

Coakley, Mary Lewis  
- The how of sex ...  
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**HOW**  
*of*  
*Sex Education*

*by*  
Mary Lewis Coakley

A QUEEN'S WORK  
PAMPHLET

187

# The HOW of SEX EDUCATION

by  
Mary Lewis Coakley



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THE QUEEN'S WORK

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THE QUEEN'S WORK

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**P**EOPLE talk quite seriously about whether or not sex instruction should be given children; but in this day, and in this country, regardless of what we say, children *are* given sex instruction. The issue is not *whether* but *how*. Should instruction be disseminated by movies, magazine ads, TV skits, newspaper stories, smutty brochures surreptitiously passed around in school, and pornographic scrawlings on back fences; or should it be supplied firsthand by us parents, with all its religious overtones and undertones? The question answers itself, for the object of sex instruction from the Christian viewpoint is to educate the will and to inculcate the virtue of purity, not just to furnish information.

### WHERE DO WE STAND?

Yet, important as is our duty to give spoken instruction as a means of this education, what we say is less important than our own attitude toward sex, since the latter, without a word's being uttered, will be betrayed in the general course of living, or it will color whatever spoken instruction we do essay.

For example, suppose we regard sex as dirty and nasty, can we fancy that our children will not sense this, and be affected by it?

Or if we are puritanical and priggish, then our self-conscious evasiveness will give us away.

Again, if we brush the subject aside with Olympian "sang-froid," that artificial posturing will undoubtedly be marked by our percipient little boys and girls, as will the martyr pretense that sex is something "a woman must put up with."

The snickering, sly attitude, or the more healthful lusty sense of humor, will also be apparent, even if we are careful that the children never hear one of our racy jokes; the sudden silence when they enter the room on occasions, or the silly smirk crossing our faces when it is mentioned, will speak more loudly than any vocable phrase.

And the coldly matter-of-fact, pseudo-scientific viewpoint which puts sex on the level of merely animal function, performed by all living beings including alley cats, if it be ours, will also transmit itself to the youngsters we are supposedly training as Christians.

So before we tackle the business of sex instruction, let's examine our own consciences to see where we stand.

Reverence, of course, should be our guidepost — reverence of God; reverence of self; reverence of others, children of God; and reverence for our bodies, the temples of the Holy Ghost; as well as reverence for marriage which is a sacrament. Sex then takes on a sacred character, and we begin to understand the august privilege of cooperating with God in bringing into existence

beings who will live eternally. Touched with joy and ecstasy, as an outward sign of the spiritual oneness with another human being, creatures of God use an intimate act He has ordained, and thereby they may, if He wills, prepare the habitat for a most precious soul.

Taking these ideas as a springboard, we plunge into the explicit instruction of sex as such.

### OMIT MYTHOLOGY

Since every person is dependent upon God, and since in the final analysis He made every person—using the parents' bodies as instruments—it is a bit undignified, if not downright mendacious, to fashion fables of storks, doctors' bags, and cabbage leaves. Moreover, the child will be less likely to apply to us later with his maturer sex questions if we fob him off with such vapid and dishonest answers initially.

### THE GOSPEL TRUTH

It is best in telling "the facts of life" to connect them with the Gospel story. Thus we further impress upon our youngsters' minds the sacred character of the sexual function. For instance, almost before Baby has learned his first nursery rhyme, he lisps the Hail Mary, so he has been saying each day: "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb." It is natural enough then, when he asks, as

children inevitably will: "Where do babies come from?" to answer: "God made you grow in your mommy's body, in a hollow place inside me, called the womb. When we say 'Blessed is the fruit of thy womb,' we mean blessed is the Baby Jesus, who came from His mother's womb, inside her."

And there's the common question: "How long does it take to make a baby, mama?" Instead of answering: "Nine months," or "Almost a year," and letting it go at that, we can add (at least for the school-aged child): "You can always count it up by remembering that the angel Gabriel appeared to the Blessed Mother on the feast of the Annunciation in March. Her Baby started to live and grow right away, but it took until Christmas — till December, that is — before Jesus was born."

