

The Problem Of Youth

Some Impressions of a Welfare Worker.

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INTRODUCTION.

No problem today causes more concern to the Church and the State than that which arises from the failure of some parents to bring up their children in a truly Christian manner. We cannot expect our youths to prove themselves good citizens unless they are taught what is necessary for good citizenship. Good citizenship can be built only on a foundation of the Christian principles of Truth, Justice, Obedience and Charity. If parents do not realise this fact and act accordingly, some steps must be taken in the interest of the children and of society.

Frequently we find that one person's morality is gauged by the other man's faults. We have often heard people say that "You cannot get on these days if you are honest." This seems to imply that our conduct must be bad because other men are bad.

We read much in the newspapers about "National Fitness." It is a national necessity, we are told. By this is meant, I presume, that every person should be physically fit to meet any physical emergency that may arise. There seems to be little thought given to moral "fitness" as a "national necessity." In many countries, some men and women have given a lead in what they are pleased to call "Moral Rearmament." In Australia, little has been done in this direction.

Strange Gods.

Men have turned their minds so much to material things that they have practically forgotten that each has a soul. Many have forgotten that there is a God. So long as men pay too much attention to material things, so long will they place such things in a prominent position in their lives. Eventually they are set up in place of God Himself. The Commandment "You shall not have strange gods before me" is not confined to the setting up of false gods in the form of idols or images. With one person, money is a god; with another it is physical fitness, with another it is sport. It is extraordinary how people will go to the utmost extremes in order to adore these gods of their own making, but question them about the one true God or ask them to serve Him, and the trouble is too great either to learn such truths or to give some time to the honour of the one true God. All should be wise about the things that are above: NOT the things that are upon earth.

The Purpose.

The Purpose of the present writer is to set down a few thoughts on the all-important subject of "The Problem of Youth" in the hope that his efforts may be rewarded, even in some small way. For the most part, what is written here is information gained from personal experience. Theories may be quite good in some things, but in the case of youths, more and more experience will avail most. For

the past eighteen years, the writer has been a close observer of children — especially boys — and his impressions are here recorded for the benefit of those who have to deal with children.

For convenience sake, this treatise will be divided into three sections, and it is hoped that readers will be able to follow each section easily.

(1) BRINGING UP A FAMILY.

(2) DELINQUENCY IN CHILDREN.

(3) THE REMEDIES PROPOSED FOR THE DELINQUENTS.

CHAPTER 1. BRINGING UP A FAMILY.

Early Training.

It is the duty of parents to begin early in the life of the child to teach it obedience. Educationalists agree that the most impressionable period of a child's life is up to the seventh year.

During this period, parents can make or mar the character and disposition of the child. This being true, parents should commence when the child is still in the cradle. Even the smallest child can and should be made to understand, as far as its mental capacity will permit, that it is not allowed to over-rule its parents.

This does not mean that the parents are to be cruel towards their children. It means that the parents must be firm. They should not allow the child to coax them to change their minds. In later years, this firmness is not to be relaxed in any way. Unless parents master the child while it is young the child will, in later life, master the parents. This sad spectacle is too often seen in otherwise good Catholic families. The fourth commandment has little meaning where such children are concerned. It is usually a case of "Parents obey your children." Children frequently tell their parents what they wish to do and what they intend to do. Parents will admit that their child will not do what they want it to do. Just imagine a boy of 10 or 12 years of age dictating to its parents. But imagine the parents allowing the child to defy their authority!

Divided Control.

In many homes, there is a serious plague, which, for want of a better name, we may call "divided control." The father, for example, corrects the child (and perhaps uses rather stern measures as the case demands) and immediately the child finds refuge in the mother. Perhaps the mother administers the correction and the child finds a "true friend" in the father. If correction is necessary, it should be administered in a kind but firm manner. Temper must not influence the correction and both parents should agree on the point. If a mistake has been made, no good purpose will be served by the parents arguing about the merits or demerits of the case in the presence of the child. Great damage will be done by one parent taking sides against the other in the matter of correction.

Neither praise a child too much in his presence, nor condemn him in the presence of others. Too much affection and over-confidence will eventually do a great deal to ruin the character of the child. When the child does something seriously wrong or when he reaches the age of puberty and learns certain truths, the parent who has shown too much confidence will receive a severe shock. Your child can do wrong, for he is no different from any other child. Your duty is to protect that child, and you are not protecting him by treating him like a hothouse plant. At the same time, the child

should not be exposed to dangers. Back-answers are not to be tolerated under any circumstances. Obedience should be prompt and cheerful. If a child is told to do something, that child should do it — not his brother or sister.

