

Bringing up the family—today¹

ROSEMARY HAUGHTON

There is nothing intrinsically virtuous about scrubbing a stone floor—nor about peeling potatoes—nor about doing large quantities of washing by hand. It is not sinful to put down a good plastic floor covering and wipe it over easily with a damp cloth. Using a potato peeler is not one of the seven deadly sins, and the washing machine was not invented by the devil.

When one makes such statements baldly, like this, they are so crudely obvious that it seems fatuous to waste one's breath uttering them. Yet there is a school of thought among Catholics in this country that makes it necessary to say such obvious things. Perhaps it would be better to call it a school of feeling, as there doesn't seem to be much real thought behind it. It may be as well to name no names; but there has been, and still is, a tendency among certain high-minded Catholics (male) to regard the scrubbing of floors as practically necessary to the salvation of females. There seems to be a preference for Welsh or Cotswold stone. But this preamble is merely intended to clear the air.

The purpose of this conference is not, presumably, to discuss the way of perfection for women in backward countries or in primitive areas of civilized countries, or even for women who suffer individual hardship in an otherwise comfortable society. Its purpose is rather to discuss the best way of making use of what is good in the civilization of our age and country. The rôle of a Christian woman in her home must remain broadly the same in every age and country, in the sense that the aim is always the same: that of bringing up children to serve God as well as possible. But the ways of compassing this end must vary widely.

In a predominantly Christian community, one which pays at least lip-service to Christian standards, the approach to the education of children must be different from that demanded of Christian mothers in a pagan or at least de-Christianized society. In our country the problem is complicated by an inherited 'ghetto' mentality. The outlook of many Catholics is that of civilians inside a besieged fortress. They intend to survive, with the hope that somehow outside help will make

¹A paper read at the conference on 'Catholic Women in the Modern World' at Spode House, January, 1962.

it possible for them to emerge and settle down outside the walls; but they do not expect or intend to make any move themselves to remedy their enclosed condition. This attitude, understandable a hundred years ago, is both ludicrous and cowardly today. Catholics are constantly being exhorted to take their proper place in public life, to try to influence society in their various professions and trades. The response is not encouraging, though of course there are many individuals who do their best to make up for the apathetic mass. This is partly the fault of Catholic schools—from primary to public—where, with few exceptions, the aim is to turn out ‘good practising Catholics’, and the religious instruction is based mainly on the idea of defending the faith when it is attacked. You seldom find a school with a dynamic approach to the teaching and practice of religion.

It is not within the scope of this paper to consider ways of altering the methods of teaching religion in our schools. It will be at best a slow process, because most of the teaching is in the hands of religious who are mainly recruited from former pupils in the same school. These pupils are, obviously, those who found congenial the atmosphere and traditions of the community in which they were educated, and they tend therefore to carry on those traditions substantially unaltered from one generation to another. So you get the spectacle of devoted and well-meaning teachers working hard to form a type of Catholic suited to a society which no longer exists. My own prejudice is in favour of scrapping the Catholic schools. Vast sums of money are now being spent on producing young people who will be either ‘Sunday Catholics’ or lapse altogether because they are ill-prepared for real life. I would like to see the money spent on the training of good Catholic teachers to teach in the State schools, and also on building and staffing a centre in every parish with a library, playroom, and room for lectures, films, exhibitions and recreation. But that is a private dream that is not likely to come true. It wouldn’t cost enough to be impressive. And above all it would put the responsibility for the Christian education of our children back on their parents and the parish priests (where it belongs). Neither would be altogether happy about this. We have become used to leaving it to the schools and letting them take the blame.

This brings me back to the real subject of this paper, which is what a woman at home can do to improve the deplorable state of Christian education in this country. There are two quite different factors that make an enormous difference to the way mothers can carry out their

vocation here and now. One is the obvious fact that labour-saving gadgets and better planned houses can, when intelligently used, give a wife and mother more leisure than was previously imaginable except for those who were lucky enough to have several servants. The other is the great improvement in the education of women.

