a joy to which your modern, poor pagan parent must ever remain a stranger.

GOD'S LAW SANCTIONED

While we are on this unsavoury subject, it is no harm to recall the terrible punishment that fell upon Onan, the first man recorded to have practised this heinous crime. The modern world you live in readily condones that sin. Your neighbour will warn you not to have too many children, with an air of assurance implying that it is for you to dictate to the Almighty. The vile perversion of the divine Law is called by high-sounding names. But look upon it with the eyes of God. What *does He* think of the practice? "The Lord slew Onan because he did a detestable thing." "Onan, the son of Juda," writes St. Augustine, "did this, and the Lord killed him for it."

Hence, attaching to the marriage vocation there is, first of all, the need of a sense of responsibility. Perhaps there is no subject concerning which your modern world makes more merry. We have companionable marriages, experimental marriages, temporary unions. We have easy divorce. Modern so-called "culture" is loud in its demands that all these be legitimatised by law and accepted generally by the people. In the midst of this flippancy and slippery morality you, Catholic fathers and mothers, have to take a firm stand, proving your loyalty to the clear teaching of Christ and the Church His infallible mouthpiece. The noble words of Pius XI, you are "the ministers of the divine omnipotence." Shocking crime can be decked out in grandiose colours. It is for you to tear away the mask assumed by the smug hypocrites who would pose as your teachers.

PRINCIPLE OF AUTHORITY

Beside this responsibility, fathers and mothers have also to keep ever before their eyes the principle of authority. If you are to foster the divine life in your child's soul, you must be authorized by God to act in His Name. And you are. "He that hears you hears Me. He that despises you despises Me. He that despises Me despises Him that sent Me." It was, indeed, to His seventy-two disciples that Our Lord said this, but the principle is quite general. You will have noticed how solemnly He warns His corrupt judges about their misuse of this God given authority. Jesus in the Passion is Prisoner and Caiaphas is judge. But the judge is warned that a day will come when these positions will be reversed. Wherefore let Caiaphas take heed how he uses his authority. Pilate is a judge, too, and he vaunts his power. Does not Christ know that Pilate is able to acquit his Prisoner or to put Him to death? Let Pilate beware. He may not use his authority in an arbitrary manner. He holds it in trust for God. Who will demand an account of its use or misuse.

Parents also share this authority, and to you, too, He utters His warning. If you exercise His authority in a fitting manner your children are going to stand an excellent chance of being what He wants them to be. If you fail Him, and your children and His are lost to Him or estranged from Him, don't think He will have much to demand from you when you stand before Him to render an account of your stewardship?

The first title chosen for this little paper was: Parents, Obey Your Children! Let me tell you why, even if the telling entails setting out a few personal experiences.

AN ANECDOTE

Some time ago a little girl, aged six, was absent from school for about a fortnight. The nun called to the home one evening, thinking that perhaps the child was ill. She was met by mother. "Oh, Sister, I suppose it is about Jane? (Again this is not the child's name.) I know, of course, that she has not been with you for a long time. No, she's not ill, Sister, but *she won't go for me.*"

At this juncture formidable six-year-old Jane stepped into the scene and mother said: "This is Sister come down from school, dear, to enquire why you have been absent. So now, dear, will you go tomorrow?"

The lady thus interrogated pulled her little self up to her full height and declared emphatically: "No!"

Then, with fitting deference, mother made another sally forth: "Will you go to-morrow, dear, and I'll give you a penny?"

This proposition was accorded due consideration, and finally despatched with another dignified monosyllable: "No!"

Whereupon mother turned her glistening eyes from her darling to the nun and said, helplessly: "Now, Sister, *you see for yourself that she won't go!*"

Yes, it looks as if we need to revise the Fourth Commandment. Parents, obey your children!

AND ANOTHER

Mother was bringing her little boy by the hand to school. He had just turned six. At the gate he wheeled round and said to mother: "Bring me an orange for my lunch." (You will observe, in parenthesis, that this was no request, but an order. And it is not usual, it seems, for orders to be accompanied by "please" or "thanks.")

