

THE CHRISTIAN HOME, PART 1

A Guide to Happiness in the Home

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TO CHRISTIAN FATHERS AND MOTHERS, HUSBANDS AND WIVES AND TO ALL HOME LOVERS THE WORLD OVER. THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE SUPREME MODELS OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME:

JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH

If the social reform that is being demanded on all sides is to have any hope of success, it must begin with the reform of the family.

--Victor Cathrein, S.J.

INTRODUCTION

THE world today is full of reformers. Society, we are told, is sick with many ills, and a radical remedy is imperative if the utter breakdown of Christian civilization is to be averted. Yet, while the urgent need of reform is quite generally conceded, there is a wide divergence of opinions as to the proper means of bringing it about. As Catholics, possessed of the divinely revealed truths that should regulate all human action, we know that many of the remedies proposed for the cure of social ills are inadequate, because they do not reach the root of the evil; and that many a well-meant reform movement is foredoomed to failure, because it is not based on the only true and solid foundation of all social reform; namely, the principle that there can be no real, permanent social justice and morality without private justice and morality; and that there can be no enduring private justice or morality without religion.

A Truism

So much is agreed upon among Catholics: religion and morality must form the basis of all true reform; and it is a truism to say that if all the individuals that make up society were morally good and religious, the ills that afflict society would disappear. It is furthermore agreed among Catholics that the Catholic Church offers the individual all that is necessary for leading a good life. Why then do so many of her children fail? They have the true Faith; they have the Commandments, which tell them what they must do and what they must avoid; and they have the means of grace, prayer and the Sacraments, to help them to avoid sin and practice virtue. Why, then, are they not all morally good and religious?

The Sin of Adam

The fundamental reason is simply that they do not choose to be so. Sin is apparently so pleasant, at least for the moment, and the constant practice of virtue is so hard, that men often choose the former in preference to the latter. Even in Paradise, where all circumstances were so favorable, Adam and Eve abused their free will by disobeying God. But in consequence of that first sin of Adam, there exists in all his descendants a strong inclination to evil, which makes the practice of virtue still more difficult. And added to all this is the example of the wicked world in which we live.

The Enemy Without

It is this latter, the bad example of the world around us, which forms the great obstacle to social reform even among Catholics. If man were merely an individual living by himself, he would have only the enemy within to fight against; but being a social being, destined by God to live in society with others, he has also an enemy outside himself—the evil example of many of those with whom he lives. How to overcome this evil example is the great problem of social reform. It is easy enough to say that the bad example must be offset by good example; but how and where is the good example to

be had?

Catholic Societies

Many there are who say that since it is mainly social attractions that lead Catholics into dangerous company and dangerous places of amusement, we must have our own societies, our own social agencies, club rooms and recreation centers, so that our people can satisfy their craving for company and amusement in a harmless manner. While admitting that our people should be provided with ample opportunity for healthful and innocent recreation; while admitting, too, the importance and desirability of Catholic societies, both secular and religious, and attesting that, when properly conducted under proper auspices, such societies can do an immense amount of good, I am nevertheless of the opinion that it is not by means of these societies that social evils will be greatly reduced. Let us have these societies by all means; but when we have established them and made them flourish, let us not imagine that our task is done. In all such societies something is wanting,--namely, the intimate daily association of the members in all the important affairs of life.

The Best Catholic Society

Happily, however, there is a society that has this all-important requisite; a natural society in which the great majority of men spend their lives; a society that is capable of exerting a lifelong influence on its members. That society, dear reader, is the family. In the family we have all the essential things that man requires as a social being for his physical, moral and intellectual well-being and advancement. And since the family rather than the individual, is the unit of society, to reform society one must begin with the family. Restore religion to its rightful place in the home; let religion direct, control and permeate the family life, and not only will the individual have the safeguard he needs against the evils of society, but society itself will be transformed. This, then, religion in the home, is to my mind, the best of all remedies for the reform of society; and the purpose of this little book is to explain the remedy and to induce all Christian families that can be reached to adopt it.

“For the love of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we implore pastors of souls, by every means in their power, by instructions and catechisms, by word of mouth and by written articles widely distributed, to warn Christian parents of their grave obligations. And this should be done not in a merely theoretical and general way, but with practical and special application to the various responsibilities of parents touching the religious, moral, and civil training of their children, and with indication of the methods best adapted to make their training effective, supposing always the influence of their own exemplary lives.”

---Pius XI, “Christian Education of Youth”

CHAPTER I: Necessity of Religion in the Home

I. Primary End of the Family

IN accordance with the words spoken by God to our first parents, “Increase and multiply and fill the earth,” the primary purpose of the family is the propagation of the human race. Now without religion, this purpose will be only imperfectly attained. All history witnesses to the fact that there can be no enduring morality without religion, and the history of the family is no exception to the rule. The suffering and labor, the difficulty and disappointment, the grief and vexation incident to the bearing and rearing of children demand so much patience, love, and self-sacrifice, that no one not imbued with a religious sense of duty and buoyed up by the hope of an eternal reward, will be willing to endure them. Hence where these religious motives are wanting, the primary end of the family will be either wholly or partly neglected, and matrimony degraded to the low level of a selfish partnership or a sinful pastime.

Perverting Marriage

We need not have recourse to pagan lands, where infants are deliberately exposed to die, for proof that such is the

inevitable result of the absence of religion in the family. The absence or scarcity of children in many families of our own land is sad and sufficient evidence. Nay, even in Christian families, where religion no longer exerts the sway it should, are found those immoral practices that pervert the sublime aim of the family. One might, and in charity one would be bound to, ascribe the absence or scarcity of children in such families to other causes, if wives and mothers did not openly advocate artificial restriction of families on the theory that it is better to have one or two children and bring them up well than to have a larger number and be unable to take proper care of them. That theory in itself, of course, is unassailable so long as no law of God is violated by having only one or two children, and so long as the expression “proper care” is rightly understood. But just the way this theory is understood and put into practice by most of its advocates shows into what errors man falls when he is not restrained by the salutary curb of religion.

Educating for Heaven

What is meant by bringing up a child well? From the standpoint of religion, as far as essentials are concerned, it means to bring up a child in such a manner that it will be enabled to attain the end for which God created it—eternal happiness in Heaven. Such an education even the poorest parents will be able to provide for their children, no matter how many they have; and their own happiness in Heaven will be increased by every child that they have added to the number of the elect. There is always a possibility of a child going wrong despite the best parental care; but the probability of its going wrong from neglect because of the large number of children is far less than the probability that it will be spoiled if it is one of a limited few. The very action of the parents in thwarting nature by limiting their offspring will militate against the proper religious training of their children; for it is not likely that parents who themselves disobey the law of God in so grave a matter will be at great pains to rear God-fearing sons and daughters.

“Proper Care” Relative

But even from a material point of view, the assumption is false that parents cannot take proper care of many children. “Proper care” is to be understood relatively, not absolutely; for while parents are bound to provide for the material as well as the spiritual needs of their children, the extent of that provision must vary with the parents’ resources. If the best possible training and the best possible care were required for every child, few persons would be allowed to marry at all; since few, if any, could be found whose circumstances could not be improved on.

Pope Pius XI on the Rearing of Children

“We are deeply touched by the sufferings of those parents who, in extreme want, experience great difficulty in rearing their children. However, they should take care lest the calamitous state of their external affairs should be the occasion for a much more calamitous error. No difficulty can arise that justifies the putting aside of the law of God which forbids all acts intrinsically evil. There is no possible circumstance in which husband and wife cannot, strengthened by the grace of God, fulfill faithfully their duties and preserve in wedlock their chastity unspotted.”

--Encyclical on Christian Marriage.

Periodic Continence

If really serious financial straits or imperative considerations of health should discountenance the addition of another child to the family at a given time, truly Christian parents will know how to meet the situation by mutually agreeing to practice continence over a certain period. So much, with a good will and God’s grace, they will always be able to do. But no combination of untoward circumstances can ever justify the misuse of the sacred rights of marriage. (See quotation above.)

I realize most keenly that faithful adherence to the law of God will sometimes require great sacrifices of God-fearing parents. But every state of life, as it confers certain rights and privileges, also demands its peculiar sacrifices; and God will always grant sufficient grace to enable one to make them. If God enables those husbands and wives to keep His holy

law who are deprived of the legitimate pleasures of wedlock by the premature death or the life-long illness of their spouses, He will certainly do the same for those whom poverty or other trying conditions place in a similar predicament. With St. Paul, every Christian can say in time of trial: "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me."

