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**The Duties of Love:
The Vocation of the Child in the Household Manual Tradition**

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Abstract

This Article analyzes the little explored late medieval and early modern household manuals that provided European and North American parents, children, and other household members with detailed instructions on their domestic, spiritual, emotional, and social responsibilities to God, neighbor, and self. The manuals outlined the duties of love, respect, recompense, and life-long honor that children owed to parents, and the duties of love, support, education, nurture, emancipation, and inheritance that parents owed to their children. Some of these early household manuals proved to be important prototypes for later theories of catechesis, education, children's rights, and books of etiquette and deportment that were common in Catholic and Protestant circles on both sides of the Atlantic.

Keywords: household manuals, children, parents, love, honor, respect, education, parental care, intergenerational care, inheritance, William Blackstone, John Locke, common law, Protestantism

In his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765), William Blackstone wrote: "The duties of children to their parents arise from a principle of natural justice and retribution. For to those who gave us existence, we naturally owe subjection and obedience during our minority, and honour and reverence ever after; they, who protected the weakness of our infancy, are entitled to our protection in the infirmity of their age; they who by sustenance and education have enabled their offspring to prosper, ought in return to be supported by that offspring, in case they stand in need of assistance. Upon this principle proceed all the duties of children to their parents, which

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are enjoined by positive laws.”² The contemporaneous *Book of Common Prayer* (American Version, 1789) described the child’s vocation thus: “To love, honour, and succour my father and mother: To honour and obey the civil authority: To submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters: To order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters.”³ Hundreds of comparable sentiments can be found in standard textbooks of law and theology in early modern times -- both Catholic and Protestant, European and American.

The common source for many of these traditional legal and theological sentiments was the Bible, particularly the Commandment: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you” (Ex. 20:12, Lev. 19:5, Deut. 5:16) and its various New Testament echoes (Matt. 15:4, Mark 7:10, Eph. 6:1-2). Also important were the Bible’s repeated admonitions to believers to “be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1-7, Titus 3:1, 1 Pet. 2:13). But what precisely did it mean for a Christian child at various stages of development to “love, honor, and obey” or to “serve, succor, and sustain” parents, guardians, teachers, and other authorities? And what did “natural justice” (as Blackstone put it) add to these obligations of “biblical righteousness”? The answers to these questions came in sundry texts – in sermons, catechisms, and confessional manuals as well as in a growing early modern industry of legal texts on domestic relations.

In this chapter, we sample an interesting, but largely neglected, historical medium for teaching the duties and vocation of the child – the household manuals. These manuals were something of the spiritual “Dr. Spocks” of their day – pious “how to” manuals, usually written in the vernacular (unlike the Latin confessional manuals), sometimes highly illustrated (for the young child’s benefit), and used regularly by priests and teachers, parents and guardians, tutors and catechists to instruct children at various stages of their development as budding communicants in the church and budding citizens of the state. These household manuals sometimes grew out of or merged into catechisms and religious teaching manuals, on the one hand, and books of etiquette, manners, and deportment, on the other. By the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, household manuals were increasingly recognized as their own distinct genre of literature, with the duties of love by and to children broken out in separate sections.

The earliest surviving household manuals in English that we have found are from the fourteenth century. The most famous was penned by the early English reformer, John Wycliffe, *Of Weddid Men and Wifis and of Here Children Also* (1390). With the advent of the printing press in the fifteenth century, these manuals became more common, finding their way into myriad church, school, city, and home libraries, Catholic and Protestant alike. They also became more complex and comprehensive, reaching their apex in the massive 800-page tome of Anglo-Puritan divine William Gouge published in 1622. Scores of these household manuals have come down to us. They provide an illuminating window on what a late medieval or early modern child was

² William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Law of England* (London, 1765), Book 1, ch. 16.

³ The Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York, 1789), p. x.

taught to be his or her vocation in life, what rights and freedoms the child must enjoy in exercise of these duties, and what rights and duties the child's parents, guardians, teachers, and tutors had in helping the child achieve his or her vocation. These manuals helped to bridge law and theology, practice and theory, belief and action in Catholic and Protestant Europe and North America.

This chapter provides a brief tour of the highpoints of these household manuals. We sample nearly 100 manuals from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries that have survived in English.⁴ We focus especially on the common and enduring Western formulations of the vocation of the child set out in these manuals – a rich latticework of virtues, values, and vocations that boys and girls respectively should consider at various stages in life.

The vocation of the child as revealed in these manuals consists of two main types of duties: (1) the duty of the child to love God, neighbor and self and thereby to become beloved to others; and (2) the duty of the child to *be* loved by parents, guardians, and others. This latter duty was sometimes also cast as the child's right to be loved -- though talk of a child's rights remained controversial in the manuals. While the child's basic duties to love did not change much over the five centuries of manuals that we have sampled, the child's duties and rights to be loved and to be beloved did change significantly in substance and form, as we note in the final section of this chapter.

The Child's Duty to Love

Love of God. The household manuals make clear that that the first and most essential duty of the child is to love, revere, and worship God. The German Reformer Martin Luther put it thus in 1531: “[Y]ou must continually have God's Word in your heart, upon your lips and in your ears. Where the heart is unoccupied and the Word does not sound, Satan breaks in and has done the damage before we are aware.”⁵ For the First Commandment of the Decalogue is “that we are to trust, fear and love [God] with our whole hearts all the days of our lives.”⁶ An influential Catholic pamphlet *L'Instruction des Enfants* (1543) stated that the primary command for every child is to “love the lord God with all your heart” and that the first responsibility of parents and siblings alike is to teach the child to obey that primal command.⁷ Robert Baxter's *Rules & Directions for Family Duties* (1681) encouraged parents to “[w]isely break [children] of their own wills, and let them know that they must obey and like God's will” first and foremost.⁸ Eleazer Moody's comprehensive manual *The School of Good Manners* (1775) listed as the first

⁴ See Appendix A for a list of the household manuals we studied.

⁵ Martin Luther, “Large Catechism” (1529), in *Luther on Education, Including a Historical Introduction and a Translation of the Reformer's Two Most Important Educational Treatises*, ed. and trans. F.V.N. Painter (St. Louis, 1928), p. 64.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁷ Anonymous, *L'Instruction des Enfants* (London, 1543), folios 1-2.

⁸ Robert Baxter, *Rules & Directions for Family Duties* (London, 1681), 1.

duty of a child the duty to "fear and reverence God."⁹ The duty to face God daily with fearful and loving reverence, the vast majority of the manuals made clear, is the foundation of the Christian child's life.

The manuals often invoked the duty to love God to compel the child to fulfill his or her other duties, especially the duty to love parents, who are regularly described as God's "priests," "bishops," "kings" and "queens" to their children.¹⁰ Of the duty to love parents, the Catholic *Christian Instructions for Youth* (1821) stated: "You cannot manifest your gratitude towards your parents by any other means but by loving them; this love must not be a natural affection only; it must be a rational love, and according to God; that is to say you must love them, because such is God's will, and you must give proofs of this love."¹¹ Thomas Becon, the sixteenth-century Anglican divine and confessor to Thomas Cranmer, wrote similarly that children must see their parents as gifts "by the singular providence and good-will of God," and they must love their parents "not feignedly, but from the very bottom of the heart and in wishing unto them all good things from God."¹² It is the child's duty "to honorably esteem them, godly to think of them, heartily to love them, humbly to obey them, [and] diligently to pray for them."¹³

While love of God and love of parents are conjoined, love of God is the primary commandment. Many of the household manuals make clear that when a parental command and a biblical command conflict, the child must follow the Bible. The manuals limited examples of such "wicked" commands of parents to obvious rejections of God or God's laws, such as a parental command that a child "forsake the true living God and his pure religion and to follow strange gods" or where parents, seeing a lucrative and evil opportunity, encourage their daughter "to play the whore."¹⁴ God commands children to obey parents, and the corollary is that in obeying parents a child obeys God. However, "in a matter clearly contrary to the law of God, and to your conscience ... you do not owe [parents] obedience; but be cautious on such occasions; and when in doubt of the justness of their commands, take the advice of prudent and discreet persons."¹⁵ Later American Protestants like Samuel Phillip commented in his manual on *The Christian Home* (1860) that "the authority of God supersedes that of the parent. Obey God rather than man," but obey parents in "all things lawful and Christian."¹⁶

Honor and Obey Parents. Except in these cases of absolute conflict with divine law and conscience, the manuals stress the child's duty of showing "unhesitating

⁹ Eleazer Moody, *The School of Good Manners* (Boston, 1775); see also William Smith, *Universal Love* (1668). 41-56.