I think these two things are complementary in the vocation of a Catholic mother. The gadgets, carefully chosen to meet individual needs and used in such a way as to get the maximum benefit from them in time and effort saved, are very important tools of her trade to a woman who wants to bring up a Christian family in the modern world. If you listen to a group of mothers talking you will nearly always find that the admiration goes to the one who performs the greatest amount of physical labour: the one who makes all the family's clothes, for instance, who bottles umpteen jars of fruit. And most women do feel a curious kind of shame when they admit that they buy their children's clothes, and don't bottle any fruit; this, in spite of the fact that ready-made clothes are frequently cheaper and can be just as good as home-made ones and that, unless you have a large and productive garden, bottling fruit costs about the same as buying it in tins. I do not at all mean that it is a waste of time to do these things; they can be very satisfying as well as useful. I do mean that a mother should use her brains to decide how much or how little of her time she can reasonably give to such occupations in relation to her other responsibilities at any given period in her family's growth; she should not allow herself to be swayed by the prestige attached to domestic arts and crafts in women's magazines and by the W.I. There are of course many cases in which every other consideration has to give way to the need for living on a very small wage or pension. I am not considering these at the moment because I assume that the phrase 'modern world' in this context refers to the kind of society we are aiming at, though we have only partly achieved it—one in which a fairly high standard of living is the norm, and comparative financial security the rule. It is, in any case, the responsibility of mothers who do enjoy a fair measure of material well-being to bring up children who will help those who are not so fortunate.

The use of labour-saving gadgets and ready-made clothes is after all a negative matter. Intelligent use of these things is necessary to give women the time they need for other, more important, things. If, for one reason or another, we have to do without them, we can count on the Holy Spirit to help us to manage somehow; but that doesn't mean

that endless heavy physical labour is either necessary or desirable for a mother—no matter what we may be told from the pulpit, and in spite of all the biographers of saints whose mothers (the saints' mothers, I mean) are so often shown at the wash-tub, as if that were what made them good mothers. The logic of it seems to be that good women in the past had a lot of heavy work to do and they managed to bring up their children as excellent Christians, therefore heavy physical work is necessary for anyone who wishes to bring up children as good Christians. The fallacy is obvious, but the conclusion is still proclaimed with fervour and conviction. It would be truer to say that neither heavy work nor the lack of it in themselves help a mother to follow her vocation, but that less fatigue and more time do at least give her more opportunities to make use of the other major asset of the modern woman—her better education. She may make an excellent job of rearing her family in spite of constant fatigue and lack of time. But such conditions are, in themselves, bad, not good, just as illness or poverty may be sanctified but that does not make them good.

Leisure, then, is a good thing for a Christian mother to have, and a good education should help her to make intelligent use of it. I do not mean that all modern girls are well educated. They aren't: Catholic girls, in particular, often receive a very cramped and negative kind of training, surrounded by warnings and cautions. But they can get at least the rudiments of an understanding of the history of their country and its literature, they have the opportunity to learn to think and to take an interest in politics and welfare if they want to. I would like to suggest, what may at first sight appear to be a peculiar reversal, that it may be easier for a wife than for a husband to keep up an interest in current affairs, including current Church affairs. The very fact that the mother of a young family does not get out into the world of factory or business or profession gives her the chance to take a wider view of many questions on which her husband's ideas may be influenced by the conditions of his particular job or the opinions of those he works with. I don't think I am simply suggesting a new occasion for marital discord. I am quite serious in thinking that it is part of the job of a wife and mother to be a well-informed citizen, both of her own country and of the world. This is generally taken for granted in the case of 'career girls' and professional women, but it is assumed that because a home and children keep a woman from direct participation in, say, local politics or Catholic Action it is no longer necessary for her to have any ideas on subjects outside the domestic round. But how are we to

