

# A Second Letter to Parents

BY REV. ROBERT NASH, S.J.

DEAR FATHERS AND MOTHERS,

The very gracious reception you gave to our first Letter emboldens us to write to you again. Many of you had the kindness to tell us of your appreciation and not a few who are entrusted with the training of youth expressed their satisfaction at seeing in print ideas, which they say, need to be continually stressed. The printer too has been kept busy. Three or four editions have passed through his machine and thence, we fondly hope and pray, to the homes of many of our parents. From all of which we deduce that, like *Oliver Twist*, you are asking for more.

I want to begin by talking to you about God's authority which is vested in you. Though we have had a good deal to say already on this head we make no excuse for our repetition. Why? Because the number of foolish, infatuated parents who fail to understand their responsibility seems to be alarmingly on the increase. Let me illustrate.

Quite recently a much respected parish priest received a letter from an irate mother. How dared he correct her child? What business was it of his? She would not have his interference, and if it was going to continue, she would withdraw her child from that school! In his simplicity the excellent priest considered that he might have something to say to the spiritual welfare and training of those committed to his care. But this youthful enlightened mother would soon teach him! Let him try it again and see what would happen!

Oh yes, she was a Catholic,—of a sort—and he is not young except in the energy and zeal with which he works for souls. When a young Catholic mother in Ireland can write in such a strain to a man entitled to respect by reason of age and position I think we need not apologise for emphasizing the obligation parents have to use their authority.

Other examples have been brought to light. Another priest, in the course of his rounds, came upon a young Irish woman who had gone through a form of marriage in a non-Catholic Church with a non-Catholic. There were three or four children, no one of whom was even baptised. The mother had been reared a Catholic, and the priest was trying to wake her up to a sense of her responsibility. "Here is your record—living habitually in sin and utter neglect of those children. Now I ask you as a Catholic, suppose you die tonight, suppose a bomb drops on this house, how are you going to stand before your God?" And her answer? With an inane smile she replied: "Father, what's the use in talking like that? Why not try to look on the bright side of things?"

All right, smile if you will as many of my friends have smiled when I told them, and I do not pretend to be blind to the ridiculousness of it. But there is surely an appallingly sad and depressing lack in the mentality of this poor woman. If the story was ridiculous merely one need give it no more than a passing thought. But when you remember that in that home the fate for eternity of immortal souls is in the balance, I think your smile will soon fade out. Here is a woman who hasn't the first idea about what she is bound to do for her childrens' souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Think of it from that angle and believe me it becomes no laughing matter.

Shortly after the appearance of our first Letter a friend sent me a gem from the daily paper. Here it is:

"In Derry last Thursday a woman was fined for the fifth time because her daughter refused to go to school. This daughter, who appears to be a self-willed young lady, lies in bed all day where she passes the time reading and smoking.

She is not content for that matter, to smoke any kind of cigarette, but sends her mother out and insists that she bring back one particular brand. She insists too that there shall be a fire in her bedroom all day. One might not be very surprised at this sort of behaviour in an up-to-date sophisticated young woman of seventeen years, but in a child of twelve, even an advanced child of twelve, it is almost unbelievable. The Educational Committee have realised the importance of the offence and have acted accordingly, but apparently the mother would prefer to pay the fines, and to provide cigarettes, novels and a fire, rather than listen to the 'backchat' from her daughter . . . During her last year's attendance the girl had gone from one school to another, attending in all about seven schools . . . Surely there is something wrong with a system which allows a child to wander casually from one school to another in an attempt to discover which one she dislikes least,

and, when she finds none agreeable to her, to retire to her bedroom to read and smoke.

To fine the mother, who is in no position to pay fines, surely is futile. When five fines already have failed to achieve the desired effect, it is scarcely likely that a sixth, less than some of the previous ones, will be successful. More severe measures ought to be taken before the young lady begins to consume large quantities of cocktails at her mother's expense. Dare we suggest a spanking?"

Dare we indeed? To be quite candid I very much want to ask at this stage if some of our parents are bereft of reason. Have they the power to take into their minds the irreparable damage they are doing to souls and the fearful judgments of God Who will demand why they have failed to use the authority He gave them? I refrain, with an effort, from enlarging on this theme, but do please read again our first Letter, —not because it is ours, but because it embodies the teaching of Christ and Our Holy Father, His infallible mouthpiece.

In this Letter I want to speak, not so much about parents who do not use their authority at all, like those in the examples quoted, as about parents who use it in a wrong and harmful way.

And, lest you might think from what has been said so far that I want you to tyrannize over your children, let us deal in the first place with the parents who correct too much. Frankly, I think this type is on the decline; the majority of parents offend by defect rather than by excess. However it is beyond doubt that there are parents whose idea of training the child seems to be to nag at the child and issue endless prohibitions and warnings at every stir.

