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6-1-1969

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#### Recommended Citation

Maxwell, C. Mervyn, "Can You Answer This?" (1969). *Faculty Publications*. 3845.  
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# Can You Answer This?

Questions Youth Are Asking Today

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## TALKING TO GOD

**Q.** I'm ashamed of your column! You're training the youth to be irreverent. I have raised two generations of teen-agers, and I have never felt it necessary to teach them to start their prayers with "Hello, God." Young people should be trained to speak respectfully to God. As a university professor, you ought to know better!

**A.** I appreciate your concern for reverence. God is the Creator of heaven and earth and not merely a chum who lives next door. Just the same, He has invited people of all ages and races to approach Him "boldly" (Hebrews 4:16), and Jesus, when on earth, invited children even to climb on His lap.

My suggestion in the April issue was made to a young person who found that her attempts to pray in conventional phrases failed to communicate and so seemed meaningless to her. I believe that prayer ought to be "the opening of the heart to God as to a friend." Since young people spend a lot of time talking to their friends on the telephone, I suggested that this girl pray to God as if she were talking to Him on the phone. Since I suppose that even if the President were on the other end of the line she would address him with "Hello, Mr. President," without any impropriety or sense of disrespect, it seemed to me that there is nothing innately offensive in addressing God in the same way.

## HAMBURGERS IN HEAVEN?

**Q.** Will people eat meat in heaven? I hope not. I've always disliked the fact that our innocent animal friends are killed to make food for man.

**A.** People will certainly *eat* in heaven. In fact, one of the first things the redeemed will do will be to take their places at the great "marriage supper" Christ is now preparing. Revelation 19:9.

But they evidently won't eat meat. The Bible says that in the better life there shall be no more death. Revelation 20:1, 4. Indeed, "they shall not hurt or

destroy in all My holy mountain, says the Lord." Isaiah 65:25, RSV.

## CHURCH STANDARDS

**Q.** I belong to what you'd call a rather strict church. Some ways it's OK; I suppose I'll keep on belonging to it. But it does seem that the church fathers do peer down your neck a lot. I mean they keep judging you by the standards of the church, when actually what really matters is your personal relationship to God. Why do they do it? What can I say to them?

**A.** Some denominational regulations are man-made. In Puritan Boston, once upon a time, a man was arrested for kissing his wife on Sunday. Catholics today are officially forbidden to use contraceptives. Such rules can be broken—but a real Christian will break them only in a courteous way that reveals his respect for the rights of others, including church leaders, to believe the way they feel they should.

But church standards that look for morality and honesty and for a reverence for the times and places which the Bible describes as holy are surely in harmony with God's will. What good is your relationship with God if it doesn't make you a better man? *How* good is your relationship if it doesn't produce good works? What right do you have to claim membership in a society if your personal conduct tarnishes the record the other members cherish?

It was Jesus Himself who said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Matthew 7:20. He also said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works." Matthew 5:16.

## THE "LEFT OUT" BOOKS

**Q.** Who decided which books should go into the Bible? Other books have been left out that are just as good as the ones that got in. Since this is so, how can anyone believe the Bible to be uniquely inspired?

**A.** Some of the books "left out" of the New Testament have titles like *The Acts of Paul*, *The Gospel of Peter*, and so on. But the resemblance doesn't extend

far beyond their titles. Compared with the books that are in the Bible, they are mighty poor stuff.

I wonder if you have ever read "The Tale of the Baptized Lion" in *The Acts of Paul* or the one about "John and the Obedient Bed Bugs" in *The Acts of John*.

After devoting a scholar's lifetime to the New Testament apocrypha, M. R. James once said that if a person will read the books for himself he will quickly see "that there is no question of anyone having excluded them from the New Testament; they have done that for themselves."

If you will read the books, I think you will agree with him.