Respect for the Truth.

Respect for the Truth and a detestation of lies will go a long way towards strengthening character. Encourage your children to tell the truth and to have a great love for it. Give them the example by telling the truth yourselves. Do not use a lie to extricate yourselves from a difficult situation. When a child has told the truth this should be regarded as at least half of the punishment for the offence, and parents need not be too severe with a child who tells the truth. However, they should be careful that the child does not think he can do what he wishes without any punishment. There is a danger that a certain bravado or insolence may arise from such over-indulgence by allowing the child to go unpunished on every occasion.

Cruelty.

Cruelty of any kind cannot be tolerated when dealing with children. “Spare the rod and spoil the child” is as true today as it always was, but the rod should be used with discretion — not to maim but to correct. Punching, striking on the head or back, and kicking are forms of brutality, which cannot be considered as the actions of a civilised person. Such treatment can have, and actually has had, serious consequences.

In the care of very small children. Parents of very small children should not allow the “juvenile” nurse-girl to assume too much control and responsibility. This is but one example where some modern mothers shirk part of their personal responsibilities. A child is not capable of tending an infant and bringing it up in the place of the mother. It is quite easy to understand how a child may do some harm (unintentionally, of course) to an infant and be too afraid to say anything about it. Yet some mothers are only too pleased to hand their baby over to a little girl to mind.

Every mother has a serious responsibility in the rearing of her children. Far more serious than many wish to admit.

Commencing School.

When the time comes for the child to attend school it should be taught to regard school as something necessary in its life. In the minds of some children, there is a dread of commencing school simply because someone has given the child a totally wrong impression of it. A child of, say, 4 or 5 years, does wrong and the threat held over him is that “next day, (or next year) you will go to school and then you will have to behave yourself.” This gives the little one the impression that going to school is to be some kind of punishment for past misdeeds and he attends school with a prejudice — a prejudice that cannot be easily dispelled from his mind. He begins this all-important work with a grudge. Would it not be better to explain to the child that every one of us must do what God wants us to do? Each person has a certain part to play in life and he must be where God desires him to be. God wishes the child to be at school as that is its place for a certain period of its life. Hence, by attending school cheerfully and regularly the child will please God. I know that some will object to this on the plea that one should not “preach” at the child. This is NOT “preaching.” It is making religion part of the daily life of the individual, and religion counts for nothing unless it IS part of his daily life.

Associations at School.

The school boy comes in contact with many different characters when he begins to associate with other children. This is the time for parents to find out the company their child is keeping. Children should associate with children. Nowadays they listen too much to the conversation of adults. How proud some mothers are to hear their child say something “old-fashioned.” This so-called “old-fashioned” manner often leads to impudence. A child, no matter how young, should be checked and kept in its place. There are many avenues through which a child may exploit its talents without imitating its elders.

Obligations of Parents.

When a mother leads her child to the door of the school and hands him over to the care of the teachers, her obligations do not cease then and there. Parents always have obligations towards their children just as children have obligations towards their parents. Children are under the control of the teachers for about six hours each day during five days of the week. What are the children doing during the remainder of the week? In many cases, they do just what THEY choose to do. It is hardly fair, then, if parents blame the school when their child does something seriously wrong. Home training must always precede school time and must go hand in hand with it. Parents should cooperate with the teachers in every way, and be sufficiently interested in the progress of their children to call at the school occasionally and have a talk with the teachers. They should not show themselves in any way antagonistic to the teachers — especially when the child is present. The teachers take the place of the parents for a short time — a mere 25 or 30 hours a week — and the teacher’s task is by no means an easy one.

Where Are Your Children?

In a family where proper control is exercised, parents will know where their children are at all times — day and night. Children trained in obedience will ask permission before leaving the home. They should state where they intend to go and at what time they expect to return. Should the child decide to go elsewhere he should remember that he was given permission to go to a certain place and before altering his destination should ask permission. Without being too suspicious, parents should never feel certain that their child is all that they think him to be. This misplaced confidence has brought many tears to the eyes of more than one mother. The first intimation they receive of the child’s wrong-doing is when the police take charge of the boy for some serious offence. It is a good practice to inquire now and then (in a casual manner, without casting any reflection on the boy) if he has gone where he has stated he was going and with the companions he has been allowed to have. Remember that your child can do wrong. No human being is an angel.

