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On: 05 February 2015, At: 18:25

Publisher: Routledge

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Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/urea20>

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Published online: 10 Jul 2006.

To cite this article: Lincoln Hulley Ph. D. (1907) Religious Education in the Home, Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association, 2:1, 13-16, DOI: [10.1080/0034408070020104](https://doi.org/10.1080/0034408070020104)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0034408070020104>

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Religious Education in the Home

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The home is the place for religious education. Other agencies are good, but this agency is the best. Round the family altar the principles of religion should be inculcated. There its importance should be emphasized.

The family altar used to be the rock on which our homes were built. It is almost a thing of the past in many Christian homes to-day. Some are old-fashioned enough to still believe in it. Perhaps it did belong to a stay-at-home age, when the activities of life did not go far beyond the farm and its narrow circle of interest. Perhaps it was easier to keep it up then, than now. What a history it has had! What a sturdy stock they were who loved it! What a priest he was who led his family at that altar into the presence of God! The busy life of the present that has tumbled down the family altar is making other inroads into the noble family life of the past. Let us hope that since the old has passed away, something better shall take its place. Religious education must still be conducted in the home.

The home is a domestic university. Some are without pupils, and a few are without teachers, but most of them have both. They run all the year round, having no recesses, no vacations. All are steadily turning out their work on the world. Some teach vice and some virtue. Some graduate pupils who will prove an honor to their university, and some graduate rascals.

Home is a school. It is a place where lessons are learned. By precept and by example the teacher inculcates the lesson. The pupils are apt learners. They hear the precept and they watch the example. Constant reviews drill the lesson in. No wonder the impressions made in this school are never forgotten. They are part of one's very self. From this one sees the importance of inculcating religious principles in children. In a Christian home these principles will be Christian principles, and they will be grounded in the Bible.

These universities are the most important. They begin at the foundations. They take their pupils before some one else has had a chance. The pupils are unspoiled. They are unmade.

14 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

indeed. If the work here is well done the child gets a good start, and later schools cannot undo the results. As the twig is bent the tree inclines. As the first years are tended so will be the later ones. No wonder Napoleon and others, great teachers among them, have asked for the first years of a child's life. They are the best. They settle what the later years shall be.

These domestic universities should be first class. The head teacher should be a queen. Embodying the high ideals of honor, integrity, truth and right, all the teachers should reproduce themselves in their pupils. Every virtue under the shining stars can be best taught by such teachers. What a precious heritage to a child is the memory of such a teacher. He will forever cherish the laws of that school. In times of trial its lessons will not have been learned in vain. Daily these homes are instilling justice and fidelity and industry into their pupils. The manhood and womanhood of the world will confess their debt a century hence.

But suppose the lessons taught there be unworthy. Suppose the child hears oaths, and evil counsel and vile motives urged. Suppose the home be one of railing, cursing, lying, cheating, hating and reviling. It will still do its work in the souls of its students. They will come out deformed, ugly, hateful, given to lying, cheating, cursing and reviling.

Little deceptions are sometimes practiced in good homes. Little falsities, insincerities exist there. The parents smooth them over and cover them up, but the child is too bright to be deceived. He knows if his mother is a liar. The child knows if his father is a coward and a sneak. He knows whether they are good because it is the fashion, or because they see an advantage in it, or because they really are good. He sees the face of his father in public, and then again at home in private, and says in his heart that he is a hypocrite, or an honest man. He sees his "angel mother" all smiles to a guest she does not want to offend, and a wild-cat when the guest is gone.

No parent can escape the searching gaze of the child. That is the hardest examination any one has to pass. The clear, innocent eyes look through sham and pretense. The soul of the child may soon yield and follow a bad example. It is likely to do so sooner or later; but if it should see a light and follow a better way, that child and that parent are separated forever.

These domestic universities teach their pupils life's best lessons. The teacher struggles not in vain. The pupils see the effort and are grateful. They know the teacher's patience and fidelity. They know the courage of that grand doctor of the old school who stands to his task to win bread, who strives against misfortune and defeat. He knows the tender solicitude that plans a thousand ways to make ends meet; and all the while he is learning to strive, to bear, to do. These are great schools. Flood them with light. Teach the Bible in them. God has endowed them. They are blessed for evermore.

The family altar should be preserved in some form or other. If the old method of meeting for family worship while the head of the family read the Bible and offered prayer is to be lost, the substance of it, at least, should be preserved. In a Christian home children should be taught the fear of God in some way. They should be taught the Bible, should commit its words to memory, should understand its principles and be familiar with its great examples. No rush of modern life can lift that responsibility from parents. The duty toward children is at home. The pastor is not responsible for your children. The Sunday school is not to blame for their ignorance. The parent alone is to blame.

The home, even if the altar is gone, should be a Christian home. Maybe that "if" is fatal. Family prayers, when held, should not be formal or mechanical. If they are, it is no wonder the children prefer not to have them. The reading of the Bible should be intelligent and interesting. The prayers should be earnest, victorious ones. Further, there should be some adaptation of the religious education of the home to the nature and age of the child.

The child has a religious nature, but it is not that of old age. It has in it some of the same elements, but they are qualified by child nature, which is not adult nature. No bigger mistake could be made, and yet it commonly is made, than to expect children to behave like grown people in regard to religion. They do not act like them in other things, why should they in the things of Christ? A child is full of impulses. They drive him hither and thither. Like the honey bee he is constantly zigzagging, but this zigzagging is the child's salvation. He would never grow if he did not zigzag. By this means he gathers new facts and changes

16 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

them into the honey of experience. He will zigzag in his religious life as much as in anything else.

A child has not the adult's love of the Bible. Yet older people are constantly disappointed that their children do not possess the same love for it that they have. Too many people forget their childhood. At least they don't want the children to have any. They want the children to start full grown. That is not nature's way.

A child is just as well fitted for religion as an adult, but in a different way. The wonder element appeals to him, not the reflective; the emotional, not the intellectual; the sentimental, not the philosophical. Religion is not a thing the child should be fitted to, but something that should enlist his awakening powers as a spiritual organism. Religion should bring out something that is in the child, and do so according to normal child processes rather than be a thing to be crammed down the child's unwilling throat as a sort of nasty medicine. Religion has deep roots in human nature, and builds on human emotions, ideas and volitions, a child's no less than the adult's.