

# QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN

By Daniel A. Lord, S.J.

## BY WAY OF EXPLANATION

DURING THE COURSE of one winter I gave a number of talks to parents and future parents about their children.

After the more or less formal talk I encouraged questions.

I knew that many parents would hesitate to speak out in open meeting—and would thus be confessing that they had problems or that they were not completely solving the difficulties of that important profession which is parenthood. So I asked them to write out their questions and send them up to the platform.

Far, far more were sent up than I had time to answer.

So after each talk I gathered up all the questions and brought them back with me. They went into a large folder, and gradually the folder began to bulge like a swelling melon. Obviously the parents of the country had many a question they wanted answered. Clearly too their sailing was not all smooth and stormless.

Eventually I sorted out the questions and picked for this booklet those that I regarded as most typical. Here are the answers as far as I felt capable of providing them.

The questions are the actual questions that were asked me. Not only are they real problems posed by real parents, but in the main I left the questions exactly as they were worded by the questioners.

The answers are an effort to combine common sense, the teaching of the Church, my observation of successful parents, and the experience of my own dealings with the children and young people of America. Literature with its shrewd summaries of human experience has some not slight part in my answers. Religion and reason have much larger parts.

This booklet is offered first of all to parents. We admire them tremendously, and we hope that among these answers each parent reader will find perhaps one solution for at least one parent problem.

This booklet is also intended for future parents. I wrote a book with them (and of course with all parents) in mind, "Some Notes for the Guidance of Parents." This present booklet "Questions People Ask About Their Children," covers some of the topics that are not treated or are sketchily treated in the larger book.

I should not however be at all disappointed if this booklet is read by the Sons and daughters of modern parents.

It might not be a bad idea for them to know that their parents have problems and that often the names of those problems are "Dick and Sue." They might be more co-operative if they understood the worries that keep their mothers and fathers awake nights. They might even see in the answers to their parents' problems solutions for some problems of their own—right here and now.

And I can remind them that good sons and daughters make good parents—just as good parents are the makers of good sons and daughters.

That the holy family may do for this booklet what its author knows he unaided could not possibly do is my humble prayer.

DANIEL A. LORD, S. J.

### *What is the purpose of writing a booklet of this sort for parents who send their children to Catholic schools?*

MAYBE THEY ARE the ones who need it most. Understand, please, that in sending their children to a Catholic school, they do a splendid part of their essential duty. More power to them! Their children will probably live to thank them for that great grace.

But my fear and doubt enter at this point.

Do these good Catholic parents think that when they send their children to Catholic schools they have done their full duty by their children? Can they shrug off the whole responsibility for the religious and social training—even the

education along normal lines—of their children? Can they with a gesture turn their boys and girls over to the priests and brothers and nuns and say, “They are yours from this point on”?

I am afraid that this is, in cold and disillusioning fact, precisely what some parents do.

Their children, they argue, are in Catholic schools. Hence they, the parents, need not worry about them further. The priests and the religious have taken over the children’s training; this leaves them, the parents, free for other and less difficult pursuits. If they (once more I mean the parents) provide the money that pays for their children’s education and comfortable homes to which the children return when the day at school is ended, they have done their full duty.

But have they?

Not as I see it. And not, I imagine, as God sees it.

No school can be the equivalent of a home. No teacher can possibly substitute full time for a parent. A priest only takes up where the father leaves off; a nun is merely the auxiliary of a mother.

Merely because our Catholic schools grow constantly better is no excuse for our homes’ becoming worse. Well-trained teachers are not apology or explanation for badly trained and neglectful parents.

### ***Couldn’t parenthood be taught in schools?***

EDUCATORS HAVE UNFORTUNATELY laid the stress on *sex* education. This mistake has confused the whole issue. With the Pope, I do not feel that sex education has any place in a classroom of adolescents.

Education for parenthood is something quite different.

I believe so much in the possibilities of education for parenthood that I had a genuine hope that my book “Some Notes for the Guidance of Parents” would be taken as a textbook for such classes. In some cases it has been thus used.

If training for every important profession in life is regarded as absolutely essential, why not for parenthood? Why not teach young people the elements of child psychology? Why not instruct them in the essential information that should be imparted to the growing child—the stories and books and music and art he should know, the manners he should develop?

Why not prepare young people to understand the problems of the child at various ages and thus dispel the ignorance of parents or the old wives’ tales they probably believe?

Why not discuss with young people in a classroom such things as home recreation and show them how it can be achieved? What about home management and homemaking in general—the important prerequisites for a growing child?

Young people are trained for the less important professions...., and young people are allowed to slip into marriage and stumble into parenthood, and everyone blames them because they don’t know what no one has taught them.

Law was once taught by lawyers in law offices. Now a man who aspires to be a lawyer must go to law school. Once upon a time it was taken for granted that children learned to be parents by their observations of their parents. If the parents are good and have plenty of time, that way might still work. If in this highly complicated world the parents are stumbling at parenthood, it can hardly be expected that their children will emerge other than stumblers.

Here is a vast field for the educator.

We have hopes.

### ***Where is a future father to get the necessary training for that career? Usually he is busy learning to earn a living.***

YOU HAVE LAID your finger on one of the problems of modern education: Men start to learn how to earn a living before they have learned how to live.

They are trained to be doctors and utterly untrained to be parents.

They know how to talk to a customer but have no idea how to talk to a son.

Remember that education is for LIFE, not for the earning of a living. Hence the importance of the cultural courses, which should be strong and required. Only when a person is a worthwhile individual should he be trained to be a tradesman or a businessman or a professional man.

If a person is learning to be a good person, an educated person, one who understands life and how to live it, he is

incidentally learning to be a good parent.

The technical side of parenthood is not too vastly different from the technical side of dealing with people anywhere any time. A man can master the few additional elements in a short time—if he personally knows how to live well and happily.

***What is responsible for the gap between mother and daughter and between father and son?***

ARE THERE ALWAYS such gaps? I'd hate to think there were. Novelists have built a lot of plots over this antagonism between the females of two generations and between the males of these same relative ages.

I am by no means sure that this situation is nearly so widespread as the novelists—and a certain type of psychologist—want us to believe.

I know a great many mothers and daughters who are closer than any sisters could be. In the cliché of the times:

They not merely love each other; they are very good friends. I know many fathers who live for the day when they can take their sons into their business or profession, and a great many sons who think their fathers are pretty wonderful people.

Certainly the slight gap that may exist between a mother and a daughter has a way of disappearing when the daughter marries. I mean this in no mother-in-law jest; it simply happens that after her marriage the daughter calls on her mother as on her best friend and wisest counsellor—often to the improvement of the daughter's marriage and the new home.

When a father starts to do things on a level with his son—play golf, play bridge, work out business problems, make calls together on cases, there is evident a comradeship that is beautiful and reassuring.

There are gaps. . . caused by ignorance, jealousy, bad dispositions, stupid parent approach or neglect, nagging or incompetence—a thousand reasons. For once it might be nice to note those parents who are close to their children rather than those who are separated from them by chasms.

***How is it that our grandparents succeeded so well without any knowledge of the science of child education and training?***

AH, BUT DID THEY? I seem to recall some rather odd specimens that developed in most of the family histories about which I know a little.

If the ills and woes of the world today are the result of the generations gone by, I think a lot more could have been done in the upbringing and training of those generations.

Let's suppose however that our grandparents did wonderful jobs as parents. Let's suppose that all their children were sound, good Catholics, fine citizens, pure women, honest men, able to meet the problems of life. The fact would still remain that today is not their day. The problems that we meet today are vastly complicated by the intricate pattern of this our modern life.

Economically life grows steadily more difficult.

Politically we are in a series of crises.

The records of our hospitals and courts show the terrific rise of psychopathic cases and psychiatric patients.

Life today grows more and more difficult to untangle and lay out in orderly patterns.

If it has never been easy to be a parent, today the profession of parenthood has become exasperatingly complicated and difficult.

Maybe your grandparents were perfect in the rearing of their children; still parents of today—you among them—are living, not in their age, but in our age. Our age is something rather tough to understand and difficult to meet with full confidence and perfect adjustment.

***How do you account for so many of us having become good people and having been reared in the old way?***

THERE'S A TOUGH ACCUSATION implied here, and I dodge feebly. First of all good parents in any generation

produce—as a rule—good children. If you had the good luck to have good parents, you can thank them for a large part of your goodness.

