

Parent's Emotion Prevents Facts-of-Life Instruction

By FATHER JOHN L. THOMAS, S. J.
Sociology Professor St. Louis University

Your advice on giving sex instructions to children shows you don't know what you're talking about! You say — follow the simple, matter-of-fact way one follows in explaining cooking, eating, etc. Really! Sex is quite different, you know. I can demonstrate eating and cooking; are we parents to give a demonstration of sex? You say give them the best explanation you can in terms of their experience — what experience does an eight-year-old have in regard to anything, much less the facts of life? Why give such a foolish answer when people naturally expect an intelligent reply?

One point is clear, Bridget, you are a woman with very definite opinions on some subjects. I sincerely appreciate your letter because it backs up several observations I made concerning the attitudes of parents toward sex instructions, and it offers me a convenient occasion to re-emphasize my original position.

If I understand your criticism correctly, you imply that my reply was not intelligent because I did not offer a quantity of factual information and failed to give a detailed, play-by-play account of how this information was to be communicated to children during the various stages of their development.

In this connection, I offer one general observation.

I ASSUMED that I was dealing with normally intelligent modern American mothers possessing some degree of ingenuity and imagination. In other words, I assumed that women who had themselves experienced puberty, courtship, marriage, and child-bearing in modern society would have acquired at least the basic facts concerning the processes of menstruation, sexual arousal, marital relations, and childbirth.

Now let us analyze what I wrote. First I noted the need to maintain good communications between mothers and daughters in this area, because giving sex instructions is not a one-shot affair but a gradual process involving frequent repetition.



I also noted that either because of previous negative training or because they themselves had never rationally faced the facts of sex in their own lives, many parents either ignored the needs of their children or developed no realistic plan for instructing them. Granting that sex was an emotion-loaded term for adults, I warned parents that in the nature of things it could not have similar meaning for their young children.

I then enumerated the basic points of information concerning which girls under ten usually ask, and which they should know.

What are the physical differences between boys and girls? What is pregnancy — where does the baby come from? How does it get there? How is it born? Isn't it pressing our credulity a little far to maintain that the normally intelligent mother does not have sufficient information on these facts to answer satisfactorily the questions raised by a ten-year-old?

My advice that you answer questions relating to sex in the matter-of-fact, simple way you use when children ask about other matters seems particularly to have aroused your scorn, since you insist, "There's quite a difference, you know." Is there that much "difference" for an eight- or ten-year old child? Not unless you have previously surrounded questions relating to sex with a forbidding aura of fear or suspicion, thus projecting your own agitation and unresolved emotions into the mind of the child.

I feel the emotional outburst displayed at this point in your letter is highly revealing. No, Bridget, you don't have to give a demonstration. At this stage, children are seeking simple answers to some rather obvious questions about the objective facts of sex. They will not understand the personal implications of these facts until after they reach puberty and consequently are not interested in details, so

why react as if you are expected to fulfill the doctor's role at a pre-Cana instruction.

You are also scornful of my advice to shape explanations in terms of their experience, for you assume that children have none. Bridget, your emotions are showing! Surely you don't expect anyone to take you seriously on this point. Girls of eight or ten have not been living in an intellectual or social vacuum.

Their knowledge and experience may vary widely, depending upon whether they have been raised on a farm or as urban cliff-dwellers, with or without sisters and brothers, among friends and classmates who discuss such matters or who do not. Perceptive mothers will understand how to time and shape their explanations accordingly.

