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"Dear Son . . ."

By the **REV. LESLIE W. SLOAT**

Librarian in Westminster Theological Seminary

DEAR SON: Little did we think, when you came along in 1933, that we'd have the job of bringing you up in the midst of a world at war. In those days there were hard times and a depression, but the idea of an actual world or global war such as is going on now was very far from our thoughts.

But times change. Of course, the fact that our country is at war now hasn't affected you a great deal. You seem to be pretty much of an average youngster—three square meals a day and ten hours sleep at night, school and vacations, roller skates and bicycles and baseball, bumps on the chin and a mother's loving arms, Sunday school and church, and even for a while—a rarity now, I'm afraid—a catechism class. Something along these lines has been the life of multitudes of growing boys like you.

Yet, as I think it over, I can see that there are myriads of ways in which you are affected by the war. On the lighter side, I see it in your play. Boys have always enjoyed guns and swords, and cops and robbers. But those toy airplanes of yours, those tanks, and so on, have a bit more realism than cops and robbers. They are P-40s and Thunderbolts and flying fortresses and dive bombers. And your enemies are Japs and Nazis, Tojo and Hitler. All of these terms come right out of the actual battlefield where our soldiers are fighting. And I am afraid that in your play you are imbibing just a bit of the spirit of the soldiers at the front, which

somehow doesn't seem just right for a kid of your age.

I suppose I ought not be too worried over the way you play. Boys have to play with something, and when you grow up most of the toys of youth will be forgotten. But still, I don't like the underlying atmosphere of the world in which you are living. It is when I see a reflection of that atmosphere in your play that I am bothered. Without realizing it, you are absorbing that atmosphere. It can't help but affect your thinking, and the thinking of thousands of boys and girls like you. And just so far as it affects you, it will affect the world which will be yours in another fifteen or twenty years.

So I want to point out some of the things in the present-day atmosphere that I am not too happy about. First, I don't like to have you living in an atmosphere of carelessness and indifference about the Christian religion. When I talk about the Christian religion, of course, I don't mean to refer to all this pious talk about religion generally that is going around—the stuff about there not being any atheists in foxholes, and so on. That usually isn't the Christian religion, at all. I think it is mostly a sort of emotional outlet for people under nervous strain.

When I talk about the Christian religion, I mean first of all believing in God—the real God; the Christian God, the God of the Bible. We believe in that God, your mother and I. We believe He is all-wise and all-powerful. We believe He created this whole world that,

The Christian Home

By the REV. R. B. KUIPER

Professor of Practical Theology in Westminster Theological Seminary

NOT every house is a home. That goes without saying. A vacant house certainly is not a home. But neither does every residence deserve to be called a home. The place where one hangs his hat when he is not away, or where one leaves word how he may be reached after he has left, is not necessarily a home.

Home may be described as the place where those who are united by ties of love and blood are wont to escape from the toil and turmoil of the world in order to find peace and rest in fellowship with one another. By the common grace of God, homes in this sense may be found among men of many races and creeds. There can be little doubt that the house in which dwelt the noble Trojan hero Hector, his lovely wife Andromache and their dear little son Astyanax was indeed a home. But the Christian home is the home supreme. The most beautiful pagan home is not even comparable with that home in which reigns the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ.

The Parents

Ordinarily it takes two Christians, a Christian husband and a Christian wife, to establish a Christian home. If one or the other is not a Christian, the Christian character of their home is sure to suffer immeasurably. The Word of God forbids so-called mixed marriages. To be sure, Paul taught the Corinthians that, if one or the other of an unbelieving couple were converted and the unbeliever should be content to continue living with the believer, the believer ought not to depart (I Cor. 7:12, 13). But that was not to say that a believer is at liberty to marry an unbeliever. In many places Scripture says quite the contrary. Before the flood the sons of God married the daughters of men. That was the beginning of the end. Wickedness multiplied in the earth; God repented of having made man; and then came the deluge. King Solomon's marriages with heathen women resulted in his turning to idols. When Judah came back from captivity the holy seed mingled with the foreigners

round about. Then Ezra, ardent reformer that he was, uncompromisingly compelled God's people to put away their heathen wives. The apostle Paul lays down the rule that Christians are to marry "only in the Lord" (I Cor. 7:39). That surely implies the prohibition of mixed marriages.