While guarding their children against evil associations, parents should not offend in the other direction by keeping the child “caged up.” Recreation within reasonable limits is necessary for everyone. A child that is “caged up” becomes morose and discontented. There is a probability that he will “break out” when least expected. He needs to associate with other children and to take part in a reasonable amount of sport.

“Early to Bed.”

Under no circumstances should a child be allowed out at night unless in the company of a reliable adult. Late hours must not be a regular part of his life. There is still much truth in the saying, “Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy and wealthy and wise.” Growing boys, especially after the age of 12, are to be encouraged to rise early for their physical and moral benefit. There is no necessity to enlarge on this point. If a child retires at an early hour, he will be able to rise early. You

will no doubt ask what the child will do when he does rise early? You will complain that he will walk about the house and wake the others in the home. Hand in hand with sound religious training go good manners. If he is trained to give consideration to others, he will not offend in this direction. In the spring, summer and autumn he may be able to go for a swim, if he is fortunate enough to live near a swimming baths. Bike-riding (with good company) is an excellent form of exercise. Failing these recreations, it is always possible for him to improve himself by reading and by learning his school work. As a matter of fact, the morning is the most suitable time to learn lessons.

A Free Country.

Obedience and respect for authority are the foundation of a good moral training. In Australia, we boast of our “freedom,” but I am afraid that we have a false idea of “freedom.” True freedom is not license, and we must not think that our freedom allows us to do just what we like without any consideration for others. Children hear their elders speaking so much about Australia as a “free country” that they think that they can do as they please. They revolt when their freedom is curtailed in any way. We, in Australia, really do enjoy a certain amount of freedom in comparison with some other countries. Any freedom that we enjoy does not mean that we are allowed to disregard the commandments of God.

The moral law remains the same no matter how much freedom we may have under other laws. For example, children cannot conclude from the fact that Australia is a free country that they may disregard the fourth commandment. Nor can we conclude from the same fact that we need not observe the commandment binding us to keep the Sunday holy. No amount of freedom as far as the Civil Law is concerned can excuse us from the observance of the Law of God. The idea of freedom in this country has been exaggerated to such an extent that people are quite satisfied to do the bare essentials in everything. There seems to be a lack of initiative even in the ordinary duties of life. When it is a matter of religious practices, for example, hearing Mass on Sundays, the duty is fulfilled more from OBLIGATION than from a spirit of religion and love. How many there are who could attend Mass on week-days and who do not bother about it. The same may be said about Evening Devotions. It seems that religion is not yet a part of the daily life of the individual.

The Model Family.

The family is the foundation of the State. Unless the family is well trained, we cannot expect the citizens to carry out their duties as good members of society. If you destroy the home or family life, you will destroy the life blood of the State. The State should exist for the benefit of its members, not the members for the State. If we reverse this doctrine, we substitute the glorification of the State, which is the unfortunate and disastrous teaching of some Countries at the present time. The model for each family is the Holy Family of Nazareth, in which an ideal can be found for every member. The State should not (and indeed does not) interfere with family life unless forced to do so by the incompetence of the parents. Let every parent then make home life such that interference will not be necessary. Removing children from the control of their parents is really the last resource of the State. Any social teaching, which gives the State control of every child from birth to 18 years of age is to be condemned.

Religion in the Home.

Religion need not become objectionable to members of the household. If religion becomes part of the family life, it is no longer a burden but a joy. Children look to their elders for good example, and it would be very sad if this example was not found in the parents. We hear people say that they had

too much religion when they were young. That is wrong. The truth is that their religious training in the home was not done in the correct way. Instead of training the child in the love of God, and teaching it to serve God through love, parents have made religious training appear to be something super-imposed. In other words, religion has not been made part of their lives. They were given a superficial knowledge of it and were not made to feel that their daily conduct should be regulated by it. They have failed to realise that they depend on God for everything.

Moral Responsibility.

Materialism and Communism are closely allied in that both deny the existence of God, and the former prepares the way for the latter. Both take away from man his dignity as a human being. Materialism makes man an irresponsible being, independent of any moral law, with no sense, denying the existence of God, and removes from man all restraint no matter in what direction his passions may tend. Of course, it is a convenient doctrine to deny moral responsibility.

Pagan Tendency.

In some branches of sport, we notice a tendency towards paganism, both in the nature of the sport and in the dress worn for it. On our beaches, the costumes are anything but modest. We are told that we must move with the times, follow fashion, et cetera, otherwise we are looked on as “old-fashioned.” Notice how any attempt by those in authority to correct this abuse is resented. Another example of the false idea of Freedom! The street dress adopted by some girls is no better than that used on the beaches. Probably girls do not realise what a danger they can be to persons of the opposite sex when they go about dressed in such attire. On the other hand, boys seem to think that they, too, can go about scantily clad without being a danger to girls. The laws of modesty bind boys and girls alike. There are NO exceptions to these laws. Every boy and girl should be taught to treasure the holy virtue of modesty.

