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Training in Chastity.
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in

Chastity



BY THE REV.
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TRAINING IN CHASTITY

by

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Training In Chastity

Training in chastity has never been an easy job. The Sixth Commandment has always been the Difficult Commandment. It is doubly difficult in our day when it has struck "sex o'clock" in America. The literature of the day, the popular magazine, the scandal sheet, the movies, the fashions, sports, dances, night clubs, road houses, and bathing beaches have conspired to flaunt sex publicity. It is made almost impossible for people to keep the mind off the subject.

Catholics must regard this situation as a challenge. It represents an opportunity for us to prove anew the undiminished power of God's grace. We must follow the example of the Fathers of the Early Church who in the face of a decadent civilization pleaded for the miracles of Christian chastity and virginity. And while pagan Rome was reveling in debauchery, Christian Rome gave us the Agneses and the Cecilians and the Sebastians. The present crisis in morality

calls for the same action on our part. The need of the hour is the will of God. The arm of God is not shortened. Our Holy Father in Rome has issued the call to direct action. Our opportunities for action were never greater than they are at the present moment. As Archbishop Beckman of Dubuque reminded his people recently, the Church is the only institution which has survived the general collapse of the past few years and it is the only institution which has the key to recovery. Men admit freely that recovery in the moral order must precede every other kind of recovery, but they do not always see that the Church offers the only means to that moral recovery.

Hence, you, the members of the Catholic Conference on Family Life, are wise in meeting here today to produce the evidence that the Church has within her the power to save America from moral ruin. You are wise in attacking the weakest link of the chain. No chain is stronger than its weakest link and, measured by this standard, our modern age is weak indeed, since the home, that essential unit of social life, has almost disappeared. There is

more truth than humor in describing the American home as a garage with a bedroom attached, or in comparing it with the lunch counter on a railway trip, where we dash in for a hurried bite of food and dash out again and away.

Whatever the Catholic Family Conference will be able to do to restore our Catholic home, will be promoting very directly the preservation of chastity. Adequate training in chastity can be accomplished only in union with complete Christian education. Training in chastity, though it is an important part of education, is nevertheless but one part and perhaps not even the most important part. Training in chastity must form an integral part of moral education from the earliest years and cannot be postponed until sex reveals itself plainly to the growing child. Here is the sum and substance of Catholic training in chastity: Give a solid religious training in general, especially in the use of the Sacraments; begin early to instruct the mind as to self-control in general, with simple applications to the sex instinct, while replying frankly to sincere questions in private; and try

fully to instruct the child whenever the occasion requires.

This theory may be illustrated by quoting the testimony of a Catholic physician:

I know an excellent young man who after he had much trouble with sex matters, later pulled away bravely from all such weaknesses, and even took a temporary vow of chastity. I asked him as to what he felt had helped him most in his battle. He answered: "Laying the natural foundation first, getting matters clearly explained and 'lined up,' then building upon that with the supernatural motives." I might add that this young man felt free to go to the priest and ask about anything he did not understand and was curious about.

General character training is the essential phase of training in chastity. I shall here discuss briefly another phase of training in chastity, namely, the giving of necessary information.

Who Should Instruct the Young?

Our first question is: Who has the primary duty of giving the necessary instruction to the young? All writers

on the subject, beginning with the Pope in his *Encyclical on the Christian Education of Youth*, are agreed that the first duty belongs to the parents. But the second question is: Do our Catholic parents perform that duty? Four years ago I asked the following question of 500 pastors: *Is it your impression that Catholic parents give the necessary sex instruction early enough to their children? If not, why not?* Replies were received from 365 pastors; of these 320 replied, "No," implying that it was their belief that Catholic parents did not fulfill that duty by their children. One pastor of a large parish in the East sent along this note:

You will render a much needed service if you will do something that will make our Catholic parents bestir themselves. Not all parents seem to realize to what frightful dangers their children are exposed at the present time. Children are seduced at so early an age, while they could be saved if they were instructed betimes at home. They contract habits of impurity before they are aware of what is happening to them. The confessor cannot do everything.

Who Does Instruct Our Catholic Youth?

