

I Know When I'm Licked!

by MARIE McCARTHY

If you send your child to parochial school, you are going to run into that inevitable and frustrating clincher, "Sister said," sooner or later. Probably sooner.



'God is a string bean!'

AT FIRST it is amusing but repetition soon gives it the irritating quality usually produced by a cinder in the eye. As a town and bred Catholic, educated in parochial school I have an innate respect for the habit.

When I was very young I fully expected the skies would open and the angry hand of God would smack me from the living, should I voice even the mildest criticism of the sisters.

If my own mother ever grieved of hearing Sister said, she gave no sign. And Sister was credited with some mighty starting statements simply because I felt not even my mother would dare to dispute Sister's word.

It was rather always a nasty shock to discover Mother's loud like instead of what Sister REALLY said.

Then one day my own child came home with a sister said. It was fairly amusing but it felt its stonewall side. Margie, age 7, was preparing for her first Holy Communion. No atomic energy plant employee going into a radiation area was ever given a better briefing.

I was even told to an exact rivety, at what point of the leg the dress hem should be. . . . Sister said.

Every night for weeks before the wonderful event, we were treated to a preview of how Margie would look going into church. Of how Margie would look going down the aisle. Of how Margie would look coming back up the aisle. Hands together, pointing straight up, every finger rigid, eyes riveted on the forefingers.

"Aren't you afraid you'll walk up somebody's back?" I asked casually.

"Mommy, Sister said this is the way we have to do it."

"Oh."

Let Sister worry about all the angelic little communicants piling up pyramid style.

Then the rehearsal for Confession.

Margie brought home a mimeographed form. It bore the appropriate title, "Form of Confession," and listed the proper prayers to be used in the confessional.

"Want to hear me confess?" asked Margie, sublimely confident that I did.

"Only," she cautioned, "I can't tell you my sins. Sister said . . ."

"Okay," I said hastily, "Confess."

She knelt in front of a chair and waited.

This story, depicting an amusing vignette of Catholic life is reprinted from EXTENSION, national Catholic magazine and official organ of the Home Missions.

"Begin," I prompted.

Margie gave me a withering look.

"Sister said we must wait until the priest opens the little window," she informed me with a trace of disgust for my ignorance.

So I waited patiently for Father to open the little window. He must have been hearing the confession of a penitent 70 years away from the church. But finally Father opened the little window apparently because the confession rehearsal started.

"Form of Confession," announced Margie.

"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "You don't have to SAY form of confession."

"Sister said . . . the wall be gan. And Margie's wall hased me to suspect a banisher somewhere in the family tree.

"Now, now, wait a minute . . . dear, I know that sister said for you to say the form of confession. That's right. I mean Sister is right. But she means the prayers."

Margie was adamant.

"Sister said . . ."

"Listen!" My voice rose a few notes. "Sister does not mean you have to say 'Form of Confession.' Don't you understand? That's just a title you start out. Bless me, Father."

"It is NOT a . . . whatever you said. Sister said the FIRST thing we must say is the form of confession. And now the lower lip quivered and tears threatened to give authority to Margie's status as a penitent.

I know when I'm licked, so I appealed to my husband. He

"Not to watch the President on television."

"Now I know Sister did not say that."

"She did, too! She said not to watch Elvis President on television."

"Oh."

I have developed admirable restraint.

No longer do I quake or blanch when one of the little students announces:

"Sister said I have to sell 10 boxes of Christmas cards."

I mentally rearrange Sister's statement to:

"Whoever sells the most Christmas cards will receive a prize."

The second grader informs me:

"Sister said for me to bring 5 dozen fancy, decorated cookies for our party tomorrow. Will you make them tonight?" (This at bedtime)

This one reduces to much simpler terms. Second graders are 'notorious exaggerators:

"You may bring cookies, if you like."

I have but one suggestion to make. When a child enters parochial school, he should be given a guidebook, written by the sisters.

After all, it's only fair to hear what Sister REALLY says, don't you think?

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Banking Family Donates School

Salt Lake City — (RNS) — Bishop Duane G. Hunt of Salt Lake City officiated at the cornerstone-laying for a \$400,000 parish grade school being donated to this diocese.