Indiscriminate Associations.

Indiscriminate Associations with the opposite sex are not conducive to the preservation of good morals. They become a source of temptation to both, and this temptation usually ends in disaster. Yet we hear young boys and girls openly boasting about such associations, and we find foolish parents who do not take steps to protect their children. Some children have scarcely reached their teens when they look for and frequently find a companion of the opposite sex. Parents will tell you that they see no harm in their children associating freely with those of the opposite sex. It is evident that they do not realise how dangerous the practice can be. Surely, they are not blind to the fact that their children are human like other children, and that their children are no more proof against temptation than their companions are. Parents are reluctant to speak to their children about such matters or to advise them. “It is only putting badness into their head” is the plea. When a child reaches the age of 14 there is no necessity for anyone to “put badness into his head” if it is a matter of temptations against the virtue of purity.

The child should be correctly advised by its parents so that no wrong ideas will develop in the mind. A child at this age needs help and advice. Once the child feels that some one is taking an interest in him he will experience more courage to resist temptation. Advice of this nature should come from the correct source, namely, from the parents, and the child is to be warned not to listen to unauthorised persons speaking on the subject. The reading of secular books dealing with sex matters or viewing motion pictures treating with the same subject is not only to be discouraged

amongst Catholic children, but forbidden. Let the parents do their duty. They will find sufficient Catholic books on the subject that will give their children all the advice and instruction they need.

When children have been taught their prayers and have learned portion of their religious duties, they are inclined to think they know enough about religion. If they wish to succeed in business or in some other occupation, they will continue to study for years after school age. Is it not far more important to learn as much as possible about the work of salvation?

It is possible to learn more every day. In addition to what a child learns from the catechism there is much about which he can and should be warned. His experience is not as wide as older people. There are many things that children need to be told.

The Difficult Age.

Nearing the age of puberty a child needs special care. He should be encouraged to the frequent and worthy reception of the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion. In these sacraments, he will receive strength to help him through this difficult and dangerous period of his life. It is possible (and very probable) that a boy at this stage of development will become troublesome to those about him. Instead of ignoring him or losing patience with him, the father should adopt an attitude of sympathy and kindness towards him. He will make sure that the boy gains the correct view of certain facts of human life. Human beings are composed of a body and soul. A temptation to commit sin is really a conflict between these two elements in man (Epistle to Romans 7:17-25). It depends on the manner in which man uses his free will whether he will sin or not. I wonder has it ever occurred to many people that sin places man on a level with the brute beasts, and unnatural acts such as are done in sins against the virtue of purity make man lower than the animals? Man is sometimes guilty of actions that no other animal has ever done. The grace of God is sufficient to overcome any temptation, and an abundance of grace may be obtained from the frequent and worthy reception of the sacraments. A boy can have a totally wrong idea of certain natural physical events which occur about the age of puberty unless the father has sufficient interest to warn him and dispel these wrong ideas from his mind.

At this period, a boy needs careful spiritual training. Difficulties in matters of conscience should be solved by the priest in Confession, but, outside the tribunal of Penance, it is the duty of the father to see that his boy is not subjected to dangerous occasions of sin of which the boy himself may be quite ignorant. Fathers of families then should take a serious view of everything that may, in any way, endanger the spiritual or moral welfare of their offspring.

“Prevention Better Than Cure.”

If I may seem to have dwelt for a long time on the subject of the correct rearing of children, it is because I am quite convinced that it is through the neglect of parents that most of the trouble arises amongst youths. If it is true to say, that “prevention is better than cure”, I feel confident that in the case of delinquent children we should seek out the cause before we can apply any remedies for delinquency. There can be no doubt that in the vast majority of cases the absence of home training is responsible for the downfall of our youths. Home training must be founded on RELIGION, and that religion must be practical, not only on the part of the children, but also on the part of the parents. We can never expect to overcome the evils of the day unless there is a sincere return to sound Christian principles.

CHAPTER 2. DELINQUENCY.

A careful examination of cases that have come under notice in the Children's Court has shown that well over 90 per cent of the delinquents came from broken homes. Under the separate headings, I shall try to point out the significance of the term "broken homes," and incidentally show the reason for a large percentage of delinquency.

(a) Lack of Continuity in Religious Training.