While Catholic parents are shirking their duty, the agents of the Devil are up and doing. From whom does the average Catholic boy receive his sexual information? A priest with a long experience of teaching in Catholic high schools reports that on an average more than ninety per cent. of our Catholic boys receive their information on sex from indecent and foul sources. In any group of 100 boys investigated by their priest, never more than six or seven stated that their first instruction in this vital matter came from their parents, teachers, or confessors. Should we then be surprised if the subject of sex is so rarely seen in its proper light by our Catholic people? First impressions are generally the most lasting, and if the first impressions are foul the mind may never come to know sex as an instinct given us by God on trust and for a noble purpose. How much would be gained for the cause of God if we could get the masses of our Catholic people to learn the sublime aspect of sex as treated, for instance, by Pro-

fessor Hildebrand in his book, *Defense of Purity!*

Why Parents Neglect Their Duty

The reasons generally given for the parents' failure to give the necessary sex instruction can be grouped under six heads: 1) Parents do not know how to instruct their children; 2) they do not realize the need of the instruction; 3) they are too timid about discussing the subject with their children; 4) they think that the priest should take care of the matter in the confessional; 5) some parents believe that teachers might give sufficient information in a general way in school; 6) too many parents believe that children may be left to themselves in the matter, that somehow or other they will find a way out of the difficulty themselves.

Practically all parents will agree theoretically that it is their duty to instruct their children betimes, but will shirk the performance of the embarrassing task. A flagrant illustration is that of a Catholic Juvenile Court Judge who went up and down the country urging the duty of sex

instruction upon Catholic parents, but who could not get himself to instruct his own children. In this matter most parents belong to the "Let me alone" club and are satisfied if they are not asked to furnish the information to their children. Many a parent feels like the mother who admitted: "I had sleepless nights full of fear and anguish and have prayed that my child would never come to me and ask me about these things."

When we come to analyze further the reasons for the parents' inability to give the necessary instruction, we find that many lack both the accurate information and the proper vocabulary. Ninety-eight per cent of them never received the proper information themselves, and hence cannot impart it; and, secondly, the terminology with which they are familiar is either vulgar or obscene, and they naturally feel embarrassed about using such language in the presence of their children. In the end, they rationalize that, just as they got their information in some way or other, they see no way of preventing their children from getting it from the same uncertain source. Other parents will simply "pass the buck" by

saying that the necessary instruction should be given by the priests in the confessional or by the Sisters in the school-room.

Catholic Literature on Sex

Much would be gained if we could get all our Catholic parents to read some Catholic literature on the subject. Let me make it plain that we now have sufficient Catholic literature in the field and there is no need for reading any but Catholic books on the subject. Non-Catholic literature on this delicate subject, though it be written with the best intentions, can never measure up to our ideals in chastity. This non-Catholic literature ignores the all-important supernatural aids of prayer, confession, and Holy Communion and, what is worse, will at times urge what is a crime in the sight of God. Hence in writing my little book, *Sex Education and Training in Chastity*, I took particular pains to list on pp. 192-194 the excellent Catholic literature we now have on the subject. We now have available a Catholic book for every kind of need in this field, and most of this literature is sold at so low a price as to be

within reach of even the slimmest purse.

There is, for instance, the pamphlet, *Watchful Elders, a Word to Parents and Educators About Educating Children to Purity*, written by Father Kilian J. Hennrich, O.M. Cap., and sold by the Bruce Publishing Company of Milwaukee, for 40 cents. The booklet is intended as a guide in instructing the little ones. If parents cannot persuade themselves to present its contents in their own way, they should be induced to read it with their children of the proper age. But if they cannot get themselves to do even so little, they may give the booklet to their children to be read, in the presence of father or mother, before the dawn of puberty. The titles of other books and pamphlets will be appended to this article so that the reader may select whatever he may need for his particular purpose. We urge all adult Catholics to read widely in the Catholic literature on the subject. They will obtain the information needed to correct the pernicious errors so prevalent today.

Here is an instance of what one zealous pastor accomplished. He has

a parish of about 250 families with children. At the regular meetings of the Holy Name Society and of the Society of Christian Mothers he took up the subject of safe-guarding the chastity of the young. He found that, of the 500 parents, about 200 mothers and 50 fathers took an active interest in the subject, and about 100 fathers "too busy" to attend the meetings approved heartily after hearing reports from their wives. In this way, the pastor reached the majority of the homes in his parish. At the same time the sisters in the school were instructed to be on the lookout for individual pupils or groups that might need special attention, and if such were found, their parents were informed. The pastor made liberal use of the opportunity of the talks and conferences to make known and distribute the Catholic books on the subject of training in chastity.

