

## "YOU CAN'T GO BACK"

For most of us going to college is a painful experience. First of all we are cutting ties with our homes -- the dependence on our folks, the kind of routine in our family life, our close High School friends, the familiar life of our churches and all the rest. There is also the adjustment to the new way of life. We feel we are more free than we have ever been. We also have a perfectly normal right to question all authority. We can choose anyone we want to be our friend. There are also new facts and subject matter in our courses of study.

Now in the midst of all this, we often get the deep urge to go back to where we were before we came to college. We want to recapture the mood and circumstances of our earlier life. In some ways this is natural but if this feeling persists it can become unhealthy. Much as I want I cannot stay mother's little boy or girl. As Paul has said, "When I became a man I put away childish ways." If we are to become mature we must go through both the pain and the excitement of growth and this involves cutting some of the old ties and accepting new experiences.

The friends I find at college will not be the same as my friends back home. The subject matter at a college level is not the familiar high school study. The church at college will not be the same as my church at home. I cannot grow if I am unwilling to accept these new experiences with thankfulness to God.

Do you remember that it says in the Gospel of Matthew that after the Wise Men had visited the Baby Jesus "they went home another way?" If your college experience has meant anything at all it means you will go home another way. A stronger person with deepened maturity. This is the invitation of a creative college experience.



## "QUIET IN THE MIDST OF STORM"

Every age of life, from birth to death, has its own unique problems of inner conflict and adjustment. All of us must pass through times of doubts, fears and haunting questions which are a part of human growth. However, that time of life which we call youth or adolescence has its own peculiar stresses and strains. These are years when explosive emotional forces clamor to find their release, when the deep hunger for love and acceptance is difficult to satisfy and when all the insecurities and frustrations of life find a painful focus in a few short years. It is not without reason that our young people blow emotionally hot and cold. Your John or Mary may seem tender and loving one minute and full of revenge and hostility the next. Nor is it without reason that sometimes our young become secretive, almost uncommunicative, while at other times they seem to lose themselves in a loud, noisy gang that gathers and runs without any rhyme or reason. Then there come those times of defiant rebellion against all authority. There is a certain wistful agony about being young which we dare not take lightly.

But the youth of our time have their own peculiar problems beyond those of any other generation. The fierce storms of global revolution which have become a part of all our lives have struck our young people with the full force of their fury. The young people who are growing up now have been more deeply scarred than we realize by the violence and death which characterizes the times through which we pass. All the way from the limited wars and refugee camps of other lands to the compulsive preparation for total and final war here at home to the gang killings and knife blade incidents among those of his own age to the cheap movies whose monotonous theme is violence and lust our young people know of brutality and death in a way peculiar to their generation.



Nor do most of us realize how John or Mary must live their lives in the midst of "catch as catch can" moral standards. The ethical landmarks that once provided a framework within which we could live our lives are now a shambles. We are now reaping the harvest of a pragmatic approach to life and the outcome has become, "It's all right if you can get by with it." Now most of the pressures on our John or Mary push them in the direction of more and more freedom in sexual experiences, toward cutting corners in school work or learning to hold their drinks at the parties they attend. In the midst of this, while our young people are trying to become persons in their own right, there are great forces that threaten the very meaning of life. All of us can become cogs in a vast machine. Our culture treats us as nameless faces belonging to population blocs or pawns to be used for the ends of great power structures that can dominate all life. Through the mass technique of advertising and other forms of thought control we can be treated as things to be manipulated. There can come a mass conformity which results in every one dressing alike and thinking alike because we are motivated by the moulders of mass public opinion. Young people feel they are caught in this suffocating spirit of conformity and in their attempt to become persons they strike out blindly against all forms of authority. Professor Reuel Howe has pointed out that the great heresy of our day is that we love things and use people rather than loving people and using things. The youngsters in our communities are not unaware of this.

So we must look behind the noisy, often cocky, front of our young people and become aware of their deepest needs and longings. This means regarding them as Christ would with the eyes of love. We will become aware, then, I believe, of their search for security. We can sense this cry for stability in the lyrics of the records they play, in their desire to "go steady," in their running together in "packs" or "gangs." Certainly we should be able to understand that young people are struggling to handle a freedom which seems



to be more powerful than their inner maturity. Here are all the facts of love and sex given so freely by the school and environment. Here is the use of the family car gained with both threat and promise. Here is the appeal of the week-end jag or slumber party. This is the "free, new" world of John or Mary. Do we understand how badly they need the inner discipline and power to judge and discriminate, to know how and when to say "yes" or "no" in the midst of many conflicting voices and cries?

Perhaps the deepest need of our young people is their longing to be understood. The understanding parents and wise friends who will love young people for what they are are often hard to find. Adults seem so terribly busy with what is important to them that the concerns of young people are pushed aside. John and Mary have questions, doubts and fears that they feel no one will take time to understand. Each young person with his unique capacities for growth needs to discover himself and awaken to the amazing possibility of life with God. He needs to become a person. He never can without love or acceptance.

