

# Christ In The Home

## Booklet 3. Part 1.

By Raoul Plus, S.J.  
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Daily Meditations on Marriage and Children: Training.

TRAINING.

THE FIRST YEARS.

In his book "Something of Myself for My Friends Known and Unknown," Rudyard Kipling uses as the keynote for the first chapter, the following quotation: "Give me the first six years of a child's life; you can have the rest."

How parents ought to meditate on those words!

Why did Rudyard Kipling speak in this vein?

Before these first six years, there is of course the question of heredity. Every man is an heir and every man is an ancestor. Children do resemble their parents. We have considered this before.

There is a second kind of hereditary influence — the formation that is given even before marriage by the father and the mother. "When does the education of the child begin?" Napoleon was asked. He replied, "Twenty years before its birth in the education of its mother."

From its mother? From its father too. But the mother is unquestionably a prime influence since until the child is at least six the principal care of the child is in the hands of the mother.

What a mistake to let a child give in to all its whims!

"But he doesn't understand," people say. "You can't reason with a baby in the cradle."

No, of course not, but from the cradle on, the child can be taught many things well. Not by reasoning but by habit-formation.

Here are two mothers; both of them have a baby. Naturally, both babies cry when they want their desires known. In one case, the mother who knows that all the needs and legitimate wants of the baby have been satisfied, lets it cry; it should like to advance if it could, the time for its bottle. No, it will be served at the right time, not before. The little one soon perceives that no one pays any attention to its demands and ceases its tempestuous howling.

In the other case, the minute the baby begins to cry, the mother dashes to soothe it. She cannot resist her baby's cry.

Instead of rearing it for itself, she rears it for herself, because she suffers too much from hearing it call or because its tears unnerve and disturb her. She gives in. She is lost. The little one is going to become frightfully capricious. Later she will not be able to control it. "Cry away my little man; you

don't need a thing," would be a more wholesome attitude than yielding, provided of course, she knows that the baby is all right and that her conduct is not motivated by laziness but by a true desire to train the child.

That is only one detail. But in everything she should be guided by the same principle — the true good of the child. Then at six years, it will know how to obey. And if the mother follows through progressively with the development of the child, helping it to use properly its young liberty, she has the game in her own hands. All is not finished. It might be more correct to say that all is beginning; nevertheless, the mother has successfully come through a vital stage. Up to this point, it is properly called training, a most necessary period indeed. This training will develop into real education. If the early training has been lacking, the succeeding education becomes almost impossible; for how can one erect a stable structure on a volcano; how build a firm will on a nature perpetually wavering and swayed by caprice?

Kipling was right. In the light of the truth he expressed let me correct, if necessary and if there is still time, my method of acting.

#### LOVE FOR CHILDREN.

IT IS essential to love children enough:

1. To be willing to have them;
2. To be able to endure their demands;
3. To be able to super-naturalize one's love for them.

1. To be willing to have them: I meditated on this point when I considered the law of fecundity and charity in marriage. (See the earlier Booklets in this series.)

2. To be able to endure their demands: Very little children have no defense and no power. Someone must always come to their assistance. Happy those who can guess these needs of theirs. Mothers generally know the secret of that. But just the same, the baby will cry, become restless and set up a howl. Every baby in the cradle is a revolutionary in the bud; the best established customs ought to give way to its caprice, or so it thinks, and if its desires are not obeyed, it storms and puts the house in an uproar.

Furthermore, the child is born cunning. It finds out very quickly the best ways to get what it wants, not through reasoning but by intuition. Such an action, such an attitude produces the desired result; the opposite way of acting does not work. There is no more limpid logic to be found anywhere.

Nor any more transparent pride. It knows itself to be the center of the household and is not ashamed to act the part. It is a monarch. Papa and mamma, brothers, sisters, and all the other members of the household make up its court, each one dancing attendance to its thirty-six wills. Furthermore, it distributes as rewards the favor of its broad smiles.

Later it will have to play, jump about and run; to break things will be a delight; so too will it be fun just to sit still and listen to a story. The little girl will be taken up with the care of her doll and if her elders have bought her a doll that says papa, mamma, they need expect to hear nothing else all day! The little boy will play soldier, or train, or if he has received a drum or whistle for Christmas, the household will be well aware of it!

Parents should take serenely and as a matter of course the baby's pranks and outbursts, working at the same time toward a wise training, the prelude of a wise education. They should expect their growing children to make noise, to be curious, to want to touch everything; furthermore, they need not feel obliged constantly, to put a damper on their romping and their noise; whenever and wherever it is necessary they ought to explain to the children what they may do and what they ought to avoid.

3. To be able to super-naturalize one's love for them: Parents should strive to love their children not only because of their natural charm but for higher and truly divine reasons. "I love my children so much," parents say as if they were vying with one another; mothers especially are likely to talk like that. It makes one want to warn them, "If only you could love them a little less but love them a little better." Or rather, since we never love too much but badly, "Love them as much as you wish but for their sakes, not for your own."

For their sakes: Therefore do not give in to all their caprices; do not try to spare them every effort; do not treat them as little idols; do not teach them pride and vanity even from their earliest years.

For their sakes: Therefore be alert to know what might harm them not only in what concerns their body but also in what might even remotely concern their soul.

For their sakes: Therefore, try to discover behind the human silhouette of each of these baptized souls the Holy Trinity dwelling within them and the likeness of Christ; do not rest satisfied until all your training and education is directed to make of them truly holy tabernacles of the Most High and authentic continuations of Christ.

#### FROM THREE TO FIVE.

AT THIS period of their life, children have not in general arrived at an awakening, at least not a complete awakening, of their moral sense. They are midway between the unawareness of their first years and a completely rational contact with life; their principal occupation is play — the little boy will be busy building and tearing down; the little girl will be busy scribbling away at indefinite designs or dressing and undressing her sawdust doll, the first in a series of many dolls.

They will have just the beginning of a contact — depending upon their family, their mother particularly — with the invisible world. They will learn their prayers, know that there is a God who is good and they will hear about little Jesus. They will also know that there are things that are forbidden, but they will not as yet see the wickedness of sin; they take what belongs to mamma without knowing that they are stealing; they do not always tell the truth without knowing really that it is an evil thing to lie and when they do speak untruly it is much more through an instinct of self-defense than through innate perversion. They would go to the end of the world for a kiss and much further still for a piece of candy. But if they must give up the piece of candy to a little brother or sister, they will do it with not too bad a grace but they will see to it that they get a lick of it themselves before parting with it; after all, aren't they being quite generous already? And if for Christmas mother has suggested that they sacrifice some of their sweets to little Jesus, they do it eagerly but see nothing wrong with coming back quietly later to eat up their sacrifices.

It is important to capitalize on this marvelous period of the child's life.

Since the child loves to imagine, it is necessary to suggest images to its mind and since the child needs to be educated, these images should be elevating. That can be done very early by using the lives of the saints, the life of Mary and of Jesus. Why not? How many details of Scripture are most

picturesque and quite within the grasp of the child's mind; this is especially true if the Gospel episodes have first come by way of the mother's heart; she will know how to awaken without straining, instruct without fatiguing, and adapt it all to the mentality of the child.

