

Why Children Jump Fences?

How does one explain children who have been strictly raised as Catholics, even in some cases home schooled, and yet some of these children walk away from their families and Christian upbringing? Some of these children not only give up the practice of their faith, but also enter bizarre lifestyles. They join the large numbers today who are living contrary to the Commandments of God and live lives of sin about which Jesus said they shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven. They reject their inheritance, which promises eternal life, and appear to be headed for hell. How is this possible when their parents worked hard to teach and form them?

This rejection of the Catholic faith is going on at all levels today. The various Protestant denominations are experiencing a similar problem. It is not just a Catholic thing. Even home-schooling parents experience it. It has been compared to jumping ship from their Christian upbringing. The Christian culture, which has disappeared from society, contributes much to this, but so does the way fathers of homes run their ship.

Parents have often seen their own flesh and blood take on the characteristics of the enemy, the very thing, the very unchristian lifestyle they abhorred. It tells us that parents who thought they were teaching and keeping their families withdrawn from worldliness were still often failing. They built fences to constrain their children and kept those fences set up as the children advanced in age. But as soon as the children were old enough to choose and act for themselves, use their free wills without regard for parental constraints, which they now ignore, many children from these families have chosen the opposite for which their parents worked and prayed. What went wrong? Why are children jumping fences? Why do they jump ship?

We have met the Enemy and It is us

Parents have sometimes worked hard to elude the enemy only to discover he was standing in their own shoes. The devil today is very active and works everywhere and is most successful with his evil designs in every vulnerable or weak spot in human nature. We are all a fallen race. We all have the consequences of original sin. Children will develop to a stage in life where they make their own choices. That they make the right choices cannot be guaranteed with strict constraints, especially forced ones. The child eventually will and must make his/her own decisions.

Parents can have their faith severely tested or shaken and say: "We went to church every Sunday, even on weekdays at times; we had family prayers, we kept our children from corrupt influences and we taught them Christian principles. Yet more than half of our children rejected the faith. Why? How could this happen?"

It sometimes happens that parents with good intentions attempt to set up their homes and family lives as if they were monasteries. Sometimes the daily prayer routine and spiritual practices vie with monastic living for which the children have neither the maturity nor vocation. It will result too often in a total rejection of the faith by children, as they grow older. More often there are failures in good common sense religious education given informally within the home and during family events. Inevitably most valuable teaching moments arise frequently in daily living and working. It is then that the parent should teach in a positive manner so that children view their faith as logical and joyful. Children, at least those of the age of reason, should understand the logic in what the parents tell them.

All are Prone to Sin

We all inherited original sin and its consequences. Adam's sin affected human nature. It affected the whole human race. We are all born without grace and the gifts we otherwise would have possessed on entering the world had Adam not sinned. We all have leading tendencies toward sin because of our fallen human nature. The seven capital sins are pride, avarice, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth. Pride and vainglory come from wanting to be held in high honor and glory. Gluttony comes from individual high living; lust from sexuality inborn to preserve the race, and avarice from the gathering of wealth. Sloth or boredom about spiritual values can develop strongly in one who does not master self-control of his will power. Envy resents another's good qualities because they may lower

one's own self-esteem. To flare out at others is anger. All these tendencies must be subject to self-discipline to develop character. There is no way parents can shield their family from these weaknesses and tendencies with which everyone is born. We are a fallen human race. Character is the moral quality of a person, founded on one's temperament and developed by free choices, which distinguish one as an individual. Parents of a growing child or adolescent who has had fences built around him or her, while attention was not given to respect the individual temperament and freewill, are simply bidding time for the day when they will jump fences. A young person should be guided in a joyful atmosphere that respects individuality so that each one makes the right choices. Each one must be convinced within their own mind and heart to the realities of life and where happiness will be found. Parents cannot ultimately make the choices for their children when they are older.

Parents who think they can condition their children into being good Christians simply by protecting them and teaching true Christian principles are not appealing to the development of the whole person of each of their children. Young people can discover sinful ways even if not exposed to sinful people. They have within them all the tendencies of the seven capital sins. However harmful sinful companions can be, yet, sin does not have to be taught in most cases. The child without a strong will and correctly formed conscience, who chooses what is evil because he wants to, will be one who gives in easily to most every kind of temptation.

Sailing in a Happy Ship

Parents are to train their children according to the biblical injunction, but do it with practical teaching while respecting the free will of each child. Some have compared the family to a ship with a captain, a crew, and sometimes passengers. The ship has a destination. It is going somewhere. It does not sail aimlessly in the vast seas. It has a purpose along with its destination and all crew members are kept informed by the captain of where they are and what they are striving to accomplish together. Passengers, on the other hand, are simply passive while on the ship, perhaps seeking only entertainment. Members of a family should be more than passengers but contribute according to their capacity to the smooth running of the ship but always under supervision of the Captain whom they trust and respect.