Anybody can foresee the inevitable result. After a short while the child placidly ignores these unceasing admonitions.

Mother is always checking the child,—“don't sit there”; “put away that book”; “don't walk on that path” ; “stop singing that song”; “hurry up and finish your tea”; “you mustn't play like that”,—and so on through a whole series of decalogues. Now if you, dear father and mother, are going to be eternally forbidding and eternally commanding, your child will presently give you a deaf ear and do exactly as he pleases. And when you have a really important order to give, he has been so long accustomed to hearing you warning or prohibiting, that in this case too the chances are that he will take very little notice, if any.

And this is extremely bad for the training of your child, for in this way he forgets all about God's authority, vested in you. He discovers he can disobey with impunity for how could he be expected to live the strait-jacket existence which obedience to your innumerable behests would entail?

Closely allied to this type of parent is the one whose main weapon is to threaten punishment. I was walking up a street the other day and here was a little girl sitting on the damp kerb-stone. From a distance mother was expostulating: “Stand up! Wait till I catch you! I promise you you'll pay for this!” And of course the little girl continued to sit there defiantly, and when mother approached she arose, ran on a few hundred yards, and promptly squatted again! She had very probably learned that mother had no notion of carrying out these threats and that all that was required, in order to do her own sweet will, was to keep out of sight for a while after the offence.

It is a pity, as we hope to show, if the threat has ever to be employed in training a little child. But if you do use it, for goodness' sake execute your threat. If you tell the child he or she will be punished for a certain offence, don't let the child get away with it.

Punish, yes, and in cold blood, which brings me to the next way of misusing authority. Never punish a child when you are in a temper. Easy? One of the most difficult rules to keep but if you do keep it your child will bless you throughout his future life. To take the cane and give your child a spanking when you are boiling with rage is going to contribute not a whit to your child's training. He sees very well that you are gratifying yourself, giving your own wrath an outlet. Did you ever try this,—when the child has infuriated you to say: “I'm much too angry to punish you now, and if I were to punish I would probably be unjust. But you shall have your punishment this evening! “And this evening let him or her have it well and truly. The child knows he deserves it, and, what is even more important he sees you are moved, not by your own passion, but by your determination to teach him obedience.

Like many sound rules this one is difficult of observance. Try it, and if you tell me, for a start, that you keep it once in six, I'm going to congratulate you from my heart.

Then there is the parent who punishes for the wrong thing. A friend of mine entered a house to find the little child howling as a result of a beating from mother. And what had the child done? Done, indeed? She had spilt a whole bucket of water on the floor! Now even you yourself might do that and you would probably consider the accident quite sufficient trouble in itself without having to face a beating over and above!

And that same parent will meet her child coming in after the day at school. "Mother, did you hear that So-and-So was brought home dead drunk last night?" "Do you tell me so? Come over here, darling, sit on mammy's knee and tell me all about it!" "Do you see my point? The mother belabours the unfortunate child for an accident for which she was not responsible. But when the little one is ready to serve up a spicy piece of scandal she is applauded and encouraged. That mother was wrong in punishing the child in the first case. She was more wrong still in listening and drawing out the uncharitable story.

I know of parents and so do we all, who keep their children at home from school for no reason or for very flimsy reasons. And what happens? Mother will tell the child: "If the teacher asks why you were absent, say you were sick; tell teacher the doctor made you stay in bed!" "The child knows perfectly well that this is a black lie. He has been having a roaring holiday out at his country cousins, or he has been buried in the cinema for three or four hours during school time. This is a very serious misuse of your authority, my dear parent. You are using God's gift, entrusted to you, to make your child commit sin.

And the danger will develop. Later your boy or girl, now aged sixteen or seventeen, is employed in shop or factory. Tea is hard to get, and you drop a hint that there wouldn't be any great harm in your child bringing some home. Butter is scarce and your girl could easily manage to slip away with an occasional pound for your family gathering on Sunday. Money for that matter is none too plentiful, and what would be simpler than that your child should help himself or herself to a little from the employer's cashbox and so solve a few of your many financial worries? All this sort of thing is to lend your God-given authority to the doing of evil. He has entrusted it to you to use; you accept it and with it you condone sin, co-operate in sin, appear at least to approve of sin.

What is going to be the result to your child? In school days he was taught by you, his mother or father, deliberately to tell lies. Now you encourage him to steal. If later still he turns out a first-class swindler are you going to exonerate yourself from all blame? And even if you do, if you shrug your shoulders and try to pass up your responsibility, is God your Judge going to corroborate that comfortable sentence?

