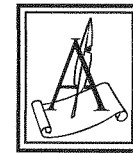


# LISTEN, SON

TWELVE HEART-TO-HEART  
TALKS OF A FATHER TO HIS SON



ANGELUS PRESS  
2915 FOREST AVENUE,  
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI 64109

*Nihil Obstat*  
Rev. John J. Clifford, S.J.  
Censor Dept.  
July 29, 1952

*Imprimatur*  
† Samuel Cardinal Stritch  
Archbishop of Chicago  
July 30, 1952

Cover image by Petra Eschenlohr

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## ANGELUS PRESS

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KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI 64109  
PHONE (816) 753-3150  
FAX (816) 753-3557  
ORDER LINE 1-800-966-7337  
**[www.angeluspress.org](http://www.angeluspress.org)**

ISBN: 978-0-935952-97-1  
Revised Edition: December 2007

Printed in the United States of America

In deepest humility  
this little work is dedicated to  
GOD THE HOLY GHOST  
with a fervent prayer  
that He may enlighten and direct  
all who read it

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# FOREWORD

We live in an age of practical paganism. There are still, it is true, many Christians who lead a truly Christian life; even many of our government officials pay external homage to God; and there are numerous evidences that religion still exerts an influence on individuals and on society. Yet the general condition of family life, the godlessness of our public schools, the trends in both private and commercialized amusements, the dominant tone of the vast majority of best sellers, magazines and papers, and the character of popular songs all paint an over-all picture of a world that is not much concerned about God or the affairs of another life.

It is into this world that the children of today are born. It is this world in which they grow up, with which they daily rub elbows and which day in and day out, in a thousand different ways, helps to affect their outlook on life, fix their standards, form their habits, shape their objectives and plans, and mold their character. It is like the current of a vast swift stream that sweeps along everything that floats on its surface.

Is there any way to counteract the influence of these forces of ungodliness? Any means of holding fast to Catholic principles and practices despite the seductions of the world? We know that there must be; for God still demands that we keep His commandments, and it is impossible to do so without going counter to the ways of the world.

Probably the most important single means to be employed in stemming the tide of worldliness is for parents

to inculcate Christian principles in their sons and daughters and regulate their home and social life strictly by these standards. Many a Catholic father no doubt sincerely desires to form the mind and heart of his sons according to Christian standards and to convince them that it is for their own good not to follow the crowd; but he lacks the ability to guide them safely amid the mass of conflicting views and to defend the Christian principles that he desires to teach. He knows the truths of the Catechism but what he needs is a short guidebook applying its truths to everyday life, especially in the difficult and delicate field of sexual and social conduct. It was for the benefit of such fathers and their sons that this series of instructions was written. In twelve heart-to-heart talks, which the father needs only to read to his son, a simple, clear, reverent, and graduated account is given of the facts that a growing boy should gradually learn to know.

It is true that a number of books already exist that were written for the express purpose of informing Catholic boys about the facts of life; but apparently none has yet met with general satisfaction. Since the publication of *Mother's Little Helper* some years ago for the instruction of girls, numerous requests have reached the publishers for a similar set of booklets for boys. It would seem, then, that the books so far written do not adequately meet the demand for a book of this type. One priest made the following observation on *Mother's Little Helper*: "All other books of this kind that I have read seemed either too spiritual or not spiritual enough. These instructions keep everything on a high plane and still give clear and satisfactory explanations and reasons."

The present little work, accordingly, is intended to be the aid to Catholic fathers that *Mother's Little Helper* has been to literally hundreds of thousands of Catholic mothers during the past dozen years. Like its elder companion, it carefully avoids the use of crass anatomical and biological terms; and by constantly referring to the fact that man is the work of God and that every detail of his origin and development has been ordained by God's infinite wisdom, strives to make the child realize that God alone is the author and master of life and, therefore, that all the processes of life are as sacred as they are mysterious and admirable.

