

RELIGIOUS TRAINING IN THE HOME¹

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THE mother is so essentially the right person to teach religion to her children, she possesses, as mother, so many qualifications for the task, that it may seem superfluous for any outsider to offer advice to her—especially in view of the fact that the conditions of her work are unique, being those of the particular home of which she is the centre. For this reason I should like to say that though it has seemed to me impossible in so small a compass to be otherwise than definite, and even dogmatic, my desire is to offer a plan which shall be treated as suggestive, and modified, altered, or rejected by each according to her need. I suppose many mothers would enumerate among their disadvantages as teachers: (1) Lack of training for teaching, and in many cases for study; (2) Want of wide experience; and (3) A feeling of diffidence coming from the realisation of inconsistency. This last difficulty haunts all teachers of religious subjects, especially those, who, speaking publicly to large numbers, are obliged to dogmatise where they are most conscious of their ignorance and shortcomings. But the mother may justly say that for her the danger is greater because she is continually, and in matters of the smallest detail, living under the eyes of her pupils. On the other hand, she is bound to them by a special tie of love, which will make the criticism sympathetic and discerning of good.

May I remind the mother of her special advantages? (1) Better than anyone else she should know her own child, and this knowledge of the pupil is the first condition of successful teaching; (2) her very lack of training and experience should make her teaching fresh; and (3) should help her to secure a special atmosphere for her lesson. And of all things “atmosphere” is the most important in religious teaching—better, of two evils, a badly given instruction in the right

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atmosphere of humble reverence and loving care than the most model lesson in “hardness of heart and contempt of God’s Holy Word.” Right information may be gained by every intelligent and interested reader for himself in after life, but the tone of reverence once lost may only be regained at the cost of much suffering and long struggle. Professional teachers may secure this right tone, and will do so if they care enough about it, in their classrooms, and their own attitude will in itself inevitably affect that of their pupils. Is it unnecessary to say that, when the children are old enough to need instruction given by experts in teaching, the mother should strain every nerve to secure that they should receive it from one of reverent mind as well as deep knowledge, and not only in actual Divinity, but in all subjects, such as history, literature, etc., in which ethical questions will be raised. Were the evidence less strong, it would be inconceivable, that in the choice of schools, of governesses, and perhaps still more of nurses, so little trouble is taken, even by those who themselves appear to care for religion, to secure for the children the influence of people of religious character. How many mothers, who themselves value their privileges as churchwomen, inquire whether their nurses and governesses are communicants, and arrange that they should have opportunities of church-going? Fortunately,

or rather should we not say providentially, education is a work which often attracts those of religious mind and which must certainly deepen character in those who undertake it earnestly.

It may be convenient to consider the mother's work as teacher under the heads of (1) Time and Place; (2) Curriculum; (3) Methods of Instruction.

Time and Place. Let these be special and jealously guarded. For the young child there should be, if possible, a daily lesson—either early in the morning before other lessons or play, or in the evening when these are over—in the mother's own sitting-room, or some other place which can be sacred from all interruption at the time, and under conditions informal and unlike those of other lessons. When the child is older and goes to school, or has a tutor or governess at home, however much she may desire to keep this teaching in her own hands, it is surely fairer and wiser to share this instruction with those

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who, in proportion to the value of their work, *must* influence the child's mind deeply. But she may still read with him—once or twice a week—at least in the holidays, under the old conditions and with the old associations.

Though the good result of religious training will be felt only where its spirit permeates every place and all time, I would plead that as a rule the *direct* lesson should be confined to the special time and place in deference to the child's natural reserve, with which his reverence is so often bound up. But here, and in considering the curriculum there is another side which should neither be omitted nor left to the care of others—I mean the training of the child in habits of devotion. It is sad to find that some mothers leave the selection of the baby's first prayers to nurses, and many more are content to let their children pick up any further prayers for themselves, so that when they come to be confirmed they have still no knowledge of any but the most childish form. Yet, upon private prayer, surely more than anything else, depends their growth in the knowledge of God, and the forming of ideas about Him.