¹⁰ See examples in John Witte, Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville, 1997).

¹¹ Anonymous, *Christian Instructions for Youth*, 2d rev. ed., trans. from French (London, 1821), p. 34; see also Richard Whitford, *The Werke for Householders* (1537), folios Ei-Fiii; Thomas Cobbett, *A Fruitful and Useful Discourse Touching the Honor Due from Children to Parents* (1656), pp. 9-68.

¹² Thomas Becon, *The Catechism of Thomas Becon* [c. 1560] (Cambridge 1844), p. 358.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁵ *Christian Instruction for Youth*, p. 34.

¹⁶ Samuel Phillips, *The Christian Home as it is in the Sphere of Nature and the Church* (New York, 1860), p. 218.

obedience”¹⁷ to her parents, often invoking the Commandment to "Honor your father and mother" and its elaborations in later biblical passages. The manuals required children to “obey your parents ... do what they command, and do it cheerfully. For your own hearts will tell you that this is a most natural extension of honor and love.”¹⁸ One manual went so far as to say that children “should have no other will” than the will of their parents, and thus, even those things that are good and righteous should not be undertaken without the consent of the parents.¹⁹ Luther explained the duty of love to parents thus: “God has exalted fatherhood and motherhood above all other relations under his scepter. This appears from the fact that he does not command merely to love the parents, but to honor them. As to our brothers, sisters, and neighbors, God generally commands nothing higher than that we love them. He thus distinguishes father and mother above all other persons upon earth and places them next to himself. It is a much greater thing to honor than to love.”²⁰ Thomas Becon nicely summed up the parameters of the duty of obedience: “Not only to give them outward reverence, to rise up unto them, to give them place, to put off our caps, to kneel unto them, to ask them blessing ... but also ... charitably to conceal and hide their faults, in all honest things to gratify them, in their need to help and succor them, and ... at all times to do all good things for them, whatsoever lieth in our power.”²¹

For most manualists, the one sentence commandment to "honor your father and mother" was the foundation for a whole range of forbidden activities from the obvious to the tenuously related: striking or kicking parents; desiring a parent's death; hating, mocking or deriding parents; angering parents; failing to help parents who are in poverty; paying offerings to the church; keeping fasting days; non-conformity with the divine rights of rulers; fostering unrest or treason against their own rulers or against their city; and depriving someone of an honor or a favor and keeping him from something he is entitled to out of “brotherly love.”²² As this list of proscriptions makes clear, the manuals extended the duty to honor and obey parents to all other earthly authority figures. As the German Catholic Dietrich Kolde put it in *A Fruitful Mirror* (1470), this commandment “requires and teaches us to assist and serve our parents with a loving heart, a polite mouth, and a respectful body. This applies not only to our natural parents, but also to spiritual and earthly authorities.”²³

Obedience to parents requires submission to Christian correction. Children have a duty to submit to punishment when it is deserved and must not resent their parents for

¹⁷ Francis Wayland, “Early Training of Children” in *The Fireside Miscellany; and Young People’s Encyclopedia* (February, 1864), pp. 60-61.

¹⁸ W.E. Channing, *The Duties of Children* (Boston: 1807), p. 5; see also Cobbett, *A Fruitful and Useful Discourse*, pp. 69-127; W.C., *A School of Nurture for Children: The Duty of Children in Honoring their Parents* (1656), 1-62.

¹⁹ William Fleetwood, *The Relative Duties of Parents and Children* (London, 1716), pp. 2-3.

²⁰ Luther, *Large Catechism*, p. 66.

²¹ Becon, *Catechism*, p. 85.

²² Kolde, *A Fruitful Mirror* (1470), in *Three Reformation Catechisms: Catholic, Anabaptist, Lutheran*, ed. and trans. Denis Janz (New York, 1982). pp. 55-56.

²³ *Ibid.*

punishing them.²⁴ One manual warned: “Forget not, young people, that your parents and masters have a right to correct you. They are bound to correct you, when you deserve it; should a slight correction in this case be not sufficient, it is their duty to use more severity.” Children are expected to love parents for correcting them because “they correct you solely for your good, and to make you discreet and virtuous.”²⁵ Some manuals took this duty further: “Should you not perchance have deserved that correction, suffer it patiently, remembering that it is less than your sins deserve; and that Jesus Christ, though innocent, suffered without complaint the torment of the cross, and death itself.”²⁶ As we shall note further below, this duty of obedience even in the face of abuse was dangerous instruction in a world where children were abused, tortured, and sometimes fell to “death itself” at the hands of their parents. The danger of children thinking that their Christian duty required them to suffer at the hands of tyrannical parents is further complicated by instructions throughout the manuals to “charitably to conceal and hide” their parents’ “faults.”²⁷

Obedience also requires that a child attend school and aim constantly for excellence in both spiritual and secular education. The manuals frequently admonished children, for their parents' sake, to work at school and aim at high standards of intellectual power and attainment. In the early manuals, this duty was simply one derived from obedience and the obligation to learn about God. Later manuals however, tied the need for good education to the child’s duty to fulfill her social responsibility as well as her duty to find a calling which should help her recompense her parents should they fall into poverty or need aid in old age.

The duty to obey requires a child to seek the consent of his or her parents to court and marry another. Marriages without parental consent violate the law of God, both Catholic and Protestant manuals insisted repeatedly.²⁸ The ultimate authority for choosing at least a minor child’s spouse rests with the parents. The child’s wishes must be considered, Anglican preacher William Fleetwood advised in *The Relative Duties of Parents and Children* (1716), for children must have a say “with whom they are to live and die” and “with whom they are to venture being happy or unhappy all their days.”²⁹ But, while parents are encouraged to respect their child's wishes, the parents' decision is absolute, and an obedient Christian child is ultimately bound by their decision.

Respect. The heart of the duty to honor and obey is to have respect for one's parents and other superiors -- to develop what the popular American manualist William Ellery Channing called a “submissive deportment.”³⁰ Channing explained in *The Duties*

²⁴ Henry Dixon, *The English Instructor* (Boston: 1746), p. 55; see also Richard Baxter, *Rules and Directions for Family Duties* (1681); Anonymous, *True and Faithful Discharge of Relative Duties* (1683); John Gother, *Instructions for Children* (1698); Benjamin Wadsworth, *The Well-Ordered Family* (1712), pp. 90-102; *Christian Instructions for Youth* (1821), pp. 51-55.

²⁵ *Christian Instructions for Youth*, p. 36.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁷ Becon, *Catechism*, p. 85.

²⁸ Fleetwood, *Relative Duties*, pp. 32-33.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁰ Canning, *Duties of Children*, p. 3.

of *Children* (1807) that “[y]our tender, inexperienced age requires that you think of yourselves with humility ... that you respect the superior age and wisdom and improvements of your parents” and “express your respect for [parents] in your manner and conversation. Do not neglect those outward signs of dependence and inferiority which suit your age.” Such outward signs include a requirement to “ask instead of demand what you desire,” and because children “have much to learn” they should “hear instead of seeking to be heard.” Channing was not arguing for a “slavish fear” of parents: “Love them and love them ardently; but mingle a sense of their superiority with your love. Feel a confidence in their kindness; but let not this confidence make you rude and presumptuous, and lead to indecent familiarity. Talk to them with openness and freedom; but never contradict with violence; never answer with passion or contempt.”³¹

Learning parental respect is a foundational duty of the child, because respecting parents eventually translates into learning the good manners, restraint, and decorum that are essential for later success in church, state, and society. To cultivate this respect, the manuals sometimes went to great lengths to dictate every aspect of the child’s manners and accompanying emotions preparing the child for the norms and habits of adult life. In many of these manuals, the litany of duties is almost overwhelming: be pious, work in school with all your heart, beware of being beaten and corrected, do not offend the schoolmaster or schoolmates in word or deed, read continually, be eloquent in speech and writing, go hastily home from school each day without tarrying, learn the catechisms, pray often, honor the Sabbath, do household chores, set the table for dinner, keep yourself upright and proper at the table, walk modestly, avoid “unchaste women,” dress neither too sumptuously nor too poorly, study diligently, avoid evil persons -- and the list goes on.