Then to the question that one child of my acquaintance asked: "Mama, was I dead before I was born?" we can answer: "Of course not, darling. I'll read the Gospel story to you, which tells how Saint John leapt inside his mother's womb when the Blessed Mother came along with Jesus inside her. He couldn't leap if he were dead, could he?"

And when the child wants to know about the father's part, we can give some inkling by repeating Mary's question to Gabriel: "How can this be, since I know not man?" adding: "Yes, a mother has to know and love some man in a very special way, like



I know and love daddy, unless God works a miracle as He did when Jesus was born."

Of course, we should not spiritualize or romanticize to the point of nonintelligibility. We must be sure that we satisfy the child's curiosity of the moment or he may quite naturally seek satisfaction through the garbled tales of his playmates.

### ACCORDING TO HIS AGE

On the other hand, it is sensible to impart only that information suited to the child's age level. Detailed and scientific facts would be completely out of place at an early age. As the child grows older and wants more biological data, we can give it—and give it simply and clearly without vague flights of sentimentality and pseudo-religion, which do not spiritualize, but only obscure, sex. Actually, if we stick to real religion and to the Gospel story, which is certainly forthright, there is scant danger of misinformation and mystification.

### BIT BY BIT

Gradually the ideas will sink in, though we needn't be surprised if Sonny asks the same question at different stages of his development. He may want confirmation of his hazy notions; or he may at this later period be ready for more details; or he may have forgotten what we said before because at that time the facts were only of passing interest to him.

It is better anyhow to give information in small capsules rather than "en masse." If the child is young, he will not be able to digest much at once, and in the hopeless effort of trying, the facts will become distorted in his mind. In other words, he will translate the incomprehensible into terms of his own understanding; and the net result will be falsity. If he is older, adolescent for instance (assuming the unlikely eventuality that he has remained ignorant of sex until that age), sudden and complete knowledge will come as an emotional shock — another reason for the little-by-little method from babyhood up. Thinking somewhat more selfishly, I might add that it is harder on us parents, too, to wait until adolescence and then do all the instructing at once, for at that age the child is more emotional, more secretive, and more unapproachable.

### AT WHAT AGE?

But the question arises: just when should we dole out these small capsules? There can scarcely be an arbitrary "right age" for any special item of information, since so much depends upon the maturity of the individual child. One rule to go by, however, is to answer questions when they come up, in the degree and manner suited to his capacity.

And if no questions are asked? Well, if the child shows normal curiosity about other

things, it is highly doubtful that he lacks curiosity about this almost ubiquitous subject; more likely he has tapped another source of information, in which case it might be well to broach the subject ourselves. If we are pregnant, that fact will furnish a marvelous peg to hang our tale on: we can tell the child that we hope to have a little baby sister or brother for him soon, and then go on from there. Or a relative's expected baby is a handle to seize. Or we can ask simply, if bluntly: "Do you know how babies come?" We might find that we have some queer notions to correct.

### WHY MOTHERS GET GRAY

More usual, however, than the reticent child, is the little inquisitor who comes out with apparently unanswerable stumbers. What can we do? Well, whatever we do, we should not lie, and we should not refuse to reply, but surely on occasion it is permissible to stall for time. We can say: "I'll have to think that out, because it's hard to explain to little children." Or: "I'll tell you tonight after dinner." And then we must follow through on the promise.

Also we might ask: "Why do you want to know that?" and partially shape our answer by the child's motive for curiosity. That last might have saved a lot of trouble in the case of a friend whose first-grader son asked: "Mama, what's a virgin?"

She replied: "An unmarried woman."

But the child retorted: "Oh no, mama, the Blessed Mother was married to Saint Joseph, and Sister says she's a virgin."

I don't know how my friend wriggled out of that fix. Perhaps she could explain: "The Blessed Mother was a special kind of virgin. She was married, but Saint Joseph didn't help her have her baby, since Jesus, who was God, already had a Father, who was God too. That's what we mean when we say in the Angelus: 'She conceived of the Holy Ghost'."

### WHY DADDY'S BOY?

Speaking of the father's part, we usually flounder clumsily when we come to accounting for that, though one mother I know did very well. When asked by her little son: "If I come from inside you, why am I just as much daddy's boy as yours?" she explained: "To make a baby begin growing, there's an act of love between a man and a lady, so if daddy didn't love me, and I didn't love him in a special way, there couldn't have been any you."