If a ship avoided all contact with every port to avoid the corruption of society, less its crewmembers were tempted to switch ships, those on board would become very discontent. Many would find ways to jump ship for another or swim to another ship, which has a definite destination and goal it, hopes to accomplish. So the ship must have a definite destination and a meaningful purpose. There would not be much happiness or a spirit of joyful fellowship on a ship whose only goal was retreating from the world and simply surviving. For the Catholic and Christian family the final destination or shore is heaven. But there are many accomplishments to be expected along the way, especially in serving others, which brings joy and satisfaction.

Now reaching that shore should not be done in an atmosphere that is remorseful. All should participate in what needs to be accomplished as all joyfully anticipate the final goal. This does not mean keeping focused only on heaven, the final, ultimate goal for all. God intends joyful fulfillment and accomplishments along the way - even visiting various ports along the way to one's final destination. With an exciting vision of great things yet to accomplish and a belief that one has a significant role in the coming events; members of a family will have a sense of mission. They will understand the value of their captain (father and his helpmate) and the ship's purpose. Then they will be willing to endure the hardships, the sacrifices of the voyage without buckling under sometimes-monotonous routines.

When members of a family, like the crew of a ship, believe their role is a means for the service of others, and the boat they are on is not the final end, then they are happy to participate and entertain no temptations to jump ship. They know they would be leaving a happy environment that has a purpose and definite sense of direction. They would not risk joining one that is sailing aimlessly. They would not jump fences or ship when they are achieving their goals with promise of future fulfillment.

Respecting Personality and Temperament of Children

We have all heard of family members from strict religious families who nevertheless jump ship. It may be a son who suddenly dyes his hair, gets a tattoo, pierced ears, and stops going to church and is rebellious to all authority. He wants to make a statement by all these things. His statement is that he does not respect authority, especially of his parents, and he wants the world to know that he is not like them.

What happened? Usually it is something like this. There was little personal respect for the individual personality or temperament of the growing son or daughter. The child advancing toward adulthood felt like an outsider within a prison and there did not exist warmth of communication and respect especially with the father toward his son, or mother toward her daughter. The son did not feel that he was trusted with real responsibility but always under constraint to fit into a perfect mode of the "perfect family" that his parents wanted. The daughter did not grasp the beauty of human life and fulfillment in serving others in a joy-filled family where love binds all. She experienced rather constant tension and frustration. The children felt totally fenced-in from the real world and wanted out.

Developing youth are emotionally dissatisfied, intensely unhappy, when there is disorganization in the family. This happens when the top commander is not decisive, not resolute, and does not communicate well or at all. Youth with little experience do indeed need a top commander who is accessible, and who obviously loves each one under him, one who is even hard and unyielding at times in what is in fact "tough love." With good communications a disciplined child realizes that punishment is for his/her own good. With good communications the child knows he is being protected by a most concerned parent. Without this understanding, situations can develop that will bring great harm, sometimes with finality that ruins lives, for those he most loves.

Authority on ship provides security and brings admiration when all realize it is for their good and the captain (father) knows what he is doing and can be trusted to always act for the good of all. The morality of his commands and unbending nature when needed does not depend on his moods but on the truth of his principles, which he makes known. In a loving way he explains his position to his family, sometimes privately and personally in a loving, caring way when circumstances require it to uphold the dignity of the individual family member so that others of the family do not look upon the disciplined member with disdain. He is concerned about unity and love among all.

Meal Time should be Communal Time

The wise captain, from time to time, meets with his crew and informs them of plans, purposes, destination, and reasons. The good father of a family will use mealtime not only to nourish the body with food but also to bond all members in love. He will use such times; from the time children are old enough to understand basics, to teach. He is the primary teacher in the home regarding family life, future life, developing life. He is especially concerned about the eternal life of his children. So at meal time there will frequently be occasions when he teaches the holy Catholic faith and morals in a gentle, loving, manly way. His wife gently joins in with respect and harmony at times.

Meal time is a good time for the father to ask his children basic questions on the faith. He is acquainted with sources and subjects which mother has been presenting the children. When children are of different ages, the older children in responding can be of great assistance to their siblings. They come together in the love of Jesus Christ. The father talks about the Sacraments, the meaning of the Mass, Church history, Apologetics. He may say, "It's been a while since we have been to confession. We all make mistakes, including your father and mother, and we need at times to get our souls cleansed and start anew. Let's think about going to Confession this Saturday. When our souls are well disposed, our reception of Jesus Christ in Holy Communion is most fruitful for time and eternity. Don't ever be afraid to confess your sins. Just like, if one of you makes a mistake and needs to talk it over, you know you can come to me privately or to your mother and we'll do our best to help you through it.