bring up our children to take an intelligent interest in the life of the Church and of their country if we ourselves are passive and uninterested? During the greater part of their childhood and adolescence their father will be at best only an occasional companion. The stimulus of his interests and opinions is very important, but lack of time and the need to concentrate on getting a livelihood limit his influence in the earlier years—the years that matter. For it is in the years up to adolescence that habits of mind and body are formed. And it is during those years that we have to encourage our children to think for themselves, constantly to question, to explore, to discover, both with their hands and their minds. It is so easy to kill curiosity. Our schools are expert at it. Any tendency to pursue a line of enquiry beyond the strict limits of the lesson in progress is too often regarded as a serious scholastic sin. Children who come to school full of eagerness and alert curiosity become, in a matter of months, accustomed to the idea that lessons are a necessary bore and knowledge something imposed by grown-ups. And it can be the same at home: so often the answer to children's questions is 'I don't know, dear' in a tone that implies that there is no need for anyone to know. Even more common is: 'Do be quiet! Can't you see I'm busy?' And after a while the child stops asking questions. And when later he needs to ask important personal questions, he doesn't. Mother isn't a person who has ideas about anything. But she should have. She should have the time and the will to have ideas, to read and to think. Yet even if the modern home can give her the time she needs, the will is often lacking. It may be much more difficult to do a bit of serious reading than to make jam; and the chances are that friends and neighbours will regard the reading as a waste of time—if not a form of showing off—while the jam-maker is admired and envied. But I think a lot of women would make the necessary effort if they realised how important it is, and how rewarding. The mother who takes the time and trouble to answer her children's questions has the satisfaction of watching their minds reach out to new ideas as they follow up the interesting subject. If she doesn't know the answer at once—and one often does not—then mother and children can find it out together, by looking it up in an encyclopedia, or by a visit to a museum or public library. Of course, children always want to know at once, and in this case it is worthwhile to do what they want. Does it really matter if we have a snack lunch for once in order to get out earlier? Is it really so important to get all the ironing finished? I think we all need to learn to put first things first. Of course, the household

chores have to be done; but it is very easy to get into the habit of making the children fit in with the chores instead of arranging the routine so as to give the children the time they need.

It is not only intellectual interests—scientific, historical, or what-have-you—that need to be stimulated in order to develop a complete human being. Most mothers spend a large part of their time preventing, or clearing up, various kinds of ‘mess’. If they used a quarter of this time in helping the children to make really interesting messes, the gain to the whole family would be enormous. Children need to use their hands and eyes as well as their minds. Reading a book is a tidier occupation than keeping snails or making clay pots; but a purely intellectual education is only half an education. The exploration of things with hand and eye not only satisfies the mind: it stimulates it. We all get a bit sick of the word ‘creative’ as used by educationists. It can too easily be used by the incompetent teacher to cover an unwillingness to tackle difficult mental disciplines with his or her pupils. But it really does matter that a child should be allowed and helped to make things, and to make them well. Clay-modelling, painting, pressing flowers, making baskets, carpentry, chemical experiments, keeping animals, making a museum, sewing, acting, they all make more or less of a mess; but they are the right kind of mess. No housewife objects to the mess on the kitchen table when she is making pastry, or to the snips of material scattered on the floor when she is dress-making. But if the children put paint on the table or wood shavings on the floor she easily feels annoyed because these things are only ‘play’ and therefore not necessary. The same applies to unmessy but noisy pursuits like singing or home-made percussion bands. We want to block our ears and say ‘Do be quiet’. Their play must not interfere with our convenience. But the divine wisdom is described as ‘playing in the world’, and if our children are to grow in that wisdom they must play that kind of play—the play of making things. If the things they make and do can also be used directly in the learning of their faith, so much the better. They can model their own crib figures and dress them, make their own Madonna for their bedrooms, paint or model the stations of the cross, fetch flowers for our Lady’s altar, and act Christmas plays or make ‘music’ for them. All these things can help them to learn their Faith and to love it with hands and feet and ears and eyes as well as with their minds. But all their making and doing is religious, even if it is not directed to specifically religious ends. It is all part of their education as the complete human beings that God wants them to be.

