

Christ In The Home

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By Raoul Plus, S.J.

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Daily Meditations on Marriage and Children: Training in Charity and Duty.

TRAINING IN CHARITY.

JEANNE-ANCELET-HUSTACHE gives us a picture of her little daughter Jacqueline in the book entitled "The Book of Jacqueline" (Le Livre de Jacqueline).

She is a well-endowed child; she is made much of, in fact, too much petted by her grandmother, by her father, by her sister who is extremely proud of her and by all the guests of the home. She is in danger of becoming a charming little self-centered individual as so many children are.

Happily, attentive care watches over her and strives to give the child the spirit of charity, love for the poor, for children, for the weak and the suffering. Little by little, Jacqueline opens her heart to this love, toward the suffering of the world.

She finds exquisite words, unexpected delicacy in greeting people, in thanking them, and in easing every wound that she guesses with a subtle and tender intuition. She is embarrassed rather than triumphant because of the special advantages she has over companions who are less gifted, poorer and less endowed. She pities the poor beggar on the boulevard; she brightens the lives of the aged sick in the hospice of Ligny with her refreshing graciousness. At seven years, this is how she prays to the Blessed Virgin for an unfortunate servant:

"O my Mother, my Mother, please deliver Yvonne. The poor little one. Nobody wants her. Her father doesn't want her, her mother is now far from her. She stole, she is in prison, she is sad and never will any one take her from it, never until her death; I alone on earth love her, I love her because she seems to say to me, 'If they would let me alone with you, I would never do anything bad'."

"I alone on earth, I love her." That is the answer of Jacqueline to the secret appeal of the merciful Christ: She will give herself entirely to those who have no one to love them; she will be their Sister of Charity, their Little Sister of the Poor, their Sister of Mercy.

The hour of God for this privileged child was to come in an unexpected way. She was to die while still very young and she was to go to the Christ of the extended Arms, the Christ who loves little children who are charitable and pure.

What an advantage for the child's later life, if the parents have succeeded in making it alert to the refinements of charity, to a concern for the needs of the world!

They do not lack opportunities. Perhaps mother and child are taking a walk. Here comes a poor grandmother, gathering dead branches, leading along an emaciated, sickly child. "Suppose we go to their aid?" suggests the mother to her little one.

Christmas comes. In many families, some good little children will have nothing, not the smallest present. Their papa is too poor; he earns just enough to provide bread to his household. Playthings? By no means; playthings cost too much. "Suppose we bring them that doll you don't play with anymore. Mother will dress it again so that it will look fine." Or, "Suppose you look for that mechanical horse you relegated to the attic. Papa will repair it so that it will seem like new."

Then there are the Missions. A terrible flood in some land has been reported. How many people are suffering! Let us fix up a bank into which each one can put his little alms! When we have a nice sum, we can send it over there. Or perhaps there is an occasion to ransom a little pagan baby so that it can be reared as a Christian. The opportunity to explain that spiritual alms are superior to material alms should not be passed by.

Once a child's eyes have been opened, how well it will know how to be good!

TRAINING IN SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY. (1) Common Good and Cooperation.

TO AWAKEN the child to solicitude for the poor and the wretched is a splendid thing. However, parents do not fulfill their whole duty, if they fail to give it a sense of responsibility for the common good and a true concept of cooperation.

Instinctively the child refers everything to its own small personal interest. If it is not taught very early to concern itself for others, it will be in danger of becoming narrow and selfish, of being forever oblivious to the general welfare, in other words, of never achieving a social sense.

While the child is very young this training will not consist in formal instructions but rather in a constant directing of attention on a thousand different occasions to the fact of having to be concerned about others. It will be taught to go upstairs without making a noise because mamma is resting; not to slam the doors because little brother or little sister is asleep; not to play noisily near papa's study. The child will learn very early in this way the social consequences of its actions.

The child may be with the whole family to meet someone at the station; the parents will have a fine opportunity to show it how selfish it is to stand directly in door ways and passages as it loves to do, since that obstructs the entrances and exits for people coming in from trains or those who merely wish to leave that way.