An Extreme Case

The following example, which is about as extreme a case as one might imagine, shows how God strengthens and consoles those sorely tried consorts who place their trust in Him. I condense the story narrated by the chief actor himself—an English Catholic journalist named W. Gerald Young—in a letter to the London Universe.

"Some years ago I stood with a woman at the altar where God united us in the bonds of holy Matrimony. She was all that man could wish for, and, with her, life was a succession of sunny days. More than once did God give her that wonderful blessing of radiant motherhood, and we were intensely happy. Today, however, black clouds of sorrow have overwhelmed us, and we are no longer together.

"Once a week I make a pilgrimage into the beautiful hill country of Surrey, where there is an institution known by the name of a mental hospital. Here it is that my dear one spends her days,— long, weary days, because she is mad. Here is my shrine. Frail and pallid, she lies on a bed, dead to the world of intelligence. Her once beautiful face is now disfigured; her old-time smile superseded by a scowl. When I kiss her dear lips, there is no warm response from the woman who loved me so dearly; and yet she still holds the keys of my heart.

"My journey back to London is a weary one; for how can we call it home when the wife and mother is absent? Little voices will ask when Mama is coming back, and Daddy cannot tell them. On my way back, I visit a little church wherein the Blessed Sacrament is always exposed for adoration. In this haven of rest where all is quiet and peaceful, I lift up my weary heart to God and tell Him my troubles, and I come out a happier man, because I have unburdened my soul to my Maker and He has given me new courage to fight this weary battle of life. Some day God may see fit to answer my petition. In the meantime I can only hope and pray." But whether God grants this brave man's prayer here on earth or not, oh, how magnificently will He reward his fidelity in eternity!

A Selfish Life

Now if a man can be faithful to the law of God in such trying circumstances, how much easier should it be for those whose happy homes are still unbroken and who need only practice Christian self-restraint? The whole argument against large families only shows the absence of the salutary restraints of religion. At bottom it is not the desire to give their children a more excellent training but the desire to lead a more selfish and comfortable life that clamors for the unnatural limitation of the family. No one is more desirous of having well-trained children than deeply religious parents; but such parents, regarding their office in the light of Faith, are bent mainly on rearing their children for Heaven; and they understand that, even should they be able to provide them but scantily with the goods of this world, by training them for Heaven the main thing is achieved and their principal duty performed. They realize, too, that the success of all their efforts in behalf of their children depends mainly on Heaven's blessing, and that if they merit that blessing by their upright lives, He who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field will also provide for their children.

Consolations of Parenthood

Happy the parents who still retain this religious outlook on life; whose religion is their guide, their support, and their consolation amid the arduous duties of their state of life! They know that they are the chosen instruments of Divine Providence for peopling the abode of the blessed. They know that in assuming the office of parenthood, they cooperate with God himself in bringing into existence beings destined to praise and enjoy him forever in Heaven. They know that every child they receive is a gift of God; since, do what they will, they can have no child that God does not give them. But above the solace of all this knowledge, is the supernatural aid which the true religion affords them. They have the actual graces of the sacrament of Matrimony, of frequent Communion, and of daily prayer to strengthen them, and the example

of their suffering Savior to console them. Yes, with religion in their homes, they can resist the evil example of those godless couples who seek only their own gratification. And though eugenic wise-acres scoff, and even misguided friends smile in derision at their old-fashioned families, they will never thwart Heaven's designs concerning their families, but look upon every child as a new token of Heaven's trust and Heaven's love.

The Parents' Pride

It is remarkable how often God rewards parents of large families by making the children that came last become the chief joy and pride of their life. The Little Flower of Jesus was the last of nine children; St. Ignatius of Loyola, the thirteenth and St. Catherine of Siena, the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth. Many parents owe the honor of having a son raised to the priesthood to the fact that they had large families. Had my own parents been willing to have five children but no more, they would never have had a priest in the family. But because they were blessed with eight children, they had the happiness of seeing the sixth and seventh celebrate their first Mass on the same day; and though they have gone to their reward, they are no doubt happy to know that two sons of their eighth child are studying for the priesthood.

A few years ago, I received a letter from a young mother of two children, in which she related how certain worldly-wise women try to induce mothers to limit the number of their children. On the occasion of a social call, a lady acquaintance of hers had remarked: "It is not a woman of refinement nowadays that has more than two children." To which the young mother replied: "In that case I hope to belong to the common herd, as I intend to take all that the good Lord wants to give me." In replying to her letter, I commended her for her truly Catholic stand, and then added: "I thank God that my own good mother did not have such a false idea of refinement; for if she had, I should have had no chance at all, as I was her seventh child." And the very first time I related this incident, namely, to a group of Franciscan Fathers at St. Elizabeth's Friary, Denver, Colo., each one of the five priests present declared that he, too, was his mother's seventh child!

II. Final Aim of Marriage

Necessary as religion is in the home for the attainment of the primary aim of marriage and the family—the propagation of the human race, it is equally necessary for the attainment of the family's final aim—the education of children for Heaven. Above all else it is the soul of the child for which parents will have to render a strict account on the day of judgment; and it is the religious and moral training of their children, therefore, that constitutes their paramount duty to their offspring. When Catholic parents stand before their Divine Judge, they will not be asked whether they did their utmost to enable their children to prosper in this world—to wear the laurels of its honors, to reap the fruits of its riches, and to quaff the wine of its sensual pleasures. No; the question they will have to answer is, whether they did their duty in enabling their children not only to save their immortal souls, but also to reach that degree of holiness to which God destined them and to embrace that state of life in which God wished them to serve Him.

Before the Dawn of Reason

To acquit themselves of this sacred duty, parents must needs foster religion in their home. If religion is to be planted deep in the heart of the child,—so deep that it will defy all later attempts of the world, the flesh and the devil, to root it out, it will not do to defer the child's religious education until it starts to school. Its religious education must be begun not only at the first dawn of reason, but long before the dawn of reason—in very infancy, so that a truly religious mind will be developed and become a veritable second nature. It follows necessarily, then, that religion must exert the dominant influence in the place where the child's first years are spent; namely, in the home. Religion should surround the child as snugly as its infant clothing. The child should imbibe religion at its mother's breast. It should be rocked to sleep to the tune of religion, and its first lisping accents should have a religious character.

Only if religion rules the home, will the child get the impression right at the start that religion is the most important thing in life. If there is little or no religion in the home, the child will naturally be led to suppose that wealth and position,

secular knowledge and training, or even worldly comforts and pleasures are the things most worth while; and that religion, instead of being a vital force in life, is merely a polite concession that man feels he must occasionally make to God, his Creator; and hence that it is, like a badge or his best clothes, to be displayed only in church and on special occasions.

Religion a Spiritual Food

Few parents who send their children to a Catholic school will deny the necessity of religion in the school. They know that even if a school should be entirely non-sectarian and in no way opposed to religion, the mere absence of religion would itself be a great evil; for, if education means the training and instructing of a child for the performance of the duties of life, it must needs embrace religious training and instruction, since the practice of religion is the first and foremost of life's duties. Now what is true of the absence of religion in the school, is equally true of its absence in the home. The supernatural graces which the child received in Baptism, sanctifying grace and the infused virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, are awaiting nourishment and warmth in order to blossom forth and yield fruit; and to deny the child the religious food and atmosphere it craves is to stunt if not to thwart its spiritual growth. To say that no harm is done the child so long as it is taught nothing positively bad or irreligious, is just as false as to say that it will not harm a child to deprive it of food so long as you do not give it poison.

Yet great as is the need of religion in the home for the proper molding of the infant mind and heart, how frequently is the hungry little soul of the child practically starved until it begins to attend a Catholic school! How often, too, is it not taught things that are positively bad either by word or by example! How often are not things said or done or permitted in the presence of children and justified or excused with the remark that "they don't know what it means," or "it won't do them any harm"! It may do them incalculable harm. It is just this seed sown in the innocent child's memory and imagination, from which later on evil will spring; and then the astonished parents wonder where the child learnt it. Small children are the most impressionable beings in the world, and the impressions which they receive are the ones that sink deepest and that will leave their traces all through life.

Shifting the Burden

One reason why the child's religious education is often neglected at home, is the tendency on the part of parents to disburden themselves of the duty of educating their children by committing that task entirely to others. The Catholic parochial school is unquestionably a splendid as well as a necessary institution; but it must be remembered that the education of children is in the first place the duty of the parents, and that the purpose of the school is only to co-operate with the parents, and in particular to take up the work at that point where the parents are no longer able to accomplish it satisfactorily themselves. That point, I am inclined to think, is ordinarily not reached before the child completes its sixth year, since there are few parents who are unable, from lack of either time or knowledge, to teach their children all they need to know on entering the first grade. There is, however, a growing custom of anticipating that point by entrusting the child to others when it is only five, or even only three or four years old; and the cause of the custom is the existence of the kindergarten.

