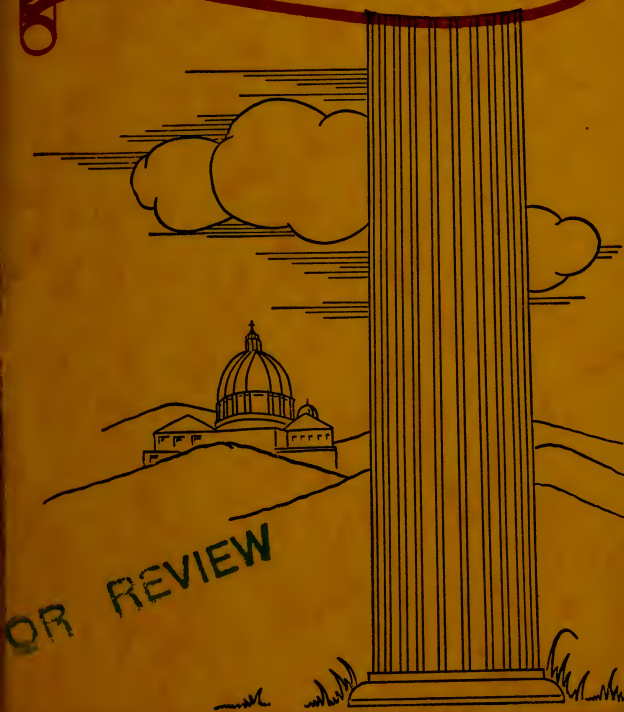


ADULT EDUCATION SERIES

Schmiedeler, Edgar
Childhood religion
ADV 6644

CHILDHOOD RELIGION



OR REVIEW

International Catholic Truth Society

IMPRIMI POTEST:

✠ MARTINUS, O.S.B.

Abbas S. Benedicti De Atchison

Atchisonii, die II Iulii, 1936.

NIHIL OBSTAT:

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Brooklynii, die VI Iulii, 1936.



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Brooklyn, N. Y.

Childhood Religion

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TEACHING their children their religion is a subject that lies close to the heart of God-fearing Catholic parents. They realize that the element of religion must permeate the entire educational process if the children are to receive a genuine Christian training. They appreciate the fact that their religion is a matter of the utmost spiritual importance to their little ones, and, at the same time, that it is a highly constructive force in the training of their characters, in the shaping of their personalities. They appreciate the honored privilege and sacred duty of parenthood, the privilege and the duty of cooperating with God in forming Christ in the souls of their little ones. They know that theirs is the lay priesthood in its most glorious form.

A well-ordered and well-disciplined Christian family, a domestic world in which a good and upright example is constantly set by the parents and other members of the household, is the environment that is needed for bringing about the true end of the education of the little one. Particularly is it the environment needed for his religious training. Speaking of this environment in his Encyclical on Christian Education, His Holiness, Pius XI, reiterated the age-old doctrine of the Church regarding it: "The first natural and necessary element in this environment," he writes, "is the family.

and this precisely because so ordained by the Creator Himself. Accordingly that education, as a rule, will be more effective and lasting which is received in a well-ordered and well-disciplined Christian family." The spirit of the home is, of course, the most important element. And in the case of the Catholic home it should not be too much to expect that this spirit be truly the spirit of Christ, a spirit which can result only from studying Christ's life and imitating it, from living His life by thinking, judging, and acting as He did and by increasing His life within the soul through prayer and the sacraments. Where such a spirit will be found within a home, there too will be found a "well-ordered and well-disciplined Christian family."

There are certain very special advantages to early religious training given a child in his home. Certainly outstanding among these is the fact that instruction within the family circle is associated with the child's sentiments of love for his parents. This lends an appeal in the case of training within the family circle that is lacking in the more formal training coming from the school or from other sources. Fortunate the little one, therefore, in whose mind the truths of religion are intermingled with his earliest recollections of home, parents and loved ones.

Worthy of particular note, too, is the fact that the child himself during his preschool years in the home is equipped with certain qualities which make much of his religious training a relatively simple matter, provided only he be brought into contact with the knowledge of God and His truths. These

qualities are, for instance, simplicity, faith, curiosity, and activity and should be made the most of. Of course, it is of great importance that special consideration be given the abilities and the educational needs peculiar to the child of such tender age.

PRINCIPLES OF EARLY SPIRITUAL TRAINING

In *The Catholic Family Monthly*, Sister Mary, I.H.M., who has given much attention to the study of the moral and religious development of children, sets forth certain principles as basic in the early spiritual training of the child, and then deduces a number of practical conclusions from them. Both may well be listed here for the convenience and guidance of the parent.

