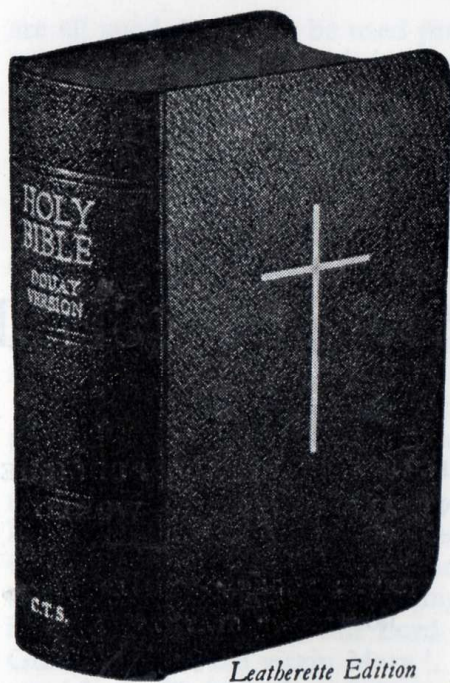


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# SEX-INSTRUCTION IN THE HOME

by

REV. AIDAN PICKERING M.A.  
*(Biology Master at Ushaw College, Durham)*

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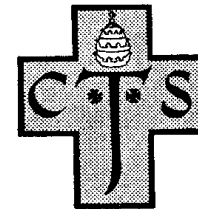
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LONDON

CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY

117th Thousand

This pamphlet is for private circulation only and is intended for the use of the clergy, parents, and teachers. The pages containing the separate talks for girls and for boys forming parts II and III have been perforated so that, if desired, they can be torn out and given to the child to read.

## PART I

### Sex-Instruction in the Home<sup>1</sup>

**T**HIS is a book on sex-instruction, and is written for parents. It is to help you to give your children the information and the training in purity they need.

It must be said at once that the instruction given here is largely spiritual, and utterly different from what non-Catholics call sex-instruction. They give detailed information about sex to their children, hoping that knowledge will solve all their difficulties. We give our children what facts are necessary, but we concentrate chiefly on training their will and their character. That is the only real solution to the problem of sex-instruction.

#### Do they need help?

Think back to your own childhood. Some of you, when you remember how you found out the facts of life, may now wish that you had learned them from a better source. Give your children the help which you would like to have had when you were young.

Actually, the whole problem is far more urgent now than when we were young. Then, sex was secret; to-day, it is advertised. Everywhere, your children are being taught 'Hollywood' morals, at the pictures, on the posters, in the newspapers, everywhere. So, if they are to get a sane, correct, Christian attitude towards sex, it must come from you, in the home.

Too many parents 'leave them to find out for themselves'. That is not right. To prove it, here are some figures from America.<sup>2</sup> Two thousand high-school boys were questioned

<sup>1</sup> Based on an article in *The Clergy Review*, May 1949.

<sup>2</sup> *Lumen Vitae*, 1947, No. 3: 'The American Adolescent and Religion', by Urban Fleege.

as to where they got their first knowledge of sex matters, and what effect this knowledge had on them. It was found that if the knowledge came from a good source (parents, priests, nuns, teachers), it had a good effect in 94 cases out of a hundred. But where the boys had been left to find out for themselves (from other boys, magazines, the 'pictures'), the effect was harmful in 75 cases out of a hundred.

So they need your help. Fr Vermeersch, in his world-famous book on Chastity, says: 'We can unhesitatingly affirm that there is occasion for sex-instruction, and the only serious question that remains is the best manner and time for giving it.'<sup>2</sup>

### Whose duty is it?

It is the parents' duty.

'As regards the parental instruction of children in the matters concerned, we are convinced that herein lies the chief cause and the remedy which is being sought. There is to-day a lamentable decline in family education, due largely to an ever-increasing tendency on the part of the parents deliberately to shirk their obvious duty' (The English Bishops in their Joint Pastoral).<sup>3</sup>

'The bond established by nature between parent and child is so close that such an intimate and sacred subject as discussion of sex is primarily a matter for parent and child' (The Scottish Bishops).

It is your duty; and I hope to show you that the task is not beyond your powers.

### What is its purpose?

What are we aiming to do for our children? Why is sex-instruction given?

'Its sole purpose should be to assist the formation of the virtue of purity' (The Scottish Bishops).<sup>4</sup> We must remember this when discussing methods of sex-instruction, and,

<sup>2</sup> A. Vermeersch, S.J., *De Castitate*, Rome, 1919, § 191.

<sup>3</sup> April 1944, published by the Westminster Press.