Often a Christian woman will seek to justify her marriage with an unbeliever by the prayer that their union may become instrumental toward his conversion. Sometimes God in His great mercy grants that prayer, but even then it must be said that she erred. The noblest end does not sanctify sinful means. In a great many instances the infidel continues in unbelief. Constant association with him is almost certain to prove detrimental to the spiritual life of his Christian spouse. And, even sadder, if children be born from this wedlock, it is well-nigh a foregone conclusion that the influence upon them of an unbelieving father will result in untold harm.

A Christian husband and a Christian wife can establish a Christian home only if they spend much time together at home. As little as one generation ago this was rather generally understood. Today that truism is often overlooked. In many instances the wife as well as the husband works away from home. In consequence, she can hardly be a homemaker. If they are so fortunate as both to have finished the day's work by five or six in the evening, it is not unusual for them to buy a prepared dinner at the corner delicatessen, or hurriedly to dish out a meal from tin cans, or, better still, to eat out, and then to rush off to some place of amusement. Thus home is reduced to a place where only nights are spent, a sort of tourist home, with this difference that, unlike tourists, the occupants forego the pleasure of studying another wallpaper pattern each night. Their home has ceased being a home, to say nothing of a Christian home.

The Children

Normally there should be children in a Christian home. Although birth control seems to be out of vogue for

the duration, there was until recently much evidence that a great many men and women desired the pleasures of wedded life without being willing to undertake its responsibilities. That this attitude stands condemned by the Word of God is evident. At the beginning of human history, God gave the command: "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth" (Gen. 1:28). And the inspired psalmist sang: "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord" (Psalm 128:1-4).

The children of Christian parents are partakers of the covenant of grace. When God established this covenant with Abraham, the father of the faithful, He promised that He would be the God not only of believers but also of their seed after them (Gen. 17:7). When the Israelites sacrificed their children to idols, God complained that they did this to "my children" (Ezek. 16:21). Paul reminded the Corinthians that their children were "holy", not only if both the parents believed but also if only one of them were a Christian (I Cor. 7:14).

On the precise implications of this Scriptural teaching there is some difference of opinion, but the best Reformed thought may be summed up in this way: The children of Christian parents are to be baptized and thus received into the membership of the visible church. So long as they are children, it is to be assumed in the judgment of charity that, if they give no conclusive evidence to the contrary, they are regenerate and, therefore, also members of the invisible church. And if, in the providence of God, any of their children die in infancy, Christian parents may rest fully assured that they have joined the church triumphant.

Thus highly ought Christian parents to regard the children whom

God has given them. But this does not preclude their admonishing the covenant children, as they approach to years of discretion, that it is their solemn duty to receive Christ in active personal faith as their Saviour and to make a definite choice between the service of Christ as Lord and the service of Satan and sin and self. They must be told that, failing to do these things, they, the children of the kingdom, will one day be cast into outer darkness, while many come from the east and the west, the north and the south, to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God (Luke 13:28, 29).

Family Worship

A Christian home without family worship is unthinkable. And yet, in how many supposedly Christian homes the family altar has fallen into decay! A few practical suggestions concerning it are in order.

The father, as prophet, priest and king in his home, should take the lead in family worship. This does not mean that others may not take active part in it, but ordinarily it should be conducted by the head of the family. Paul must have had good reason for singling out fathers when he said: "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Family worship should be conducted with a high degree of regularity. If this is not done, the danger of neglect will be great indeed. It does not follow that each Christian home must have precisely the same program of worship. One family may not legislate for another. It has been my good fortune to have been reared in a home where family prayers were said before and after each meal, Scripture was read at every meal, and frequently there was common prayer again at bedtime. To the present day, I consider this an excellent plan. But the point which I wish to make just now is that each family should adhere strictly to that plan which seems best to meet its needs.

