

a **means** or an **object** but rather as another Christ whom it is their privilege to serve.

4. Instill an appreciation of beauty, whether it be in nature, literature, music, or art. The books, magazines, compact disks, videos, musical instruments, and art that you have in your house, the television shows that you watch together, and the family excursions that you take will prepare them to appreciate the goodness of the material world that God has created and redeemed. They will also understand and despise by contrast the **culture of death**, which kills both the body and the soul. Beware of leaving your children alone with the television or computer, particularly as regards games and the Internet. They should be considered as **dangerous substances** easily subject to abuse and thus closely supervised and controlled. All of this will prepare them, as they mature, to be more reflective, and contemplative thus more able to wisely discern and answer God's call.

Take special care with their formation outside the house. Encourage them to have a wide variety of friends with whom they can share the joy of your own family life. By the time they graduate from high school they simply must have an excellent grasp of Catholic teaching in its doctrine and morality and be able to give an account to others of the hope that is within them. This is your **primary** responsibility. Every family has different financial circumstances and choices. It may be home schooling, the parochial or private school, or even the public school. It is not simply a question of choice, however. Christian parents have a serious responsibility to improve all varieties of education, always insisting on the primary responsibility of parents for their children's education.

If need be, you may have to teach them the Faith yourselves but in any case you must not send them off to college as innocent lambs ready for the slaughter. Believe me, there are plenty of wolves out there. Introduce them to the saints as their role models while also encouraging them to imitate the virtues of the great men and women of history. Remember you are preparing them for a life of service and dedication to God and not necessarily in

the convent, monastery, or rectory. You may also want to encourage them, gently, to participate in Catholic programs for youth that are sound, demanding, and fun. It may be there that they first come in contact with those other mentors and new friends who will introduce them more concretely to the possibility of a life of total dedication.

These are just a few ideas. You yourselves will have others. Nobody knows your children better than you do or loves them more save God Himself. Vocations are a supply-side phenomenon. Supply creates demand. If you supply (offer) your children to God through your prayer and careful preparation, He will match you by taking them and through His grace and their collaboration. Don't forget the shortcut of entrusting them to Mary, the Mother of God. If our Lady takes a special liking to them, her Son will form them into the new evangelizers of the third millennium. You will lift a hymn of thanksgiving to God for rewarding your generosity by calling one of yours to be a special one of His. And if your children don't receive a divine vocation which is unlikely if you follow the advice given above? Don't worry, your grandchildren will. You cannot outdo God in generosity.

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Pamphlet 122

The Family: Seedbed of Vocations

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We know that the core teaching of the Second Vatican Council is the radical call of all to holiness. However, we also know that God calls a chosen few, that should be many, to follow him even more closely in a life of apostolic celibacy for the kingdom of God, whether it be as a priest, religious, or layperson. The founder of Opus Dei once remarked that those called by God owe ninety percent of their vocation to their parents. The family is the seedbed of vocations.

Saint John Bosco was reported as saying that one out of every ten Catholic men has a vocation to the priesthood. We could say that he employed the word men in the inclusive sense and say that one out of every ten persons has a specific supernatural calling from God. Perhaps this is the Lord's way of assuring a total tithing of his children. He has no interest in money but has a total commitment to his children as a loving Father.

One of the greatest hopes of any Catholic family should be to have one, or more, of their children to be chosen in a special way by God for his service. Traditionally, this has meant a vocation to the diocesan priesthood or one of the religious congregations. In a specific sense we are referring to the priesthood, the religious life, or to one of the various movements and institutions for laypeople that enable them to dedicate themselves totally to God in the middle of the world. These new institutions are highly favored by the Church as a means of complete dedication to the apostolate as we approach the millennium. Nowadays, it is more and more recognized that the vocation to apostolic celibacy for the kingdom of God is also a viable choice for the layperson. Indeed, the Church has made it quite clear through its enthusiastic endorsement of the need and efficacy of specific vocations to the various movements and institutions of the Church that are lay-oriented.