Curriculum—to eight years old. The baby prayers will come first. May I plead that they should be said *with* the child—the mother kneeling by the side rather than sitting while the child kneels—so that from the first the child may realise the mother's prayer and she by her own reverence may most easily evoke his. It seems to me important also that the order of the Lord's Prayer and our own Church Services should be kept; "to render thanks ... to set forth His worthy Praise, to hear His most Holy Word," and only then "to ask those things which are requisite and necessary," and these for others as well as ourselves. The first part of the Gloria, or perhaps later the summary of the Creed used as a Gloria. "Glory be to God the Father who hath made me and all the world ... " etc., will supply a very short and beautiful form of praise which will become more and more filled with meaning as the child grows. While still very young he can have a short and simple verse of the Bible read to him and be asked to explain it; he can be taught from the very beginning to thank God for his particular pleasures as well as to express his own desires; and he should also be taught

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very early the use of ejaculatory prayer, even if it be only the saying, "Lord have mercy upon me and help me," when in any danger or trouble or temptation. So prayer will become real and practical, the more so if it is used with his mother, not only morning and evening, but at other times such as before the daily Bible lesson, or for forgiveness after a serious fault has been rebuked.

In passing, it may be said that the practical treatment of discipline, punishment and forgiveness in the home—a most difficult as well as important subject—will greatly influence the child's views of the justice of God. No really serious moral failing should ever be dealt with apart from its religious bearing. For churchwomen (and though so much religious training is common to all creeds, I hold that the particular creed must influence it, and therefore write primarily for members of the English Church), the basis of the first religious teaching may well be the great festivals of the Church. The child may be taken to a short service as a special treat first on the great festivals of Christmas, Easter, etc., and may, during the following week or weeks, have lessons on the Life of Christ, as connected with that season. On the anniversary of the child's baptism, which should be marked in some special way (as later he should be urged to keep for himself the anniversary of his Confirmation or first Communion), he might learn about the Baptism of Christ. At other times, as during Lent, lessons from the Life of our Lord might be taken twice a week (the Gospel for the week will suggest a subject); those from lives of the Apostles, the women of the New Testament, etc., twice a week; Old Testament biographies and stories twice a week.

During this first period he should know by heart, besides the Lord's Prayer, which he will of course use in his daily prayers, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, some good children's hymns, the Venite and one or two of the shorter and Psalms of Praise, the Beatitudes and some of the shorter and simpler stories from the Gospels. Some would add the Church Catechism, but I should myself be content to leave that until rather later.

Eight to thirteen or fourteen. As soon as the child is able to say his prayers alone, he should have a written or printed

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card or little book with some form of private prayer. Perhaps a skeleton form is best, to be filled in, in part, in his own words. A good card is printed by Spottiswoode (Eton), but it does not include any form of praise or prayer to the Holy Spirit, which can, however, be easily added. The same publishers print *Lectiones for Juniors*, a course of Bible-reading arranged for every day of the year, each passage consisting of three or four verses with a heading which brings out its spiritual teaching. The child should now be taught the duty and privilege of intercession not only for personal friends but for public objects, his country, etc. This he will learn unconsciously if he is accustomed at family or school prayers or at any service he attends to hear special events, either public or private, made a subject of thanksgiving and intercession, or if he is taught to make particular applications of the Litany, Prayer for the Church Militant, etc.

During these years he should take in outline the synoptic Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, should read the historical Books of the Old Testament, and if possible should learn something of the history of the Church from Apostolic times. He should learn by heart the Veni Creator, the Canticles, the Nicene Creed, the Gloria in Excelsis, the Sermon on the Mount, I. Corinthians xiii., many of the Psalms and other Old Testament poetry, such as the Song of Deborah, the Blessing of Moses, parts of Isaiah and other prophets. As he grows older it may be well to let him choose for himself the passages which strike him most.