Of course, in some instances, even that answer would prove unsatisfactory to the child, and then (assuming he is old enough to understand) we must launch into fuller exposition. Should we refuse to do so, the chances are that the child, having by our evasiveness grown self-conscious and also

more curious, will not come to us again with his questions, but perhaps will use the sources open to every schoolboy. Or perhaps his persistence with the question at the original asking may indicate he has already gleaned some "back-fence" information, and he is trying to check. If by fishing around tactfully, we find this to be the case, it is better to set him straight than to allow him to go on harboring false notions. We can explain that God has provided seeds of life in the man's body, and these the man, by a special embrace only grown-up people can use, must put into the woman's body, to make, if God wills, a baby. The actual physical details of the act need not be told before adolescence unless we are absolutely sure that the child has picked up information elsewhere.

### DON'T BE SHOCKED

One point we should always bear in mind is never to become shocked by the questions of our children. Often we impute to them wrong motives and attitudes because we are thinking subjectively. Normal children are curious about sex in the same way as they are curious about any other natural phenomenon. For instance, a little girl may ask innocently enough if she can start a baby growing now. And having some notion of the need for male cooperation, she may also ask if she can get Johnnie Doe, down the street, to help her.

It's up to us then to remind her that the act which starts babies is only possible when two people are completely grown up. Moreover it is a good act only if they are married.

### AND DON'T LAUGH

Neither should we laugh when the child's concepts are comically askew. At times, I'll admit, that puts a strain on us, for children can be very funny indeed. One of my favorite stories in point, was told me by an old friend. His seven-year-old came home from school one afternoon, and the pious grandmother asked her usual question: "What did you learn in catechism today?"

The little fellow replied: "We learned what the commandments mean—that is, all but the sixth. Sister said we didn't have to know what adultery meant, because only old people commit that." And then upon a moment's reflection, he added: "Gee, grandmother, you're awfully old. I bet you committed that sin lots and lots of times."

### FAMILY SECRETS

But seriously again, another thing to remember in our instruction on sex, is that it's a strictly individual affair, and we should speak singly to each child, that is, we should never talk to two daughters together about the subject, although they be close in age.

Also we should warn them that since sex is very private and sacred, it is best for them not to talk about it except to us. By such advice we guard our children, to some extent at least, from the objectionable conversations which go on not only in back alleys and on street corners, but in the "best homes" and in the schools of highest rating.

Moreover, we can explain that since each mother wants to be the one to tell her children these holy, intimate matters, it is only fair not to scoop her story. For the same reason, these subjects shouldn't even be spoken about loudly or rudely in public places, where we could be overheard. Incidentally, this last may spare us embarrassment, like that of the mother of a little girl, who, in a crowded bus, asked shrilly: "Mama, when will daddy put another seed in you, so you can start growing a baby again?"

### SMALL CHILDREN

So far we have been talking strictly about sex instruction, but what about sex manifestations which sometimes appear in small children? A word on the subject might be inserted parenthetically at this point.

There are parents who become alarmed at the apparent sex activity of infants, but in nine cases out of ten, their alarm is

without real cause. All babies delight in the discovery of their fingers and toes, and like to play with them, and usually too they play with the so-called private parts, perhaps finding the act pleasurable. As a means of stopping this, we should first make sure that the baby is clean: cleanliness is important in that it avoids sources of irritation. Then since any infant is very distractible, our cue is to hand him a rattle or a teething ring—or better still to put these objects in his crib so that he plays with them before going off to sleep, and finds them in the morning when he awakens. If in spite of precautions, the trouble continues, we'd better turn to the pediatrician for advice. To punish or threaten would only emphasize the affair and stamp it on the baby's memory.

### SOME MAY DISAGREE WITH ME

The tot old enough to have left his cradle is also, on occasion, cause for concern. I remember once when a small girl was spanked for curiosity about the sex organs of a little boy, when probably they meant no more to her than the sawdust stuffing of her teddy bear.