Lack of Continuity in Religious Training takes away from the home that religious spirit which should exist in every home. Some parents seem to think that they are not obliged to do anything in the religious education of their children. They have the false idea that "the school does everything in this direction". They think they have little or no obligations when they have enrolled their children in a Catholic school. When the children leave school, parents make no effort to keep them attentive to their religious obligations.

(b) Parents Who Are Careless in Their Religious Duties and Domestic Responsibilities.

Parents Who Are Careless in Their Religious Duties and Domestic Responsibilities pave the way for waywardness in the children. We can hardly expect children to carry out their duties in a conscientious way if their parents do not give the example. How often we have heard parents admit that they do not attend Mass on Sundays and then excuse themselves by saying, "I always see that the children go." Is not example the best teacher?

Such parents may be regarded as socially and externally respectable. They observe the laws of the country. They keep their homes clean and tidy. They do not quarrel with neighbours. But how do they stand in the sight of God? Are they acting as they should towards Him, or, in other words, are they so respectable in His estimation? No man can honestly come forward as a "reformer" or a teacher until he has "reformed" himself. A man (or a woman) who is estranged from God is a long way from being a reformer. If such a one cannot give to God what is due to Him, how can he expect to be honest with his neighbour? In his own life, he robs God of what is due to Him. In such circumstances, how can this person bring up children correctly?

(c) Mixed Marriages.

Mixed Marriages are another source of difficulties in the rearing of children. Even in cases where the required promises have been signed before the marriage, and are to some extent observed, there is something wanting in the lives of the children. In order to have a true continuity of religious training in the home, both parents should be practical Catholics.

(d) Lack of Interest in the Children, Their Conduct and Welfare.

Lack of Interest in the Children, Their Conduct and Welfare slowly but surely gives them the impression that they can do what they like and no one seems to take much notice. They are not taught to know God and His law. They have no fear or respect for God or man. If religion is not taught, there is nothing to induce restraint on their actions. If children are trained in justice and charity, they will respect their fellow man and his property. Even in school, the boy who cannot leave his record on the school roll had better not leave his name on the desk. The desk is not his property. It may not be out of place here to quote the words of one of our magistrates with regard to the lack of interest shown by parents. Mr. Arnold, Stipendiary Magistrate, speaking in the Sydney Central Police Court (May 15, 1939), about youths who take cars and use them and either damage the cars or endanger the lives of people by reckless driving, said: "The stage has been reached when I think the only thing to do is to send these youths to gaol even for a first offence. From my

experience in the Children's Court, I know the parents are to blame in many cases for not exercising any control. Their children are out till all hours, yet no attempt is made to find where they have been or what they have been doing. If mothers and fathers exercised more control over their children there would not be so many of these car stealing cases." What he says with regard to car stealing is equally true of other offences also.

(e) A Material and Mercenary Outlook.

A Material and Mercenary Outlook on the part of the parents leads the child to believe that all that is required of him in life is that he be of some service to the home financially. The very day after his 14th birthday, he is sent off to look for his first "job." We know, of course, that in some homes it is necessary for children to leave school and earn money to help to support the family. As a general rule, the parents who need the help most are those who do not wish to let their children leave school. Were it not a matter of necessity, they would allow them to continue their education rather than expect them to leave school at 14 and earn money for the upkeep of the home.

(f) When Parents Are Drunkards.

When Parents Are Drunkards, home training and good example are practically at their lowest. The example set by such parents has a bad effect on the children. Quarrels are of frequent occurrence and children lose respect for drunken parents. Frequently the children are the victims of drunken quarrels through physical violence. Drunken parents are NOT capable of caring for their children.

(g) Parents Who For Some Reason Do Not Live Together.

Parents Who For Some Reason Do Not Live Together have only half a home. A child can hardly have any respect for a home where the mother will not live with the father or vice-versa, and/or where one parent has an unlawful partner living in the home. Can you imagine such children growing up with respect for authority or with any regard for the sanctity of marriage? There is little respect for the Sacrament of Matrimony in the world today. This is clear from the long list of divorces we see from time to time in the newspapers. Very little discretion is exercised in choosing a partner for life. Young people who believe in divorce will not bother about this very important consideration. Would it not be a good idea if they paused and thought of the little ones they would bring into the world before they make any arrangements for a marriage? Many take a girl out with no other intention than violating her virginity. Lust rather than true love is the motive.

Men are careful to breed cattle well so that the stock will not degenerate. How much more important for men and women to choose their partners carefully so that their offspring will not be degenerates. Not enough thought is given to marriage and its consequences because divorce is too easy.

