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Teaching ---
ADU 8744

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YOUR
CHILD
ABOUT
GOD



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TEACHING YOUR CHILD ABOUT GOD

By Gerard A. Pottebaum

Remember your life as an infant, or at two or four? Perhaps an event returns from the haze, but only as a shadow, through a glass, darkly. It's all a mystery. It's the child's world.

Children live in a wonder-filled world of mystery. It's a mystery to the child, for instance, why he has to eat at certain times, why he must dress warm in cold weather, or why he can't turn on the gas stove when he pleases, or stick hairpins in wall sockets. Eventually, though, he learns to participate in this world in spite of his incomprehension. He never ceases to investigate and to discover.

And before he reaches the age of reason — and before we know it — he has developed lifelong living habits and attitudes.

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These habits and attitudes represent his response to the mysteries that make up his world. So, while helping the child survive these mysteries, parents fittingly should teach him about God, the Mystery of mysteries.

The child learns to live his natural life and God's life in the same lesson. Parents can teach both aspects by building God into the child's life so that as he discovers the mysteries of this world, he will be led to discover the mystery of God. Eventually the mysteries of his world die to understanding and God our heavenly Father raises the child to a new life, the life of Christ. The child's consciousness as a son of God begins to awaken. He reflects the image of the Risen Christ. He participates in the mystery of salvation.

Christ Is the Mystery

The center of this great mystery is Christ — “the mystery which has been hidden for ages and generations, but now is clearly shown to His saints. To them God willed to make known how rich in glory is this mystery among the Gentiles — Christ in you, your hope of glory” (Col. 1:26,27).

For centuries God kept this mystery concealed. Neither man nor angels knew.

When the time was right, He began to

reveal His plan of salvation, in the Old Testament. But not until Christ came were those revelations fulfilled. Christ is the mystery of God revealed.

Today the mystery of Christ is communicated to men through the Church. Parents, as members of Christ's Church, know the mystery of Christ. And as members of Christ's Mystical Body, they participate in the mystery of Christ. It is the parents' holy duty to reveal this mystery to their children.

Christ Must Be a "Habit"

Parents themselves need to participate in this mystery of Christ in order properly to reveal it to their children. They need to make Christ a "habit," because the child learns about God through the habits of his parents. And as the child learns living habits, parents must help him get into the habit of God.

A child hears his parents speak. First he does not understand. But he watches, listens, and finally he speaks. No formal language course.

So with God. A child sees his parents pray. First he does not understand. But he watches, wonders, and at last he presses his dimple-knuckled hands together and smiles. He speaks the language of God. He prays.

Since the child's response starts long before he reaches the age of reason, it is obvious that parents must create the kind of environment that will enable the child to *experience* God's presence.

Crayons, Paper and an Offering

For some time a certain mother and father tried to think of a way to teach their preschool child the meaning of offering at Sunday Mass everything he did during the week. Unlike the wage-earning father, the child does not see money as symbolic of his world. So putting money into the collection wouldn't work for the child. But crayons and paper would.

At a parent-educator meeting the parents talked over the idea of drawing a cross, dividing it with squares that the child could color each time he offered something to God. And since children are basically imitators, the mother and father decided they would each have a cross, too. With the enthusiastic approval of their pastor, they would all drop their crosses into the collection basket each Sunday.

The child's eyes glowed when Sunday came. The Mass now meant something to him but nothing particularly new to the parents, until later.

In the excitement, the child lost his offering, of course. They all three searched under the kneeler. Then, before they knew it, the usher passed them by, leaving them holding their crosses. For the first time, the mother and father realized how the chosen people in the Old Testament must have felt when they wanted to make a worthy offering but couldn't.

This story may seem insignificant, but in their attempt to create an environment that would draw their child closer to God, God drew these parents themselves more deeply into the mystery of salvation, the mystery of His love. This is far from insignificant. They became "as little children" and were drawn closer to God's kingdom.

God Set Up a Partnership

The salvation of parents is divinely integral with that of their children. God made parents His partners. God has a special plan for them, just as He does for each one of their children. Parents must adopt this — God's — viewpoint to teach their children about our heavenly Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit. Their teaching must include all Three Persons.