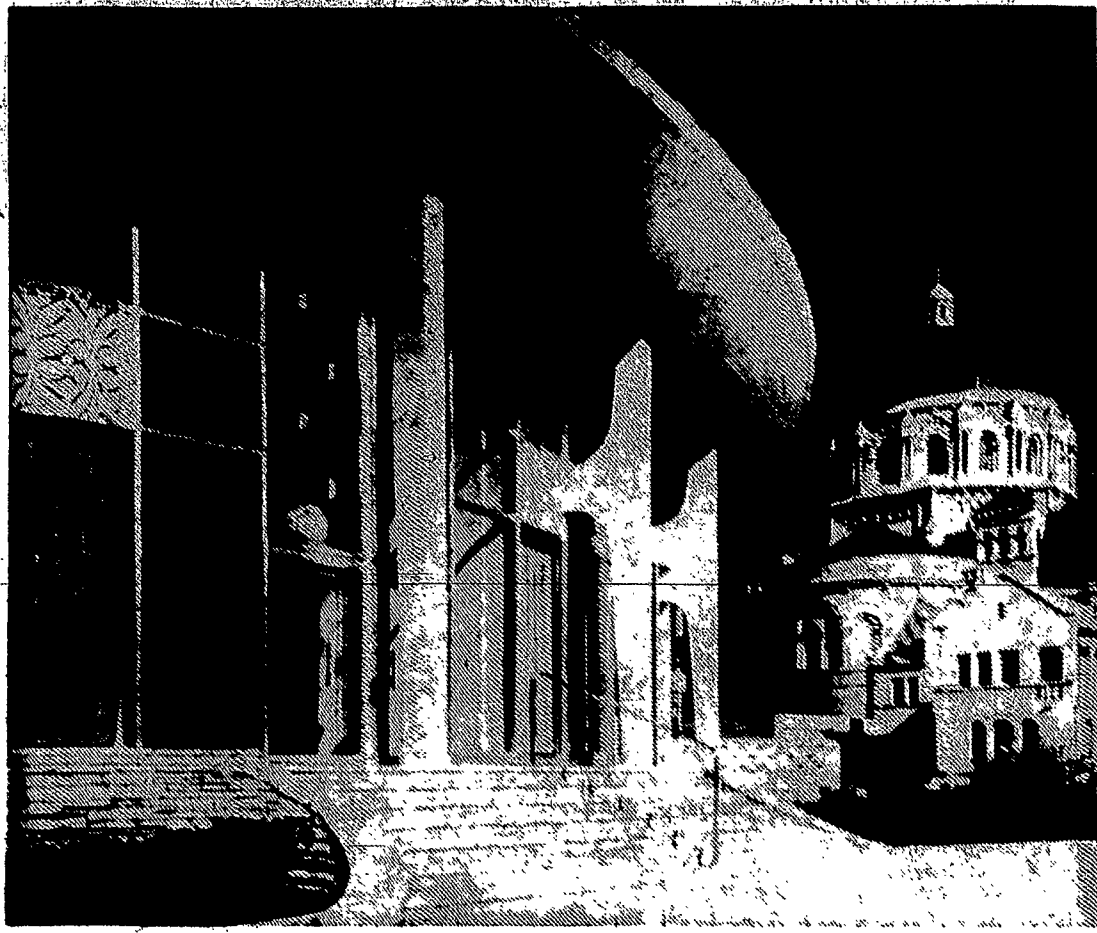
To be sure, there are numerous books and pamphlets dealing with sex instructions, available in bookstores and libraries. I have frequently mentioned Fr. Henry Sattler's, "Parents, Children and the Facts of Life" (St. Anthony Guild Press and in paperback) which has a good bibliography. "What to Tell Your Children about Sex" by The Child Study Association of America (Permabooks, N.Y.) is excellent for facts.

Yet none of these books will help parents very much unless they have developed a balanced, rational view of sex in their own lives and can discuss the relevant facts without fear and agitation. I repeat, the crux of the parental problem here is not primarily lack of knowledge but refusal to face the normal implications of sex in themselves and in their growing children.

Million To Notre Dame

South Bend — (RNS) — A grant of \$1,000,000 has been awarded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to the University of Notre Dame to expand and improve its College of Engineering. It was announced jointly here by Alfred P. Sloan Jr., Foundation president, and Father Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., Notre Dame president.

Father Hesburgh said the university will endeavor to match and supplement the grant so that a total of \$2,500,000 will be available to underwrite engineering development at Notre Dame in the immediate future.



Working in Circles?