If a little girl accompanies her mother on a shopping trip, she can be taught not to ask the clerk to display more goods than necessary because it will all have to be refolded and replaced after she leaves.

At basketball or football, it is not so important to be a star player oneself as to bring the team to victory. It is true sportsmanship and true nobility to renounce a personal triumph by passing the ball to a fellow player who will assure the victory because he is in a better position or better qualified.

"Point out to us the lessons of the football game," a young sportsman asked his older friend. And he gave the one that extols the virtue of renunciation: "I will pass my chance to him" — the sacrifice of selfish or vain calculating, with a view to the result for the whole.

The child can be shown that when there is question of committing an infraction of discipline in school, he ought to avoid it not so much because of the effect on the teacher — “He who budges will have to deal with me” — but rather the disturbance it causes for his comrades whose attention is distracted and progress retarded. Discipline was not invented for the comfort of the teacher but for the good of the pupils.

In this way, theoretical teaching is preceded by the practical background of the child in an atmosphere of cooperation, of social interchange, of help. Every occasion for practice of this type should be accompanied by an explanation that later they must always act with like consideration in the office, the factory, the army or in whatever community they may be.

Once the children are old enough to understand more theory, every opportunity to instill doctrine should be seized: An international problem arises: Selfishness or mutual help? What does the Church say on this point? What does the Gospel say? Or perhaps it is a problem of relations between employer and workers, a strike in the father’s factory or in the city. Here too, what does the Church say? What does the Gospel command? Selfishness or reciprocal understanding?

Trained in this fashion the young will be ready and quick to understand the social or international doctrine of the Church when they are old enough to be taught it academically. They will not oppose correct principles, as they only too often do with a wall of prejudices or pseudo-traditions, when their religion or philosophy teachers explain them.

TRAINING IN SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY. (2) Service.

WE HAVE accomplished a good deal if we have accustomed the child to put itself as much as possible “in the place of others.” “If I were in such and such a situation, what would I do, what would I think?” We are all wrapped up in ourselves as in a cocoon, the child more than anyone else; particularly if it has been coddled, if it has been born into a family that is comfortably fixed, if it gets accustomed, or others make it accustomed, to being waited on.

The child must be encouraged to wait on itself and to give service. If for any reason the mother needs to hire help, that is no reason for the child to monopolize such help to its own comfort; it should never be permitted to give direct orders to domestic help.

As much as possible, especially in the case of little girls, the child should be given the opportunity to do many little tasks that make family life run more smoothly: to set the table, to dust up a room, to arrange a bouquet, to take care of the baby. Such assignments should not be presented to them as burdensome tasks but as an aid toward the common good, a lightening of mamma’s work so that they are joyful about it even if it demands an effort, upsets their well-laid plans or requires a sacrifice. Often the child will be delighted, proud of its importance. However, care must be taken to appeal not to vanity but to responsibility.

A delicate point to consider is the question of friendships. Should the child be permitted to associate with children who are not, as we say, of their class? They will meet in school. If these possible friends are morally good and well-mannered, why not? It will offer a fine opportunity to show that money is not everything, that the only true worth is virtue and human dignity. The child may be too much inclined to pair off only with those who belong to the same social circle or environment; that flatters its vanity. The parents should react to this tendency by teaching the little one that it ought to share with a comrade who is less privileged and while avoiding indiscriminate associations with

anybody and everybody, seek out as friends not the best dressed but those who are the best students, the most truly pious, the strongest personalities for good, in a word, those that deserve most esteem.

Should the family circumstances require sacrifices, show the child that there are people who are poorer; silence all jealousy. When the time comes for a choice of profession, direct the boy or girl to choose judiciously not according to possible profit or financial returns but according to the possibilities for best serving society, the common good.

Generous parents will not hesitate, if the child's qualifications are adequate and the opportune moment presents itself, to speak of vocations of complete consecration, the priesthood, religious life. There are so many needs in the world. "The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few." They enlist their children's interest. A priest? Why not he? A religious? Why not she?