Again, it is natural for children to notice the physical differences between themselves and their brothers or sisters and ask questions. If a boy sees his baby sister in her bath, he will ask no doubt why she isn't made like he is. The simple answer:



"Girls are always different," will suffice, and to my mind it is just as well for him to see and know these differences at an early age when he will take them matter-of-factly, as he must all phenomena of this strange wide world he is discovering. It lessens curiosity later, when the emotional factor enters in, and it gives him a feeling that he "always knew" that much.

But what if children do actually get off by themselves and show one another "how they are made." Only if they are very tiny can this be innocent curiosity, and in any event, we should find means to end it speedily. Without raising a rumpus, we can tell them that that isn't done by good people, that it isn't respectful to God who is with them. When they are even slightly older, the instinctive feeling of shame which descended upon the human race when Adam and Eve sewed together fig leaves, will whisper the same thing to them.

Obviously, I am not discussing here problems of an abnormal nature. When abnormalities arise, we parents should of course consult experts in the field.

### ADOLESCENCE — A NEW PHASE

But to get back to sex instruction — when children approach adolescence, this pedagogy enters a different phase, because, as we said, it begins to hit with new emotional impact. The adolescent boy, for instance, finds it awkward if his mother talks to him

about sex, and a girl cannot without confusion listen to her father speak on the subject. Therefore it is evident that henceforth father must take over the boys' instruction, and mother the girls'.

Not that father is without influence on daughter, or mother on son in sex matters. Father's attitude toward women will affect daughter's ideas, and the ideals he incorporates in himself will be her criterion in choosing a husband. Conversely, the same goes for the mother-son relationship.

But about direct instruction: because of our own embarrassment in mentioning sex after our children reach a certain age, we parents often clam up. Selfishly we allow personal discomfiture to take precedence over the good of our offspring. In fact, I'd say our selfishness amounts to cruelty to the child when a mother does not prepare a girl by telling her of menstruation before she experiences it, or when a father neglects to tell a boy about nocturnal emissions before the lad meets the phenomenon firsthand.

But besides special items of information, imparted sporadically, there's a place for a comprehensive talk. Yes, there comes a time, usually at this stage, when the scattered bits of knowledge gleaned by the children through question and answer as they were growing, and picked up by them from schoolmates, should be reviewed, in order to correlate and unify them into a coherent whole, and to correct any misconceptions

gathered along the way. In this talk it is well to stress the order, harmony, and beauty of the design, and the marvelous perfection, completeness, and method of the plan which, for instance, makes a microscopic spermatozoon carry within itself the physical and psychological hereditary traits.

### OUTSIDE HELP

If our tongue-tied state is too acute, we can always use as a starter, books, pamphlets, or phonograph records from Catholic sources, and then after the children have read or listened to them, discuss them point by point. The discussion is just as important as the written exposé, for there are bound to be vague and loose ends which it is our duty to tie up.

Nor should we think that, this momentous task being done of a fine morning, we have acquitted ourselves once and for all ways. Further questions will surely arise in the child's mind all through high school and college, and we should make it clear to him that we're willing to answer them. It's much better if he continues to come to us than if he stewes in solitude, or delves into other sources of knowledge open to him.

### SHE REMEMBERETH NO MORE

For a girl inevitably there will be perplexities about childbirth. In giving her some enlightenment, though it might be

necessary to mention pain (to ignore it entirely would be silly), it's better not to emphasize it. Fear can snowball in her mind, and have detrimental effect on her future marriage relationship. Also to stress pain, regardless of its possible intensity, is not to present a true picture, in the larger sense, since we mothers know a joy of fulfillment which soon blacks out pain, and overlays it in our memory.

### QUIZ KIDS

But there are other facets of sex, and all sorts of queer questions may be asked: "Do you have a baby every time? How often do married people do 'it'? What's birth control?" In any case, we can pray for guidance, give the amount of information we deem wise, and then leave the rest to God. Much more important than these granules of objective knowledge is the subjective aspect of sex which now pushes to the forefront, and we must be prepared for the role of mentor with regard to our children's personal problems. New and baffling sensations plus new urgent temptations may assail them, and we must have ready answers if asked advice.