From thirteen to eighteen. When boys or girls are preparing for Confirmation, still more when they have become Communicants, they should realise their own responsibility for their devotional life, should be encouraged to make their own plan of prayer and Bible reading, and though books may be recommended or given to them the use of them should be quite optional.

Their Bible study should now include the careful study of the text of selected books of the Old and New Testament, and unless the mother is able to read the subject thoroughly herself in the first authorities it will be wiser for her to entrust the direction of their work to others, and indeed, if they go to school this must be so. But she can still read with them in the holidays, either on the same or

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different subjects, such books as *The Sermon on the Mount*, by Gore; *Footprints of the Son of Man in St. Mark*, by Luckock; *Isaiah*, by G.A. Smith; *Letters to a Godson*, by Bickersteth; *Studies in the History of the Prayer Book*, by Luckock; *Wakeman's History of the Church of England*; *Lightfoot's Leaders of the Northern Church*, etc.

Method. It is in methods, much more even than in the choice of a curriculum, that the mother, inexperienced as a teacher, finds difficulty, and often because she handicaps herself at the outset by neglecting the preparation which the trained teacher knows to be essential. If Bishop Dupanloup, who had a natural genius for teaching, found it necessary to spend six hours in preparation for an hour's Catechism on a subject familiar to him, it is obvious that one less gifted and experienced cannot dispense, even in elementary lessons, or rather perhaps especially in elementary teaching, with careful preparation. It is better that this should be undertaken some time beforehand, so that the lesson may be thoroughly assimilated before it is given—thought over and revised—and enriched by the illustrations which will come from many outside sources.

It is a great help to clearness to write out the lesson or at least headings of it. Without going into technicalities of the art of teaching, it should be remembered that the education of the child should aim at the training of the intellect, emotions and will. In every lesson the child should, if possible, gain some information, imagine and take interest in some person, or place, and be led to make some resolve, to learn some spiritual truth. The lessons in any one subject should be consecutive and connected, questions should be asked about the previous lesson, and the ground-work made sure; and the lesson itself should be a discipline for intellect and will, e.g., repetition should be perfect, and a half-learnt lesson should not be accepted.

Within these very general principles, the mother's lesson should be as individual and unconventional as possible. She will take the little child upon her knee and perhaps begin by showing a picture. May I plead that the picture should be a representation of a *good* one—one of the best. The Perry Pictures, published by the Art for Schools Association, have reproductions of the old masters, which, if not archæologically so

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correct as more modern pictures, have more often the dignified and reverent feeling which is surely of far greater importance, and the artistic merit which is perhaps not unimportant. Then, having herself recently re-read the incident which the picture represents, the mother will tell it in very simple words, and then read it in the beautiful words of the Bible itself. She will then ask the child to repeat it, and his narration will give rise to questions on his part, and will give an opportunity for bringing out the moral and spiritual teaching. The lesson may end with the child's selecting and learning a text, and saying it until it is perfect. The next lesson may begin with the repetition of the same text. If the child is naturally gifted with a vivid imagination, he may be encouraged to make his own pictures, and to describe them. As he grows older the Bible reading may come first, he will then be asked to put it into his own words, and when

difficulties have been explained, to narrate the whole and draw his own lessons. Occasionally when a new book is begun a general view of the contemporary history will be needed, and may be given *viva voce*, or if possible read in some standard book. Were the subject Shakespeare, no more need be said; but the Bible holds a special position, as containing the story of the growth of the Jewish and later the Christian [sic] religion. The historical and literary criticism of the Bible therefore, is not a matter of mere intellectual interest or even of feeling, but touches the most vital matters of faith. How are we to deal with the Higher Criticism of the Bible? Are we to introduce it or to recognise it in our teaching, or are we to wait until it is brought up? and how are we to meet it then? No wonder mothers tremble and are perplexed when they reflect that on the right treatment of this subject may depend, in the future, the religious faith of a son or daughter, the more so since they must know that, however carefully they may guard them, sooner or later they must read or hear criticism which is actively hostile to the Christian Faith, or even to all religious belief. No one may dare to dogmatise on so serious and perilous a matter, each of us may only hope and pray that there are some antidotes which may be given before the poison of a cynical disbelief is met.