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum on Sex Education, published with the approval of the Bishops of Scotland. This Memorandum, and the Joint Pastoral of the English Bishops, are given as appendices in *Sex Enlightenment and the Catholic* by J. Leycester King, S.J.

above all, when we are talking to our children. We give them the facts of life only as a means to purity, and because ignorance of the facts of life can endanger purity.

### Wrong sex-instruction

The sex-instruction encouraged by the secular Education authorities is worse than useless.

It is becoming increasingly popular with non-Catholics, and even with a few Catholics, but it is wrong.

It is far too detailed.<sup>5</sup> You would be appalled to see the anatomy charts of the sexual organs and the growth of the unborn child published for use in schools with boys and girls of twelve and thirteen.<sup>6</sup> All this type of sex-instruction misses the point. The problem is not chiefly one of giving information, but of training the will.

Sex-instruction is a moral problem. Now God made the Church—not the secular Education authorities—our guide in all matters concerning faith and morals; therefore, it is to the Church, to the Bishops and to the Pope, that we must look for the true solution. Unfortunately, the Government may try to force their harmful sex-instruction on all our Schools. We must resist the attempt. The Bishops in Low Week, 1948, specially declared that sex-instruction is part of the religious instruction of the child. Therefore, it does not concern the secular Education Authorities in any way.

### The right sort of sex-instruction

First, there is no need for detailed information. 'The history of the world has not yet furnished proof of any need of detailed lessons in sexual physiology', say the Scottish Bishops; and in another place, sex-instruction 'must comprise a minimum of factual knowledge'.

But at the same time, we must give them the main facts of life. 'If a youth is to be trained in the virtue of purity, some

<sup>5</sup> This type of sex-instruction has often been condemned. Read Pope Pius XI on *The Christian Education of Youth*, C.T.S. S 99, and the Joint Pastoral of the English Bishops.

<sup>6</sup> It might be mentioned here that, if you have and use any 'Motherhood' books, you should be most careful not to let the children see them or have access to them. These books are good for you, but harmful to the children.

minimum knowledge of the facts of life is necessary' (Scottish Bishops).

Father Vermeersch gives us this excellent principle to work on: 'Natural ignorance is not necessarily to be dispelled, nor is artificial ignorance necessarily to be fostered; the explanation of sexual matters which we approve of is not that which increases, but that which diminishes worry in these matters.'<sup>7</sup>

So the Church's traditional method of sex-instruction is this: to give the facts of life when necessary and as far as necessary, and to give training in modesty and purity from earliest childhood.

### Two stages of knowledge

Good Catholic parents do not find much difficulty in the formation of good habits in their children. That is why I used the word 'traditional' just above—they have always done it. It is in the need to give their children information, a need growing very urgent now-a-days, that they find their difficulty. Therefore, we will speak of two stages of knowledge:

1. A knowledge of the mother's part.
2. A knowledge of the father's part.

Let us talk about each separately.

#### 1. A knowledge of the mother's part

By this I mean a knowledge of the facts connected with childbirth.

The proverb, 'Well begun is half done', certainly applies to sex-instruction. If parents would only begin to answer the questions of their children truthfully, right from the beginning, half the difficulty would disappear. If you do this, your children never lose confidence in you. They will continue to question you as they grow older; therefore, they will provide you with opportunities to give them the further knowledge that they need, all quite gradually and naturally, without the need for 'talks'.

No matter how young they may be when they begin to ask questions, never tell them silly stories about the stork. . . . 'Train the minds of your children. Do not give them wrong

<sup>7</sup> *De Castitate*, § 191.

ideas or wrong reasons for things; whatever their questions may be, do not answer them with evasions or untrue statements which their minds rarely accept' (Pius XII).<sup>8</sup>

As you put them to bed at night, they will often ask you questions. It will increase their love for you to know that a baby grows inside its mother for nine months; to know how the baby is born; that childbirth hurts you; to know that the baby is fed from the breast after it is born, and that even while inside its mother she feeds it through a tube which is afterwards cut off, leaving a mark called the navel. Even the bodily difference between boy and girl will be quite obvious to them once they know that the baby is born from its mother, and therefore needs a large opening to pass through. It is good that boy and girl should each know how the other is shaped, but this knowledge must come to them very naturally and early on in life.

Make all this explanation spiritual, open, obvious. Make no mystery about it. Take examples from the *Hail Mary*, from the feasts of the Church, just to show how natural it all is to us Catholics. Here is a small practical example; if you are feeding a baby at your breast, you can do it quite modestly, yet without trying to hide it from your other children. Or if you are going to have another baby, you can tell your children a month or so beforehand; let them do small jobs for you to save tiring you and the baby.

Alongside this policy of truthfulness and gradual growth in knowledge, give your child a positive training in modesty right from its earliest days, by gently teaching it not to touch, or show, or speak about these parts except when they have a reason for it. Your help will be especially necessary if they are getting into the habit of rubbing and exciting these parts. But do not be harsh with them, even if they do occasionally embarrass you by their behaviour or questions in the presence of visitors! Correct them, but do it gently.