A father or mother will sometimes tell you: "Well, I'm not much good at going myself to Mass and the Sacraments but I always make sure the youngsters go." Do you imagine that in this good easy way you can salve your conscience? How will any child argue as soon as reason begins to dawn? "Mother always sends me but never goes herself! Dad makes us go to Mass every Sunday and to the Sodality meeting. But if it is so important for us, why isn't it the same for him?" And there is no answer except to admit you are quite wrong. An ounce of example is worth several tons of precept.

By all means send your child to Confession and Holy Communion regularly,—but kneel by the child's side and receive yourself. Certainly insist on the practice of morning and night prayers but let your child see an object lesson in your own fidelity and reverence in prayer. Enforce the injunctions you give by example and the child will believe in their importance. Neglect to give the example and there is a goodly chance that the child will follow your evil lead at an early date.

Our divine Lord, we are told, "began to do and to teach." In this as in all else let Him be your Model. Who does not know the lasting influence throughout life exercised by the memory of a good father and mother? Their mutual love and forbearance, their vigorous piety, their strictness tempered with a loving sweetness,—such things as these are long-lived and they act as a most powerful support to your God-given authority. On the contrary, if in later life, your children recall that you missed Mass for every trifling excuse, that you were often at logger-heads with each other and squabbling bitterly, that many a time there was dishonesty in your dealings or uncharitableness in your conversation,—don't you think that all this is going to influence permanently and for evil, the future of your child? I hope you yourself were blessed with good parents. If so, test yourself and see how their example influences you to this day. Your own children will be

telling the same by and by.

So our next hint about your authority is that you should enforce it by your own example.

Our present holy Father is reported to have stated that in many ways the most important years in a child's life are the first six. In these the character develops greatly and it is quite possible for parents to make the mistake of thinking that to yield always to the baby's whims is the correct way. Far from it. The baby in the cradle can gain a victory over its elders, and moreover be quite conscious of the fact. Baby can soon understand that mother or father is sure to yield if baby cries long and loud enough. Now it is of the first importance to train that little child, even from earliest years, that its every whim is definitely not going to be granted. So, dear fathers and mothers, begin in time, to assert your God-given authority. If you are on the point of calling me a martinet may I ask you please to go back a page or two to what we said about tyrannizing?

In every one of us there is a deeply-seated self-love. Naturally every one of us is devotedly fond of doing exactly what we please, saying exactly what we want to say, going to just those places where fancy or impulse beckons us. Now if father and mother yield to every whim of the child what is going to happen? This innate selfishness will develop at an alarming rate, and, like our Lady of Leisure, the child will be utterly impossible, utterly beyond control, in no time. Hence, begin early.

And lastly, in exercising your authority, may I suggest that you do not multiply or overstress the "don'ts." Did you ever try, when cycling, to avoid riding over a stone on the road? You see the stone ahead of you, and you say to yourself: "Now don't you go over that stone. It won't do your tyre any good, so don't you ride upon it. Tyres are expensive at present, and if you get a puncture you are going to rip the new one you've just bought. So don't." The very fact that you've said that "don't" seems, somehow, almost to impel you in the wrong direction, and you won't surprise me if you tell me that you go bump right over the stone.

Something similar seems to happen if you are always giving negative commands to your child. "Don't put your finger into your mouth. Don't turn in your toes. Don't go into the pantry. Don't, DON'T."

The reiterated prohibition stresses in the child's mind the thing he is not to do. He visualises the pantry and the jam, his teeth begin to water, and when your back is turned he pounces on the forbidden fruit. Don't turn in your toes,—the very phrase summons up an image in his mind. To walk with toes turned in seems so funny or clever that at once he wants to do it and have the experience of seeing how it actually looks. Don't put your finger in your mouth,—and immediately that finger begins to taste sweet as candy and he longs to feel and do the direct opposite to your "don't."

Suppose you try instead, to give your orders a positive turn. Dad says to mother, as it were by accident, when the child is listening: "I notice how smartly Mrs. Next-Door's little girl picks her steps." Your own child will probably never again want to turn in her toes. Instead of saying: "Don't go to the pantry" say: "We are going together to town this evening to do some shopping." "Don't put your finger in your mouth" is translated into "please hold mammy's umbrella," or "please carry this parcel" and the desired result obtains automatically.

And now, mea culpa, on re-reading these pages I find that so far I have inflicted a number of "don'ts" on your good selves, dear fathers and mothers. Let me collect them here before passing on to the positive ways of using your authority aright. Here is the list as far as we have gone: Don't multiply rules and injunctions needlessly. Don't employ threats except when other means fail, but if you do threaten fulfil your threat always. Don't punish your child when you are in a temper. Don't punish where the child is not to blame, and don't approve when you should show strong disapproval. Don't use your authority to condone or encourage sin. Don't merely issue orders; enforce them by your example. Don't begin too late to exercise your authority. Don't overstress the "don'ts."