The principles:

The child at baptism is a child of God endowed with supernatural life.

Holiness is the presence of grace unimpeded by the human will.

Men have the power of winning grace, that is, more supernatural life, for others.

Knowledge of God is the necessary preliminary to union with God.

Habits in accord with rational nature are a necessary foundation for the work of grace.

The conclusions or facts deduced from the principles:

The baptized preschool child is in the state of grace.

He cannot impede grace before he reaches the use of reason.

Parents can win grace for the child.

Knowledge of God can be given the child as his intelligence develops.

Habits of virtue can be formed, thus rendering him amenable to the greatest activity of grace.

By the time he reaches the age of reason, the personality of the child can be so formed in knowledge, in habits, and in attitudes, that the higher powers, reason and free will, will find a life of active cooperation with grace both natural and easy.

RELIGIOUS TRUTHS CHILDREN KNOW

It should be very useful to parents who are interested in the religious training of their children to have some appreciation of the religious knowledge that is actually acquired by children in their preschool years. Sister Mary, collaborating with Margaret M. Hughes, has set forth the facts regarding such knowledge, as shown by a group of 1,218 children of preschool age studied by them. The data found in their brochure on *The Moral and Religious Development of the Preschool Child* reveals the following:

1. Some children show an appreciation of their creation by God very early, in fact, at two years of age. Two-thirds show their appreciation at about the four year, six month level. The idea practically reaches the one hundred mark at the six year, six month level for Catholic children.

2. The preschool child begins to develop very early the concept of the existence of His Creator in Heaven. This idea may be said to be well established by the fourth year.

3. The notion of Heaven as a reward for good people is not so familiar to the child as that of God dwelling in Heaven. Yet it is present after the fifth year in the majority of cases. Non-Catholic children betray less spiritual appreciation in this concept by their greater concern for what happens to the mortal remains of the deceased.

4. The concept of the existence and office of Guardian Angels is not so well developed as are several moral concepts. However, the findings of the study suggest that more could be expected here; that the potentialities of the children are left undeveloped.

MORAL TRUTHS

In the same study the following facts were brought out regarding the moral truths known by the members of the group:

1. A high percentage of children show an appreciation of the necessity for obedience in the first two years of life. The concept is practically universal before the child is of school age. His notion of the sanction of obedience and his reasons for being obedient are more slowly and completely developed.

2. He is aware of the principle of individual rights very early. This is shown by his consciousness of the rights which others have to their possessions.

3. He recognizes the need of replying truthfully to a direct question about his behavior by the age of five years. However, his ideals

do not demand that he take the initiative in reporting on himself even at the age of seven.

4. The concept of love of parents is recognized at a very early age, 60 per cent giving evidence of it at the three year level.

5. The concept of goodness is not yet expressed by the average child at the age of seven years. The highest peak which this concept reaches includes only 40 per cent of the subjects and is reached at the age level of five years and six months. The percentages at the six and seven year levels are lower than this.

6. The composite data show that the period of moral growth is especially rapid from three to five years, while the growth from five to six is less pronounced. Hence the period for instilling the simple, fundamental moral concepts and the corresponding habits of action which will root these concepts firmly in the life of the child, is before five years. Apparently there is the closest relationships between the rapid development found in the fundamental moral concepts between three and five years and the general accelerated mental development of children which is characteristic of this period.

On the basis of their study the two came to the following general conclusion: "Viewing the moral and religious development of the child as a whole we may, therefore, infer that, 1) the basis for some of the fundamental and necessary moral concepts have their beginning in the preschool years before, presumably, the individual receives any formal training; 2) moreover, not only beginnings have been made, but for several concepts considerable progress has been attained in these early years; 3) from

data in several problems where the stage of development of the moral or religious concept tested depends upon the activity and planned direction of the parent rather than upon acquirement through the child's life experiences, it is apparent that great possibilities for moral and religious development remain latent in most children. Since the average moral development curve indicates great possibilities for training during the preschool period, and since parents, good parents, desire the fullest and best development of their children, it must be either that they are not aware of these possibilities or that they do not know how to utilize the power for good that is theirs.

"Hence, we come to the conclusion that parents today need, first, to be made aware of the undeveloped spiritual potentialities of preschool children, and secondly, to be given some specific, practical suggestions for developing these possibilities. The home, in most instances, has the exclusive care of the children until they reach school-age. The increased leisure of women, through the many aids available in household tasks, should free the mother to give more direct and personal attention to the children. That they are willing to give this personal attention without consideration of cost to self, the carrying out of the minutiae of the schedule for the child's physical welfare amply proves. The mother should know her power and her opportunity in the moral and spiritual development of her child at least as well as she at present knows the requirements for his physical well-being. This necessity is forced upon her because her duties toward the child include not merely the care of his physi-

cal needs, but also the responsibility for his training to good citizenship for time and eternity."