So much for the knowledge of childbirth which may be given to your youngest children. For the time being, they do not need further knowledge, and I suggest you should not tell them of the father's part just yet: 'unveil the truth as far as it appears necessary' (the Pope).<sup>8</sup> Often they will seem

<sup>8</sup> *The Pope Speaks to Mothers*, C.T.S. S 168.

to be asking for this further information, when really they are not. For instance, if they ask how a baby begins, they are quite satisfied if you tell them that you can feel it begin. Answers of this kind—the truth, yet not the full truth—can be given to similar questions.

## 2. A knowledge of the father's part

When it becomes necessary, you must also tell them of the father's part; that is, of the marriage act.

This is the advice the Pope gives you: '... you will not fail to watch for and to discern the moment in which certain unspoken questions have occurred to their minds and are troubling their senses. It will then be your duty (mothers) to your daughters, the father's duty to your sons, carefully and delicately to unveil the truth as far as it appears necessary, to give a prudent, true, and Christian answer to those questions, and set their minds at rest. If imparted by the lips of Christian parents at the proper time, in the proper measure, and with the proper precautions, the revelation of the mysterious and marvellous laws of life will be received by them with reverence and gratitude, and will enlighten their minds with far less danger than if they learned them haphazard, from some disturbing encounter, from secret conversations, through information received from over-sophisticated companions, or from clandestine reading, the more dangerous and pernicious as secrecy inflames the imagination and troubles the senses. Your words, if they are wise and discreet, will prove a safeguard and a warning in the midst of the temptations and corruption which surrounds them.'<sup>9</sup>

### When to give it

It is for you to watch your children carefully. Any time from about ten onwards they may need this extra information. 'The sex-instinct awakes in different children at different ages' (the Scottish Bishops). Even if they are too shy to ask, you should be ready to speak and answer their 'unspoken questions'.

Now supposing your children show no signs of trouble at all.

<sup>9</sup> *The Pope Speaks to Mothers.*

Even so, by the time they are twelve you ought to speak. By then, a boy may already be experiencing the erection about which he needs to be told (p. 23, 5 (1)); by then, a girl is often beginning to feel headachy and miserable monthly; and they begin to wonder what these things mean.

Besides, you will find it far easier to talk to your children at this age than later on when they have already begun to be awkward and self-conscious because of their growing emotions.

Another strong reason for speaking at twelve, rather than later, is this. At twelve, the only temptation and danger that can come from your talk is the temptation to curiosity, to find out more. But if you put it off till later, there is increasing risk of physical temptations to impurity, which are much harder to resist.

Two hints might not be out of place.

First, American statistics show that parents keep putting off this talk, in spite of the best will in the world. Decide definitely that, if you have not had reason to speak before then, you will talk to your child on its twelfth birthday itself. That fixes you down to a definite day, and overcomes the temptation to keep putting it off. If that day passes, and you have to admit to yourself that you are incapable of it, then either read him the talk you will find at the end of this pamphlet, or tear it out and give it to him<sup>10</sup> to read for himself.

Second, you might prefer to talk to your child when you are both out for a walk. It will be less awkward for him to be told in this way than when having to sit facing you while you talk to him at home.

### How to give it

The rest of this pamphlet is taken up with two complete talks, one for a boy of twelve, and the other for a girl of twelve. If you have done your best to answer your child's questions as it grew up, and to train it in modesty, you may find that you can shorten the talk considerably. But each talk has been given in full, just in case. You might prefer to give it all at

<sup>10</sup> Throughout the rest of this section, 'him' refers to either boy or girl.

once, or you might prefer to give it in sections as suitable opportunities arise.

It may be as well to point out how these talks differ from the usual non-Catholic method of sex-instruction. We say nothing of internal anatomy; we use no scientific terms; we take no examples from plants or animals. There does not seem need for any of this, and it is only making your task more difficult. Instead, we take our examples from the feasts and prayers of the Church, and keep the whole thing as simple and as spiritual as possible.

Study the talks, but only as examples of how it might be done. Both talks follow the same general pattern. The paragraphs to notice most carefully are those where we wish to indicate the marriage act and the parts used in it, in very delicate and yet very clear language. You must be delicate, yet at the same time you must be easy to understand. These paragraphs may seem indelicate when set out in print, but they will not be when used in conversation between yourself and your child.

Stress the fact that these acts and pleasures are good for married people. 'In marriage sexual pleasure is good, lawful, in fact holy: this principle should be clearly taught to all adolescents' (Scottish Bishops). Even grown-ups are often mistaken on this point.