You will have noticed the severity with which Our divine Lord, Who was habitually so gentle, treated the Pharisees and Scribes. If you go back on our list of "don'ts" in the preceding paragraph you will easily see His reason. They misused the authority God had given them, in one or other of the ways against which this Letter is warning us. Thus they were forever wrangling about the lesser details of the Law and ignoring its spirit utterly. They were always ready to dictate to others but, puffed up with pride as they were themselves, they made very light of their own obligations. And the

gentle Christ lashed them mercilessly. “Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, brood of vipers, whited sepulchres!” Why? Because they misused their God-given authority. I don’t want you, dear parents, to fall under the same condemnation.

By way of sharp contrast notice how Our Lord uses His authority. He enforces His commands by His shining example. He does not multiply injunctions, rather He reduces them all to the great Commandment of love. In exercising your authority often ask yourself: How would He act in these circumstances, I wonder? How would He treat this child of mine who has disobeyed? How would He set about correcting this fault in my child? If you can discover the answer you need read no farther. You have all you require to direct you aright.

Perhaps you want to tell me that your child or children have very glaring faults of character. Shake hands! I’m very glad to find you admitting it. To hear some parents raving about their progeny you would be inclined to think they were scarcely of the earth,—until, perhaps, you come to know them personally! But you are more honest and you say that your child is sour-tempered, or sulky, or untruthful, or lazy. Of course many of these objectionable traits are born with your child and I am not going to pretend that, even with all the care in the world and all the training you can give, they will necessarily be completely cured.

But I think it is worth while examining into your attitude towards the child in order to find out if you are developing rather than stemming these faults. Take a child who is naturally stubborn. A common way of handling such a child is to threaten and employ force. And there may well be times when no other means will succeed. But, I fear, the most you will attain to is a most ungracious unwilling obedience and you may well have the humiliation of witnessing a disgraceful exhibition of fury from your little child,—possibly, to add to your confusion, in the presence of strangers.

So, I would say, if your child is naturally inclined to sulk and pout do be slow to bully or threaten. Though, let me repeat, I am very willing to admit that there are times when the rod is the only means left you of securing obedience. But, .rod or no rod, let me implore you to make sure that you are going to win. If once you tell the child that this or that is to be done, never yield. It is of paramount importance that you and not the child win through.

What is objectionable in the method of threatening and bullying is that it fails to train the character. It secures at best a forced external compliance with your wishes, but this much effects very little that is of permanent value to the formation of your child. The same holds for the craze parents have at times for multiplying rules and regulations. Over all these there looms in the mind of the child just one all-embracing rule,—don’t get caught! As long as your eye is upon him he may be a paragon of all the virtues but the moment he is on his own he kicks free. Why? Because the motive of fear predominated and that motive is very nearly worthless in the all-important business of giving your child sound principles to guide and foster his obedience. “Send us out men to India,” wrote St. Francis Xavier, “who can be depended upon to do the right thing when they are alone.”

“Punch” had a cartoon some years ago of Mary Ann, the cook, seated comfortably in her kitchen arm-chair reading a yellow-back novel, the table in front of her littered with unwashed dishes and cups. Behind at the kitchen door appears the mistress of the house obviously in a rage.

“Mary Ann, how does it happen that every time I come down to this kitchen of yours I find you idling?” And Mary Ann, dropping the offending novel and assuming her most innocent expression: “Well ma’am, to tell you nothing but the truth, I believe it is the rubber heels that does it!”

Having dwelt thus at some length upon the “don’ts” it is time we turn now to the positive side and try to discover what we ought to “do” in order to develop on right lines the character of the child. And let me state with all the emphasis at my command, that I am absolutely convinced that every child, if taken in time, can be profoundly moved and permanently influenced for good, by true religion. More than that, I am convinced that nothing except true religion will save the child from the innumerable pitfalls to which he will necessarily be exposed as he journeys through life.

Every child, certainly every Catholic child, starts life with an enormous advantage. Grace has been poured into his soul in Baptism and with it there is in the child an innate religious sense. He quite naturally longs to hear about God and divine things and if the parents take him early in hand they can effect wonders. I have seen it and so have you. There is an

immediate response on the part of the child to the teaching given about the supernatural. Nor is this to be wondered at, seeing that Our Lord promised that the heavenly Father would reveal Himself “to little ones.”