Other pastors have found the parent-teacher associations helpful in reaching the homes of children. Some pastors had physicians and nurses address these groups of parents and thus used them as leaders for creating general interest in giving proper instruc-

tion to the children at home. It might be possible for the Catholic parent-teacher associations of a town or even a diocese to cooperate in securing a competent lecturer for addressing the individual groups on the subject.

Need of Individual Instruction

The object of all these endeavors should be to interest each and every parent in doing his duty by his children. As the young man can be taught fully only in private, the parents are the natural instructors. They know their children best, and will understand just how to adapt the instruction to their individual needs. They should be made to recognize that it is easier by far to guide a good child in the ways of goodness than to bring him back once he has stepped aside from the right path. There was a time when some Catholic parents really thought it sinful to bring up this subject with their children, but from our inquiries we are inclined to think that such erroneous views no longer obtain, and that most of our parents are simply too timid about undertaking what will always remain an ordeal.

It may be well to mention that our

Catholic parents need not be finicky about the form of their instruction or the phrasing of what they will tell their children. Even though they should not be familiar with the choicest words, their instruction would be given with the proper intention and would proceed from chaste lips, and hence would be immeasurably superior to the instruction that their children might be receiving from vile sources. The crudest teaching of Catholic parents is always better than silence, for silence on their part will generally compel their children to drink in the infection from the street. Parents may be induced to do their duty if they recall their own plight in this matter when they were children—and they may rest assured that the plight of the children at the present time with the universal corruption is undoubtedly greater. Catholic parents in America are too hesitant about instructing their children in the matter, and we must be prepared to answer all kinds of objections.

Are the Children Too Young?

A frequent objection is that the children are still too young, and that the

instruction will be given later. To convince parents that this excuse is frequently a mere defense reaction, we might ask them just when they intend to impart the instruction, and we shall discover that the parents are only shirking an unpleasant duty by procrastinating. We must therefore bring home to parents that procrastinating will only delay the duty, and, while increasing the danger of corruption for the children in the interval, will render the task all the more difficult at a later time. The younger the child, the less sex-consciousness will there be on his part, and consequently the less embarrassment for both parent and child.

The only safe rule that can be given as to the time for giving the instruction is to say that the instruction must be given as soon as necessary. It is better to give the instruction a year too soon than one hour too late. In our day and country the instruction is needed much earlier than most parents imagine. Miss Tracy, a police-woman of Worcester, Mass., admits that nine-year-old children have told her things about sex which she did not know at forty. Still, we must not allow the

reports of the police to determine the rules for dealing with the average child. It is important that we ascertain just when sex problems begin to appear in the child's life. Records show that interest in sex first began as early as six and as late as 18. Dr. Hirschfeld, an investigator, is authority for the statement that 22 per cent of children commit the solitary sin from the 5th to the 11th year. The interest in sex probably begins earlier in life now than formerly.

A Safe Rule

The only safe rule to follow is to study each child individually and to give the information just as soon as the individual requires it. A fuller statement of this rule is to give the information, first, in accordance with the symptoms of curiosity; the child's curiosity in sex matters is legitimate and he has a right to have his questions answered frankly and sincerely. Secondly, give the information in accordance with the child's physical development. Here watchful parents may have to anticipate questions on the part of the child. Another wise rule tells us to give all information

needed so that the child will not be helpless when the changes, either physical or psychical of adolescence, come into his life, and secondly so that the information will not come first from the wrong source.

The Rev. Dr. Paul H. Furfey, who has written several helpful books on educational topics, advises in his book, *You and Your Children* (Benziger Brothers, New York):

Further instruction on these matters should be given before puberty. This commonly occurs between the ages of thirteen and sixteen — probably somewhat earlier in girls than in boys. Before this time the child should be informed about the physical side of marriage. This is admittedly a difficult subject to face, but it is essential that it be discussed. At the same time the child should be taught the nature and dangers of solitary sin. The girl should be told frankly about menstruation and the boy about seminal emissions. Other instructions may well be postponed until adolescence, at which time the growing child should be told about the nature of venereal disease, about the physical dangers involved in promiscuity, and about the social evil.

All the evidence available would seem to prove that no definite rule can be laid down to cover all cases. Every single case must be treated individually. The important thing is that our Catholic parents be convinced of their duty in the matter, and then we may safely commit the choice of the proper time to their judgment. Some parents have found it advisable to offer direct opportunities to their children for the asking of questions, for example, in connection with their examination of conscience with regard to the Commandments when preparing for their first confession. Subsequent confessions would then provide further opportunities. In this way parents may train their children to come to them for whatever information they wish to have.