That supposes a spirit of detachment in the parents, an informed appreciation for the needs of the Church, love of the general good of Christianity, the sacrifice of little hopes for building up a new family. Yes, it means that.

Such parents will often call attention to the distress of the world; to the struggle of nations among themselves. They will explain to their children that union alone is fruitful; furthermore, that union alone is truly Christian.

What an inspiring example do those children have whose father has always been a man of broad sympathies and a generous heart, highly social-minded; if in his profession he has always tried to serve rather than merely to earn money; if a lawyer, he has always been concerned for justice; if an industrialist, he has applied himself to bettering the human aspects of production; if a merchant, he has been attentive to injure no one; if a doctor, he has sacrificed himself to do the most possible good; if an employee, he has given his time loyally and honestly to his work — a worker eager for work well done and the social defense of his profession.

The boy and girl learn from this to consider their chosen professions or careers as future social service. They get out of their narrow selfish views, which formerly warped their characters — they emerge with souls truly formed.

TRAINING IN SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY. (3) Thinking of others.

IF WE are alert to seize the occasions, everything can serve to teach children to guess or at least to understand the needs and requirements of others.

A little girl who could no longer be called a baby had not as yet any brother or sister. One day she noticed her mother busy with the details of a layette, a set of clothing for a new-born: "Is all that for Liette, mamma?" She was Liette. "No dear, not for Liette, but for a little brother or sister who is going to come."

Liette was utterly stupefied. What was this? Mother was not working only for her then!

The first school for social consciousness is the family. What a handicap if mother has never worked for anyone but Liette, if Liette remained an only child! We can readily guess what selfishness she would have been capable of displaying.

The family is together: "It's so stuffy here; I'm going to open the window."

"No, grandmother has a cold."

The child understands it is not alone; others count.

The family lives in an apartment. The children are making an uproar. "Gently, children; we must not disturb the people downstairs. Not so much noise." Others count.

The little girl is learning how to keep house. She shakes her dust-cloth out of the window. "Did you look to see if someone was passing by?"

To know that other people exist and to understand that we must restrain ourselves for them is the root of social consciousness. A person would think that we all would have it and to spare.

Unfortunately, experience proves otherwise.

Mother and child go to a neighboring park for play. How tempting to make little sand piles all along the bench beside mamma! "You will see; I will not get you dirty, mamma."

"No, my little one, but you are not thinking of the people who may come in a little while to sit on this bench."

The street as well as a public garden can offer opportunities for such lessons. "Step aside dear. Don't you see that mother who is pushing her baby buggy; let her pass."

On the streetcar: "Give your place to the lady."

In a train: "Take turns sitting by the window." "Let's not speak so loud; it will disturb other people's conversation or their reading."

On a visit: "The steps have just been scrubbed; clean your shoes on the mat and walk along the edge so as not to track them up for the lady."

All this is rounded out in Catechism lessons. "Then in heaven I will be with some poor little child, won't I? We'll both be rich in the goodness of God!"

Children of poor families should be taught the dignity of poverty and labor, the duty of contributing one's best efforts to lift the living conditions and social status of their group.

Children of wealthy families should be taught their responsibility toward the working classes; they should be taught how far material, moral, and spiritual destitution can go and what they ought to do to learn how to remedy it.

TRAINING IN SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY. (4) Prevention is better than Cure.

WE HAVE not done everything when we have given children the idea and the desire of going to the aid of the poor. There is something better to be done. That is to teach them gradually to try to prevent misery from invading the poor world. We shall never succeed completely in checking it, but what a beautiful work it is to try to spread more happiness among men!

As children grow and reach an age of keener perception and of deeper reflection show them that the problem involves: The relations of social classes with one another; The relations of nations toward one another.

Within a single country, there are those who have what they need, those who have more than they need, those who have not even the essentials.

Is it not fundamental to establish a condition in the world in which the fewest people possible lack the necessities of life or better in which the most people possible can attain a sufficient possession of the goods of the earth, the culture of the mind and the knowledge of supernatural riches?