It was not easy to get an orange at that particular season, but the dutiful mother trudged all over the town, tried seven or eight shops, and at last her diligence met with its due reward. An orange was found for Master Tommy's lunch. The delighted mother purchased it forthwith. Now, young six-and-a-half could be faced at twelve o'clock with easy conscience and untroubled mien! "Sure, he told me to get it for him," declared the poor, victimized mother later in the day, "and I'd have no business going without it!" Sensible woman!

Parents, obey your children! Perhaps you are smiling dear fathers and mothers. I hope you are, and I may as well admit that the ludicrous side of such performances makes me smile with you as I recall them. But there is a tragic side, too, I'm afraid. What are our parents thinking about, or have they been smitten with unaccountable blindness? When you have had your smile, don't you next feel inclined to lose patience with infatuated parents of this type—and I fear their name is legion? If a mother takes "orders" like that from a child of six, what is going to happen when he is seventeen or twenty?

AS THEY GROW OLDER

That is no rhetorical question. Let us try to answer it.

At seventeen or twenty (or even earlier) that boy or girl will do exactly as they please. There will be no controlling of them. They will rule the house. They will come in at any hour of the night, and dare you ask why! They will associate with whom they please, and who are you, anyhow, to object? They will demand money for pictures, for the dance hall, for cigarettes, and you will produce it or else timorously face the storm that will ensure! Or they have discovered simpler methods for supplying themselves with the wherewithal. What does the Seventh Commandment matter, anyhow? Am I exaggerating? I don't think you will say that I am.

But will you please recognize the danger *in time*? We saw that there are seeds of selfishness in every human heart, and

these will grow with alarming rapidity unless they are checked *from the child's earliest years*. It is too late to begin when your child is nine or ten or even younger. Habits have been formed by then, and you will encounter more opposition.

BEGIN IN TIME

Listen to this conversation which took place recently between a judge and two parents. The eldest daughter, aged seventeen, had met with misfortune and the parents were trying to "get things fixed up."

Judge: "This happened after the dance? What time does your girl get home at night?"

Parents: "We don't know. We go to bed at about half-past ten, *after the rosary*, and leave the door open for her!"

"And her younger sister (aged fifteen), does she also go to the dance?"

"She *do!*"

There is a third daughter, I understand, aged thirteen. Does she go?"

"She *do, sum times!*"

Or look over my shoulder and read this—an extract from a mother's letter: "I spoil all my children by doing too much for them. Now I see when it is too late, that, that was real selfishness on my part." Parents, Obey Your Children!

Children fail in the designs of their loving heavenly Father for them largely because their parents won't exercise authority. Every whim of the child is granted. Parents will plead or request the child, instead of saying definitely what is to be done. Results to parents afterwards? They are disappointed in their hopes of the children. Perhaps they are even cowed by the child's insufferable arrogance.

WORKING IN HARMONY

You know, too, that this state of affairs is often the fault of *either* of the parents. There must be a fixed policy agreed upon by both father and mother. If you think dad is too strict, and you want to tell him so, please wait till the children are sound asleep in bed. If you consider that mother is petting them too much, all right. Say **it** to her in a friendly way. Talk it over, but let the talk be when the youngsters are at school. Before the children be of one mind and one heart, or you'll neutralize each other's effect for good.

You can easily see how fatal is the opposite policy. Mother tries to assert her God-given authority and train the child to obey. But father, good, easy man, wants his club, or his armchair and newspaper and pipe—and peace. Anything for a quiet life! I know cases where the mother has worn herself to a shadow trying to train the children to habits of self-control and self-denial. But dad gives her no support; more than that; he opposes her. If the girls want to go to the cinema, let them go—always. If they are going to be out till two or three in the morning, very well. Dad won't worry or ask any questions, provided they don't make a row coming in and disturb his slumbers. The youngsters will be only once young, and they may as well have a good time. Mother's way of it is that all should be in for the family rosary. Dad smiles good-naturedly and preaches from the housetops that there is far too much piety in the house. Whose voice is likely to prevail? So, once again, dear fathers and mothers, let there be a fixed policy agreed upon between you and in your exercise of authority.