The foregoing study, therefore, as well as others that have been made show that children of preschool age do, as a matter of fact, have many religious and moral concepts. But, at the same time, they show latent possibilities for considerably more knowledge in these fields. They show, for instance, that while children are capable of certain religious notions and moral ideas at the age of three or even before, great numbers of them do not come into possession of them until some years later. Again, they show that children of six years, who are attending school, are usually quite sensitive to the ideas of religious duty and are readily influenced by religious motives, while many of the same age or thereabout, but not yet in school, are lacking in religious motivation. Their obedience, for instance, is merely a natural act, quite unrelated to any truth of religion. They obey simply because their parents demand obedience of them. There can be but one reasonable explanation of this, and it is that many Catholic parents are not making the best of their golden opportunities for the religious training of their children in the preschool years.

As soon as the child enters the Catholic school he is taught to act from religious motives and shows his ability to do so. Many parents are obviously failing to train their children to do this. In general, retardation in from one to three years in the development of moral qualities has been found to be the common occurrence, while even greater retardation showed

itself in the matter of religious development. Hence, the practical conclusions that parents today need, first, to be made aware of the undeveloped potentialities of preschool children, and secondly, to be given some specific practical suggestions for developing these potentialities. The general retardation indicated in the foregoing study should do much to make them realize these undeveloped abilities. The few observations in the following paragraphs may throw some further light on the subject.

WHAT THE CHILD CAN KNOW

There are, of course, differences in the ability of children, and consequently there will be differences in their religious knowledge, even where the same amount of training is given them. But it seems safe to say that the average child, if taught to say some simple prayers during his second year, will attain to some religious information by the time he is two years old. By that time, too, the idea of the creation of things about him by God can gradually be brought home to him. By the age of three he should have some appreciation of the fact that God is everywhere, in Heaven and near us even though we cannot see Him. Some notion of Heaven, of Christ's life, of his own guardian angel, should be within the child's reach at the age of three. Certainly no later than his fourth year should he have some appreciation of the fact that the Christ Child is God; that He came among us as a child because He loved us; that He died in order to win Heaven for us. By the next year, his fifth, he should be capable of appreciating in some measure the truths that God

is a spirit and that there are three persons in God.

The first moral ideal that the child will learn is that of obedience. The need for this virtue must be brought home in daily life to the child even from his first year on. Gradually thereafter he can be motivated to obey "because father or mother want it," and still later, after the concept of God has developed, because God wants it and expects it of him. The fulfillment of little duties or chores about the house may be expected of him from about his second year on. More difficult ones can be assigned by the age of three. By four, little services for others can be expected of him. By this time, too, his acts should be extensively supernaturalized or based on motives such as winning heaven, pleasing God, or pleasing others for God's sake. Since, by the age of three he has some notions of right and wrong, he should from that time on gradually be taught to do that which is right in order to win the approval of God, his guardian angel, or his parents, who represent God. Such motivation should be fairly well developed in him by his fourth or fifth year. Concepts of obedience, truth, duty, right and wrong should also show considerable development by that age.

During his preschool years, too, the child can be given a fairly clear idea of the meaning of sin, of grace, and of some of the means of grace. A little more detailed attention will be given these topics later.

How to Teach the Child

METHODS

How to make the most of these potentialities of the child for his religious and moral training is of no less importance to the parent. One of the main things that he must come to appreciate in this regard is the fact that both formal and informal education methods must be made use of. Something can be accomplished by way of inculcating abstract ideas. But it must not be overlooked that the little one appreciates more readily the things he can see and feel than mere abstract notions. Mere verbal teaching and general abstract ideas have their place but they will not influence the young child as will either the example of parents or, for instance, visual education by means of religious pictures, statues, crucifixes, etc. The example of the parent is outstanding for the two-fold reason of the child's highly developed power of imitation and the bonds of affection that bind parent and child in unison. Visual education is helpful because it permits of distinct image forming. The parent will make no mistake in seeking to make points of both doctrine and practice interesting by vitalizing them with something that appeals to the imagination: pictures, stories, dramatizations, etc. So, too, will references to the things the child already knows prove particularly helpful.

