



Keeping in Touch

A quarterly newsletter for Catholic homeschooling families

AMDG

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Term One 2006

Welcome to another edition of Keeping in Touch, a quarterly journal for Catholic home schoolers. We have many wonderful articles this issue which we hope you'll enjoy. Please especially look at Fr Tierney's Lenten article on pages 14-15 and the contribution from Sr Maur on page 7. God bless you all.

Happy reading from the Vieira family who put this issue together.

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The next edition for term two will be prepared by Mrs Toni Stevens. Please send any contributions via email to: antoinettemarie@optusnet.com.au or by post to 765 Forest Rd, Peakhurst. 2210

Perfection or Dejection?

By Anthony English

Can anyone really be perfect? First the bad news: We must be perfect. To prove this, we need go no further than Our Lord's own words in the Sermon on the Mount: "Be ye perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

If you find such a command discouraging, here comes the good news: God doesn't command the impossible. If God wills us to do something, He also wills to us all the means to do it. St. Augustine advised: "God never commands the impossible, but in commanding He admonishes us to do what we can and to ask for grace to accomplish what we ourselves cannot do."

So we are all supposed to aim at perfection, and God will supply all we need to do that. Knowing our own imperfection, we may be tempted to ask: what sort of perfection does Jesus mean? After all, when we look at the thousands of actions we do in our lives, we are likely to wonder whether any of them are really perfect. Is it possible to have complete success in anything we do, where we really, perfectly achieve what we set out to do? Be assured that the perfection of which the Gospel speaks is not about physically perfect acts. It is about morally perfect ones.

"Be ye perfect" isn't referring to perfect technical achievements. A couple of examples may help here. A surgeon may commit a murder by means of a perfect act of surgery. Surgically it is faultless but morally it is most blameworthy. A less dramatic example: praying the rosary. We may pronounce the words of the prayers correctly but our hearts may be only vaguely attentive. Neither of these

fulfils the command to be perfect.

Within the context of the Sermon on the Mount, the words "be ye perfect" follow Christ's command: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." In fact, this is "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in Heaven." Jesus says that unlike the pagans who love and greet only their friends, we are to aim at a much higher love. He then commands: "Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." Clearly, the perfection Our Lord refers to here is perfection of love.

Love and feelings

The first point to note is that perfect love doesn't mean perfect feelings of love. It is rare that we feel love towards our true enemies, yet we must still love them in spite of our feelings. This supreme love which imitates Our Heavenly Father is above mere emotions. It is charity, that love of God above all things and love of neighbour as we love ourselves, for the sake of God's love.

St. Paul links perfection with this Godly love when he calls charity "the bond of perfection."

Christian perfection doesn't apply only to what we do but also to the love by which we do it. We may be somewhat relieved that we can be a good Christian without being a good carpenter, or a good singer, or a good surgeon. Even so, we may still feel the burden of having to strive for perfection in love, we who are so overwhelmed by awareness of our weaknesses and sins. Here we are reminded of St. Paul's struggle to overcome a thorn in his flesh. Despite

the Apostle asking three times for it to be taken away, he was left to struggle with it. God told him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." St. Paul then boldly shows the power of grace working in the through weakness: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" 2 Cor. 12:9.

Judged by love

So we are called to be perfect in love. If that thought makes you despondent, take heart. First of all, God supplies all we need to do what is His will. His will is to love Him with all our hearts and minds and strength, so He will supply all the grace we need to achieve that. Secondly, we are not bound to do the most perfect action. We are bound to do good and to avoid evil. The evil we need avoid is, of course, moral evil. Frequently our morally good acts entail some physical hardships. Not that we ought to seek difficulties for their own sake. An action isn't better in itself because it is more difficult. It is better the nearer it leads us to God. Objectively, a better act in itself, such as praying, draws us nearer to Him than a less worthy act, such as sweeping. Subjectively, a person who sweeps may gain more reward because he puts so much more charity into that act than another who is praying, but with less charity. As St. John of the Cross said: "at the sunset of life, you will be judged by your love."

If you are still overwhelmed by the obligation to be perfect in charity, remember that charity is a virtue – a good and noble habit. As we grow in a virtue its acts become easier and more perfect. The reason is that because of the virtue we are more inclined towards the good. That is why good habits are so important. They are fixed and stable dispositions inclining us to do good. Here we see clearly that the man with a

habit of prayer will most likely pray better than someone who has a habit of avoiding raising his mind and heart to God.

We have seen that we are all called to perfection and that God will supply all the grace necessary for that. We have also noted that perfection doesn't necessarily mean doing the very best action possible. Even less does it mean doing the most difficult act. It is about doing what we ought to do with perfect love – charity – which is "the love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us" (Rom. 5:5).

Fidelity and abandonment

Having recognised the principle of doing everything we do with charity, let's see how we might apply that with some practical steps. First, we recall the advice of the spiritual masters "do your duty, come what may." This is summed up in the word "fidelity." God gives us the grace and energy and time to do what we ought to do. The temptation for everyone, in every vocation, is escapism. God has some set tasks for us to do and that is where we ought to apply ourselves, according to our capacity. That may mean doing housework, or it may be patiently bearing sickness, dealing with interruptions cheerfully and graciously. It could be reasonable nourishment or legitimate relaxation so that we are invigorated to take on our coming responsibilities. Our duty can manifest itself in a thousand different ways which is why we need prudence to know it and carry it out with as much love as we can muster. Realistically, though, we admit that there are so many circumstances which are simply out of our hands. If doing what we can do demands constant fidelity, then those things that are beyond us require surrender to God's will. The best we can do is to take the next good step and

wait for Him to show us what He has in store for us.

It is a lifetime struggle to attain perfection, the perfection of charity, but we can make a very simple start. Many people find it helpful to set aside a particular period of each day – maybe half an hour at a given time – and offer each of the acts they do with as much charity as they can. They need not be specifically religious acts, such as attending Mass or praying the rosary.

If people can't see Jesus in us, it's not Jesus' fault.

These acts are, of course, more perfect in themselves than most other things we do, but we can offer our ordinary actions – our duties – with greater love of God. If you do this you may well find that this particular half hour is full of frustrations, interruptions and temptations. Very good, if that is what wills for you. The important thing is what you do with those circumstances. Difficulties can draw us closer to Christ by means of His cross, which St. John of the Cross called the song of His love. Charity is the bond of perfection. It is a love which comes entirely from God, given to us, so that we may respond to Him with His own divine love. In doing so, we truly can be perfect, as our Heavenly Father is perfect.