This duty of sex-instruction is certainly a difficult task. But pray about it and think it over beforehand. And remember that when you were married you received the sacrament of Matrimony. This is not a sacrament which is over and done with on your wedding-day; it lasts all your life, and gives you a right to all the graces you need to do your duty as parents, including this particular duty of sex-instruction and training in purity. The grace of God is there to help you.

If you do your duty, and help your children, you will always be thankful. By treating sex as a common-sense subject, and purity as a common-sense virtue, and by the very fact that you have talked to your children about them, you will have given them great help. Beyond this, your personal example, your home-life, and the grace they receive in the sacraments, will see them through successfully 'from the unconscious purity of infancy to the triumphant purity of adolescence' (the Pope).

### Later help

We have talked all this while of the task of helping your children while they are still young. But even when they are grown up, and begin work, or begin 'going out', or go off to the Army, or become engaged, you can continue to help them. Since they are then almost grown up, they can benefit by reading books for themselves. I suggest you give them something on the following lines.

For girls :

*Growing Up* : A book for girls, by a Catholic Woman Doctor. Burns and Oates (1/6).

*Into Their Company*, by a Medical Woman, a Wife, and a Girl. Burns and Oates (2/-).

For boys :

*The Difficult Commandment*, by Fr Martindale, S.J. Manresa Press (1/6).

*For Boys and Men*, by Rev. J. L. McGovern. C.T.S. Pamphlet (3d.).

## PART II TO GIRLS

**N**OW that you are nearly grown up, there are a few things I'd like to explain to you.

You may have wondered how a baby is born. It is quite natural to want to know, and it is best that you should know.

### 1. How a baby is born

We all have a body and a soul, as you know from your catechism. God Himself creates the soul of a new baby, but its body comes from the body of its mother, starting to grow from a tiny egg the size of a pin-point. But before this can begin to grow, it needs to be joined by a special liquid called 'seed' from the father, which is put into the mother when they join their bodies together.

The part the father uses to give the seed is the part from which his water comes ; and the part the mother uses to receive the seed is inside the opening from which her water comes.

Sometimes, there is no little egg ready in the body of the mother. But if there is, and it meets this seed, God at the same moment creates a soul for the child, and sends down an angel to guard it and help it to get to heaven. We call this first moment the conception of the child. We often talk about Our Lady's Immaculate Conception, don't we ?

For nine months, the baby grows inside its mother : here, in her womb. Then, when it is big enough, it is born through the same opening through which she received the seed. The birth of the baby nearly always gives its mother pain, but she puts up with it for love of her baby.

When it is born, the mother begins to feed the baby with milk from her breasts. But even while it was still inside her, she was feeding it through a sort of tube that joined its body



to hers. But after the baby is born, the nurse or the doctor cuts off this tube, because it isn't needed any more. And the mark that is left, here, is called the navel.

I want you to see that this act of love between a father and mother, and the conception of a child, is a sacred thing, because God Himself shares in it.

## 2. It is good to know these things

Some girls have the idea that there is something secret and wrong about these things. You can tell that from the underhand way they sometimes talk among themselves. Really, there is nothing wrong in knowing about them, so long as we treat them reverently.

(a) For example, Our Lady knew these things, so there cannot be anything wrong in knowing. Do you remember when the angel came to ask her to become the Mother of God, Our Lady said: 'How will this be done, since I know not man?' meaning, 'since I have promised God not to receive the seed of any man'. So, you see, Our Lady knew how a baby is conceived and born.

(b) Besides, we often mention these facts in our prayers and in church. For instance:

(i) Every time you say the *Hail Mary*, you say 'Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus'. That means, 'blessed is the baby Jesus you carried in your womb'.

(ii) And every time we say the Angelus, we mention 'conception': 'The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived by the Holy Ghost'.

(iii) When the priest reads out the Epistle at Mass on Sundays, perhaps you have noticed the words 'seed of Abraham'. They mean the children of Abraham who have grown up from the seed he gave to his wife.

(iv) How long does a baby need to grow up inside its mother? Nine months. That's right. Well, the feasts of Our Lord and Our Lady teach us that. When is Our Lord's birthday? Christmas Day, of course—on December 25th. So, if we want to find out when He was conceived, we count back nine months, and we come to the feast of the Annunci-

ation, on March 25th exactly. That was the day when the angel asked Our Lady to be the Mother of God, and she said 'Yes'. It's just the same with Our Lady's feasts. We keep her Immaculate Conception on December 8th. See if you can work this out for yourself—when do we keep Our Lady's birthday? That's right, September 8th. Good.

I have told you that the love between father and mother is holy, and the conception of a child is holy. And just as we don't make fun of holy things or talk about them in a careless way, so we must not talk about love and the birth of a baby disrespectfully. To help us, God puts into us, especially as we grow up, a special virtue called modesty, a shyness and fear which prevents us from leading ourselves or other people into temptation by bad talk or by actions that are dangerous to purity.