The Holy Father on the Decline of Family Education

"We wish to call your attention in a special manner to the present-day lamentable decline in family education. The offices and professions of a transitory and earthly life, which are certainly of far less importance, are prepared for by long and careful study; whereas for the fundamental duty and obligation of educating their children, many parents have little or no preparation, immersed as they are in temporal cares.

"The declining influence of domestic environment is further weakened by another tendency prevalent almost everywhere to-day, which, under one pretext or another, for economic reasons, or for reasons of industry, trade or politics, causes children to be more and more frequently sent away from home even in their tenderest years."

--Pius XI in "Christian Education of Youth."

Kindergarten vs. Home Training

There are those that favor the kindergarten; and it is easy to understand that, like the day nursery, it is a most welcome institution to mothers who are obliged to work away from home for the support of their families. While the use of the kindergarten in such a case is certainly above criticism, the same cannot be said in regard to its use by those parents who avail themselves of it merely to have the children off their hands. And, even where there is no lack of parental love and care, there is likelihood that parents will send their children to the kindergarten simply because others do so; or from the mistaken notion that they are supposed to do so. Now, without wishing to dogmatize in the matter, I want to tell such parents that, in my opinion, the kindergarten training is not superior to home training; and that nothing is learned in the kindergarten that cannot be learned equally well at home. It is quite true that the school mistress who specializes in her work may be intellectually better equipped than many mothers for the education of very young children; but it is none the less true that the mother is by nature the child's first and chief educator; that the mother is nature's own specialist just in the task of educating the child before it reaches the age of reason; and that, as regards religious training, it is every mother's bounden duty to acquire so much knowledge as will enable her to teach her children that rudimentary religious knowledge that they should have before they complete their sixth year. (See quotation above.)

A Work of Love

Yet it is not so much duty, young mothers, that I would emphasize, as love, to induce you to make the early education of your children your own personal task. Soon enough, yes all too soon the time will come when your darlings will pass from the sacred sanctuary of your home to spend the greater part of their waking hours elsewhere. Should your mother's love not be anxious to have them under your watchful eye as long as possible? During those first half dozen years, when the child's heart can be molded like soft clay, should you not desire to fashion it to the highest ideals with your own loving hands? Should you not wish to be able to say that those essential prayers, which you expect your children to recite daily through life, were first learned and lisped at their mother's knee? Should you not aim to bind them to their home by the strongest ties of interest as well as of affection? If so, then the surest way is to make the home the fountain at which they first drink the waters of wisdom; to make the home the attractive center of all their earthly hopes and joys and the holy shrine round which will caressingly cling the fondest of all the happy memories of childhood.

Harmony between School and Home

But even when parents have done all in their power for the religious education of their children before the latter begin to attend school, let them not imagine that their task is accomplished. When they finally commit them to the charge of others, at the proper age, they do not thereby divest themselves of all responsibility, but must co-operate with the teachers by their interest, their discipline, and their moral support. (See Holy Father's quotation below.) Here again appears the necessity of religion in the home. If the child learns at school that it is in this world to serve God and to save its immortal soul, and that the things of earth are to be used merely as means to that end, that lesson must have an echo in the home. What the school emphasizes as the most important thing in life must likewise be regarded as such in the home. It will not do for the child to find a disagreement between the religious truths it learns at school and the views it hears expressed and defended at home. The irreconcilable opposition between the maxims of Christ and the maxims of this world will come home to the child soon enough; and if the former are to take root in its heart as they should, the seed sown in religious instruction in school must be nurtured by religion in the home.

A Puzzling Contradiction

It is true, the child will come in touch with irreligion sooner or later outside the circle of the home and school; but that is not likely to affect it so easily, since it has been taught to look upon the world as hostile to its own best interests. It will be quite different if irreligion is met with in the home. A child implicitly trusts its parents. It believes that they have its

welfare at heart; and it will be confronted with a puzzling contradiction if its parents by word, deed, or omission countenance or counsel anything that it was taught at school to regard as wrong. Just because of its confidence in its parents, the child is more likely to follow the example of the home than the precept it learned at school. Example is always more powerful than precept; and it is of the highest importance, therefore, that the religious instruction of the school be seconded by the example of sterling Christian conduct in the home. Only when home and school work hand in hand, mutually supporting, complementing, and encouraging each other, may we hope that our children will receive the kind of education that will enable them to bring forth the fruits of a truly Christian life.

Pius XI on the Status of the School

“Since, however, the younger generations must be trained in the arts and sciences for the advantage and prosperity of civil society, and since the family of itself is unequal to this task, it was necessary to create that social institution, the school. But let it be borne in mind that this institution owes its existence to the initiative of the family and of the Church, long before it was undertaken by the State. Hence, considered in its historical origin, the school is by its very nature and institution subsidiary and complementary to the family and the Church. It follows logically and necessarily that it must not be in opposition to, but in positive accord with those other two elements, and form with them a perfect moral union, constituting one sanctuary of education, as it were, with the family and the Church. Otherwise it is doomed to fail of its purpose and to become instead an agent of destruction.”

--Encyclical on “Christian Education of Youth.”

Non-Catholic Schools Forbidden

The very fact that the school is supposed to continue the education of the home and that both must be pervaded by the same Christian spirit, shows the obligation that Catholic parents are under of placing their children only in a Catholic school. In his encyclical on the Christian Education of Youth, Pope Pius XI emphasizes this duty in unmistakable terms “There is no need,” he writes, “to repeat what Our predecessors have declared on this point, especially Pius IX and Leo XIII.... We renew and confirm their declarations, as well as the sacred Canons, in which the frequenting of non-Catholic schools, whether neutral or mixed, those namely which are open to Catholics and non-Catholics alike, is forbidden for Catholic children, and can be at most tolerated, on the approval of the Ordinary alone, under determined circumstances of place and time, and with special precautions.

“Neither can Catholics admit that other type of mixed school...in which the students are provided with separate religious instruction, but receive other lessons in common with non-Catholic pupils from non-Catholic teachers. For the mere fact that a school gives some religious instructions (often extremely stunted) does not bring it into accord with the rights of the Church and of the Christian family, or make it a fit place for Catholic students.

Religion Must Pervade All Schools

“To be that, it is necessary that all the teaching and the whole organization of the school, its teachers, syllabus, and textbooks in every branch be regulated by the Christian spirit, under the direction and maternal supervision of the Church; so that religion may be in very truth the foundation and crown of the youth’s entire training; and this in every grade of school, not only the elementary, but the intermediate and the higher institutions of learning as well. To use the words of Leo XIII:

“It is necessary not only that religious instruction be given to the young at certain fixed times, but also that every other subject taught be permeated with Christian piety. If this is wanting, if this sacred atmosphere does not pervade and warm the hearts of masters and scholars alike, little good can be expected from any kind of learning, and considerable harm will often be the consequence.”

Exceptional Cases

It is true, indeed, that Catholics who have had the very best religious schooling and come from the finest Catholic families sometimes fail nevertheless to turn out well; but that is certainly not because of, but despite, their religious education. Such cases, too, are relatively rare; and I think that on investigation it would be found that most of them were thrown too suddenly upon the world, or passed at too early an age beyond the sustaining and restraining influence of Christian surroundings. The great majority of men stand in need of the support and encouragement of a good example throughout their entire life; and as they cannot find this encouragement amid the hustle and bustle of the world, they must find it in their homes. It is not enough, then, that the child have the advantage of an early religious home training. The steadying influence of religion in the home must continue all through life.

The Grown-up Children

This phase of our subject, the necessity of religion in the home also for the children that have graduated from school and for the grown-up members of the family, ought perhaps to be emphasized most, because it is so commonly disregarded. It is with religion as with all other things that influence our lives: it must be fostered if its influence is to last; and once the child is beyond the school age, there is great danger that it will gradually limit its religious practice to the hour in church on Sundays, if a truly Christian home life does not continue the beneficial religious influence previously exerted by the Catholic school. The home is really the only place, besides the church, that can be made to conform to one's daily religious needs; and it is here, therefore, that one must provide what cannot be had abroad. If abroad, amid the enforced companionship of unbelieving fellow-workmen, it is not always possible to avoid hearing one's religion set at naught and ridiculed, in the home one can insist that it be held in honor and esteemed the most vital thing on earth. If abroad the open practice of any act of religion would ordinarily be viewed with silent wonder or unconcealed contempt, in the home the act of folding the hands or kneeling to pray must be regarded as natural as eating and drinking. If abroad one is often powerless to prevent irreligion and immorality from having access to the press, bill-boards, art galleries and places of amusement, one can at least refuse admission to them when they knock on the door of our Christian homes.