To the degree in which we are impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel, we will desire that our brothers about us are not only cured of their wounds but preserved as far as they can be from possible wounds and established in a state of adequate human development, and of adequate divine development.

To dress a wound that has been infected is a good deed; to prevent a wound from being inflicted is a better deed. To prearrange indemnity for those who fall into unemployment is good; to strive for a status of work in which unemployment is prevented is better.

Now the conditions of modern living, the economic equipment of society, have thrown a whole section of society into a situation in which life has become very hard, in which "earning one's living" has become a terrible problem.

Young boys and girls must be taught to realize these facts as they grow up. They must open their minds to an understanding of the social problems in their most agonizing aspects; they must prepare themselves to work to the best of their ability to counteract these evils.

When the social questions are concerned with relations between peoples of different nations, then how many problems crop up! Wars, even after treaties have been signed, leave hearts embittered. New difficulties arise. A very correct idea of patriotism is of capital importance!

Is periodic war between nations justifiable? Ought we not do everything in our power to constitute a state of peace in the world by an honest agreement between nations?

What procedures should we follow that these desirable understandings be effective?

What virtues must be developed in order to reconcile at one and the same time concern for national dignity, love of peace, brotherhood according to God!

How can we get different peoples to live together side by side without the grave interests of any group suffering, even though each nationality remains deeply concerned for its own greatness?

A whole education on these points must be given.

THE FAMILY AND THE SCHOOL.

TO CHOOSE a school and then TO HELP the school are two great duties of the family.

1. To choose a school. It is quite clear that a Catholic family ought to choose a Catholic school. On every level of education when there is a choice between a Catholic school and a public school, Christian parents have the serious duty to prefer the one which speaks of God and Christ rather than the one which sins by omission.

It is a duty and a serious duty for many reasons:

First of all, when Catholics practically bleed themselves to death financially to maintain their schools, not to profit by their sacrifice is to do them grave injustice.

Then, and this is serious, even when there need be no fear of the danger of immorality, the very fact of the mixed religions necessarily involved is a danger for the child's faith since because of this variety, the education offered is severed from all allusion to things eternal. It is by a regrettable

amputation that educators pretend to isolate in the human being, the merely human vocation and the supernatural vocation. We have not been created to be human beings pure and simple but divinized human beings. Educators can work in vain; secularization will accomplish nothing in changing this truth. It is just that way. The same holds for the education the parents give to supplement that of the school; it is immeasurably harmful for the moral life of young minds and young hearts never to hear mentioned that which alone counts for life. That is, however, how so many generations have become accustomed to put life on one side and religion on the other as if they were separate water-tight compartments.

To count on the school alone, especially when it is neutral, to equip children adequately for life is a grave delusion.

Herbert Spencer, that English realist, once wrote:

“The one who would want to teach geometry by giving Latin lessons or who believed he could teach pupils to play the piano by drawing would be considered crazy. He would be just as reasonable as those who pretend to improve the moral sense by teaching grammar, chemistry or physics.”

An education, even a solid education that is purely secular is insufficient for the full development of the moral sense and the adequate formation of character.

2. To help the school. After the school has been carefully chosen, the family still has the duty to help the teachers in their task. Therefore, parents, older brothers and sisters should: show new interest in the children’s studies not as they often do through vanity but through real interest in the children. They should never contradict the disciplinary measures that teachers thought necessary; if a punishment has been inflicted at school or a schedule decided upon, the pupil’s family ought to support it and express themselves as being in accord with it. They should, if necessity has obligated them to put a child in a secular school, supplement the regrettable deficiencies of the school by competent religious instructions; they must also exercise vigilance over the friendships and associations the children form.

They should exercise vigilance in this regard even when the school is of the highest moral standard; particularly careful must they be of the influences of doubtful companions the children might become acquainted with on their way to and from school. Along with the school and the home, we must take account of the influence of the streets.

THE SECULARISM OF CHRISTIANS.

WE ARE not concerned here with refuting the doctrines of secularism. Every Christian ought to know the mind of the Church on this subject; we need not go back to ancient documents either to discover it. It is enough to recall the Encyclical “*Summi Pontificatus*” issued by Pius XII in 1939 at the beginning of the Second World War.