Unless a boy acquires the supernatural attitude toward this subject right in the beginning, there will be danger of his having a wrong attitude towards it all through life. But if the subject is introduced and unfolded to him by his own parent in a tactful and reverent manner with constant reference to God and a minimum of physical details, the first impression he receives will be sacred, deep, and lasting; and he will be prepared to acquire more detailed information from other Catholic sources whenever his age or circumstances require it.

The generally accepted principles among Catholics in regard to the imparting of sex information can be summarized as follows: 1) It should be imparted by the parents; 2) It should be graduated to the child's growing needs; 3) Details should be given to single individuals, not to a group, and above all, not to a mixed group; 4) The information should be accompanied with suggestions of motives and means for the practice of purity. To enable parents to observe the spirit of these rules, there should

be separate books for the instructions of boys and for the instructions of girls; and sex information of importance for adolescents of only one sex should be excluded from books intended for the instruction of the opposite sex.

An earnest effort has been made to make *Listen, Son* conform to all these requirements. Not only is the matter specialized for the boy, but it is graduated both by age groups and by stages in the several age groups. Every effort should be made, however, that the rights of the parents in this regard be respected, and especially that the great advantages of the son's receiving these instructions from his parents be safeguarded.

The age at which the first instruction may best be read to any particular boy, as well as how long an interval should elapse before the reading of each successive instruction, will naturally depend upon the type of boy and each one's peculiar circumstances. The proverb "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," still has its justification, especially since experience proves that too early initiation into the mysteries of life does not make a boy truly wise, but produces rather that undesirable and posterous thing—the sophisticated child. Even in this age in which the atmosphere seems charged with sex, many perfectly normal, wide awake, and lively boys find so many things absorbing their interest that they never pay any attention to sex; and some even pass the middle of their teens without ever thinking to inquire where babies come from.

Still, as a rule, the first instruction had probably best be given when a boy reaches his ninth year, even though he may have asked no questions nor manifested any curi-

osity about the origin of life. The remaining instructions can then follow the schedule of years given on the title page of each booklet, unless some circumstance should make it advisable to anticipate the suggested schedule. A point to be noted is that all the instructions are to be read by the father to his son and not simply given to him to read for himself. Some fathers may prefer to study the contents and then give the substance in their own words or recite the instruction from memory. But many will not feel capable of adopting that method, as the right word that seemed so inevitable in reading over the instruction often fails to come to mind on repeating the lesson. Then, too, the very fact that the matter is being read from an approved Catholic book will lend it additional authority in the eyes of the boy.

The main reason why the booklet should not be given to the boy to read is that he should be trained to confide in his father in regard to all problems of the years of his adolescence, and an occasional heart-to-heart chat with his boy is one of the best means the father can use of winning and preserving his confidence. For the same reason, if there are two or more sons of nearly the same age in the family, the talks should nevertheless be given to each separately, so that each may have the father's whole attention and an opportunity to ask questions without being embarrassed by the presence of others. Though they should be encouraged to ask questions and mention their doubts, they should also be given to understand that, if it is deemed advisable to postpone the answer, they should be content and not seek information elsewhere, as their

father will tell them all that will be useful for them at the proper time.

One last word of caution may not be superfluous; that the instructions should be given at a time when the boy is in a quiet mood and disposed to receive them. He will not be disposed if he is forced to sit down and listen when he is dying to be somewhere else. The father should choose a time when both are at leisure, gain his interest by some paternal remark (which might well be a compliment or a word of appreciation), and then invite him aside for a little chat. The mother can co-operate by arranging to have the other children occupied elsewhere; and both parents should recommend the matter to God in prayer both before and during, as well as after, the conference.

## **PART ONE**

**TO BE DISCUSSED WITH BOYS  
AGES 9-12 YEARS**

# INSTRUCTION 1

Listen, Son.

One of the very first things you learned in Religion class was the answer to the question: "Who made you?" You were taught that God made you: that He made heaven and earth, the land and the sea, plants and animals and all things. Later on you were told how God made the first man and the first woman. The first man, Adam, God made by making a body out of earth and breathing into it an immortal soul. And Eve, the first woman, God made out of a rib which He took from Adam's side while he was asleep.