I have never advocated a “new way” of parenthood or parent training. Really all I ever do is advocate a return to nature’s way and God’s way—and there couldn’t be anything much older than that.

***If the home is such a powerful factor in the future of the children of a nation, why are such powerful groups in the nation arrayed against the home?***

PRECISELY BECAUSE THE HOME is powerful. If it were not an important institution, the enemies of God and of man would leave it alone. Because the people who control the home control the future, because parents are the first representatives of God on earth, because within the home is the hope of morality.... for these reasons the men who wish to control the future, who hate God, and who would for their own selfish purposes wipe out morality attack the home openly or subtly.

***I am thinking of adopting a child. What about the risks of heredity?***

NOWADAYS, if you are considering the adoption of a child from any reputable orphanage, you won’t find it too difficult to make some check on the ancestry of the child. You can learn a good deal without ever discovering the name of the parents.

You run a risk with any child. You would run risks with children of your own. There are strange things that crop up in the best-bred boys and girls. Science is a long way from having mastered all the details and facts involved in heredity.

But environment is the more powerful factor in the shaping of a human being.

If you will give this adopted baby love and affection and a good home and careful training and wholesome food... if you will lead it into the faith and see that it comes to know God and distinguish right from wrong. . . if you will be a careful and devoted parent, neither spoiling it with kindness nor warping it with neglect. . . you will have a first-class chance of seeing the baby grow into an adult of whom you will be proud and who will give you real happiness.

***Did not the poverty-stricken environment of Abraham Lincoln help make him a success?***

BOTH THE ENVIRONMENT and the heredity of Lincoln seem to have been somewhat in the nature of mixed blessings (to put it gently).

No rules, I’ll admit, normally cover the development of genius, at least none that are yet adequately understood. Extreme poverty and extreme wealth are normally notable handicaps to a child. The best environment is the one that offers enough but not too much the need to struggle—without starvation.

The genius is not always however a happy man. He may do a wonderful job along one line or another. He may become a great musician. He may leave immortal poetry when he dies—in his garret. He may prove to be a one-sided wizard who knows all about electricity and nothing much about anything else.

I do not recall that heredity and environment collaborated to make Abraham Lincoln personally a happy man. It seems to me that he was our American Hamlet — except that, unlike Hamlet, he did great things for all of us. He was troubled, confused, often terrifyingly tragic, usually lonesome, and apparently always a little sad as he questioned his own soul.

***Do you approve of children’s attending a convent school from nine to five o’clock? Very little time remains for parental supervision of the children.***

CORRECT ME IF I’M WRONG. I don’t think the convent schools started this system. As I recall, some of the secular fashionable schools of our cities initiated the system. They took the children off the parents’ hands from rosy dawn to dewy eventide.

Several factors may have inspired this:

1. A desire to relieve the parents of as much responsibility for their children as possible and to give the parents more

time to do the really important work of the world— make money, attend clubs, become bridge experts, and maintain adult life and contacts.

2. A sneaking conviction on the part of many an educator that children should be separated from their parents' pernicious and untutored influence—to the children's ultimate and probably immediate good. There are many educators who think the child vastly better if he is taken from his parents early and kept late. Socialism and communism had some such ideas.

So the situation of an all-day school arose. What to do? Catholic children were being taken into these secular schools. The convent authorities saw the trend, knew that some children would be so parked or checked for the day, and, preferring the lesser of two evils, offered to take the children into a Catholic educational atmosphere—on the same time basis that the secular schools offered.

I suppose all schools are an admission that parents cannot properly educate.

The all-day-long school seems to proclaim that parents cannot educate at all.

But since the trend existed, I'm glad that the sisters stepped in to give the youngsters Catholic education and training. . . and a Catholic atmosphere throughout their day's absence from home and parents.

### ***How much independence should a child be allowed?***

THE INDEPENDENCE he needs to become a self-reliant, fully developed adult able to meet and solve the problems of life with competence and correctness....

The independence that is, not license, but controlled and directed initiative. .

The independence that has in it respect for law and a prompt obedience coupled with encouragement toward candour, honesty, and the ability—proportionate to his age—to handle the affairs of his life.

Mothers who in great fondness for their children bind them to their waists sometimes do the children irreparable wrong.

Parents who make of their children little parrots will have parrots and not people.

Independence may be a good thing.., and it may be bad.

A child should be encouraged to manage his toys, keep his own room and belongings tidy without constant direction and supervision. He should be trusted to the degree in which he has justified trust. He is trusted in small things. If he stands up to that trust, the trust is increased. If he fails, while the trust is not immediately removed, he is corrected and warned that the punishment for further failure will be the withdrawal of trust.

He is praised when he does things well and on his own. He is encouraged to think out his own problems and to bring his answers or solutions to his parents. If his solutions are correct, he is again praised. If they are not correct, he is sent to think his problems over again...or he discusses them with his parents until he is led—without too much emphasis on the leading—to the right answers or solutions.

It is important that children do their own thinking— guided and directed but their actual thinking not done for them. It is important that they learn to feel responsible for small obligations and duties where their possessions are concerned, their associates, their brothers and sisters, the house.

It is a mistake for an adult to do a child's homework for him. Homework can be a fine training in independent thinking and acting. If the parent does the homework, the parent might as well pick up the books the next day and go to school, leaving the child at home. But helping a child by pointing out the methods and then letting the child do the actual work is something quite different.

A child should learn early some independence in the control of money. A few unrestricted pennies given him can in the course of time be increased to his allowance, which he learns to use wisely by his actual, gradual wise use of it.

It seems that a large part of the failures in marriage can be traced to children who were childishly dependent upon their parents and who as adults cannot stand on their own feet.

Certainly many a failure in business and the professions is a person who never got the training that might have made

him a fully developed, mature individual.

That safe attainment of the adult stage is most important, and it requires on the part of parents skill and planning.

***Do you think that children should be taught early in life to assume certain duties in the home, some responsibility, a kind of partnership with the parents?***

ABSOLUTELY. Indeed this is an essential element in the training of children. When they are young, they find responsibility and duty a sort of game. It's fun to help mother. It's fun to have some chore to do.

The fun then becomes a habit. The sense of responsibility ripens and develops. The children are part of the household, having their place in it, and upon their work depends some of the happiness and comfort of the others.

This work should of course be proportionate to their strength; it should not make of them drudges. It should be proportionate to their age; it should not deprive them of fun.

And their work should be paid for.

This is the best possible arrangement where small amounts of spending money are concerned. Pay the child in spending money for the work he does. It gives him a fine independence of spirit, a sense of co-operation, and an appreciation of how money is got and managed.

***What would you suggest as a cure for a selfish child?***

THAT DEPENDS upon the age of the child. The cure for selfishness must properly start as soon as its presence is recognised. That first sign is manifested pretty early.

Children are lucky if they are born into large families; the other children have a way of handling the selfishness of one of their brothers or sisters.

I have been told that the communist pedagogues and psychologists, in order to make impossible toy-hoarding and early to develop co-operation in play, for a time did not allow in the Soviet the manufacture of any toy that could be used by any one child alone. The toys were all either too big and too heavy for a single child to handle (he had to call for help from a playmate), or they were designed to be used and operated by at least two children.

Whether or not this is true in the Soviet today, I do not know. It sounds sensible enough though.

Selfish children should be encouraged to play with other children. They should be given things—candy, toys—with instructions that they are to share them with others. If they do not share, they should be corrected.

If the selfish child has no brothers or sisters of approximately his age, it is well to bring in children of his age with whom he can play.

The elders of such a child should not allow signs of notable selfishness to pass uncorrected. If a child should be punished for anything, it is for selfish grabbing of the toys of others, the hoarding of his own toys, his refusal to share with others.

Here again however the example of the parents is potent. The family should be generous in sharing, with a fine sense of "ours" and a slight emphasis on "mine" and "thine." Parties together, fun shared in company, guests invited to share family recreation, picnics with groups—all these practices accustom the child to think of the many instead of himself.

In the presence of the selfish child unselfish boys and girls should be mentioned and praised for their actions— direct comparison however not to be made with him to himself, but the moral so presented that it can be easily drawn.

***Do you think that children should obey on the instant, as they did thirty and more years ago? Or should we allow them to act as individuals rather than as rebels?***

THE RECORDS SHOW that the Army and Navy had a tough time in World War II with the youth who had learned to take his time to think over a command.