THE DRUG PROBLEM IN AMERICA

The other day, someone at a store in our town read that a metham-phetamine lab had been found in an old farmhouse in the adjoining county and he asked me a rhetorical question, "Why didn't we have a drug problem when you and I were growing up?"

I replied: I had a drug problem when I was young:

I was drug to church on Sunday morning.

I was drug to church for weddings and funerals.

I was drug to family reunions and community socials no matter the weather.

I was drug by my ears when I was disrespectful to adults.

I was also drug to the woodshed when I disobeyed my parents, told a lie, brought home a bad report card, did not speak with respect, spoke ill of the teacher or the preacher, or if I didn't put forth my best effort in everything that was asked of me.

I was drug to the kitchen sink to have my mouth washed out with soap if I uttered a profane four-letter word.

I was drug out to pull weeds in mom's garden and flower beds and cockleburs out of dad's fields.

I was drug to the homes of family, friends, and neighbours to help out some poor soul who had no one to mow the yard, repair the clothesline, or chop some firewood; and, if my mother had ever known that I took a single dime as a tip for this kindness, she would have drug me back to the woodshed.

Those drugs are still in my veins; and they affect my behaviour in everything I do, say, and think. They are stronger than cocaine, crack, or heroin; and, if today's children had this kind of drug problem, America would be a better

I'm Going to be a Nun: The Responses

By Sue Elvis

"I'm going to be a nun" is a statement that is guaranteed to get a huge reaction! From stunned silence to animated delight, the responses have been amazing. Whatever the response, it is never one of disinterest.

When Felicity told me she wanted to become a Tyburn nun, my initial reaction was one of delight. I wasn't exactly surprised. I was happy that she had the courage to do what she thought God wanted of her. It wasn't until a couple of hours after her announcement that other emotions came into play. I slowly realised the sacrifices we would all be making and the initial excitement became mingled with feelings of intense sadness and loss. I had been prepared to give Felicity to a religious order but I hadn't considered what was involved in letting her go to an enclosed order.

Of course, there were many, many expressions of congratulations especially from close friends and homeschoolers. We are so blessed that God has called our daughter. With so much to be thankful for, feelings of sadness and loss can make me feel guilty. The other day, a good friend said something along the lines of: "We all want our daughters to become nuns if that is God's will but I'd never before thought about the sacrifices families make. Think of all the Irish religious who travelled off across the seas and left their families behind, never to see them again. What courage!" We are so fortunate: Felicity is not off overseas (or at least not until she has finished her novitiate!) and we can see her every month. A great consolation.

A few days after Felicity made her momentous decision, she put her notice in at work. She'd been working casually

in our local supermarket. Her fellow workers wanted to know what Felicity was going to do next. "I'm going to be a nun."

"No, be sensible! What are you *really* going to do?"

"I'm going to be a nun."

I don't think any of the check-out girls have ever thought about the religious life, let alone left to enter a convent. Felicity's announcement caused a sensation. They knew Felicity was different, but this different? Coming from a large family, never having been to school, not having a boyfriend and always wearing skirts had set Felicity apart from her fellow cashiers. Now she was going to be a nun!

Questions came thick and fast: "Are there really still nuns? They don't wear habits do they? Well, at least you won't wear a veil? You will? Will you come and visit and show us your habit? What, you'll be enclosed? You won't go out at all? Can we email? No computers? No TV? Well what luxuries will you have? None? What about personal items? Bubble bath, hair shampoo, hair conditioners? No baths? What do you mean, no hair?"

"I'll cut it off as short as possible all over and I'll have no hair to condition." With a grin, Felicity bounced out of the super-market leaving her workmates with their mouths wide open and at last, speechless.

Despite Felicity thinking she was on the lowest rung of the checkout hierarchy, I think she was admired and liked much more than she realised. When it came to goodbyes, a number of her fellow workers gave her gifts and cards as well as contributing to the

combined gift. What a hard task Felicity had given the present buyer: what do you give a future nun who is giving up the world and will no longer own any personal possessions? They decided on a set of towels assuming that even nuns have to shower.

One of Felicity's managers gave her a very special gift: a rare copy of a sketch of St Mary's Cathedral by Lionel Lindsay. This picture had been in his family for many years. The manager's family were Catholics and his mother had wanted to be a nun when she was younger. Unfortunately, a medical condition wouldn't allow her to follow a religious life. The manager thought Felicity was a very appropriate recipient of this family treasure.

A very special family friend still does not really understand Felicity's calling. Never having married herself, she had previously expressed a wish that Felicity find a nice young man. She was very quiet when Felicity told her that she was off to the convent. "I'm not really surprised. I knew Felicity was too serious but I'd been hoping..." Our friend does her best to understand but swapping a talented musical career for the enclosed life has disappointed her. "How's Felicity? Is she still mopping floors?"

"Yes she is, but she's also playing the organ, having singing lessons and she's playing in a recorder quartet," I reassure her.

"Is she happy?"

"Yes, very."

"If she's happy, then you are happy and I guess that's all that matters."

Many people worry that Felicity is wasting her talents having joined a contemplative order. "But what about her music and her writing? What about her uni studies? She's spent so long learning to drive. It seems such a waste. She won't even take her test? You mean the nuns never have an opportunity to drive?" I try and share with them

Mother Cyril's reassurance that every one of Felicity's talents will be used in some way. God will put them to good use as long as she follows His pathway.

I told a fellow parishioner Felicity's news over the phone. The line went silent for quite a few seconds. "Well...um...er...I don't know what to say," she at last managed to stammer. She was stunned but after the news had time to sink in, it was obvious she was very supportive. She'd just never considered that Felicity might choose the religious life. Later, she admitted that she *could* imagine Felicity as a nun. This lady has become a very faithful correspondent with Felicity.

I was at a parish lunch chatting to a parishioner. She was so excited: "I was talking to Father the other day and I was telling him how the Tyburns had a new postulant. I'd read about it in the *Tyburn Talk*. Father replied, 'Yes, I know. It's Felicity Elvis.' I thought Father was joking and I didn't believe him. When I got home, I thought I'd just have a look at the *Tyburn Talk* again and there it was: 'Sister Felicity'. I couldn't believe it!"

Felicity is very well known in our parish. Besides being noticed in the long line of children in our pew, she was involved in many parish activities. She played the organ, was a catechist, a regular model for the Vinnies' fashion parades, a reader and a member of the choir. All our parishioners are very interested in her progress as a postulant. Every time we go to Mass, at least one person, usually many, ask after Felicity and ask me to pass on their regards. This can be difficult as sometimes I don't even know who they are, though they know me. I'm not Sue. I'm Felicity's mother!

