

THE STORY OF CHRIST

BY GIOVANNI PAPINI

PAPINI'S PRAYER TO CHRIST

TRANSLATED BY VERONICA DWIGHT

From the Italian of Papini's "Life of Christ," With the Author's Consent and Approval.

Every day Thou art still in our midst, and Thou wilt be with us forever.

Thou livest amongst us, beside us, on the earth that is Thine and ours, on the earth that received Thee, a child amongst children, innocent between thieves.

But now the time is come for Thee to reappear to all of us, and to give a pre-emptory and convincing sign to this generation.

Thou hast pardoned everything and always, Thou, who hast stood in our midst, Thou knowest the depths of our wretched nature.

We have need of Thee alone, and of no other; Thou alone, who lovest us, canst feel for all of us who suffer, that pity which each one feels for himself.

But now the time has come when men are more drunk than then, but more thirsty. Never, as in this age, have we felt a thirst so burning for a supernatural salvation.

At no time within our memory has baseness been so base, desire so fierce. Earth is hell lighted up by the setting sun.

Under the old régime, the father usually worked in or near his home, in his little home shop or on his farm.

The growing boy was the father's helpmate, the growing girl the mother's. Play and recreation were also largely home-centered.

Parents and child were closer in work and in play. They worked together and to no small extent played together.

Parent and child being in fairly continuous personal contact, parental influence and coaching itself was fairly continuously exercised.

Moreover the fathers and mothers in personally initiating their boys and girls into the mysteries of the domestic and industrial arts and in personally supervising the young folk's leisure time incidentally imparted to them the character training that is so closely bound up with the child's work and play.

In a word, under the old régime, automatically, so to speak, and by force of circumstances, the home was the center of family life, of work, and of play.

It was likewise the preeminent and almost exclusive center of religious and moral education as well as of industrial education.

The educational forces clustered around and radiated out from the home. Education was home-centered, as it had been from the infancy of the race.

Then came the great upheaval as the iron man stepped out upon the stage. At first he stalked out from the wings unobtrusively and without observation, but soon he took the center of the stage.

He has played the stellar role a century or more in England, the home of the industrial revolution, and especially since the Civil War in our own country.

The story of the far-reaching changes wrought by machinery in wages and hours and working conditions has been told in detail many a time.

The story of the still more far-reaching changes wrought by machinery in home conditions and parental education has usually been given step motherly treatment in our standard narratives of the rise and growth of the modern industrial system.

A first effect of the modern system was to transfer the center of production from the home to the factory and mill.

As an immediate result, the modern city father, be he tradesman or business man, more commonly works away from home and children.

In addition, mothers have been drafted in legions into the factories and mills and shops and offices, while the children themselves leave the home to betake themselves to school or to work.

Fathers, mothers, and children are separated for a large part of the day and often during the evening and night. They have scattered like the fragments of a bursting sky-rocket, and this scattering has occurred almost

at arms of them that hold money unjustly, have scourged Thy shoulders and made Thy brow to bleed, and thousands of Filates, clothed in black and scarlet, perfumed with ointment, well combed and shaved, have thousands of times handed Thee over to the executioners after having declared Thee innocent, and innumerable flatulent and vinous mouths have numberless times, demanding the liberty of seditious robbers, of confessed criminals, of recognized assassins, that Thou mightest be dragged, innumerable times to Calvary and fastened to the tree with nails forged by fear, and driven in by hate.

But Thou hast pardoned everything and always, Thou, who hast stood in our midst, Thou knowest the depths of our wretched nature.

We are but tatterdemalions and bastards, shifting and passing leaves, slayers of ourselves, abortions born out of time, that wallow in evil, like to a sucking babe swaddled in its water, to a drunkard thrown down in his vomit, to a stabbed man stretched in his blood, to one covered with sores lying in his pus.

We have repulsed Thee because Thou wert too pure for us; we have condemned Thee to death because Thou wert the condemnation of our lives.

Thyself didst say it in those days: "I stood in the midst of the world, and in the flesh I revealed myself to them; and I found them all drunk, and not one amongst them did I find sober, and my soul suffers for the sons of men because they are blind in their heart."

All the generations are like to that which crucified Thee, and under whatsoever form Thou comest they refuse Thee: "Like," Thou has said it, "to the boys that stand in the market place and cry to their companions, we have piped and you have not danced, we have sounded a lament and you have not wept."

Thus have we done for almost sixty generations. But now the time has come when men are more drunk than then, but more thirsty.

Never, as in this age, have we felt a thirst so burning for a supernatural salvation. At no time within our memory has baseness been so base, desire so fierce.