## 3. What purity means

Now I want to explain something else to you: what purity means, and what impurity means.

I'll start this way. God often makes the things that are good for us pleasant for us. For example, eating. We all like eating, don't we? God has made it pleasant for us, to encourage everyone to eat, because eating is good for us. Now, because He gave us free will, we can either use this power of eating properly, and enjoy it, as God meant us to do; or else we can misuse it, out of selfishness, by greediness and gluttony. That would be wrong, and a sin.

In the same way, God has made this act of love between a man and a woman, by which a baby is conceived, a great pleasure, so as to encourage parents to have children. But, God only means this pleasure to be for married people. For them, this act is a good and holy pleasure; but for anyone who is not married, this act is wrong and a very serious sin of impurity. So this means that if ever you were to try to get this pleasure, either by yourself or with someone else, it would be a mortal sin, if you did it deliberately and knowing what you were doing. I want to warn you about that, once and for all.

God has given our bodies these powers and pleasures, and

they are good in their proper place, in marriage. Purity is the proper control of these powers. Impurity is giving way to them out of selfishness, just for pleasure, when we have no right to them. So, until you are married, you must control yourself very strictly in your thoughts and words and acts.

#### 4. Thoughts, words and actions

Because girls often get terribly worried and anxious, I'll say something about temptations to impure thoughts and words and deeds.

(a) *Thoughts.* Sometimes you will find thoughts in your mind which you suddenly realise are impure thoughts. You cannot be blamed so far, because you didn't bring them into your mind. So far, they are only a temptation; and remember, a temptation is no sin. But as soon as you realise the danger is there, you must do your best to get the thoughts out of your mind. And the best thing to do is just to think of something else (your hobby, for instance), and worry no more about it.

And it is just the same with pictures, either in magazines, or books, or at the 'pictures'. Turn away from them, quietly, without fuss. If you were careless or slow in putting them away, that would be a venial sin; but if you kept them there on purpose to enjoy wrong pleasure, that would be a mortal sin.

(b) *Words.* Talking about these things is quite all right if it is necessary. And if there is need to mention them, we call these parts of our body the 'private parts'. If ever there is anything you want to know, I want you to come to me, or your father, or if you want to know whether a thing is right or wrong, ask the priest in confession. You may feel very shy about asking: that's natural. But all the same, if you have a worry or difficulty, get over your shyness and ask.

But don't talk about these things to other girls, especially to joke about them. That would be clearly a sin, and might lead to much more serious sins.

(c) *Actions.* This is where you must use your common-sense, and not worry where there is no need to worry. For instance, it is obviously all right to touch this part of your body

when it is necessary. But to touch yourself or handle these parts through idleness or curiosity would be immodest and sinful, and these actions may lead you into bad habits which seriously offend God. So be strict with yourself.

Use your common-sense. Try to please God. If you are doing that, be quite confident, and do not worry.

#### 5. Things you must not worry about

I have spoken straight out about the seriousness of impure thoughts and words and deeds, because you are old enough to understand it.

But here are one or two things that need not worry you.

(1) Soon, within a year or two, you will find that blood will come from this opening of your body, and you may feel head-achy and sick for a day or two. It may even happen quite suddenly, and frighten you. But there is nothing to be afraid of, and nothing to worry about. When it happens, come straight to me, and I'll show you what to do. You see, it is quite natural, and only shows that you are grown up and healthy. This blood has in it the tiny egg we talked about. Your body will soon begin to make one every month. But until you get married, you won't need them, so the body gets rid of them this way. You call it your 'monthly period'. Come to me as soon as it happens, won't you? I wanted to tell you about it before it happens, so you won't get frightened.

(2) Another thing. As you get older, you will find yourself more and more attracted to boys. That is quite natural. God makes us like that, or else men and women would never fall in love and get married. God put the attraction in us, and it is good; but at the same time, we have to control it. Perhaps, at school, you will hear the other girls joking about boys and talking about them in a silly sort of way; don't join in any talk like that.

These feelings and attractions are natural, and shouldn't worry you. But at the same time, you must be very careful about purity. It is a great virtue, and very pleasing to God and to Our Lady. The best way to keep pure is to be very careful about modesty, which makes us fear to do anything

that is a danger to purity. You can easily give serious temptation to others when you are careless about modesty, and if you know what you are doing, God will hold you responsible.

### 6. Pray to Our Lady

I have tried to help you. In return, there is something I want you to do for me. From now on, each night before you get into bed, I want you to say one *Hail Mary* to Our Lady to ask her to keep you pure. Do that, and do it all your life. Never miss.