If parents take God's viewpoint, their teaching about the Blessed Trinity will spring from love. For God is Love. And

just as God made the world out of love, so parents must create an atmosphere of love wherein their children can live. They do this by the love they express between each other as husband and wife, and with their children.

Even though they do not stop to analyze it — until years later when they have their own family — the children sense their mother's love for their father and for them, and they sense their father's loving response. In little ways parents create an atmosphere of love. As the child discovers this love, he begins to discover the great mystery of love — God.

But Parents Are Not God

Parents undermine this preparation when they take God in hand and from their own point of view say to a child who has misbehaved, "God will punish you for that!" First of all, it probably isn't true for the preschool child. Secondly, it gives the child the impression that all God does is punish. Thirdly, it jeopardizes the relationship of security in God that is a by-product of love.

Without false references to God, the child under the influence of love will grasp the meaning of God's love when parents tell him, for example, that God made the world because He loves. Deep in the re-

cesses of his mind, the child's past experiences come into play. This is the first and most important lesson that parents must teach their children about God — that God is Love. They teach it by loving.

Look for the Right Moment

One of the best times to develop security in God's love is when parents tuck the child into bed. The bed is soft. The way the pillow sinks under his head is familiar. He feels safe and secure. He relaxes under the warm covers, and as the parent tucks them around him, in the same gesture, he kisses the child and whispers in his ear, "God bless you."

It was later than usual one night when a father tucked his child into bed. An hour later, the child called the father, who went to the bedroom "to lower the boom." But he changed his mind when the child explained, "Daddy, you forgot to say, 'God bless you.'"

The blessing had become an important part of the child's bedtime ritual. He had grown into the habit of God.

These habits need to be cultivated before the child reaches the age of reason. The older the child, the harder it becomes to introduce new habits. The parent who wishes his child God's blessings for the first time when the child is 12, is apt to

get a peculiar look, because the child knows the expression is out of character for his parent.

Good religious habits bring children to discover God's protecting love. An electric storm comes up and mother lights a blessed candle to remind the family that God is present. She tells the little ones, "You don't need to be afraid. God is with us." The sun sets like a fireball and father calls everyone to the window. "Look at the bright sky!" he says. "Didn't God make the world colorful!"

These examples are effective only if parents themselves feel God's presence in these events. Whatever the events might be that work best for the individual parent, the important point in all cases is to project into the heart and mind of the child a *loving* God.

Teaching Virtue: Sharing

As the child grows older, he will begin to understand that he responds to God's love by sharing with others. "God loves your brother John," father explains to his daughter. "When God sees you share candy with him, He knows you love John, too. But when you hurt someone God loves, then God thinks you don't care about what He loves, and that you don't care about loving Him either."

Learning to share helps the child become a generous adult. For the preschooler, sharing isn't easy. Parents shouldn't insist on a child's sharing something only when the child is keyed up to enjoy it himself. They can, however, create situations when the child will find it easier to share and will then taste the satisfaction of being generous. Before the child has asked for a candy bar, for instance, the parent can offer one to him and ask him to share it with his sister. If parents ask the child to share only when he's keyed up, they're asking the child to swim in deep water before he has learned the strokes.

From the very beginning, the child needs to learn to respond to God's love by loving God's people. If he learns this lesson, he will respect people's property, share what he has with the needy, and be honest with others. He is then on his way to developing the virtues necessary for a strong moral character: justice, prudence, temperance, fortitude.

A Mature Sense of Time

The foundation of the strong moral character was laid in Baptism when the child received the gifts of faith, hope, and charity. If we understand these virtues, we also understand better how we partici-

pate in the mystery of Christ. Think of them as analogous with the three dimensions of time, relating faith with the past, hope with the future, and love with the present.

Through faith we believe all that God has revealed. We believe that He has told us all we need to know to get to heaven. We believe that Christ, the Son of God, came to save mankind.

Through hope we yearn for Christ to come again. We long for the joys of heaven. We seek the vision of God.

Charity (love) — the greatest of the three — is the meeting place of faith and hope, just as the past and future meet in the present. Through charity we love our neighbor because God loves him, and we love God, Who is always present and Who has no past and no future. When Moses asked God what he should tell the Israelites if they ask His name, God answered, "I am Who am" (Ex. 3:14).