Earth is hell lighted up by the setting sun. Men are plunged in a mire of dung wet with tears, from which they, now and then, rise up, frantic and disfigured, to cast themselves into a red welter of blood, hoping thereby to cleanse themselves.

They are but now come forth from one of these terrible baths, and are gone back, after the immense decimation, to their common dung heap.

Pestilences have followed wars, earthquakes pestilences; immense armies of rotting corpses, which would once have served to populate a Kingdom lie stretched under a light layer of dust, filling, were they laid side by side, the space of many provinces.

And as though all these dead were but the first instalment of universal destruction, they go on killing themselves and one another. Rich nations condemn poor nations to famine, rebels slay their masters of yesterday; the masters slaughter the rebels by the hand of their mercenaries; new dictators, profiting by the undoing of all systems and all laws, reduce whole nations to want, to massacre, and to dissolution.

TO BE CONTINUED

"FLAMING YOUTH"

A STUDY OF THE PRESENT DAY PROBLEM

By Rev. John M. Cooper, Ph. D., S.T.D., Instructor in Apologetics, Catholic University of America

"We are hearing and reading a great deal these days about 'flaming youth.' Its new ideas and conduct are being exploited on the stage, in the movies, and in literature.

Some weeks ago I saw a statement in the paper from Judge Ben Lindsey, of Denver, dealing with the subject, in which he said in effect: 'Youth is on its way. We do not know where it is going, but it is started and will not be stopped.' There can be no doubt that in these days youth has less regard for the home and parental authority than it had in any former period.

The foregoing paragraph is quoted from a letter written recently to me by a friend. He goes on to say: 'Youth is making its own code of conduct. This applies to girls as well as to boys. Whatever restraints it is under are self-imposed. It does not care much for parental advice; in fact, is rather scornful of it. Its sense of obligation to parents is seriously impaired, if not wholly destroyed. It takes for granted the duty of the parent to provide a home, clothes and education, sees no merit whatever in the parents who do so provide, taking these things as its rights, and feeling no sense of obligation or responsibility. It has a very keen perception of a parent's duty, but absolutely none of its own. In a word, it is becoming absolutely selfish. The old idea that a boy up to the age of twenty-one and a girl up to the age of eighteen were under moral as well as legal compulsion to obey the parents is as obsolete as the colonial styles of dress.'

My friend is a journalist of wide experience, keen observation, and tempered judgment. Judge Lindsey whom he quotes is far from being an alarmist or an extremist. Would you agree with their indictment? Would you go so far, not

so far, or farther? Would you tone down the tints or would you use bolder pigments? Perhaps no two observers would agree on the exact depth of shading and the width of color. But even those who would withhold judgment as to whether the change has thus far been for better or worse would readily grant that there has been a significant change fraught with far-reaching possibilities for better or worse.

THE CHIEF FACTOR IN THE CHANGE

What lies back of the change? What factors and influences have brought it to pass? Shall we chalk it up against the account of the Great War? Shall we attribute it to parental shirking and stupidity? Shall we consider it as merely an abnormally virulent outbreak of what the adult viewpoint commonly looks upon as normal and endemic youthfulness, cussedness and bolshevism? Is it the adolescent phase of contemporary adult unreligion and moral individualism? Is it an adolescent participation in the current adult race after pleasure and excitement and experience? Is the mounting divorce rate the culprit? Some and probably all these factors have contributed to the development of the present situation.

There is, however, another seldom mentioned factor. It is perhaps the chief factor, and its name is machinery.

The last two centuries have ushered in three great revolutions, the political, the industrial, and the domestic, these three. And the greatest of these is the third.

The domestic revolution has been brought about to a certain extent by the alarming growth of divorce. No doubt, but divorce is not the whole story. Catholic homes which have been almost entirely spared the ravages of divorce, have nevertheless undergone profound change as have non-Catholic homes.

The domestic revolution has been in the main a by-product of the industrial revolution, a by-product that promises or threatens to far outstrip in significance the industrial revolution which has engendered it.

The significance of the domestic revolution so far as the question of "flaming youth" is concerned may be summed up in two short sentences. Under the old industrial system the home was the preeminent and almost exclusive force in child training. Under the new industrial system it is not.

Under the old régime, the father usually worked in or near his home, in his little home shop or on his farm.

The growing boy was the father's helpmate, the growing girl the mother's. Play and recreation were also largely home-centered, and much, if not of most leisure time was spent by children and parents together.

Parent and child were closer in work and in play. They worked together and to no small extent played together.

Parent and child being in fairly continuous personal contact, parental influence and coaching itself was fairly continuously exercised.