(h) Public Schools.

Public Schools are a great danger to the Catholic home. The Catholic child who attends such schools will receive, at most, only about one-fifth of the religious training he should have. There he associates with some children who come from homes where they have not been taught religion of any kind, and with others who are even taught to deny the existence of God. A child is influenced by environment. I am not attacking or condemning the public schools as such. They are doing good work in the material education of the children, but teachers are in the unfortunate position of not being permitted to instill Christian training into the minds of the young. They can encourage "good clean living" in the broad outlines, but they cannot give anything definite in the way of religious

teaching. As religion is the foundation of education, there is something wanting in our education system, at least as far as the Catholic child is concerned.

Our education system, which is free intellectually and financially, has led many to believe that they can do what they please with regard to both God and man. In country districts where parents have no choice but to send their children to a public school, one usually finds that the children are instructed by the parents, and there is some kind of religious atmosphere in the home. Our excellent Religious Correspondence Courses now in use in the country help the Catholics to understand their duties better. As a rule, it is not the country children who give us most concern in the lack of religious training and subsequent delinquency.

(i) Stepfathers and Stepmothers.

Stepfathers and Stepmothers are not always a success in rearing the children of the former husband or wife. It matters not whether these step-parents are the result of the death of the father or mother or of a divorce. In the latter case, however, the position is less hopeful. Therefore, use much prayer and much prudence.

(j) Truancy.

Truancy over a lengthy period is usually the forerunner of delinquency. Children who play the “wag” must find something to occupy their time, and the tendency is to get into some kind of mischief. During the time of the truancy, they often associate with boys of questionable character. Truancy can be attributed to two main causes:

(1) Some defect in home, or parental control.

(2) Some defect in the child.

In the first case, the causes I have outlined as regards delinquency are applicable.

In the second case, the child may have some bodily ailment which hinders him from applying himself to his work or which even makes his work almost impossible. Again, the child's intelligence may not permit him to keep pace with the work done in school. The result is that he becomes downhearted and thinks there is no use trying to learn. He has a dread of going to school. In ordinary daily life, no person is expected to perform a task beyond his strength or ability. Why expect a child to do it?

I have already said that parents should co-operate with the teachers in the education of their children. It is not much encouragement or example for the children when parents criticise teachers in the presence of the children. It is far worse when parents show themselves antagonistic to the teachers. Parents should remember that teachers are trained for their work in the schools and deserve some credit for what they do. Parents are not trained for teaching children in school, and hence have no experience in this direction. I repeat that the work of a teacher is not easy. Parents often complain that they find it hard to control two or three children. Some fail to control even one child correctly. What, then, must be the task of the teacher who has as many as 50 children in one class? You can take it for granted that all those children are not angels. There is a tendency these days to take the part of the child against the teacher without the facts having been made clear. As a general rule, the parent would be wise not to let the child know if any complaint has been made to the school unless it is something concerning the conduct of the child himself. A child who loses

respect for authority will prove himself a difficult problem for parents and teachers alike. However, parents should at all times guard their children against false teachers of any kind.

“Catholics Are Filling Our Gaols.”

From time to time, we hear people say that “Catholics are filling our gaols.” This is not true and therefore is no slur on the Catholic Church. If a large number of Catholics are brought before the Court, the blame is to be attributed to the parents NOT to the Catholic faith. Most of the cases that come before the Court are the product of irregular homes. I have shown that delinquency for the most part is the result of bad home surroundings and lack of training and religion. Not one child in ten of the Catholic children brought before the Children’s Court comes from even a fair Catholic home. It is equally unfair to blame Catholic education, as not two cases in ten are the product of a true Catholic education. It is usually found that there has been a break (and sometimes a long break) in the period that the child has attended a Catholic school. Parents often change the child from one school to another — from State school to Catholic. It will be seen then that most of the trouble is due to careless parents and the consequent lack of home and religious training.

Discipline Necessary.

On June 14, 1939, the Commissioner of Police in New South Wales was reported to have said: “My opinion is that until the people of this State attack crime at the cradle and get the youths banded together and disciplined, we will have waves of crime.” (See “Sydney Morning Herald,” June 14, 1939.) Yes, discipline is vital in the control of the young people, and if they are trained while young, there will be some hope for them when they grow older. This discipline must be personal and social, so that the best results may be secured. Social discipline will follow quite naturally once the individuals learn self-discipline. Each one should know himself (or try to know himself) and endeavour to correct what he finds wrong in his character.

CHAPTER 3. REMEDIES.