Denouncing the aggressive encroachment into the field of religion by some present-day particular doctrines, he traced even farther back the source of the evil, which has poisoned the whole life of Europe; he pointed to the doctrines which tried to build up the present and the future of humanity by getting rid of God and getting rid of Christ.

The problem now is to determine which of the unfortunate species of secularism has invaded me, my home, my habits, and which now may dominate me.

Of course, there is no question of a denial of God or of Christ. But what place do they hold in my family life? In my daily life, in my profession, in my participation in civic affairs?

Has it not often happened that in choosing schools or colleges for their children so-called Christian parents often evidence a utilitarian materialistic spirit; they give lame reasons for choosing the secular colleges instead of a Catholic college — the teachers are better, the chances for success after graduation are more certain. Are they so sure? And if by chance, it were true? Do the souls of their children mean less than a diploma?

Has it not often happened that the influence of such Christian parents in their social and civic life was practically nothing as far as bringing the doctrines of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church to bear on those domains?

And even though they neglected nothing of the essential practices of their religion, was it not primarily mere formality rather than solid convictions; conformity or fashion rather than true worship? There was a great disparity between their external actions, their attitudes and real prayer, the living knowledge of the gift of God?

Is not following the doctrines and the morality of Christ nothing more than letting them be evident in my life and my family?

The world must be made over. In the light of an Apocalypse, terrible ruins have been effected. The edifice that was the European world appeared solid; the foundation stone was deficient. Are we going to build the new world on an equally fragile base? If we are, then, the causes remaining the same, the results must inevitably be the same. And we shall continue indefinitely to see renewed destructions. If God has no place in the foundations of the City with all that His inclusion implies, then how can the City remain standing? That is a thought expressed in an ancient psalm; there is no exception — the truth of this fact remains. The stability of nations and of society is bound up with eternal principles.

Am I sufficiently convinced of this? Do I not have much more confidence in human formulas than in the rule of complete truth? Do I not unconsciously try to establish human life only upon the human? Am I not still and always, in spite of the lesson in world events, the victim of a deficient ideal, of inadequate principles?

I must Christianize my Christianity. I must make it evident in every department of my life — in my relations with my family and with society; in the opinions I hold regarding national and international issues. In all that depends on me, there shall be one hundred percent Christianity.

FAMILY AFFECTIONS.

THE FAMILY spirit, that traditional ensemble of convictions, ideals, and domestic practices which constitute the sacred patrimony of people united by the same blood, can exist without a very strong affection among the members. The family spirit is in itself something precious; but when it is merely a sort of collective egotism, it has been blemished; it is a beautiful fruit injured by a worm.

What an inspiring and noble reality family affection is! One author refers to it poetically:

“...Beautiful families that travel as a group and as a choir on the road to heaven after the pattern of stars that are united in constellations in the firmament...”

How we ought to pity those husbands or wives and often young boys and girls who find the hours spent at home long; those husbands and wives who are bored with each other; those brothers and sisters who find one another's company monotonous and whose glance is ever on the door, the gate or the garage!

Mutual Love of Parents and Children: Joseph and Mary did not grow bored with Jesus; Jesus did not tire of the company of Mary and Joseph. It is said that love does not go backward. We do not find too many examples of parents who do not love their offspring but how many children neglect their father and mother with painful disregard! They explain it by saying that young people like to be together. But there is a time for everything. There are some who do not make enough of the part of the home in their lives. How strange it is that children can be so loving when they are little, so demonstrative, and when they grow up so adept at saddening their parents?

Brotherly and Sisterly Love: Where will we find love if not between brothers and sisters? "Who then will love you," Bishop Louis Baunard asks, "if you do not love your brother? It is like loving yourself. I believe the etymology of the word 'frater', brother, is made up of these two words *fere alter*, that is nearly another self."