### THE STRAIGHT OF IT

We know the general principle that any voluntary incitement of sex pleasure ("venereal pleasure" is the theological term) outside marriage, is wrong, whether it be di-

rected toward solitary enjoyment or toward another person, and our job is to translate that principle into understandable, simple terms for the individual boy or girl. We must tread warily because, above all, we do not wish to put ideas in the child's head, but on the other hand, we do wish to protect him from falling through ignorance.

With regard to the relationship with other boys and girls, we should somehow put over the significant distinction by the time our child is in his late teens, that anything which stimulates the generative faculty and produces, directly or proximately, physical sex pleasure extra-maritally, is sin; and that anything which is merely an expression of affection, is not necessarily sin, but must be indulged in gingerly, because it can lead to sin.

### HANDS OFF

Or in words of their vocabulary we say: "Petting is out." Petting defined as "roving hands," is a sin because normally it arouses sex excitement. That sort of thing we can explain is morally good and fine in matrimony, where it reaches a natural and splendid completion, but to chisel around the edges is a low, quasi-perverved trick.

Necking, defined as a more or less prolonged kissing and hugging bout, is more often wrong than not, so obviously is hazardous pastime.

## KEEP IT CASUAL

And an occasional goodnight kiss — well, emphatically we should not give our children the impression that we consider that necessarily wrong. The girl, for instance, who is "sweet sixteen and never been kissed" is largely a myth, so there is no use filling our daughter's head with scruples for a casual caress. And the boy who hears such opinions will shrug them off, and, on the grounds that we are downright prudish, discount anything else we say, meanwhile evolving a lax code in contradiction to our views. Besides, the unvarnished truth is that there are kisses and kisses: the affectionate touching of lips is not the same thing as those open-mouthed wonders.

## PHONY FLORENCE

But a daughter should be warned that boys are more prone to sex excitement than girls are, so if she wants to play fair and square, she has no right to lead her date on by allowing him intimacies which she knows will stimulate him, if not herself. The current slang for that sort of shabby conduct is "court a storm," and it seems pretty clear upon a moment's thought that a girl who courts a storm and then "bawls out" the boy for his behavior, is just a plain phony and hypocrite. If she causes him to commit the sin of sex desire (though she herself remain unruffled), obviously she shares in the sin she provokes.

## FOR SALE — CHEAP

Without thinking of all this, a girl frequently allows liberties simply because she figures that's one way to be popular. Now, there is no use telling her that such is not the case. If she offers her wares at a cheap price, a motley crowd will snap them up, but it will be interested very much more in the easy-to-come-by merchandise of her bargain counter than in her. In other words, let's explain to our daughter that the girl who is tagged "a heavy neck" can obtain almost no interest in herself as a person, and whatever interest there will be, can come only from the wrong boys.

Inversely, the thoroughly decent girl, if she puts the same effort into being entertaining that the other girl puts into being seductive, can register just as high a popularity rating, with boys who are really interested in her — and what's more they'll be the right boys.

Can there be any question which of the two is better off, even in the natural order? Obviously in the supernatural order there is no comparison. As one modern lad scathingly put it: "The kind of gal that pets is only technically a virgin."

## NO, NO, A THOUSAND TIMES NO!

But even a girl of good intentions often finds it hard to stick to her guns. The boy is insistent, and she doesn't know how to

ward him off without seeming a prude. Well, she doesn't have to go melodramatic with righteous indignation every time; she can cultivate the light, but firm, touch. A faint note of understanding for his natural impulses is not necessarily incompatible with definite refusal. If he still persists, there's always a trump card: male pride cannot withstand being laughed at, and if the boy's amorous addresses elicit only good-natured mockery, he will stop abruptly enough.

### KEEP THINGS HUMMING

Also she should cultivate her social charm and skills. A boy may resort to necking because "there isn't anything to do or to talk about." Certainly it is no compliment to a girl for her date to demand caresses because she has nothing else to offer.

In speaking of popularity above, I used a provisional phrase, "if she puts effort into being entertaining," and I meant to imply that she should do just that. Contrary to what some girls may think, those "terrific personalities" didn't spring full-armed from the head of Zeus; they are the result of effort.