A lot of training and some rigid, blind discipline were demanded before these young men learned to obey a command first and think about it afterward.

“Gold braid” in the Navy is a patently clear symbol. The man who wears it gets instant obedience. The reason for that is obvious: In battle, with ships and aeroplanes moving at lightning speed, there is no time to thresh out the rightness or the wrongness of an order. There is time only for action, obedient instant action. So in the training for battle there are only three recognised answers: “Yes, sir!” “No, sir” and “No excuse, sir!”

It seems strange that the very young people who take time to sit down and think over a parental order, obey with the response of an electric light to a switch whenever on the gridiron the quarterback gives a command and shouts a signal. Believe me the athletic coach of the winning team would be amazed if the athletes practised on him the weighing and appraising of orders that are actually encouraged by some parents.

Let’s go back however to the parents.

Parents have the God-given right to command.

If they give stupid or silly or wrong orders, they are abusing their rights. They should not expect their children to obey this type of order with other than reluctance or bad grace.

If the commands are correct, valuable, helpful, and important, the parents have every right in the world to be obeyed—and promptly. There can be good reasons for the parents’ explaining, if there is plenty of time, why they have given a certain hard command. But parents have no slightest obligation to submit to the judgment of a child a command that is right and correct.

However parents may possibly have, even in their own way of thinking, a way of lumping under the head of commands directions that are not by any means entirely commands.

A parent may make a request: “Son, will you please go to the corner and pick up a package of tobacco for me?”

She may make a suggestion: “It looks as if it’s going to be a little chilly. It might be a good idea for you to wear your sweater.”

He may open a discussion: “Son, what do you think about your taking a turn wiping dishes for mother?”

He may issue a command: “Hereafter you will be in by eleven o’clock on Friday nights.”

To call all these very different things commands is to use language carelessly. The request for the tobacco is like any request that one civilised and well-mannered person makes to another. Adults do not ask unreasonable favors of adults. A decent adult does not greet a polite request with a rude “No!” Since parents are training their children for participation in social living, they try to make reasonable—and only reasonable—requests; they expect civil and courteous answers.

But a request is not a command.

The suggestion that the child wear a sweater remained in the realm of suggestion. It was not a command; hence to punish the boy if he did not wear his sweater would be to blame him for a not incorrect use of logic. He might answer the suggestion thus: “I’ll be too hot if I wear my sweater. I was out, and I found that it isn’t nearly so cold as it looks.” Reasonable enough, with the whole matter balanced by fact and argument. If the parent turns this into a command, the whole matter is changed. But that parent is not too wise who constantly offers suggestions that are not suggestions at all but commands couched in delicate language.

A discussion is a discussion, whether between adult and adult or between adult and child. “What do you think about...” was the form that the opening gambit about the dishes took. If his answer is, “I can’t, dad; I have homework...” or “At that time mother wants me to empty the scrap baskets,” he is only following an adult lead. An appeal to his love of his mother should naturally lead to a generous response. But here too it is a suggestion calling for a free and reasonable response, not for obedience to a command.

The last statement—the hour at which the son or daughter is to be in on Friday nights *is* a command. I am taking it for granted that the reasons for the command are obvious or have been sufficiently clarified.. The order is not given, I hope, out of the blue, with no reasons back of it, a command based merely on adult caprice. The father is a reasonable adult and commands something that he knows is for the good of the boy or girl or the common good of the household. He may even have permitted a discussion on the matter prior to the command.

When the command comes however, the command is a command. A parent is simply failing in his duty to the boy if,

once the command is given, he sits back until the youngster has decided that he will or will not accept the order.

It is wise to make not too many requests. Children should not be servants or slaves.

Most often only suggestions are needed.

A discussion should not be started if the adults do not intend to be swayed by reason and argument. It is unfair for an adult who has decided to give a command, no matter how the arguments go, apparently to lead the child into a discussion of the pros and cons of the command.

Real commands are most effective if they are given not too frequently, if they are concerned with things of real moment, if they are reasonable in content, if they are given once and for all, and if they are held as the law until circumstances change and the need for the commands disappear.

***Should a father or a mother be the one to say yes or no to where the children go and how late they stay out?***

WHY NOT A DECISION based on consultation between both parents? The direction will come with more authority if it is backed by an agreement of both parents.

America tends to give parental authority more and more to the mother. Yet often enough it is the father who most probably knows more about the situation and can judge it more objectively and more realistically.

I suggest that the parents talk the decision over together. Then when they give their decision, it will stand without the kind of division between father and mother that can result in a child's confusion, delusion, and inevitable insubordination.

***So many modern children seem to be vandals. They recklessly destroy property or deface it. What is to be done about this?***

THERE AGAIN I'D ASK: Are the children so much different from their elders?

We have done a lot of wholesale destroying in the past few years. The war was a masterpiece of destruction accomplished with scientific thoroughness.

But in general... have you noticed how supposedly grown-up people deal with the property of others? their careless use of books from the public library? the way they set wet glasses on the top of your apartment grand piano? their destruction of hotel property when the party gets a little loud? the way apparently adult men act at, let's say, some of the American Legion conventions or on New Year's Eve? their wholesale theft of silver, linen, knickknacks from hotels and restaurants? their utter thoughtlessness in the way they put their feet on the seats of public conveyances? their use of linen towels in train washrooms to wipe their shoes?

We should give a lot of thought to that phase of the seventh commandment that regards proper care for the belongings of others. . . including, I might add, the property we share together in parks and public buildings.., and the property of large corporations, who according to some people have no rights at all.

The approach to youth—here as always—is first of all good adult example.

I then suggest a reteaching of that seventh commandment and a stressing of its importance for the whole of decent living.

Manners have a great bearing on conduct of this kind. Children who from infancy are taught not to handle things that do not belong to them are likely to develop respect for the property of others.

A quite justified if slightly selfish convenience may be appealed to: We in turn have to use things that are used by others. If a boy vandal cuts up a chair in the movie house, it may be our bad luck to sit on it afterward. If the washbowl is clogged up because someone carelessly tossed a towel down the drain, we may not be able to use the washbowl. Vandalism hurts everybody. Everybody pays tribute in annoyance to the vandal.

Example and education—use both in your teaching.

And of course this is all tied in with God's basic commands, which remain sound common sense and good pedagogy.

***Do you believe that children should be spanked? Or should parents reason with their children?***



I FIND IT HARD to see how even the most skilful parent could reason with a child under the age of three. He would have to be a child prodigy.

Reasoning is, almost by definition, possible only when the child has reached the age of reason.

A swift little spank on the sector that nature seems to have designed for that purpose—a nerve centre padded against any real harm to nerves or muscles—is often the one convincing argument.

Irresponsible spankings are of course usually the sign of an inadequate, nervous, or already beaten parent. A swift little crack (“Not on the head, Morris!”) need not be a manifestation of parental petulance or of the failure of parental psychology. It may be the most reasonable thing in the world. The baby hand continues to grab after the parent has spoken; a swift little slap on the hand serves as a deterrent to the baby. He would have had the same lesson from a fire into which he might have thrust his hand—without however the saving fact that the pain of the slap is soon over (the pain of the burn would have been of longer duration).

Spankings should be very rare. . . though there are situations in which spankings are emphatically called for.

Spankings should not be the common form of discipline. They should not be so recurrent that the child begins to regard his parents as tireless whipping machines. They should be almost a last resort.

Some children can early be shown what is right and what is wrong, and they accept reasonably parental commands.

Some children need the fear of a sharp but not lingering physical pain to hold them back from evil and harm to themselves.

But if the right discipline is given early, the spanking can later disappear completely from the discipline. It is very bad to spank adolescent children, who dread the pain not nearly as much as they hate the humiliation and resent the fact that there is no way for them to strike back.

### ***How should a parent deal with teen-age impertinence?***

HEAD IT OFF before the children reach their teens. The correct training in good manners, self-control, and morals during the formative days of infancy and childhood will mean few outbursts of temper or temperament in adolescence.

Parents and elders in general must be sure that what they regard as impertinence really is impertinence. Boys of adolescent age often have voices that slip strangely out of control. So they become embarrassed, and do and say strange things. They are crude with their hands and clumsy with their feet. Since they deal all day long with boys of their own gangling and juvenile age, they find it hard to change completely to good manners at the family dinner table.