GOD'S WORKS

One of the most satisfactory ways of bringing before the child the idea of God is to lead

him to observe and admire the beauties of creation. Not a few opportunities can be found for the parent to call his attention to the fact that God made the beautiful world in which we live. Having pointed out to him time and again the beauties of sky, tree, and flower, as wonders that his Father in Heaven has made for him, the child will come to think of Nature and God in one and the same mental breath. As the writer has stated elsewhere: "In his early years the child is readily filled with wonder and awe at his natural surroundings. It is the wonder age in which the little one sees mystery in every bit of foliage, in every bird's plumage, in every cloud and star of the heavens. By teaching the child to observe nature he can be led to see the hand of God in all things, and he will grow in reverence because of it. The lesson must, of course, be oft-times repeated and at opportune moments. When interest is aroused by the appearance of the first flowers of spring-time, that is the time to point out that God sent them to grace the earth. A beautiful sunset, a winter snowfall clothing the earth with a garment of white—these are among the wonderful works of God. Such repeated observations will enable the child to grasp the idea of God as Creator of all things and will lead him more and more to realize and appreciate the power of God."

HOLY PICTURES

Again, there is the value of religious pictures on the walls of the home, and the benefits to be derived from showing and explaining illustrated books to the child. These will give

him a more vivid idea and more lasting impression of Our Lord and the saints than abstract explanations alone can possibly give. Pictures appeal to the child because the latter's sense faculties are more highly developed at this time than his intellectual ones. Hence, no Catholic home should be without some good religious pictures on the walls. Fortunately, too, there are to be had at very reasonable cost today some excellent illustrated booklets, prepared precisely to aid parents in their tasks of teaching their children religious truths. The well-trained school teacher today is awake to the value of pictures as a means of educating the young child. The parent should learn to imitate his example and make use of this important means for imparting religious instruction. Such visual education is in fact more necessary in the case of the preschool child in the home than it is in the case of the little one of school age.

Children are naturally interested in children. Hence, it should be a fairly simple task to make the Christ Child known to the little one by directing his attention to Him in pictures. There are so many of these pictures in which He appears; for instance, Raphael's "Madonna of the Chair," Murillo's "Children of the Shell," and Corregio's "Holy Night." Large and small copies of these can be had in rich coloring that appeals to the child. Other pictures, such as that of the Crucifixion or some of Christ's miracles should also be shown and the child taught to pick out the main characters on the pictures. Other activities in connection with pictures are, to have the child sort them out, to arrange them or put them into

his own picture book or scrap book. Gradually, too, he can be given completion exercises in the form of pictures cut first in two parts and later in four or more. These and similar activities will keep the small child happily associated and wholesomely occupied. More than that, they will help to acquaint him with the truths of his holy religion.

Sister Mary also gave attention to this matter in her studies of children. She has this to say of the recognition by them of Jesus, Mary, and St. Joseph pictorially presented: "The representation of Our Lord in the aspect of Redeemer is quite familiar to Catholic children at an early age. The Infant Jesus is less well recognized. Our Lady is better known to children in the Nativity than in the Crucifixion group. In neither case do children show a knowledge of Our Blessed Mother consistent with their age. St. Joseph is relatively unfamiliar to most children, while St. John and St. Mary Magdalen are practically unknown." Apparently, then, there is room for further use of holy pictures by parents in the religious education of their little ones.

THE STORY TELLING METHOD

The practice of telling stories is also helpful in teaching the small child his religion. One mother speaks as follows of this method: "I am a strong believer in the story telling method of imparting religious and other knowledge. I fear too many parents today are not making the most of this particular method of procedure. If we tell stories of a religious nature it is indeed remarkable how close even the child of three or four years feels to God and

how much he will rely on prayer. I have often wished, upon hearing my own tots having a heart to heart talk with God in their little prayers, that I might express my own wants with such freedom and confidence."

The telling of stories may well be closely linked with the showing of sacred pictures to the child. As the child learns to pick out the various personages represented in the picture he may also gradually be taught in simplest terms the meaning of the entire scene or be told the story that it is meant to convey. Among the first stories to be taught him should be such as are concerned with the childhood of Christ, the story of the Nativity, the coming of the Wise Men, the Presentation in the Temple. These and similar religious stories should be repeated again and again. The child does not grow tired of such repetition. Indeed, he delights in it. By the age of four the little one can begin telling the stories himself. By this time, too, he should be able to appreciate the story of his patron saint's life and also of other saints, notably child saints.

Sister Rosa has with particular clarity and in considerable detail discussed this interesting and useful topic of teaching the child his religion through stories. Her own words may well be given at some length. She writes: "Stories of the Child Jesus the mother will tell her child perhaps at the bedtime hour, perhaps at some other fixed time of the day. These, when he has learned to talk, he can repeat to her and to father.

"Much of this can be done with the two and the three year old child, more with the four year old to whom the Boy Jesus will

appeal. The story of His praying at Mary's knee, His going up to the temple when He was twelve, His teaching the doctors there till His Mother and St. Joseph found Him, and then His going down to Nazareth and being subject to them—these stories with the pictures and handwork increase the child's knowledge of the friendship with the Boy of Nazareth.