Give me truly Christian homes, homes in which Christianity is not merely tolerated but revered and fostered, and homes that are homes and not only sleeping quarters, and I will give you a race of Christian men and women who will cling to their Faith despite the insidious machinations of a corrupt and irreligious world.

III. Religion Prevents Divorce

It remains yet to touch briefly on a third reason why religion is indispensable in the home; the fact, namely, that without religion in the home the very existence of the family is in danger; for religion is the only sure safeguard of the indissolubility of marriage, the only bulwark against the breaking up of the family by divorce.

Where there is no religion, no supernatural motive to sustain and comfort them and no belief in the inviolability of the marriage vow, it is but natural that when difficulties that demand mutual forbearance arise, as they inevitably will, the husband or wife will have recourse to divorce. God Himself knows that it is by no means always an easy matter for husband and wife to bear with each other's shortcomings; that unaided human nature cannot perseveringly fulfill all the duties of wedded life; and for that very reason He supernaturalized Christian marriage, making it a sacrament that confers all the special graces needed to enable the married pair to perform their duties faithfully until death. It is mainly owing to the denial of the sacramental character of Matrimony, that marriage is entered into so lightly outside the Catholic Church, and that so little is made of the wide-spread evil of severing the marital union.

While we may rejoice that divorce is not prevalent among Catholics, we must nevertheless admit to our shame that divorced Catholics are not altogether unknown, and that not infrequently the strained relations between husband and wife and the breakdown of parental authority fall little short of the evils of actual divorce. It is not enough, therefore, that the religious character and the indissolubility of the matrimonial union be acknowledged. Religion must sanctify not only the beginning but the entire course of wedded and family life.

What a world of difference it would make in our lives, if among the requisites for an ideal home, the first place were assigned to religion! We say, “What is home without a mother?” and it is true that the absence of a good mother makes a gap that cannot be adequately filled. Yet how far, how unspeakably far, short of the ideal mother does she fall who does not foster religion in the home!

Religion a Gracious Queen

Why then are there so many homes, even Christian homes, where religion is notably lacking? Is it perhaps because religion is regarded as a tyrant ruling with an iron hand? Undoubtedly this view is responsible for the attitude of many who style themselves Christians. But no view could be farther from the truth. A real tyrant in the home, a tyrant whom many serve with slavish care, is the insatiable desire for ease, pleasure, or social standing, which forces families to live beyond their means in order to equal their neighbors in sumptuousness of board and luxury of equipment; while religion, whose sway would be that of a tender mother and gentle queen, is shown scant courtesy or even barred admission.

Welcome religion to your homes, therefore, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, all ye who would be the possessors of truly happy homes. Welcome religion with open arms and gladsome hearts. Grossly do they err who look upon her as a tyrant. Religion is a queen, a most gracious queen, whose sway is as gentle as it is salutary. Yield yourselves to her loving influence so that the smile of her approval will ever beam upon you. Let her rule your going out and your coming in! Let her occupy the place of honor at your table! Let her sit with you in your study! Let her kindly eye restrain you in time of joy! Let her tender hand wipe away your tears in time of sorrow! Let her minister to you in time of illness and distress! Then, having received your last breath, she will conduct you at the last from the threshold of your earthly home to the eternal home of your Heavenly Father.

WHAT A GREAT ENEMY OF THE CHURCH SAID ABOUT THE FAMILY

Before his conversion, a great infidel made the following admission to the eminent apostle of the Sacred Heart, Father Mateo Crawley-Boevey, SS.CC.:--“We have only one object in view— to dechristianize the family. We are willing to let Catholics have their churches and chapels and cathedrals. We are satisfied to have the family. If we gain the family, our victory over the Church is assured.”

CHAPTER II: Prayer in the Home

Irreligious Atmosphere

IN our day, irreligion may be said to pervade the very air we breathe. Just as our lungs inhale the germs of disease, and our bodies are coated with minute particles of dust, whenever we go abroad in a crowded city, so our souls, our memory and imagination, are exposed to an atmosphere tainted with irreligion whenever we go abroad into the world. To counteract the evil effects of a day’s exposure to the smoke and dust of the city, we wash the stains from our bodies when we return home, we restore our lost vitality by partaking of wholesome food; and we fill our lungs with air free from the impurities that vitiate the atmosphere in factories and the busy marts of trade.

We must pursue a like course if we wish to render our souls immune from the contagion of irreligion. We must cleanse our souls from the dust of earthy and irreligious impressions that we acquire from contact with the wicked world. We must move about in a pure atmosphere from which all taint of irreligion is excluded. We must strengthen the Faith within us by nourishing our souls with wholesome mental food. To drop the metaphor, we must offset the irreligion that we daily encounter abroad, by prayer, by a Catholic atmosphere, and by good reading in the home.

I. Daily Prayer

The simplest, the easiest, the most ordinary, and still, for the individual, the most important exercise of the virtue of religion is prayer. Hence, if religion is to occupy that place in the home which we have seen it deserves, the members of

the family must be faithful to the time-honored custom of daily prayer. No matter how old-fashioned and childish it may seem to some to insist on morning and evening prayer, grace before and after meals, and family prayers at certain seasons, it is these very things that establish religion firmly in the home, bring down Heaven's blessing, and give the home its true consecration. Show me a family where all the members are regular in saying their daily prayers, and I will show you a home where religion flourishes and peace and contentment reign. Show me a home where prayer is habitually neglected, and I will show you a family whose religion, if any still exist, is merely a matter of form.

Natural Place for Prayer

How, indeed, could it be otherwise? We have the duty of saving our immortal souls not only at the moment of death but all through life; and that duty necessarily implies keeping ourselves in the state of sanctifying grace. No one will remain long in the state of grace, if he is careless about his daily prayers; and few will pray daily, if they do not pray at home, because the home is the most convenient as it is the most natural place for one's regular daily prayer. What could be more natural for a man who believes that God is his Creator and Sovereign Lord his greatest benefactor and best friend; who believes that we are in this world solely to do God's holy will and thus merit an eternal reward; what could be more natural, I ask, than for such a one to remember and to acknowledge this fact the first thing on awaking in the morning; to turn his first thoughts to God by blessing himself and making the good intention, and then to kneel down to pay his homage to his Creator, to thank Him for His endless favors, to renew his fealty to Him, and to implore His blessing? And what more natural as well as more wise and fitting than for him to do the like in the evening before he commits himself to the night's sleep from which he never knows whether he will awaken?

It is not necessary to devote a great deal of time to one's morning and evening prayer. For the ordinary layman five minutes will usually suffice; and, if necessary, one can say a really devout morning or evening prayer, embracing all the essentials, in two or three minutes. The important thing is to be regular about it; to have a regular formula or number of prayers to say; to say them at a regular time, and in a certain regular manner. If you like to use a book, you will do well to do so. The use of a book helps to fix the habit of praying. But such is in nowise necessary. Only have some definite prayers to say as the minimum and say that minimum well.

How Much Must One Pray?

But what should be the minimum for a good morning or evening prayer? That depends on various circumstances—one's age, one's leisure, one's needs, and also on the extent to which one makes use of the other means of grace—the Mass and Holy Communion. It is plain that not all have the time for the same amount of prayer in the morning. Some find it more convenient to say only a short prayer in the morning but a long prayer at night. Others are accustomed to say the greater part of their prayers in church during the day. A certain doctor of my acquaintance has the very praiseworthy habit of praying for about a quarter of an hour in church on his way home every evening. Nor do all need the same amount of prayer. Persons exposed to greater temptations, or subject to evil habits, as well as persons bound to a more perfect life must pray more than persons not thus circumstanced. But all must pray enough to enable them to live habitually in the state of sanctifying grace. So much is certain: if one falls into mortal sin, the reason is to be sought in the insufficiency of one's prayers or in the infrequency of one's reception of the sacraments. While it is impossible, therefore, to determine just what prayers each one should say in the morning or in the evening or even each day, it seems to me that our daily prayers should always include the acts of Faith, Hope, Charity, contrition and thanksgiving, the Apostles' Creed, and several Our Fathers and Hail Marys.

Pray on Your Knees!

