

TIPS FOR PARENTS

HOW TO COMBAT A SECULAR CULTURE

So many parents complain to us about their children. They come to seek advice about many things, but especially about counteracting what they call the “influence of environment.” By this they mean the children next door, who are allowed to do things which they would never allow their children to do, such as staying out until all hours, watching offensive movies, or going out with whomever they wish, whenever they wish. The list of things to fight in today’s environment seems to be endless.

What is the key to combating the prevailing culture, which is overwhelmingly secular? Fundamentally, the answer lies within the souls of parents. A searching examination of conscience must be undertaken. In a way, this searching may lead, from the worldly point of view, to dire consequences; in fact it may well revolutionize the lives of the parents themselves. It has to be a thorough examination, without self-illusion, without compromise.

Together husband and wife must face themselves and see themselves as clearly as is humanly possible. Therefore, such an examination of conscience must begin with fervent prayer. Here are some key questions that parents must ask themselves:

What are your dreams and ambitions? What are your ideas of recreation and fun? Is your home a place where all the youngsters of the block would come in preference to movies or anything else? Is there warm understanding of youth in your home? Deep love of youth? A remembrance of your own youth, its joys and difficulties?

As parents, do you take seriously your most awesome and holy vocation? Or do you bear with it because you have to? Is your home a place of peace and love radiating into every nook and corner and spilling over onto friends and neighbors? Is your standard of living that of keeping up with the Joneses or with Christ?

On and on, one can extend the litany of questions parents must answer to make this examination deep and faithful. Perhaps a few examples may illustrate better what I mean.

I knew a lady whose house-keeping was so impeccable that all the women of the neighborhood extolled her, and whose cooking was so perfect that all the men wished their wives could cook as well. Yet the strange thing was that both her husband and her children were seldom at home. Mr. X preferred to spend his evenings “with the boys,” and the children could

invariably be found a few doors away, where the lady of the house, her husband, and her brood welcomed them happily, and gave them the front living room for themselves. Mr. and Mrs. Neighbor spent much time in their large, old-fashioned kitchen, to which everyone eventually gravitated for cookies and milk, of which there always seemed an inexhaustible supply.

Now Mrs. Neighbor was not a perfect housekeeper. How could she be, with youngsters running in and out all day? With toys covering tables and chairs, not to mention skates, sweaters and such? But the whole house smelled of the wondrous cookies she always seemed to be baking. And the big, inviting smile of her



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Pass It On! #5



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husband drew crowds of boys to talk about anything and everything, from fishing to dating.

I knew another couple who made it a rule to watch television programs together. Very soon the children were content to be guided in their choice of television shows by their parents. It happened quite simply. Everyone in the house was invited to comment on each program afterward. Easily, with much joking and laughter, between sandwiches and beverages, the parents taught their children to appreciate a good show. It was almost like a game. Once in a while the question was asked, "If you were Christ, what would you think of this show?" It worked miracles.

Have you ever watched youngsters listening to an adult conversation? They even imitate the inflections of their parents' voices. I overheard a little girl of nine saying to another little one of the same age, "Oh, you mean Mrs. Y. Ho hum! She does not amount to much. Her husband is only a garbage collector." Now, where did she hear that sort of thing? I happened to know her mother, and the tone of her voice was identical. So was the content. How could the good lady hope to make that child what she should be before God, when by age nine, she already had a valuation of human beings not by their worth before God, or their goodness, or their dignity as human beings, but by the silly and unimportant measure of social status or class?

A man down the street from where I once lived beat his boy black and blue for gambling on pin ball machines. Yet, he himself gambled on the stock market, and the family life was bearable or unbearable, according to stock market quotations. The boy knew full well there was something terribly unjust about this. Eventually he ran away from home. God only knows what happened to him.

Yes, an examination of parental consciences is indicated. And it must go deep, for only then can anyone counteract the baleful influences of environment. It must begin with parents, not with children.

If the home is Christocentric, if Mary, the mother of Jesus, is loved and cherished in it, if the avowed and openly discussed goal of the whole family is sanctity (which is the goal, or should be, of all Catholics), and if life is lived and measured and evaluated against that goal, then the environment does not matter. In fact a family like that, in any given neighborhood, will soon change the environment of their neighborhood.

Why not do this examination of conscience now—and ask Christ, who changed the world, to help you as a parent to change your home—and your neighborhood along with it!

Compiled from the writings of Catherine Doherty
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