"God is our loving Father. His mercy is infinite and forgiving. Catholics are so fortunate. We have the fullness of true faith. We have the Church with the power to forgive sins in Jesus' Name. We have the Church,

which truly gives God infinite worship because at the Mass we are really at the Sacrifice of the Cross --- the same that Jesus offered on Calvary. When we go to Confession Jesus, the High Priest, forgives us our sins when we are sorry, through the priest who has on his soul the indelible character of the Priesthood of Jesus Christ . . . " etc.

When a family member is going to make a First Holy Communion, or a new member of the crew is to be baptized, it is a family spiritual affair, and an important part of the father's conversation, which includes his wife and other children. All family members join in joyfully celebrating these Sacraments.

This communication in warmth, in love, with the total family, must be ongoing. It must exist through all the years as the children advance toward adulthood to steer their own ship.

The Family Commander Subject to Higher Authority

Using the analogy of the ship, the family members should know that the ship they are members of, though seeming to be alone a good part of the time, yet, they have qualities, which are part of a larger armada, all traveling to the same location for the same purpose. Some families drive extra miles when they go to Church for Sunday Mass or special services so that their family members all realize the armada of which they are a part - has the same values and goals. They go to a parish where the truths and values of Catholicism are well enunciated.

Parents of a good ship and a good family, who know what they are doing, will not hesitate to point out to children and youth, when some who call themselves "Catholic" are not living or acting according to true Catholic faith. This will be for the purpose, not to put others down, but to instruct and see that their children are not scandalized. However, for the most part, family conversations regarding their holy Catholic faith are positive and informed.

The ship's members should not have feelings of isolation. They should be aware and share through contact with other ships that have the same destination and know the exact directions to get there. There should even be good wholesome entertainment and sharing at times, not only within one's own ship but also with other ships with the same destination and understanding of how to arrive there. Each one on board these ships that are in communication with each other must understand that the captain is answerable to a high Commander who holds the power of life and death and ultimately of eternal life and death. The crew will have a reverential fear of this highest Commander and thus also a certain but loving fear of the captain of their individual ship who represents Him.

The captain must mete out discipline when required. He cannot vacillate or be squeamish in doing so. His subjects must know why he is reacting as he is and as he is required to by a higher Command. The captain, who conducts himself with dignity, integrity and honor, retains the respect and love of his crew. Each member of such a ship takes pride in the ship to which he belongs.

When children have confidence that their ship is going somewhere, to a port with tremendous possibilities, then they can stand up in rightful pride and joy as they are sailing to a new world. Children have individual souls, with individual intellects and wills. They are people, not fully adults, but still with potentialities equal to their parents and often with potential gifts to be developed under the right circumstances, which may exceed the gifts of their parents. It should make parents happy to know that their own flesh and blood have immortal souls created by God with special gifts which the parents want to see developed. God gave each one different or special gifts to be developed, not wasted. Parents will encourage proper development, even when hard work is necessary for it.

Parents must respect the individual vocations in life to which their children may be called. Father and mother will talk privately together about each of their children. They will discuss how each child is developing his or her gifts. They will discern whether each is developing in the fullness of faith and whether certain ones need special and individual counseling, guidance, attention in love.

Children, if treated as crewmembers and not as passive passengers on a pleasure liner, will be more likely content on your ship. They will respect you as captain and helpmate; they will trust you and know, not only that they are secure but are learning to be captains themselves one day, especially the boys. The girls will develop knowing that men and women have different roles that are harmonious for the good of the family and for the good of society. Girls will not be trained to compete with the boys but to develop their own femininity and skills.

God intended male desire to dominate

God created boys and men to exercise dominion and to subdue. (Genesis 1:26-28; Hebrews 2:7-8). Sacred Scripture itself tells us God created the nature of the male to rule with power and glory. God's own nature is to subdue and exercise dominion and man, whom he created in his own image and likeness, also desires to subdue and exercise dominion. Mothers must recognize that a man or boy, who does not strive to conquer, rule, and subdue, is not acting within the will of God. The male must play by God's rules; of course, he must serve others with his strength. He should be taught to respect and protect the gentler sex. Yet, boys cannot be raised or trained like girls in personality and temperament. They are different both psychologically and physically. Even the brain structure of boys and girls differ.

The above reasons are why St. Paul in the Bible says that wives must be submissive to their husbands. If wives idolize their husbands, they will have the motivation and courage to conquer and subdue kingdoms. She herself will be bitter if she rebels, as she will not be living her God-intended role.

Consider how Jesus Christ practiced his being the head. He is the Lord, the first one and the superior, captain of the universal Church. We've used the ship as an analogy of the family, but a bigger ship has long been representative of the universal Church with Jesus as the ultimate Head. Jesus practiced his headship by being the last one, putting himself in the last place, by becoming the servant to all of us, while still directing and sacrificing himself for all. Jesus Christ proclaimed and interpreted his headship to his disciples when He said: "The son of man has not come to be served but to serve and to give himself as a ransom for many."