Besides they are often preoccupied with temptation and troubled by physical problems to such an extent that they are snappish and short and rude. Such seeming impertinence rises sometimes to answer a fierce struggle that is raging in their own natures. A wise parent is aware of this and not too quick to be resentful of it.

Then too all young people tend to develop a language of their own. It sounds flip, crisp, cryptic, sometimes a little vulgar, and frequently quite unintelligible to their elders. If they use the language around the house, it is because like most human beings they follow the fashion of their peers. Yet slang is not always impertinence, and the cryptic jive talk of youngsters may indicate merely that they are demonstrating that they are in the know.

When however a teen-ager first shows signs of real impertinence, he or she should be clipped immediately. Once more: No scenes and emotional displays. None of this appeal to parental dignity and rights—“How dare you talk like that to your mother?” Rather the quiet and final answer: “I consider that distinctly impertinent and the sort of thing that is not to happen around here again—ever.”

If elders take such a stand early—the stand based on a well-planned course of childhood and early-youth training in good manners and right conduct—the single reproof may be enough.

### ***At what age should a child be taught the facts of life?***

THE BOY OR GIRL should be taught the facts of life from the dawn of reason on.

Not all at once of course, but gradually, as interest awakens, questions are asked, and the child’s physical development

calls for preparation through knowledge and information.

The trouble with most parental explanations of sex— if such explanation is given at all—is that it is usually given all at one time; and it is given either too early (this is rarely the case) or too late (this is too frequently the case).

The correct procedure is to allow the instruction to grow with and out of the child's development. When he is approaching a physical crisis in his life, the crisis should be explained in advance. When he comes up with a question about these facts, the question should be answered in a way suited to his age. The big developments in his life should be explained as they arise and in a casual and informal manner.

Sex instruction should be in other words matter of fact, gradual, suited to the development of the child, designed to meet and satisfy and allay his curiosities, and be presented as naturally and as simply as God intended all life to be.

***I intend to instruct and train my boy, but I don't want to nag him.***

INSTRUCTING IS AN ART. Nagging is an abuse. Instructing is crisp, brief, pointed, personal, effective. Nagging is slow, iterated, querulous, dull, ineffective.

Correction should be given all at once—and then dropped quickly.

Nagging goes on and on.

Right correction distinguishes between things that are important and that need amending. Nagging is constantly to dog the child, to make little distinction between what is really important and what merely annoys the parent.

Correction should make a sharp impact upon the guilty.

Nagging is like the slow madness of the Chinese water torture—drip, drip, drip, until the victim thinks he is going mad.

Instruction, training, correction are blessed arts.

Nagging is a nasty nuisance.

***If a sixteen-year-old daughter has never brought up the subject of sex, never asked questions about it, is it advisable for a parent to bring the subject up first?***

NOT ANSWERING the question right now... I am reminded of the mother whose little girl, five, came to her and said: "Mommy, where did I come from?" The mother sighed. Now was the time, she felt, to answer honestly the question she had been asked. So she said, solemnly, "Since you want to know, sit down and mummy will tell you." And she did, in considerable detail. At the end the child looked very bored and said, "Well I just wanted to know. The little girl next door said she came from Pittsburgh."

As for the question... I'm afraid once more that sixteen is too, too late for the start of much intelligent instruction.

It may be that the girl is totally incurious. That is rare.

It may be that she had got instructions from other sources. These may have been very bad. . . imperfect and incomplete.. . totally misleading.., or correct. Even if the last eventuality is true, the parents come with their explanations very tardily. If the other eventualities are true, the situation is worse.

A wise mother seeing a situation like this and realising that up to the present she has not been wise at all might frankly ask the girl if she had any questions about birth and children that she wanted answered. If the mother is careful and observant, the daughter's answer may be the mother's lead. She will know from the child's apathy, embarrassment, quick flight, or frank interest what her assignment is.

***It seems to me totally unnatural for children to discuss marriage with their parents.***

A PROLONGED and detailed discussion of the sex relation by parents and adolescent children.., that would be difficult.

A careful preparation by the parents of the children for the children's physical development and future sex experiences. . . what could be more right and natural?

A discussion of the joys and obligations, the possibilities, the difficulties and delights of parenthood and home management, the happy associations of a good man and a virtuous wife...these seem to me charming and gracious and wonderfully helpful.

***Should we let children read the so-called comic books?***

AS I WRITE THIS, the comic books have (happily) taken a circulation nosedive. May they go way, way down until they disappear in the Gehenna of forgotten nuisances.

Of course there are all sorts of comic books even in the current crop.

There are comic books that are really funny. They may have a delightful humour to help develop in children their slow-of-growth sense of the ridiculous. But these comic books are rare.

There are books that are called comic books but are really adventure stories in pictures.

A slight minority of the comic books are published with worrying parents in mind. There are Catholic comics. There are comics sponsored by such organisations as the parent-teacher associations.

There are comics put out by secular firms that have not quite lost their sense of responsibility to the public. Even these however, which may be neutral, tend to exaggerate fiercely, to present everything in glaring colours and with grandiose gestures. But at least they do no moral harm, however much they may follow the fashion of appealing to the child's easily aroused emotions.

Then there are the comics that are pretty much per-versions.

Some of them are bad merely in this, that they present a ridiculously false way of life, a presentation that makes the world that the child sees around him (really a wonderful world) seem boringly tame and uneventful. Even a circus is not very exciting to a youngster whom the comics have been transporting to Mars and other worlds of unleashed imaginations.

Other comic books blend sex and crime in doses so large that the result is the sort of emotional overdose that is bound to be bad for any growing child. Murder and sudden death become a routine part of his mental pabulum. He is stimulated to an interest in sex before ever sex should claim his attention—or at a time when his inner temptations are already stormy and certainly stepped up by what he sees in the comics. No one needs to be told the effects of this kind of diet on the child.

What to do?

There is only one thing to do with children: Substitute. To forbid the child the comics is to create a vacuum. In this world a vacuum is invariably a dangerous thing.

It is the job of the parents early to arouse in their children a love of good books. One of the crimes of the comic books is that they destroy in the child all ability to read, that they make the picture substitute for the printed page. The lurid illustration becomes the whole story; text without an overbalance of pictures is boresome.

From the age at which the child can listen, he or she should be read to.

His own books should be among his first possessions— books that are not these days too expensive: the fairy tales, the legends, the stories of great men and women, the wonderfully dramatic stories of the faith.

The habit of reading aloud in the family means the stimulating of good tastes and love of good books.

Only the parents can do all this really adequately.

A child who began early to acquire a taste for good literature and a desire to collect books that are worth having may pass through a brief time of submergence into the comics. He will soon be bored by the ridiculous improbabilities, the coarse colours, the absurd characterisation in the comics. He will soon enough come back to the literature to which his parents introduced him.

***What do you think of “kissing games” for children of twelve and thirteen?***

SELDOM ARE THEY seriously sinful. Seldom are they marked by good manners or a training for social life.

Usually they are played, these kissing games, because some parent has failed to provide the children with something better to do. There comes a lull in the party... somebody suggests post office... and the kids are off on their own.

All social life in youth, beyond the immediate fun that the youngsters have and rightly have, is supposed to be a training for social life later on.

I should hesitate to suggest that kissing games are any sort of training for adult social life.

Good games on the other hand are supposed to develop skill, the ability to get along with others, the art of conversation, correct manners, friendliness, sportsmanship, and the ability to enter a room without kicking the furniture and to handle dishes without breaking them.

I wonder whether anyone has stopped to think of the youthful tragedies connected with kissing games. Please understand that I am not referring to possible sin.

There is the good little girl who enters the post office (often enough a bedroom) with trembling heart and a disturbed soul.

There is the boy, already tempted, who wonders whether he shouldn't leave the party entirely.

This sweet little girl, whose beauty will not however flower for another few years, is neglected and sits alone, deep self-distrust in her heart, while the pretty little girls are chosen and called and knelt to and kissed.

The little boy whose skin is already starting to break out badly is embarrassed, so he covers his embarrassment with loud noises and a general gaucherie.

This particular premature boy is cynical or curious or avid about the whole performance.

This still very immature child regards the games with complete bewilderment.

Recently I saw a letter that a youngster of early high-school age wrote to her aunt. The girl is stranded—and stranded is the precise word—in a small lumber town of the deep south. She writes: "Boy! oh, boy! is this town ever dead! Not a thing to do here but neck. And I don't think necking is much to be doing."

