

What Happens to Innocence?

What happens to ten-year-old girls in sweet dresses and pretty hair showing the loving attention of a mother? Charming smiles are shy or vivacious. Laughter lifts. But in two or three years the change is profound and brutal. Innocence is replaced by precocious make-up and affected sophistication. Tight jeans and raised heels flaunt an immature clumsy seductiveness. Mourn innocence.

Surely no responsible mother had a part in this. And that is symptomatic and symbolic. In too quickly abdicating authority, parents helplessly stand aside and allow innocence to be raped. Do not tell me it is hard to resist today's pressures. Of course it is. But if you are going to be a good parent in a wicked age you must be a fighter. If you are unwilling to fight, please do not have children.

The ravagers of innocence are not subtle. A rock concert can do it in a night, Television, controlled by a cadre evangelistic in opposing morals of the past, is unconscionable, And permissive parents who provide a child with his own television set perform the moral equivalent of handing him a revolver with only one empty chamber and telling him to go play with it in his room, Television needs supervision. Its events and ideas need discussion by responsible parents. But most often, it just needs turning off.

That and other modern activities isolate a child from the family. And that is precisely what an inordinate and excessive devotion to the sacrosanctity of privacy does. Children supposedly need their "space." But if we make our homes happy and sharing, a child will relish his space inside a nurturing family. Isolation tends to alienation and seems like lonely company. The consequences can be tragic. A child needs his family more than he needs prolonged privacy.

Togetherness creates family loyalty and helps overcome peer pressure, another ravager of innocence. Peer pressure is caring more about what one's associates think than what one's parents think, A tightly knit family of joy and love can yield youngsters who care more for their parents' estimation than that of their peers.

Another problem is school. Given the penchant of teachers for assigning The Scarlet Letter and Catcher in the Rye, we know there is Trouble in River City. While the former, in the right circumstances, may teach tempered judgment, in the milieu of today's classroom it may simply make adultery seem less than bad. Then there are the problems that arise such as insistence on shorts in mixed gym classes. And sex education may become sex advocacy, unrestricted.

THE FATHER KNOWS BEST

I know parents who tell their children exactly what to tell the teachers about all this. But a willful teacher is not deterred by that, and is not above intimidation by humiliation. Parents must take responsibility for a child's morals, and when necessary go to the teacher personally and establish that, and go with dignity. That usually suffices. When it does not, since you cannot accept what is wrong, it is time for no-compromise-determination, back-against-the-wall courage, and a take-no-prisoners-battle that may escalate to the principal, superintendent, and school board. And if it is for a principle of faith and religious freedom you can do it and win. You may not destroy objectionable curricula, but you can keep them from involving your children,

Do not be deterred by, and do not tolerate threats of, lowered grades or non-graduation. They will graduate, and can do so respected and with honors. And if you are not just cranky, but live consistently with your principles, your children will have learned something about conviction, courage, and idealism. There are worse things to learn in life.

Parents need to consider two questions, One, "What do I want this child to be?" The best trumpeter in the county? See that he never misses a rehearsal or a performance, not even for church services. He might make it, and how proud you will be. But do not be surprised if somehow he gets the idea that some things can be more important than serving Christ. Of course, in the Judgment he might seek a trumpet tryout. But I doubt if he will be able to replace the angels who have the trumpet seats pretty well nailed down. You see the point. More important than fleeting recognition is the character and service that will stand him in good at the Judgment, That is what you really want most for him, isn't it?

The other question is, "What do I want?" Will my children see inconsistency, compromise, selfishness, or neglecting Christ, or them, in order to obtain my ambitions? Do I need the vicariousness of my children's triumphs, even to the point of exploiting them and giving the Lord short shrift? What you are and want is the starting place of what your children will be. That's where it started with Timothy.

Let's try this summary: Love God, love right, love service, and love your children, all uncompromisingly. Now get out there and mop up on today's mess.

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