LET TEACHER TRY

Sometimes a conscientious teacher will step in and make an attempt to supplement these lamentable defects. He or she will try to insist on obedience. Teacher sets home work and child returns next day to school with no work done. Teacher questions and discovers that the child has a lying tongue. Dare *he* assert his authority? Is it a fact that he had the temerity to punish the child? Why, mother is up at lunch hour (or sooner, for possibly the poor victim will make his escape home the first moment the tyrant's eye is off him). In bursts the mother, boiling with righteous anger, feathers all sticking out and wax paint on!

Then and there the unfortunate teacher is called to order, *in the presence of the child*, possibly even in presence of an entire class of children. I marvel at the forbearance and long-suffering of that most devoted body of men and women, our

children's teachers. But I marvel not the less at the utter silliness of many of our parents. How *can* that child of yours ever learn respect for authority?

TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

Suppose, for the sake of supposing, that in this particular instance the teacher is wrong. For goodness sake, drop in and see the teacher in his home this evening, *when your child is absent*. That is the time to discuss your grievance, if you think you have one. But do avoid allowing your child to develop into a talebearer. Don't let him get away with the idea that you are at hand to support all his real or imaginary accusations. Don't show yourself always ready to take his side. If you bounce *in* on the teacher in the way we refer to, believe me your misguided and lopsided love is going to ruin your child's chances. You are going to see very soon a selfish, conceited, disobedient, revengeful, untruthful, bad-tempered little boy or girl. And later in life? Overbearing manners, serene sneering contempt for you; often worse things that I don't have to specify, but I leave the spaces to yourselves to fill in. And who is to blame? *You* are. Please examine your conscience.

In spite of all this, you will frequently come across parents who bristle like a hedgehog if anybody dare suggest that their child's conduct is not all it should be. *Their* little girl going with company unsuited for her? What a monstrous idea! Or if there is anything in the report, you may depend upon it that *she* is wide-awake and well able to mind herself.

It would be the easiest thing in the world to run off a dozen cases of parents bridling up like this when a kindly, well-meaning teacher or friend, or even priest or a nun, dropped a hint that their child was beginning to tamper with danger. And once again the result? Do you wish me to tell you of the sad things I have seen? Do you want to hear about the bitter tears shed by parents who refused to be warned? Of the heads bowed low for the disgrace of the child? Dear fathers and mothers, your child may be an angel in the flesh, and God grant it. But in this world of sin and temptation nobody is impeccable—not even your child. Be wise in time. Be grateful for the word of warning. There are many who were not and are sorry.

FRIENDS OF THE FAMILY

Of course, it is very possible, too, to err on the side of over-strictness. There are excellently intentioned fathers and mothers who will not endure the idea of their sons or daughters keeping company. How often the boy or girl will say with a laugh "Does mother or father know I'm keeping company? Not much! I wouldn't dream of telling. They would murder me!"

Now, there is a right way of keeping company, just as there is a right way of saying prayers. It is certain that much sin would be prevented if boys and girls could bring their friends into their homes. And why do they not? Because father or mother would "murder" them! No. Let there be a clear understanding between you and the child (whom we are now envisaging as having reached young manhood or young womanhood) that you will be glad to welcome any of his or her friends or acquaintances. It is right that you should have the child's confidence and that the child should have the benefit of your advice and opinion as to who is and is not suitable company. But "murder" engenders neither confidence nor sympathy.

Far be from us the blindness that would make us insensible to the sterling qualities of our growing manhood and womanhood! High ideals of self-sacrifice and unselfishness are in evidence everywhere. Many a young man or woman is thrilled by the clarion call of our late Pope to rally under Christ's banner in the serried ranks of Catholic Action. Many are quick to translate that thrill into magnificent practical work for souls, as Sodalists, or Legionaries of Mary, or members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Thank God for that. It is a delight to meet youth in these spheres, and you run into them everywhere.

YOUTHS' GLORIES

Youth was ever dear to Jesus Christ, and it is good to know how His kindly eyes watch their struggles upward and onward in their most difficult years. It is comforting to realize how deeply He sympathizes with them in the hard fight for

purity, how His Sacred Heart throbs with gladness when He sees them uphold their high idealism in a world where loyalty to Him lies crashed and bruised amid the wreckage of sin and of wasted lives.