"The public life of Our Lord offers a vast amount of material. The story of the stilling of the waves opens the way to teaching the two natures—His human body weary, falling asleep in the boat, His Divinity quelling the waves. The healing of the lepers, the raising of the daughter of Jairus to life, the feeding of the thousands with a few loaves and fishes show His omnipotence and goodness. One small boy concluded from a study of these stories, 'He was always helping people.'

"The story of the Baptism introduces the Blessed Trinity. The Heavenly Father was already known from the early days when the Child Jesus was pictured leaving His Father in His heavenly home to come down to us because He loved us and wanted to show us the way to heaven. The story of Christ blessing little children always is the favorite. . . .

"As the seasons of the Church year come along the child will catch the spirit of each from his parent's instructions: in Lent the story of the Passion, at Easter the account of the Resurrection, and at the Ascension, Christ's return to His Father in heaven."

Parents are not likely to expect too much of the child regarding this story-telling method of teaching him his religion. It is hardly less than astounding what can be done through it

if fathers and mothers really set themselves to the task. Recently the writer came across a preschool child of five years of age who could tell in considerable detail practically every story in the Bible History, and even point out the moral contained in a number of them. The child gave no evidence of exceptional brightness. However, his mother had taken pains with him in the matter of teaching him his religion. She had in his first years obtained for him a well-illustrated child's Bible History and had regularly helped him with suitable explanations to understand the illustrations and the stories they portrayed. He showed the full effects of his excellent training.

THE PROJECT METHOD

The child also learns readily by doing things. Hence the value of the project method in teaching him. This can go hand in hand with learning through pictures and story-telling. Thus, the child can learn to draw a cross, to fill in picture outlines with colored crayons, to make a crib or other sacred object from cut-out pictures. Somewhat later he can work with plasticene or clay, modeling a crib, the cave at Bethlehem, or the sheep of the shepherds on the hillside. To be sure, the attempts will be crude and imperfect. But they will have value nonetheless.

The Child's Prayers

Normally, the first efforts of parents to train the child in his religion will center in teaching him to pray. And one of the first tasks in this connection to confront the parents will be that of teaching him to make the Sign of the Cross. A certain amount of repetition and drill will be required, since making the Sign of the Cross is quite a complicated act, say, for a child of a year and a half or two years. Not only will the child need to be shown repeatedly how to make the Sign of the Cross correctly but he will also have to be helped to do so time and again.

It is not an exceptionally difficult task to teach a child to memorize a few short prayers during his early years. Among the first words that he learns to pronounce should be the names of Jesus and Mary. Some children may be taught to say a very simple improvised night prayer by the age of two. Much, if not all of the "Hail Mary" may be known by the little one of three or four. Differences of ability will, of course, show themselves here. In all cases repetition and drill will be necessary. This naturally calls for patience on the part of the parent. A considerable measure of patience is necessary, too, because a child easily forgets prayers that he apparently knew well before. Simply neglecting to recite his prayers for a time may be the reason for this. Or again, a spell of sickness may be the cause. But taken all in all, it is a relatively simple task for a parent to teach even the child of two or three to say some prayers.

Certainly that is the view of the father

of three school children who penned the following lines: "There is no difficulty in teaching them to pray," he writes, "any more than there is in teaching them to memorize anything else. The only one of our children that we really had to take pains with was the oldest. Even in his case the task was relatively simple—largely a matter of an occasional few words of praise whenever he did well. Quite some time before he was two years old he had the notion that he was a sort of chanticleer and that he could not possibly eat until he had said his meal prayers. As soon as Number Two was able to talk she drew our attention to the fact that she also prayed, although for a long time her voice was quite inaudible. The older child soon taught the younger the prayers he knew. The rivalry in prayers before and after meals really became intense, however, when Number Three began to take a hand. He is almost two years old now and there is not the least question who is leading in prayer. I think it good practice to permit the youngest who is able to do so to lead the prayers for some time at least."

To be sure, one can create difficulties here as one can in other matters of child training by demanding too much of little ones, by insisting, for example, upon teaching them too many and too lengthy prayers. But there is no benefit to be derived from such a practice. Indeed, it may prove both hampering and hurtful. The child's first prayers should be short and simple. It is also preferable that they be in verse, as for example, the following little invocation in honor of one's patron saint: "Oh, Holy Patron, pray for me and teach me

how to follow Thee!" Verse is the natural language of children. Its rhythm, that is the simple tones succeeding each other at agreeable intervals, attracts and holds the attention of a child. Rhythmical verse gives him something to follow that he uses gladly and this makes memorizing a pleasure. It calls forth effort that it would otherwise be very difficult to elicit from children. The average child will recognize and enjoy the rhythm of the verse some time before he can grasp the sense of the words that are used. This, in fact, may easily lead him to learn the verse quite incorrectly—a thing that should not be tolerated by the parent. Neither inaccuracy nor slovenliness in prayer should be permitted even in the cases of very young children.

