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## [Book Review of] *Challenging Children to Chastity*, by H. Vernon Sattler

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# Challenging Children to Chastity

by H. Vernon Sattler, C.Ss.R.

*Catholic Central Verein of America, St. Louis: 133 pages.*

It would be difficult to think of anyone with more extensive credentials for writing a book on teaching children about the virtue of chastity than Father Vern Sattler. He has, as Cardinal O'Connor says in his preface to this book, devoted most of his life to the theology of marriage and sexuality. Despite his expertise, however, the author makes no claim for having written a "how-to" book or a manual of instructions for parents. His intention, as he points out in his introduction, is to reinforce the intuitive and experiential talents of parents in responding to children and setting them an example.

Parents are, by right, the primary educators of their children. There are some educational tasks which parents may delegate to schools and churches and others who stand *in loco parentis*. Education for sexuality, chastity and family life is not merely a didactic exercise, however. It is imbibed on a daily basis through life in a loving home, observing devoted parents and emulating virtues which are demonstrable.

Modesty is a principle which flows from chastity. One ought not engage in those activities which symbolize the nuptial meaning of the body. The display of affection before marriage might legitimately signal or promise what is to happen after total commitment but there are specific actions and exchanges which are reserved for the marital covenant and nowhere else.

Parents in imparting information and understanding to their children have, in the past, been able to trust a commonality of purpose with religious educators inside and outside of the classroom. They might also have been able to trust the maintenance of standards of decency in press, media and entertainment. The modern American parent, however, can count on very little reinforcement for principles taught within the home. Inevitably then, parents must accept a role in the sex education of their children since their only alternative would be to abandon the child to the insidious influence of the culture or the values clarification methods of the secular educators.

Father Sattler's discussion of the nuptial meaning of the body is both scholarly and practical. With subtlety and insight he traces the meaning of the smile, the kiss, sexual intercourse, love-making and baby-making as progressive symbolic stages of the total self-gift. Modesty and chastity reinforce the mutual self-surrender while we'll nonetheless be vulnerable to personal failure and perversity.

The process of sex education in the home is really a feature of the process of becoming a person. As such, it is not so much a matter to be taught as to be "caught" through a continuing exposure to mature role models in the developing child's environment. The joys of sexual maturity in marriage or in celibacy are better demonstrated than inculcated.

Father Sattler anticipates the problems of parents in dealing with their responsibilities in the imparting of sexual information to children in two chapters entitled "Step by Step in Sex Education" and "Parents and the Direct Sex Education of the Children." These chapters are rich in principles but appropriately short on details. The goal of these chapters is to open up a lifetime of parent-child interaction.

Group based, value-free classroom sex education can never compensate for an absence of the rapport of a close parent-child relationship. Sex education in a Catholic classroom will reinforce the virtues of purity and continence through access to Covenant Theology, the sacraments and Church traditions. This reinforcement, however, must build on the ultimate training ground of home and family in order to succeed. Father Sattler's comprehensive and well edited volume will be an asset to any parent who accepts the commitment to educate his children for pre-marital and marital Chastity.

— Eugene F. diamond, M.D.  
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