Through Baptism our children are born into this life of virtue, just as through natural birth they were born into time. During the child's early years he begins to awaken to a sense of the past, present, and future. In this same period, parents need to awaken him to a sense of faith, hope, and charity.

Parents create for themselves and simul-

taneously for their children a life of faith, hope, and charity by developing a mature sense of time. They know that the past cannot change, just as the word of God is unchangeable. Their vision of the future goes beyond elaborate plans of retirement and a search for self-comfort. Making the best of the moment at hand is their main concern. In this way, parents prepare for the child an environment that will allow his baptismal graces to penetrate every dimension of his life as circumscribed by time. And as the child awakens to a sense of life in time, so will he awaken to a sense of his new life, which is of eternity — God-life.

Teach Love by Loving

Without going into further detail, it can be said that developing virtuous attitudes and habits in the child begins with the parents, not the lesson or the child. And just as the most important moment is the one we're living right now, so also the greatest of all the virtues is charity — love in action. Children are endowed with an uncanny intuition that enables them to sense vibrations of selfishness behind words that speak of love.

Without the environment of love that parents create, words remain words. If the child is to learn anything, particularly

things about God, parents must start with something the child knows, something he has experienced. The reason that some parents succeed in teaching the child that God is Love is because they have taken God's point of view: they themselves love.

This doesn't mean that the child must have achieved a certain maturity before you can show him a crucifix and tell him this is Jesus, the Love of God in the flesh. You don't strip his environment of these articles. Life isn't so academically hygienic. The point is that before a person can learn something new, he must have a corresponding experience of life.

In this case, if a child does not develop a mature sense of time, for example, he will have difficulty growing to a mature life of virtue. In turn, he will have difficulty knowing God. And if the child has not developed a sense of compassion for others who suffer pain or, more fundamentally, if he himself has not suffered, explaining Jesus' suffering will mean nothing to him.

God Speaks in Nature

Through his daily experiences the child learns about God, because God speaks to man not through a good angel sitting on his right shoulder but through the world, its joys, sorrows, needs, abundances. So

one of the first lessons parents must teach children is to listen to God speak through nature.

We must understand that God doesn't shout. He speaks in silence. This use of the word "silence" does not describe the absence of noise, but an inner disposition toward what goes on around us. Through honking horns, the whine of buses, and the traffic officer's shrill whistle, God speaks to us about how urban His people have become. Through rattling hammers and barking foremen God speaks of His people's strength. Through the pop, flutter, and whirr of threshing machines, God speaks of His people's use of the land. Through a squeaking back-yard swing, God speaks to the child of the peace in simply going back and forth, back and forth. Through the purr of cardboard on bicycle spokes, God speaks of the thrill of speed.

Learning to Listen

A story about Elias (3 Kgs. 19:11-13) serves well as an introduction to children in the way God speaks. Elias once was waiting to hear from God. He thought that since God was so powerful, surely He would speak in a great and strong wind that would knock down mountains. But, "the Lord is not in the wind," the Bible story goes. So Elias figured the

Lord would speak in an earthquake, then a fire; but none of these. At last, the air whistled gently, "and when Elias heard it, he covered his face with his mantle . . ." and knew then the voice of God.

In the silence of our hearts, we meet God. "Silence . . ." the great French novelist Mauriac wrote, "is the beginning of eternity." So through teaching their children to know silence, parents lead them to discover the beginning of eternity, God-life, here on earth.

This union with God's life is sacramental in origin, baptismal. At that moment, however, God does not destroy man's nature with His life. Through His Son, He raises man's fallen, human nature and works through it as the leaven in dough.

When parents awaken the child to what is genuine and what is phony in the world around him, they are preparing the ground for this wheat seed of God to grow up to become the bread of the world. Thereby, the child already while still earthbound begins to share in God's kingdom of heaven. "The kingdom of heaven," Christ said, "is like leaven, which a woman took and buried in three measures of flour, until all of it was leavened" (Matt. 13:33).

