

TROUBLED TEENS: WHO'S TO BLAME?

By Fr. Franklyn McAfee

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prv. 22:6). And how does a parent train a son or a daughter in the right way? By teaching them to love God with their whole heart and strength and to love their neighbor as themselves. God has provided us with the guidelines on how to do this and has given us a moral code which flows both from His own divine self and from our human nature. This code is known as the Ten Commandments, a blueprint for a successful life. Breaking them will bring disaster and in some cases eternal punishment; keeping them will bring us to the kingdom of heaven.

The Jews of the Old Testament were commanded by God to teach their children His law, and His words spoken to them apply just as much to parents today. "These commandments which I give you this day are to be kept in your heart; you shall repeat them to your sons, and speak of them indoors and out of doors, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on the hand and wear them as a phylactery on the forehead; write them up on the door-posts of your houses and on your gates" (Dt. 6:6-9).

These forceful words are repeated by our Blessed Lord in a different way when He told His disciples, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (Jn. 14:15-16) and again "if you heed My commandments you will dwell in My love" (Jn. 15:10). The importance of the Decalogue was repeated by our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesis in Our Time (Catechesi Tradendae)* where he teaches, "a certain memorization of the words of Jesus, of important Bible passages, of the Ten Commandments . . . far from being opposed to the dignity of young Christians, or constituting an obstacle to personal dialogue with the

Lord, is a real need" (#55).

A recent Gallup Poll of American teenagers revealed that 80 percent of them believed that the Ten Commandments were valid today. One wonders what the other 20 percent think has happened to the moral force of the Decalogue. Does societal norms, the ethical whims of the passing age invalidate a law enacted by Almighty God? The Gallup Poll also showed that only 3 out of 100 teenagers could list the commandments! How can one follow a law if one does not know it? But a teenager could counter by asking, "How is one to know it unless he is taught it?" We have not been teaching the moral law and its binding force and the accountability of our actions.

God told the Israelites, "When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the precepts and laws which the Lord God gave you?' you should say to him, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt and the Lord brought us out with His strong hand. The Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes and to fear the Lord our God, it will be for our good at times, and He will continue to preserve our lives. It will be counted to our credit if we keep all these commandments in the sight of

the Lord, our God, as He has bidden us" (Dt. 6:20-25).

This passage from the Book of Deuteronomy is a beautiful example of a catechesis on the law that parents and teachers could give to youngsters when they, in their quickening and awkward eagerness to find an explanation for all things, question the reason for these laws. The son God is referring to is probably a teenager, and He told the Israelites how they should answer their son's challenging of the law so that he could come to a mature and deeper appreciation of it.

Violations of God's Law

Many teachers of religion (and I include some priests among them) have watered down the binding force of the commandments or even denied it when faced with a challenge from a youngster. In an attempt to avoid all things which might provoke a questioning attitude from an adolescent, religion teachers and parents have skirted those important fundamentals of Christian doctrine that their children need to walk the way of righteousness.

Our children are not provided with the knowledge of God's irrevocable law, they are not taught the consequences of violating that law, and they are not given the means to help them keep faithful to that law. As a consequence, they are easy prey for the Devil who "goes through the world like a roaring lion" seeking to devour them. Our youth are confronted with a massive violation of Divine Law every day in the media and, what makes matters worse, they are taught a new law by secular society, namely, "No one can decide what is right or wrong for someone else." With this false law in place there can be no objection to adultery, fornication, abortion, contraception,

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Today's Teenagers

Teenagers are different from adults and from younger children. That is a fact of life. There has and will always be a tension between parents and their teenage son or daughter. This is called growing up, a process which cannot be accomplished without pain. But this painful maturation process has been manipulated into a "generation gap" by the powers of evil in the world so as to separate the young from their parents and from their priests and make them pliable material for Satan. Teenagers are going to have their own taste in food, clothing, and music but what has happened is that this individuality has been exaggerated to an extreme so that they now live in their own world. The high priests of the media have created a chasm between the young and adults which then results, first in rebellion against the structures of the "adult world" such as the Church and the school, and then in a growing loneliness among the youth and an increased rate of teenage suicide.