Moreover the fathers and mothers in personally initiating their boys and girls into the mysteries of the domestic and industrial arts and in personally supervising the young folk's leisure time incidentally imparted to them the character training that is so closely bound up with the child's work and play.

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Fathers, mothers, and children are separated for a large part of the day and often during the evening and night. They have scattered like the fragments of a bursting sky-rocket, and this scattering has occurred almost

as much among the well-to-do and comfortable classes as among the very poor. The dwindling of formerly continuous contact of parent with child has naturally had the effect of whittling down parental influence and the religious and moral training parents formerly gave. The exercise of moral influence and the imparting of character training cannot well be carried out upon absentee children. You cannot broadcast such training through the ether. A sine qua non for adequate moral education is personal contact between educator and to-be-educated.

INDIRECT UNDERMINING

In indirect ways, the industrial revolution has still further undermined parental influence. The growth of the factory system has been chiefly responsible for the growth of our gargantuan cities and for the crowding and congestion therein.

High rents, high at least in comparison with the income of the great masses and even of the great middle classes, have necessitated overcrowded living quarters, and play space and play facilities within the home have largely disappeared. So play, like industry, has largely passed out of the home.

Vacant lots have been rapidly disappearing under the compulsion of business and housing expansion, so play near the home has suffered, and much leisure time idleness with all its traditional hazards of character has crept in.

Commercialized away-from-home recreations with their own peculiar moral menace have naturally increased apace.

Housing congestion has moreover robbed home life of much of the privacy so vital for normal home education, while the custom or necessity of taking in strangers or remote relatives as boarders or roomers has still further complicated the conscientious parent's task of training offspring, to say nothing of the all too common grave moral danger that lurks in such custom or necessity.

Then, too, against the account of the industrial revolution we must to no small extent charge such undermining of moral education as has occurred through the increase in desertion, the decrease in the size of families, and the breaking down of old friendship and kinship groups that are such powerful moulders of youthful conduct under rural and village conditions.

PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON THE WANE

Parental authority, it is often said, has waned. Yes, but this is grossly understating the case. Parental authority is one phase only of parental influence, and it is parental influence that has waned.

On the other hand, it is as often said that the home has broken down. This is an equally gross overstatement of the case. Our home life is at heart sound and healthy. It is not, we hope, suffering from any fatal malady. But it is suffering from severe shock. It has received a bad setback. It finds itself in an unaccustomed and uncongenial climate and environment and has not yet gotten used to the new conditions.

Whether or not it will become acclimated in the course of time remains to be seen. If it should not, our western civilization must crumble.

What prescription must we write for the patient? It would be quite possible to formulate a remedial program for the whole situation—on paper. But a lot of paper would be needed, and by the same token a lot of good paper might be wasted. The whole home problem will be solved when all the myriad other social problems with which it is tied up are solved, that is, when Utopia dawns to the meantime, some immediate and quite feasible remedial measures are obviously indicated. I shall touch lightly upon two only.

Parents will need to keep close to their children, close to them in their work and in their play, as close as circumstances possibly permit, closer by far than they are keeping today—not to spy and domineer, but to influence, to help, to coach. Formerly fairly continuous contact of parents with their children came about automatically, without planning, by the very circumstances and conditions in the home. Today such fairly continuous contact has to be consciously planned for. Divorce of father and mother is from the educational standpoint scarcely less disastrous to the children than is separation of parents from children. And it is just this separation that the newer industrial order has most efficiently accomplished.

THE PROFESSION OF PARENTHOOD

Secondly, the parental art of child training will itself need to be taught to actual and prospective parents. Parents are supposed, like poets, to be born, not made. The same may be said, with the same measure of truth and untruth, of any profession, which, like the complex profession of parenthood, comprises a strong human element. Nevertheless we still maintain professional schools for the teaching vocation and other vocations of life, and we feel confident that we accomplish results worth while.

Without going so far as to advocate professional schools to train for parenthood—although the idea is perhaps not so fantastic as it at first blush seems—may we not hope that actual or prospective parents will give as much attention by reading and study to their educative task as they would give to the study even of golf or dancing or music or radio

or infant feeding or mah jong? If societies and study clubs include in their varied programs everything from evolution to Scandinavian poetry, everything from medieval architecture to prison reform, why may they not find place on the program for the noble art of child training? Perhaps we may even some day consider it worth while to make place in our school and college curriculums, alongside the traditional liberal and fine arts, for the ancient and honorable art that lies at the center of home life and that ought to be the pivotal point of education for life, the ancient and honorable and blessed art of training children to increase in wisdom and virtue and grace before God and men.

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