The child's life with God is as intimate as leaven and dough. It is as intimate as

the life of parents with their children. God works through parents to provide leaven in their children's lives. He capitalizes on the nature of the parent-child relationship to bring generation after generation to an awareness of Himself.

Forming Little Witnesses

When a child goes to a neighbor friend's house to play, parents frequently are heard to say, "Be good now . . . and don't get into trouble." In a way, they're joking. But then again, they are serious.

What their child does reflects the kind of home parents have created. He also reflects the kind of people his parents are as persons. What's more, his actions reflect on his parents as persons. If their youngster acts up, they are responsible. The child is not only a witness to what goes on in his home; he is also a witness to his parents as persons. This is the way God made parents and children, "and He saw that it was very good" (Gen. 1:31).

Christ takes advantage of the intimate nature of the parent-child relationship. He did not bypass it, ignore it, or destroy it when the child was baptized or the parents were married. The graces of these two sacraments cannot work successfully unless the parent-child relationship functions healthily.

When Christ ascended into heaven, however, He did not tell those gathered around Him, "Be good now . . . and stay out of trouble." He quite specifically commanded, "You shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

Parents Reflect Christ

The goal parents must strive for in teaching their children about God goes beyond rearing good boys and girls who stay out of trouble. Parents must teach each of their children about God by forming them into witnesses of Christ. They must reflect the person of Christ to each child, just as the child reflects the person of his parents to the neighbors.

This is the foundation parents must build upon in order successfully to teach their children by word of mouth about the Blessed Trinity. Teaching children to be Christian witnesses enables them to discover that the Supreme Being is a personal God, a God of love. In this way, the child *experiences* God in his life. He not only knows God with his mind, but he feels God in his heart and hands.

With this understanding, let us consider now how parents can, as the child grows older, explain in words about the Trinity.

Teaching God the Father

The child learns about God the Father

first through the impression he has of his own father. And having painted, drawn, and created things himself, he can then appreciate knowing that God his heavenly Father created the world — out of nothing.

Parents must keep in mind one basic principle when teaching children about God by word: Lead the child to beliefs that later teaching can build upon. The story of creation, for example, if poorly told, can lead children to false beliefs. Parents should omit reference to the six days and the seventh day of rest, as if God had worked so hard that He needed to relax. Nor is it wise to quote the text that says that Eve came from Adam's rib. The rib is a symbolic device meaningful to adults. Such detail leaves the literal-minded child with false impressions. Later teaching cannot build on these impressions without first correcting them.

Children this age do not require elaborate explanations. If the child knows he can trust his parents in other things, it will be sufficient to tell him simply that God made the sun, the stars, the earth and everything on it.

Children should not be given the impression that God the Father is a bearded old man. They are apt to think that He is just that. The picture destroys the

dynamism and the mystery of God. Instead, a hand is the accepted visual expression because it suggests the creative activity by which we know the Father.

Use the Bible

While working through nature, parents also teach their children about our heavenly Father through using stories from the Bible. Nowhere in the Bible is our heavenly Father spoken of as an old man. By using the Bible, parents reveal God to their children in the way God revealed Himself to all men. So the biblical method of teaching about God is God's own method: it expresses abstract truths in concrete terms. In the Bible, God speaks through His creation and His creatures.

The catechism, on the contrary, contains truths in an abstract, fleshless form. As such, the catechism is not a useful tool for parents.

The Bible, however, was not written for children. So parents will need to select the proper stories and retell them to fit the age level of their child. Parents can find Bible stories for children in their local bookstores. There is no mystery involved in what stories will or won't work and what method of telling is or isn't suitable — just common sense. Never should the truth be distorted. There is no need to

“sugar-coat.” Parents should watch for these failures in children’s books.

Samuel Is a “Natural”

The story of Samuel (1 Kgs. 3:1-10) is a good example of a natural story for parents to tell children. The story is well chosen to awaken the child to a sense of God’s presence.

Samuel was just a small boy who one night heard a voice calling him: “Samuel, Samuel!” He thought it was the priest with whom he was living. “Here I am,” Samuel answered and ran to the priest’s room. But the priest told him, “I didn’t call you. Go back to bed now.”

So Samuel went back to bed, only to be awakened again by the voice: “Samuel, Samuel!” He ran to the priest again and told him, “Here I am. You called me.”