Eleazer Moody's wildly popular *The School of Good Manners* first published in the United States in 1715, outlines 163 rules for children’s behavior -- 14 rules for behavior at home, 43 for the table, 10 for at church, 41 for company or in public, 28 for speaking to superiors, and 13 for school. The directives range from the impossible (“approach near thy parents at no time without a bow”), to the practical dinner table instruction (“take no salt with a greasy knife”), to the amusing (“throw not anything under the table”), to the improbable (“be not hasty to run out” out of church “when worship is ended, as if weary of being there”).³² The *Christian Instructions for Youth* (1821) devoted 258 pages to the duties of young persons ranging from how they should honor their parents, to how they should take correction, to the means of preserving their chastity, to choosing and maintaining friendships. Good manners also included a range of simple rules of etiquette: taking care to clean one’s body, covering with clean and modest apparel, keeping elbows off the table at dinner, not drinking wine and ale excessively and preferably not at all, purity of speech in all encounters (not to swear,

³¹ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

³² Moody, *School of Good Manners*, pp. 7-8, 11-12.

interrupt, or speak of vile things), not contending with another, humility, keeping to one's own affairs, and ignoring information one should not have overheard.³³

According to many household manuals, humble and limited speech is a critical characteristic of a good and respectful Christian child. Evil speech and swearing are telltale signs of inner impurities and utter disrespect. But early manuals also warned children to limit their chatter (whether pure or not), speaking to their parents and other adults only when absolutely necessary. Out of the duty of obedience and good manners, children were also required to listen attentively to parents and never to speak to them with derision or mocking tones. Luther remarked that honoring parents requires "that they be esteemed and prized above everything else as the most precious treasure we have on earth. That, in conversation with them, we measure our words, lest our language be discourteous, domineering, quarrelsome, yielding to them in silence, even if they do go too far."³⁴

Some of the early household manuals called for a child to have complete control over his or her emotions in order to demonstrate this requisite respect. In his *Little Book of Good Manners* (1554), the great Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus called children's to be "merry and joyful" at the dinner table, and never "heavy-hearted." In his *The Civility of Childhood* (1560), Erasmus admonished children not to be "angry" when corrected or to "rejoice" when praised, for such habits were not becoming of a "courteous Christian child."³⁵ The child's duties to honor, love, obey, and respect parents, Erasmus insisted, require a child to exert and exercise full control over his emotional state, requiring tenderness in place of torment, happiness in place of heartache, and delight in place of despair.

Respect and Recompense. This calling of the child to respect parents continued into adulthood, even after the duty to obey parents in daily life had expired. American writer Timothy Shay Arthur made this point in his *Advice to Young Men on Their Duties and Conduct in Life* (1848), a highly popular manual, and often reprinted on both sides of the Atlantic: "Although the attainment of mature age takes away the obligation of obedience to parents, as well as the right of dependence upon them, it should lessen in no way a young man's deference, respect, or affection."³⁶ William Blackstone wrote similarly in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765) that as children we owe our parents "subjection and obedience during our minority, and honor and reverence ever after."³⁷

One of the most important expressions of ongoing respect is the child's duty to "recompense his parents" for rearing him, especially if his parents fall ill or become

³³ See, e.g., Desiderius Erasmus, *A Little Book of Good Manners* (London, 1554); see also Desiderius Erasmus, *The Civility of Childhood* (1560); Robert Crowley, *The School of Virtue. . . Teaching Children and Youths Their Duties* (London, 1621); Robert Abbott, *A Christian Family Buildd by God* (London, 1653).

³⁴ Luther, *Large Catechism*, p. 66.

³⁵ Erasmus, *The Civility of Childhood*.

³⁶ T.S. Arthur, *Advice to Young Men on Their Duties and Conduct in Life* (Boston, 1848), p. 100.

³⁷ Blackstone, *Commentaries*, I.16.

poor. For younger children, the manuals insisted, the duty to recompense is bound up with the duty to obey. William Channing, for example, instructed children: "Do not expect that your parents are to give up every thing to your wishes; but study to give up every thing to theirs. Do not wait for them to threaten; but when a look tells you what they want, fly to perform it. This is the way in which you can best reward them for all their pains and labors."³⁸ The child's duty of recompense also requires "concealing, hiding, covering and interpreting all their parents' faults and vices." Further, it requires "never objecting nor upbraiding them by any thing done amiss; but quietly and patiently to bear all things at their hands, considering that in thus doing [children] greatly please God, and offer unto him an acceptable sacrifice." "It becometh a good and godly child not to display, but to conceal the faults of his father, even as he wishes that God should cover his own offenses."³⁹

For mature and emancipated children, the duty to recompense also requires them to give their parents aid, comfort, and relief in accordance with their own means and their parents' needs. The Catholic manualist Barthelemy Batt put it thus in *The Christian Man's Closet* (1581): "To honor parents is to relieve and nourish their parents in case they fall into poverty and decay. And when they are old, to guide, lead, and bear them on their shoulders if need be." If the parents "shall fall into any grievous sickness, poverty or extreme old age, it shall be the children's duty willingly to relieve and comfort them by all possible means."⁴⁰ Luther taught similarly that honor is due to parents by our actions, "both in our bearing and the extension of aid, serving, helping, and caring for them when they are old or sick, frail or poor; and that we not only do it cheerfully, but with humility and reverence, as if unto God. For he who is rightly disposed to his parents will never let them suffer want and hunger, but will place them above and beside himself, and share with them all he has to the best of his ability."⁴¹ Becon called for children "to requite their parents for ... [the] great benefits as they have received of God by them and their labors." And "if their parents be aged and fallen by their own industry and labor, then ought the children, if they will truly honor their parents, to labor for them, to see unto their necessity, to provide necessaries for them, and by no means, so much as in them is, to suffer them ... to lack for any good thing" because parents care and provide for children when they are unable to provide for themselves.⁴²

A child must discharge this duty of recompense even if the parent does not deserve or appreciate it. Recompense is due to parents "in their old age" even when they were "hard and cruel" earlier in life, or if they now betray "unwieldy crookedness," wrote Heinrich Bullinger, the sixteenth-century Swiss Protestant.⁴³ Luther counseled similarly that "even though [parents] may be lowly, poor, frail, and peculiar, they are still father and mother, given by God. Their way of living and their failings cannot rob them

³⁸ Channing, *Duties of Children*, p. 7.

³⁹ Becon, *Catechism*, p. 358.

⁴⁰ Barthelemy Batt, *The Christian Man's Closet* (London 1581), pp. 60-101, esp. 61, 71, 74.

⁴¹ Luther, *Large Catechism*, p. 66.

⁴² Becon, *Catechism*, p. 358.