Sometimes the false notion is spread abroad that the little child cannot take in this or that religious truth. I wonder. I admit that if you pack your little child off out of your sight to the cinema on a Sunday evening, and allow him or her to read the sentimental sensational “literature” of the day, or deck them out in a way that offends modesty and that soon will develop in them a forwardness that is far from lovable,—if you do these things you will quickly stifle the child’s innate sense of the supernatural and I feel intensely sorry for you, and for the child. But if, as is your duty to God, you forestall the attacks of worldliness on the little one’s soul and take care to develop the seed of divine grace, you will be amazed and delighted at the promptitude with which the innocent pure heart will leap up in an ardent love for Jesus Christ and Mary.

Of course, in this place the old adage comes into its own, that no one can give what he hasn’t got. For many tolerably good Catholics religion runs parallel to the rest of their lives instead of permeating them, energizing them, vivifying and deifying them. But it is not enough to be a tolerably good Catholic, especially in our times. You, Catholic parents, are entrusted by God with the formation of a generation that is going to have to stand loyal to Him in face of fearful difficulties. Hence, teach your child, from the cradle, true religion and thus make him invincible.

True religion? Yes the teachings of the Catholic Church, of course. But teach these, not as dry truths divorced from your daily life, but as the mightiest forces shaping and directing and determining you in your choices, in your decisions, in the whole orientation of your mind towards men and things. Again let me illustrate. Only a few days ago I saw a man standing in a Church before a large image of Jesus Crucified. He was carrying a little child, aged about two years, in his arms. You should see how that tiny baby listened to the excellent father’s explanations and watched the bleeding Figure. Don’t tell me they cannot take it in. They can, unless,—the calamity of it!—unless you allow the world and the devil to get in first! I don’t mind telling you that I whispered a word of well-deserved praise to that father.

True religion? Teach them that God, their loving heavenly Father is everywhere,—that His eye is always upon them, watching their every step, listening to their every word, seeing their every thought. Teach them to cultivate towards Him the attitude of a simple, very loving little child, and watch their responsiveness.

Very early in life acquaint them with the most wonderful love story ever written,—the deep personal love of Jesus for them,—a story written in the blood of the Lover. Give them the details of His life, in simple easy language, and I’m greatly mistaken if you do not find their little hearts expanding with love for Him! and eagerly awaiting the next section of His story.

Tell them why He came amongst us, love for us and anxiety to have us with Him urging Him to descend from heaven. Dwell on the cold and poverty of Bethlehem, the shepherds and the Magi, the Flight before Herod’s sword, the Hidden life of, obedience, the miracles and preaching of the Public Life, the long hours spent in prayer on the mountain-side, the attacks of His enemies, the parables He gave and their application, and finally the Passion which I have seen more than once to draw tears from the child’s eyes. Are our parents too sophisticated for all that? Will you object that your child would never sit and listen? If you do, I counter your objection by telling you what I suspect. I fear you have allowed the silly butterfly mentality into your child’s life. You are training an affected, precocious, worldly-minded, worldly-tainted little boy or girl. The taste for divine things has been vitiated and you have deprived God of your child’s love, and your child of the greatest treasure,—a development of the life of sanctifying grace in the soul.

True religion? Never forget that the child must give to Mary the deep affection due to a most loving Mother. Never speak to your child of Jesus without mentioning His Mother. Speak of her sinlessness, of the suffering she endured, of her courage in standing under the cross and offering Him for you and me, of her immense power with God in heaven.

Talk much about prayer. Some of the most exquisite prayers ever spoken are the spontaneous utterances of little children to the heavenly Father, to Jesus or to Mary. Make the child realise, at least in some measure, the meaning of the Blessed Sacrament. All this is the sort of thing I mean by true religion. Believe me, the little mind is receptive, the little heart will quickly go on fire,—if to you yourself religion is a real living force, not a dry code of formulas, and if your words carry the ring of conviction and the warmth born of personal experience.

Haven't you an immense power placed in your hands by God, dear fathers and mothers? No wonder our hearts bleed when we hear how Catholic parents squander God's precious gift. For what can be more lamentable than the sight of father and mother turning their backs on the children when most the child craves for God and the things of God? Parents, forsooth, have other engagements,—there is the bridge party, the latest picture or thriller, there is golf or an all-night dance or a late dinner. The list runs on indefinitely. It is nothing short of sickening to think of Catholic parents frittering away their lives thus and shirking the training of their children. Sickening, yes, that is the word. And tell me, if you happen to be of their ilk, does all this sort of thing make you happy? I don't believe it. You may proclaim loudly that you are having a rollicking time. Nothing will ever convince me that you have not your moments of bitter remorse when your conscience reproaches you. And if you deny this, let me assure you that they are ahead of you!