A prime guiding principle here is: "Never anything inexact!" Children at this age are extremely docile. "Papa said it or Mamma said it," makes it sacred. Therefore, great attention to the stories they are told, to the allusions made or the conversations held in their presence.

At this age the child is inclined to refer everything to itself, but very likely to be disinterested in goodness. By nature, it is selfish; it has a terrific sense of ownership; will share nothing; wants everything. Since it has numerous needs and knows itself to be little, it seeks to surround itself with the greatest possible number of things to its own advantage. But if little by little it is taught to look about to see that there are others less privileged, that to give up things for love of another is something fine, it will be found capable of remarkable generosity.

The child at this age has not since the time of its baptism become incrusted with the shell of negligence and the faults an adult might commit; simplicity is inherent in it; it is pure; it has infused Faith and the Holy Spirit in its soul is at ease.

But it is essential to avoid scandalizing the least of these little ones, giving them the example of evil, of impurity, even material impurity, of lying, of anger.

Further, the child is readily distracted, forgetful, has its head in the clouds. You speak to it and it listens or does not listen as fancy strikes; it follows its own thought and interior emotion. Your commands fall on its ears like water on marble. You must catch its attention, reiterate your suggestions or commands without impatience on your part or fatigue for the child.

Constant attention is necessary to train them in manners, in proper sleeping habits, in conduct at table; to check the first symptoms of greediness, laziness, lack of discipline, sensuality. The child is still thoughtless but the educator must not be. Long explanations are not needed; a word, or a simple look go a long way and speak volumes at times.

Parents should never lose courage even if the results are imperfect. Let them examine their methods and change them if necessary. Let them see in these little ones only Christ —

"Whatsoever you do to these, the least of My brethren, you do unto Me."

#### THE ART OF GIVING CHILDREN FAULTS.

THERE are two great means of developing faults in children:

First by giving them a bad example; second, by spoiling them.

1. Giving them a bad example: All men are imitators; children are more exposed than others to the appeal of imitation; they love to imitate adults, and by preference, those within their immediate circle particularly their parents who appear to them as exceptional beings in whom there is nothing reprehensible.

Is the mother vain? The daughter too will be vain; she will speak, act, dress, not for an ideal of beauty in keeping with her condition, her station, but for the favorable opinion of others. She will strive to surpass all her companions, her friends, by the cut of her clothes and the extremes of style; she will attach a considerable, yes even an exaggerated, importance to the tiniest details of her costume; she will suffer a severe attack of jealousy when she believes someone outshines her.

Is the father proud? Does he try to exaggerate his good points and belittle those of others or refuse to recognize them? His son will be a snob, disdainful of others, self-sufficient, pretentious, arrogant, obstinate and he will manifest no understanding whatever as far as others are concerned.

Are the parents loquacious? Contentious? Sharp in their speech? Their children will be intemperate in speech, quarrelsome, envious.

Are the parents deceitful? The children are in danger of becoming liars. Are the parents generally indiscreet in conversation, passing judgments thoughtlessly? The children, already too much inclined to judge everything from the height of their grandeur, will pass snap judgments, unjust and untimely criticisms.

Do the parents manifest their love of ease, of wealth, even a thirst to acquire riches by any means? The children are likely to be selfish, attached to their own comfort, cheaters on occasion.

2. Spoiling them: Some parents are too harsh and do not encourage their children at all. Others, by far the greater number, are too indulgent, flatter their children, satisfy all their whims.

Parents who spoil their children do not seek their good, nor love them for their sakes. No, it is a form of self-love; the parents seek themselves in the child. Such parents cannot put firmness into the education they try to give; they cannot punish when necessary; prevent escapades; secure obedience; they cannot defend themselves against any caprices.

“But if I lack kindness,” you say, “my child will withdraw from me; in difficult times he will avoid speaking to me; I shall not have his confidence. If on the contrary I have multiplied my kindnesses to him, he will remain open; I shall keep a hold on him.”

There is no question here of failing in kindness; it is a question of forbidding oneself any weakness. Far from having to fear the loss of the child’s confidence, if one is judiciously firm, the parents shall win the child’s confidence because they are wisely strong. When the children understand that in the marks of affection their parents bestow on them they are not seeking something personal but only the good of their children, they will be quick to realize that in the severity their parents inflict on them, there is likewise no trace of caprice but only the desire for their good as before.

It is precisely that realization which has educative force — this contact with strong and detached souls.

#### THE UNTIMELY LAUGH.

A FAMOUS French critic relates this incident about one of his colleagues. ‘He was only five years old and he had committed some misdemeanor. His mother, who was busy painting, put him outside her studio as a penance and closed the door to him. Through the closed door, the little fellow, using his most earnest and pleading tone, begged for pardon promising not to be naughty again. His mother did not answer. He made so much ado that she opened the door and on his knees he crawled toward her, pleading with her as he came, in a voice so earnest and an attitude so pathetic that by the time he arrived before her, she could not refrain from laughing. Immediately he stood up and changed his tone, “So,” he cried, “Since you are making fun of me, I will never ask pardon again.” And he never did.’

To appear amused at an act of generosity on the part of a child is the best way to make it lose forever a taste for generosity. Beyond a doubt, the mother was not laughing at the sentiment that stirred the soul of her child, but only at his heroics in expressing it. But the child could not

distinguish. She laughed; therefore she laughed at him; if she laughed at him, he must have seemed ridiculous; never again would be put himself in a ridiculous attitude. His little conscience is geometrical. His reasoning is utterly simple but it is in keeping with his age.

Can anyone ever measure how much a poor child who has done wrong has to overcome himself in order to ask pardon? He blunders and then what happens? Can't you see? He is wounded by the pain he gave his parents, tortured perhaps by remorse, frightened by the prospect of punishment. His request for pardon is expressed in sobs and long drawn out breaths. But he is truly sorry. Born actor that he is, it is possible that he might deliberately exaggerate the outward manifestation of his repentance, but is it true? Most often, the child is honest and except where there is direct proof to the contrary, his action is sincere, expressing exactly what he feels.

How disconcerted he is then when his repentance is met in a way he so little expected and so misunderstood. Sometimes the child merely wants to confide a secret or in his simplicity he asks a question without realizing its import or he expresses an enthusiasm he hopes to have shared or a desire to be generous that he longs to have approved, but if he sees that no one listens to him or that his elders appear to smile at his beautiful dreams or his requests for explanations, he learns to close up like a clam; no one will ever know anything more of his little soul; he will keep his thoughts secret and will try to find for himself the answers to the troubling questions that torment him.

There is another kind of ill-timed laugh, the laugh of parents or others at the morally bad actions of a child.

In considering the behavior of children, careful distinction must be made between two kinds of acts: those which have no moral import such as skinning their knees in a fall while running, soiling their clothing through inattention, turning over an inkbottle through clumsiness, and those which do have moral significance such as stealing, lying, disobedience and lack of respect.