⁴³ Heinrich Bullinger, *The Christen State of Matrimony Moost Necessary and Profitable for All*, trans. Miles Coverdale (n.p., 1546), p. ___.

of their honor."⁴⁴ Benjamin Wadsworth, American clergyman and later Harvard president, insisted in his *The Well-Ordered Family* (1712) that it was "a natural duty" for a child to take care of his parents, when they revert to the feeble and fragile state brought on by age and sickness, as a way of recompensing them for their earlier care of the child who was once just as feeble and fragile. You are "bound in duty and conscience" to "provide for them, nourish, support and comfort them."⁴⁵ "[T]he time is coming when your parents will need as much attention from you as you have received from them, and you should endeavor to form such industrious, obliging habits that you may render their last years as happy as they have rendered the first years of your existence."⁴⁶

The Duty (and the Right) to be Loved

The child's duty to love, honor, obey, respect, and recompense his or her parents and other guardians and loved ones was only one half of the domestic ethic envisioned by the household manuals. The manuals also spoke of a child's "duty to be loved" by his or her parents and others. The child was regarded as both an agent of love and an object of love -- one who discharged the duties of love and one who induced parents and others to discharge their reciprocal duties of love to that child. These twin duties of love *by* and *of* a child were interdependent. The child had to discharge his duties of love in part in order to make himself beloved and thus to become the object of the love of his parents. But these twin duties of love were not mutually conditional. The child had to discharge her duty of love to parents even if the parents did not or could not reciprocate. The parents, in turn, had to discharge their duty of love to the child, even if the child was incapacitated, recalcitrant, or unruly.

The later manuals sometimes put these duties of parental love for their children in sweeping emotional terms. T.S. Arthur's *Advice to Young Men on Their Duties and Conduct in Life* (1848), for example, described a mother's love thus: "She watched over you, loved you, protected and defended you; and all was from love—deep, pure, fervent love—the first love, and the most unselfish love that has or ever will bless you in this life, for it asked for and expected no return. *A mother's love!*—it is the most perfect reflection of the love of God ever thrown back from the mirror of the human heart."⁴⁷ Such talk of emotional love was largely absent from the earlier Catholic and Protestant household manuals. More typically, the duty of the child to be loved was expressed as the set of duties that Christian parents, guardians, and other members of the community had to rear and raise the child properly so that he could prepare properly for his Christian vocation.

The later manuals also sometimes translated the child's duty to be loved into the child's right to receive love, support, education, and nurture. As Charles Reid shows in his chapter herein, some medieval canonists and moralists spoke of the rights of the

⁴⁴ Luther, *Large Catechism*, p. 66.

⁴⁵ Benjamin Wadsworth, *The Well-Ordered Family, or Relative Duties* (Boston, 1712). pp. 98-99..

⁴⁶ Channing, *Duties of Children*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Arthur, *Advice to Young Men*, 101 (emphasis in original).

child in these terms.⁴⁸ None of the early household manuals that we have sampled, either Catholic or Protestant, spoke of “children’s rights.” In fact, this language was sometimes explicitly rejected. Anglican Bishop Jeremy Taylor, author of *Bishop Taylor’s Judgment Concerning the Power of Parents Over Their Children* (1696), for example, put it thus: “So long as the son is within the civil power of his Father, so long as he lives in his house, is subject to his command, is nourished by his father’s charge, [he] hath no distinct rights of his own, he is in his father’s possession, and to be reckoned by his measures.”⁴⁹ This was doubly true for daughters, whom the manualists and common lawyers alike readily treated as the property of their fathers and families.

Explicit talk of a child’s rights to the love and support of his or her parents entered the manual tradition only at the turn of the eighteenth century, and it remained controversial. An early example was the 300 page English manual, *The Infant’s Lawyer* (1697), which gave a detailed guide to the status of children at common law and contended that “the law protects children in their persons, preserves their rights and estates, executes their laches and assists them in their pleadings.”⁵⁰ This manual, which was largely a set of instructions to litigators, showed how children may not be convicted of felonies until “the age of discretion,” and how even minor children can be protected in their “estates and rights.”⁵¹ Such language became more popular with the rise of Enlightenment thought, particularly through the influence of John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, though, as we shall see, children’s rights language was sometimes staunchly resisted, especially by Protestant writers.

The manuals’ dominant genre was a discourse of parental duty to children. On the one hand, the manuals encouraged active parental involvement and attentiveness to children, and chastised parents for neglecting their children’s temporal and spiritual needs. On the other hand, the manuals increasingly sought to prohibit abusive parenting.

Parental Duties of Love. The manuals rooted the parent’s duty to love and care for their child in the Commandment that children must honor their fathers and mothers. The parent’s duty to the child was the correlative and complement to the duty that the child owed parents -- per this Commandment and many later biblical instructions for children.⁵² Luther put it thus: “Although the duty of superiors is not explicitly stated in the Ten Commandments, it is frequently dwelt upon in many other passages of Scripture, and *God intends it to be included even in this commandment, where he mentions father and mother.*” “God does not purpose to bestow the parental office and government upon rogues and tyrants; therefore, he does not give them that honor, namely, the power and authority to govern, merely to receive homage. Parents should

⁴⁸ See chapter by Charles J. Reid herein, and further exposition in Charles J. Reid, Jr., *Power Over the Body, Equality in the Family: Rights and Domestic Relations in Medieval Canon Law* (Grand Rapids, 2004), pp. 213ff.

⁴⁹ Jeremy Taylor, *Judgment Concerning the Power of Parents Over Their Children* (London: 1696).

⁵⁰ Anonymous, *The Infant’s Lawyer* (London, 1697), A2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

⁵² See the detailed biblical analysis in the chapter by Marcia Bunge herein, and in Marcia Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, 2000).

consider that they are under obligations to obey God and that, first of all, they are conscientiously and faithfully to discharge all the duties of their office; not only to feed and provide for the temporal wants of their children ... but especially to train them to the honor and praise of God.”⁵³ This was a typical sentiment of the household manuals, both Protestant and Catholic.

The manuals presented this parental duty to love their child as a duty owed first and foremost to God. A child is made in the image of God, and as one of God's own is to be embraced and loved as such. But the child is also made in the image of the parent, and thus to love and embrace that child is in a real sense, to love oneself. The duty to love one's child, therefore, is one of the most sublime gifts by which a parent can live out the primal command to love God, neighbor, and self at once.⁵⁴

Right rearing of children involves constant attentiveness, the manualists insisted. Parents must not be lulled into a sense that “the parental office is a matter of your pleasure and whim, but remember that God has strictly commanded it and entrusted it to you, and that for the right discharge of its duties you must give an account.” Parents are not blessed with children as merely “objects of mirth and pleasure” or “servants to use, like the ox or the horse.” Nor are parents to raise children “according to [their] own whims—to ignore them, in unconcern about what they learn or how they live.”⁵⁵ Children must not be neglected, but should be “objects of conscientious solicitude.” They must be cared for, but not coddled. “If we wish to have worthy, capable persons for both temporal and spiritual leadership, we must indeed spare no diligence, time or cost in teaching and educating our children to serve God and mankind.” Parents must know that, under the threat of “loss of divine grace,” their “chief duty is to rear ... children in the fear and knowledge of God; and, if they are gifted, to let them learn and study, that they may be of service wherever needed.” “The children ... we have are the children ... we [must] rear.” And, if we are negligent in this duty, not only will the child be harmed, but social discipline and peace will suffer.⁵⁶

The manuals focused on four main duties of love and attentiveness that parents must discharge for their children. First, a parent must instruct the child about God and God's commands -- by baptizing the children, taking them to church, and teaching them about sacramental and virtuous living, and guiding them through catechism to confirmation.⁵⁷ This duty, the manualists emphasized, begins as soon as the child is able to speak. In *Of Weddid Men and Wifis and of Here Children Also*, Wycliffe opined that the greatest downfall of parents is in tending more to the temporal than the spiritual welfare of their children.⁵⁸ Kolde's *Fruitful Mirror* emphasized that parents must

⁵³ Luther, *Large Catechism*, p. 77 (emphasis added).

⁵⁴ Kolde, *Fruitful Mirror*, 53ff; see also Richard Baxter, *Rules and Directions for Family Duties* (1681).

⁵⁵ Luther, *Large Catechism*, p. 77. See further such sentiments and other early Protestants in John Witte, Jr., *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 262-277.

⁵⁶ Luther, *Large Catechism*, p. 78.

⁵⁷ John Wycliffe, *Of Weddid Men and Wifis and of Here Children Also* (1390), reprinted in *Selected English Works of John Wyclif*, ed. Thomas Arnold (Oxford, 1871), pp. 195-197.

