

My Children Are Wearing Me Down, They Say 'Other Parents' Aren't Strict

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Do you realize what a rough time Catholic parents face if they try to raise their children according to the rules promulgated by the Church? We stand pretty much alone, and our children never let us forget it! Mine have started to call me "Saint" Catherine because I insist that rules be obeyed. But children can wear you down, and even make you doubt the correctness of your own position after a while. What's the best way to handle this situation?

Many parents feel pretty much as you do about this, Catherine. They don't want their children to think they are too strict, yet they recognize their sacred obligations as parents. Meanwhile, other parents seem to allow their adolescent children much greater freedom.

Who's right? Are you being old-fashioned and prudish? Don't you trust your children? Haven't conditions and attitudes changed since you were growing up? Can't you do as much harm by being too strict as by being too lenient?

WE COULD MULTIPLY these questions and the doubts they raise in parents' minds, but to what avail? They all stem from the same source: American parents no longer agree on how to raise their children, and the children know it.

If there were a common parental front, your task would be relatively easy. All good parents would enforce the same norms and rules of conduct, the children couldn't play one set of parents against another.

It may help you and other Catholic parents face your problems more confidently if you recognize the reasons why there is so little agreement among American parents.

In the first place, Americans no longer agree on the origin, nature, and purpose of man. Where does he come from? What is he? What is his purpose in life? Hence they no longer agree on man's relationship to God, on what constitutes moral good and evil, on what represents morally proper conduct.

This means that in a rapidly changing society like our own, they have no set of common principles on the basis of which they can develop new standards of conduct and new patterns of behavior.

It follows that Catholic parents who have very clear ideas about the meaning of life, man's relationship of dependence on God, standards of moral good and evil, and so forth, will constitute a minority group in regard to the way they wish to raise their children.

The real crux of the problem stems from the fact that many Catholic parents are content to simply follow the crowd, without questioning the moral principles which form the basis for this conduct. They continue



to pay lip-service to Catholic ideals, but follow standards based on quite other principles.

This places Catholic parents like yourself, Catherine, clearly on the spot. You definitely cannot allow your children to follow the crowd in regard to modesty in dress, dating, parties, and many other commonly accepted teenage patterns of conduct. Yet your children openly question your judgment, and you yourself sometimes wonder whether you're taking the right stand.

Explain to them in your own words that there is a clear relationship between what Catholics believe and how they may act. For example, if one accepts the Catholic concept of chastity, common sense and experience indicate that certain forms of dress, association between adolescent boys and girls, and so forth, must be avoided.

Teach your children to think in terms of basic Catholic

principles. Inspire in them a healthy pride in their privilege of being followers of Christ.

If they doubt the prudence of your judgments in some matters, don't hesitate to lay the facts of life on the line. They'll soon discover that the Church's norms are not arbitrary, but stem from solid Christian principles and a long experience in dealing with human nature.

Finally, since there are other parents facing the same problem, wouldn't it be a good idea to join with them in discussing your common problems? You can do this through Parent-Teacher groups, the Christian Family Movement, parish discussion groups, and so on.

By talking over your problem with other parents, you will be able to check your own views and practices, and at the same time, you will realize that you are not fighting the good fight alone.

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BOOK SHELF

Stories of Children

By Sister Margaret Teresa, Nazareth College

The Young Ones, by Bishop James E. Walsh of Maryknoll. Farrar, Straus, '58. 213 pp., illustrated. \$3.50.

No more perfect expression of the timeless, loving heart of Holy Mother Church can be imagined than these idyllic stories of little children, true stories reaching us out of Red China—despite a heavy censorship that confiscated others like them from the Bishop's pen.

There is no word of Communism in them, indeed no word proclaiming them Eastern rather than Western. These little folks are just children of the Church of a particularly fascinating branch of it—and they twine around your heart in the usual way, and you understand exactly why no pastor, no missionary could choose to leave them.

THE YANG BOY or Little Tough Lady, or Princess in Overall, or Wei-Number Five with woad layers of clothing for the winter ('lucky child') or Mrs. Yeh's baby son Great-Favor—they are one and all among the dearest children, the most natural, you have ever met.

Poor baby Great-Favor, fed within an inch of his life by the parish ladies on a freezing Christmas Eve, getting mittens in his prize-package and dropping them to set up a wail for a white plush goose somebody else has drawn—you've met him. He gets the goose, of course, and the 'mittens, and many other things.

OR LI-NUMBER TWO—you've seen him in action. He empties a wastebasket on the first instant of his tour round an office, upsais a glue-bottle (capped, hurrah!), breaks an ashtray and spends many quiet minutes try-

ing to join the pieces by main force; then he stares hard at the Father's cassock and delivers profound judgment. "Very ritzy buttons—very many buttons!"

Yang Number Three is caught putting a lizard in Lo Number Four's coat pocket, and stands to lose either a sampan on the river or his chances as an altar boy. Choosing to miss the ride, he wins both, and something bigger yet.

Eldest Son, Kai-Ling, has the most serious problems of all, with two such little brothers as his.

No matter how well he entertains Old Uncle and Old Aunt, he has no standing with family father if those little brothers are not in line. But Ma explains the severity of family father and of all fathers Eastern and Western:

"Of course he expects you to do everything well all the time. . . . And he expects you to know lots of things by yourself—and he doesn't think that you need to be told. Why, he thinks you ought to be able to do things easily and know almost everything—and never make a mistake! And that you will be one of the greatest men in the world some day, maybe! And do you know why? . . . It's because he's proud of you . . ."

So the world is right side up, then, for Kai-Ling.

And the world is right side up for the Maryknoll bishop who can study human nature so lovingly in the midst of persecution and war.



Convert Now Nun

Manchester — (RNS) — Dressed in a bridal gown — symbolizing her marriage to God — a 22-year-old Chinese girl enters the English Convent of the Poor Clares in Levenshulme here. She is Doreen Chan, daughter of a wealthy rice merchant in Hong Kong, who was converted to Catholicism two years ago.



Should I Be A Priest?

Durwoodie — (RNS) — An 11-year-old CYO youth tries to understand the mysteries of the Mass while studying a vocational display at St. Joseph's Seminary here. The exhibit included a demonstration of the celebration of the Mass at a practice altar. Frank McMillan of the Incarnations parish, New York, is the boy.



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