You remember how one day a young man came to Him to question Him eagerly about his vocation, and how “Jesus, looking upon him, loved him.” That same love still shines in those eyes of Christ and evokes a noble response from many a high-souled boy and girl. Witness the thousands flocking to embrace the priesthood or the religious state at the very age when the world is wont to exercise its most alluring spells. Count up the hundreds on the quays every year tearing their hearts out of the land they love in order to face the rigours of missionary life. “Ah me!” exclaims Canon Sheehan, “what a glorious thing is this enthusiasm of the young, this noble idealism that spurns the thought of consequences, only sees the finger of God beckoning, and cares not whither!”

THE ROOT OF THE TROUBLE

No, we deprecate the charge of pessimism about our youth. But the question forcing itself to our lips is: “Why are there not more with this fine spirit?” You will begin to expatiate on the prevailing laxity. You will tell me that youth is pleasure-mad. You will cite for me chapter and verse to prove that they regard life as being of interest and value only in the measure in which it can be made to yield to them the maximum of enjoyment. That may be all true, but it is not the root of the trouble. *You* are. God has given you authority to use in His name and you are not using it. Or you wake up too late and try in vain to retrieve lost ground. Once again may I ask you, please, to examine your conscience?

Don’t you know parents who are the very first to fan the flame of self-indulgence in a child’s heart? They will put into the child’s hand papers and magazines that openly or occultly arouse dangerous curiosity in the receptive mind of the child. Little boys and girls will be brought to shows where scenes and situations are depicted that can have only one purpose and only one result—to rob that little heart of its innate love of Christ. Catholic mothers will deck out little girls of four or five in dresses that are shamelessly offensive. Christmas comes or the little one’s birthday, and at the party little five-year-old girl is met with advances from little six-year old boy and delighted parents rock with laughter.

NOT NARROW-MINDED

Narrow-minded, are we? I don’t believe it. I’m prepared to admit that I’m narrow-minded in maintaining that it is madness to think that petrol flung on a fire will tend to keep it in check. I’m very conservative in holding to the notion that a wild beast captured from the jungle should be safely stowed away in the zoo in a strong cage. One sickens at times at the unending catalogue of complaints about our youth. When are we going to get to the root of the trouble? When are Catholic fathers and mothers going to wake up and understand that God expects them to use their authority—and from the child’s earliest years?

Mind, we are trying to be very fair. Not all the blame is to be laid at the door of the parents. Granted that there are other evil influences at work, too. But this is *your* letter; hence the stress laid on *your share*, not a small share, of the blame.

What, then is to be done? Do we want fathers and mothers to become martinets, ruling their children and home with a rod of iron? God forbid! All that is advocated is that you assert and maintain your authority. Especially train your child, *from babyhood*, to the Christian practice of self-denial.

A TRAIN JOURNEY

You will allow me to revert again to an anecdote. Two ladies and a little girl bundled themselves into the railway carriage—one the mother, and the other, it transpired, a friend of the family. The child, one gathered from remarks made, was just a little over three. Presently the tiny tot began to grow restless, and slapped at a bag of sweets which mother was carrying in her hand. Mother said, very firmly, I thought: “All right, dear, I’ll give you one. But mind, now, *only one*.” So only one was produced. The child took it eagerly in her left hand, passed it without a word into her right, and then straightaway extended the left hand again for a second sweet. And mother, who had just stipulated that it was to be “only

one,” capitulated without a word of remonstrance.

Now, the child discovers that this *is* a paying game, so tries a third time and a third time succeeds. In all, as far as I remember, the “only one” materialized into “only five” before mother finally called a halt. Then was it “Thank you mother,” do you think? Not a bit of it. Holding her five prizes with difficulty in her little right palm, the child raised her left hand and smacked mother’s hand soundly. Then turned on her heel and scurried out into the corridor. I can still see mother looking lovingly after her, and I remember my gasp when she turned to her friend and explained with an understanding smile: “Poor little dear! You know, *she’s dead with the sleep!*”

THE TRAINING SHE GOT

Once again I’m glad if we are both smiling. No, don’t be a martinet, but do train your child in “the art of doing without.” it is grand to think of the child who was taught by her parents to save her pennies until she had sixty, and then mother would give her three big silver coins. These she proudly presented to the priest to say Mass for a dear departed one. Sometimes it was not so easy getting up to sixty, and she would come to mother with only fifty-five or fifty-six. On these occasions mother, by way of a great concession, would sometimes supplement the deficit, or sometimes her little girl could “owe” to mother!