The school is named in honor of the late James E. Cosgriff, local banker, whose family is providing the funds for its construction.

Donors include Mr. Cosgriff's widow, Mildred; his son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Walter E. Cosgriff; and his son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Emerson S. Sturdevant.

James E. Cosgriff was president of the Continental National Bank and Trust Company here at the time of his death in 1938. His son now heads the bank. The Cosgriff family owns or controls 21 banks in seven western states.

The school in St. Ambrose Parish, will include eight classrooms, a kindergarten, and an auditorium that will double as a cafeteria and gymnasium. It is scheduled to open in September.

American Legion Backs Bingo Bill

Milwaukee, Wis. — (RNS) — The executive committee of the Wisconsin department of the American Legion has announced its support of a bill to legalize bingo games sponsored by churches and veterans' organizations.

State and local governments would be given a percentage of the profits from the games under the bill, which was introduced in the state legislature by two Milwaukee Democratic assemblymen.

Neither churches nor veterans' groups would be permitted to bring in professionals to manage the games.

BOOK SHELF

Cornelia Connelly

THE CASE OF CORNELIA CONNELLY, by Juliana Wadhwa.

Pantheon '57. 276 pp. with bibliography. \$3.75.

This retelling of the strange life of Cornelia Connelly, wife of the famous apostate Pierce Connelly and foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Childhood, enables one to see vividly at least three levels of significance in that saga of suffering.

She suffered the loss of her wifehood and motherhood, and later her reputation and even the respect of her nuns, through the terrible caprice of a husband blind to his own fault; she suffered these things through the enthusiastic misdirection of churchmen who sought the talents of Pierce Connelly in an era when the Church apparently all in the permissive Will of God for the good of her soul and the souls of others. It is a poignant and noble record.

PIERCE CONNELLY drew her after him into the Catholic Church. Then, determined to become a priest, he made her resolve on a religious life and the settling of her beloved children, the youngest only three, the oldest only thirteen, in separate schools.

She accomplished this death in herself (No wonder she afterwards taught her nuns in unambiguous terms absolute death to do the work of God!) after some months, though her health was never the same thereafter, and her phraseology gives grievous clue to the cost ("Do not allow your heart to be wounded, and if it is . . . stitch up the wound with the love of God . . . I very often have to remember this and then resign myself to endure more . . . not to allow one's poor heart to drop blood till it withers!")

All her religious advisers concurred in the counsel that Pierce

be unhampered and that family life be sacrificed. Nobody saw the effect upon the future of the children as it would immediately be seen (by advisers!) today.

CORNELIA OBEIENTLY lent herself to the business of becoming a foundress of a new community of educators—poured her soul and energies into the work, striving at the same time to remain a careful mother by mail and by visits rarely enough made.

Then Pierce discovered that he was unable to do without her fortifying approval and the comfort of her love. He sought to become a director of Cornelia's community and of her work.

When she held to her new course, to which she and the souls under her were wholly committed, he passed from fury to deliberate estrangement of her children from her (of which there are many sad consequences), and thence to apostasy, into which he led the children also.

Public disgrace was added. Years and years of litigation in the English courts to a raked Pierce's unceasing effort to regain control over his wife. Her name and story were banded abroad, fier friends, some of them, even some of her nuns, found her a scandal—were actually waiting for her death! The name of Cardinal Wiseman shines as that of a friend who would not forsake a friend, controversial figure though she was.

BUT CARDINAL Wiseman died, and persecution and sorrow did not at all. The measure of her suffering gives pause: the

COURIER-JOURNAL
Friday, May 3, 1957

unmitigated suffering of a loving wife, a sweet mother, of immense originality and devotion, a Catholic of deepest spirituality, a religious fervor as well as a scholar, and finally, in the Cross to the last day of her old age. This victim of a new candidate for beatification.

The author, an Englishwoman educated by the Holy Child, is a mother of four children as well as a scholar, and has lived this life perceptively. Many American slang is unexpected and amusing; her objectivity is unusual.

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