“No, Samuel,” the priest said, “I didn’t call you. Go back to your bed and if you hear the voice calling again, answer it by saying, ‘Speak to me, Lord. I am listening.’” The priest knew it was God Who called Samuel.

So Samuel went back to bed and God called him again: “Samuel, Samuel!”

“Speak, Lord,” Samuel said, “I am listening.” And God spoke to Samuel within his heart.

Parents can retell the Bible story in

a way such as this to make the point that our heavenly Father is with us as He was with Samuel. And He speaks to us by putting good thoughts in our heads, and by helping us to see His presence in the world around us.

The Samuel story is particularly good because it is characteristic of the nature of the Holy Bible: God speaking to men, the story of God's love, and man's response to that love.

So the value of biblical stories such as this one is not primarily entertainment. In retelling all biblical accounts, parents must lead their children to respond to God's word, His love. They must show the child the presence of God here and now.

In this way, parents draw the child not only to a knowledge of our heavenly Father, but also to a personal relationship with Him, through Christ. Similarly, as pointed out earlier, parents use nature — the child's environment and his response to it — to lead him to discover God, our heavenly Father, and to participate in the mystery of His love.

Teaching God the Son

Before parents tell about God the Father, the child could have already met God the Son. Perhaps he'll ask about a

crucifix on the wall. "That is Jesus," the parent will explain. "He died on the Cross and then came back to a glorious life again so that we can get to heaven and see our heavenly Father." Then the parent might kiss the crucifix or just tell Jesus, "Thank you." The child will probably do the same. Unless the child asks more questions, this explanation and gesture will do. If it fits the parent's personality, the child will be back for more.

Perhaps the child's first questions about Jesus will come at Christmas, with the Babe in the manger. Children love the Christmas story and readily associate themselves with the child Jesus. However, parents need to guard against overstressing the baby Jesus. When a father is gone from his family on a trip, and mother wants to remind the children of their loving father, she doesn't run to the family album for his baby picture. She shows a picture of the grown man.

Similarly, parents should not emphasize the beautiful Christmas story to the point where the child is left with the impression that Jesus never grew up. Frequently this impression is carried over to the point where not the Risen Christ, but baby Jesus, constitutes the Eucharistic Presence.

Jesus Is Met at Mass

Besides the crucifix on the wall or the crib at Christmas, the child will also meet Jesus at Mass when his parents take him along to the Communion railing. He will sense his parents' respect and imitate them like a shadow.

A three-year-old boy once asked his father, "Why can't I have some?"

"Jesus wants to come to you, too," the father explained. "Until you are older, you just tell Jesus you can hardly wait. He'll understand."

And so will the child.

In one parish, the pastor blesses the very young with the Sacred Host. In addition to its sacramental value, this practice helps to develop the child's wonder about the mystery of the Eucharist.

If the child asks how Jesus gets into the host, parents can simply explain, "When the priest says the words Jesus told him to say, the white host changes into Jesus Himself, even though we can't see it." The firmness of the child's belief in this mystery is a reflection of the parents' belief.

Use the Church Year

Parents can create activities where teaching about the Son of God comes naturally. The best example is that given

by holy mother Church and her Liturgical Year, in which she celebrates Christ's life and work. Palm Sunday, for example, stands out as a good time to parade through the house with blessed palms. The parents can explain the reason for the palms, and then together with the children can pretend that they are cheering Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. It's a five-minute affair, but worth a lifetime of influence. The Church Year offers many such activities.

Lighting the Advent-wreath candles (and blowing them out), getting ashes on Ash Wednesday, blessing the fields on Rogation days — each offers an opportunity to teach another facet of our relationship with God. Having children keep a Liturgical Year calendar in their bedroom reminds them each day to ask, "What day is this?" This question opens for parents the chance to tell about the saints and various events in Christ's life. The last bedtime ritual is marking off another day with a crayon.

Teaching the Holy Spirit

Following a family life that is Christ-centered as expressed in daily, virtuous habits, in personal prayer, and in celebrations reflecting the liturgical season, the child's soul awakens to the life of God,

the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, within him.