However, it is no secret that generally, with some few notable exceptions in some few dioceses

and religious congregations, vocations have been in sharp decline in Europe and North America over the last forty years while on a steady but unspectacular rise throughout the rest of the world during the pontificate of John Paul II. There are a variety of reasons for this decline in the West. We could cite contraception producing smaller families, general affluence resulting in the bourgeois spirit producing a consequent lack of generosity, lack of catechesis, the general confusion in the Church, the sexual revolution and the consequent loss of innocence resulting in cynicism and hedonism among young people where ideals should be high, the sad example of tens of thousands of married couples and priests and religious who have not been faithful to their commitments to God and the Church, and each other. However, the example of holiness is a much more powerful influence on young people if they are brought up in such a way as to appreciate it. Witness the impact of John Paul II, Mother Teresa, the new Doctor of the Church Saint Therese of Lisieux, Blessed Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei and so many others. Look at the World Youth Days in Czestochowa, Denver, and Paris with their millions of young people united in prayer and sacrifice, and apostolic zeal with the Holy Father and the Church.

The family atmosphere in which vocations are bred, nourished, and readied for fruition really is no different than what any serious Catholic parents would want to create for their children in order to prepare them for holy marriages and to give a Christian witness in the world. As the noted family expert Jim Stenson has remarked, parents should form their children with their vision pointed into the not too-distant future when their children will marry and have children of their own. They are preparing their children to be responsible, faithful adult Catholics and family persons who will build up the Church, society, and culture.

Catholic parents who want to produce vocations for the Church have to be ready to be heroically counter cultural. As the old Beatles song put it, "It don't come easy." Putting it mildly, the world appears designed at the moment to thwart people, particularly young people, from even entertaining the

thought of complete dedication to God. I like to speak of three particularly strong influences on young people today. One, the general culture; two, the educationally system; three, the family environment. Hopefully, at least two out of three would be positive influences to create a favorable environment for young men and women to commit themselves totally to God. Unfortunately this is not the case. The secular educational system, from top to bottom, as presently constituted, represents the ideology of secular humanism as the norm; the general culture appears designed by a demonic Intelligence to destroy any notion of beauty or truth in any young mind or heart. This leaves the family which is under unprecedented attack by the aforementioned forces and others apparently left alone to fend for itself. However, the reigning Pontiff John Paul II tells us that the future passes through the family. I, with him, bet on the family. It has a long track record of survival. Be sure to read his *Letter to Families* for some hopeful and helpful advice.

What can parents do to create an environment where one or some of their children will discern a specific call from God to follow him completely? They should want to foster a family life where it is natural to be generous, to make a sincere gift of oneself to others. Here are a few ideas:

1. Parents must be their children's best friends. To win and keep children's friendship is a daunting but joyful task. You must show your trust for them and respect for their freedom from an early age trusting that the Holy Spirit is already at work in their soul from Baptism. You may sometimes be disappointed but your children will realize that your love is unconditional. Speak often positively about the Church and the greatness of being called to a life of dedication in it. Never speak negatively about persons who have dedicated their lives to God no matter what their human failings might be. Your children should know that you pray for them every day, that they be holy and happy and generous to whatever God calls them. They must know that while you are concerned with their education, health, achievements, career prospects, these are all

secondary to their being virtuous and happy in this life and saved in the next.

2. Foster a simple life of piety in the home adjusted to the condition and ages of the children. It should leave the children asking for more, not begging for less. The Cure of Ars was once asked by parents what they could best do for their children. He said simply to bring them frequently to Jesus in the Eucharist and in the Sacrament of Penance. Figure out how you can do this respecting their freedom yet making it attractive.

What is most important is their seeing you lead a more devout life than they. They will watch you pray, go to Mass, go to confession, read the Sacred Scripture, pray the Rosary, and so on. They will see that the liturgical calendar is the most important one for their family and that you celebrate accordingly. They will also see you make sacrifices in order to do so. Pleasing God, not men, will thus become the priority in their life also.

3. Teach them to value poverty and detachment. Keep them short on money. Do not let them indiscriminately acquire things or to measure people by the amount of their possessions. Teach them to make things last and how to go without happily. Teach them how to share cheerfully. Make sure they spend their summers productively. That often times will mean they work and/or spend time in generously serving others less fortunate than themselves.

Expose them according to their age and ability to "take it," to misery. Soup kitchens, nursing homes, and hospital for incurables including for children should be places where, over time, they feel comfortable. One of the most effective ways to assure this quality of generosity is simply to have a large family and to treasure the children God has sent to you. This will help them to place the **person** and not the **pleasure** or object at the heart of their moral universe. The greatest gift you can give to your children is more brothers and sisters. Persons are not things. Thus too they will never see another person as