She is no longer a child now. Have mother and father any complaints to make about her? Not they. They thank God hourly for the treasure she is to them. And, marvel of all marvels, the great God bends down and thanks them for the training the child on His lines!

So teach your child at least sometimes to say “no” when he or she very much wants to make it “yes”; or yes when no is so much easier to say. Above all stress the *motive* and you will observe a most gratifying strengthening of the little character.

TELL THEM WHY

For instance, point to the motive this way. The elder Brother did hard things of His own free will—much harder than He asks or expects from the child. Why? Because, somehow, when you love a person very much you always know that doing hard things is a sign of that love. So Jesus did very hard things, out of love. Wouldn’t it be grand to “give up” that show, or put by that nice dress till another day, or even give that sweet to somebody else, as a very tiny proof of love for Jesus?

Or again: Think of the teeming millions of pagans all over the world. Priests and nuns have left home and friends in order to give their whole lives to working for these pagans—every one of whom has a soul destined for heaven and redeemed by Our Lord’s Blood. Now, here is a scorchingly hot day. What about waiting for ten minutes before taking that lovely cool glass of water or opening that tempting bottle of lemonade? Perhaps at this very moment a priest or a nun (all the better if the child knows one personally) is trying to convert some such soul, and your tiny sacrifice, united with the elder Brother’s great one on Calvary, may be just what is wanting to ensure success.

YOU DID TO ME

Or yet once more. A poor man comes to the door. Our Lord never tires of telling us that what we do to others He takes as done to Himself. The little child is “saving up” to buy that precious toy in the shop window. The toy is going to cost five shillings, and he has safely deposited in his money-box four shillings and fourpence! Suppose he gave the fourpence to this poor man! But that will throw everything out! At present he has “only eight pence to go”! Put up the supernatural motive and let him decide for himself. It will be all to the good if you can manage not even to know what decision he comes to.

And when you have the motive well implanted, don’t overlord the child with extravagant praise. A hearty word or two of encouragement certainly, but if you are forever harping on the great things achieved, especially before strangers when the child is listening, you may easily enough only pull down with one hand what you have built up with the other. Your

little one is quite capable of grasping the idea of doing these things hiddenly, to be seen only by Jesus and for love of Him and souls. His way of telling us this is: "Let not your left hand know what your right hand does."

The results can be marvelously consoling, for the little one's soul is, as we saw, "naturaliter Christiana." Of course, all this means devotion to the child and zeal for God's plan. For yourselves, too, it may mean a practice of the self-denial which you preach. One thing it will infallibly mean—happiness. Just try.

RELIGIOUS TRAINING

It is not enough, of course, merely to protect that divine seed in the child's soul by teaching self-denial. You have the further sacred task of fostering its growth by the religious training you give your children. And it is not superfluous here to begin by asking if you give any religious training at all? I have known of boys and girls to come to Catholic schools from supposedly Catholic families and have had their religious training completely neglected. They, literally, could not make the sign of the cross. They were just polite nicely mannered little pagans, or were saved from being no more by the one redeeming fact that they had been baptized. Aged anything from six to ten, they had not the most elementary notion as to the meaning of Prayer, the Blessed Eucharistic, Confession, the Life of Our Lord, or of the loveliness and beauty of His Immaculate Mother.

Do the parents of such children ever stand face to face with God, I wonder, and let Him look into their lives? Listen to the weighty words of Pius XI: "For the love of our Saviour Jesus Christ, we *implore* pastors of souls, by every means in their power, by instructions and catechisms, by word of mouth and written articles widely distributed, to warn Christian parents of their grave obligations." You cannot toss over lightly on the school your solemn obligation of giving your child religious training. That duty devolves on you primarily. The function of the school is to supplement the work begun in the home, not to supply for it.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Now, let us proceed with the examination of conscience. Are your children taught their Catechism and do you show your interest and anxiety about it? Are you much more keen that your boy *win* a place in the team or bring home a scholarship than that he should be in the Sodality of Mary, Is the family rosary a forgotten thing? Grace at meals? Are you by the child's side at night, praying with him? Have you taught your children to direct their first thoughts to God in the morning? Are they members of the Apostleship of Prayer?