The Holy Spirit is probably the most forgotten, and seemingly the most difficult, of the Three Persons to explain to the preschool child. He will know of the Holy Spirit from hearing his parents pray. He will himself know the Sign of the Cross. However, he really won't be much aware of the Third Person.

When trying to explain about the Holy Spirit, the inclination is to use the dove and tongue of fire. These symbols are too sophisticated for very young children. Here again, rather than trying to explain, parents should help the child savor the mystery of the Holy Spirit. Even in the Bible, the dove that appeared above Christ's head at His Baptism was not seen by anyone. On Pentecost, the tongues were not seen outside the room; people outside saw only the effect on the Apostles when they burst forth with Christ's message.

Parents can introduce the child to the Spirit of God not only by teaching the child to speak to God, but also by helping him learn to listen to God.

Once parents have firmly established in the child a sense of God's presence as loving Father and as protecting King and Shepherd, they may ask the child to

“quietly listen to God, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, speak to you. You won’t hear a voice, but the good thoughts that come to you in the quiet come from the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit within you.” Naturally you can’t expect the child to listen quietly when the television is blaring or when he’d rather wrestle. Parents need to watch for the right moment.

The Personal Approach

Parents need to accompany their teaching about God with meditation and conversation with God. The God they teach is a *personal* God. Their children need to learn to speak to Him in their own words. At this age, adult formulas are meaningless. Forcing children to learn them makes conversation with God — prayer — difficult. So formal prayer is not the place to start; they will pick up the adult prayers just through hearing parents use them.

Parents can help children learn to speak to God in their own words by making it a habit themselves. Mothers especially influence a child’s prayer life through the day by dropping little remarks to God. This does not exempt the fathers. One night a father said to God, “Thank you, Father, for giving mother and me such a fine little boy and girl to care for.”

Without prompting, the five-year-old girl prayed, "Thank you, dear God, for giving us this daddy." The Lord could hardly refuse to bless such prayer.

Summing Up

In teaching children about God and their relationship to Him, it is clear that parents cannot start with an abstract definition of the Blessed Trinity. Nor is it enough just to teach about God the Creator, or about Jesus our Redeemer, in terms of past events. They must make the mystery of God present here and now. They must begin with showing the child their own love, their own witness to Christ. From the relationship he experiences with his father and mother, the child becomes oriented to discover our heavenly Father.

Parents also reflect the image of the Son of God; they show the child the way to the Father. Through parents' own Christian witness, the child discovers the presence of Christ in life here and now. Through stories about Christ's life, the person of Christ takes dimension. And finally through speaking to God and listening to Him, the child's soul awakens to the life of God, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, within him. In other words, as the child grows, his world of mystery unfolds, it reveals to him the Mystery of

mysteries, God, the Blessed Trinity.

The child learns about each Person by leaning on the experiences of life. Each step toward a pure, childlike understanding of the Blessed Trinity must be reflected in a corresponding growth in his spiritual life. Then the teaching he receives is rich and full of life. The grace of Baptism in his soul penetrates this life with the glory of a redeemed man. He participates in the mystery of love.

“Of Such Is the Kingdom . . . ”

When teaching about God, parents need always to remember what Jesus said about little children: “Let the little children be . . . for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14). We must be as docile to them as they are to us. Too often we aren’t.

We adults sometimes take advantage of the very young — the little people. We protect them, make decisions for them, read and write about them, watch them imitate our adult ways, and laugh at the kids’ stuff they pull. Usually we are conscientious about caring for them and are increasingly concerned about educating them. Sometimes though we overdo it by failing to see what we can learn from the little people.

With a certain amount of air in our

cheeks we don't easily let them forget that we've been around. We've been to school. We know what life is about, and God, and religion. Everything we do is so much more important than what the little people do. We know how to distinguish between people on this side of the track and those on the other side; or between the white man and the Negro; or between a Catholic and a non-Catholic; or Democrat and Republican. The little people can't even tell the difference between right and wrong. That makes us pretty smart and them pretty dull. They've got everything to learn, and all from us.