Among the earlier prayers to be taught a child should be the Acts of Faith, Hope, Love, and Contrition. They should be taught, however, in short form. At the age of three or four the following forms would seem suitable:

Act of Faith: Jesus, I believe in Thee

Act of Hope: Jesus, I hope in Thee

Act of Love: Jesus, I love Thee

Act of Sorrow: Jesus, I am sorry
and will do better

And at the age of five the following:

Act of Faith: O my God, I believe
in Thee; strengthen my faith in
Thee

Act of Hope: O my God, all my
hopes are in Thee; confirm my
hope in Thee

Act of Love: O my God, I love
Thee; teach me to love Thee more
and more

Act of Sorrow: O my God, I am sorry for having offended Thee and will try to do better.

Some children at this age may be capable of even more elaborate Acts, as for example, the following Act of Contrition: O my God, I am sorry for all my sins. I do not want to sin again. Help me to do better and to sin no more. Help me, for I want to be more like You.

Certainly among the first of the more lengthy and formal prayers that the child should be taught are the "Hail Mary" and the "Our Father." To be sure, the young child will not fully understand the full meaning of these prayers, and for some time the parent will even have to help along, supplying what the child will omit. Still, the properly trained tot of only three or four years should be able to grasp in some measure the notions expressed in the Lord's Prayer: that God is the Father of all; that He is in Heaven; that His name should be honored; that He gives us our daily bread, etc.

Not a little guidance regarding the particular prayers appropriate to children at various age periods can be obtained from the following words of a mother and former school teacher who has successfully reared a family of children of her own: "I am a firm believer in 'bending the twig,' hence I think religious training should start in the very cradle. It was my own custom to pray at the crib of my little ones. If such a practice does not teach the child anything, it is at least a good thing for the parents themselves. It is truly re-

markable how early the children tried to imitate the rest of us in making the Sign of the Cross. Even as babies in their high-chair they soon learned that no food would be given them until prayers before meals had been devoutly said. I find that the average child of two years will enjoy story telling and may be told in simple language of the Christ Child and then gradually taught simple prayers to be said before retiring and after rising. A little prayer to his guardian angel helps wonderfully to make any child forget his fears in the dark. A normal child of four should be able to memorize, and in some degree understand, the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the simple Acts, and by the age of six or seven, the Apostles' Creed."

PRAYING VERSUS SAYING PRAYERS

While teaching a child merely to memorize some formal prayer which he can say by rote may be a relatively simple task, teaching the preschool child really to pray, that is, to speak to God intelligently and with understanding, will involve no small amount of patient effort on the part of parents. This teaching is not a thing apart. It should go hand in hand with the general religious training of the individual and should follow as closely as possible upon the more mechanical task of memorizing his first formal prayers. The child may not grasp the meaning of the words of his earliest prayers, though every reasonable effort should be made to teach him prayers made of words which he can understand and expressive of thoughts and feelings that he really has. Nor will he at first realize

the need for prayer nor the good of prayer. But, with growing intelligence he will gradually learn what prayer really is, not only through instruction and guidance by the parent but also through example or the hearing of sincere appeals to God on the part of others. Indeed, in his early years the example of his father and mother and other grown-ups about him, and the whole religious atmosphere of the family circle, will exert a most far-reaching religious influence over him. The child at this age is exceedingly imitative and such practices as saying grace before and after meals, the reverent repetition of simple prayers with the child while kneeling before bed time all seems in some indescribable way, peculiar to the little one, to direct his mind even before he can comprehend the meaning of formal prayers. The small child seems to learn intuitively from the heartfelt invocations to God of his elders who pray aloud with him.

As soon as the child is capable of grasping even in a vague sort of way the notion of a Supreme Being, the fundamental foundation for teaching him to pray has been laid. The parents should then make it a point to bring the idea of God more and more into the life of the child and link it with his daily prayers, thereby vitalizing them.

RESPECT FOR SACRED ARTICLES

Another thing that the parent should early teach the child is respect for and the reverential use of medals, holy pictures, and other sacred articles. All these things are important to his religious life. They help to enrich it and to make him both holy and happy.

