

# Teenager Expresses Concern Over Parental Neglect

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Why don't more parents tell their teenage children about the facts of life? I'll be 16 next week and my folks still haven't told me a thing. All I know is what I found out for myself — that isn't much. I think if parents explained the facts, there wouldn't be so much filth being sent through the mail, and so many bad magazines bought by teenage kids.

You're so right, Phyllis! Many religious leaders and teachers have expressed similar views, but I feel your letter is especially important because you speak for the victims of parental neglect—the many boys and girls who need to know, and have a basic right to know, the Christian view of sex, yet must try to find out for themselves. As you say, they don't find out very much; and I might add, what they do learn is either false, pitifully inadequate, or distorted because not presented within a larger framework of Christian values.

I used to think that modern parents were starting to do a better job in this regard. There has been so much writing on this subject, and popular opinion has become so pagan that one would think Catholic parents, in particular, simply could not continue their neglect. Wide experience in dealing with family problems has taught me that this is not the case. Why do parents, who work so hard to provide for their children's needs, fall them here?

In his excellent book, *And God Made Man and Woman*, Father Lucius Cervantes, S.J., calls it "parental taboo," that is, parents seem to regard discussion of the facts of life with their children as something forbidden or under sacred interdiction. People, or at least, good people, just don't discuss such things with their children, and this attitude is maintained in spite of the fact that the normal development of boys and girls, as well as practically everything they see or hear on TV and radio, or in magazines and newspapers, raises questions that demand answers.

Many writers call this attitude of parents "puritan-

cal," concluding that it is a cultural residue or carry-over from the last century when custom dictated an exaggerated avoidance of all reference to sex in polite conversation. This is an oversimplified conclusion for in societies never affected by the Puritan reaction, parents are equally neglectful, while American society has dropped all inhibitions about discussing sex, certainly since the "roaring twenties."

The real reason that many fathers, mothers—and others—cannot teach the facts of life to young people is that they have never faced these facts squarely in themselves and in their own lives. Owing partly to faulty training in youth, and partly to failure to think through the meaning and implications of human sexuality as adults, most people maintain completely negative attitudes toward sex. Sex is not regarded as a positive value, a normal impulse or drive toward the fulfillment of the highest creative act of which man is capable in the natural order. Rather, through a carefully elaborated social fiction, it is looked upon as a kind of skeleton in the closet—everybody knows that it's there—yet pretends that it does not exist.

Why is this fiction maintained? St. Thomas Aquinas suggested that because sex is a powerful human drive, it frequently challenges the control of right reason and consequently humiliates us. Hence people like to act as if sex did not exist, at least, not among "good" people, and since such pretense generates anxiety, tension is released through jokes and humor—man's way of dealing with facts and feelings he does not wish to face rationally.

Parents frequently try to excuse their neglect in giving adequate instruction by saying that they do not know the appropriate terms. In reality, they are so inhibited by their negative feelings that they do not even make the attempt. Adequate instruction does not require a course in physiology or anatomy. It deals primarily with the development of balanced Christian attitudes, the application of pertinent moral principles, and some knowledge of the sources of sexual excitation

and the means of self-control. Parents have experienced puberty, adolescence, and marriage. What further knowledge do they require?

The fact of the matter is that most parents refuse to think about or face up to the meaning and implications of sex in their own lives. Such refusal has serious consequences for their own marriage, as well as for parenthood, since sexuality that is not subjected to reason readily becomes exploitation in marriage and a source of embarrassment in instructing children. If readers feel that I have exaggerated the extent of this refusal to think rationally about sex, let them explain how parents can tolerate and even promote current dating patterns among their teenage or pre-teenage children. Surely, only parents who pretend that sex does not exist could accept such patterns.

## Ferry Carries

### 200 Nuns

West Palm Beach, Fla. — (RNS) — One of the largest contingents of nuns to leave Cuba arrived here aboard a ferry.

The 200 Salesian nuns are en route to the mother house of their order in Paterson, N.J. The 11 schools and an orphanage they operated have been nationalized by the Castro government.

## SVD Missioner

### Formosa Bound

Girard, Pa. — (RNS) — Father Edward J. Wojniak, S.V.D., for the past 12 years Mission Procurotor stationed at the Divine Word Seminary here, has been notified by the Society's Rome headquarters of his assignment to Formosa.

Previous to his assignment here, Father Wojniak served in China from 1937 to 1947, leaving there after the Chinese Communists took over his mission. A departure ceremony will be held for him Sunday, June 4, in the seminary chapel. The Divine Word priest is a native of Chicago.

## 14 Missionary Bishops Consecrated

Vatican City — The large statues in St. Peter's Basilica dwarf 14 missionary bishops at their consecration by Pope John XXIII, who is seated on the papal throne at left. Right of him stands Msgr. Enrico Dante, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and then

the 14 bishops. The third from left is American-born Bishop Thomas A. Newman, who has been serving as a missionary in Burma. Tenth from left is Irish-born Bishop Francis Carroll, who was Apostolic Vicar at Monrovia, Liberia. (RNS Photo)

## Warning Given On Malta Red Group

Valletta — (RNS) — Declared the following activities "condemned" as sinful: • Any offense by word, writing or deed against the Archbishop or Roman Catholic clergy. • Support to Labor Party leaders so long as "war on the Church prevails" and that party's contact is maintained with Communists, socialists and the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization.

Reading and sale of three Malta Labor Party newspapers "so long as these pursue their present course already condemned by the Church."

The Archbishop also reminded parents of their "grave responsibility before God" if they allow children to join the Youth Brigade established by the Labor Party.

Priests of the archdiocese were told that "confessors in

prudences are duty bound to ask necessary questions of penitents, in view of the fact that many seem to go to Holy Communion without confessing these sins" (participation in any of the activities condemned).

The controversy between the Church and the Labor Party, long smoldering, broke out in August, 1960, when the party's leader, Dom Mintoff, was condemned in all Catholic Churches as being guilty of "pro-Communist words and actions."

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## Bishop Killed In Car Crash

Buenos Aires — (RNS) — Auxiliary Bishop Lorenzo Gallardo of San Juan was killed when an automobile he was driving collided with a truck in the neighborhood of Monte Grande near here.



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