At times, new acquaintances will ask how many children we have and I

will reply, "Eight but only six are living at home." I know if they question further, I will have to explain what Felicity is doing (and probably where Thomas is too!) In fact, the reaction to Felicity being in the convent is sometimes very similar to that we get when people discover Thomas is dead: there is an embarrassed silence before they can think of something else to talk about. Talking about Thomas, I had a magnificent conversation with a parishioner the other week. It went like this: "How many children do you have? Eight and six living at home? I know Felicity is in the convent. Where's your other child? He died?" Silence for two seconds, then an admirable recovery: "How wonderful! He's made it to heaven before all of us!"

It is four months since Felicity left home for the convent. She is obviously in the right place. When we visit, it is impossible not to notice that she is full of joy. Initially, she had a tough time dealing with homesickness but she persevered through that. Of course, she misses her family and we miss her but she is not coming home. Her application to enter the novitiate has been approved and in May, our daughter will be known as Sister Mary Raphael of the Redemption. What a proud and thankful moment that will be for us.

**A BIG THANK YOU
FROM SISTER BEDE
AND SISTER MAUR**

A special thank-you to all the Home-schooling families who attended and/ or contributed in any way to the celebration of our Jubilees of Religious Profession on the 19th November, 2005 : 50 years for Sister Bede and 60 years for Sr Maur. We enjoyed the day immensely and we were especially impressed by the Homeschoolers Choir. You are all remembered in our prayers and only the Good Lord can repay you adequately for your kindness. God bless and we look forward to seeing some of you at Fitzroy Falls in April.

**God's Selection
Criteria
By Michele Vieira**

Each of us has been placed on this earth to do a specific job for God. What is the job description? For each of us this is different, yet the Essential Criteria used to measure success in the end - also known as the spiritual and corporal works of mercy - is what we're going to be examined on. So, at this time of Lent it may be good to do a spot check.

The Spiritual Works of Mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbour in spiritual necessities (CCC #2447), those being focused on getting a soul to Heaven. The seven Spiritual Works of Mercy are:

- Admonish the sinner
- Instruct the ignorant
- Counsel the doubtful
- Comfort the sorrowful
- Bear wrongs patiently
- Forgive all injuries
- Pray for the living and the dead

The seven practices of charity toward our neighbour, based on Christ's prophecy of the Last Judgment, that will determine each person's final destiny:

- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Shelter the homeless
- Visit the sick
- Visit those in prison
- Bury the dead

The corporal works of mercy are oriented toward the body. The spiritual works of mercy towards the soul.

BOOK REVIEWS

**DRESSING WITH
DIGNITY**
by **COLLEEN HAMMOND**
Reviewed by **Helen Brearley**

Well here is a book bound to cause controversy. Some people will love it and others will surely think it over the top. I, for one am a complete supporter of this book. I have been waiting for some time for someone to write such a book.

Colleen was a former cable network anchor, image consultant, actress, model and beauty queen. She has had extensive experience over a number of years of this trade. Colleen stopped all this after the birth of her first child. Her “reversion” or journey back to her faith, as she calls it, happened by chance when she read a marketing study done by the advertising industry, she stumbled across in the library. The study was undertaken in the 1970’s and they had used modern technology to track a man’s eyes when he looked at a woman wearing pants. To find out the results of this you need to read the book, it is quite amazing.

From this point Colleen says she started reading more about modesty but most of what she read was not Catholic. Her first book was on marriage and as she travelled the country doing radio interviews, mothers asking how to get their daughters to dress modestly constantly barraged her. One mother even said to her she thought God wanted her to write a book about modesty and purity. It was after this that she really undertook the project to research and write about modesty and purity.

The book is short and to the point and very easy to read. It has some very interesting information regarding feminism, freemasonry and the duping of us all by fashions, and the consequent loss of faith. It is a book I would urge everyone to read. Colleen has completed thorough research from church documents and quotes several teachings of past popes on these matters. Some will find this book hard to digest but it should be read, considered and put into practice in our families.

**PLEASE DON’T DRINK
THE HOLY WATER**
by **Susie Lloyd**
Reviewed by **Michele Vieira**

When I read the title of this book I was drawn to it. But when I read the sub-title I knew this woman was a “kindred spirit” in Anne of Green Gables terminology. You see the subtitle is “Homeschooling Days, Rosary Nights and other near occasions of sin.”

Each chapter in this book is a little snippet exemplifying in a very humorous fashion, the trials and turmoils of normal family life Lloyd family style. There is so much in this book with which we can identify - and laughing at yourself as you notice your reflection in this book, helps relieve the stresses inherent in aiming at perfection (or anywhere near it) while living in an imperfect world.

The book is divided into four parts: “Mom, don’t try this at home”, “Driving under the influence of guilt”, “Trust Providence - not to warn you what’s coming” and “Just between you and me and the crayon on the wall”. So, if you want to read a book which is light and fun, try this one available from Fountain Resources.

**DRESSING WITH
DIGNITY**
by COLLEEN HAMMOND
Reviewed by Fr James Tierney

In 2004, Colleen Hammond was on radio presenting her favourite theme in her coming book, *Love, Honour... and Obey*. However, "every single phone call for two solid hours was from parents asking how to get their daughters to dress in a modest and dignified manner". Hence *Dressing with Dignity*.

Her basic assertion is that women should not be aping men, but should be happy to be women.

She is supported by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC): "Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual *Identity*. Physical, moral, and spiritual *Difference* and *Complementarity* are oriented towards the goods of marriage and flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out." CCC 2333 (including the italics).

This is expressed in the *Catholic Family Catechism Disciples' Edition* (CFCDE), thus: "The tendency to turn women into men and girls into boys, in speech, dress, deeds and work weakens the complementarity of the sexes and the capacity of women to enoble men -- hence a weakening of marriage, family and civilization." CFCDE p. 111.

She quotes Popes and other authorities, and most recently St Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio), and warns the fair sex against tempting men (1) by bare flesh, (2) see-through garments, or (3) garments so tight-fitting as to provoke a train of undesirable images about their occupant.

Women perhaps do not realize that gentlemanly modesty (in both

senses of modesty) may inhibit a man telling a woman what he really feels, even if she asks him.

Mrs Hammond warns that fashion designers, and even established cultural practices, cannot guide our generation to modesty. We must become "counter-cultural", to combat today's "culture of death". For a certain relativity in modesty, see CCC 2524. [The forms taken by modesty vary from one culture to another. Everywhere, however, modesty exists as an intuition of the spiritual dignity proper to man. It is born with the awakening consciousness of being a subject. Teaching modesty to children and adolescents means awakening in them respect for the human person.]