Along this line, we parents can help our daughters. Indeed, we should have been helping them for years by encouraging outgoing extrovert tendencies, and by training them to be considerate, cheerful, unselfish, and interested in the other fellow rather



than exclusively in themselves. A girl with these qualities should easily be able to win the reputation for being a "swell kid," who is fun to date without gay Lothario tactics.

This of course takes no account of the few inveterate "wolves," whom she will occasionally run into inadvertently. But the girl who is popular with "the gang" can more easily arrange double dates and group dates, which are some safeguard against the operation of wolves.

### BEWILDERED BOYS

Boys are often as bewildered as girls. They sometimes make advances, not because they want to, but because they think the girl expects it. Frequently they are relieved when they discover that they can gracefully maintain the ideals of their better nature. If we parents could just put over to these awkward gallants that they never have to do anything because somebody else wants or expects it, that they must stand on their own feet and do what their own conscience indicates.

Or as a matter of curiosity some boys try to see how far a girl will go, and are genuinely surprised — and I might add disappointed — if she offers no resistance. They say that they like to rate their "women," but isn't that one way of morally passing the buck to the women? I wish we parents could impress them with the fact that, like Adam, they stand to lose just as much as their feminine partner by such a policy.

## OF A DIFFERENT COLOR

Of course there are always boys who, in the heady ebullience of youth, have a hard time controlling their emotions. These youngsters may be grateful to the "nice girl" who gently, but resolutely, stops them before they've crossed the borderline into sin.

Again there are those wolves we spoke of, the boys who ask only two questions about a girl: "Is she good looking?" and "How far will she go?" They can't be bothered with a girl who resists, for they must demonstrate their prowess with women, first because they want to boast about it to the other fellows (yes, boys *do* talk) and build up a reputation of being "quite a guy"; and second because they have an insatiable desire to cram as much excitement as they can into each passing hour.

If we suspect that a son of ours fits into this category, our task is to prove tactfully to the would-be man-of-the-world that he really hasn't changed much since his little boy days, when to show off and because he was greedy, he shoved as many cookies as possible into his gaping jaws.

## DOUBLE STANDARD

The difference is that the wild oat diet does not satisfy as did the cookies: the more of the former he has, the more he is

likely to want, and the more difficult he makes it for himself to return to Christian restraint later. In fact, the world's preaching about this Christian restraint's being unrealistic and impossible of achievement will seem plausible enough to him once he lets sex take hold. But can't we perhaps point out that he is just rationalizing what he wanted to do in the first place? If he wants to do wrong, there are plenty of handy excuses. Another favorite is the double standard, which says that men's sins count for less than women's. Now couldn't we puncture that one by recalling to his mind that in God's kingdom no such distinction is made: God recognizes only a single standard and judges accordingly.

### DOUBLE PATTERN

Yet in all truth, there is a double pattern, and our sons should know about it. By "double pattern" I mean that boys and girls react to sexual stimuli in different ways. If we told our daughters that boys are more inflammable than girls, then we should also tell our sons the same truth in reverse. Usually a girl begins by allowing a few tentative liberties, only because she is eager to please and because she craves affection, but the boy, judging by his own reaction, thinks that her acquiescence indicates that she's getting the same immediate "kick" he is. Consequently, he goes on, and of course ends by introducing her to sensations she had not dreamed existed, but of which in the future, she

will crave repetition. In short, he takes advantage of her innocence, and it could be said that his behavior is the same in type (though certainly not in degree of guilt) as that of the dope peddlers who work among the young and recruit new addicts.

Conversely, the girl or boy who measures up to the high water mark of purity is doing an apostolic work. The boy whose advances are repulsed by the girl, or the girl whose overtures are ignored by the boy, may be shamed into pulling up sharp.

### ARE YOU A MAN, OR A MOUSE?

I wish there were another word for purity. To some ears, it sounds saccharine, and together with the phrase "pure young maiden" it evokes the idea of a simpering, sweet, and unreal creature in the flowing robes of another era. Somehow it doesn't seem very applicable to the modern girl with slacks and loafers, or the Korean veteran in Marine uniform with three days' growth of straggly beard on his tired young face. But in reality there is nothing sentimental or saccharine sweet about purity; on the contrary, it is the virtue above all others for the courageous. It demands the last ounce of energy as a confirmed soldier of Jesus Christ, for the urgent call of the hot blood of youth whips the battle to fever pitch.