And wealthy parents are by no means the only offenders. It is just as distressing to see a queue of poor ragged little children drawn up outside our cinemas, even on Sunday evenings. "In this town the children live in the cinema" I was told the other day. Parents will dump the children on the cinema and children will beg, borrow or steal the few pence for admission. And what are they going to see there? Scenes that will help them to love God, to know Jesus Christ, to understand the meaning and purpose of life, and the beauty and value of their immortal souls?

I wonder what hour at night those poor little ragged children come in off the streets. Have the parents no responsibility? Is that little boy of seven or that girl of nine going to see anything good at eleven o'clock, or even later, in the streets of a big city? Do you want straight talk? All right. I have seen little children of that age hanging around the doors of a public house and enjoying the boisterous refrains, and for all I know worse, that were coming forth. No man or woman who thinks at all but must be profoundly grieved by the apathy and indifference of such parents. Those children are not going to see or hear anything good in the vicinity of a public house. They will probably fare worse in the other holes and alleys. And why? Because their fathers and mothers are neglecting their God-given commission to train those children and "suffer them to come" to Him.

For rich and poor alike a return to duty implies self-sacrifice. It means curtailing your liberty in many ways. But it means more. It means that God, Who has made you "the ministers of His Omnipotence" will reward, as He is always seeking opportunity to reward, in a measure "pressed down, shaken together and flowing over." This reward will be the bond of strong love that will bind your hearts to the hearts of your children. We have often repeated the golden sentence, and here too it finds place, that God never allows Himself to be outdone in generosity. Try it.

I think I can promise you that if you take the child in hand early in life and develop its sense of the supernatural, you are not going to have much trouble in securing respect for your authority and obedience to your commands.

Where a child's heart is inflamed with a personal love for Jesus Christ, obedience becomes the most logical thing in the world. The good parent will have brought the little one many a time to Nazareth and pointed out that all Jesus did there for eighteen years is summed up in one sentence: "He was subject to them,"—to Mary and Joseph. Of course the child wants to be like Him Who has captured his heart, and here is the obvious way.

And why did Jesus obey! Because the commands which fell from the lips of Mary and Joseph were what His heavenly Father wanted Him to do. Mary and Joseph took His place. He had given them His own authority. Just as you tune in in order to hear the voice at the microphone, so when anyone with authority tells you what to do or not to do, you recognise in the voice the voice of God. All authority is from Him. Here is a motive indeed for an obedience that will be cheerful, constant, unquestioning. The child loves Jesus and wants to be like Him. The child learns that father and mother take God's place.

Given the religious background I doubt if there is any child who will fail to respond to such motives. How poor by contrast is the motive of fear or threat! "Wait till I catch you! You're going to pay for this!" No. Take the child in time and I have every hope that the results will be gratifying beyond your fondest and wildest expectations.

If the child's heart is early won to this personal love for Jesus and Mary, there will be another very happy development. In every child there is a desire to do things that cost, by way of giving proof of one's love. This trait too has to be seized upon and developed by the parents before the world and its agencies get in. Now if there is an understanding of the

reality of Our Lord and His love, if the little mind has grasped in some measure the message of Calvary, there will arise, almost spontaneously, a desire to imitate. And so even little children can early be taught to say “no” to themselves.

I know an ideal family in which prevails, among other excellent practices, the custom of making an hour’s nocturnal prayer each month. Each member counts the months and the years that separate him or her from the coveted age of fourteen. Why? Because at fourteen he or she will be allowed to make this vigil. Not so long ago a member of the family, a boy, came home in the middle of a children’s party,—leaving all the good things that delight a child’s heart. And what brought him back so early? It was his night to undertake the hour of prayer! This came entirely from himself. Yes, there is much generosity in the young heart. Fathers and mothers, will you please develop it?

Up to this point we have kept in mind, for the most part, the child in the earliest stages of its life. We have indicated ways to be avoided in the exercise of authority and we have set forth one suggestion, which we believe to be all-sufficient, by way of securing a right attitude towards authority on the part of the child. And we have appealed to you, dear parents, to realise what a magnificent opportunity you have and to seize upon it. Before we leave this section of our booklet, let me add one word about the importance of repetition. The lessons about God’s Presence, or the love of Jesus and Mary, or the meaning of prayer, won’t sink in all at once. The little mind is unstable and it is only by dint of saying the same thing many times that the idea gets home and stays.