That's the way it turns out with parties that degenerate into kissing games. They are dead. Little has been planned for the youngsters. No games have been prepared. They have nothing to do. And when youngsters are left with empty hands and a generous stretch of time, necking and kissing games turn out to be the inevitable substitutes for things worth doing.

***If parents in our day have gone soft, I think that is equally true of teachers.***

YOU ARE PROBABLY RIGHT. However let's pause for a moment on the word "soft."

I doubt whether you mean that either teachers or parents should reach more often for the birch or fortify their position by recourse to cruel and unusual punishments. That day is fortunately gone. (I say fortunately, despite my belief in the value of an occasional spanking swiftly and purposefully administered.)

But "soft" may mean something else: It may mean parental and pedagogical laziness. Members of either profession—parents or teachers—may be unwilling to do the hard, patient, painstaking, systematic, repetitious work that is necessary for success with the young. Both parents and teachers tend to grow soft with themselves rather than soft with their dependants.

It may be however that softness means something quite different. It may mean that parents and teachers want the love and affection of their children—at all costs. Experience shows that any parent or teacher must sometimes sacrifice immediate popularity for the sake of the child's future. He or she must be willing to say no when a yes would be easy—and wrong. He or she must make demands in patient training, against which the childish nature rebels. The soft guide will say yes when a no is called for, will accept slipshod work and slack obedience rather than risk a frown or the child's quick resentment.

We might put it this way: Soft parents and teachers are popular for the moment; parents and teachers who do their hard duty are loved and remembered and enshrined in the rational gratitude of a lifetime.

***What do you consider the chief cause of Juvenile delinquency?***

NOT WHAT, BUT WHOM. Bad parents or ineffective parents....lazy parents or badly trained parents.. . parents who have been reluctant about having children or think that a child is something that can be developed incidentally to some really important job or career.

The whom? Parents. . . parents. . . parents.

***Should the child be protected from adverse influences? Or should he be allowed to meet them and be trained to overcome them?***

HE SHOULD BE PROTECTED against those adverse influences that his strength and wisdom are as yet insufficient to handle.

He should be trained and prepared for the difficulties that are bound to arise in his life.

He should be watched and guided through his small problems so that little by little he will learn to master the larger problems.

What he needs is warning, training, supervised development, and a constantly increasing measure of guided independence.

***Do you believe there is a black sheep in every family?***

I CERTAINLY DO NOT. I recall the funeral sermon preached years ago over the father of a large and splendid family, and the priest made a point of the fact that it was a family without a black sheep.

Since then I have been watching, and I am delighted to report that I know many, many families in which all the children grow up to happy and virtuous adulthood.

Sometimes people use the words black sheep rather carelessly.

They may mean the words to refer to a perfectly good man who seems never to make much money or who has a series of notably hard-luck adventures.

They may even mean a person who through an early accident has suffered some psychic setback that resulted in later aberrations or failures.

These are not morally and wilfully bad sheep, and we cannot blame them for their wanderings.

In a notably good family, where the children are outstandingly good and whitely virtuous, one boy who is a little wild or one girl who whistles around the house (sad crime in some strait-laced families) is the one over whom heads are shaken gloomily. A slight sin in one child of a good family may show up startlingly. But one sin, one fall, does not make a black sheep.

***Are parents to be held responsible for the actions of a married daughter, twenty-five years old, who, though she is a Catholic, is seeking to divorce her husband, also a Catholic, and to marry a non-Catholic?***

I DON'T KNOW either the parents or the daughter. It happens that good parents who have given their children the right training and good example will on occasion see their children do or want to do the wrong things. This daughter is sadly turning to the wrong. . . and it may be that her parents are good.

If that is the case, the parents need not blame themselves.

If however the training they gave her was defective, lacking in Catholic example and standards and education, the story is quite different.

But in either case the fact that the daughter is twenty-five years old is no reason for the parents' not giving her the advice called for by her immoral and stupid intentions. They cannot wash their hands of concern and responsibility for their children just because the children are married and are independent.

Someone must talk to this particular girl.

Railing and abuse and indignation and wrath aren't the right approach. A cool and objective discussion of her obligations as a woman and as a Catholic, the presentation of the position of the Church (a position that she probably knows

well enough), and a plea to her to take her time and not do something so fatal as this—these actions can well be within the simple duty of the parents.

The parents of this girl may be able to handle the situation. It may be though that it would be better handled through some priest whose interest they enlist. Or an outsider, a good friend, often a professional man or woman— any of these may be the one to make the approach.

But the parents cannot sit back helplessly and on the basis of their training of their daughter act as if all were right when all is surely not right. They cannot let their grown daughter plunge into a life that Catholics regard— with Christ— as adulterous. They should at least let her know clearly that they do not approve, why they cannot approve, and what they think will be the consequences of her heedless and pagan selfishness.

### ***How do you explain the good children of bad parents?***

THEY ARE SADLY INFREQUENT. Sometimes what is meant by “good” children is merely “successful” children, children who make money, who rise high in the world. They are not always good in the sense that a Christian understands good.

But the good children of bad parents can be found.

After all children have free will and the grace of God.

Sometimes because of a variety of circumstances they escape the evil influence of their parents.

Sometimes the very characteristics of their parents turn them against evil. They hate the sins of their parents; they are driven to virtue by their distaste for vice.

But such children are always the happy exceptions to the unfortunate rule.

### ***Have nervous parents an emotional influence on their children?***

NERVOUS PARENTS, like all other nervous people in places of influence, should do their best to control their nervousness... or cure it completely.

Nervous mothers are often nagging mothers.

Nervous fathers can prove to be irritable and temperamental fathers.

Nerves are manifested in fears, a sad thing to pass on to children; in quick flashes of temper and sometimes rage, resulting in frightened or resentful children; in commands given and forgotten, issued without thought and seldom enforced.

Yet I have known naturally nervous people who did wonderful jobs protecting others against the penalties of nerves. They argued that it was unfair to make others suffer for their illness.

### ***Should a sinful daughter—an unmarried daughter—be turned out? Or should the family stand by her?***

MAY THE SITUATION never happen to any of you good Catholic parents. But let's suppose it does happen. Let's suppose that a daughter of the family is about to have a baby without benefit of wedlock.

The first impulse of the modern pagan is to resort to an abortion. This is of course murder, and the Catholic parents cannot permit it—much less encourage or arrange it. Excommunication for the guilty persons in such an action is part of the temporal punishment.

The next impulse is anger at the disgrace: The girl has betrayed the family honour; she is unfit for the family circle.

Sometimes the girl will brazen out her sin. She will be unrepentant and bitter and difficult to handle.

Usually however she is beaten, broken, bitterly tragic, and willing to do anything to get right again with God and with society.

Whatever her attitude, she is a pitiful case; and if at this time the family turns against her, she may be lost hopelessly. Now if ever she needs help and sympathy and the protection of those who are her natural and supernatural protectors.

Anger, upbraiding, bitter attacks, the cruelty of a slashing tongue, blows, rejection....what good do these do? They

make the girl suspect or fear that even from God there is little hope of forgiveness.

In a way the parents should represent the mercy of God and His patient forgiveness of all sinners who repent, however durable and permanent the consequences of their sins. The parents will do their best to hide her from the gossipy and giggling and slanderous world. While they make clear to her their grief and their conviction of her sin, they will be tender with the child and do what they can to rebuild and salvage their daughter's life.

They will not by cruelty and vigorous if mistaken justice confirm her in her tragedy and blight the rest of her days.

### ***Should teen-age boys and girls do much dancing?***

CORRECT DANCING is a social art. It is a natural manifestation of joy and youthful vigour. It helps the social spirit of a group. It makes a boy less clumsy and a girl more graceful.

The only real questions about dancing are: Where? When? With whom?

At home? Wonderful. Under wholesome auspices—the parish? the school? Splendid. At good dancing schools? Fine. In clubs that have been organised with the approval and are conducted with the chaperonage of parents and school alumni and alumnae? Excellent.

When? At times that the work, the sports, the outdoor life, the studies of the young people will not be interfered with. Better early than late, afternoon and early evenings rather than nights.

With whom? People of whom the parents can approve.

### ***What do you think about high-school students' going steady?***

I DISLIKE the current practice so heartily that I have written a pamphlet against it (“Going Steady”), thereby endangering my popularity with many a group of young people. Yes I dared to ridicule it and to speak violently on the subject.