In regard to the manner of praying, it is best to say your morning prayer after you are dressed; your evening prayer before undressing, and both on your knees. This last point is of great importance. In the first place, the act of kneeling is itself equivalent to a prayer, being an act of adoration, and it is unquestionably the most becoming posture in which to

address ourselves to our Creator. Then the practice of kneeling to say our prayers has the good effect of reminding us of that duty. If we want to say our prayers only while dressing or undressing or when in bed, the chances are that in many cases they will be said poorly or be altogether forgotten. And lastly, the habit of kneeling at our morning and evening prayers will have a most edifying effect on others in the household. Even though each one prays in the privacy of his room, it will be generally known in the family that one is accustomed to pray on bended knees, and that knowledge will be of inestimable value in mutually encouraging one another never to abandon the practice. When brothers occupy the same room, or sisters share the same apartment, the practice is of still greater importance for their mutual edification. Yet most important of all is that parents who are still able to kneel, do so and thus give a good example to their children.

The Parents' Example

Setting a good example in this matter of prayer is a part of the religious education which parents owe to their children. And what a beneficial influence it will have upon the children all through life, if the parents not only teach them from their tenderest years to pray but also pray with them; and even when they are grown up, let them always be aware of the fact that their parents, too, prostrate themselves morning and evening on their knees in order to pay homage to their God. Nothing will impress more deeply on the child that prayer is not merely a child's duty but a duty for life; that religion is something not only for the church but for the home as well; that there is nothing about praying or kneeling for anyone to be ashamed of; but rather that it would be a cause of shame for any Christian, be he old or young, to be obliged to admit that he did not daily lift his hands and his heart to God in prayer.

How well do I remember the splendid example that my own father gave in this respect. Every evening without fail he would kneel, entirely free of any support, before a Crucifix in the living room, and with devoutly folded hands, and body as upright as a mountain pine perform his evening devotions.

II. Grace at Meals

But it is not enough that each and every member of the family have the habit of saying his morning and evening prayers. Where religion flourishes in the home as it should, if the family is truly to deserve the name Christian, there must be found also the age-old Christian custom of saying grace before and after meals. This venerable custom is the inevitable consequence of a Christian outlook on life. If we believe that God is the author and sustainer of life, that "every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (Jas. 1, 17) then surely we should be mindful of our indebtedness to our Heavenly Father at least as often as we partake of the food by which our mortal life is sustained. Our blessed Savior expressly teaches us to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread"; and what time could be more fitting for the fulfillment of that duty than the hour of our daily meals?

A Profession of Faith

There is, however, yet another important aspect to the practice of saying grace in the home. To pray in the presence of others is a profession of one's Faith; and for that reason alone, if for no other, the practice should be fostered. You simply cannot make your religion a strictly interior affair, just as little as you can make it exclusively a church affair. If you sow good seed in a fertile soil and take care that it receives the necessary warmth and moisture, the seed will not long remain hidden but will sprout forth and give unmistakable evidence of the living principle within. It is exactly the same with religion. The man that really has deep religious convictions will also show them exteriorly at the opportune time and place. Only those Christians whose Faith is not deeply rooted or who have been misled by the unchristian fashion of the day will say: "I believe in praying without attracting notice. There is no use making a show every time a person wants to pray." Indeed not; and it is to be presumed that thousands of Catholics pray frequently, even in company, without others being aware of it. I am willing, too, to pardon them if they offer that excuse for not praying openly in public eating houses, but not when there is a question of meal prayers in the privacy of one's own home.

But someone might say: "I don't see the value of such a profession of Faith in the home. Everyone at home knows my

religious convictions; so why need I manifest them by blessing myself or saying grace at table?" One might argue with just as much logic: "I don't see the need of showing the members of my family that I love them. They know that I love them, and that love is an affair of the heart. So why should I give token of my love by my looks, manner, words, or actions?" Just as the person who shows little love for the members of his household really has little love for them; so he, too, who cares not to manifest his religion to them very likely has precious little religion left in his heart. Interior virtues must needs be exercised by exterior acts; otherwise, they will wither away and finally perish altogether.

Prayer Necessary for Salvation

It is quite true that there is no positive law commanding us to pray before and after meals. Neither is there such a law requiring us to say our morning and evening prayers. But nothing is more certain than that we are obliged to pray, and that, for adults, prayer is an indispensable means of salvation. And since a more fitting time for prayer can scarcely be found than the hour of rising, the hour of retiring, and the meal hours, it is much to be feared that those who do not pray at these times do not pray at all, or at least not enough to satisfy the obligation of prayer. It will doubtless be found that usually those that are most conscientious about saying these customary prayers are also the ones that pray most at other times and make the most frequent use of the Mass and the sacraments.

Let me beg the reader, therefore, not to dismiss the question of saying grace as a trifling matter. A drop of rain is also a small matter; yet every rain, the heaviest as well as the lightest, is made up of drops. In particular as a means of making religion flourish in the home, the value of prayer at meals can hardly be overestimated. To say grace before and after every meal means to worship God, to profess your Faith, and to edify your neighbor six times a day, 180 times a month, and more than two thousand times a year. Small as the single prayers may be, and insignificant as may seem their effect, the total sum will amount to a great deal and is sure to bring down a shower of blessings.

III. Family Prayer

"Where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18, 20). By these words our blessed Savior clearly ascribes a special power and a special blessing to prayers said jointly with others; and we may be sure that if this is true of any group of persons gathered together in His name, it is doubly true of the Christian family, which is knit together not only by the strongest ties of mutual love but also by the consecration of a sacrament. All the good effects that flow from prayers said by the individual, will accrue in still greater abundance from family prayer. In their pastoral letter to all American Catholics some years ago (1920) our Bishops expressed themselves on this point as follows: "We heartily commend the beautiful practice of family prayer.... The presence of Jesus will surely be a source of blessing to the home where parents and children unite to offer up prayer in common. The spirit of piety which this custom develops will sanctify the bonds of family love and ward off the dangers which often bring sorrow and shame. We appeal in this matter with special earnestness to young fathers and mothers, who have it in their power to mould the hearts of their children and train them betimes in the habit of prayer."

Example of Tobias

It is to young parents, too, nay, to newly married couples, that I would appeal not to await the appearance of children, but to begin to pray in common from the very outset of their wedded life. While everything is new and family traditions are only in the making, it will be an easy matter for them to establish the custom of family prayer; whereas early neglect may allow a contrary custom to get so firmly rooted that it will be hard to break. Would that all newly married couples would follow the beautiful example of the younger Tobias and his wife Sara. "We are the children of saints," he said, "and must not be joined together like heathens that know not God" (Tob. 8, 5). Accordingly they did not wait until the wedding festivities and their honeymoon were over before thinking of praying in common but the very first night after their marriage "prayed earnestly, both together, that health might be given them" and that God would bless their union.

Family Worship a Duty

To anyone that gives the matter serious thought the neglect of family prayer in a Christian family must seem well-nigh impossible. It is to be supposed, namely, that the head of a Christian family esteems the Faith as his greatest treasure, as worth more to himself and to every member of his household than any amount of earthly goods. It is further to be presumed that, valuing his faith as he does, he will be most solicitous about preserving it so as to insure its blessings for himself and his family. On such a supposition, is it possible that he will relegate all prayer to the privacy of each one's room and never have the family pray aloud in common? Just as little as he would have each member of the family take his meals alone and never do any work or have any recreation in common. As long as the family circle, family meals, family picnics remain in the families of civilized communities, so long will also family prayer be fostered in every truly Christian home. For, even apart from the value of family prayer as a means of securing the blessings of religion, it will ever be incumbent on the family as a specific duty. The family is a perfect natural society, a distinct entity in itself; and as such it owes God an act of common worship. It is not enough that the single members of the family practice their religion; the family itself as a society must pay its homage to the Creator and Lord of the family; and this is done by family prayer.

Saying Grace Aloud

How often this duty will be performed, will depend on each family's devotion, and more particularly on the religious zeal of the parents. In families where different members rise at different hours, it is usually unpractical, if not impossible, to recite the morning prayer in common; but the evening prayer could easily be a family prayer, especially in young families; and this practice is most heartily to be recommended. There is no valid excuse anywhere, however, for not saying grace at meals aloud together; and I hope that no father or mother who reads this will fail to introduce the practice, if it does not yet exist in their families. The prayer most suited for this purpose is without doubt the "Our Father," to which may be appropriately added the "Hail Mary" and, before meals, "Bless us, O Lord, etc." and after meals, "We thank Thee, O Lord, etc." To recite these three prayers aloud, slowly and distinctly, and to make the sign of the cross before and after, requires no more than one minute of time. Surely no Christian can be so niggardly with God as to say that that is too much; or to contend that to devote a minute to prayer before and after each meal would be to convert the home into a monastery. Yet I pronounce no anathema against the family that is content with less. Where appetites are especially keen, the chances are that the saying of a short prayer is more likely to become regular than the saying of a long one. And hence, as a compromise, I would suggest that the afore-mentioned prayers be said in common at least before and after the principal meal, and that a part of them be said at the other meals.