It sometimes happens that people are extremely severe and make much ado over the acts in which no moral responsibility is involved, but they joke or laugh at words and acts that are morally wrong. Nothing so deforms the consciences of children. They learn to consider as serious acts those over which their elders have made a scene but which actually are not serious at all; to consider as insignificant those acts which made others smile but which are morally quite serious.

All this means that as a parent, as an educator, I must be watchful over my smiles and my laughter. I cannot be inopportune in their use.

#### LOVE VERSUS MATERNAL INSTINCT.

A MOTHER of a family, herself a noble and spiritual educator wrote:

“We never succeed in making of our children all that we should like to make of them; and sometimes we do not accomplish anything of what we thought we could accomplish. The role of educator in theory offers many charms but in its fulfillment how many thorns! Not to become discouraged is in itself quite an achievement.”

The most important virtue to engender in the souls of children is confidence.

Children always have faults; they develop with age; when one fault is destroyed, another appears. What ought to be developed first is confidence; a confidence which will make them docile solely because of the conviction that there can be nothing better for them than the arrangements of the persons who are training them; but when they seem to torment them or cross them, they truly have

their good at heart. The most agreeable training is not always the most salutary. Far from it! Adversity and contradiction are useful for all ages but particularly for the young, to correct their violent tendencies and strengthen their undeveloped wills. For those who consider everything from God's viewpoint, adversity gives the final touch; it adorns as with gold one in whom virtue is deeply rooted. But how can one call upon this harsh instructor to teach one's very own children? Mothers are too tender to be perfect educators or rather their tenderness has about it too much sensitivity, which, we might say, aggravates the eternal conflict between the spiritual man and the carnal man. Maternal love is often too much hampered by maternal instinct, which protests and prevents the forceful action that ought to be taken.

This distinction between real maternal love in the full sense of the word and maternal instinct should be maintained; the author of the preceding lines is alert to the difference and concerned about not confusing them; one of her daughters had a particularly difficult temperament; the mother encouraged herself to exercise the necessary firmness with her just as with her other children:

'I shall set myself the duty of not being weak, too easy, of not giving in to all their desires. I shall try to give them the reason for my decisions, but I shall believe that I do them a service by putting some obstacles to their desires. Kindness will dictate my conduct; I hope that kindness will render it bearable for them.

'If I fear the opposition of a strong character and the tendencies of a spirit which promises to be frank and curious in Laurence, I fear in her sister the faults arising from an easier temperament which is avid for praise. Will she be able to hold her own with the firmness I should like to see her acquire? My God, I cannot foresee that; I place her interests as I place my own into Your Hands.'

That is the way to act: To try to adopt toward each child the method most likely to succeed, and when that is done, to trust the rest to Divine Providence.

#### TRAINING IN OBEDIENCE.

THE father is the father; the mother is the mother. Each one's role is different; together they must harmonize.

This is particularly essential when there is question of the exercise of authority over the children.

The principal authority is centered in the father; the mother who is associated with him, shares this authority. Both have therefore according to their respective roles the mission to command; the father in a way that is not more harsh but more virile; the mother in a way that is not more easy-going — she ought to demand the same things the father requires and with the same firmness — but more gently expressed.

Parental action must be common, harmonious, coordinated, directed to the same end. Extremely unpleasant conditions are created if the mother for example tolerates an infraction of an order given by the father.

The father on his part should avoid too great sternness, an uncalled-for severity of tone or what is worse, cruelty. The mother should guard against weakness and insufficient resistance to the tears of the child or the cute little ways it has discovered for avoiding punishment or side-tracking a command.

She ought to be particularly cautious not to undermine paternal authority either by permitting the children to disobey his injunctions or, under pretext of tempering the father's severity, by

countermanding his orders. It is from the father himself that she should secure the necessary relaxation of requirements if she feels he is being too rigid; never should she on her own change a decision that the father has given. Otherwise, the children will soon play the father and mother against each other; they will know that they can have recourse to mamma when papa commands something and they will be able to disregard the order. Father and mother both lose their authority in this way to their own great detriment. The wife discredits her husband in the eyes of the children and herself as well. Never should the children sense the least discord between their parents either in regard to their principles or their methods of training. Quick to exploit the rift, they will also be quick to get the upper hand. It is the ruination of obedience. The mother can blame herself for working forcefully for its destruction.

She is perfectly justified in trying to make the execution of the father's orders more agreeable; that is quite another thing. But in this case, she must justify the conduct of the father and not seem to blame him by softening the verdict.

Husband and wife are but one; he, the strength; she, the gentleness. The result is not an opposition of forces but a conjoining of forces; the formation of a single collective being, the couple.

Another point in this matter of obedience: Never let the children command the parents. How many parents, mothers especially, betray their mission! Parents are not supposed to give orders indiscriminately but wisely; when they have done this, they should not go back on a command. To command little is the mark of firm authority; but to demand the execution of what one has commanded is the mark of a strong authority.

There should be no fussiness, no irritation, only calm firmness. The child, who becomes unnerved, and certainly not without cause, before a multiplicity of disconnected orders that fall upon him from all sides, submits before a gentle and unbending authority. Calmness steadies him and unyielding firmness unfailingly leads him to obey.

#### CHILDREN WHO COMMAND.

IF THE training of the children from babyhood has been well done, there is the happy possibility that the parents can really be masters in their own home later on. Not that they need to exercise a fierce militarism; they should rather inspire a holy and joyous liberty; but when they give a command, the children must know that there is nothing for them to do but obey.

They will give few commands, avoiding such perpetual admonitions as "Stand up straight! Don't slouch! Do this. Don't do that," which irritate children to a supreme degree, weaken authority, and in time nullify the effect of any effort to command. In the whirlwind of commands and prohibitions in which they are caught, children can no longer distinguish between important issues and details. Not having the strength to observe all the directions they receive, they decide quite practically to observe none except when a painful punishment impresses them with the need to obey.

Although the parents should give few commands, they must abide by what they have commanded and see it through. If children note that it is easy for them to wear out the patience of those who issue commands or prohibitions, and that sooner or later they will have the victory, they will unconsciously or even through a perversity that will always increase, set about to maneuver more and more triumphs for themselves.

"Leave that door handle alone!" Fine. The child hears the command. A second later, he is at the handle again. Again, he is told to leave it alone. The child resigns himself and for some time does

not go near the door. Will he make a third attempt? Why not? After the second injunction mamma generally says no more. As a matter of fact, he renews his disobedience. Mamma lets it pass. She is conquered.

She will be conquered forever.

That is just one example of ten thousand where training falls short.

But when children know that what is said goes, the temptation to defy a command does not so readily come to them; or if should it come and they yield, they know their parents will not let their disobedience pass and that they will pay the penalty; they know too that the punishment will be in proportion to the offense, neither too little or too much but exactly proportionate; they take it for granted.

Away with all fussiness however! Let children exercise some initiative. How many parents forget that they were once young and as a consequence, what it means to be young.