It is, I feel, against nature. Don't take that “against nature” in the strongest sense. I mean by it that youngsters of that age are gregarious; they tend to move as a group or a crowd; the “going steady” stuff cuts their social living down to one person.

It is against their full development. At the time in their life when they should be learning how to get along with a wide variety of people, they concentrate on one person—to the stunting of their social sense and growth.

It is lazy. The boy does not have to plan for pleasant parties or times for his “girl.” He knows that he can call her up any time and she will be waiting for him.

It makes the girl dependent. She can't accept other invitations without offending the boy. She has to wait for his nod, his beck and call.

It develops bad traits of character. The boy and the girl feel that they must exercise selfishness: They demand of each other the full rights of exclusive companionship. It makes for jealousy: The boy pouts if the girl goes out with another boy; the girl is resentful if the boy goes out with another girl.

It limits their growth in the social graces. They do not have to learn to converse; they just “go together.” They get into the habit of dancing always with one partner, and they later find it not so easy to dance with others. They come to take each other for granted, and they lose thereby the niceties of manners that are—too often—reserved for strangers.

It leads to sin. A boy and a girl cannot be continuously in each other's company without feeling the sexual urge. Familiarity makes preliminary gestures easy. They begin to think of themselves almost as an engaged couple, with what they conceive as the rights of engaged couples. They become easily a peril to each other.

It leads nowhere. If they marry, it is likely to be a mistake. They have not, strictly speaking, made a choice. They have accepted a habit. If they do not marry, they break up—usually by way of a bad quarrel. Often in a rebound the boy marries badly. The girl is stranded and may in jealous pique throw herself at someone for whom she is even less suited than she was for the first boy, to whom she wants to prove that she can get along without him.

Group parties, going with a variety of people, learning to be pleasant and agreeable to people of assorted tempera-

ments, avoiding the familiarity that leads to temptation, growing in friendships rather than in the premature stimulation of affection—these should be part of high-school days.

High-school students' going steady is pretty much of a curse.

In a word: I think it's a blight.

***What do you think of co-education?***

USUALLY—CERTAINLY IN ITS ORIGINS—co-education is a matter of economic necessity. We have one school for both sexes, not because the boys and girls profit by the same sort of education or would actually need it, but because we cannot afford two school systems.

As a teacher I much preferred to teach boys and men alone or girls and women alone. That is possibly a matter of personal taste. I enjoyed teaching anyone who would listen to me; but I found it easier to teach a one-sex group....all male....all female.

But this is part of the larger question: whether in education the sexes should be completely separated. Should men teach boys and men? Should women teach girls and women? A lot has been written and thought and discussed about this. All the votes are not yet in.

American custom has placed boys and girls in the same classrooms throughout the elementary grades. Apparently the supposition was that up to the eighth grade boys and girls were not too different and responded to the same training. I question that supposition. Certainly in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades boys are very much male and girls are rather delightfully feminine. It takes a wonderful teacher in those upper grades to make the class acceptable to and for both sexes. Usually the boys are slower than the girls, who tend to develop faster. Later the man takes over the scholastic leadership.

So I have often felt (not too originally) that many a male early develops an inferiority with regard to education because during the grammar-school years the girls always led the class. He turns from the arts to practical studies. He thinks that books and culture are only for women.

The long-standing historic tradition in the United States has been to separate our adolescent boys and girls, to put them in separate schools. Back of the educational reasons for this has been the conviction of educators that during adolescence boys' and girls' interest in each other is distracting to their school training. They are entering a period of moon-struck fancy and puppy love. The boys regard the girls with avid curiosity. The girls are skittish when the boys are around.

I was lucky enough to go to a boys' high school. My mother provided for me plenty of feminine society outside of school. In school we students were strictly male; we had no distractions from girls and no sense that we were intellectually the inferiors of the girls, who had developed mentally more rapidly than we had.

I note how many of the outstanding colleges of the country tend to remain one-sex. As they develop into universities, they may allow or even encourage co-education. The tendency among the more important and private colleges is to remain either for men or for women. I wonder whether the founders and perhaps the present executives, not bound by the taxes of the state, have not felt that women and men had different vocations in life and hence should be trained, if not in different subjects, at least with a different outlook and viewpoint on subjects.

When men and women reach university level, they should be mature. They should know what they want of their studies and of their life, and the adolescent curiosity and skittishness should have disappeared. Yet it is surprising how many university departments are open only to one sex and how a fair number of universities do not look with pedagogical approval on co-education.

Or were you thinking all this time about the moral issues of co-education?

Why can't we for once view education as education? Let's stick to that aspect of the matter.

***Do you think that teen-age canteens and clubs for dancing and soft drinks are good?***

IF THEY ARE WELL and correctly run, certainly yes. But the parents should take an active part in them. They are bad



if they tend further to separate parents from their children.

The ideal would combine the elements of home, church, and school—in the sense that the parents, the priests, and the teachers were interested and approvingly co-operative.

The young people should not feel that they are supervised, but they should know that they are chaperoned. They should not feel watched, but they should not feel abandoned. They should not have to carpenter their fun to the desires of their elders, but they should be aware that their parents approve the sort of fun they are having.

The canteen or club is a wonderful place if it is happy, informal, full of the things that children or young people like to do—but not cut adrift in a manner to become a rival of or substitute for home, church, and school.

### ***How do these modern children pick up drinking habits?***

FROM THE DRINKING HABITS of adults. Children are naturally imitative. They ape anything they see or hear. They learn to speak by mouthing the sounds they hear around them. Their first educational processes in school and out of school are through imitation. Before they know what faith means, they imitate the religious practices of their parents; they make a funny little motion with their hands that is somehow their reproduction of the sign of the cross.

It happens that today adults are doing a lot of plain and fancy drinking.

If the children see pleasant drinking in the family, wine or beer served in moderation at meals, the cocktail an additional luxury before the meals of greater moment, they stand a fine chance of associating drink with normal, wholesome family living. They may learn to drink without acquiring bad drinking habits.

If mother and father are known never to drink, and if early their parents tell them why they do not drink, the children may follow their ways. The reasons for total abstinence can well be good and can readily be made appealing: the thirst of Christ, the dangers of drinking, the better fun that a young person can have without drinking, the ugliness of the drunkard, self-control, the bodily strength and athletic skill of non-drinkers, the desire to bring one's body and soul to full and unimpeded development.

Right now however the child is constantly stimulated to imitate his drinking elders.

Hardly a motion picture is shown in which the leading man and leading woman aren't taking a drink. In some of the recent pictures almost continuous drinking by everyone marks the development of the film. And in some pictures that most repulsive of humans, the drunk, is treated as if he were a delightfully pleasant, charming eccentric.

The children in their room upstairs or adjacent to the living room hear their parents and the guests getting high, tight, and maudlin—or quarrelsome and stupid. What is the effect? First fear, then revulsion, then angry protest, then an accustomed acquiescence, then more than a suspicion that drinking must be fun or accompanies fun, then the desire to be grown-up and adult too—then the sampling of the drink. . . and the start of the drinking habits of “these modern children.”

We American Catholics made a great mistake when we allowed the total-abstinence pledge to be dropped—to disappear in fact from the safeguards of youth. Once that pledge was part of the ritual that surrounded first Holy Communion. All children were expected to take the pledge until the age of twenty-one. It was a great idea. But it was killed by that unfortunate era known as prohibition. In our desire to protest against the thing we called morality by law, we endangered morality by habit, example, and free choice.

I sincerely wish that that pledge could be restored.

But even the pledge will not save the younger generation so long as the older generation sets the current example of substituting drinking for practically every form of social life. . . so long as children see drink thrust at them from the screen, the news-stands, and the practices of slightly older boys and girls.

### ***This young father drinks beer continuously in the presence of his four young children. Will the children grow up to be drunkards?***

EVEN SHOULD I PEER with concentrated attention into the father's most recent glass of beer, I could not clearly see the future.

I happened to know however a certain father who was always just a little bit sodden. He would have raged at you had you suggested that he ever got drunk. He took only a few drinks during the course of the evening; that was all. He was never completely drunk...but he was never completely sober.

With real pity I watched the reaction of this man's children to him.

His eldest daughter positively hated him. She was ashamed of him and disgusted with him. When she brought home some of her young friends, he was likely to be a little maudlin and not quite clear in his speech. He tended to paw and be silly or sentimental.