The reading of God's Word and prayer are essential elements of family worship. When Scripture is read, God speaks to those present, and when prayers are made, those present respond to God. The singing of psalms and hymns will contribute much to both the content and the interest of

worship. With due respect for those who may differ with me, it is my opinion that it is better to read through the whole Bible from beginning to end than to limit the reading of Scripture to scattered selections. The reading of brief devotional articles, such as are found, for example, in the *Daily Manna Calendar*, is altogether commendable, but such material may not be permitted to crowd out Scripture itself. Prayers should be brief and to the point. "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Eccles. 5:2). Care should be exercised lest the service of family worship become so lengthy as to weary the children, to say nothing of the adults.

Religious Education

The religious education of the children of the covenant must begin at home. How obvious that parents are the God-appointed teachers of their children! It has been said that the child's education begins years, even generations, before its birth. However that may be, it should begin at the latest very early in the child's life, long before he goes to school. It may be doubted whether we learn as much in any subsequent five-year period of our lives as we do in the first. In that period our parents are our teachers. Parents may be expected to be good teachers of their children because they are in a far better position than others to understand them and to sympathize with them. Is not every child "a chip off the old block"; in fact, a chip off two old blocks? And who can possibly have as deep an interest in the spiritual and eternal welfare of children as their own parents? No wonder that God commanded parents to teach His Word to their children when they sit in their house, when they walk by the way, when they lie down, and when they rise up (Deut. 6:7).

The responsibility for the religious education of children rests primarily upon their parents. To be sure, parents may, and ordinarily must, call in the help of others for the performance of this large and difficult task. But the responsibility which is theirs they cannot transfer to others, such as the Sunday school teacher, or even the pastor.

The church too must provide religious education for its youth, and it should emphasize Christian doctrine

most of all. In the home the practical should be stressed. Parents should teach their children such things as to pray, to fear God and keep His commandments, to honor their superiors, to acknowledge their sins and seek salvation in Christ, to love God and one another. Perhaps the most effective method of giving such instruction is by the concrete examples of Bible history. In every Christian home should be found—and diligently used—a book relating in the simplest language the stories of Holy Writ. Of the many volumes of this kind in existence, likely the best is that by the late Mrs. Geerhardus Vos.* Why be content with telling the little tots silly bedtime stories, when the supremely interesting and highly instructive stories of God's own Word are available?

A great many Christian parents are wont to teach their children that by being and doing good they can assure themselves a place in heaven. A more serious blunder could hardly be made. From early years children should be made conscious of sin and should be told that there is but One who can save them from sin and its consequences—Jesus.

The day-school is an extension of the home. It follows that the instruction given in the day-school must be in line with the training received at home. And that means that Christian parents may not be satisfied to commit their children—God's children—to schools which are hostile to Christianity or, at best, supposedly neutral as regards religion. The Christian school is a necessary complement of the Christian home.

History gives many striking examples of divine blessing upon faithful parental training of covenant children. Susannah Wesley attended painstakingly to this task, and three of her sons became preachers. The wife of a Reformed pastor in the Netherlands labored diligently at the Christian nurture of her six sons, and every one of them turned out to be a minister of the gospel.

Social Life

Children are children, and their elders should permit them to be children. Youngsters should not be dealt with as if they were oldsters. In *The*

* *The Child's Story Bible*, by Catherine Vos. Eerdmans, \$3.50.

Life of Samuel F. B. Morse occurs this passage: "Their tenth and last child was Jonathan, who died at the age of three years and four months, having read the Bible through twice, committed many passages to memory, and conducted family worship". It may be said with perfect safety that Christian parents need not worry if their little ones are less precocious and to all outward appearances far less spiritual.

The home should be a place where children like to be. To that end, home life should be characterized by naturalness, not by unhealthy piety. To the same end, the home atmosphere should be one of radiant cheerfulness. This will seldom be the case unless the mother realizes that the making of a happy home is a full-time assignment. There should be much play and laughter, and frequently the parents should play and laugh along with the children. Then, too, the children should be made to feel free to bring their friends into the family circle.

Such a home will prove attractive and, while this will not render discipline superfluous, it will tend to keep disciplinary problems from arising. As they grow up, the children will be less inclined to roam the streets, to arrange clandestine meetings with undesirable companions, and to frequent places of questionable amusements.