Her practical conclusion strongly favours full dresses/skirts over tight jeans/trousers.

I intend to contact her soon, and praise her insight, research, courage and practical suggestions. I shall suggest that her quote from St John Bosco gives the impression that all impurity is mortal sin. Later, she clarifies this: all unchastity is "grave matter", but it needs "full knowledge and full consent" to make it a mortal sin.

The back cover blurb tells us that, "She is a former cable network presenter, image consultant, actress, model and beauty queen, who abandoned it all to be a stay-at-home mother. She is also an award-winning writer, radio and television talk show host and speaker, who is widely sought after because of her lively interactive style and fresh approach to living out the Catholic Faith in daily life."

I recommend this book, and suggest it be implemented by gracious example, and without giving the Devil a chance to twist our spoken words to stir up strife. [138pp; Price \$16.50

Available from Cardinal Newman Faith Resources
02 9637 9406 or
fr@cardinalnewman.com.au

A Children's Holy Hour

by Fr. Antoine Thomas

<http://www.the-realpresence.org/eucharist/pea/children.htm>

Dear parents, priests, catechists, and all who care about the formation of children's souls:

Over the years I have heard many reasons why parents hesitate to bring young children before the Eucharist each week to adore Jesus. Among these reasons are that they are too young to sit still, or that they won't understand what is happening. Some feel that it is hard enough to get them to be attentive at Mass, and if they add another hour on Sunday, how can they expect them to behave?

Well, I remind them that Jesus Himself told us, ***“Let the children come to me and do not hinder them; for to such belong the Kingdom of Heaven.”*** (Matthew 19:14) And, that our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, has made this request, ***“I urge priests, religious and lay people to continue and redouble their efforts to teach the younger generations the meaning and value of Eucharistic adoration and devotion.”*** (from the Vatican, 28 May, 1996) So, how else can we respond than to bring children to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus!

After many years of leading Holy Hours for children, I can tell you the benefits are numerous for both children and their families:

Children who previously had only the weekly experience of Mass, discover that the Host is actually the person of Jesus, mysteriously hidden.

They develop a greater interest in the mysteries of our Faith and the liturgy of the Mass.

They understand - more than other children of their age who have not experienced Eucharistic Adoration—the relationship between the gift of the Eucharistic Presence of Jesus and His sacrifice on the Cross out of love for mankind.

They become much more aware of the various degrees of sin and seem very eager to receive the sacrament of Confession often.

Families accompanying their children witness a growing desire for peace and forgiveness within the family.

When children become friends with Jesus, by spending time with Him, do they not become living signs of faith in Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist for those who doubt, and therefore also become wonderful signs of hope for those who despair in finding God on earth?

Here are a few steps to help you get started:

- Ask your pastor if he would agree to watch the video on children's adoration.
- Discuss with him who can lead the Holy Hours
- Pray for help to know a good time for the children's Holy Hour in your parish
- Advertise in your bulletin and parish paper
- Put some posters up around your parish
- Address the Mother's Group if you have one, and don't forget the home-schooling families

- See if you can send home an invitation with the school children

When you begin the hours you will want to be prepared. General norms for the worship of the Eucharist are found in *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, published by *Catholic Book Publishing Co.*, © 1976. It is important that those who plan a children's Holy Hour be familiar with the teachings and rubrics of this ritual text. You can use the manual that we have prepared or design your own format.

And for parents especially, from morning to evening you go through all kinds of activities. There is so much going on around your homes. Are you sometimes too busy to stop and drive your children to the Adoration chapel? Or, maybe there is no access to a perpetual adoration chapel? This is a good reason to develop a "Spirit of Adoration" in your children.

The Virgin Mary lived in this spirit of adoration in her home in Nazareth. Whether she was cooking, cleaning, helping around her community, whatever she was doing, throughout all her activities she was always adoring God. Why not start to develop this spirit of Nazareth, this spirit of living in the presence of the loving gaze of the Father at all times in your children?

You can begin teaching your children this at such an early age. Teach them to make acts of adoration all throughout their day. Begin first thing in the morning as soon as they awake. Make this act of adoration together, "My God, I know you are with me as I begin this new day. You are always with me, watching over me in all things, I adore You." Then throughout the day continue to make these short acts of adoration, drawing your hearts and mind briefly into the presence of God. Offer to Him the adoration He deserves.

Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity had a deep desire to enter the Carmel. For 6 years her parents refused to give permission and so she made her bedroom a little Carmel. How pleased Our Lord would be if you could teach your children to do this. Help them to make a small corner in their rooms for prayer. You will see how much fruit will come from this over time.

And so dear people, please learn to encourage children to live in this spirit of adoration at all times, both in the presence of Our Eucharistic Lord and in the everyday activities of life, living in the spirit of Nazareth with Mary. May Our Lord bless you through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist.

"Join Fr. Antoine as he leads a lively discussion group with children on the topic of Eucharistic Adoration."

To obtain a manual or for more information contact

Fr. Antoine Thomas at

www.childrenofhope.org

I never had a bad teacher, but youth must be taught not by neutrals, but by faith-filled and holy souls, who moreover know how to give the reason for their beliefs and inspire young people with a firm confidence in the truth of their faith.

Charles de Foucauld

Disaster strikes - the Rosary saves

by Catherine and Lisa Bucknell

The following is a recount of the events of the First Friday (3rd February), between the hours of 14:56 and 16:03 which led to the tragic demise of the Bucknells' fifteen-year-old Toyota Hiace. *As retold by Frederick and Timothy Bucknell**.

As the Bucknell children were filing into their vehicle for the long trip from Penrose Park back to the 'city', Timothy noticed a strange sound emanating from the engine of the automobile. Upon voicing her concerns that their old bus may not be in optimum health, and there was a possibility that the Bucknell family might not make it back to Campbelltown on this trip, Timothy was duly ignored by her mother. So the bus hurtled along at a rather remarkable speed for one so old. (The bus, not the mum).