Now let us be frank with ourselves. No little technique or clever plan of action will bring strength and inner resources to our young people struggling to find themselves in their crazy, mixed-up world. We must face the facts of life. We will probably live in tension and upheaval all our lives, and there is no hiding place in the midst of this storm. Furthermore, nothing we do will protect or insulate our young people from the dangers of this revolution. Our only hope then is being able to live with some confidence and power in the midst of the storm. Those of us who are Christians have been given this confidence and power through the rich resources of Jesus Christ. But are we able to share these resources with our young people?

Our highest calling as Christian parents then is to live so deeply in the power of Christ's life that we are able to share his love and joy and



strength in the family circle. Far too many of us accept the calling of parenthood as a side issue rather than as a central concern. We cannot treat family life superficially and expect our children to discover any significant resources within the home relationship. The calling to family life requires time and understanding as well as concern and love. There are no options about this. As long as making more money with which to buy more gadgets or joining more neighborhood clubs or getting caught up in the social merry-go-round is more important to us than the claims and opportunities of Christian family living we will never be parents in the deepest sense. However, when we respond to the claims and opportunities of family living by giving ourselves with abandon we have shared the most precious gift our children could possibly receive from their home.

If we are to be these kind of parents perhaps we could best begin by evaluating our use of our time and rather ruthlessly cutting out all peripheral activities. We need a new priority that gives a high and holy place to family life. Our John or Mary need parents who give themselves in love to all the members of the family. They are looking for a mother and father who are "available" and understanding in all the intimate relationships of the home. Do any of us realize how much it means for our youngsters to come home from school or a party to find one or both of their parents simply there -- at home?

But time spent in trying to be good parents is not enough! There is a certain distinctive quality or atmosphere about a home when it has emotional and spiritual resources available to all its members. The people who live in this kind of home seem to share a joyful strength and a spontaneous freedom. They enjoy being with each other and they are not afraid of laughter. God's greatest gift has come to this home, for its members love each other.



This is the family which knows first-hand a far greater security than that which has been stirred up simply within its own strength or enthusiasm. In other words, here is a family that draws power from a Source greater than itself. The members of such a family have dared offer all their possibilities and hopes to the Living God. They have given themselves together to the Kingdom of Christ. This is their security! It is like a mustard seed or leaven working quietly with power and life in their midst. They have found in the words of John that "all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." This gift will not shield them from any of the storms of our time, but it has given them the only adequate security in the midst of all the doubts and fears through which we must pass. Only this, properly understood, can give a home stability and strength which can be communicated at a depth level with all its members.

Beyond any religious exercises or talk of God is this quality of Christ's reality and presence that speaks most deeply to John or Mary in a Christian home. This means that each person is truly accepted for what he is with all his shortcomings and human foibles. In this home there is trust and confidence. People are eager to listen to each other and become liable for each other as they share one another's joys and sorrows. This is a costly, high road for family life and few there are who walk in it. It calls for sensitivity and discipline, but it is the way of everlasting life for the family. It is in this kind of atmosphere that our John and Mary can discover who they really are and commit themselves to God's dream for their lives in Christ. Throughout all their days the members of such a family will have roots in a security which will nourish and strengthen their souls.

This calls for a simple framework of discipline within which the family lives its life. There is a claim on the Christian family to practice the presence of God in its daily life. We do not see or understand God in the abstract or in a vacuum. He is best known in life's common experiences. Moses saw and heard God



while he was watching sheep in the wilderness and Matthew heard the call of Christ while he was a tax collector. So it is when the family sits down for breakfast together or tries to work out the family budget or when the little baby almost dies that God can be known deeply and intimately. We need to cultivate that kind of awareness and expectancy to His Presence.

This can be done in the use of the scriptures and the practice of prayer together. A Psalm, an Old Testament story or parts of the life and teachings of Christ read in the family setting daily can keep them all aware of God's nearness. Then we need honest, relevant prayer as a part of family life. Our speaking with God as a family should be related to our daily needs and hopes as a family. What could be more real than our need for daily bread and forgiveness for which our Lord taught us to pray? Everyone in the family who can possibly participate in such simple worship should be invited to do so. There is a great need for creative involvement by all members of the family. In the context of these experiences, then, we need to discuss openly our common problems and goals as a family. In all of this the church and family are allies in a deep and real way. They speak to each other and share in each other's life.

There is no easy way for our young people to find quiet in the midst of the storm. It will be a costly undertaking however it is approached. Yet we Christians know that the resources are greater than the need. Surely these resources cannot be divorced from our life as families. To establish new priorities and discover eternal resources anew within a simple framework in which these resources can be shared may be the greatest challenge we face as parents.