The remedies to be applied for the prevention of juvenile delinquency concern the Churches, the State and the parents. Under each of these headings, I shall discuss the means to be adopted.

(1) THE CHURCHES.

THE CHURCHES should be active in the instruction of all the people under their care. Religion is the foundation of education. No education is complete without it. Therefore, they should insist that proper CHRISTIAN education is given to all children by the competent religious authority. If correct instructions were given in the virtues of TRUTH, JUSTICE, OBEDIENCE and CHARITY, there would be little fault to find with the average youth. Religion must form part of the daily life of the citizen. It is NOT something for Sunday alone. Since we all belong to God, it is quite true to say, that religion should be the main part of our lives. It is not acceptable to many because no material gain can be derived from it. A more active campaign for a return to religion is necessary before we shall have made even a start in the right direction.

The Newspapers.

The Newspapers could do quite a lot to foster and encourage religion amongst the people. The same may be said of the radio and other media. But we know well that there is nothing to be gained, in the material sense, from religion. There is no money to be made by encouraging people in this way. On the contrary, there is more profit to be made by encouraging people to indulge in “border-line”

amusements. We read much from time to time in the newspapers about the care and cure of delinquents. Many theories are advanced, but we do not find the daily newspapers advocating a little more religion in the community. The daily newspapers are supposed to be the expression of public opinion. We live in what we are pleased to call a Christian community, but is there, after all, a great deal of REAL Christianity in our country? Christianity has NOT failed, but men have failed in their religious duties, and it is the DUTY of the newspapers to try to restore that Christian spirit.

We do not desire the newspapers to commence a campaign of dogmatic teaching, but we DO expect that those who read them would be encouraged to practise their religion in a conscientious manner. How often we find that something detrimental to a particular religious body is reported in “screaming” headlines while no serious effort is made to encourage people to be truly religious. The newspapers should at least give Christian principles a fair chance and impress upon their readers to do the same. Are those newspapers one with the man who considers that “religion is the dope of the people”? Christ has said that he who is not with Me is against Me. By their very silence it would appear that the newspapers are NOT wholly WITH CHRIST. Are we still going to blunder along with theories and work in the dark without the light of religion? Why could parents who lived from 30 to 50 years ago rear children correctly without the aid of our present-day “science”? There was no “psychology” to help THEM find out what made their children disobedient. Yet they seemed to get along quite well and reared sons and daughters who have been a credit to their country. There is no reason to believe that they would have done any better if they had been aided by modern “psychology” — without a soul.

Why has delinquency increased in these days? It takes two generations for an evil system to have its effects upon the people in the sense that it becomes noticeable to its victims. How long has our secular education system been in operation in this country? Well over 50 years, I should say. Can you imagine what the next generation will be like? [Dear modern reader, YOU can answer that question now. Have things improved? Or worsened? How much prayer and Christian discipline and training is there in your household? In your life?]

The Layman’s Part.

It will be noticed that many representative people do not consider it their duty to encourage religion as the solution of our present-day problems, yet if we are to make any progress in the solution of our difficulties, it is the most important consideration of all. In conversation, people will agree that religion and proper parental control are the most necessary items in the training of the child. Why do they not advocate these in public? They have the false notion that religion is a matter for the minister of religion alone to teach and encourage. “Let your light shine before men” does not mean that a layman’s religion should be confined to the house in which he lives, or to the church in which he worships on Sundays.

(2) THE WORK OF THE STATE.

In conjunction with the spiritual work of the churches, the State can and is bound to provide for its citizens so that they will have a respectable existence. The State has no right to interfere with the spiritual life of the citizen, but it is bound to encourage Christian principles. It is the duty of the State to see that its people receive a LIVING WAGE that is sufficient for a family to live in comfort. Many of the hovels that glory in the name of “homes” should be demolished and comfortable homes built for the working people. Well supervised parks and play-grounds are also

necessary so that children would not be forced to play in the streets. In fact, every effort should be made to keep the children off the streets as much as possible.

Institutions.

Institutions for delinquent children should not be conducted by the State on more or less “go-as-you-please” lines. Strict discipline should be enforced and religious training should be given to make up for what the child has lost in the broken home. Hence, delinquents should be cared for in denominational institutions where the religious training would be carried out correctly.

It is ridiculous to take a delinquent, place him in an institution and then allow him to do practically what he wishes while he is there. These children would not have come before the Children’s Court if they were not lacking in obedience and self-control. Why not endeavour to teach them these two virtues at least? Training in truth, justice and charity should do much to make the delinquent better than he was. While I do not advise or condone cruelty of any kind, still it is a fatal mistake to pamper many of these children in any way.