What Not to Say

While we must warn our Catholic people, in the spirit of the Pope's *Encyclical on the Christian Education of Youth*, "not to descend to details, nor to refer to the various ways in which this infernal hydra destroys with its poison so large a portion of the world," we may not grow weary

of impressing upon fathers and mothers the fact that their children will get sex information in spite of hesitating parents, and that in getting the information from the wrong sources they get the wrong quality in the wrong quantity, with the result that their attitude is altogether wrong, and they may suffer shock and moral injury which years or even a lifetime may not be able to efface.

Even savages have realized the need of instructing the young in the intimate matters of personal life. Indian squaws in British Columbia have continued up to the present time their ancient custom of calling the Indian maiden aside to a solitary wigwam at the time of the first symptom of puberty in order to give her some kind of instruction in "sex hygiene." Is there less need in a Christian family for timely instruction?

CATHOLIC LITERATURE ON THE SEX PROBLEM

The best way to drive out darkness is to open wide the doors and windows to let in God's sunlight. Similarly, to correct the pernicious doctrines that are being shouted from the housetops, we must make known God's views on this important subject. Fortunately we now have available a plentiful supply of Catholic literature to meet all needs.

First on the list is *Sex Education and Training in Chastity*, by the Rev. Felix M. Kirsch, O.M. Cap., Ph.D., Litt. D., published by Benziger Brothers, \$2.00. This book of 540 pages has rightly been called a Catholic encyclopedia on chastity. With the help of this book parents, priests, teachers, and social workers would seem to be well equipped to meet every need in the field.

The book answers in detail all such questions as to when the sex instruction must be given to the child, who must give the instruction, what must be said, and how it must be said. In-

dividual chapters deal with the control of bad thoughts, bad talk, the solitary sin, and the association between the sexes.

Other important sections deal with the education for marriage and Catholic character education. The author is at home in psychology and biology, but rightly insists that while the natural helps must be employed, it is the supernatural aids of prayer, Confession and Communion that are most effective. While this book thus meets every need of the mature reader, there are other publications for particular needs.

For instance, *Watchful Elders*, by the Rev. Kilian J. Hennrich, O. M. Cap., M. A., published by the Bruce Publishing Co., (40c), instructs parents how to give the necessary sex information to children. The pamphlet contains further material that may be used in early and late adolescence, and deals also with particularly difficult cases.

Safeguards of Chastity, by the Rev. Fulgence Meyer, O. F. M., published by St. Francis Book Shop (35c), offers frank yet reverent instruction on

chastity for adolescent boys. The author suggests that fathers read and explain to their adolescent boys those portions of the book that pertain to their age and condition. *Helps to Purity*, by the same author, is a companion volume for adolescent girls.

In the Heart of a Young Man, or Talks on Personal Purity to Boys, by the Rev. Lionel E. Pire, C.P.P.S., published by F. Pustet Co., 35c, will prove useful to both parents and teachers. A teaching Brother who has used the book for several years with high school boys reports that the young people have been greatly helped by the information given by Father Pire.

"I'm Keeping Company Now," by the Rev. Fulgence Meyer, O. F. M., published by the Paulist Press, 10c, deals in a clear, helpful way with the temptations that assail young people during the period of courtship. The author presents telling evidence to prove that God's law still holds in our day, and shows at the same time how prayer, Confession, and Communion make possible the practice of the holy virtue even during the time of greatest danger.

The Difficult Commandment, by the Rev. C. C. Martindale, S. J., published by P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 35c, deals with the subject of self-control in a way that will appeal especially to young men. The same author has edited a companion volume for young women, *Into Their Company*, 35c.

Plain Talks On Marriage, by the Rev. Fulgence Meyer, O. F. M., published by St. Francis Book Shop, 40c, is a booklet for people who are married, or who are about to be married. The author, who had many years' experience both in teaching theology and in preaching missions, offers practical help in the difficult problems that confront married people today.

Birth Control, by the Rev. John M. Cooper, D. D., published by the National Catholic Welfare Conference, 35c, is an excellent manual on a difficult subject for married men and women.

In Defense of Purity, by Dietrich von Hildebrand, published by Sheed & Ward, 65c, should be read by all mature Catholics for its clear exposition of the Catholic philosophy of sex.

The book will prove an inspiration to both the married and the unmarried.

All of the books listed above can be ordered through the editor of The Catholic Family Monthly, Huntington, Indiana. The prices quoted include postage.

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