In his book "My Children and I," Jerome K Jerome criticizes in a humorous fashion the exaggerated notions of some parents who do not want to recognize the power for frankness in boys and girls of twelve, fourteen or sixteen years. Veronica, one of the young daughters of the home, finding that the discipline of the house was too rigid protested with the comment, "If grown-ups would be willing to listen, there are many things we could explain to them."

She decided to write a book in which she would give parents some wise advice. "All children will buy it," she said, "as a birthday gift for their father and mother."

Veronica was doubtless somewhat presumptuous but not stupid. People can learn at any age.

Even from their children.

Even when their youthful lessons are developed from impertinence.

It is better, of course, not to need their lessons.

#### TRAINING IN DOCILITY.

MANY parents complain that they can no longer get their children to obey.

Is it the fault of the children? Is it not rather the fault of the parents? A failure in obedience because of a failure in authority?

To command requires as much abnegation as to obey. If a person commands to satisfy his need of imposing himself on others, to satisfy his vanity, to prove his power to himself, he has missed the purpose of authority. Authority does not exist for itself but for the good of subordinates.

Parents can go to the other extreme and leave their children to their whims and fancies in order to escape imposing any inconvenience upon themselves, allowing everything to pass and even refusing to forbid what they should forbid. That too is a failure in their mission. To have authority is to have the obligation to exercise it — according to the circumstances and without exaggeration certainly — but it must be exercised and not held in abeyance; that would be a betrayal of a trust.

Authority is to be exercised; to be exercised within the limits of its control; that is its function. If through laziness or poor judgment, authority is not exercised or is badly exercised, how can we be astonished that obedience is lost?

Authority supposes a soul at peace, a courageous soul, dominated by a sense of duty, devoted to the interests of the subject, free of capricious impulses and that sentimental concept of love, which is often found in mothers who confuse tenderness with idolatry.

Parents and educators must arm themselves with courage to dare to take a stand against the caprices of their child. They must have keen judgment to know in which instances they should command or refrain from commanding, to be able to adapt the order to the capacity of the subjects, to be able to understand the subjects' desires and satisfy them, to oppose their whims, their impetuous desires and disordered impulses.

In all this, there must not be the shadow of oppression. Parents should realize the children's need for distractions, activity, learning, and loving. They ought to satisfy them in everything that is legitimate. That will provide a generous principle by which they can refuse them what is not legitimate. In everything, the parents should act with a balanced mixture of gentleness and firmness.

Certainly, they should not govern their children in a way that suppresses their initiative. Their problem is not to develop paragons of perfection, children who are exteriorly docile but docile through passivity.

Parents should as often as possible insist that their children make their own decisions, assume their little or great responsibilities; but at the same time supervise and watch over them unobtrusively; be ready to help them if need be when they hesitate or arrive at imprudent decisions.

This implies that the parents strive less to develop a satisfactory exterior behavior than to fashion in the child a conscience that is exact and clear in the knowledge of its duties; it is essential that when a child obeys he does so not because of external constraint but through obedience to the law of duty, to the inward law formulated in the depths of his soul by God Himself.

The formation of the child's conscience is therefore inseparable from his training in obedience. Let the child know that he must obey only because he must above all obey God; parents and educators are only the intermediaries of God in his regard. Punishments which must follow wrongdoing will never be for him the indication of his parents' excitability or moods but always and only the justification of a moral principle that has been violated.

#### INTELLIGENCE AND FIRMNESS IN A MOTHER.

CAN the mothers who are real educators be counted by the hundreds? Many see what ought to be done but do not have the courage to require it or rather to impose it on themselves to see it through. Others again have sufficient firmness of character but lack keenness, insight, psychology.

Madame Marbeau whose son was to become bishop of Meaux possessed the rare balance of intelligence and firmness.

One of the brothers of the future bishop had been naughty and troublesome at school and was sent home by way of punishment. At home, he was obliged to recount his escapade. The child was difficult and it was not his first offense. Madame Marbeau marched him up to his room, closed the door behind them, took a switch and ordered the boy to take off his coat and a few more things.

"My child," she said, "you are dishonoring your name. I am going to whip you for it so that you won't forget it. It grieves me to do so. I have a heart ailment and could die of emotion... at least my death would remind you not to offend God."

When her children were old enough to be able to take responsibility, Madame Marbeau gave each of them a watch, accompanying her gift with the wish "May all the hours of your life to the very last, mark the good you do. May you never have to blush for one of them."

She encouraged the older ones to offer sacrifices to bring blessings on their future home, "Offer that up for the one whom you will marry."

A mother ought to be willing to make her child shed tears if that is the only way to instill a lesson which other means have failed to inculcate.

Surely, the whole art of educating does not consist in the art of being severe; some parents are too stern and they create a depressing and disheartening atmosphere in the home; that is the other extreme of indulgence. Exaggerated repression and excessive weakness are both harmful. The one who must be most watchful against excessive weakness is the mother, to whom is attributed the quality of kindness as an almost natural instinct and whose whole vocation is bound up in kindness. In their early days, the children will be tramping all over her feet, but when they grow older, they will trample on her heart.

The child should be encouraged to the complete accomplishment of his duty; nor should the parents take over to spare him the necessity of effort; they should rather stimulate him to furnish his own effort. He should be given a taste for fundamental honesty very early in life, the understanding that time is money advanced to us by God to enable us to purchase not only our eternity but also the grandeur and beauty of our present life.

Then at the opportune time, the child should be directed to consider his future. After making of his present home an invaluable training center, let the mother use the thought of the future home he will establish as an incentive to needful renunciation and self-denial. Should a son or daughter give indications of a special attraction to the virginal state in a consecrated life, with what care should the mother watch over them. What a grace for the family if their dreams should be realized! But such graces are bought! By the sacrifices of the children. By the sacrifices of the parents above all, but primarily of the mother.

These are not the only characteristics of a solid training but they are important characteristics. Let me examine myself on them. What judgment must I pass on myself?

#### PICTURE STUDY.

MOTHER has gathered her little world around the table. She has chosen a supply of beautiful pictures; there are all sorts of them.

"Now suppose everyone keeps still. Look well at these pictures and make your choice without telling it... Then in a few minutes you may each tell me in your turn which one you prefer. If you explain well why you prefer it, you may have it to keep for yourself. All right, let's start. Is everyone here? Take time to think carefully. When you have all made your choice we shall begin to speak."

Soon little hands were busy fingering the pictures; indecision was evident on the children's faces. Finally, their choices seemed to be settled.

"Very well, Peter, you begin."

Peter had been attracted by a troop of soldiers marching behind the red, white and blue:

“Because it has the flag of my country,” he said.

What a beautiful lesson to develop, the lesson of patriotism, a lesson in humanity. Why should we love the world; why too should we prefer our own country? We should prefer it to the point of defending it if it is unjustly attacked. What is a just war, an unjust war? Is it sometimes permissible to kill? What is the duty of the leaders in war? Why should we salute the flag?

And all listen to the simple lesson so marvelously and expertly explained drawing great profit from it. A true course it is in philosophy, civics, international ethics, and will-training.