As the child grows up new problems arise for the parents. Growing-up people have their problems, and often problems of a very agonising sort. There is nothing more natural than that an adolescent should find himself or herself one day asking how they came into the world, and it is the parents’ duty to tell them. Now there are good parents, parents excellent indeed in most respects, but they shirk this weighty responsibility. They have been known to allow the child they loved to leave home and face the world without any definite knowledge of the facts of life. Let me quote from an experienced teacher: “I knew at least two such girls who had a positive grievance against their mothers for neglecting them in this way. And small wonder for things might have turned out otherwise than they did had they not fallen into good hands.”

The growing boy or girl should be told very definitely not to be afraid to ask mother or father any questions they might want answered. And if after, say fourteen or fifteen, no question is forthcoming, father or mother should take the initiative. I say nothing here about the parent who turns the child’s question into ridicule and regards it as matter for a whispered joke with one of the elders. Do that and your child will never ask again. Do that and your action is little short of criminal.

But, as we were saying, if no question is forthcoming, take the initiative yourself. You may assume that your child wants to know, and, nowadays especially, the danger of picking up the desired information from polluted sources is terrifyingly prevalent. And once more it is here that the early training already outlined is going to prove an enormous help. All during the early years the child has been taught a deep reverence for God and the things of God. It is not going to be difficult now to get him to look upon these God-given functions with the same reverence.

Hence our first hint for the imparting of this knowledge is a reverential approach. In another place we have tried to show the sublimity of God’s plan in allowing men and women to share with Him a most sacred power, and perhaps what we said there may serve as an outline of what to tell your child. \*

But if reverence is essential, nervousness or “hush-hush” is fatal. If you are going to be in a panic of excitement and tension while telling your child, I honestly think you had better leave the task to someone else. But anyhow, what is the reason for making all this mystery? Can’t you speak in a very natural, almost off-hand way, about the beauty of God’s design? I believe that the more casual you are the more effectively you will discharge your duty. I have known young people to come out from such an interview with father or mother infinitely relieved to have their questions correctly answered and delighted with the assurance, given without the least indication of mystery, that son or daughter can drop in again “any old time” if there is anything further they want to discuss.

Indeed often the best way of imparting this knowledge may be when your young son and yourself are mending a puncture together, or putting up those shelves for mother, or when little Miss Fifteen is learning a new stitch from mother

*\*See Can I Keep Pure? by Father Nash, S.J*



or is being initiated into the mysteries of making pastry. Anyhow the point is that you should certainly give the facts when asked, but with reverence and without any sign of panic. And you needn't give all at once. Often the child will want to ask just a question or two and then will trot off quite satisfied. In such a case leave things alone, but impress on the child that he will probably be wanting to learn more and that you are there to tell him.

In connection with the sacredness of what you have to say it is wise to tell him or her to avoid discussing these matters indiscriminately. Sacred things may not be lightly used. We keep the sacred vessels under lock and key in a safe. So sacred are these things that it would be wrong to speak of them, except to yourself or a teacher or confessor. Sometimes companions will laugh about these things but the child with the right religious background will readily understand that such companions are to be shunned.

Beware too of showing surprise, no matter what your boy or girl tells you in this matter. Be very wary of saying that what has happened is a sin. That is for his confessor to decide, and if you jump to a rash conclusion you may very well crush the child under a load of depression which he may not succeed in shaking off for many a day or week. Finally and above all, do not wriggle out of your responsibility by inventing a story, or, to put it bluntly, by telling a lie. Your child is sure to find out what he wants to know, and probably very soon, and he is not going to thank you for deceiving him or trying to deceive him, nor is your lie going to engender confidence in you for the future.

And what about your child's career? Let me here say that generally speaking our Catholic Irish parents show a wonderful generosity when there is question of their sons or daughters embracing the priesthood or the religious state. We could, I'm sure, between us, count such noble-hearted parents by the score, possibly by hundreds, if we sat back and began to think. You have known a father to yield to the entreaties of the little girl whom he worshipped when she whispered to him that she wanted to be a Carmelite or a Poor Clare, or to go out as a missionary nun to nurse lepers. I have known brave mothers to stand on the railway platform watching the departing train which bore away the boy they loved that he might spend himself for God as priest or brother. Their hearts were torn with sorrow, but would they have him back if they got a chance? Not they! Was it to forego the privilege of having their boy consecrated irrevocably to the service of God? Yes, thank God, that is the ordinary attitude of our Irish parents when there is question of the child who has, or gives hopes of having, a divine vocation.

But there is, unfortunately, another side to the picture.

Did you ever hear of Irish Catholic fathers and mothers opposing by every means the children's vocation? Or refusing to speak to them or write to them, when, despite the opposition, they had followed what was clearly God's call? Or insisting that, before they give their consent the child must "see the world?" By which they mean that the vocation must be subjected to a well-nigh impossible test. The chilling blasts of worldliness must first be given every chance of extinguishing the flicker enkindled by the hand of a loving Christ. I admit it is hard to understand that mentality from Catholic fathers and mothers. Yet all of us have seen it in actual life.

