

The use of the Christian Home

by Mrs. C. W. M. Argent

A home is ideally a place where two people live together making a common life, each finding in the common experience fulfilment and happiness—a place from which they can go with the strength to meet the day, and to which they return to find peace and renewal together. A Christian home is this, plus the added depth which comes from the knowledge that the Lord is there, to Whom both partners owe a first loyalty—before even their loyalty to one another.

The Christian marriage is subject to all the hazards of any other marriage. A Christian wife does not get any less tired in caring for small children, nor does her housekeeping money stretch any further. In fact the very reality of their dedication may bring to a Christian couple strains which others do not have to cope with, for instance, where a husband feels he should do a good deal of work outside the home, leaving the wife with the main burden of domestic detail, and the loss of her husband's company quite often. But the Christian couple know where to turn for help in the small and practical details of their life together, as well as in the big issues.

Most Christian couples want their home to be a centre of witness, and there are many diverse ways in which this can be a reality.

Most couples who have any interest in youth work will know how necessary it is to have an open door, for their house to be known as one where any of 'the group' of younger ones can come and feel welcomed and accepted for what they are in themselves, without feeling that they are regarded only as potential converts. Many of the young people in our youth groups today have no Christian influence in their background, and have never been in the atmosphere of a Christian home. The difference is first felt and observed, and afterwards understood. Many young people want and need a place where they can come and talk, air their ideas, stretch themselves mentally, and not be preached at. A great deal can be done by means of this kind of hospitality. It is marvellous to watch a group over the years, of seemingly unpromising material, to note the gradual change in manner of speech, general appearance and manners, the gradual understanding of Christian values, to see the boy/girl friendships developing, to see reception into Church membership, to be invited to their weddings and to see the beginnings of new Christian homes.

Newly-married couples can do quite as much along this line as those who are more mature. Young people will often turn with their problems to someone just a *few* years older than themselves, who they feel will not

be too old or too 'square' to understand how they feel. Youthful callers will enjoy sitting at a happy meal table, but they will appreciate much more the fact of being welcome in the home of those who value their company, and in whom they find the friendship which may not be available to them in their own homes.

Children of Christian parents sometimes prefer to consult grown-ups outside the family. It may be that the need is simply to have the moral implications of parents' belief and teaching explained in fresh terms. For such young people, the right mental atmosphere for self-expression may be a small group gathered in a Christian home to discuss informally and freely the basic beliefs of the Christian faith, and their application to the moral or amoral world of school, college, office or factory.

But apart from group work—so worth while, but costly in terms of patience, time and wear-and-tear on one's home—probably more is done as *individuals* feel that here is a door on which they can knock and be welcomed just to talk. It is not easy or convenient to be always available, but we must never convey the impression of hustle or impatience. However late at night a person knocks on your door, the very lateness of the hour means that the problem to be talked over seems to him urgent and important, however it looks to you. The caller may have come straight to you from the shattering experience of having his girl-friend turn him down. It may be the caller may be a Christian girl whose non-Christian boy-friend has made demands she cannot meet, or she has met them and has come with the disastrous consequences to seek help from the person to whom she feels she can turn.

We should not limit the use of our home to our recognised Christian activities, but always be looking for the 'odd' opportunity. A young 'Mum' attending a baby clinic usually becomes friendly with others in the same group. An invitation to a friendly cup of tea can be not only the beginning of lasting friendship but of insight into a different way of life, as conversation reveals Christian standards at work in the ordinary affairs of daily life.

There are foreign and coloured students at our colleges and in our hospitals who are very lonely, and would appreciate a home where they could come during off-duty time, not necessarily to be evangelised or hustled off to meetings, or hymn-singing sessions, but to enjoy rest and relaxation, to write letters, to read in quietness, or just to talk. When one considers the temptations there are for young people very far from their homes, we should be willing to open our doors to them as often as possible. We once had a disastrous experience along this line. We had invited a group of coloured nurses to our home, and three arrived—charming girls. Another guest staying in our home at the time, whom we thought we could trust to deal gently with them, evidently thought we weren't likely to 'wave the flag' vigorously enough, and started on them within a few minutes of their arrival, enquiring what would happen if they were 'suddenly hurled into eternity!!' Needless to say, we never saw those girls again.

In the cold light of the next morning, they probably thought they had been unfairly got at—which they had. The sad thing was that not only did we lose contact with that particular group, but could not make any approach to other girls in that institution, for surely the word would be passed round.

Most of us can from time to time offer a few days' rest and convalescence to someone who has been ill. Just supposing someone comes into our home on these terms, is given kindness and care, but nothing is said beyond grace at meals—no public prayer or reading, or hymn-singing. No-one should be able to be in our home for a week without recognising that here is something different, and being ready to question. This is a much better basis for spiritual conversation than the feeling that guests are being got at, and can't do much about it because they *are guests*.

There are many elder brethren who think and say a great deal about the Christian's separation from the world, but there are others of us who believe that a Christian should have a social conscience, and be very much involved in questions and causes which concern the well-being of his neighbours, in the widest sense. These interests often involve meetings of committees, etc., which can be invited to the home. There are many non-Christians who think of committed Christians as something a bit peculiar, and this is a good way of showing that Christians, and even P.B's, are just ordinary people—plus.

All our interests, business, social, home, Church, should be equally dedicated, and the uses to which our homes are put can be effective in showing just what this means. But a Christian couple can only show as much as is *there*. You can't show outside more warmth and friendliness, and love, and spirituality than exists between the people living in the home, and every Christian couple should be conscious of the need for the daily tending of their relationship, so that they learn with and from each other, and together deepen and nourish the friendship between them, that they may have more to give.

We took it as a compliment when an Anglican friend said: 'I'm glad I've met you. I have always thought the Brethren must be very peculiar people, but *you're really quite normal!*'