

St. Alphonsus Liguori: Advice to Parents, I

Saint Alphonsus Liguori lived from 1696–1787, and was founder of the Redemptorist order. Here he discusses the grave duties of parents to raise children in the love of God and the Catholic faith, reminding them that they will one day have to render an account for their children's souls.

Part I

The Gospel tells us that a good plant cannot produce bad fruit, and that a bad one cannot produce good fruit. We learn from this that a good father brings up good children. But if the parents are wicked, how can the children be virtuous? Our Lord says, in the same Gospel, "Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?" (Matt. 7:16). So, it is impossible, or rather very difficult, to find children virtuous, who are brought up by immoral parents.

Fathers and mothers, be attentive to this sermon, which is of great importance to the eternal salvation of yourselves and of your children. Be attentive, young men and young women, who have not as yet chosen a state in life. If you wish to marry, learn the obligations which you contract with regard to the education of your children, and learn also that if you do not fulfill them, you shall bring yourselves and all your children to damnation.

I shall divide this into two points. In the first, I shall show how important it is to bring up children in habits of virtue; and in the second, I shall show with what care and diligence a parent ought to labor to bring them up well.

A father owes two obligations to his children: He is bound to provide for their corporal wants, and to educate them in the habits of virtue. It is not necessary to say anything else about the first obligation than there are some fathers more cruel than the most ferocious of wild beasts, for these squander away in eating, drinking and pleasure, all their property, or all the fruits of their industry, and allow their children to die of hunger. Let us discuss education, which is the subject of this article.

It is certain that a child's future good or bad conduct depends on his being brought up well or poorly. Nature itself teaches every parent to attend to the education of his offspring. God gives children to parents, not that they may assist the family, but that they may be brought up in the fear of God, and be directed in the way of eternal salvation. "We have," says St John Chrysostom, "a great deposit in children; let us attend to them with great care." Children have not been given to parents as a present, which they may dispose of as they please, but as a trust, for which, if lost through their negligence, they must render an account to God.

One of the great Fathers says that on the day of judgment, parents will have to render an account for all the sins of their children. So he who teaches his son to live well shall die a happy and tranquil death. "He that teaches his son ... when he died, he was not sorrowful, neither was he confounded before his enemies" (Eccl. 30:3, 5). And he will save his soul by means of his children, that is, by the virtuous education which he has given them. "She shall be saved through childbearing" (1 Tim. 2:15).

But on the other hand, a very uneasy and unhappy death will be the lot of those who have labored only to increase the possessions, or to multiply the honors of their family, or who have sought only to lead a life of ease and pleasure, but have not watched over the morals of their children. Saint Paul says that such parents are worse than infidels. "But if any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8).

Were fathers or mothers to lead a life of piety and continual prayer, and to receive Holy Communion every day, they should be damned if they neglected the care of their children.

WATCH NOW

If all fathers fulfilled their duty of watching over the education of their children, we should have but few crimes. By the bad education which parents give to their offspring, they cause their children, says St. John Chrysostom, to rush into many grievous vices; and thus they deliver them up to the hands of the executioner. So it was in one town, a parent, who was the cause of all the irregularities of his children, was justly punished for his crimes with greater severity than the children themselves.

Great indeed is the misfortune of the child that has vicious parents, who are incapable of bringing up their children in the fear of God, and who, when they see their children engage in dangerous friendships and in quarrels, instead of correcting and chastising them, they take compassion on them, and say, "What can I do? They are young; hopefully they will grow out of it." What wicked words, what a cruel education! Do you hope that when your children grow up, they will become saints?

Listen to what Solomon says: "A young man, according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). A young man who has contracted a habit of sin will not abandon it even in his old age. "His bones," says holy Job, "will be filled with the vices of his youth, and they will sleep with him in the dust" (Job 20:11). When a young person has lived in evil habits, his bones will be filled with the vices of his youth, so that he will carry them to the grave, and the impurities, blasphemies and hatred to which he was accustomed in his youth will accompany him to the grave, and will sleep with him after his bones are reduced to dust and ashes. It is very easy when they are small to train children to habits of virtue, but when they have come to manhood, it is equally difficult to correct them if they have learned habits of vice.

[Read Part II of this sermon here.](#)