Two minutes into the trip, the younger Bucknell children (from Timothy down) noticed an unusual, rubbish-baggish-sounding hissing noise from the belly of the bus. Upon further remonstrations from the young fry to "stop the bus" (or at least slow down!!) the co-pilot, Ann, rolled her eyes at the Lady of the Vehicle and muttered "children! always over-exaggerating! hih!" (please repeat in a high falsetto for the full effect)

Upon glancing over their shoulders, Frederick and Timothy were horrified to discover the billowing, black clouds of smoke spewing from the exhaust. This information was speedily related to the rest of the passengers, whereupon the younger Bucknells pleaded, remonstrated and shouted at their over-worked mother to pull over and take a break (and give *us* the kit-kat!) At this, Ann turned around and

roared, "Mother is *slightly* preoccupied at the moment...can't this wait??!!!" Relentlessly grasping the steering wheel tighter, Mother continued to bounce over the black tarmac.

Upon the realisation that the driver was going to stop at nothing, the children could hope only for a miracle. Then, it happened. Clunk. Slap (No, Ann hadn't hit anyone...yet) Hisssss. Slapity-slap slapity-slap. The children looked worriedly at each other. What was to become of them? sniff Sniff SNIFF. The smell of burning rubber overtook the stench of sweaty boys. That did it. Cries of "MUM, THE CAR'S ON FIRE" and "EVERY ONE BAIL OUT!!" and "We're ALL GONNA GET BLOWED UP!!!" finally forced Mrs. Bucknell off the road. Upon inspection of the car, it appeared that at least one of the belts had snapped. Mother walked and 'mummy junior' (AKA Ann) lumbered over to the emergency phone where they attempted to call a number of people, but to no avail. Mother and Junior marched back purposefully and declared that the Rosary was in order.

Two Rosaries later, a Good Samaritan happening along the same stretch of road noticed our plight and pulled over in the hope that she could help. Her name was Mrs. Antoinette Stevens. Ten minutes after she left with Frederick and Ann, a certain Mrs. Gai Smith also pulled over to the side of the road, and kindly added four extra bodies to her already crowded car.

Here, our part in the story ends. Apparently, Mother and the rest were left to the mercy of the hot sun and the scorching winds by the side of the road. No...my more trustworthy sources tell

me that they were, in fact, rescued by Mrs. Sonja Hooker, who brought them home, safe and sound.

And what of the Toyota? Well, the car doctor has diagnosed a collapsed bearing on the water pump; complications may ensue. But that is another story.

*AKA Catherine and Lisa Bucknell

MOTHER'S NOTE: "God Bless the souls of the Good Sams who helped us out that day".

Coming events

The Catholic Adult Education Centre for the Archdiocese of Sydney would like to warmly invite you to an evening **seminar on the new encyclical** by Pope Benedict XVI *Deus Caritas Est - God is Love*. It will be held on

Thursday 2nd March at 7.30pm at The Catholic Centre, 2 Keating Street Lidcombe. Supper will follow.

Presenting the evening seminar is Fr Anthony Robbie and Fr John Flader, addressing such issues as the key significance of the encyclical and meaning of the document for each of us. All are welcome, so please pass this on. Copies of the encyclical will be available for purchase at The Mustard Seed Bookshop on the night.

The Day of the Unborn Child is to be celebrated again on **Saturday 25th March** this year. It will start with **Benediction at 10 a.m. at St Mary's Cathedral**, Sydney followed by street procession with brief address in Martin Place. The day will conclude with **Holy Mass celebrated by Bishop Julian Porteous at 12.10 p.m. at St Mary's Cathedral**. Please feel free to come and bring your family and friends.

Reasons for Hope weekend away for young people will be held this year from Friday evening March 31st - Sunday afternoon 2nd April. Clergy attending include Bishop Julian Porteous, Fr Brendan Lee, Fr Joe Pich, and Fr Robert Stewart. Cost \$100 students and \$120 non-students with a \$10 discount if your enrolment is in by March 17th. For more information visit www.reasonsforhope.net

Children are thrown into the world without being given the weapons necessary to fight the host of enemies

They will find both within and outside of themselves. Christian philosophers resolved, so long ago and so clearly, all the questions that every young man must feverishly ask himself, without suspecting that the answers are right there, luminous and clear, just a step away!

By Charles de Foucauld

Getting up for God and Smiling

By Fr James Tierney

Each morning, try Getting up for God, and each day, try Smiling at people.

This twofold programme suits any time of the year, especially Lent. It is part of Our Lord's Law of Love. What could be simpler?

MORNING OFFERING

Getting up for God begins with a bedside morning prayer. Such a Morning Offering is best recited kneeling. Some say it twice, first in bed, and then on their knees, because postures are sacramentals.

Waking up and getting up! These are sacred moments, 'getting going' for the day, taking responsibility before God for our free choices, with a whole wide world awaking to its work. The natural 'sacrament of the dawn' suits praying. A new start in life! It is unusual to make a midday offering of the next 24 hours. Noon does not begin a natural slice of life.

The morning is 'the natural time' for Holy Mass. Participation in Mass is the completion of the Morning Offering, indeed, it is the supreme Morning Offering. It gives fuller meaning to Getting up for God.

The offering up of "prayers, works, joys and sufferings" flow in and out of Mass. Evening Mass does not fit this natural rhythm as well. And a Holy Hour fits best before its climax in the Mass.

It is said that Pope John Paul II liked to watch the sunrise. In Krakow, this would have been just before 4 a.m. in summer (or 5 a.m. on daylight saving time).

Strangely, the customary Morning Offerings do not appear in the prayer-appendix of the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

But see the Catholic Family Catechism Disciples' Edition, pp. 8-9

GOING TO BED AT NIGHT

Some folk, of course, are hemmed in by their duties. Others seem too lazy to close down their day's doing and get themselves off to bed, and they make excuses for themselves to potter about. Inevitably, they have trouble in Getting up for God in the morning.

It is maturity to defer one's doings according to a scale of priorities, and to call a halt the night before in favour of proper sleep, and time to pray in the morning. Indeed, it is matter for a good Lent...

FIXED HOUR OF RISING

A disciplined body of men, like an army, a monastery or a seminary, has set times for rising and roosting. The great spiritual guide, Dom Chautard, laid it down that the spiritual life required a fixed hour of rising. See his *The Soul of the Apostolate*, which St Pius X made his bedtime book. Of course, a growing changing organism like a family cannot have an army discipline, but it can still have 'Getting up for God'.

MORNING PERSONS / NIGHT PERSONS

Is it nature or nurture that some folk seem to do better at one end of the day or the other? One thing is certain: noble motivation seems enough to get a Night Person up early in the morning. And the Gigantic Bluff called Daylight Saving works for Night Persons simply by pretending that it is not an hour earlier.