Such is Christ's way of being the first, the head, and if the husband truly understands and imitates Christ's way of being the head, the husband becomes the one who gives, who bows, because he sees his greatness in the dynamic act of being subordinate to all members of his family in the sense that he serves them and sacrifices as the head. St. Paul explains this especially in the fifth chapter to the Ephesians. Husband and wife should imitate this mode and grow toward each other when they do not strive to be served but to serve each other and the members of their family whom they train by example.

There is Strength in Forgiveness

The act of giving is really forgiveness, a readiness to start anew and to let love begin anew by taking strength from forgiveness. When the head of the family humbly admits that he made a mistake he does not lose respect, he gains it and gives a powerful example. The father who lets his sons in middle or late teens try something, even when he may disagree that it is not the right way, is permitting his sons to learn by experience. When they fail, he should not say "I told you so," but kindly suggest a way he knows will work. Permit your sons to fail at times. It will put steel in their bones. But be there to help later and supervise their endeavors. A boy's drive is to conquer, lead, control. That is his male nature created by God. If you work to crush it, you may keep the boy sweet, but destroy his manhood.

Even very small children at three or four often try to help, to do things. They will think they are doing great things when permitted to try to help with work when in reality they may be more work that way for the parent. But then children from very young onward feel that he/she is part of the crew.

Little girls want to put clothes in the laundry, wash dishes, mop floors, and fix dinner for daddy. They want to do the things they see mother do. As they get older, mother should be teaching girls certain feminine crafts, sewing, knitting, dressmaking, cooking, cleaning, whatever. They should be trained to be feminine, not masculine. God did not create women to act or live in a masculine way or do things especially intended as masculine roles. From the time girls are very small and through their teens they should be learning homemaking. They should be discouraged from considering college when they have no intention of spending their lives in professional careers. If they want to marry and be mothers they should learn homemaking and how to be mothers at home within their own family. They will retain purity and learn vastly more in a practical way than they would ever learn in college.

Many girls today not only lose their purity in college but also lose orientation to God-intended woman roles and mothering a family. Many of them are taught in college and in secular society to resent any submissive roles of women as God intended and the Bible clearly directs. They will not live happy lives then with such corrupt mentalities and influences for they will be trying to live as men rather than women and mothers and wives.

A boy beginning his teens is not particularly inclined toward difficult work on his own without training. He has inherited the tendency to sloth when he inherited original sin. But let him do things with his father, work beside him, and he will do the same difficult work all day and enjoy it. Wise fathers, as their sons grow in age, will let their sons, under some supervision, do some navigating and piloting of the ship in the various responsibilities they carefully share with them at times. It tells their sons that they are trusted and respected and the sons will in turn respect the father.

When a developing young man has the respect of his father, does things with him, he is highly unlikely to jump to another ship, which may be sailing aimlessly, or as we believe with our faith, is headed toward hell.

If a father has a seventeen or eighteen-year-old who is treated as a passenger, never allowed to take any significant responsibility, never listened to or permitted to initiate and try his own ideas, he will not be content on your ship. A seventeen-year-old already thinks he is smarter than his father. You've heard of the seventeen old who thought his father didn't know anything. Yet his father wisely showed patience and let the young man try his own ideas, and who learned by his mistakes and added steel to his bones. Then at twenty-one the son was amazed at how much his father had learned in four years. The wise father will congratulate sons who as young adults may have fresh ideas that work better than his own. He will express his pride of them to such sons.

Justified Pride

A young person feels good about himself when he has triumphed and the father is the one who made it possible, because he stood by him, encouraged him, initially showed him how to do things. When his father watched with joy and approval when his son triumphed, there will then be a bonding that will never end regardless of age. It will continue beyond the grave.

The father will give his sons sex education and the mother will instruct her daughters. The Church teaches that young people should be given and adequately taught about the facts of human procreation according to their age and mental ability, especially today when they are exposed to so many perversions of sex in the media. It should always be given along with the necessary moral instructions. If not given by parents, children will develop corrupt ideas and practices regarding a beautiful gift from God. Good mothers and fathers have the primary right and duty to give this education. Within the family circle such education should meet the personal needs of each child as they are taught a profound love of human life and a reverence for purity. Individual instruction should be given to each child at proper times and occasions. When a mother does things, like sewing or cooking with her daughter and the father does things with his son they know the right moments to give such education at informal moments when they are especially bonded.

Children need to know they are on the best ship possible. God gave them the parents they have and gave their parents the sons and daughters they have. God does not make mistakes. All have the needed grace to cooperate and live together if they but keep their minds and hearts open in deep love and respect for each other at every level. Such marriages are closely knotted. Such families are closely bonded. No one wants to jump a successful ship. No child wants to be fenced-in in an unhappy home. RJF