His only son thoroughly despised him and regarded him as a sot. The youngster hated drink in all forms and didn't touch a drop—as long as I knew him, which was into his early manhood.

His second daughter was simply sorry for his wife, her mother. She avoided him when she could and concentrated her love and thought on the mother.

When he spoke to his children, they faced him with baleful eyes. His influence was not particularly bad... because it was nil. Those children were, as far as they were concerned, fatherless.

I think I felt sorrier for him than I did for his children.

### ***What do you think of girls' smoking?***

IT'S A LITTLE UNFAIR, isn't it, to pick on the girls when the whole world is walking through clouds of smoke?

If ever propaganda and skilful advertising put a habit over on the world, cigarette advertising and propaganda did. In my youth cigarettes were called "coffin nails." Toughs from the Bowery smoked 'em to prove they were toughs. Polite people regarded cigarettes as the badge and the sign of the slums and the underworld. My father used to say he would as soon have a man slap him in the face as smoke a cigarette while he talked to him.

Then the might of American advertising was thrown behind the cigarette. All credit to a great job! World War I made the cigarette almost exclusively the male smoke. Shortly afterward a billboard advertisement showed a young man and a young woman sitting on a moon-drenched hill. She said to him, "Blow some smoke my way."

That was the start.

Within a very short time women were skilfully convinced that the cigarette was their easy way to retain their youthful figures: Smoke and stay slim. Then the ads practically guaranteed to the users of their particular brand voices irresistible to the Metropolitan Opera.

The motion pictures took up the campaign. They presented their heroines smoking—especially if they had pretty hands. Magazine illustrators drew characters who were always smoking. Jewellers made the cigarette case part of the accessories of a well-dressed man—or woman. The cigarette was an essential accompaniment of conversation or card playing. Cigarette companies put on far and away the most elaborate radio programs. The United States Government regarded the cigarette as part of normal Army and Navy rations—to be included even in emergency kits.

In the end the cigarette became the currency of war-wrecked Europe and impoverished Japan: Not money, but the Lucky or the Camel was the medium of exchange and the coin of purchase.

So why pick on the girls?

Since I am a non-smoker, the fascination of tobacco escapes me. I recall a learned psychologist who claimed that taste had nothing to do with smoking; it was a matter of habit, of reflexes and motor actions—a series of impulses, the reaching for the cigarette, the opening of the pack, the tamping, the match, the striking of the match, the cigarette placed in the mouth, the first inhale..., just a chain of motions rutted into the brain and calling for repeated action.

Seldom do I say to a smoker who offers me a cigarette, "Thanks, but I don't smoke," without hearing him say, "You're lucky." About half my friends are always on the verge of "giving it up." One in a thousand does—to the amazement of his friends and the envy of other smokers.

During the cigarette shortage I saw people suffering real famine, and I did my best to save them—as I should have tried to save any kind of famine victim.

I have been told by smokers that they think the habit is terribly costly and dirty. I recall that H. L. Mencken once said that all women who smoked stank.

So...

But as long as grownups smoke, young people will think it the thing to do.

Once the young people start to smoke, they are not likely to do otherwise than take recurrent resolutions to give it up—and keep right on making the tobacco companies almost the only ones that never know depressions.

***What about slumber parties for mixed groups?***

A CATHOLIC PARENT who allows an adolescent son or daughter to go off to what is called a mixed slumber party needs the advice of a psychologist rather than a priest.

I am convinced that innocence can triumph over opportunity.

I am sure that virtue resists even the most flagrant of temptations.

But repeated opportunity has a way of finally tripping up innocence. And virtue has a pretty tough battle of it against insistent temptation.

I am fully aware, understand, that these so-called slumber parties are supposed to be as innocent as the Bundling Parties of Revolutionary days in America. With plenty of safeguards, we are told, the boys and girls merely sleep together (when in a setting of the sort, with crowds around, they sleep at all). But may I pause on that phrase “sleep together”?

Time was when that combination of words had a very clear technical meaning. In fact it was one of the euphemisms of our language, a phrase that put into words only a small part of the real meaning. I even hesitated to use the phrase here, for I recalled that I had never before put it down in cold type.

So at a time in their lives when temptation is a pretty realistic and often brutal thing, your boys and girls spread their blankets on the floor—around a campfire or before a hearth or elsewhere—and sleep together.

Let’s stop there.

You parents may carry on the discussion, which suddenly seems to me entirely unnecessary.

***How can it happen that when a mother loves and practices her religion faithfully, her son will be indifferent—if not positively antipathetic—to religion in all forms?***

THIS TIES IN with the snarling apology that some males offer for their non-attendance of church: “I had too much religion when I was a kid.”

The more exact reason usually is: “You had too much religion of the wrong kind. . . . Or the right religion was presented to you in an unattractive fashion.” You can’t possibly have too much of Christ’s religion—if it is presented as Christ meant it to be.

Parents who love their religion and practice it happily and with a certain attractive gaiety of soul seldom have cause to complain that their children do not like religion.

It may happen—and it sometimes does—that a boy or a girl has by forces outside the family been led into positive evil. The boy is practising impurity, let’s say, and the thought of his parents’ religion appals and frightens and shames him. Or the girl is severely tempted to sin by the company she is keeping, and she resents religion as the force that may keep her from her dangerous ways.

But if the boy is not held fast by sin or the girl is not strongly and to her own curiosity or satisfaction tempted, the explanation of a child’s indifference to religion lies with the parents. Mothers have been known to make religion most unattractive. They have neglected their homes for religion. Instead of getting dad and the children a good breakfast, the mother is at morning Mass. When the family very much wanted to go to see a movie, the mother dragged the family night after night to the novena services. There are mothers who regard life mournfully and shake doleful heads over the decay of the world and the wickedness of youth. They have made Sunday something of the burden and bore that it was in Puritan New England. They constantly threaten their children with the wrath of God and the pains of hell.

No wonder their children don't find religion attractive. God loves us; Christ died with utter selflessness for our salvation; the Holy Spirit lives like a bright flame in our hearts. The Eucharist is with us, and the saints are about us, and heaven waits at the end of a good life.

We have the sacraments as well as the commandments. The Church has its feast days as well as its fasts. Christ says, "Come to me," far more often than He says, "Depart!" And Mother Mary regards her children with a loving smile.

Make religion a thing of joy and beauty, of strength and promise, of life rather than death, and children will not find it other than what Christ meant it to be—the way to a blessed life here and hereafter.

***How do you account for the great differences between children of the same parents?***

THAT'S A LARGE SUBJECT and calls for a lot of discussion. Let's see if we can synopsise.

Since a child shares the heredity of both his father and his mother, he shares the traits that have been passed on from a long line of varied ancestors. The combinations of these traits is simply limitless in variety. The child may combine the traits of a maternal aunt, a paternal uncle, one of his grandmothers, and some ancestor whose name is no longer recalled in the family. Another child in the family may combine the traits of a paternal aunt, a maternal uncle, another grandmother, and a well-known ancestor who had a genius for writing. The combinations are intriguing in their possibilities.

Then sometimes parents who are very strict with child one, two, and three grow tired and become utterly careless about child four and five.

Or child three may have been ill as a baby and hence is quite spoiled by the parents, who worry about his physical life and let his emotional life run riot.

Or a child may early fall into the hands of a bad nurse or of wicked playmates, or he may have an experience—unknown to parents—that leaves a bad scar on his character.

Sometimes parents change their place of residence frequently. The neighbourhood in which some of the children pass their impressionable years may be quite different from the neighbourhood in which the other children live through childhood and adolescence.

Some of the children are born at a time when their parents are going through emotional or health crises. This child lives his early years during a time when his mother is ill. Or the father and mother were moving toward an estrangement—happily averted—when this particular child was young. This child's young years were marked by the family's financial struggle. This child knew only prosperous days...And so on.

All these factors are decisive. If one knew the entire history of each family, the inherited traits and the environmental factors in each child could perhaps be traced with surprising accuracy.

***To what extent should parents show affection for one another in front of their children?***

You HAVE ANSWERED your own question in the noun you used. Show affection, and much of it. Displays or manifestations of passion might alarm your children or surprise them or make them curious.

***What about parents who quarrel in the presence of their children?***

GOD FORGIVE THEM the wrong they do their children!

Even the youngest child recognises the evil of such conduct. Quarrelling parents have nervous, highly emotional, unstable, frightened, brooding children.