⁵⁸ Anonymous, *A Glass for Householders* (London, 1542), n.p.

discharge this first duty both by good instruction and by setting a good example of doing virtuous works. Parents must not curse, nag, or scold a child or do anything else to set a bad example for their children. Nor should they "constantly torment or beat or kick their children," thereby "inducing them to have evil thoughts." Kolde emphasized that "carelessness and neglect by parents who do not instruct their children well when they are young ... is the main reason why people are so evil in the world and why so many evil afflictions and plagues come over the world. When children grow up doing and being as they please, they are without fear and anxiety and shame. And so they remain hard-headed, horrible, obstinate and disobedient." When these children are grown, "they ruin their parents and themselves as well," becoming poor, criminal, and "often die in their sins and are damned. Thus they make themselves a whip and a rod to be beaten with."⁵⁹

This points to the second main parental duty, viz., of subjecting children to proper Christian discipline and correction. A few of the early manuals, both Catholic and Protestant, countenanced severe discipline and violence against children. John Bradford's *A Letter Sent to Master A.B. From the Most Godly and Learned Preacher I.B.* (1548), for example, advocated violent beatings of children, and called parents to be "deaf" to their cries and moans of pain even while whipping and scourging "not only until the blood runs down, but even until we have left wounds in the flesh." Bradford believed that severe discipline is the only way to save a rebellious child from eternal damnation. He adduced the Bible in support of his views. Deuteronomy 21:18-21,⁶⁰ he argued, gives parents the right to take their rebellious children of any age before the town's people who may stone them to death.⁶¹ While stoning may no longer be expedient, Bradford argued, this passage underscores that parents have absolute control over their children, including the power to "scourge" them severely as needed.

But even Rev. Bradford insisted that such harsh treatment be reserved only for the most rebellious child who was "more than twenty years old" and should by now know better. He further qualified his remarks by chastising the parents to whom he addressed his letter for failing to punish this particular son at a younger age, which would have spared all of them this later and greater severity of treatment: "If you had brought up your son with care and diligence, to rejoice in obedience toward his parents; and on the other side to be afraid to do evil and shun disobedience, and to fear the smart of correction, you would then have felt those comforts which happy parents receive from their good and honest children."⁶² Because these lax parents had allowed their child to "run the course of his own will" in his early years, and had "foolishly

⁵⁹ Kolde, *Fruitful Mirror*, pp. 114-115.

⁶⁰ Deuteronomy 21:18-21 (NRSV) reads: "If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father and mother, who does not heed them when they discipline him, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the gate of that place. They shall say to the elders of his town, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.'" Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death. So you shall purge the evil from your midst; and all Israel will hear, and be afraid."

⁶¹ John Bradford, *A letter Sent to Master A.B. from the Most Godly and Learned Preacher I.B.* (London, 1548), A-Cii (modernized spelling).

⁶² *Ibid.*

foregone to spend the sharp rods of correction on the naked flesh of his loins,” they were now required to save him from hell by making “his blood run[] down in streams, scourged loins, and forty days of pain.” Any further indulgence or forbearance would put their son “in hazards of bitter confusion” and most assuredly put them in judgment before the Lord for “carelessly and negligently bringing up their children.”

Most manualists, particularly by the sixteenth century, called for more “reasonable” forms of discipline and correction. A good early example was Alberti’s *Della Famiglia* (c. 1570). “Children must always be corrected in a reasonable manner, at times with severity, but always without anger or passion. We must never rage as some furious or impetuous [sic] fathers do, but must ... not punish anyone without first putting anger aside.” While, “[i]t is a father’s duty...to punish his children and make them wise and virtuous,” punishment must be “reasonable and just.” Similarly, William Gouge’s *Of Domestic Duties* (1622) taught that parental authority should evoke fear in children, but parental love should evoke affection in children. “Love, like sugar, sweetens fear, and fear like salt seasons love.”⁶³

The call for moderate and reasonable correction was even more pronounced in later manuals. In his *The Christian Home* (1860), for example, Samuel Phillips called parents to find a moderate middle between “over-indulgence” and “the iron rod of tyranny.” Parents must take steps to rule their households and execute their commands, or children will “end up ruling them.” But no household should feature “parental despotism,” “making slaves of children, acting the unfeeling and heartless tyrant over them ... and making them obey from motives of trembling fear and dread.” That is not only “un-Christian” but ineffective, said Phillips. Parental despotism engenders in children “the spirit of a slave” rooting out “all confidence and love,” and making their obedience “involuntary and mechanical.” A proper Christian home must find a middle way between these extremes: “It is mild, yet decisive,” and it is “not lawless, yet not despotic.” It “combines in proper order and harmony, the true elements of parental authority and filial subordination.” In the Christian home, “[l]ove and fear harmonize; the child fears because he loves; and is prompted to obedience by both.”

Phillips condemned those who favored severe corporal punishment in reliance on the Proverbial adage that “he that spareth the rod, spoileth the child.” The term “rod,” in this passage, he argued, does not necessarily mean “the iron rod of the unfeeling and unloving despot” but instead could be interpreted as the “rod of a compassionate father” who “does not always inflict corporal punishment,” and when he does, he does so out of love. Phillips argued that corporal punishment does more harm than good, resulting in “depravity” of character, resentment, and ultimately criminal acts against and by the children. “Christian correction is the interposition of love acting according to law in restraining the child.” We should “correct but not punish” our children in a manner where “true severity and true sympathy...unite and temper each other.”⁶⁴

⁶³ Leon Batista Alberti, *The Albertis of Florence: Leon Batista Alberti’s Della Famiglia*, trans. Guido A. Guarino (Lewisburg, Pa., 1971), pp. 74-77

⁶⁴ Phillips, *The Christian Home*, pp. 218-231.

Third, beyond the parental duties of divine instruction and Christian discipline, the manuals emphasized that parents must teach a child a “trade” or “occupation” -- or what the Protestant manualists frequently called “a divine calling” or “Christian vocation.”⁶⁵ Heinrich Bullinger’s instruction was quite typical. He emphasized that teaching a child a proper Christian vocation was a matter of “mutual discovery” for the parent and the child. Parents must observe and assess the child’s talents and inclinations, and prepare and place the child in the occupation for which the child is best suited. This vocation should be one that is not only most conducive to the child’s abilities and interests but also the “most profitable and necessary” for the church and commonwealth. One of the chief parental responsibilities is to “place his children with expert and cunning workmen” who will “teach them some handicraft” and livelihood -- or, as later manualists emphasized, to place them in a school to train them for their proper vocation. Placement in a job or a school should be determined by the “children’s wit” and aptitude, and by mutual determination of where children would find the “most delight.”⁶⁶

Consideration of what vocation would bring the child the “most delight” became more explicit in later manuals – but principally for males. Most of the manuals restricted young women only to the vocation of being a wife and mother -- or a nun or religious servant in a few of the late medieval Catholic manuals. Rather than seeking a vocation “most profitable and necessary for the commonwealth,” the manuals encouraged that parents place daughters in a vocation “profitable for the family.”

Fourth, the manuals emphasized the parent’s duty to find a suitable mate for their children, the reciprocal of the child’s duty to procuring parental consent before marriage. Bullinger insisted that while children “must” not marry without parental consent, “[s]o *should* not the parents without any pity compel their children to marry before their time, nor wickedly neglect them, nor leave them unprovided for in due season.”⁶⁷ This was a common sentiment in early modern Protestant and post-Tridentine Catholic circles that insisted on parental consent for valid marital formation.⁶⁸ While the children “must” obey parents in this matter, at least when they are minors, the parents “should” act reasonably. Children objecting to their parent’s choice of a mate should do so “comely and with good manner,” and recognize that the parental word is final in the matter.⁶⁹ Similarly, Nathaniel Cotton’s *Visions for the Entertainment and Instruction of Young Minds* warned young women “impatient of a parent’s rule” not to rush into marriage without parental permission. Such foolish “rebels,” Cotton warned, will only suffer a “joyless” life and, to add insult to injury, will become “barren.”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Batt, *Christian Man’s Closet*, p. 65; Bullinger, *Christen State*, pp. lxix-lxxii.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*; Henry Bullinger, “The Fifth Precept of the Ten Commandments” [c. 1542] in *Decades of Henry Bullinger, Second Decade* (Cambridge, 1849), pp. 267-298.