“Even the busiest of mothers,” writes one parent, “can explain to a child why we use sacramentals, why medals are worn, why we use holy water. And if they do this they create a reverence in childhood which, I firmly believe, takes much deeper root than most of us are wont to believe. I am a strong believer in early impressions being the most lasting. If a child is taught early the value of prayer, is taught in his first years to call upon the name of Jesus in danger and in temptation and to raise the mind to God in short prayers many times a day, and is taught reverence and respect for sacred things, although the world may efface some of this, I have the strongest hopes that his faith will never be entirely lost.”

THE IDEA OF SIN

As the little one's conscience develops and he comes to see more and more clearly the distinction between right and wrong, the parent must try to bring before him a correct understanding of sin. Even the tone in which a mother will correct a child when he does wrong will lead him to realize that he is doing something that he should not do. But this will hardly suffice to give him a definite conception of sin. This is a concept that is not altogether easy to teach the little one. Concrete examples cannot be used since they might suggest evil to him. There should, however, be no objection to calling his attention to mean acts on the part of others, particularly such as will naturally arouse feelings of contempt, and then telling him that these are things that God does not like, that they are offensive to our

Heavenly Father Who does so much for us and gives us so many things.

Still another way to introduce the idea of sin is to tell the story of the fall of Adam and Eve, pointing out that after their sin they were not children of their Heavenly Father any more and that God was no longer their beloved friend. The stories of the Prodigal, of the Fallen Angels, the Deluge, and the Lost Sheep may also be used for this purpose. So, too, may at least some of these serve as a means of bringing before the child's mind the notions of sorrow for sin and of asking pardon for it. These latter concepts should not be so difficult to teach. A well-trained child will have been taught from his earliest years to acquire the habit of being sorry for any misdeed of his, and of asking forgiveness of his parents whom he has displeased. As he arrives at the knowledge that sin is an offense against God and displeases Him, he will also readily see the propriety of expressing sorrow for it and asking God's pardon.

THE NOTION OF GRACE

While, for the sake of clearness, the notions of sin and of grace are here in part treated separately, in teaching the child they may to advantage be brought to his attention at one and the same time. In their efforts to bring home to the little one the idea of grace the parents may well begin by trying to give him some appreciation of what the Sacrament of Baptism, which he received as a new-born babe, means to him. They will teach him that when he received that sacrament, God made his soul pure and beautiful; that He

came to abide with him, to live with him; that then he was holy, and God's love and truth were in him. But when he does things which are against God's love and truth, in other words, when he commits sin, his soul loses its beauty and its holiness. They will teach him that some sins are very great and take away all holiness and beauty from the souls of those who commit them. None of God's love then remains in them. And should they die at that time, God could not take them to His heavenly home. Instead they would have to go where all bad people go.

All this should logically suggest the Sacrament of Penance, for the reception of which the child should gradually be given some preparation as he approaches school age. It can be pointed out to him that God is so eager that His love and His life remain in our souls that He has given His priests power to forgive sins that have unfortunately been committed, thereby restoring to the soul the life and beauty which it had lost. The story of the Prodigal may well serve to bring home to the little one the essentials of the Sacrament of Penance, namely, examination of conscience, sorrow for sin, resolution of amendment, and the confession of sin.

THE MASS AND HOLY COMMUNION

Two other highly important means of grace with which the child should be given some acquaintance even during his preschool days are the Mass and the Holy Eucharist. The two go hand in hand. Knowledge of them will normally be acquired gradually over a period of several years. When the child is

first taken to church, say at the age of two, he will have no understanding of the meaning of the Mass. Nevertheless, it is well to take him even at this tender age and begin teaching him to behave in Church, to genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament and to fold his hands. By the age of three he can be told that the priest prays at Mass and that he should also pray. Perhaps at the age of four he will be able to grasp in a measure the notion of Christ coming down upon the altar at the quiet of the Consecration. From then on his interest in the Mass should be developed more and more through his learning to observe the priest more closely during the course of the Mass. By repeating to him often the stories of the Last Supper and of the Crucifixion, the child will come by the age of five to grasp at least something of the great mysteries of the Mass and of the Holy Eucharist—mysteries which he never will be able fully to grasp but which will be a source of happiness and of help to him throughout life, in proportion to the measure in which he comes to comprehend and love them.

Perhaps verses, such as the following by Sister Mary Gertrude, will prove helpful to parents in teaching the child of five or six years further to appreciate the Mass and the Blessed Sacrament:

THE ALTAR

A is for Altar,
 before it we pray
 Our Lord dwells upon it
 by night and by day.
 He cannot be seen,
 but we kneel and adore.
 O Lord, I believe
 May my faith grow still more!

THE CHANGED BREAD

B is for Bread
 that is used in the Mass
 Unheard and unseen
 a great change comes to pass:
 "This is My Body"—
 the priest says the word,
 And the bread becomes truly
 The Flesh of Our Lord.