Seasonal Devotions

In addition to daily family prayers, there should be also seasonal prayers in common in all Christian families, especially during the months of May and October and during the holy seasons of Advent and Lent. There are, it is true, special devotions in church at these seasons, two or three times a week; but a good Catholic should not be content with these. If the family is to share the blessings of religion to the full, the changes of the ecclesiastical year, which are so striking a feature of the services in church, should be reflected also in the home. Very suitable for these seasonal devotions in the home are the approved litanies of the Sacred Heart, the Holy Name, the Blessed Virgin, and St. Joseph, and above all the rosary. The rosary, with its joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries, is appropriate for every season; is made up of the best of all prayers; can be lengthened or shortened according to pleasure; is easily recited by even a small child, and is enriched with numerous indulgences. Consisting, too, as it does of a number of different prayers linked together by the consideration of a certain mystery for the purpose of praising God, the rosary is a fitting symbol of the Christian family, whose members are united by the bonds of blood and religion; who share joys, sorrows, and glories in common; and who work together for a common end—their temporal and eternal welfare and happiness.

Overcoming Bashfulness

I realize that in families where the custom does not exist, a certain bashfulness in regard to spiritual matters will have to be overcome in order to make a start; but once the ice is broken and a beginning made, it will be easy to develop the practice. Women and girls are usually less backward than men and boys in these matters; and as in so many other worthy causes, so here, too, let them take the initiative. They know how to coax the men folk in order to attain their own personal aims. Let them employ the same knowledge for the benefit of the entire family. God will most certainly reward them richly if they establish in the family this pious practice of saying the rosary; for to them will go the credit of enriching their home with those spiritual roses that fill it with the fragrance of Heaven's blessing.

The Golden Mean

It is hardly necessary to remind parents that even in fostering so praiseworthy a practice as family prayer, they should not attempt too much. As in all things, so here, too, one must observe the golden mean. Children cannot be expected to devote as much time to prayer as their elders do, or should do. They naturally take more to play than to prayer; and if they are indiscreetly obliged to take part in interminable prayers, there is danger of creating in them a distaste for prayer. Such a method defeats its own end. The object in accustoming children to say their prayers regularly from the time they begin to talk, is to develop in them a love of prayer and a realization of the need of it. This can be done while their hearts are still pliable by teaching them very short prayers as early as possible, and by gradually making them understand that when they pray they are speaking to the good God, from whom all blessings flow; to their loving Jesus, who came upon earth that they might come to Heaven; and to the Mother of Jesus or to their Guardian Angel and the Saints.

Making Prayer Spontaneous

This background of religious truth and Gospel story is of the greatest importance in teaching the young to love prayer and to feel the need of it; and it should not be hard for any mother who has a little piety herself to instill into her children such an appreciation of God's greatness, goodness and power that prayer will come natural to them as the spontaneous utterance of their grateful and confiding hearts. Or would it really be so hard, even before the infants are able to speak, to make the sign of the cross over them and to say a brief morning and evening prayer aloud in their stead, thus accustoming them to the sound of the words, so that "the good God" or "Jesus" or "Mary" might be the first word their innocent lips would utter?

Would it not be easy to show them pictures of Jesus and tell them stories of Jesus, as their understanding develops—stories of His childhood, of Bethlehem, the stable, Mary and Joseph, the singing angels and the adoring shepherds—stories of His public life—how He loved children, how the crowds followed Him, how He went about doing good? Remember, mothers, that your little ones' sanctified souls are hungry for knowledge of God and holy things. So tell them how much God loves them; that it is God who made all the good and beautiful things they see—the fruits and flowers, the trees and bushes and grass, the birds and the fishes, the soft-furred kitten and the friendly dog. Tell them, too, how poor Jesus was; that He became poor for love of us. Speak to them of Jesus in the Tabernacle, and awaken in them a desire to visit Him. In this way, not by threatening or scolding but by gently leading and by instilling knowledge which will of itself yield motives for prayer, you will surely implant deep in them for life, if not a love, at least a strong feeling of the appropriateness of daily prayer.

Mothers of Future Saints

But to pursue such a course, some may say, would be to try to make a saint out of every child. Well, is that such an awful possibility to contemplate? Somewhere in the world to-day are the mothers of the saints of to-morrow; and not of the saints only but of the criminals also; of the great as well as the lowly, the heroes and the outcasts, the successes and the failures. You know not what latent possibilities are in your child. Of one thing only are you sure, that one day he will be numbered either among the elect or the reprobate. What his eternal lot will be, will depend largely upon his practice or

his neglect of prayer. Have a care, mother dear, lest his neglect of it be laid to your charge.

Jacob's Ladder

When Jacob, the son of Isaac, fled from the anger of his brother, Esau, into the land of Haran, he pursued his journey until after sunset; and then, weary and footsore, he laid himself down to sleep, resting his head on a stone. While he slept God appeared to him in a wondrous vision. He saw a ladder that reached from earth to Heaven, and on it angels of God ascending and descending. And the Lord himself, leaning on the top of the ladder, spoke to him saying: "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac.... In thee and thy seed, all the tribes of the earth shall be blessed. And I will be thy keeper whithersoever thou goest, and will bring thee back into this land: neither will I leave thee, till I shall have accomplished all that I have said."

Upon awaking, Jacob trembled and exclaimed full of awe: "Indeed, the Lord is in this place.... This is no other than the house of God and the gate of Heaven" (Gen. 29).

The ladder which Jacob beheld in his dream, with angels ascending and descending, is an appropriate symbol of the prayers that ascend to Heaven from the Christian home and bring down God's blessing on its inmates. Would to God that such a ladder would rise to Heaven from the home of every family in the land! If you would have God's angels bear His special blessing to your homes, Christian parents; if you wish the Lord to be your keeper and to abide in your home; if you would be led back to your true home, the land of your Heavenly Father;--then let your prayers ascend to Heaven like a cloud of precious incense morning, noon, and night, and God will look down upon your home with special favor. In very truth may it then be said of your home what Jacob said of the place of his vision: "Indeed, the Lord is in this place." During life it will be a house of God, and at the end of life the gate to Heaven.

CHAPTER III: Catholic Atmosphere in the Home

"In order to obtain perfect education, it is of the utmost importance to see that all those conditions which surround the child during the period of his formation, in other words, the combination of circumstances which we call enthronement, correspond exactly to the end proposed. The first natural and necessary element in this environment, as regards education, is the family, and this precisely because so ordained by the Creator Himself."

--"Pius XI in "Christian Education of Youth."

Need of Healthy Atmosphere

To enjoy the great boon of good health, it is not enough for one to be cleanly in one's person, to partake of sufficient wholesome food and drink, and to take a proper amount of exercise. Many a child in the crowded districts of our great centers of industry has plenty of good food and exercise and has been taught by a loving mother to cultivate the habit of personal cleanliness, and yet is far from enjoying good health. Living in the shadow of huge buildings, breathing in constantly the smoke and dust of near-by factories that becloud and bedim the small portion of sunlight that it receives, instead of attaining the full vigor and sprightliness of the normal child, it must languish and pale like a flower in a sterile soil. But take this child from these unpropitious surroundings place it in the country far from the dusty city; let it bask in a glory of sunshine and drink deep draughts of pure country air; and the bloom that will redden its cheeks, the sparkle that will light up its eyes, and the lilt that will appear in its gait will proclaim the beneficial effects of such a change. The one thing that was wanting to the child was a healthy atmosphere; and such an atmosphere we must all have in order to remain in a state of perfect health.

Now what is true of the body and natural life is equally true of the soul and the religious life. If the vitality of a Catholic's Faith is not to be gradually weakened by the contagion of irreligion that infests practically our entire public life, he must be able to spend the greater part of his private life in a place where the moral atmosphere is not only not tainted but is positively religious; and this he will be able to do only if he have a morally healthy and religiously bracing atmosphere in his own home.

Atmosphere of the Home

The reader will readily understand that in homes where family prayer is regularly practiced, much has already been done to create a religious atmosphere; for by the atmosphere of the home I mean, broadly speaking, the aggregate of external influences in the home, affecting the spirituality of the members of the family, and, in a narrower sense, the sum-total of sensible objects in the home capable of exerting a favorable or unfavorable influence upon the religious or moral life of its inmates. Just as we are variously affected as regards our bodies by the material atmosphere in which we live,--by its heat and cold, by the gases and germs and minute particles of dust that it holds: so, too, are our souls affected by the sensible objects around us; and the aggregate of such objects is accordingly quite appropriately called moral atmosphere.