Little Louise decided on a picture of a beautiful baby by Reynolds, a pink, chubby baby with curly hair. She gives her reason in a tone of voice that reveals her budding maternal instinct, “I want it because it looks like my little brother.”

And Mother seizes her opportunity to explain the mother’s role, her joys, her difficulties, her responsibilities.

Jeanne, a robust girl, not blessed with much imagination shows great admiration for a very ordinary postcard representing two children in the country, standing before a rustic home at an outdoor fireplace roasting potatoes and chestnuts... She chose it because “it shows what we do on vacation when we have no more homework to do.”

This brings forth a little homily on energy at work, coupled with praise for the honesty of the child; the motive of choice alone is blamed as indicative of no great zeal for study.

Paul, whose stuffed pockets seem to contain a whole workshop — string, broken springs, rubber bands and other odds and ends has been waiting a long time to explain his choice: “I like this airplane which is going to take off; see the pilot has put on his cap; he is going to take two passengers. I want to be a pilot when I get big...”

How many correct ideas to develop, enlarge and enrich; how many inferior sentiments to uplift; how many social principles to instill according to the capacity of these little minds and consciences so newly formed; how many futures to map out and how many vistas to open up.

There is nothing austere or forbidding here. It is life presented in beautiful simplicity. All the mother’s explanations are within the children’s grasp, but how richly instructive and informative! They had so much fun. And they learned so much.

#### IMPARTIALITY.

ONE great principle of education that is of prime importance is that there must not be two systems of weights and two systems of measures in the family; it is necessary to treat all the children impartially.

The celebrated Carmelite, (the Venerable) Mary of Agreda, whom Phillip IV of Spain did not hesitate to take as his confidante and advisor in matters of state and the government of men because of her spiritual insight and virtue, wrote the following advice to him on October 13, 1643 after she realized, either through spiritual lights or human reports, that he was inclined to yield to the ascendancy of a certain individual in his court:

“It would be better to put all (your counselors) on the same level by listening to all of them so that each one believes himself to be your favorite without Your Majesty’s according more to one than to

the other. Thus God has placed the heart in the center of the body that it may vivify and stimulate all the members equally; the same sun lights us all without any distinctions."

This rule, which Mary of Agreda gave Phillip IV for the government of Spain, is very valuable within the family.

One or other of the children must not get the idea he is preferred; he will be tempted to abuse the situation. Above all, the other children must have no cause to believe that one of the members of the family is the object of special predilection.

All ought to believe that they are, each of them individually, the privileged one; and that because actually and not as a pretense the father and mother make no distinctions of person but give to all their maximum love.

If any exception must be made let it be for that one who is least gifted, the most sickly, who has the least defense. In such a case only will the other children pardon partiality.

Generally, however, such advice need not be given to mothers. As Bishop Dupanloup explains, maternal love is so wide and deep that there is in it an innate and magnificent contradiction.

If her child is beautiful, richly endowed, how the mother cherishes it! If on the contrary, her child is puny, deformed by nature, she has treasures of affection for it such as she has for no other.

Here is the beautiful passage. It is taken from a volume which has not gone out of date; how many married people and parents could profit greatly by reading it and meditating on it: The name of the book is "Letters of Direction on Christian Life" by the Abbe Henri de Tourville, and the particular sections referred to now are the passages on Marriage, Motherhood and Conjugal Fidelity:

"Maternal love possesses two contrary impulses which are characteristic of it. We could not measure either of them, nor could we pass them by in silence.

The mother loves her fortunate child, the handsome child, the prosperous child, for its happiness, its beauty, its prosperity; there is in this a just pride, which belongs to maternal love and does not sully it. At the same time, the mother loves her child who suffers, who is listless, who is deformed because of its suffering, its languor, its deformity; and her love goes to terrifying extremes.

One must see a mother looking at her infirm and deformed child... It is as if she wants to fill up all the voids of that being; that she wants to enclose it within herself so that curious and unkind looks cannot reach it.

If she has a wayward child, it is this one she loves in spite of herself; if she has a sick child, it is toward that one she directs all her concern, and on the contrary should her child be a hero... how happy she is!

#### DIFFICULTIES OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION.

IN ORDER to make a true Christian of a child, four difficulties must be conquered:

1. The child himself. — He is light-minded, superficial, completely exterior. The invisible world seems unreal to him. Doubtless, the infused faith received at baptism gives him a kind of aptitude for perceiving divine realities; and the educator will not fail to utilize and develop this aptitude. It still remains true that the child for whom the world of images alone has value is in grave danger of

progressively losing interest in the Kingdom of God to give more and more attention to what Our Lord calls all these other things.

Furthermore, he is on the threshold of life and that life is the present life; he feels strong; death is far away. His very existence appears to him as something almost eternal. He dreams of marriage, thinks of a career and is immersed in distractions. He thinks very little about his soul if he thinks of it at all.

2. The family circle. — The family encircles the child with a certain general atmosphere of ease, of comfort, of forgetfulness of the essential. The practice of Christianity within the family may be very weak; there may be a complete absence of good example. An exaggerated liberty in regard to reading may prevail; the newspapers and magazines brought into the family are perhaps most unchristian, utterly pagan in tone. And as for the religious observance of Sunday, it is reduced to a minimum and that minimum is merely routine. True piety is definitely lacking; so too is any semblance of regularity in rising and retiring; a shameless preoccupation with frivolities crowds out everything else. The development of a spirit of sacrifice and the formation of a religious spirit receives scarcely any attention.

3. Schools. — Let us consider only those schools in which religion is recognized. To whom is the religious instruction confided? How well is education to the supernatural safeguarded? Even in institutions where exercises of piety are held in esteem, is sufficient effort made to combat routine, to avoid blind imitation and to vivify religious practices? Is sufficient care taken to explain doctrine thoroughly? Is not a great deal of precious time lost in problems of apologetics while the children have very little acquaintance with the substantial realities of the deposit of faith? Is the teaching of Catechism carefully centered about the dogma of Grace and of Incorporation in Christ? Are the truths of faith made to live by being presented in relation to modern life, adapted to the needs of the young people and the needs of the time?

4. The general easygoing attitude of society. — Father Gratry used to say that young people had difficulty escaping the two trials that their social environment imposes — the trial of fire and the trial of light. The trial of fire. By that, Father Gratry meant the test of pleasure, the test of the senses. The great means of information are sometimes transformed into means of corruption. Reading, unbridled freedom, certain types of amusement, finish the destruction. The world ridicules the chaste; materialism, at times gross, at times refined, threatens to penetrate all of life especially now that the constraints of the war have been lifted. The test of light. This, Father Gratry explains, is contact with pagan mentalities, with philosophies of skepticism and agnosticism as noisy as they are baseless but none the less alluring in an age of independence and awakening passions.

All these conditions point to the importance of a virile training of the individual from childhood; the need of a healthy and uplifting family life; the value of a solid intellectual formation that is thoroughly Christian; the necessity of a purification of the general atmosphere.