⁶⁷ Bullinger, *Christen State*, xv-xviii (emphasis added).

⁶⁸ See examples in Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*; John Witte, Jr. and Robert M. Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin’s Geneva I: Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage* (Grand Rapids, 2005), pp. 165-201.

⁶⁹ Bullinger, *Christen State*, xv-xvii.

⁷⁰ Nathaniel Cotton, *Visions for the Entertainment and Instruction of Young Minds* (Exeter, N.H., 1794), p. 76.

Evolving Ideals

Gender Roles. Not surprisingly, the manuals revealed the common double standards for men and women that prevailed in late medieval and early modern society. While much of the language in the household manuals was gender neutral and addressed to “children” or “youths,” the manuals were directed principally at young men – as is clear from the prevalent warnings against “whoremongering” with women and proper habits of courting women. When the manuals did distinguish between gender roles, they generally called boys to learn to be bold and courageous and girls to be fearful and gentle. A 1542 manual made the father primarily responsible for rearing courageous and God-fearing young men and the mother responsible to raise gentle and virtuous females: “So in women ... there is nothing more laudable than fearfulness and gentleness of manner. To the mother, your wife, give charge to do her duty in bringing up your women children virtuously and in the law and fear of God, as you do the men children.”⁷¹

The Christian Man’s Closet (1581), set out a typical list of duties that were “especially applicable to daughters.” These include: (1) speaking and understanding (that is learning) only about the fear of God; (2) not using filthy words; (3) modesty in appearance (meaning limited makeup and natural hair color); (4) avoiding wine and overindulgence in food; (5) learning to make woolen and linen cloth; (6) donning appropriate apparel without focus on silks; and (7) avoiding unvirtuous (“light”) maidens.⁷² Typically, in the early manuals, the duties of young women also included “shamefastness,” meekness, chastity, modesty, “sadness,” and sobriety. The most important thing for a daughter to learn and to be taught, the manuals emphasized, is “how to please her husband through gentle behavior, discrete conversation, prudence, wisdom, and virtue.” As to education, “[d]aughters should be instructed in prayer and Christian knowledge, but should not be too busy in teaching and reasoning openly.”⁷³

A few of the manualists had other vocations in mind for young women beyond demure marriage and dutiful motherhood. Juan Luis Vives' *Instruction of a Christian Woman* (1523), which appeared in some forty editions, was a good early example. Vives, a Spanish humanist and philosopher, recognized that many young women would pursue marriage, and their mothers had to teach them the proper ways and means of “keeping and ordering of a house.” But other women “are born unto [learning], or at least not unfit for it.” They were “not to be discouraged, and those that are apt should be heartened and encouraged.” Vives acknowledged that “learned women are suspect to many.” Thus “young women shall only study that which leads to good manners, informs her living and teaches the ways of a holy and good life.” Eloquence and learnedness, while not necessary among women, is only shameful when it leads to indiscretion or deceit. Above all, women need goodness and wisdom. However, a

⁷¹ Anonymous, *A Glass for Householders* (1542), n.p. (modernized spelling).

⁷² Batt, *Christian Man’s Closet*, 75-76.

⁷³ Bullinger, *Christen State*, p. __ (modernized spelling).

woman is never to teach, because she is a “fragile thing,” and, “like Eve,” may be deceived by a weak argument.⁷⁴ These were only dim foreshadowings of the more ambitious vocations and aspirations for girls and young women projected by nineteenth and twentieth-century feminist writers.

Enlightenment Influences. John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) challenged many of the traditional notions of childhood, child rearing, and education. Locke advocated much more intimacy between parents and children. He rejected the idea that the child is marred by original sin, and instead saw the child as a free form ready to be shaped by experience and education. The parent’s role was to guide and mediate those experiences for the benefit of the child. Education of children, Locke argued, is not simply for acquiring knowledge, but especially for building a virtuous and useful character. “Virtue is harder to be got than knowledge of the world; and, if lost in a young man, is seldom recovered.” The aim of education is not simply knowledge, but to teach a child how to live life, and to live it well. Locke urged parents to teach their children self-discipline so that corporal punishment would be unnecessary. “I told you before that children love *liberty* and therefore they should be brought to do the things that are fit for them without feeling any restraint laid upon them. I now tell you they love something more: and that is *dominion*.” He urged parents to restrain a child’s cravings and desires by not giving in to the child’s every whim.⁷⁵

While Locke’s treatise on education made a splash, Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762) changed the tide of childhood education. Rousseau wrote: “Everything is good coming from the Creator, everything degenerates at the hands of men.” Thus a child ought to be free to experience life in every respect irrespective of potential harm, for a child’s “joy of freedom compensates for many injuries.” Rousseau criticized the heavily duty-bound ethic of earlier household manuals, catechisms, and educational texts; parents and others, he insisted, should “[n]ever tell the child what he cannot understand.”⁷⁶ He minimized the importance of book learning, and promoted instead the idea of educating a child’s emotions and affections. Rousseau urged parents and teachers to focus on the passionate side of the child’s human nature, something that earlier teachings had neglected, in his view. Like Locke, he specially recognized the virtue of a child’s learning through experience -- by trial and error, experiment and failure.

Rousseau’s Enlightenment ideas of children and their education were highly controversial in their day, but they slowly found their way into the household manual tradition. Enos Weed’s *The Educational Directory* (1803), for example, echoed Rousseau in arguing for a less rigid educational structure. Children should be exposed to a variety of experiences, and they must be allowed to question parents, teachers, and other authorities, especially as they grow older. Furthermore, while parents have a duty to correct children in all manner of wrongs, Weed warned against strict punishment. Good parenting requires taming an unruly will without breaking a child’s spirit. A child’s

⁷⁴ Juan Luis Vives, *Instruction of a Christian Woman* (London, 1585), pp. 8, 18, 25-30, 322.

⁷⁵ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (London, 1693), secs. 54-69.

⁷⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (Paris, 1769), pp. 292ff.

“trifling playish temper and disposition,” which had been stifled by the strict traditional requirements, “should be encouraged, as being beneficial to them.”

Weed, like Rousseau, criticized the heavily duty-bound ethic of the earlier manual tradition, calling for “very few” rules, lest the child's "natural development" be impaired and impeded. He had little sympathy for traditional instruction in decorum, etiquette, and manners, for this endless “heaping on them a large number of rules about their putting off their hats or making legs or courtesies” are mere “outward gestures to the neglect of their minds.” Weed also railed against the earlier manualists’ calls for emotional control of children, advising instead that children “should always ... speak and act according to the true sentiments of their hearts.” He despised compulsory use of courteous addresses made “for show and not from affection.” Children should be free to express themselves to parents and other superiors according to the “true sentiments of their heart.”⁷⁷

Weed did not fully dispense with tradition. He thought that moderate corporal punishment to correct a child when necessary is best. He counseled that children should not be indulged in all their desires, and they should be taught to dress modestly, eat moderately, and avoid wicked speech and actions. Parents should likewise provide a good example for their children, a common theme of the earlier manuals.

Tennessee Celeste Cook went further in her chapter on children in *Constitutional Equality a Right of Woman* (1871). Cook was a feminist writer and reformer, most popular because her sister was the first woman to run for president of the United States. Cook wrote: “The teachings of Christianity are well; they have been taught persistently. But we have now arrived at that practical age of the world which demands adequate results as proofs of the validity of assumed positions.” Among other things, practice has proved that while parental education and proper rearing of children are essential, “society is responsible for the character of the children which it rears.” Heretofore, the household manuals had stressed the personal responsibility of the parent in rearing children, and the personal responsibility of the child to be well taught. Cook, following Rousseau and Locke, made this a paramount social duty as well, particularly through widespread schooling for young men and women.