For the adults in the family, too, an occasional social time with Christian friends is most wholesome. This is one way of exercising "the communion of saints". Nor need the conversation on occasions of this kind turn always to theological themes. Pleasant talk with fellow-believers, eating and drinking with them, and now and then playing games with them should prove conducive to full-orbed Christian living.

The Sabbath

The Sabbath should be a red-letter day in every Christian home. It is the Lord's day. On it Christians commemorate the Lord's glorious resurrection from the dead. Therefore it should be a day of rejoicing, not of gloom.

Preparation for it may well begin on Saturday. Things that might unfit for Sabbath worship, such as parties lasting into the small hours of the night, should by all means be avoided. *The Directory for the Public Worship*

of God of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church says: "It is the duty of every one to remember the Lord's day and to prepare for it before its approach. On the preceding day all worldly business should be so ordered by each person and seasonably laid aside, that he may not be hindered thereby from sanctifying the sabbath, as the holy Scriptures require". On a wall in my home hangs a plaque depicting an elderly man reading from the Bible by candlelight to an audience of several persons listening reverently. Underneath is the line from *The Cotter's Saturday Night*: "From scenes like these Old Scotia's grandeur springs".

If at all possible the whole family should attend Sunday morning worship. It goes without saying that mere babes who would likely create disturbance are better left either at home or in the church nursery, but all who can should go to church. In no case should mother or daughter stay at home to prepare dinner. There are Christian women who attend the morning service with unflinching regularity and are wont to serve Sunday dinners good enough for a king. I know this from personal experience. In the evening, too, all who are able should repair to the house of God.

The Sunday afternoon is a splendid time for such activities as evangelism and visiting of the sick. In the home it should be a spiritually delightful and profitable season. While there is no objection to a nap for the older members of the family or an outdoor walk for those with more physical vigor, here is an excellent opportunity for the reading of Christian literature, with which every Christian home should be well supplied, and for the religious instruction of the young.

God

Attention has been called in sketchy fashion to a few prominent characteristics of the Christian home. Perhaps it is well in conclusion to give a comprehensive description of the Christian home. That can be done in one sentence, even in one word, albeit a compound word. The Christian home is a God-centered home. God dwells in it. God's Son is its head. God's Word is its rule. God's children constitute it. God's love pervades it. And all that is done in it, whether it be eating or drinking, waking or sleeping, praying or playing,

singing or weeping, teaching or learning—all is done to the glory of God.

In a word, that home is Christian whose occupants have God Himself for their home and therefore call upon Him as

"Our God, our Help in ages past,
Our Hope for years to come,
Our Shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal Home".

Calvin Institute

By the REV. EDWARD J. YOUNG, Ph.D.

FOR four years Philadelphia's Calvin Institute of the Bible served to train young people in the knowledge of the Word of God. A fairly comprehensive course was offered, which covered the whole field of Christian doctrine and practice. Courses were also given on individual books of the Bible and on methods of practical Christian work. Those who attended the Institute testified to the good which they received from its courses.

However, due to the war and to other considerations, it has been necessary for the Calvin Institute to close its doors for the time being. At the earliest possible moment, however, the Institute should reopen.

Calvin Institute is badly needed. It can perform a work that is beyond the reach of the individual church. In our denomination there are many young people who are greatly interested in the work of the church. These young people need solid doctrinal instruction. In ordinary Bible and catechism classes it is impossible to present matters as fully and completely as can be done in a Bible institute.

In Calvin Institute the entire field of Reformed doctrine was covered in a period of four years in regular doctrine classes. In addition to these classes in doctrine, there were other courses in which the doctrines were also presented. For example, in the course on Genesis, stress was laid upon the doctrines of God, the Creation, the Fall, and so forth. Consequently, those students who attended these classes really learned the Scriptures.

This brief article would seek to arouse interest in the reopening of the Calvin Institute. Calvin Institute is needed, if our young people are to have a thorough grounding in the Word of God. May the day soon come when her doors will reopen.