The children of today have been compared to “an invasion of little barbarians.” We must civilize these barbarians if we want to prevent the arrival of barbarism or a return to barbarism.

#### SUPERNATURAL MOTHERS.

CHESTERTON expressed himself as well satisfied that education is entirely confided to women until that time when to educate becomes entirely useless — for, “a child is not sent to school to be instructed until it is too late to teach him anything.”

In other words, education depends on the training given during baby days and early childhood and such training is the concern of women. That is a certain fact. It is also a serious fact. Because at once there arises the problem: Are all mothers charged with educating their children capable of it?

Some women excel in child-training. And often they are equally successful in handling their children once they are grown.

How solicitously these mothers watch over their children even in their babyhood not only in concern for their bodily good but for their soul as well, warding off from them whatever could be a source of trouble later. With what love of God they profit by their babies' first glimmerings of reason to teach them how to fold their hands in prayer and lift their hearts to God. How zealously they prepare them for their First Holy Communion, speaking to them of the marvels of the Eucharist, encouraging them to generosity and love of Jesus Crucified.

Without any thought of self, but with joyful and supernatural austerity, they teach their children to make sacrifices, to think of others; with what divinely inspired skill they show them the immense needs of the world, make them think of little pagan children who have no Christian mother or father or brothers or sisters who have been baptized.

“Children are serious-minded, and to keep a childlike soul means precisely to continue to look at life with a serious attitude,” says Joergensen. Mothers with a supernatural spirit, whether they have read Joergensen or not, seem to use this idea as a guiding principle and by it help their children to preserve while growing up, the juvenile depth of their serious outlook on life.

Even when their children are grown, how they help them to develop this serious attitude and protect them from losing it or submerging it in an atmosphere of worldliness and frivolity! How earnestly they try to give their children true Christianity grounded much more in love than in fear; they do not constantly terrify them with the idea of sin; they lead them even more by example than by word, to look upon God as a God of mercy and not as a sort of “super-parent who is always dissatisfied, severe, angry, ready to forbid and to punish.”

Living a life of divine familiarity themselves, these mothers have learned the great mystery of “God nearby,” of God residing in the depths of the soul in grace, a God whose dearest wish is to draw us into closer intimacy with Himself.

It has been said that “there are two ways of giving the consciences of children an intense sense of the privation of God”; either by “default”, by never putting them in His presence; or by “excess”, by putting them in His presence in such a way that He becomes a “nightmare to them from which they flee as soon as they realize that the whirl of life helps them not to think of Him.”

Supernatural-minded mothers would never fail in the second way. If their grown boys and girls remain in the state of grace, it is through a holy pride, an interior joy, the result of having been impregnated early in life with the conviction of God’s nearness, with the determination to remain forever living tabernacles of the Trinity, other Christs.

Honor to these mothers, true educators!

#### EDUCATION TO THE SUPERNATURAL (1). God and the Child.

THIS does not mean education to piety. In Christian families, this is properly provided for: The children are taught their prayers, how to go to Confession, how to prepare for Holy Communion,

how to assist at Holy Mass and other church services, how to say the rosary. All this is fine, but perhaps it is not the essential!

The important thing is to teach the child who he is, who God is, and how God wants to mingle His life with his by coming to dwell in him, consecrating him thereby as a living tabernacle of the Most High. When the child knows all this not merely as bookish knowledge but as knowledge lived out and often recalled, exercised by his faith and his young good will, then and then only, will there be a solid foundation on which to build religious instruction, to justify and demand exercises of piety. It is absolutely essential that before all else the child be informed of the divine riches which his baptism brought him. It must be explained to him that the day he was carried as a little baby to be received into the Church, God came to take possession of his soul.

He should be taught that when people come into the world they do not possess this divine life. God gave it to Adam and Eve in the beginning but they lost it. Right here is a splendid opportunity to explain the greatness and goodness of God, the marvel of our supernatural life, how God created man greater than nature, how He wanted to make all of us His children. The little one knows well what a father is. Explain to him that God is our Father in order to give him what is essential in all true piety, a filial spirit and an understanding of how true it is to call God, Good.

The story of creation fascinates children; so too does the story of Adam and Eve and the Fall. What a lesson for the child is the example of the terrible punishment incurred by disobedience!... The divine life is lost! But God still loves His poor human creatures just as mamma and papa continue to love their child after he has done wrong. And what is God going to do to give back this lost supernatural life? When one commits a fault, he must make up for it to obtain pardon. Who can make up for such a fault? God asks His own Son to do it. His Son will come down to earth. And then follows the beautiful story of the Christmas Crib and the timely application of these truths: How we should pity those who do evil and if we can, help them get out of their misery, their bodily and spiritual wretchedness!

Not only will Jesus live upon earth with us but He will die for us after living more than thirty years over in a little country where we can find many souvenirs of His stay — the little town of His birth, the workshop of His foster-father, that noble carpenter named Joseph, the villages that heard Him preach to all, and especially to children, on how to get to heaven, the place of His death upon the Cross, that place of suffering where Mary His Mother stood beneath His instrument of torture... All that, all that so that John, Paul, James, Henry, Peter, Louise, Camille, Leonie, Germaine may be even while they are still on earth, little — and yes very great — living tabernacles of God who is Goodness itself; so that later in heaven they may be with the God of their hearts forever.

Religious instruction is not sufficiently centered; it is not centered about the central mystery of Catholicism. Even the catechism with its divisions of Dogma, Morals and the Sacraments — divisions that are perfectly logical and understandable but more adapted to theological authors than to the souls of children — can, if we are not careful, make one forget the beautiful wholeness of Christianity which is superbly majestic in its architectural lines, clear, and pulsing with life.

#### EDUCATION TO THE SUPERNATURAL (2). Baptism makes us Living Tabernacles.

IT IS clear that everything centers about the dogma of grace and our supernatural elevation. The best way to develop this idea with the child is to use the technique of an object lesson and explain the rites and ceremonies of baptism to him. That will be a little drama in which he has been the

hero, and consequently, it will hold tremendous interest for him. It is something about himself, it is his own story he hears; he will be delighted.

Describe the ceremonies graphically for the little one. As soon as feasible, take him to church. Before showing him the tabernacle, the Eucharistic dwelling, take him to the baptismal font: Here is where you became a living tabernacle of God. At the words of the priest, "Go out of this child, unclean spirit; give place to the Holy Spirit," the devil was forced to leave you, because of the power Our Lord gave to His priests. Then the Holy Spirit came to dwell in you. And since the Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son, God in His fullness came to dwell from then on in your heart — yes, there are three Persons, but there is just the same but one God; there are five fingers but they make only one hand — and that one God in all three Persons dwells in you.