One day not long ago a father watched his three-year-old girl standing quietly for ten historic minutes gazing out of the living-room window. It was a cold winter day. The sun had slipped down almost out of sight. The dimming light slowly but distinctly changed the colors of the neighborhood trees and houses. The little girl had rested her chin on the sill. It seemed so fixed there that if she walked away, her head would have stayed. Then her mother called her for supper, and when the little girl turned, her arms fell limp to her sides, and with sagging, burdened shoulders, she said, "Oh dear, it's going to get dark again today."

How is a kid as dull as that ever going to learn about God?

On another occasion this little girl's sister, older and smarter by a year, was sitting in her father's lap watching a movie in which appeared a crippled boy. He was three or four, another of the little people. With his twisted legs, he walked like an ostrich. The little girl squirmed in her father's lap. She turned her head to him. He noticed she had forced the smile to her face. She clearly did not know what to make of how she felt. Then she said, "Daddy, I think I feel like I'm going to cry."

But they'd be just kid's tears. She'll get over it. After she becomes adult and matures, such feelings won't be so strong.

One day after Mass the father of these two little people felt a surge of the educator in him and he asked them who was in the Sacred Host. (The more exact question perhaps should have been "Who is present under the appearance of the white host?" but he was coming down to kid level.)

"Jesus!" they said too quickly . . . too easy a question, obviously.

"So what's He doing there?" the father asked without considering what he was asking, much less what the answer might be.

But just as spontaneously as before — as if it were a standard catechism question with a pat answer — the little people frankly replied, “He’s drinking 7-Up.”

It caught him off guard. But since he didn’t have an answer, he asked himself the same question: just what *is* Jesus doing in the Sacred Host? The answer seemed too complicated to go into at that moment. Where did the little people get their idea?

He and their mother had told them again and again that Jesus was really present in the Sacred Host. How much more “really present” can someone be than to be drinking 7-Up? Didn’t Our Lord ask for something to eat when He appeared to the Apostles after He rose from the dead? As far as the little people were concerned, Jesus could not have been doing anything more enjoyable. And the father wondered again what it meant *to him* that Jesus was really present in the Sacred Host. The fact came as a discovery. Maybe these little people aren’t so dull after all. He watched to see.

Parents “Discover” Little People

Then a few weeks before the new baby was due he heard one of them ask their mother, “Is *God* in your tummy?” That had never occurred to them either; not

that way. But it was a fact that went beyond the mystery big people concern themselves with — whether it is a boy or a girl. God knows. And just as surely as God breathed life into Adam, the breath of God is the unborn baby's source of life, its soul.

The life of little people the father saw now as a life of discovery. What big people often take for granted, he saw little people penetrate to reveal the truth and often Truth itself. Even day and night, for the little people, are new and mysterious, and the two need not necessarily have to follow each other.

Yet, for some strange reason, even though night need not follow day, the little people know something is wrong and sad and they want to cry when they see a boy walk like an ostrich.

Though the father knew children are notorious imitators, he discovered that these must be the things in children that Jesus told the big people to imitate. Not to be childish, but to be able to discover the real world. To be of faith, yet not take life for granted. To be leaders, yet also be able to follow. He saw that big people could in such ways allow God to become a more intimate and dynamic force in their lives in a natural way, like the

natural way He is present in the lives of children.

In the cycle of day and night, and in life in the womb, they could discover the presence of the Creator. In the suffering of a crippled boy they could feel with genuine compassion the suffering of Christ. They could know the meaning of Christ's Real Presence in the Sacred Host not only as an isolated Presence locked in a tabernacle: they could discover that Presence as an event penetrating and permanently locked in the tabernacle of life, where God, the Holy Spirit, dwells.

The spirit of discovery in the lives of the little people will then belong also to the lives of adults, the big people, who live on one or the other side of the track; who are either white or black; Catholic, Protestant, or Jew; who know the difference between right and wrong . . . and whom the little people imitate.

“Of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

NIHIL OBSTAT—John L. Reedy, C.S.C.
Censor Deputatus

IMPRIMATUR—✠ Most Rev. Leo A. Pursley, D.D.
Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend

Third Printing, July, 1965

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TEACHING YOUR
CHILD ABOUT GOD
originally appeared in
a special series of
articles entitled:
PARENTS
AS TEACHERS.

This pamphlet is published in response to the requests of those people who read it first in . . .