COSY BED

The Anglicans used to poke gentle fun at their brethren who did not rise from "cosy bed" for early church on Sundays. With cheerful sarcasm they would quote Psalms 149:6, "Let the saints exult in glory, **let them rejoice in their beds.**" Alas, our Grail translation in The Liturgy of the Hours flattens this out: "Let the faithful rejoice in their glory, shout for joy and take their rest" - which leaves no scope for irony.

Again, and from the same office of Morning Prayer, Sunday, week 1, the Grail, in Psalm 62[63]:7, has "On my bed I remember you. On you I muse through the night." However, the New Vulgate (the Church's official Bible, 1979), when translated, gives: "When I have remembered Thee upon my bed, I shall meditate on Thee in the mornings" -- which is traditional spirituality of retiring to rest with thoughts of God, with a view to making a morning meditation on them.

SMILING

God so valued a smile that He planned fewer facial muscles for smiling than for scowling.

Smiling signals good will. It encourages others to smile back, and to show good will in turn. It may enkindle in others the fire of love. As St Thomas Aquinas pointed out, to love is 'to will the good'.

Smiling exerts a secret power over those who smile. It makes them more cheerful and helpful than they would have been if they did not make themselves smile. Further, it helps cheer up other people, and inclines them to be helpful in their turn.

A Quaker variant, harder to master than a smile:-

"Before uttering a sentence the early Quakers are said to have asked themselves, 'Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary?' If at all dubious, they changed their minds and said nothing.

This, within limits, is what we all do but some people rebel against the convention, arguing that childlike spontaneity is preferable to an eternal hypocrisy. Why do we not give free expression to all that we think and feel? Why cannot we be honest and say whatever comes into our heads?

"The answer is that we are not good enough. If all our thoughts were charitable, kindly, intelligent and pure, there would be no objection to our expressing them. There are people, no doubt, of saintly character and childlike innocence whose thoughts are always fit to share. But few of us answer to that description. Our unguarded remarks, if we uttered them, would be selfish, unsympathetic, irreverent, indecent or harsh...

"The chief character in Max Beerbohm's Happy Hypocrite wears the mask of a saint but ends up becoming one. Few of us could claim to have done that but we are all a little more saintly for pretending to be better than we are. At least to some extent, the affectation ends as fact." (These three paragraphs are from Mrs Parkinson's Law by C. Northcote Parkinson.)

This tribute vice pays to virtue is not always hypocrisy. Indeed, hypocrisy has now become the tribute virtue pays to vice. Some folk pretend to be worse than they are out of human respect for what worldly people will think of them. This makes the world a worse place than it is, and hinders its improvement.

Curmudgeons rarely smile. Let us not be curmudgeons. Try smiling, and Getting up for God.

A FIRST COMMUNION HYMN

Words by Fr John O'Neill
To the tune of O Mary, Mother, Sweetest, Best
Arr. P. Jones

My Loving Father, God above,
you always loved me so
And my true home is waiting there,
while I'm on earth below.
I'll not forget You all my life,
Your love I will repay:
For I taste the Food from Heaven
On my First Communion Day (rpt)

Your love you poured into my soul
When life had just begun.
For You, your Son and Spirit come
When holy waters run,
Your life of grace will shine in me
More than the sun's bright ray,
For I taste the Food from Heaven
On my First communion Day (rpt)

And when I look upon His cross
And see how Jesus died,
I stand there with His mother
And see the tears she cried.
She smiles on me and says,
"Dear child, my Son you'll not betray,
For His Body is your Food always,
From your First Communion Day" (rpt)

DOCTRINE:

Verse 1:

God's eternal love (Ephesians 1)
And Heaven our home (Thessalonians)

Verse 2:

Grace i.e. indwelling of the Trinity
begins in Baptism, grows through
Eucharist

Verse 3:

Personal Love for Christ because of His
love on the Cross; and for His mother;
and their love for us.
Protection against sin through Eucharist.

Message from Pope Benedict XVI:

..."The recitation of the rosary can
help you learn the art of prayer
with Mary's simplicity and depth.

It is important that you make
participation in the Eucharist, in
which Jesus gives himself for us,
the heart of your life. He who
died for the sins of all desires to
enter into communion with each
one of you and is knocking at the
doors of your hearts to give you
his grace.

Go to the encounter with him in
the Blessed Eucharist, go to adore
him in the churches, kneeling
before the tabernacle: Jesus will
fill you with his love and will
reveal to you the thoughts of his
Heart. If you listen to him, you
will feel ever more deeply the joy
of belonging to his Mystical
Body, the Church, which is the
family of his disciples held close
by the bond of unity and love....."

**from the Pope's Message to
Young Dutch Catholics**

24/12/05

The Educational Importance of Manners

By John Hovatt II

At first glance it might seem rather forced to make a connection between education and manners. In our secular society, manners like morals seem to be optional in the formation of youth.

It is something relegated to parents to teach children at the dinner table if and when they eat together. Manners are a feel good thing, a way to be nice to people, or maybe even a “social lubricant” that helps one get ahead but hardly an essential part of education.

If we accept the premise that education is the mere imparting of knowledge to children, then manners are indeed superfluous and really serve no purpose

However, if we believe that education involves the formation of the whole character in addition to imparting knowledge, then we must enthusiastically endorse manners as something that has an enormous educational importance.

Indeed, when we say in Spanish that a person is “educado,” or literally “educated,” it is not to say he is a Ph. D. candidate. Rather it means he is well mannered. Similar distinctions were made in the Portuguese and Italian languages which show how these traditional societies definitely made the connection. The teaching of manners was a very important part of the whole education of a child.

And so manners and education definitely do mix.

However, it would be quite premature to recommend a mandated Manners 101 course in public schools or turn an edition of *Manners for Dummies* into a standard textbook.

This is because manners cannot be seen

as a kind of a feel-good set of rules for being nice-to-everyone or a politically correct framework for tolerating just about anything. There are those who are all too ready to spin manners into, for example, “evolution's solution to easing the stresses of communal living.”

If manners are to be taught, it must be within their proper framework. We must go beyond the rules of etiquette and into the very nature of manners themselves.

The Nature of Manners

What are manners? There are many good definitions: un-enforced standards of conduct, passed down codes for human behaviour, norms set by society to facilitate the common good and the concrete practice of charity toward our neighbour.

Manners are such that they become so ingrained in a person that they come to characterize that person. A lady is a term used for a woman who follows proper manners; a gentleman is the male equivalent. By these acts, we exteriorize something much more profound.

Manners are, therefore, mere exterior manifestations for a set of values and principles inside the individual and society. In themselves, they are sterile and artificial. If we reduce manners to fork positioning or social formulae, we reduce them to irrelevance. They become a kind of social re-enactment without a real link to our modern day world.