Our Lady is the model of purity, and this is the reason why. She is the Mother of God, so God made her perfect in body and in soul, to make her fit to be His Mother.

He made her soul sinless from the first moment of her conception in the womb of St Anne. He made her body perfect and kept her always a virgin. This means that Our Lady conceived Our Lord without receiving the seed of man, and gave birth to Him without any opening of her womb. In the Apostles' Creed, we say that Our Lord 'was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary'; and in the Catechism, we say 'Jesus Christ had no father on earth; St Joseph was only His guardian or foster-father'. It was done by the power of God, by a miracle.

In this way, God has made Our Lady the model of purity for everyone. For married people, because she is the Mother of God: for unmarried people, because she remained a virgin, as you must be until you marry.

God calls most people to marry, and marriage is a real vocation. In fact, it is one of the seven Sacraments. But to some girls He gives the special vocation to live singly and to remain virgins for His sake, as nuns or in ordinary life. You must follow whichever way God calls. That is the best way to heaven for you.

There, I think I have explained everything. But come and talk to me about these things whenever you like. I'll do my best to help you.

## PART III

### TO BOYS

**Y**OU are getting grown up now, so there are one or two things I want to tell you.

Maybe you have wondered, sometimes, just how a baby is born. That's natural, and it is best that you should know, so I'll tell you.

#### 1. How a baby is born

You know from your catechism that you have a body and a soul. The soul of a new baby is made by God Himself, but its body comes from its mother. It begins to grow from a tiny little speck, an egg the size of a pin-point. But before this tiny egg can begin to grow into a baby, it has to be joined by a special liquid called 'seed'. This comes from the father, and is passed into the body of the mother when they join their bodies together. The part the father uses to give her this seed is the part from which his water comes; and the part the mother uses to receive the seed is inside the opening from which her water comes.

There may not be an egg ready to grow inside the body of the mother. But if there is, and if it meets some of this seed, the life of the baby begins, because at this same moment God Himself creates a soul for the child, and sends an angel to guard it all its life and to help it to get to heaven. This first moment is called the conception of the baby. We often talk about the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, don't we?

For nine months after this the baby goes on growing inside its mother, in her womb. Then it is born, and comes out through the same opening through which she received the seed. This birth of a baby nearly always gives the mother a lot of pain, but she puts up with it out of love for her baby.

After it is born, the mother feeds it with the milk from her

breasts. But even before it was born she was still feeding it. Its body was joined to hers, inside, by a sort of tube. After it is born, the nurse cuts off this tube; and the mark that everybody has here, just below the belt, marks where it used to be. It is called your navel.

I want you to realise that this act of love by which a child is conceived, is a sacred act. After all, God Himself is taking a share in it. And so we must always treat it and talk about it reverently.

## 2. It is good to know all this

Some boys don't treat these things reverently. In fact, they have the idea that there is something secret and wrong about it all. You can tell that by the underhand way they sometimes talk among themselves. But there is really nothing to be ashamed of in knowing these things, provided we treat them reverently.

(a) For example. Our Lady knew them, so there can't be anything wrong in knowing. Do you remember when the angel came to her to ask her to be the Mother of God. Our Lady said: 'How will this be done, since I know not man?'—meaning, 'since I have promised God not to receive the seed of any man'. So Our Lady knew how a baby is conceived and born.

(b) Besides, we actually mention these things in our prayers and in church. For example:—

(i) Every time you say the *Hail Mary*, you mention the word 'womb': 'Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus'. That is, 'blessed is the child Jesus you carried in your womb'.

(ii) And in the *Angelus*, we mention 'conception': 'The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived by the Holy Ghost'.

(iii) Perhaps you have heard the priest use the words 'seed of Abraham' sometimes, when he has been reading out the Sunday Epistle. He means the children of Abraham, who grew up from the seed that Abraham gave to his wife.

(iv) How long did we say a baby needed to grow up

inside its mother? Nine months. The feasts of Our Lord and Our Lady remind us about that. When is Our Lord's birthday? That's easy. On Christmas Day—on December 25th. Now, if we wanted to find out the day He was conceived, you would count back nine months. If you did, you would come to March 25th, and that is the very day we keep the Annunciation of Our Lady, when the angel asked her to be the Mother of God, and she said she would. Now you can work the next one out for yourself. If we keep the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady on December 8th, when is her birthday? That's right: on September 8th.

You must always remember that the love between married people is holy, and that the conception of a child is holy. And just as we don't make fun of holy things or talk about them in a careless way, so you mustn't talk about love, or about the birth of a baby, in a disrespectful way. To help us, God puts into us all, especially as we grow up, a virtue called modesty, a shyness and fear which prevents us from leading ourselves or other people into temptation by bad talk, or by actions that are dangerous to purity.

## 3. What purity means

I want to tell you quite clearly what we mean by purity, and what we mean by impurity.