THE CHALICE

C is for Chalice
 the wine cup of gold
 Our Lord's Precious Blood
 in the Mass it will hold,
 For the wine becomes changed
 to the Blood of Our Lord,
 Then by people and priest
 is devoutly adored.

Finally, with regard to grace, the child must not only be taught its meaning and the various channels through which it may be received, but must also have impressed upon his mind from his early years the importance of co-operating with grace. He must be taught that to increase the grace of God in his soul should

be his aim throughout life, that God continually offers him more and more of this spiritual life but that he must cooperate with Him by making use of His graces. He must be brought to realize that without such cooperation on his part there can be neither the full flowering of the possibilities of his religious development nor the accomplishment of God's will in behalf of his soul, namely, its ultimate sanctification and eternal salvation.

SAINTLINESS OR GODLESSNESS?

By making a reasonable use of the many golden opportunities that are theirs for the religious training of their little ones within the home, parents can keep them from their earliest years close to God, close to Christ. Indeed, they can make them other Christs; they can make them child saints. For we may well call the little one in whom something approximating perfect development takes place, primarily in the supernatural and moral orders, a child saint. What an alluring opportunity for the true Catholic parent! The increasing number of biographical sketches of holy children in our own day, show that sainthood in these little friends of Christ is by no means an impossible ideal. They show, too, that not a few parents, coming from various walks of life, are in our modern world making the most of these sacred opportunities that are theirs, and are really producing such religious prodigies in their homes.

Unfortunately, however, we also find the contrary. We find parents today who in sorry contrast to the foregoing type deliberately deny their own little ones the very knowl-

edge of their Heavenly Father and of holy things. The type is well illustrated by the mother who some time ago strenuously objected against including in a book for children a picture of two tots kneeling in prayer, and then expressed herself about it as follows: "If such a picture were put into the hands of my children, I should be in for a bad half hour trying to explain what prayers were and why they did not form a part of their routine. I would not bar the book from the house to save myself this trouble, but I think it is vastly improved by the omission of such a picture, for a great many children today are brought up without ever hearing of God and religion. Mine are among them.

"To introduce a small child to the idea of an omnipotent Father may easily rob him of his self-dependence. He may form the habit of leaning on some person or power instead of growing up in the belief that he alone must meet and solve his problems as they arise. One might jeopardize the whole future happiness of a child by telling him that he is accountable to God for what he does and not to his own conscience."

That is an example of what must be contended with today. One might no longer be shocked to hear such words from the mouth of Lenin or Stalin, but coming from the pen of an American mother, from one of the intelligentsia, so-called, it is quite a different story. And there are a number of erratic people among us who are weak enough to be led astray by such jargon. It seems almost incredible to what extremes man's pride and conceit can lead him.

It need not be argued, of course, that no Catholic parents share any such attitude toward the child and his religion. Indeed, they are all justly shocked at such utter godlessness. But, on the other hand, is it not equally true that many among them are not leading their little ones on definitely toward saintliness? Is it not true that many of them are not measuring up to what is properly expected of them with regard to the religious training of their children in the home? Surely no one could hesitate to answer in the affirmative. And it is for all such to aim definitely higher. They must come to appreciate more fully the importance of the early years in the spiritual development of the little ones whom God has entrusted to their care. They must learn to accept anew the sacred responsibilities of parenthood. They must acknowledge in practice the wondrous opportunities that are theirs as members of the lay priesthood.

Study Outline

1. Why has the home special advantages in training the preschool child in his religion?

2. Name some of the main principles on which the early spiritual training of the child must be based. What conclusions are to be deduced from these principles?

3. What religious truths can the preschool child learn to know? What moral truths? At what particular age period can he learn to know these various truths?

4. Show how the idea of God can be brought home to the little child through the medium of the wonders around him.

5. How can holy pictures be used to advantage in the religious training of the child? Name some of the pictures that should prove particularly helpful.

6. Show the value of the religious story in the child's spiritual training.

7. Give examples of projects of a religious nature that the child might be given to do.

8. What is the value of verse in teaching the small child to pray?

9. What unnecessary difficulties do parents at times create in trying to teach their children to pray?

10. Formulate some prayers suitable to a child of four or five years of age.

11. What is the distinction between praying and "saying prayers?"

12. What sacred articles might be brought to the attention of the little one in order to teach him reverence for holy things?

13. How may the child be taught the notion of sin?

14. How may the child be taught the notion of grace?

15. How can the child be given some appreciation of the Sacrament of Baptism? The Sacrament of Penance? The Holy Eucharist? The Mass?

16. Name some child saints of our day.

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