Childlike Simplicity

The children of Garabandal were children of wonder. They were still able to be awed by the flashing sight of a firefly, the discovery of a frog, and silenced by a colorful sunset. They could love a rose. Their minds and hearts had not been ossified by a world that valued the what over the who, the how-to over the why. Adults have a strong tendency to lose their childlikeness, this sense of awe and mystery, but today in our American society even our children have lost it. We have taken away their childhood. How many of us would offer the Virgin a stone to kiss and be thrilled when she did so? St.

Francis of Assisi would and so did the children of Garabandal. A story is told about St. Francis that, one day while out on an afternoon walk in the woods with a fellow monk, he came upon a stream with a large flat rock in it. St. Francis got excited and said to his fellow monk, who was carrying a loaf of bread, that God had provided them with a picnic: the bread for food, the water for drink, and the rock for a picnic table. The other monk got angry and told St. Francis he didn't know what he was saying. There was no picnic table, no picnic lunch, no fantastic drink, just a rock, a small loaf of bread, and a stream. Two people saw the same things but in vastly different ways.

So we have the difference between Conchita, Mari Loli, Jacinta, and Mari Cruz and the teenagers of our society. The childlike simplicity of the Garabandal children is shown by the joyful expression on their faces. And when they see the Virgin Mary, they smile. And the Virgin smiled at them. One remembers the Little Flower in her autobiography saying how the Blessed Mother had actually smiled at her and how we need that smile so much. St. Therese was cured of a malady at the time the Blessed Virgin smiled at her but, whereas we would make a big fuss over the miraculous cure, she made one over the smile.

Eucharistic Reverence

This childlike simplicity, this reverent sense of wonder has its greatest manifestation in one's belief and reverence for the Holy Eucharist and especially the Eucharistic celebration. Every week I celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for Mother Teresa's sisters, the Missionaries of Charity, and at each Mass I am

deeply moved by their complete prostration on the floor when I raise the sacred Host and the Precious Blood. I have been blessed to give retreats to Carmelite nuns and have been impressed to see how they genuflect with great care and love. And then I think of how we do it so much out of routine and in such an awkward way. Shouldn't we be instructing our young people how to genuflect out of love, how to be attentive and prayerful during the celebration of the Eucharistic mysteries, and to visit the Blessed Sacrament often? But how can they do it if they are not told that the celebration of the Eucharist, the most holy Mass, is the unbloody renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary? But we adults, to do that, must restore our sense of mystery because the eyes that do not see marvels in the beauty of God's creation will not see Jesus under the appearance of bread.

homosexuality, drug and alcohol abuse, and suicide to mention some. Within the last month I have seen on television two sympathetic portrayals of bigamy!

Popular music has a special role to play in the deformation of our young. The lyrics extol illicit sex and urge our children to "make love," as well as criticize authority, and condone the use of drugs. The disc jockeys who play these records on radio are some of the most offensive and reprehensible creatures on earth. The whole rock scene is drenched through and through with ugliness. The performers dress in bizarre and hideous clothing and behave in a repulsive manner. A psychiatrist once told me that after looking at the covers of rock albums in a record store he could not see how an adolescent could remain psychologically unscarred by constant exposure to such ugliness. Besides all of this, we have in some music elements of Satanism.

I agree with the psychiatrist; how can a young man or woman be exposed to all of this and not be left an altered person? How can they sit through hours of television and movie dramas telling them homosexuality is all right and have a news reporter confirm that opinion, and not be drawn to at least consider accepting this as truth? What becomes of a son or daughter if they hear and see all this propaganda and never hear the truth from their priests or religion teachers? What happens to them if sex education, even under Catholic auspices, becomes sex liberation?

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