Supposing I start with an example. God often makes what is good for us pleasant. For instance, eating. We like eating, because God has made it pleasant, because He wants us to eat. Now, because He gave us free will, we can either use this power of eating properly, and enjoy it, as God meant us to do: or else we can misuse it by greediness and gluttony. That would be wrong, and a sin.

In the same way, He has made this act of love between father and mother, by which a baby is conceived, a great pleasure. But notice this. God only means this pleasure for married people. For them, this act is good, and holy; but for anyone else, who is not married, it is very wrong, and a mortal sin of impurity. I think you are old enough to understand all this, and I want to warn you about it. If ever you were to try to

get this pleasure, either by yourself or with anyone else, then it would be a serious mortal sin, if you did it deliberately, knowing what you were doing.

God has given our bodies these powers, and they are good. Purity is the proper control of these pleasures; impurity is the selfish attempt to enjoy these pleasures, when we have no right to them. So until a person is married he is bound to control himself very strictly in his thoughts, in his words, and in his actions.

#### 4. Thoughts, words and actions

I'll speak about these, because temptations often worry boys.

(a) *Thoughts.* Sometimes it might happen that you suddenly realise that there is a wrong thought, an impure thought, in your mind. If you couldn't help it coming into your mind, you are not to be blamed, so far. But as soon as you realise that it is there, you must do your best to put it out. And the best way to do that is just to think of something else (of engines, stamps, football, or whatever your hobby may be) and worry no more about it. And the same goes for pictures you might see in books or at the 'pictures'. Just turn away from them, quite calmly. Remember, there is all the difference in the world between a temptation and a sin. If you try to put the thoughts out of your mind, you have done good. But if you are careless or slow in putting them out, that would be a venial sin; and if you keep them in your mind on purpose to enjoy wrong pleasures, that would be a mortal sin.

(b) *Words.* If there is need, of course it is all right to talk about these things; and if ever there is need, you ought to know that we usually call these parts of the body the 'private parts'. So if ever you want to know anything, ask me, or your mother, or if you want to know whether a thing is right or wrong, ask the priest in confession. It will probably happen that as you get older, you will feel shy to ask. But if you have a worry or a difficulty, you should overcome this shyness and get the difficulty cleared up.

But you must not talk of these things to the other boys at school. That would be immodest talk, and sinful, and it might easily lead to much more serious sins.

(c) *Actions.* Sometimes boys worry a lot about touching this part of their body. Use your common-sense. If there is any need for it, it is all right: that is obvious. But if you were to touch these parts out of curiosity or idleness, that would be immodest and sinful, and these actions may possibly lead you into habits which seriously offend God. So be strict with yourself.

#### 5. Things you must not worry about

I have told you straight out about temptations against purity, because I think you are old enough to understand.

But there are a few things that need not worry you:—

(1) First of all, this part of your body sometimes becomes excited. Don't be worried. It is quite natural, but the best thing to do is to take no notice of it or of any slight pleasure you may feel in it. Turn your mind to something else.

(2) Another thing. This might not happen for years yet, but I want you to know beforehand. You may notice that this part of your body has been giving out some thick liquid. Probably it will happen at night while you are asleep. This is the seed that we talked about, and shows that your body is now fully grown up and healthy. The body begins to make this seed, but it will not be needed until you are married, so your body gets rid of it in the night. You may wake up while this is going on, often with your mind filled with thoughts. If this happens, do your best to take no notice of the pleasure you feel. Say a prayer to Our Lord or Our Lady, turn over at once, and think of something else. But it is all perfectly natural, and needn't cause you trouble. For instance, if you go to Communion each morning, then go next morning just as usual. There is no reason at all why you should miss just because this has happened.

(3) A third thing which need not disturb you is that, as you grow older, you will find yourself attracted to girls. This is natural. God gives us that attraction, or otherwise men and women would never fall in love and get married. The attraction is good, but it has to be controlled. Even if other boys you know talk about girls and carry on with them, you must not.

So God gave our bodies these powers and attractions. They

are all good, but must be used properly. Purity is the proper control of these powers ; it is a very great virtue, and pleasing to God and to Our Lady. Impurity is the selfish enjoyment of these pleasures when we have no right to them. Be careful about purity, and remember that modesty is meant to protect your purity. If you are careful about modesty—and refuse to do anything dangerous to purity—you will be all right.