St. Louis — (RNS) — This unique, circular chancery building housing administrative offices of the St. Louis Catholic archdiocese was dedicated here by Joseph Cardinal Ritter, Archbishop of St. Louis. Designed by W. Sarmiento, a St. Louis architect, the two-story structure has curtain walls of aluminum and glass, with pre-cast concrete columns to support a dome-roof of concrete. The building is 100 feet in diameter and has a rotunda rising the full height of the two floors. Radiating from the rotunda are individual offices. Taking a little more than a year to construct, the project cost \$758,000. In the background is the Byzantine-style St. Louis Cathedral and at center is the cathedral rectory.

Family Joins Missioners

St. Paul — (NC) — A young family here is busy packing for social service at the Jesuit university in Bogota. He will have other tasks too, such as advisor to various university groups. His 23-year-old wife will work informally with groups interested in home economics. They have volunteered for three year's service.

The two say they knew from the time they were married that they were going to be lay missionaries.

THEIR DESTINATION is Bogota, Colombia, and their purpose is apostolic service plus professional work — he in social work and she in home economics-education.

The family is being sponsored by the Association for International Development of Paterson, N.J. AID is a Catholic lay group which recruits, trains and helps sponsor Catholic professional and technical specialists for service in underdeveloped nations.

Memorial To Red Victim

Taipei — (RNS) — A new Catholic student center constructed outside Taipei has been named in honor of Brooklyn-born Bishop Francis Xavier Ford, M.M., who died in a Chinese Communist prison in 1952.

Dutch Asked To Pray For Delhi Meet

Utrecht — (RNS) — A letter was read from the pulpits of all Roman Catholic churches in Holland calling upon the faithful to pray for the success of the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches now taking place at New Delhi, India.

Signed by Bernard Cardinal Alfrink, Archbishop of Utrecht, and the other members of the Dutch hierarchy, the letter also urged that evening Masses be offered in all churches and chapels "to ask God's blessing" for the assembly and the cause of Christian unity.

Written in impressively warm and sympathetic terms, the hierarchy's letter said that "Catholics, too, see in this dynamic development an impetus of God's spirit, making use of the World Council to inspire more Christians everywhere with a strong yearning for unity."

Alluding to the theme of the Third Assembly — "Christ, the Light of the World"—they said the World Council "is seriously convinced that Christ, as the Light of the World, is obscured by discord in Christian witness and that the well-being of the world is affected by this discord."

"What happens at New Delhi," the bishops continued, "cannot leave us Catholics indifferent. Distress over the division of Christianity must also be felt by us as a true distress. The objective of unity aimed at by the Second Vatican Council is a vivid evidence of this. Pope John XXIII summons us all to a renewal of thought and life, in order that the pure shape of the Church for which the whole of Christendom is searching may become manifest."

Vatican Aid For UNESCO

Vatican City — (NC) — Pope John XXIII has again shown his interest in United Nations efforts to preserve historic monuments.

The Holy See has donated \$10,000 to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to preserve monuments in Egypt's Nubian Desert which are due to be covered by an artificial lake created by the Aswan Dam.



be sure to visit Sibley's wonderful world of toys... see the delightful animated story "The Small One"... visit Santa! Toyland Fourth floor!



build your railroad empire with these great values!

TYCO HO BLUEBIRD WEST TRAIN SET 22.99

A precision-engineered scale model that has the 0-4-0 steam "Shifter" gear driven loco, reeler car, box car, operating hopper, chemical car, flat car, gondola and caboose. Track includes 11 curved pieces, 1 straight, 1 rereiler and 1 terminal track.

GOLDEN POWER PACK 13.95

An essential with your HO train equipment! Has a 2 amp output with 16 volt AC terminals and 12 volt DC terminals. Pulse power switch gives added realism.

(NOT SHOWN): CASEY JONES STEAM SET 19.99

Get your start in HO with this Sibley-exclusive set! Big Casey Jones engine, tanker, refrigerator car, flat car with automobiles, box car, caboose. Set includes 12 pieces of curved track, 1 rereiler and 1 terminal track.

Sibley's Toys, Fourth Floor, Downtown; Irondequoit, Eastway, Southtown and Newark

