

# Returning Our Children to the Lord

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*Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord.  
The fruit of the womb is His reward. (Psalm 127:3)*

Our children really are the Lord's and they should therefore be returned to Him. All life is from the Lord; and all forms of life created by Him are meant to be of service in His kingdom, on earth as in heaven. Parents who are spiritual *want* to return their children to the Lord, in accordance with His will. They want to do this because they realize that their children are from the Lord. They are really His; just as their own life is His. The spiritual love of infants comes from innocence, that is, a willingness to be led by the Lord.

Spiritual parents have a great desire to help prepare their children for heaven. In order to achieve this they need a blend of love and wisdom—love to move them to do it, and wisdom to show them how to do it. The love must be a genuine, spiritual, outgoing love—love received from the Lord. It is obviously a matter of the regeneration of each parent individually. The more a parent's love approaches the ideal—that is, the more it is in an image of the *Divine Love*, which longs to make others happy to eternity—the more suitable the sphere of the home will be. It is a well-known teaching that children, especially infants, do not have a sphere of their own, but are dependent upon the sphere that surrounds them. The sphere of love truly conjugal in the home, and the peace, innocence and tenderness that flow forth from it, are ideally suited to implanting heavenly remains of goodness and truth in the interiors of infants' minds. These holy states can be of use to the Lord in the later regeneration of the children when they attain maturity. The first duty of parents in their desire to return their children to the Lord is to attend conscientiously to their own regeneration. In this way, they invite into their home a sphere favorable to the preparation of their children for heaven.

But love, while the first and most important requirement, is not the only thing. It must be married to wisdom. Love without wisdom to guide it is blind, and therefore ineffectual. Therefore we must *know* what will benefit our children as well as loving and *wanting* to benefit them.

The most universal principle to be followed in the right education of children is that we are to cooperate with the Lord in meeting the needs of children at each stage of their growth—their *needs*, as distinguished from their ever-changing *wants*. It is necessary to know, from Divine Revelation confirmed by experience, what are the physical, psychological, moral and spiritual needs of children as they progress to adulthood.

The first need in time that infants experience is the need to have their physical appetites and comfort attended to. At the same time, they need to be handled lovingly in order to learn how to love. A human being must first be loved before it can learn to love. In meeting this need the sense of touch, which is the sense belonging to conjugal love, is important. The Lord teaches us quite distinctly in the work *Conjugal Love* that a sphere of innocence flows into the souls of parents and conjoins itself with the same sphere in infants, and that this inflows especially through touch (*Conjugal Love* 395, 396). For this reason, the most basic psychological, moral

and spiritual needs of infants are fulfilled all at once by the delights of the sense of touch, by them being fondled and handled in a loving manner.

Another important principle is to avoid accelerating the stages of development of our children. By this is meant leaving children in their present states until completion, until the children wish to advance to the next stage. Our whole endeavor must be to cooperate with the Lord in giving children what they need in each state. This cannot be achieved if children are urged on impatiently by their parents to attempt tasks for which they are by no means prepared and ready. We live in an age where people are becoming increasingly superficial, increasingly influenced by considerations of time and space rather than by state. There seems to be the notion that we are making progress if we can cause our children to grow up more quickly and become adults sooner than in the past. Despite the findings of psychologists and sociologists about the problems that result from allowing children to have experiences in advance of their normal development, these dangers are being increasingly ignored. And this does not even take into account the *spiritual* impoverishment that can result. If we are going to return our children to the Lord, it is quite essential that we allow them to savor fully each good state through which they pass.

Protecting each subsequent state can begin at a very early age. So, too, can our caution with regard to what we say in the presence of our children—what we say with our lips and with our facial expressions. Children can understand what is said to them or about them long before they can talk; even babies are sensitive to the atmosphere that surrounds them. For example, it is quite necessary to praise children when they do what is right and courteous, or when they achieve something. This is necessary in order to build up their sense of achievement, and to teach them what is acceptable behavior. But it is much wiser to praise the actions rather than the children. It is much wiser to say, “That is good,” or “That’s the way,” than to say, “That is a good boy or a good girl.” Similarly, it is wiser to say to a child who has misbehaved, “That is a bad thing to do,” rather than, “You are a naughty boy or a naughty girl.” If we cause children to identify goodness with themselves, they will become painfully conceited; if we cause them to identify evil with themselves, they will begin to think that they are bad, and will behave accordingly. Children will think (even subconsciously) that poor behavior is expected of them.

This principle is a very important preparation for the later acceptance and practice of the fundamental teaching that all evil flows in from hell and all good from the Lord. In other words, that both good and evil are separate from a person.

As children grow up through infancy and childhood, their wills need to be educated and trained, even as their understandings are instructed. For example, they need to be taught to *share*, as a preparation for life in heaven as well as on earth. They need to do what they *have* to do before they are allowed to follow their pleasures and do what they *want* to do. This is very important, since it is part of the great principle of educating the will and developing character—that we learn to put off the pleasure of the moment for a more distant goal. It is a great help to have learned this in childhood, so that in adult life it will be so much easier to give up the allurements of this world for the sake of eternal life.

As we contemplate our responsibilities in regard to returning our children to the Lord, we may feel overwhelmed by their weight. But this should be balanced by the reflection that the Lord is

on our side, that He wills to bring our children into heavenly happiness even more constantly than we do. Also, the Lord can overrule our mistakes. This comforting truth ought not cause us to slacken our efforts and cease to do the best we know. Rather, let us keep in mind that in our efforts to become spiritual parents we have to act *as if of ourselves* just as we do in the matter of our own regeneration. We have to act as if we alone were responsible, yet acknowledge that only the Lord can bring our children in adult life into His kingdom.

This reminds us of the most important principle of all in returning our children to the Lord, namely, that we teach them to look to Him always. We can do this by inspiring in them a reverence for the Holy Word and teaching them from it about the Lord. Children very soon learn that their parents do not have the Divine and Infinite qualities that they *seemed* to have at first. Even before they realize this, children should be taught that the Lord is infinitely loving and wise, that He is all powerful, that He rules the universe. In this way, we gradually transfer their dependence upon parents to dependence upon the Lord, which is the end in view.

“The truths that a person learns and believes in his earliest years when he is a young child but which later on he either endorses, has doubts about, or refuses to accept, are in particular these: There is a God, and He is one; He created everything; He rewards those who do what is good and punishes those who do things that are bad; there is life after death, when the bad go to hell and the good go to heaven, and so there is a hell and a heaven; the life after death lasts for ever; also, people ought to pray every day and to do so in a humble way; they ought to keep the Sabbath day holy, honor their parents, and not commit adultery, kill, or steal; and many other truths like these.” *Arcana Coelestia* 5135:3