Science.

It is expecting too much if we try to overcome by modern “scientific” and materialistic methods, an evil that is mainly spiritual. No amount of science can take the place of the Ten Commandments. The indifferent and irreligious spirit that is so common in the world today is but the gradual result of the Reformation of the 16th century, aggravated by secular education. We are very optimistic if we imagine that we can cure in a comparatively short time an evil that has been maturing for the past 400 years and more. Society in general needs regeneration in order that we may produce the desired effect on the delinquent section of society.

Hostels.

Hostels for certain classes of children would be an asset, for example, for orphan children from 14 to 18 who are earning their living and/or children who can conduct themselves well enough when away from bad home surroundings. Such hostels should be under denominational control and conducted in a truly religious atmosphere. In other words, the hostels would make up (in some way) for what the child has lost in its own home through the carelessness of the parents.

Our governments are supposed to be Christian, so their work for the people should be Christian also. Our civilisation depends on how much Christianity there is in the community.

(3) PARENTS NOT EXCUSED.

Although the Churches and the State may do their part, this does not excuse the parents from their obligations. They must realise that their domestic happiness and the peace and happiness of the community depend entirely on the amount of religion there is in the home. On the parents rests the responsibility of bringing up their children as God wants them to be instructed. At times, their work may be hard, but they should not shirk their obligations just because they find it a little difficult to do what is right. Much of the blame for delinquent children can be attributed to the parents and in many cases, the parents and not the children should be prosecuted in the Court. A father or a mother will go to great trouble to excuse a child’s fault, which really amounts to excusing themselves. There is little use trying to impress religious principles on children unless there is good example shown by the parents.

Use of Spare Time.

Children should be taught to use spare time well, for example, by being interested in some useful hobby. Figures supplied by the Saint Vincent de Paul Society Probation Committee for 1938 show that the number of boys on probation at the age of 14 was just double the number of the age of 13. From the age of 14, there was a slight increase in numbers up to the age of 17. This would seem to indicate that when the boys leave school they are at a loss to know how to use their spare time. They drift away from home, go with bad companions, and are tempted to make a nuisance of themselves. If they were encouraged to have lawful hobbies, they could use their spare time well. Wherever possible, boys should be bound to a trade and then the nights would be well occupied by attending a Technical School.

The slogan to be adopted by all parents is: — “Our children must be kept off the streets at night.” You will ask then what will the children do at night. Many of them should be in bed an hour or two earlier than they are seen on the street. The remainder can occupy themselves with something useful. I have outlined above how time may be spent with profit. There is an old saying that “Idleness is the devil’s playtime.”

Picture Shows and the Media.

A strict censorship must be exercised over the films that children are allowed to see, and the books they are allowed to read. Some of the films are dangerous because they are not well censored. Parents take too much for granted in this matter. While we know that nothing openly immodest would be allowed to appear on the screen, still suggestive films are frequently shown. [It is much worse since this was penned.] We have a public censor, in 1944, who does his work well, but parents should not be satisfied with that censorship. The obligation is on THE PARENTS to find out if a film is fit for their children to see and to make sure that there is nothing in the film, which offends against faith or morals. No child should be allowed to think he has the right to go to picture shows. Neither should the child be allowed to tell his parents what pictures he will attend. The parents are the judges in this matter. Many children attend the pictures each week more regularly than they attend religious duties.

Privileges of any kind are a reward of good conduct. If the child has not behaved himself during the week then let him understand that privileges will be forbidden until there is some improvement in conduct. Parents frequently fail in this way. They are inclined to overlook misconduct too easily. I do not mean to say that they should keep “nagging” at the child on account of some fault, but, at the same time, the child must realise that he has done wrong and cannot expect a favour immediately after an act of misconduct. Children soon realise that they can win over weak parents. Your “no” should be “no,” and you should mean “yes” when you say it. A cute child will play on the affections of weak parents.

Modern Entertainments.

Besides the picture shows and uncensored books, there are two other dangers about which we must give a note of warning. These are modern “dancing” and modern “music.” Neither of these has valid title to its name. One has only to walk into a dance hall to realise this. The rubbish that so often is given over the air under the title “music” makes one feel ill. Both much modern dancing and much modern music are dangerous to morals. The same can be said, sadly, about so many of the films. This does not mean that each person may be affected in the same way or by the same kind of amusement. Such amusements undermine the moral fibre of many, and on that account are a danger to the community. Parents, exercise prayer and prudence!