### 6. Pray to Our Lady

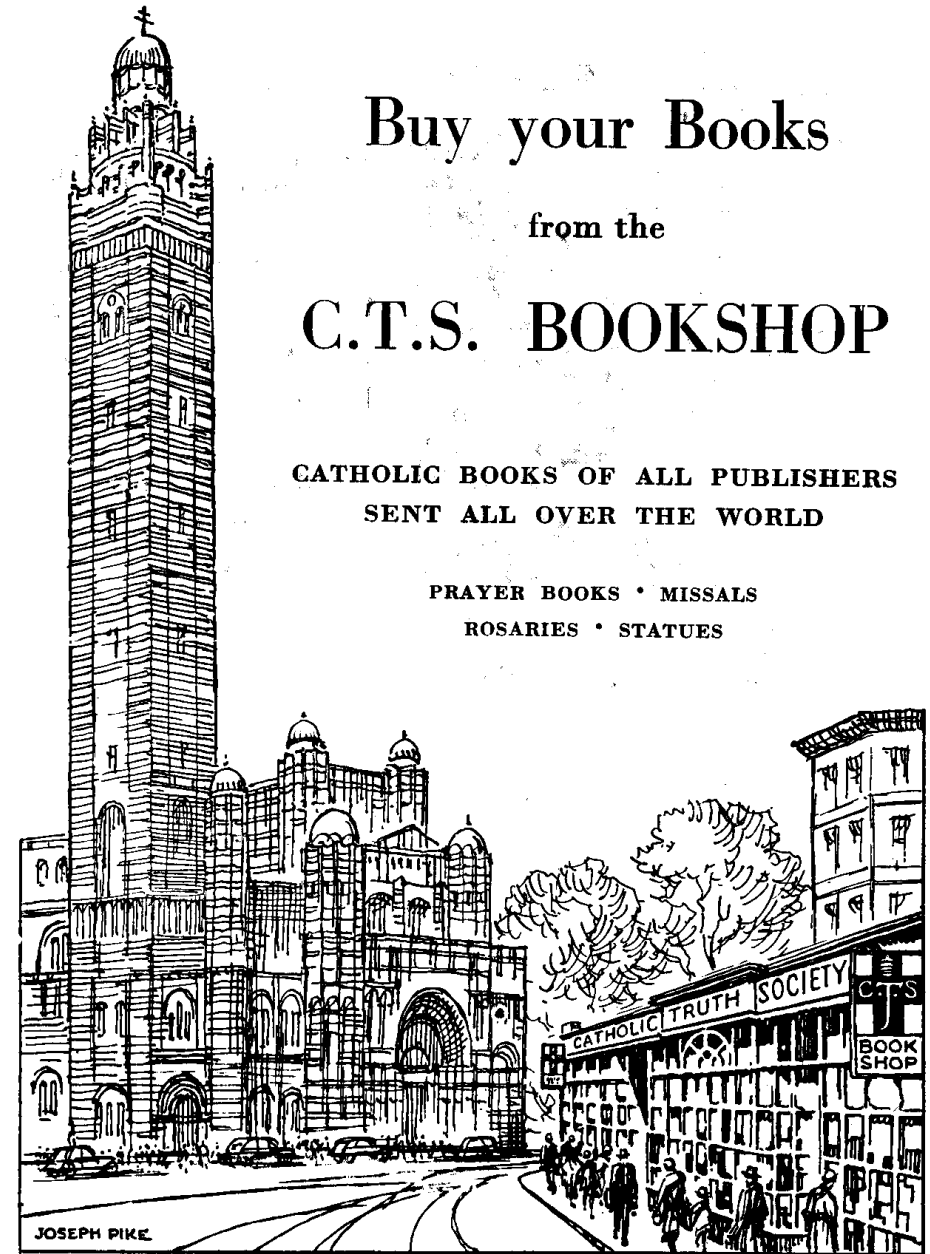
There's something I want you to promise me. Each night, from now on, I want you to say one *Hail Mary* to Our Lady for the grace to keep pure. She will help you.

Our Lady is the model of purity, because God made her perfect in body and soul, to make her fit to be His Mother. He made her soul sinless from the first moment of her conception in the womb of St Anne. He made her body perfect, and kept her always a virgin. This means that Our Lady conceived Our Lord without receiving the seed from any man, and gave birth to Him without any opening of her womb. As we say in the Apostles' Creed, Our Lord 'was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary'. And in the Catechism, we say 'Jesus Christ had no father on earth : St Joseph was only His guardian or foster-father'. It was all done by the power of God, by a miracle.

In this way, God made Our Lady the model of purity for everyone : for married people, because she is the Mother of God ; for unmarried people, because she remained always a virgin, as unmarried people are bound to do.

Most boys marry when they grow up, and marriage is a real vocation from God. It is one of the seven Sacraments. But to some boys, God gives the special vocation to remain unmarried and pure for His sake, either as a priest, or lay-brother, or in ordinary life. Whichever way you think God is calling you, you must follow. That will be the best way to heaven for you.

Now, I think I have explained everything to you. But come and talk to me about these things whenever you like. I promise to help.



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