#### **GIVING "HEARTS" TO JESUS**

**Q. There's this preacher. He really bugs me. He keeps asking us to "give our hearts to Jesus," or to "let Jesus come into our hearts." I did that when I was a primary in Sunday School. Why do preachers have to keep on asking us to do the same thing over and over?**

**A.** It would be nice if some ministers would vary their sermons more. But let's try to see what they mean, if we can.

People change all the time. You gave your nine-year-old heart to God; have you given Him your sixteen-year-old heart?

People are complex. Many churchgoing young people have accepted Christ into their hearts but still reserve for themselves "private rooms" inside their hearts. They make Jesus comfortable in an easy chair in the living room of their hearts, then sneak off into their private "Purple Rooms," for example, where they nurse their anger against their parents and think out great plots for revenge. Suddenly Jesus knocks on the door of these rooms and offers to come in and repaint them. Are we willing to let Him come into these recesses of our hearts and have Him help us turn our anger into love?

Other people have "Green Rooms," where they nurse envious, jealous thoughts about young people who are a little bit smarter, or richer, or better looking than they are. Jesus wants to enter these rooms and change our envy into warm appreciation and friendship.

There are many other rooms like these, such as those where we make our decisions about sex, our life ambitions, and our friends.

Do you have any "rooms" in your heart that you are keeping Christ out of? If so, why not let Him enter every one of them?

#### **WHAT'S WITH MY CHANGING SIS?**

**Q. I guess your column is for bigger kids than me, but then my question is not about me. It's about my sis. It seems like she's always scrapping with Mother. Last night she had it out with Daddy too. I can't figure it. She used to like everybody at home, but not lately. She's a sophomore in high school. What's with her?**

**A.** Somewhere between thirteen and eighteen something important happens to people, a change from being a child to being an adult. Parents sometimes

call it "going over fool's hill." Doctors call it "adolescence." I'm sure you've heard about it.

Adolescence is nice in a lot of ways. A girl, like your sister, finds she is beginning to look pretty in a womanly way and that boys have suddenly become wonderful to dream about.

But it has its difficult side also. A person's nerves, muscles, bones, glands, and mind don't all grow up at the same rate of speed! Oh, in time they do catch up with each other, I'm glad to say; but in the meantime a boy fumbles a baseball because his slowly growing nerves cannot coordinate his quickly growing muscles, and he is embarrassed to tears. His skin glands work *too* hard, and he gets pimples and is embarrassed some more.

All of this makes an adolescent feel awkward, troubled, irritable. Half of him says, "Treat me like a grown-up," while the other half says "No, I'm not ready yet."

Be patient with your sister. In a year or two she will feel more calm at home. Besides, in a few years you may feel like she does now. Can you believe it?

#### **CAN ONE BE SAVED TOMORROW?**

**Q. I was brought up on "Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories. (Am I glad I'm reading them again now to my children.) Since your father wrote them, perhaps you could explain one of them to me. It's the one where a street preacher uses the text, "If thou save not thy life tonight tomorrow thou shalt be slain." The boy in the story makes sure he's a Christian before He goes to sleep, and I tried to do the same the night my mother first read it to me. But I soon noticed that other children who weren't especially trying to be good weren't dying off! Years have passed, and I still don't understand the text.**

**A.** How interesting! I had the very same experience with this story when I was small.

The words occur in 1 Samuel 19:11. They were spoken by David's wife, Michal, warning David to escape King Saul by climbing out the window.

A precise theologian would say that the evangelist in the story misused the text by taking it out of its context. Strictly speaking, the verse does not refer to the salvation of one's soul but to the ordinary saving of one's life from danger. Still, the words as they stand do carry a deep religious meaning. No one can count on living until tomorrow. Fatal accidents occur suddenly, as you know. Even more seriously, if we do not accept a solemn appeal by a minister today, we cannot count on doing it later on. Thousands of people have left a religious meeting fully intending to return and accept Christ at the next meeting, but have failed to return the next night on account of something unexpected. They have also failed to return the night after that. And so it has gone on till they have lost all inclination to be Christians.

The Bible says, "Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Hebrews 3:15. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." 2 Corinthians 6:2.