This we parents should emphasize, and not tacitly deny by acting as though tempta-

tion were not possible to the "nice people" of our family. We can promise our children only "blood, sweat, and tears."

Incidentally, part of the success of Communism, in a different way of course, is that, expecting the utmost effort, it appeals to the idealism of youth. It isn't that we Christians demand too much; it is that we demand too little, that our young people are sometimes lax and careless. They have no challenge to rise to, for we have erroneously presented purity as a negative virtue, the refraining from something pleasurable. Actually, it is the proud holding of the temple of the soul, the holy citadel of the spirit; it is the keeping of the immortal essence inviolate under the banner of Christ the King in order that the defender may, according to God's plan for his welfare, have the joy of sharing that unconquered fortress with the one he joins in the sacrament of matrimony.

Or we have even made the mistake of implying that purity is an unfair law of conduct, as though God gave the individual certain strong, almost unruly, instincts, and then like a Moloch, arbitrarily orders that we sacrifice their use. The truth of the matter is that God, desiring man's welfare, asks only that we use them according to the plan by which they will yield the greatest satisfaction. Every talent, every instrument, every tool has its proper use, and to employ it against the rules of its being is to nullify its service.

## ON THE EARTHLY SIDE

In short, there are rewards for "fighting the good fight" (and rewards right here on this familiar planet earth), for marriage will be more satisfactory if the partners have not indulged in heavy petting beforehand. This isn't just a pious layman's opinion. Recently in a secular magazine, an article on sex among the young referred to a doctor's statement that people could teach their bodies to settle for less than the real thing, and thus make satisfaction in physical union difficult after marriage. For a few transient thrills it would be absurd, even on the natural level, to sacrifice the joys of future married years.

### "TWO ANIMALS CAUGHT IN A TRAP"

Again without reference to the supernatural, we can tell our children that moral mandates are silken ties in comparison to the iron bonds with which people fetter themselves once obsessive sex takes over. We can explain that we're not even speaking of "going the limit" either, a person can feel helpless in the grip of desire just for the lesser expressions of passion, especially when he's young and has never experienced passion's ultimate. With the exaggeration of youth he may believe that he can't live without the person who has aroused his emotions. In truth, many other persons of the opposite sex could cause the same animal titillation, so it isn't the person

he's enamored of, but the sensation. Or briefly, we can say he is enamored of himself, since he craves only self-gratification, not the happiness of another.

This travesty of love is the exact antipode of the genuine article, the keynote of which is giving. When love exists, then physical acts are the culmination of self-consecration and surrender on a spiritual level. Moreover, love looks ahead to the perpetuation of itself through the mutual fruit, children, so it cannot be a flighty matter of a few sporadic minutes or hours, but of life, stretching out for as many years as God allows.

### IS THE TIMING OFF?

But here I've been going on for pages setting forth a regular Smorgasboard of tidbits for us parents to choose from for distribution to our children, yet even if we do manage to pass them out occasionally, who knows how correct our timing may be? Perhaps we were late with some remarks, and the child may see that past acts of his, performed without full awareness, were wrong. If we suspect, or if he tells us, that he is now upset about this kind of problem, we can remind him that God will hold him responsible only to the degree of his knowledge and wilfulness at the time of the act. However (though he is not obliged to confess the sin in the light of present knowledge) it might be wise to

carry such troubles to the confessional so as to get further advice and enlightenment. And we can add that it is usual, not exceptional, for young people to have problems, questions, and troublesome doubts about sins of purity, so the priest has literally "heard everything."

## HOW CAN WE?

But at this point a protest is sure to be voiced: How in the world can we manage to talk so openly to our children! Admittedly, I've been babbling along as though I blandly assumed that such instruction and discussion were easy. Though in a few cases it might be, in many others it definitely would not be.

On one hand, there are youngsters such as a friend of mine spoke of when she said: "Kids nowadays certainly are outspoken. My daughter asks me things I'd have dropped dead rather than mention to my mother." On the other, there are children who find their parents the very last people on earth with whom they could discuss intimate sex matters.