There is nothing specially modern about children's need to 'make a mess'. What is new—and bad—is the tendency to substitute ready-made entertainments for self-made ones that require, initially, more effort, more mess and perhaps more room. I am not condemning television. It can play a fascinating and stimulating part in the education of children. But like all tools it needs to be used with intelligence and purpose, not just because it's there. This is a case where we have to revive what was once taken for granted rather than to work out something new. Catering for the need of our children to make and explore and discover can be difficult in modern cramped conditions; but no amount of purely intellectual stimulus can be a substitute for it. This is by the way, but in a civilization in which, for good or ill, more and more of the things we need are going to be produced by automatically operated machines, doesn't it make sense to suggest that our children, when they grow up, will want to make beautiful and useful things, not because they must as in the days of cottage industries, but just for the love of making? Then they could use and love in their homes the things they had time to make because the machines had done for them what was dull but necessary.

So the time saved by a sensible use of gadgets and by the non-scrubbing of floors is to be used, first, to educate oneself in order the better to educate one's children. All knowledge is worth having, and wide interests are necessary in the mother to stimulate wide interests in the children. If she is an alert, adventurous, experimenting person, she will bring up children with the same qualities.

But for us who are Christians there is one kind of knowledge which is of capital importance because it provides, or should provide, the framework into which all the rest is fitted. I mean a knowledge of our Faith. Teaching the children their religion is of course a perennial part of a mother's work, but there are special difficulties confronting us, here and now, in England in the sixties, because of the kind of society into which our children will emerge. Personal goodness and piety is, as always, enormously important, and I am not going to enlarge on that because there is nothing especially modern in the need for holiness in the mother of Christian children. But it isn't enough. There are mothers of undoubted personal holiness, women who compel admiration by their unflinching cheerfulness under difficulties, their charity and courage; yet when the children whom they have carefully trained grow up they begin to question the religion they have been taught. Without losing their love and respect for the mother who taught them

they gradually abandon—partly at least—the beliefs and moral standards in which she trained them. What was lacking? I think what they missed was an element of intellectual toughness underneath the piety. They were told things, but not directly encouraged to question; they were instructed, but not stimulated. In fact they were not used to thinking about their religion.

This, then, is a field in which it is a strict moral duty for a mother to be very well informed. She needs to know more than the catechism answers. She needs to read about, for instance, recent developments in scriptural studies, about the liturgical revival and what it means. How many intelligent adolescents have begun their drift away from the Faith because they thought they were obliged to believe in the literal truth of some Old Testament myth? To read one of the many books for lay-people on the study of scripture by perfectly orthodox writers can be an eye-opener and an enormous relief to faithful but ill-instructed Catholics who had secretly been worried by Joshua's sun or Jonah's whale. It is for modern Christian mothers to see that their children do not regard the 'miraculous' flight of the Holy House to Loreto as an article of the creed, or the clumsy reporting of young visionaries as exact records of the opinions of our Lady.

These are negative aspects of religious instruction, they concern simply the removal of obstacles to belief; but that does not make them unimportant. If we are to bring up well-informed Christian citizens, they must be well-informed Christians as well as well-informed citizens. A faith that is clogged with half-buried doubts cannot give (even if faith survives) the impetus needed for living a full Christian life in the modern world.

One far from negative aspect of the Church's teaching is the Christian doctrine on sex and marriage. It is far too big and too important a subject to be dealt with as a mere part of a paper like this. Enough to say, here, that it is vitally important for the success of her own marriage as well as for the education of her children that a Christian wife should understand what is the real Christian teaching about marriage and sex. The real truth of it is marvellous and satisfying.