God does not have to use an airplane like the one you saw landing from its flight the other day, but He does come down from heaven to dwell in your soul; He came into each of us, Papa, Mamma and in you, in Henry and James and Pauline, in Genevieve and little Louise. He comes on His own without anyone else sending Him and His coming is very real. Besides all this, His dwelling in all of us does not keep Him from continuing to dwell in heaven, too. He is all-powerful; it causes Him no difficulty to be at several places at once. If He who exercises His power everywhere, comes especially into the souls of the baptized, it is to dwell there in a dwelling of love. When your godmother or your grandfather comes to spend a few days (or a few years) at your house, how happy you are! It is to give you pleasure that they come; and they bring with them goodies and lovely presents... God does the same thing when He comes to stay in you — He brings presents with Him; we call these gifts graces; that means favors, gifts He is not obliged to give, but which He gives just because He is so good. Good, did we say? Extraordinarily good! Much kinder than godmother or grandpa; kinder even than Papa or Mamma. He is the One who made the kindness and goodness of fathers and mothers and of all good people on the earth. Think how much greater is God's goodness since He possesses all this goodness put together and a great deal more besides!

But then if God is like that, how ought James and Joseph and Henry and Isabelle and Louise and Madeline behave themselves? Well, first of all, they should never do anything that would chase God from their souls; to do that is what we call mortal sin; mortal, because it forces God to leave just as if it killed Him. God cannot die, but it is just as if the person would say to Him, "I don't want anything more to do with You; if I could do away with You, I would do so!" That is why mortal sin is such a vile thing.

And it is not enough for you to keep from driving God out of your soul; no, there in the depths of your heart, you should try to keep Him company. Don't you think so? How sad that would be if He would be there within your soul and you would not pay any attention to Him, and seem to attach no importance at all to His Presence. That would not be very nice. You ought to visit Him there within your soul, in the morning, in the evening and often during the day; speak to Him; tell Him that you love Him very much. He who loves as a real Christian, a truly baptized soul, keeps God company, since God is with him all the time.

#### EDUCATION TO THE SUPERNATURAL (3). Avoid Sin.

SINCE God is always present in the soul of the baptized person — provided that person has not driven Him away through mortal sin — with what respect should he treat not only his soul but also his body!

Mothers always dress their little ones in a beautiful white dress for their baptism. This is to show that later they ought never cover their souls with stains of sin. If muddy spots on lovely white material is ugly, how much uglier are sin stains on the soul!

That is also why the priest after bringing God into the soul of the tiny baby by saying as he pours the water, "I baptize you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," hastens to add the injunction, "Receive this white garment and carry it undefiled to the Throne of God." The whiteness of the garment symbolizes the purity of the soul.

When we have to appear before God at the end of our lives, what will He ask us? "Have you been faithful? Have you always respected the beautiful virtue of purity? Or is your soul stained by sin? Have you committed sins? Mortal sins? At the moment death struck you down, did you have God in your heart or had you driven Him away as if you wanted nothing more to do with Him?

"You drove Him away? Ah, well, since that is how it is, I want no more to do with you: I too will drive you away, begone!"

It is just as a father might call before him his child who had grossly insulted him or tried to kill him; he would say, "I no longer look upon you as my son. You are not worthy to remain in the house. Get out! I will never speak to you again; I will never love you as my son again! Though I love you, you have rejected me!"

How dreadful to be driven away by God because we tried to kill Him with sin in our soul; because we tried to drive Him away... to drive Him, God who is so good, from our heart!

We must indeed pray that such a thing never happens!

If we want to die without stain of sin upon our soul, we must live without staining our soul by such ugly defilements. Now since God dwells within our soul and since our soul is enclosed within our body, then we must also keep our body pure. We must never use it to commit sin. We should always look upon it as a kind of church in which God dwells. What would we say of naughty boys who would throw pebbles into the window of the parish church or mud from the street on the decorations or the altar inside? It would be an insult hurled at Jesus who stays there in the tabernacle so that we can go to Him to tell Him that we love Him and that we are happy to be with Him.

A little baptized child is like a church, but a living church.

Jesus and the Child.

How should we introduce Jesus into the life of the little one? Marie Fargues, a one-time educator, suggests the following psychological procedure: "You love Jesus very much, don't you?" the mother asks the little one in a tone of voice that calls forth a fervent "yes." Mamma must love Jesus to speak as she does. Therefore, Baby loves Him, too, and he wants to show it. He will clutch the picture of Jesus that the mother holds out to him, and kiss it with much ado. A statuette, a crucifix, a medal — these objects offer no direct interest to the child other than their polish or their color; mamma's face is certainly softer and more pleasing. But if one is to embrace, there must be something to embrace; and how can one show that one loves without embracing. That is the sole reason of existence for the statuette, the picture, or the medal of Christ as far as the baby is concerned. People don't embrace just anything, like papa's paper or the sugar bowl; these things have other uses. But the things that are connected with the Name of Jesus, these things one kisses for love of Jesus.

## But Who is Jesus?

Who is Jesus? A baby does not ask that question. Jesus is a fact, like papa or mamma. And the little one is not in the least disturbed about giving the same name to quite different objects, a medal, a picture, or a crucifix. For, in the beginning, the picture, the medal, or the crucifix, is Jesus. It will take time for the little one to understand that these things are merely representations of Jesus.

Little by little, the child will begin to distinguish the person from the representation and will begin to build up a more correct concept: Jesus is at one and the same time, the One who is represented on the medal, the One who lives in the tabernacle, the One who is on the crucifix, the One who is on the picture, the One who lives in the church, and the One who is in mamma's heart after she goes to Holy Communion.

From then on, the clarification can be continued by helpful statements or questions: "Yes, Jesus is here," or "Jesus did that" or, if we are in church, "Where is Jesus?" At Christmas time when the little one pulls on mother's sleeve, insisting, "I want to go over and see little Jesus in the pretty crib," a splendid opportunity presents itself to explain the difference between the figure of Jesus in the crib and Jesus present in the tabernacle.

The transfer from the concept of Jesus to that of God is evidently a delicate step. The mother has told the child that God is everywhere, sees everything, but that He has no body. Now Jesus has a body. All that is not very clear to the child.

Little by little, it will become so.

God is at one and the same time, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost and they have existed from all eternity. It is the Son, however, who became Jesus when the Blessed Virgin gave Him a body, and He walked among men on earth.

Thus, the little one through acquaintance with Jesus rises to knowledge of God. That God should have become man, is not at all astonishing to the child, and still less astonishing is it to him that Jesus had a mother.

Thus, bit by bit, things are seen in their proper relation. There cannot be complete clarity all at once. However, by means of successive bits of information, and above all by successive attempts at prayer, the little one enters into contact with Jesus; this contact is more of the heart than of the mind.

Historical and doctrinal ideas will be added later to complete the child's concept. Even at this early age, he has become acquainted with the Triune God and the Incarnation. The cross, too, has been revealed to him. It is a delight for the child to hear the story of Jesus' life, and, in the retelling how many ideas can be given, how much curiosity satisfied, how many lessons taught!

Since Jesus loves children so much — and we know that He does from the gospel story of Jesus blessing the little ones — since He has loved people so much and done so much for them, should not little John, or Lucy, or Alice, love Jesus, too, with all their heart; should they not learn from Him how to make a generous sacrifice when the opportunity presents itself?