## PRAYER AND THE SACRAMENTS

Here's where our early encouragement of the children's regular reception of the sacrament of penance pays off: we can feel easy in our mind if that habit goes on.



And we can now recommend (even to a shy child) praying for purity, explaining that the ability to withstand temptation does not come from will power in the sense of gritting the teeth and saying: "I'll be good." It comes from a will turned heavenward, and empowered from above. In the case of purity, the Virgin Most Pure, the Mediatrix of Grace, would seem the patron "par excellence," for "never was it known that anyone who fled to her protection, implored her help, or sought her intercession, was left unaided . . . "

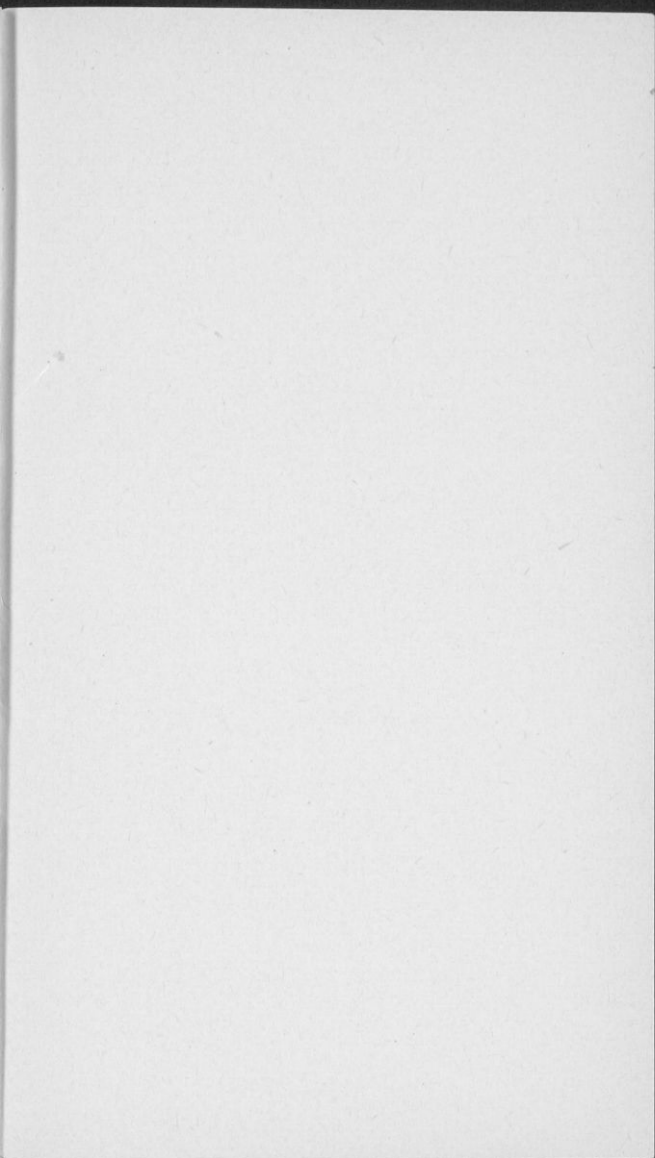
In addition, we can emphasize that everybody with any gumption prays during temptation. If every suggestion of the devil is answered by a whispered prayer, the smart demon will likely enough cease to plague his victim, seeing that he is defeating his own purpose: the temptation is making the person holier rather than more sinful.

### TEMPLES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Moreover, if we have brought up our children with the consciousness that their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, that they are cells in the Mystical Body of Christ, and that one day their bodies will arise—in glory we hope—to take their places among the choirs of angels, we have given them the strongest arguments possible for preserving purity. From time to time we can refer to these truths so that we all continue to live in their light.

“But the body is not for impurity but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body; for God through his power hath raised the Lord, and us too shall he raise up. Know ye not that your bodies are members of Christ? . . . Flee from impurity. Every other sin that a man committeth is a thing outside the body; but the impure sinneth against his own body. Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is within you, whom ye have from God? And ye are not your own, for ye have been bought at a price. Glorify God, then, in your body.”

Can I end with stronger words than these of Saint Paul? Let us hope that our children, who are not so much our children as God's, heed them.



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