Naturally, no one woman can work up an absorbing interest in every aspect of the history, life and teaching of the Church. But I think that to have some idea of what is going on, and of the history behind modern developments, is not a luxury for the odd pious blue-stocking, but a necessity for every mother who wants to do her work efficiently. At present there is all too much truth in the popular im-

pression that Catholic mothers are miserable, dowdy, over-worked drudges, with no ideas in their heads beyond the babies' nappies and their rosaries.

Of course they aren't all like this, perhaps not many are; but the trouble is that a slightly sanctified version of this is offered to us as an ideal. The image of the meek, simple, devout mother who mutters 'Hail Mary's' over her wash-tub and is too absorbed in her children and her prayers to bother about her appearance is held up for our admiration and imitation from pulpits and in those saints' lives that I mentioned earlier. Of course there is a very real kind of holiness that lies behind this subtly distorted image. I don't at all want to make fun of it. But I do suggest this version of the ideal Catholic mother can too easily be an easy way out for people who don't want to face up to the demands of modern society as it affects the rearing of Christian children. Not only do some women find this distorted ideal a convenient excuse for mental laziness, but some of the clergy encourage them to do so because they don't really want lay people to start thinking for themselves and running things.

Our society needs mothers who are willing to tackle the complex business of bringing up children with intelligence and adaptability. More leisure and better education give us the opportunities we need; it is for us to make use of them and not to be put off by the unbalanced values, inside and outside the Church, of those who exalt physical labour and achievement at the expense of intellectual effort. In the last resort our children's souls are more important than pots of jam.

And when the children have grown up and gone away, what then? The woman who has dropped all interests but domestic ones faces a rather dreary future unless she is strong-minded enough to try to develop interests and skills that come comparatively easily in youth but are much more difficult to acquire in middle-age. The woman who, for the sake of her children, has continued, or even perhaps begun, to learn to think and to experiment, has every chance of making a full and useful life for herself. She will be less tempted than most to cling disastrously to her departing brood. And they will be glad to see her in their own homes because she is an interesting and a stimulating person to have around.

One aspect of modern life that I have not mentioned is its precariousness. We all know, at the back of our minds, that the whole fabric of our civilization could come to a messy end very quickly. Does this make any difference to what I have been saying? I think not. We don't

know what will happen. Even if we did, the best thing most of us could do would be what St Aloysius is reputed to have said he would do if about to die shortly: carry on as before. If we are doing our best to make a good job of our vocation that is all we can do. And assuming that the cataclysm is somewhat delayed, the best hope of averting it permanently surely lies in bringing up a generation of sane and responsible men and women who will be prepared to take their places as Christians in national and world politics, industry, welfare, or education, as their abilities and talents allow.

The Scapegoat and the Underdog

JOHN FOSTER

A FEELING FOR SIN

In comparing the very vivid sense the Israelites of the Old Testament had of themselves as the chosen people to the slight feeling modern-day Christians have for themselves as the new people of God, it is interesting to notice that a powerful symbol (that of the scapegoat), integral to the Jewish law of holiness, has been reproduced in the Christian way of life with a much less valid one (that of the underdog).

In the book of Leviticus (16. 2-28) one can read how, before the high priest entered the Holy of Holies each year, two buck goats were presented to him, one of which was not killed but symbolically, through a laying-on of hands, invested with the sins of the people; then led away by a man appointed for the purpose to an uninhabited place in the wilderness, there to be let loose or pushed over the rocks from the top of a mountain. Only after the exit of the scapegoat did the high priest enter the Holy of Holies: and when the man who had led the goat away returned, he like the priest was ceremonially washed. A similar symbolic rite, this time concerning the purification of the leper, is described elsewhere in the book (Lev. 14. 1-32). If anyone suffering from leprosy is cured, he is only readmitted to the community after a purification ceremony during which one of two 'clean' live birds is dipped into a mixture of spring water and the blood of the