Effect of Environment

That the moral atmosphere or environment, as it may also be styled, exerts a strong influence upon a man's habits and the formation of his character, no one that has the slightest knowledge of human nature will presume to deny. It is a principle of sound philosophy that there is no conception in the mind which is not preceded by a perception of one of the five senses; and since it is the mind and will that govern our rational actions, it follows that our sense-perceptions, notably those of seeing and hearing, must have a powerful influence upon our actions. Absolutely speaking, of course, a person may shake off this influence; but the important thing to be noted is that the influence is there and is felt even though it be withstood; and since we must be guided by what ordinarily happens and not by what is theoretically possible, parents and other responsible persons should see to it that the moral atmosphere in their home is such as will exert a wholesome influence on all in the household. It is true, the influence exerted by environment produces its effects slowly and perhaps imperceptibly; but it may not for that reason be belittled or ignored, any more than the slowly but constantly dripping water which little by little hollows the stone.

A Worldly Atmosphere

To state in the first place what the moral atmosphere of the home should not be, if it is to meet the requirements of a truly Christian home, I would say that it should not be worldly. Worldliness is diametrically opposed to religion. The spirit of the Catholic religion is the spirit of the Gospel, and the name for that spirit is unworldliness. The whole purpose of the Catholic religion is to turn our thoughts, our hopes, our aspirations and our efforts away from this world to the other world; and we are good Catholics only in so far as we realize this end. Christ tells us plainly: "You cannot serve two masters." We cannot serve God and the world. Yet one of the two we must serve. Hence we are obliged to choose either the one or the other. If we choose to serve God, if we want to rule our life according to the precepts of the Gospel, then we must banish worldliness from our homes. If we fail to banish worldliness even from our homes, which we are free to fashion to suit our own tastes and to meet our own wants, then we plainly show that the world still has a place in our hearts.

Extravagant Furnishings

But how does this worldliness manifest itself in the home? When may the atmosphere of the home be said to have a worldly character? First of all, when its dominant note is luxury or extravagance. If the Christian's attitude towards wealth must square with those two statements of Our Lord: "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God" (Mk., 10, 23), then it is plainly an evidence of worldliness, or opposition to the spirit of Christianity, if wealth obtrudes itself in the home from every nook and corner. I do not say that a rich Catholic may not have a splendid home, furnished in a manner suited to his station in life. But there should be no boldly conspicuous display of wealth, evidencing an inordinate love of worldly magnificence and a disposition to glory in it. That would show a worldly spirit.

But it is not only the rich who may sin by extravagance. Families of the middle class are just as often guilty. The

homes of such families betray a very decided spirit of worldliness when they are quite evidently furnished more richly than the owners' modest means can afford. We are in conscience bound to make a discreet use of our earthly goods and to make our expenditures in proportion to our means. The endeavor to match the splendor of one's own home with that of the homes of one's more well-to-do acquaintances proceeds from pride and leads to other unchristian practices besides the misapplication of one's earthly goods. In order to be able to earn more money to spend on luxuries, some young wives persist in retaining the gainful positions which they had before marriage, and for the sake of this filthy lucre sinfully postpone the task of rearing a family. That is the worst kind of worldliness—the kind that weighs duty and worldly goods in the balance and deliberately chooses the latter. Beware of it, my dear young couples. Beware! (See quotation below)

Extravagance in Dress

What has been said of excessive expenditures for the furnishing and decorating of one's home, is equally true of extravagance in ornamenting one's person. The home may be given a worldly touch by the unduly rich or extremely stylish apparel of the persons that dwell in it. One is certainly allowed to dress well and becomingly within the limits of one's means and according to the requirements of one's station in life; but in no station in life is there an excuse for extravagance. There may be no injustice to anyone if a woman buys all the exquisite gowns, rare jewels, and costly footwear and headgear that she can possibly pay for; but neither is there any charity in it or Christian moderation; and justice is not the only virtue that must regulate the use we make of our worldly goods. We are bound also by the law of moderation and of charity; and it is sinful to waste money for the extravagant decoration of one's person or one's home when there are thousands of deserving poor who have not even the necessary food, clothing, and shelter.

Pope Pius XI on Mothers Who Work Away from Home

“Mothers will above all devote their work to the home and the things connected with it. Intolerable and to be opposed with all our strength is the abuse whereby mothers of families, because of the insufficiency of the father's salary, are forced to engage in gainful occupations outside the domestic walls, to the neglect of their own proper cares and duties, particularly the education of their children.”

--Encyclical “Quadragesimo Anno,” on the Social Order.

N.B.—If His Holiness condemns the abuse whereby mothers are forced to work away from their homes, what must he think of those mothers, who, without any compulsion whatever, entirely of their own accord, pursue gainful occupations outside the domestic walls?

Keeping a Family Budget

The best way for parents to avoid excessive or ill-advised expenditures is to keep a family budget. Let them make a careful study of their resources and a classified list of their needs; e.g., housing, food, clothing, running expenses, improvement, and savings. Then let them fix a certain percentage of their income for each of these items of expense, and hold their disbursements strictly within the budget allowance, unless real necessity or charity require otherwise. It is hardly necessary to remark that also such expenses as church, school and club dues, charity and amusements must be figured in the budget, and that according to the aforesaid classification these, together with all outlays for reading material, could be put under the heading improvement; that is, mental, moral, or physical. Keeping a home and family is just as much a business as running a store; so why should it not be kept on a business basis? Many couples have had their eyes opened by keeping an itemized account of disbursements. They found that they had been extravagant without realizing it. But if keeping tab on one's expenses teaches economy, it should be done in every Christian home; for economy, supernaturalized, is nothing but the Christian virtue of moderation.

A Touch of Paganism

Another indication of worldliness in the home is the unchristian and sometimes even pagan character of the objects with which it is equipped. Let us enter such a home. What do we see? At our very entrance, perhaps, a painting of Apollo dancing with thin-clad muses on the lawn; there a lamp or candelabrum supported by the nude figure of Cupid; in a corner, perhaps, a statue of Venus of Milo; on the library table various gay-colored magazines displaying bathing girls or notorious "movie" actresses on the front covers; on the mantle a snow-white bust of Pallas or some other mythological deity; and here and there as we wander through the various apartments, sundry other ornaments and articles of a like character. Will any Catholic maintain that such objects are appropriate in a Christian home? Yet there are Catholic homes, and not a few of them, in which such ornaments are quite common. In some cases their presence is due to mere thoughtlessness or sheer worldly-mindedness, and no conscience is made of it. In others, however, a sense of guilt is manifested by the care with which such objects are removed when a visit of the pastor or some other clergyman is expected.

Regard for Modesty

To be in thorough accord with its profession of Christianity, the home of a Catholic family should be free from all things of this kind. The home is not an art museum; and statues of pagan deities that may be tolerated in museums are out of place in a Christian home. And so, too, are all images not in conformity with Christian modesty. It will not be enough to limit them to a small representation. Neither will it suffice to confine them to one place, say the reception room, in order that there at least you may show your broadmindedness to the non-Catholics who enter your home. No, a Catholic home should contain nothing that proclaims sympathy with the spirit of the world. One picture, one statue, one ornament may mar the character of an entire room and thwart the good effect that other images are calculated to produce. Away, then, Catholic fathers and mothers, with all worldliness from your homes! You are exposed enough to its contagion when you go abroad. At least be quit of it when you enter the sanctuary of your own home.

An Insidious Propaganda

If pictures and statues of persons insufficiently clad give an air of worldliness to the home, what must be the effect of such lack of modesty in the living inmates? There is an insidious propaganda abroad in our day to tear down the conventions that Christian civilization has established as safeguards of the virtue of purity. Despite the specious reasons advanced in its defense; e.g., that one should become familiar with the nude in order not to be affected by it, the plain purpose of this propaganda is to substitute a pagan code for our Christian code of morality. This purpose is the more evident since some of the more outspoken adherents of the movement have declared that the Ten Commandments are antiquated and that there is no longer such a thing as sin. In view of this threat of paganism, the duty of Catholics is clear. Neither in the home nor elsewhere may there be any letting down of the bars of decency and Christian propriety. And mothers should so train their children from childhood on that they will never presume to appear in the presence of others without being modestly covered. Those girls who make no conscience of exposing themselves in the presence of their sisters, will gradually come to make nothing of wearing insufficient clothing in public. And when modesty is thrown to the winds, purity will not be slow to follow.