Traditional schools, Cook argued, had failed to educate children in their duties as citizens of humanity: “We are arguing ... [for] the rights of children ... which shall make every child, male and female, honorable and useful members of society.... Scarcely any of the [traditional] practices of education ... in regard to children are worthy of anything but the severest condemnation.” Ignoring the child’s “inherent rights,” traditional schools cultivate virtues and “affections to the exclusion of all reason and common sense. They forget that the human is more than an affectional being; that he has other than family duties to fulfill, and that he belongs to humanity.” Especially with respect to young women, Cook insisted, “[v]ery much of the fashionable external nonsense, which forms so great a part of young ladies’ education might well be dispensed with, and they,

⁷⁷ Enos Weed, *The Educational Directory Designed for the Use of Schools and Private Families* (New York, 1803), pp. 21-22.

instead, be instructed in their mission as the artists of humanity; artists not merely in form and feature, but in that diviner sense of intellectual soul.” Cook viewed all children, male and female, as having both the ability and the responsibility to contribute to the common good. Indeed, she went so far as to urge the state to take children from parents not best suited to raise them in a vocation good for the commonwealth. “To make the best citizens of children, then, is the object of education, and in whatever way this can be best attained, that is the one which should be pursued, even if it be to the complete abrogation of the present supposed rights of parents to control them.”⁷⁸

While Weed and Cook were more radical than most, a number of more traditional manualists did absorb some of the Enlightenment concern for greater gender equality and greater respect for children’s rights. A good example was the *Christian Home as it is in the Sphere of Nature and the Church* (1860), authored by American minister Samuel Phillips. Phillips called the Christian home “a little commonwealth jointly governed by the parents,” rather than principally governed by the paterfamilias. It is “the right of the parents to command; and the duty of the child to obey,” he insisted. But “parental authority” must be limited, and parents must not “enact arbitrary laws.” While they should not be “despotic” to their children, they must also not be “indifferent” or “permit children to do as they please, and to bring them up under the influence of domestic libertinism.” While children must obey their parents, “obedience of the child is not that of the servile, trembling subject.” This “is not unnatural” and results in “no infringement upon the rights and liberties of the child” because “[h]is subordination to the parent is the law of his liberty.” Indeed, “he is not free without it.”⁷⁹ According to Phillips, a home “destitute of reciprocated affection” between parent and child is lacking Christian family values.

Some Christian manualists were more critical of these new Enlightenment views. For example, John Wesley, the father of Methodism, derided Rousseau’s *Emile* as “the most empty, silly, injudicious thing that ever a self-conceited infidel wrote.” Upon reading Rousseau on matters of education, Wesley harshly commented, surely “a more consummate coxcomb never saw the sun!”⁸⁰ Joseph Benson’s *Hymns for Children*, collected from the works of John Wesley, included this hymn entitled “Obedience to Parents,” to be sung in services and Sunday schools: “Children your parents’ will obey, the Lord commands it to be done; and Those that from the precept stray, To misery and ruin run.... The disobedient children meet the vengeance of the Lord Most High; His curse pursues their wand’ring feet, And ere they reach their prime,—they die!”⁸¹

New Protestant Emphases. While early manuals did speak of obedience to the political authorities as an extension of the duty of obedience owed to parents, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American Protestant household manuals placed

⁷⁸ Tennessee Celeste Cook, *Constitutional Equality a Right of Woman* (New York, 1871), pp. 130-147.

⁷⁹ Phillips, *The Christian Home*, pp. 213-217 (emphases added).

⁸⁰ John Wesley, “Entry of February 3, 1770,” in John Wesley, *Journal and Diaries*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), vol. 5, p. 214.

⁸¹ Joseph Benson, *Hymns for Children* (London: Geo. Story, 1806), p. 32.

increasing stress on patriotism as a duty of children, especially young men.⁸² Samuel Deane's *Four Sermons to Young Men* (1774), for example, instructed young men thus: "It is glorious to love your country. It is fashionable to profess this love. It is necessary that you abound in it, in the present distressed and alarming state of our public affairs. You can in no way so much befriend your country, I am sure, as by your being truly religious."⁸³ Similarly, Arminius Calvinus' *First Principles of our Religious and Social Duties* (1795) urged young men to esteem and emulate the virtues of love of country, exemplified by President George Washington, so that "future ages know his worth and venerate his memory."⁸⁴

Likewise, while earlier manuals stressed good manners, affections, and recompense toward parents, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century manuals laid increasing stress on a child's charitable duties to others. John Barnard's *Discourses on the Great Concern of Parents and the Important Duty of Children* (1737) urged children to "cultivate and improve their natural disposition to pity and compassion." Charity was to be exercised in "inward affection" by showing love for God and all humanity, but especially to the "church family."⁸⁵ Charity also requires outward affection in the form of counseling and relieving the poor. Focusing more on the financial aspects of charity, Henry Dixon' *The English Instructor* (1746) required children to give to the poor as they are able.⁸⁶

Summary and Conclusions

"We must not forget one very important admonition, which should be frequently inculcated to young students; that is, to pray often and fervently to God for his grace to know their vocation."⁸⁷ Amidst a litany of instructions, copious "how to's" and multitudes of good manner books, this simple counsel is the most timeless teaching of the household manuals.

The foundation of a child's Christian vocation is the love of God, most manuals insisted. The child truly loves God by living a life in profound, awe-filled reverence to God. This love for God involves a tenderness of feeling and a deep personal attachment to God that flows from God's power and majesty as the giver and sustainer of life. Love of God, in accordance with the first commandment of the First Table of the Decalogue, leads a child to honor of parents, in accordance with the first commandment of the Second Table. Children are called to obey and respect their parents as a gift of God, to accept their correction and direction in life and learning, to cultivate the habits and manners of Christian living, to offer them recompense and support in their time of

⁸² See e.g. Arminius Calvinus, *A Catechism Containing the First Principles of Religious and Social Duties* (Boston, 1795), p. 16.

⁸³ Samuel Deane, *Four Sermons to Young Men* (Salem, 1774), p. 30.

⁸⁴ Calvinus, *Catechism*, p. 18.

⁸⁵ John Barnard, *Discourses on the Great Concern of Parents and the Natural Duty of Children* (Boston, 1737), pp. 57-58.

⁸⁶ Henry Dixon, *The English Instructor* (Boston, 1746), p. 11.

⁸⁷ *Christian Instructions for Youth*, p. 252.

need, to accept their counsel in choosing a mate and in preparing for their own vocation in church, state, family, and society.

The child's duty to honor and obey his or her parents also defines the parent's duty to nurture and educate their child. Parents are called to cherish their children as divine gifts who are images both of God and of themselves. They are to protect and support their children in their infancy, to teach them by word and example the norms and habits of the Christian life, to offer them correction and discipline, to prepare them for independence, and to direct them in their marriages and in their Christian vocations as adults.

Though sometimes quaint and idealistic, and occasionally offensive to modern ears, some of the lessons of these historical household manuals still ring true for young men and women struggling to find their direction and vocation in a world of conflicting loyalties and duties. On a practical level, the requirement that children be modestly dressed and primed says much to a culture numbed by the latest designer fashions for children. Cautions about moderation in food and drink provide an important message for a society with nearly half of its children suffering from obesity. The repeated instruction for children to work hard in school and to prepare for a vocation that serves the common good is good counsel for children who neglect or despise their education or parents who treat the school as a convenient child warehouse and day care center. For the older child, the duty to recompense, care, and honor parents in old age is a valuable lesson as aged parents struggle on social security or live their twilight years lonely and isolated in nursing homes. On a social level, the requirement of parental attentiveness and attention to children alerts parents of the dangers of placing other vocational duties before their principal vocation as a parent.