You were never told how God made all other men and women; but you know that they must be made in a different way than Adam and Eve, because God made Adam at once a full-grown man and Eve a full-grown woman; while all other men and women come into the world as babies.

Now have you never wondered how God makes babies, and where they come from? Perhaps you did ask your mother sometime where babies come from; and she probably told you that they come from God, which is perfectly true. But things come from God in different ways.

You see, son, when we say that God made all things, or that He is the Creator of all things, we do not mean that He made everything directly out of nothing. God made the peaches and the apples, which you like to eat, and the roses, which you love to see; but you know that they are not made directly out of nothing, because you

have seen them growing on trees and bushes. At first the peach tree produced buds; the buds grew into blossoms, and the blossoms into peaches. And even the tree itself was not made out of nothing; because you know very well that trees, like plants and flowers, grow up out of seeds. Yet it is entirely correct to say that God made them, because in the beginning, thousands of years ago, God created the first trees and plants and flowers, and made them so that each one would produce seed from which other trees and plants would develop.

Thus God is the Creator of all things, since He made everything either directly out of nothing or indirectly by making certain things produce other things of the same kind. This shows the greatness of God's power. Men can make flowers, too, that is, artificial ones: and they can make them so perfect that you can hardly distinguish them from natural ones. But no man can make a flower that will grow and have seeds and produce other flowers.

This is all very interesting to you, I am sure; but the most interesting thing is how God makes man. Every day thousands of new children come into the world. Do they just drop into their cradles out of the air like the lovely snowflakes that fall from the sky? Or do their Guardian Angels bring them down from heaven and place them in the arms of their mothers? No. God could create them in that way if He wanted to, but He doesn't. There are many ways in which God could bring children into the world, but He chose only one way; and since He is infinitely wise and holy, the way He chose must surely be the best. But what is that way?

When God creates a new human being, instead of making its body, as He did Adam's out of earth, He makes it out of a substance which He prepares in the body of its mother. In the very same instant that the tiny body is formed, God makes an immortal soul directly out of nothing and unites it to the body. This tiny living body is then nourished and developed inside its mother's body until the time comes for it to be born.

It was in this way that the Son of God Himself became man, as you can see from the Gospel that is read on the feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin. "The Angel Gabriel," so we read there, "was sent by God into a city of Galilee called Nazareth to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And the Angel being come in, said to her: 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women....Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son, and He shall be called the 'Son of the Most High.'...And Mary said: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word'" (Lk. 1:26-38).

As soon as Mary uttered these words, she conceived by the Holy Ghost, as we say in the Angelus; that means, by the action of the Holy Ghost the body and soul of Jesus were made in Mary's womb and united to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. So you see that the sublime mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God was accomplished in the chaste womb of the immaculate Virgin Mary. The womb, you must know, is that organ inside a woman's body in which a child is conceived, that is, brought into existence, then nourished just as its mother

is nourished by the food that she eats, and from which it is finally brought forth or born and then nourished at its mother's breast. And as Jesus was formed in the womb of His Blessed Mother, so every child that comes into the world is also formed inside the body of its mother.

So now you know how God creates little children; and you now understand, too, why a mother loves her child so much, since the child's body was formed out of her own substance and fed with milk at her breast. But now listen, son. I never spoke to you about this before, because the creation of a child is something so wonderful that boys and girls are usually not told about it until they are old enough to appreciate the information. Then, too, it is a very mysterious and sacred subject, which young folks do not know how to talk about in the right way. But you are now supposed to be old enough and to have sense enough to keep this information to yourself and not to speak about it to anyone but your parents or your confessor. From time to time, I intend to give you other instructions on this subject and on other subjects; and I want you to feel free to ask me any questions that may come to your mind. You can be sure that your mother and I want to do all that we can for you, not only to make you happy and help you grow up healthy and strong, but also to help you grow up a good boy. So trust us and don't try to get information from other persons, because we will tell you all that it will be good for you to know at the proper time.