Wouldn't you be inclined to believe that any sane parents would be overjoyed to think that their child was God's special choice, that He had special work for that child to do, that He wanted to save through that child's instrumentality perhaps thousands of souls? Could you imagine a source of greater consolation to a dying Catholic parent than the knowledge that their boy or girl was shielded from much of the scorching fires of temptation and spending himself or herself unstintedly for God?

Of course there is no blame to you to insist that your child considers every side of the question before taking the step. Of course you want to be morally certain that this is not just a passing emotion: Of course the human nature in you will cry out that the separation is cruel. All this is admitted. But does all this justify you in thwarting a genuine vocation? The child is God's you know, as well as yours, and whose claim is the stronger?

Unless your child is blessed with this singular blessing of a religious vocation, it is likely that he or she will settle down in married life. Happy the parent who shares the confidence of the boy or girl when the attraction of the opposite sex begins to make itself felt. The wise father or mother will show real sympathy and genuine anxiety to advise. It is fatal to refuse to entertain the idea that your child is ever going to leave your side. There are parents who are ready to pull the

house down if the child dares to suggest that he or she is interested in a possible suitable life partner. The result often is that secret sin is indulged in which would never happen if the child knew that father and mother would listen with sympathy. It is the parents' right to be acquainted with the associates of your child and how can that be if the boy or girl knows that the mention of such things is anathema?

So, let it be understood that you are prepared to consider any likely partner and let him be invited to your home where you with your riper experience, may be able to judge for yourself and advise accordingly.

Moreover you know that a good deal is written about love at first sight and it is beyond question that two young people can be powerfully attracted at their very first meeting. Now concerning this impulse there are two very important truths to be kept well in mind, viz. it can be prevented from going any farther, and often it must be prevented.

Much nonsense is written on the assumption that the impulse is, in its incipient stages, beyond control. The assumption is quite false. Granted that the boy or girl may have a struggle, even a very fierce struggle, in the effort to prevent themselves from seeing or meeting that person again. There are times when such a struggle is imperative, and with a cast-iron resolution and the never failing grace of God the day can be won.

And secondly the impulse may not be allowed to develop unless there is a reasonable hope that it is going, within a fair period, to culminate in a happy marriage. Suppose a girl feels this incipient attraction for a young man who is a slave to drink. Let her but keep on meeting him and presently she becomes deaf and blind,—deaf to the pleadings of the father and mother who have her best interest at heart, and blind to the unfortunate boy's repeated lapses. What has happened? The girl has allowed herself to become infatuated with the wrong man. As well at this stage may you try to make the Shannon flow back to Cavan as secure that now she will give him up. Too late. The spark should have been jumped upon with both feet long ago. Now the flame is beyond control indeed.

Because the impulse can be controlled and often must be controlled, it is of the first importance, dear fathers and mothers, that your child should be trained to share all secrets with you. Let him or her know that you will be reasonable and sympathetic, that you won't fly off the handle if the boy or girl hints they are interested in someone. Young folk are often blamed for not taking or seeking advice. Perhaps the blame is too often to be laid at your own door. Parents can often be very selfish. Mother likes the company and attention of Mary who is advancing perilously near to thirty, or has even waved a farewell some two or three years ago to that date. But mother doesn't want to lose her and so she stands in her way and makes Mary miss her chances. Father finds young Tom a great help on the farm or behind the counter and woe betide his silvering head if he suggest marriage!

And there is also the other extreme. Parents, so far from directing the choice of the child and checking it if necessary in good time, will show even less sense than the infatuated boy or girl. They will smile good-naturedly and tell you that youth must have its fling!

These ideas, dear fathers and mothers, may suggest practical lines upon which to work when the vocation to marriage begins to loom in sight for your child. I am painfully conscious that what we have written may make very dull reading about such a thrilling subject as love and marriage.

But I feel sure that you at least won't blame me, for you will admit that marriage is not a perpetual honeymoon. It was St. Francis de Sales who, abounding as he did in common sense and good humour, declared that marriage is a state of life in which the novitiate comes after the Profession!

The printer is insisting that I put down a big full-stop and place your Letter in its envelope. Paper rationing compels him. However, I am going to have a final word,—if your family and home are not consecrated to the Sacred Heart call round to the priest today and arrange for that Consecration. And on the morning of your son's or daughter's marriage make sure of the Nuptial Mass, and let the first Guest to all present be the Christ of the Eucharist. May He and Mary bless you and yours abundantly!

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