There is also a hard, but enduring, lesson in the traditional teaching that the duties of love by and for a child are mutually dependent, but not mutually conditional. The manuals make clear that the failure of the parent does not alter the duties of the child to that parent. Indeed, a parent's failure increases, rather than diminishes, the child's duties to irresponsible parents. Children reared by wicked, abusive or drunkard parents, the manuals emphasize, must cover up the faults of their parents and "meekly" admonish them to return to their duties. A Christian child must fulfill her duties to God, including the duty to honor and love her father and mother, even if the parents are undeserving. This traditional teaching goes entirely against modern views that children are less culpable for their personal failures when they suffer from poor parenting. The household manuals call children to rise above poor parenting, to set aside excuses, and to fulfill their duties of love, even when they are hated and despised. Their duty of love to God demands no less. Overcoming child adversity and taking responsibility can be a source of great empowerment. When the child understands that she belongs to God, she also realizes that her vocation belongs to her. Outside forces do not absolve the child of her duty, but they also cannot deprive the child of her vocation.

The rich history in the household manual tradition reminds us of something else that we might be apt to forget in a modern Western world voracious in its appetites for

latest technological innovations. Reading these manuals allows our minds drift to a historical place where father, mother, son, and daughter taught and learned the Christian traditions together by the soft glow of candlelight at the common dinner table. There is a great benefit to be derived from the familial bonds created by dinner conversations rather than by T.V. dinners, as several recent social science studies again underscore.⁸⁸ The unspoken, unwritten, and invaluable lesson of the household manual tradition lies in how those lessons were transmitted—a direct and loving line of communication between parents and children that requires the sacrifice and commitment of all parties.

⁸⁸ See the summary of recent research on the importance of family table talk by Robyn Fivush, “The Family Narratives Project: Building Strength Through Stories” (March 23, 2005). (www.law.emory.edu/csrlr/Fivushtext.pdf).

APPENDIX A: List of Sampled Manuals in Order of Publication

- John Wyclif, Of Weddid Men and Wifis and of Here Children Also (1390)
- Kolde, A Fruitful Mirror (1470)
- Jacque LeGrand, A Little Book of Good Manners (1498)
- Martin Luther, The Law, Faith, and Prayer (1517)
- William Harrison, Condemnations of Matrimony (1528)
- Martin Luther, Small Catechism (1529)
- Martin Luther, Large Catechism (1529)
- Richard Whitford, The Werke for Householders (1537)
- Anonymous, A Glass for Householders (1542)
- Anonymous, L'Instruction des Enfans (1543)
- Bullinger, The Christen State of Matrimony (1546)
- John Bradford, A Letter Sent to Master A.B. (1548)
- Erasmus of Rotterdam, A Little Book of Good Manners (1554)
- Erasmus of Rotterdam, The Civility of Childhood (1560)
- Leon Batista Alberti of Florence, Della Famiglia (?)
- Barthelemy Batt, The Christian Man's Closet (1581)
- Richard Greenham, A Godly Exhortation & Fruitful Admonition to Virtuous Parents and Modest Matrons (1584)
- Juan Luis Vives, Instruction of a Christian Woman (1585)
- Pierre Viret, The School of Beasts (The Good Householder) (1585)
- Henry Smith, A Preparative to Marriage (1591)
- Dudley Fenner, The Order of Household Government (1592)
- Robert Cleaver, A Godly Form of Household Government (1598)

Stefano Guazzo, The Court of Good Counsel (1607)

William Perkins, Christian Oeconomie (1609)

William Phiston, School of Good Manner (1609)

Edward Topsell, The Householder (1610)

William Martyn, Youth's Instruction (1612)

Leonard Wright, A Display of Duty (1614)

Robert Crowley, The School of Virtue . . . Teaching Children and Youths their Duties (1621)

William Gouge, Of Domestical Duties (1622)

Thomas Carter, Carter's Christian Commonwealth (1627)

William Lily, The Fairest Faring for a School-Bred Son (1630)

Matthew Griffeth, Bethel: A Form for Families (1633)

Henry Peacham, The Complete Gentleman (1634)

Thomas Ridley, A View of the Civil and Ecclesiastical Law (1634)

Baron William Burghley, Directions for the Well-Ordering and Carriage of a Man's Life (1636)

Robert Abbott, A Christian Family Buildded by God (1653)

Thomas Cobbett, A Fruitful and Useful Discourse Touching the Honor Due from Children to Parents (1656)

John Horn, Brief Instructions for Children (1656)

W.C., A School of Nurture for Children: The Duty of Children in Honoring their Parents (1656)

William Smith, Universal Love (1668)

Joseph Church, The Christian's Daily Monitor (1669)

Owen Stockton, A Treatise of Family Instruction (1672)

Peter Du Moulin, Directions for the Education of a Young Prince till Seven Years of Age (1673)

R. Mayhew, The Young Man's Guide to Blessedness (1677)

Samuel Crossman, The Whole Duty of Youth (1678)

Richard Baxter, Rules & Directions for Family Duties (1681)

Edward Lawrence, Parents' Groans over their Wicked Children (1681)

George Fox, The State of the Birth, Temporal and Spiritual (1683)

Anonymous, True and Faithful Discharge of Relative Duties (1683)

Henry Swinburne, A Treatise of Spousals (1686)

William Smythies, Advice to Apprentices and Other Young Persons (1687)

John Hart, The School of Grace (1688)

Bishop Jeremy Taylor, Judgment Concerning the Power of Parents over their Children (1690)

John Locke, Inculcating Self-Discipline (1690)

Lancelot Addison, The Christian's Manual in Three Parts (1691)

John Hawkins, The English School-master Completed (1692)

Oliver Heywood, Advice to an Only Child (1693)

John Locke, Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693)

James Kirkwood, A New Family Book (Advice to Parents) 1693

James Kirkwood, Advice to Children (1693)

Anonymous, The Infant's Lawyer (1697)

John Gother, Instructions for Children (1698)

Church of England Catechism from Book of Common Prayer (1698)

Cotton Mather, A Family Well-Ordered (1699)

Benjamin Wadsworth, The Well-Ordered Family (1712)

William Fleetwood, The Relative Duties of Parents & Children (1716)

Benjamin Bass, Parents and Children Advised and Exhorted to their Duty (1729)

William Cooper, Serious Exhortations Addressed to Young Men (1732)
The New England Primer Enlarged (1735)

John Barnard, Discourses on . . . the Important Duty of Children (1737)

Henry Dixon, The English Instructor (1746)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Emile (1769)

Samuel Deane, Four Sermons to Young Men (1774)

Eleazar Moody, The School of Good Manners (1775)

Shippie Townsend, Practical Essay: Part III—An Inquiry into the case of Children (1783)

Nathaniel Cotton, Visions for the Entertainment and Instruction of Young Minds (1794)

Arminius Calvinus, A Catechism containing the First Principles of Religious and Social Duties (1795)

John Willison, The Mother's Catechism (1795)

Enos Hitchcock, The Parents Assistant (1796)

Enos Weed, The Educational Directory (1803)

Joseph Benson, Hymns for Children (1806)

W.E. Channing, Sermon Delivered on Lord's Day (1812)

Christian Instructions for Youth (1821)

Francis West, The Responsibilities and Duties of Children of Religious Parents (1837)

Lydia H. Sigourney, Do Your Duty to Your Brothers and Sisters in *Youth's Magazine* (1837)

Thomas Becon, The Catechism (1844)

Mark Trafton, The Duties and Responsibilities of Young Men (1845)

Thomas Becon, The Principles of Christian Religion

T.S. Arthur, Advice to Young Men on their Duties and Conduct in Life (1848)

Henry Bullinger, The Fifth Precept of the Ten Commandments in Decades of Henry Bullinger, Second Decade (1849)

Horace Bushnell, A Milder and Warmer Family Government in Christian Nurture (1849)

Sara Willis Payton, Children's Rights in Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio (1853)

Francis Wayland, Early Training of Children in *The Fireside Miscellany* (1854)

Alfred Beach, A Sermon Addressed to Parents (1858)

Samuel Phillips, The Christian Home (1860)

Rev. Daniel Wis--, The Young Man's Counselor (1865)

Lady Tennessee Celeste Cook, Constitutional Equality a Right of Woman (1871)

Robert Speer, A Young Man's Questions (1903)