Thus, if we are to re-established manners and their proper role in education, we must reconnect with the values and principles that gave rise to them...and we must confront and disconnect with a culture that lives in

denial of these very principles.

Desire for good manners

No one will deny that manners have declined. News polls reflect the opinion of most Americans that we have become ruder and more brutal in our treatment of others. We do not need pollsters to tell us this; we experience it in our daily lives.

However, it is not from a lack of desire on the part of Americans to live in a more civil society. It often is not even from a lack of trying. Even the best of parents experience almost insurmountable difficulties in imparting manners to children. Every-one would certainly like to see more civility and manners.

No, we are uncivil because we are immersed in a culture that undermines those principles that give manners meaning. We are uncivil because in the sixties, we ourselves jettisoned what we considered the excess baggage of manners and civility so we could do our own thing.

Since then, we are engaged in what many have called a Cultural War – a battle much more important than politics and economics in the history of our nation. It is what Edmund Burke called that “most important of all revolutions, a revolution in sentiments, manners and moral opinions.”

In this struggle for our nation’s future, manners thus have a very important role. Our education system must necessarily be involved.

However, manners will only come back when youth are aware of the philosophical and metaphysical premises that support a civil society. To that effect, three such premises might be mentioned.

Beyond Locke: Radical Individualism

The first is a rejection of the radical individualism of our culture. Manners like tradition can only exist in a social context. We must direct them toward someone else.

We Americans tend to be social contract individualists. We take pride in our self-esteem and self sufficiency. However, we are now seeing a radical individualism that goes beyond Hobbes or Locke.

From our earliest youth, we were taught that each one is the center of the world. We do not think in social terms anymore. We do not think in terms of generations. Rather everything is oriented toward instant gratification of our desires. The only important thing is each one’s comfort and happiness. We simply do not care what other people think or do.

Sometimes we see people in the streets who present themselves without any consideration of how they look or offend people. Bad manners abound in the dirty ragged clothes, multiple piercing and undisciplined ways of speaking or eating seen everywhere. Individuals are oblivious to the existence of another. The message is: I do my own thing, and I simply don’t care if others are repulsed or offended by what I say or do. I am a world unto myself.

It must be admitted that the way our society is organized does not help in our social relationships. Everything in our society is done to minimize human contact. We are taught to bypass people by visiting ATMs, paying at the pump and using the omnipresent self-service option. The message is: I just take care of everything myself. I don’t need people. I don’t need manners. I am sufficient unto myself.

The result of this radical individualism is that we lose notions of charity toward others. We are reduced to the smallness of our own existence. It is an attitude that condemns the individual to a regime of self-imposed mediocrity.

Individuality not Individualism

Man was made to live, talk and act in society. By living in society, he enlarges his horizons and develops his individuality to its fullest.

Manners are enhanced by individuality, the development of a person's full potential in society. However, manners are destroyed by individualism, whereby a person enthrones himself as the standard of all things.

Thus, education should open the eyes of youth to think beyond themselves. They should be taught that greatness exist in sacrifice and consideration for others. Education should propose to students the heroes and archetypes that embody these ideas. They should also be taught sound philosophical social principles about the nature of society, the common good and our role inside society.

Much to the secularists' chagrin, that is why Christian education is especially suited to this purpose since Christian charity teaches us to overcome our natural self-centeredness and practice the love of neighbour for the love of God.

In a culture like this, manners spring up naturally and almost spontaneously. It is not something forced. Manners are a consequence of this education. It is a logic behaviour that comes from reaching out beyond ourselves.

The Rejection of Crass Egalitarianism

The second premise that supports a civil society is a rejection of crass egalitarianism.

While all men are equal in their essence and entitled to certain fundamental rights, among them the right to life, men are unequal in their accidents and naturally tend to form different forms of treatment and consideration.

That is why it is an oxymoron to speak of socialist or communist manners. Where all men or comrades are the same, there is no reason to treat

others differently. Where no one should excel, excellence is not rewarded or given special consideration.

Manners can only survive again in a social context and in an atmosphere where distinctions are made, where excellence is rewarded and difference are noted and even enjoyed.

One reason why we have an uncivil society is because it is a society of cultural egalitarianism. We are asked not to make distinctions. One of the things that makes political correctness almost tragically comical is that it destroys distinctions. It is a kind of egalitarian tyranny where nobody can acknowledge problems or inferiority anymore. Failure is now called "deferred success." Everyone is somehow "challenged" and woe to the well-mannered person who tries to show compassion or condescendence.

We are asked not to recognize superiority. So often, our situation comedies portray characters that glory in the fact that they ridicule or humiliate others. We see the Bart Simpson syndrome where parents are made to look like fools in the eyes of their children. All authority is seen as clownish and not worthy of respect. Manners are the habit of thinking about others; the act of adapting oneself to the individual person. They are naturally opposed to crass egalitarianism. They presuppose distinctions. They call upon us to honour those who are superior and excellent with special treatment. At the same time, we show compassion and consideration for that which is inferior or weak.

In this context, education must play a key role. Education has always recognized excellence. It has always reprimanded mediocrity. It is anti-egalitarian. And so if we instil honour and respect for different people in different circumstances in the child, he will naturally become, to borrow from the Spanish, "educado." He will

naturally adopt manners.

Instilling a Clear Idea of Purpose

Finally, the third premise for a return to civil society is that youth must be instilled with the clear idea of purpose to their lives. They must be given ideals greater than themselves. There is nothing more terrifying to the soul of a youth than the conclusion that life has no purpose.

And yet so often, youth have been betrayed and given exactly this message by a secularist establishment. Anything that smacks of metaphysics or transcendence is labelled religious and therefore put on the index of forbidden subjects.

Many have disparaged intelligent design as creationism lite. But what is the philosophy of neo-Darwinism but existentialism heavy?

So many youth are taught that their lives are the mere result of randomness, mutation and adaptation without a clear purpose for life. Our culture teaches that life is a party, a beach – a mere succession of experiences without a real essence of its own.

The passion of youth is made for great causes; youth need a clear purpose. To quote the French writer Paul Claudel, “Youth was not made for pleasure, but for heroism.”

In the past, education instilled a clear idea about life and its purpose. Indeed, Great Books programs have this in mind by calling to mind the great ideas and purposes of times past.

Youth have always hungered for great ideals. It is not something from Mars. It is as true today as in the times of Plato.