II. A Catholic Atmosphere

Worldliness, then, must be banished from the Christian home, if the latter is to fulfill its mission of helping the individual Catholic to resist the enticements of the world. Yet when we have purified our homes of worldliness, our task is not yet completed. We must provide also a distinctly Catholic atmosphere. There are Catholic homes, or I should say rather, there are homes of Catholics, that do not contain the slightest evidence of the religion of those that dwell in them. You may see there pictures of beautiful birds and horses and dogs; of landscapes and castles; of distinguished authors, musicians and statesmen; but you will look in vain for any religious token of a distinctly Catholic character. The

occupants of such homes justify this want by saying that they do not believe in parading their religion before the world. I agree that ordinarily we need not parade our religion before the world; but are we doing that when we give it scope within the sacred precincts of our own homes? The Catholic who fails to avail himself of the external aids to religion provided by religious objects in the home shows that religion is not a dominant factor in his life.

Portraits of Your Friends

By all means, therefore, let there be some distinctly Catholic images in your home, if you wish to enjoy the advantages of a healthy Catholic atmosphere. Far from being singular or obtrusive, nothing could be more natural or more appropriate. If you hang portraits of your relatives and friends and of eminent men and women on the walls of your home, should you not do as much for the best of all your friends and the greatest of all illustrious men and women—Our Blessed Lord and the saints? There is no valid reason why these latter should be restricted to the bedrooms or to some obscure corners. It is true, the home is not a church; and if one has a special place at home for prayer, a little shrine to which one can withdraw for undisturbed communion with God, it is quite proper that it be in a somewhat secluded spot. Neither is the home a church goods store; and it may be no impiety, therefore, if some one expresses his dislike of a home so crowded with religious pictures that they seem to be on display for sale. Allowance must be made in this matter for individual tastes. Some delight in a profusion of ornamentation, while others are for using it very sparingly. But whether your taste favors much or little decoration in the home, see to it that the religious element is not stinted.

The Chief Symbol of Your Faith

Foremost among the religious articles that should have a place of honor in every Catholic home is the Crucifix, the image of our crucified Savior. The Cross is the principal emblem of the Catholic religion; it is the symbol of our Faith, the source of our hope, the incentive to our love, the sign of our redemption, the pledge of our salvation. A beautiful and also moderately large Crucifix should be one of the finest and most cherished ornaments in the home. But there should be at least a small yet properly fashioned Crucifix also in each one of the bedrooms. It is deplorable that so many Catholics are satisfied with any kind of Crucifix, no matter how poorly it is made. They can afford to have large and expensive portraits of their parents and children, but balk at spending a few dollars for a worthy image of their crucified Savior. Let them remember that just as their taste is betrayed by the other objects, so the depth of their Faith is indicated by the quality of the religious images with which their home is equipped.

Image of the Sacred Heart

Other images that should be seen in every Catholic home are a picture of the Holy Family and of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Pope Leo XIII prescribed that all Christian families should be consecrated to the Holy Family; and Our Lord revealed to St. Margaret Mary that He would bless all houses where an image of His Sacred Heart would be exposed and honored. The choice of other pictures must be left to each one's individual taste and devotion, always, however, in entire accord with the teaching of our holy religion and the spirit of Holy Mother Church. A picture of the Child Jesus or of the Guardian Angel would be very appropriate for the children's apartments; and one of the Blessed Virgin and of St. Joseph in the rooms of the larger girls and boys respectively. In each bedroom, at least, there should be a vase with holy water, which should be religiously used on rising and before retiring. And in a becoming place, one should preserve some blessed palm branches and at least two blessed candles, the latter in suitable candlesticks.

Unedifying Pictures

While, as I have said, the selection of the different images must be left to each one's own taste, one quality must be insisted on as indispensable: the images must be such as will edify. If they are not of a nature to edify, then they cannot possibly produce the effect that they are employed to produce; namely, a wholesome Catholic atmosphere. The requirement that the pictures be edifying may seem to be rather vague and indefinite; but it furnishes a working rule that

will answer all practical purposes. The main thing is to eliminate all images that are not edifying; and such one may call all those that represent Our Lord or the saints in a manner unworthy of them; that is to say, in an attitude or attire or in circumstances in which they themselves would certainly not wish to be pictured or seen. If no one would feel himself honored to find a caricature or other unworthy representation of himself on the wall of your home, how can you expect by means of similar pictures to please Our Lord and the saints?

Untrue to History

It is no excuse to say that a certain picture is true to history, that it merely represents an actual fact in the life of the saint. That an immoral pagan judge subjected a saint to indignities does not justify us in repeating the indecency on canvas. But many representations lack even this flimsy excuse, as they are positively untrue to history. In the Gospel story of the birth of our Savior, for example, we are told that the Virgin Mother wrapped the Babe in swaddling clothes; yet we find pictures inscribed "The Nativity" in which the Divine Child is not only not wrapped in swaddling clothes but not clad at all. The same is true of the Christ Child on many Madonnas. No one will maintain that such a representation is true to history. Neither is it true to the highest standard of Catholic art; and least of all is it true to that reverent delicacy of treatment due to the august person of the Child Divine.

I realize quite well that strict insistence on this rule will debar many a picture from the Catholic home. Be it so. There are hundreds of other sacred pictures to choose from,—pictures that are in every way satisfactory, in point of art no less than in point of propriety. Let such only adorn your walls, and the sight of them will be to you a source not only of edification in your daily life but of consolation and encouragement in days of sorrow and distress; and a daily reminder that if you but imitate the example of the saints whom they represent, you too will one day share their happiness.

Good Example

In the foregoing pages, I have dwelt only on the visible objects that give character to the home—on what I have called its moral atmosphere in the narrow sense. It will be remembered, however, that I defined the home atmosphere also in a broader sense; namely, as the aggregate of external influences in the home affecting the spiritual life of the inmates. In this broader sense, the words and deeds of the inmates also contribute essentially to the moral atmosphere, and if the latter is to be thoroughly Catholic, the general tone of conversation and conduct in the home must reflect a Catholic mentality. The Holy Father emphasizes this point in the following passage of His Encyclical on the Christian Education of Youth: "That education, as a rule, will be more effective and lasting which is received in a well-ordered and well-disciplined Christian family; and the more efficacious in proportion to the clear and constant good example set first by the parents and then by the other members of the household."

The Catholic Mind

One cannot, it is true, in view of human frailty, expect that the members of even the better Catholic families will never be guilty of wrong-doing of any kind. But what can be expected is that when wrong-doing does occur, it will be found to be out of keeping with the surroundings. In other words, should deviations from Catholic standards sometimes occur in practice, there should at least be no deviation from Catholic principles in theory. Should the conversation, for example, turn on such subjects as Sunday observance, frequent Communion, mixed marriages, cremation, forbidden societies and books, attendance of Catholics at non-Catholic schools, the relations between Church and State and the like, the attitude of the Church will be accepted without question. The accepted stand of every member of the family will be the same as that of the Church; and if in any instance any member should mistakenly espouse a contrary opinion, he will at once recede from it when assured that it is not in accord with the teaching of Holy Mother Church. This is what is meant by the Latin phrase "sentire cum ecclesia," "to be of one mind with the Church," to have the Catholic mentality or the Catholic mind. In homes where such a mentality prevails nothing will be found that antagonizes the Church. No songs will be heard that offend against Christian virtue; no literature will be tolerated that openly or insidiously undermines Catholic morals; and

no radio programs will be listened to that disseminate false doctrines of a religious or moral character.

Homes of the Early Christians

Would to God there were more Catholic homes of this kind scattered up and down our beloved land, homes that are in every sense Catholic and veritable strongholds of Christianity! Some will no doubt aver that it is an idle dream to expect an increase in the number of such homes amid the adverse conditions of our age. But are the conditions of our age any worse than were the conditions of pagan Rome? The moral atmosphere of Rome at the dawn of Christianity was so corrupt that vice was not only tolerated but even enthroned as a god in certain forms of religious worship. Yet, despite the universal corruption without, so pure, so holy and so heavenly an atmosphere pervaded the homes of the Christians that it not only kept their minds untainted and their hearts unsullied, but, by its own superior power expanding and radiating from those homes, gradually purified even the public atmosphere and in the end brought about the conversion of the entire Roman people.

Who shall say that what was accomplished in those days is impossible of accomplishment now? It would require perhaps a miracle of grace; but the days of miracles are not over. Catholic families, however, need not look so far ahead nor to such far reaching results for inducements to preserve a Catholic atmosphere in their homes. Such an atmosphere will offer them full and immediate compensation for the pains required to maintain it. It will keep their religion pure and undefiled and keep them unspotted of this world.

Nihil Obstat

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Censor Dep.

Imprimi Permittitur:

Fr. Optatus Loeffler, O.F.M.

Min. Prov. Die 2 Martii, 1934

Imprimatur:

✠ George Cardinal Mundelein

April 7, 1934.