The first is to teach the utmost reverence for the Bible as the book of spiritual life. Let its very externals be respected;

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give the child not a school copy, but one beautifully bound, to be kept in a special place and treated with all care. Insist from the first that its object is to teach spiritual truth, *e.g.*, point out that while little stress is laid on the foreign wars of such a king as Ahab, great attention is drawn to his moral position and its effect on his people. Emphasize the fact that while part of the literature of the Old Testament, such as the latter part of Isaiah, ranks as literature amongst the greatest books of the world, it ranks still higher for its moral enthusiasm and spiritual insight.

The second is to watch for and check any symptom of the controversial spirit in matters of religion. A clever child, naturally fond of argument, will soon pick up the habit of religious controversy so fatal to reverence—especially if he hears the Sunday sermon torn to pieces at the luncheon table—if his difficulties are treated as mere matter of argument, or if his lawful desire for explanation is met by rebuke or indifference. Let all *real* difficulties be treated with the most tender consideration, but any attempt to argue on the surface be checked as unworthy of the subject.

The third is to teach that “Truth is great and will prevail,” that religion can never fear truth, that reverent research must lead to it; but that, on the other hand, spiritual truth is too great to be capable of exact definition or logical demonstration, that the Infinite cannot be expressed in finite terms, and that conviction must go hand-in-hand with spiritual experience, which will remain unshaken in the face of difficulty. But if this lesson is to be taught the teacher must above all be herself true, must *never* offer an explanation which is not acceptable to herself, must never shirk answering a difficult question, but must very often be content to say, “I do not know, but we will try to find out an explanation,” or “I do not understand this, there must be so many things in religion one cannot understand, the Truth would not be the Truth unless it were beyond our understanding.” If this attitude can only be gained it will help the student to wait for the explanation of difficulties raised by textual and historical criticism, and to meet, through faith in God’s love, the far harder questions of the moral government of the world.

With little children it is easy to avoid controversial points, to read the Bible to them, knowing that they will accept it

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as *true* in the real sense without troubling about its literalness. To take an example often given, it is possible in the story of the Fall to bring out points of spiritual experience which even a small child can understand; the choice between good and evil, the shame of disobedience, the restoration through forgiveness to the Presence of God, the bearing of the necessary punishment and its remedial power. As children grow older, one part of the Bible may be used to explain another, *e.g.*, in reading of the “days” of Creation they may be reminded that “with the Lord a thousand years is as one day.” Make use too of all the gains of the Higher Criticism—for there *are* gains—of the light thrown on the prophetic and historical books, and the confirmation of their story by secular history and Assyrian and other inscriptions, using such books as Sayce’s *Fresh Lights from the Monument*, and enforce the moral lessons by comparison with modern history, by the spiritual crisis, *e.g.*, of such a period as the French Revolution.

But as boys and girls grow older, those who teach them must be prepared for the possibility of their hearing hostile attacks. And, if possible, they should be able to deal with these from a first-hand knowledge of the great authorities on both sides, or at least with such a knowledge of the attack as is found in the best works of defence. Further, if they are to hear of difficulties, it is far better that they should hear of them first from those of reverent faith. It is better, for instance, that the question of the authorship of St. John’s Gospel and the bearing that it has on the history of the Christian Creed should be put before them by a Christian, than that they should hear of it first from one who is not.

May I end with a quotation from Archbishop Temple, whose methods of teaching, at one time so severely criticised, were so amply justified by the result:—

“In training the young, teach naturally, as you would have taught had there been no difficulties at all, with two provisos:

“(a) Do not lay stress on things which will afterwards have to be unlearnt, so that faith may not be bound up with such things.

“(b) It is right to let the young feel that they do not understand the whole, but that they should keep their minds in readiness to accept new modes of handling things, not possible to them at present.”

¹ An Address given at Camelford House on behalf of the Bishop of London’s Council for the Religious Education of the Upper Classes.