Even a single sharp quarrel in the presence of children upsets the children beyond the parents' imagining.

If parents must quarrel, I suggest that they remember the old slogan—hire a hall... or go down into the basement and shut the doors and windows....or wait till the children are five miles away.

***Do you think that parents should subsidise their children's marriages?***

IF PARENTS HAVE GIVEN their boy an education to fit him to take a good job in the world, they have really

subsidised his marriage.

We Americans—thank heavens!—have never had the dowry idea—endowing a wife with an income which under the direction or control of the husband goes toward the upkeep of the home.

Recently there has been more and more inclination on the part of the well to do to support their children during the early days of the marriage.

It is, I suppose, a matter of personal opinion—but I should find the practice distasteful and unwholesome.

Under such circumstances the children are not really able to establish a full family life. They become a sort of parasite or satellite family. They lose that sturdy independence that makes a man hustle and a woman save.

They get a false sense of their own economic status. They live beyond their actual means, supplementing their actual income with money that some caprice or accident can easily remove. They start “at the top” instead of working their way up. They lose their sense of the value of money—as one always does when one is spending money that has come out of some fairy godparent’s purse.

Such subsidising seems to me like a fine way of destroying independence, resourcefulness, initiative, and a realistic attitude toward married life.

I should advise parents not to give money endowments in this way; I should advise the young married couple not to take such endowments.

***What would you suggest as the best means to bring a seventeen-year-old son and his father closer together?***

IF THEY ARE NOT already close, I’m afraid the situation is not too hopeful. If they are already close, the trick of bringing them closer is not too difficult.

What are the common interests of men? Sports chiefly, sports participated in together or seen together. . . enthusiasms for games of all sorts, shared and discussed.

A boy of that age responds to his father’s intelligent and unobtrusive interest in his school — his teams, his studies, his grades, his teachers. Schools nowadays usually have father-son clubs and meetings for fathers. The wise father attends all such meetings and sits with his son—or with the boy’s classmates, if the son is playing—during the school’s athletic events.

Sometimes fathers and sons have hobbies in common. They collect stamps. They are interested in photography. They enjoy the woods and the open spaces. The father takes the boy hunting and fishing, invites him out with parties of his men friends who are going on field trips.

A father can teach his boy card games and give him a social interest in the more intellectual forms of card playing.

A smart father sometimes invites his son downtown to lunch, notably to meet his friends—with or without the sons of those friends. He takes his son through his business or factory and gives the lad insight into what he is doing there.

He listens when the boy wants to talk—and in general listens much more than he talks. If his son has a skill or knowledge that the father hasn’t—an interest in aviation or in Diesel engines for instance—he is not too proud to listen when his boy explains these things to him. Indeed he is proud to be pupil to his own son.

All this is much easier if the relationship between father and son has existed from the infancy of the son. A father cannot hope for too much success if at six o’clock in the evening of February 3, when the boy is already seventeen years old, he decides to get closer to his son. The boy thinks this sudden burst of interest is queer. The father is self-conscious. Both will do a lot of unhappy gulping and feinting—and in the end probably miss the connection.

***Can a child of divorced parents ever be completely normal—psychologically and emotionally? What happens when the parent in charge is really devoted to the care of the child?***

A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO one of our big-circulation weeklies ran an article called, “I Am the Child of Four Parents.” It was the story of a young woman whose parents had divorced, married again, and competed fiercely for her affection. Each parent with his or her new partner struggled in a racking tug of war that pulled the girl emotionally apart.

Around that time I met a young woman who was in a similar situation as far as the divorce of her parents was concerned. But when I mentioned the article, she laughed bitterly. "I could write another article," she said, "called, 'I Am the Child of No Parents.' Each of my parents is remarried, and the one thing neither wants is to be reminded of that first failure or have me around as the element to create jealousy and disunion in the new marriage."

She was incidentally a real psychic problem.

Nature meant that children should have the benefit of a joint guardianship, the father and the mother each contributing his and her individual characteristics both as parent and specifically as father or mother. Something is missing when there is only one parent. There are deficiencies. In the case where one parent dies, the child remains the charge of the other parent; he does not however recall the often blighting experience of the pre-divorce episodes. He does not feel the pull toward a parent who no longer has part in his life.

A successful play on Broadway, "Christopher Blake" is based on a boy's emotional alarms and excursions that result from such a situation.

One wonderful parent has been able to do remarkable things with a child. Yet there is the pressing danger that, in an effort to make up for the lack of the second parent, the one parent may spoil the child. He or she may be too kind and generous and lenient. He or she may strive to find in the love of the child an equivalent for the lost love of the other parent. That is not good.

That person is wise who makes the best of any existing situation, however unsatisfactory or bad. Just so the innocent parent now responsible for the care of the child is wise to do as good a job as possible. And the job may be very good indeed.

But nature meant children to have two parents sharing in the care, training, and character formation and development of the children. It is sad when the broken marriage of two adults means a handicap to the guiltless child.

***Do you think that true love between two people is greater at the time of their marriage or after many years of normal married life?***

TODAY most young couples marry on a tidal wave of romantic love...and tidal waves have a way of receding.

But if a couple have obeyed God's laws, worked together in unity, known joys together and borne burdens together, been brought close by the partnership of a lifetime, their love ripens and matures. Their love is like their wisdom:

It grows greater in quantity and deeper in kind.

The mistake is to think that romantic love is the only kind of love.

Love is a thing of the whole man and the whole woman, body and soul. As bodies develop and souls mature, love should move along in the rising growth of personality and character.

After all love is a virtue. Virtues improve with practice. Practice makes for habits. Strong habits are characteristic only of well-developed and matured personalities.

***Why did you become a priest?***

CHIEFLY because God was good and I was very lucky. In the order of time... I suppose I owe my vocation first of all to my mother. She prayed that I would be a priest. She set me the example of a fine Catholic faith. She sent me to a high school and a college that has seen develop from its student body many another priest.

Then I met priests and priests in training for whom I had admiration. As baseball stars inspire boys to play baseball, and young men become doctors because of their high regard for physicians they have met, I thought of the priesthood because of the examples of priests and priests in the making.

It seemed to me too that the life of a priest was naturally one in which I should be able to do many of the things I enjoy doing. What seemed to me then has certainly turned out to be the case.

I had a desire to save my own soul. The priesthood seemed the profession that most completely guaranteed that desire.

In a vague sort of way I, like most fairly decent kids, wanted to do some good for others—and for the world. Where, I

argued, still rather vaguely, would this be more fully possible than in the priesthood?

But in the last analysis a vocation to the priesthood is the grace of God. . . and the fact that two mothers—one on earth and one in heaven—took an effective hand. I arrived at the threshold of my training almost without personal impulse. I continued because the life proved far more wonderful than I had dreamed, and the promise of the priesthood grew constantly more desirable.

I regard as deeply blessed others who have my luck.

***How can a parent train a boy to be a priest?***

ONE THING IS SURE: You mustn't tell the boy you want him to be a priest. Priesthood and the vocation to priesthood is a gift of God. Yet we get God's gifts for ourselves and for others, not by chance, but by co-operation with God and prayer to Him.

Parents are wise if they pray for a vocation for their boy.

They should pray however not merely that he will be a priest but that he will be a good priest.

From the boy's infancy the setting should be right: holy, good, normal, natural—and supernatural. Those adjectives are all intended to modify the noun setting.

The faith of the parents, manifested in practice more than in words, will pass on normally to the child. Their high respect for the priesthood and their reverence for and kindness toward priests will affect him powerfully.

The choice of a school for the boy has much to do with this vocation. His education should of course be Catholic. The kind of high school and college that he attends—and by that I mean the type of priests (secular or religious) who direct it—will have a profound directive influence upon his vocation. Parents might be wise to inquire whether a particular school has been marked by many vocations or whether few boys go from it to the seminary or the noviciate.

In most other things his life should be natural and normal. It should include games and sports, parties and pleasant friendships, a wholesome attitude toward girls, a clean and happy social life.

Boys do not like to be urged into the priesthood. Mothers especially are sometimes insistent and demanding about it. The whole religious attitude of parents can be much more effective than their words. Their prayers will have a hundred times the efficacy of their pleas.

But in general good parents, who have strong faith and a prayerful regard for their children's future, are likely to be blessed with children whose vocations take them to the seminary or the noviciate.

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