An example that comes to mind is our military. Inflamed with the ideals of "honour, courage and commitment," young people in our military find purpose in their lives and develop corresponding manners that belie their interior convictions almost as a secondary consideration.

This can be seen in many traditional colleges dedicated to the great idea that truth exists that have sprung up over the last decades. They manage to instil this sense of purpose in their students. It is always accompanied by an accentuated sense of manners and civility.

Part of the Cultural War

Thus, we must teach manners with principles. Manners and education are inextricably linked. Our problem is not to separate the two but to unite them once again by reconnecting with the values and principles long lost.

Indeed, this matter of manners is catapulted beyond the mere re-establishment of manners and civility. It is part of Burke’s “most important of all revolutions” – that of sentiments, manners and moral opinions. It enters into the question of the cultural war that so polarizes our society.

These are the themes that are deciding the future of our country today. Americans have a hunger for such topics and part of the conservative reaction today is because so many have been mugged by the terrible reality of a society that lives in denial of these principles and values. They have crystallized into a reaction because of things like manners and education.

Other topics like Supreme Court justices and Social Security are indeed important. However, culture is where policy and reality meet in the daily lives of our citizens. This is where the real battle is taking place and we ignore these themes to our own peril.

The above essay is based on a talk given at the Foundations of Education Conference at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas on November 4, 2005.

(Permission granted to reprint this article was kindly given by the American TFP whose website is www.tfp.org)

Editors note: Although this article was aimed at an American audience, we can still gain much to ponder in reading it.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Catholic Adult Education Centre offers five certificate courses. They are: Certificate in Youth Ministry, Certificate in Faith Education, RCIA Formators Certificate Core and Advanced. The certificate courses have 6 Core units common to all of them which all certificate students must complete. The Core Units are: The Sacraments, Christian Prayer, Opening the Bible, The Creed, Moral Life in Christ, & Christian Leadership. The other units are electives and depending which course you are completing as to which areas you need to cover.

The units may be studied face to face at the Centre or via correspondence in the form of CD's. A written 1000 word assignment is required. If you do not require a certificate you may study single units. These courses are accredited and recognised by CEO Sydney and CCD Sydney. To qualify to teach RE in Sydney Archdiocese, may be done by completing the Certificate in Faith Education.

The Lecturers include: Fr John Flader (who is also the director of the centre); Fr Peter Joseph, Fr Anthony Robbie, Peter Holmes, Dr Brigid Vout, Joanne Zwaans, Dr Andrew Foong, Professor Hayden Ramsay, and Anthony English. More information may be obtained by ringing CAEC 9643 3660 or email info@caec.com.au

The *Catholic Adult Education Centre* at Lidcombe in Sydney's west runs courses designed to deepen an understanding of the Catholic Faith. Each unit is 8 weeks long with a choice of classes on Monday and Tuesday nights, and another on Thursday mornings. Students outside the Archdiocese of Sydney may study by correspondence. The CAEC phone number is (02) 9643 3660 and their very helpful web-site is worth looking up for

more information: www.caec.com.au

The Centre for Thomistic Studies, Inc offers year-round courses on Catholic Church teachings, based on the philosophy and theology of the "Angelic Doctor," Saint Thomas Aquinas. The CTS web-site www.cts.org.au has a lot of articles of interest as well as a timetable for classes. The classes are very affordable and accommodate beginners as well as those who have previous studies. Contact details: (02) 9759 8014.

The Cardinal Newman Faith Resource Centre is open 9:30 - 4 p.m. Monday to Friday for all your religious items, books, videos, holy cards etc... at 342 Merrylands Road Merrylands NSW 2160
P O B o x 6 9 7
M e r r y l a n d s N S W 2 1 6 0
fr@cardinalnewman.com.au
phone 02 9637 9406 fax 02 9637 3351

“Study the children during his tender age. If you know him well you will educate him well. You will not misconceive his character. You will come to understand him, knowing when to give way and when to be firm. A naturally good disposition is not the lot of all the sons of men.

Train the minds of your children. Do not give them wrong ideas or wrong reasons for things. Whatever their questions may be, do not answer them with evasions or untrue statements which their minds rarely accept. Rather, take the opportunities they give you to train their minds with the first ingenuous gropings of their reasoning and reflective powers. Who can say what many a genius may not owe to the lengthy and trustful questions of a child at the home fireside.”

Pope Pius XII Address to newlyweds 24/9/41.

A lot of religion

By Sarah Fanning

It is always encouraging when someone makes a positive comment about one's children, especially so when it refers to their relations with others; you feel vindicated in your decision to bring the children up as you have, particularly to homeschool. I suppose it is really a form of pride: look how nice my children are! What a triumph for me! One of the benefits of homeschooling is the community of friendship you form with other homeschooling families; but it is easy to become complacent.

Recently I had a conversation which made me stop and think a little more. I was talking to a religious brother, a supporter of homeschooling, who told me about his vocation; it included the familiar story of a desultory Catholic upbringing, ignorance of the riches of our faith leading to searching elsewhere, then the gradual discovery, providential friendships, and finally conversion to the true teachings of the Church. "As a child I called myself Catholic but I knew nothing about it," he said.

We were standing watching the children of a number of homeschooling families playing, and I replied that I hoped that was one problem which these children would not face. He watched them for a few moments in silence and then said, "I have found that there is a lot of religion among the homeschoolers, a lot of religion, maybe too much; but sometimes not enough charity." I was very taken aback. This man is a simple and sincere person, not much given to intellectual analysis, and his remark struck home with all the more force for that. Not enough charity.

By nature of being homeschoolers most of us declare ourselves as independents. We are willing to step outside convention in order to ensure the faith education of our children. But that very independence can bring about a degree of pride in our own opinions, an inflexibility that can lead to self-righteous censoriousness. There the devil rubs his hands with glee, for there is fertile opportunity for discord.

Examining my own conscience I was uncomfortably aware of the many ways in which I had indeed fulfilled the brother's observations. How often I had adversely criticized others, sometimes in the hearing of my children, or to other homeschooling families about mutual acquaintances; how often I had adversely criticised members of the hierarchy, or listened without protest to such criticisms; how thoughtlessly I had assumed my own righteousness! What an example to give anyone!

Yes, homeschooling is a wonderful way of life, and I pray it inculcates our religion; but be on your guard for a lack of charity. We cannot afford to fight with our own when we have so much to truly fight against outside, in this secular world.

Editorial note: Take heart. Fr Tierney says it's impossible to have too much Religion but it is possible to have too little charity. So we need not abandon our religious instruction and weep and mourn at our children but rather encourage by word and example, a living charity.