The Sacraments? Why is it that in school during term there is a big number of daily communicants, but that for the first few days after the holidays you can count the numbers approaching the rails on your fingers? How often do your children see you going yourself? And with what reverence of preparation and thanksgiving? Twenty-five or thirty years ago we were taught to make always a thanksgiving of a quarter of an hour. Do the youngsters do that? Do you?

THINGS YOU SAY

Then the conversation at home? At table is it always the latest bit of spicy scandal about Mr. or Mrs. Next-Door? Or a cynical yarn about your priest, or a jibe at the nuns? Young nine-year-old at your elbow looks knowingly across the table at the little sister of a year less. Your remark is not lost on them. Is it likely to deepen their respect for religion? I wonder.

What is read in your home? Look at the stack of periodicals and papers. Not anti-religious? No, but almost worse, treating God and religion as if they did not matter a great deal, taking unchristian principles for granted, that is all. How is it going to affect the child's mind?

Does your home show that you are proud of being a Catholic? Does a non-Catholic, on coming into your best room, know immediately that you are a Catholic? Have you a Sacred Heart picture there for the world to see? Or Holy Water near the hall door? Oh, you don't like making a parade of religion. It is hypocritical and embarrassing to allow it to protrude everywhere. You object to advertising it.

SUNDAY RELIGION

I admit that most of my friends are very anxious to advertise what they are most proud of. If God has gifted you with a glorious voice, you don't need much persuasion to sing. If you have painted a beautiful picture, you are not very likely to want to hang it downstairs in the coal cellar. Why jib at exhibiting the most precious treasure of all? It is time we called a halt to this sickening, semi-apologetic attitude towards our glorious faith. Religion for a Catholic permeates his whole life. It is not a mere appendage, which he puts on and takes off with his Sunday suit. Your children see that, I fervently hope.

Three children came into Mass with their dad. They came late, during the sermon, and made their way to the organ gallery. Dad, having dumped the three youngsters unceremoniously into the nearest pew, saw a friend of his sitting at the rails of the gallery. He planked down beside him, then crossed legs and entered upon a lengthy chat. I was almost expecting that he would next produce a box of cigarettes and light up, but he didn't. Mark, there was no genuflection, not a semblance of a prayer, not a single bend of the knee. What could those children think but that religion was a bit of mummery? What could the chance onlooker think? Ask the men if you meet them. They were told!

You have seen children hauled by the arm out of the church at the Last Gospel. Follow the mother who is too busy to wait for the end of the Mass and reckon how many minutes she will stand gossiping at the corner on the way home. Oh, the children don't think. Perhaps they do. Is this the sort of thing that makes them later regard religion as of very secondary importance?

YOUTHS' PATRON SAINTS

The ink is running out of my pen, and perhaps you are not sorry! The enemies of the Church today are making feverish efforts to capture youth. Dear fathers and mothers, yours is the glorious vocation to shape our young men and women into sterling characters of whom the church may well be proud. Yours it is to put into them the spirit that made the youthful Tarcisius shed his blood rather than betray the Blessed Eucharistic which he was carrying on his breast. You have to enkindle in youth today the idealism that made eighteen-year old Stanislaus Kostka tramp four hundred miles on foot in order to escape from wealth and the world and give himself to Jesus Christ as a Jesuit. The delightful holy familiarity with God and the childlike spirit of faith that obtained in that singularly blessed home of the Little Flower is a treasure which you, too, must plant securely in the hearts of the children He has given you.

Look up and down the ranks of that vast army of youthful saints. Have they any one trait in common, differing as they do in character, in natural gifts, in the places and periods at which they lived? Yes, every one of them "God used to reincarnate Himself in them." Now, look back again at your own little flock. In them, too, He would become "reincarnate," in them, too He will become "reincarnate," on the condition that their fathers and mothers permit themselves to be used as "the ministers of His omnipotence." This they do by developing in their home the three qualities which have formed the subject-matter of this letter—a sense of responsibility, authority, and religion. These, I think will go a long way towards making your home a miniature Nazareth.

Nihil Obstat,
PERCY JONES,
Censor Diocesan

Imprimatur,
✽ DANIEL MANNIX,
Archiepiscopus Melbournensis
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