## THE FATHER WHO DOESN'T PRAY.

LITTLE Paul who is only four-and-a-half years old, is kneeling beside his bed saying his night prayers; they seem to be very long.

“Haven’t you finished your prayers?” asks his nurse.

“Yes,” answers the child slightly embarrassed.

“Well, then, what are you doing now?”

The child blushes and murmurs timidly, “I say two of them every night — my own and papa’s. I heard him refuse mamma when she asked him to say his prayers; so now I am doing it for him.”

Precocious, would you say? Maybe so. But have children not often startled us with their penetration?

How foolish are those parents who believe they can fail in logic before their children! How little do they know of the workings of those little minds and those little hearts! How little do they know how these little ones can put to use what they hear!

Lady Baker, a convert, writes in her book “The House of Light” that when she was a child of about eleven years, she overheard a conversation between her father and her mother on the subject of religion. The father was saying, “I heard a good sermon today; it pointed out how the Reform was a great mistake and that England would have been much better off without it...”

“Be still,” interrupted his wife in a scandalized tone, “be careful before the children.”

“I was sent off to my studies,” continues Lady Baker, “and I heard no more of the conversation; but I took to dreaming over these strange words.”

That very evening while taking a walk with the maid, she asked to visit a Catholic church. From that date, she says, there was born in her the desire to study the beginnings of the pretended Reform and to change her religion later should this study prove that what her father had said was true.

It may be that I have not lost the habit of prayer, thanks to God’s grace, but it could easily be that I do not let my children see me praying often enough. To pray, and to let one’s children see that one prays, are two different things. It is not enough to pray as an individual only. My duty as head of the family is to pray in the name of the family, in the sight of the family, and with the family. My boys must know that their father honors God; they must see that he conducts himself respectfully before Him; they must learn from his example the great duty of adoration and worship. Prayer, at least evening prayer, should be said in common.

In many families where all gather together at the end of the day to honor God, it is the mother who leads the prayer until the time comes when each child will be able to take a turn. It would be much better if the father would take the lead. It is the function which belongs to him, a function which is almost priestly in character.

Should it ever happen that I have occasion to pass unfavorable judgment on a churchman, or on some religious incident — although it could seldom happen that such an action would be my right — I must take care as to who is listening. Children don’t miss anything... let me give that some thought.

#### TABLE PRAYERS.

A CELEBRATED economist, Pierre Le Play, wrote, “Until I can say grace at meals without astonishing any of my guests, I will not believe that I have done enough for the return of good

habits." Grace at meals seems to be a simple detail. Are we not perhaps attaching too much significance to it?

Consider it a detail, if you wish, but it is a detail which proves much. Rene Bazin relates how edified he was while visiting in the north of France as a preparatory study for one of his novels, to observe how the family of an industrialist, in Roubaix, had said grace faithfully before meals, assigning each child a day to lead.

Another author relates the profound impression made on him by his visit to the home of an outstanding businessman in Antwerp. Before and after dinner, the eight children stood with their parents around the table while the father devoutly recited the meal prayers.

Where the practice of saying grace is found in a family, there is also found true family life blessed with children and with solid piety; there will be no selfishness; instead there will be found a love for tradition, respect for authority, and an undisputed reign of Christ over the home. The saying of grace may be a small thing, but it is an indication of great things.

The Christian family will not be restored, nor will it be maintained, without the restoration and the maintenance of Christian practices — the noblest practices surely, and the most obligatory, but likewise the most insignificant in appearance. However, are there any which are truly insignificant? — 'But these things will embarrass our visitors'. Nothing forces them to pay you a visit, and if they want to do it, they undoubtedly respect the customs of the house, the crucifix on the wall as well as the tint of the wall, the normal acts of Christian life as well as the menus prepared for them. No one is obliging them to adopt your conduct, but they can at least accept it while they are with you.

The real motive, if you are truly honest, is not charity for others, but human respect and a concern for yourself. You are afraid; you do not dare.

Your visitors will be either Christian or non-Christian. Why among Christians should one blush because of Christ? If the guests are not Christians, will they be astonished at Christian acts, knowing the atmosphere of the home and the character of those who dwell in it?

In addition to grace at meals, another beautiful Christian custom for the home is the evening blessing given by the father to all the children: As each child comes to give him a good-night kiss, the father lays his hand upon his head or traces a little cross upon his forehead. What an advantage for the children who see in their father a quasi-religious — as they really should be able to do. What an advantage for the father who will as a consequence be more conscious of his office. Imagine what his thoughts must be as he blesses his children in the evening if, during the day, he has done something for which his conscience reproaches him!

"We shall make our brethren Christians again," sing the Young Catholic Workers. "We shall make homes Christian again," should be the song of married Christians. To do that, they must begin with their own.

#### CHILDREN AND CHRISTMAS.

IT IS easy to understand how enraptured children can become at the contemplation of a tiny Babe in a manger. To have God reduce Himself to their own status, to become a child like them, to need a mother, what more could they desire! They feel on a footing with Him. The Almighty is of their stature!

We are told that on Christmas Eve, Saint John of the Cross used to carry a statue of the Infant Jesus in procession about the monastery. The procession would stop before each monk's cell asking hospitality for the Divine Babe. The cells, like the hearts of the monks, would open to faith and to love. Only then would the statue be carried to the Crib and the Divine Office begin.

Children share the simplicity of these holy monks. Nothing attracts them more than the Crib.

This very attraction makes it imperative that they learn about it correctly.

Care must be taken not to mix in with the gospel mystery any details which the child will later come to recognize as false. What good can come of representing Santa Claus almost as God the Father who has given us His Son? Why let children believe that it is the Infant Jesus Himself who comes down the chimney to bring them presents... only to hear some day, "You know, mamma, this is the last time I'm going to believe in Little Jesus who comes down the chimney with presents."

If we mix the false with the true, it is no wonder the child will not be able to separate legend from doctrine later on. The Gospel is sufficiently extraordinary in itself without our adding any of our own creations to it. If we do, we may well fear the child will become disgusted later at being deceived and reject everything.

Any charming legend or pious little story we may want to tell them when they are very little should be kept quite distinct and handled very differently from the dogmatic truths and authentic historical facts we teach them. Let us not introduce fairies into the story of Saint Jeanne of Arc's childhood, nor put the legend of Saint Nicholas rescuing little children on a level with the realities of the Redemption, with the facts of Our Lord's saving us from hell.

If, therefore, we are to capitalize on the child's attraction for the marvelous, let us avoid abusing his credulity; above all when dealing with the lives of the saints, with the Blessed Virgin and with Christ, let us not mix the false with the true. Let us always keep on a plane apart those truths which are to be forever the object of ineradicable belief.

There is, however, a positive suggestion to offer: Explain to the child how Baptism has made him a living Crib; not a wooden manger padded with straw, but a living Crib; not a crib where only little Jesus lives but a Crib where the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity dwell, the Three Divine Persons. Here, too, is splendid opportunity to show the child the difference between the two presences — the presence of God in the soul through grace and the presence of Jesus in the stable through the Incarnation.

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