Adrien Albert Marie de Mun, the Count de Mun wrote in his "Memoirs," "It is sweet to me to have to speak in the plural when recalling the first years of my existence. I have a twin brother who has never been so much as a step away from me in my career. My life is his life, my joys have been his, and his successes mine. It is not Anatole and Armand (Adrien), he and I, it is we."

Marshal Hubert Lyautey had a brother who was a colonel during the war of 1914; this brother manifested to all who spoke to him not only his admiration for Lyautey, the Governor of Morocco, but his deep affection.

One only had to hear Father Foch, a fine type of Jesuit, mention his brother Marshal Ferdinand Foch to sense his love; though he showed a complete reserve, it was more eloquent than any discourse; his was a warmth of heart which a few restrained but touching words sufficed to express.

There should be place in the home for the affection that grandparents, uncles and aunts deserve.

On the children's birthdays, why not invite the godparents; they would enter better into their office. "Men and women who have held children at the baptismal font, I remind you that you will have to render an account of them before God." For their part, the children will get a better realization of this beautiful institution of Christian sponsorship.

If all the members of the family are to understand one another and love one another, each one must have a great virtue. The same training and the same blood are not sufficient; self-conquest is necessary. Bishop Jacques Bossuet expressed it well: "Natures are always sufficiently opposite in character to create frequent friction in a habitual society. Each one has his particular disposition, his prejudices, his habits. One sees himself at such close range and one sees oneself from so many angles, with so many faults in the most trifling occurrences! One grows weary, imperfection repels, human weakness makes itself felt more and more, so that it is necessary to conquer oneself at every hour."

THE HIERARCHY OF DUTIES.

APOSTOLIC work if carried on inopportune or immoderately can take a woman away from her home too much.

Beyond a doubt, there are immense needs: help for the sick, catechetical instructions, guild meetings for the Sisters, spiritual conferences, and in all of these, great charity can be exercised. It is much better for a woman to spend her time in such things than in lounging, or in numerous and useless visits, in exploring for the hundredth time some enticing department store. Nevertheless, the duties of the home remain her principal work: To plan, to arrange, to mend, to clean, to sew, to beautify, to care for the children. Insignificant duties? But what would that matter if they represented the Will of God? Are we not too often tempted to want a change? Impetuous zeal, poorly directed service, caprice under the guise of generosity seek to substitute for daily duty which perhaps has not much glamour about it but which is, just the same, wanted by God.

Would not the greatest charity in such a case be not to engage in works of charity but to remain faithfully at home and devote oneself to works which no one will speak of and which will win no one's congratulations? Later when the children have grown up and settled, there may be leisure; then a large share in the apostolate will be open according to one's strength and time. Until then, my nearest neighbor, without being the least bit exclusive about it but merely judging with a well instructed understanding, will be this little world that has established itself in my home...

Another danger besides excessive apostolic works that might ensnare some wives and mothers of families would be to give exaggerated place to exercises of piety. Did not one of the characters in a novel by Georges Duhamel lament this tendency: "I have heard priests say that some women have spoiled their married life by excessive attendance at religious ceremonies and they sighed, 'Why did they get married if they had a religious vocation!' Yes."

There are unfortunately some husbands so superficially Christian that they see exaggeration in the most elementary and normal practice of piety on the part of the wife and mother. That is only too sadly true! Their judgment is worth nothing.

We are referring only to an actual excess, which would really be considered such by a competent judge.

There is no doubt that a married woman, if she is a good manager and is not encumbered by some job outside the home, can find time for normal religious exercises and can even provide for meditation, spiritual reading and a relatively frequent assistance at Mass and reception of Holy Communion; time, after all, is something that varies in its possibility for adaptations and compressibility and woman excels in the heart of putting many things into a small place...

If she suspects that her husband finds certain exterior acts of piety exaggerated, attendance at weekday Mass for instance, let her increase her private devotions somewhat, a little more meditation or spiritual reading when he is not around; whether he is right or not, it is better not to irritate him if grave consequences might result. That is how Elisabeth Leseur managed; never did she betray the least annoyance when disturbed in her devotions; she always answered her husband's call or his outbursts of irritation with a pleasant face.

Never neglect a duty but observe the order of their importance.
