
Why Be Honest?

It may be a fake letter, bait in a promotion scheme, but it is typical of the confused mind of American youth on moral problems, so we are passing it on to you. It is a letter in the American Magazine for February, said to have been written by a high school senior, a boy who weighs what he has been told about honesty and wonders if it pays.

He sets down the reasons for being honest as he had heard them at home, at Sunday school and in the public school. These are: 1. Honesty will get you to heaven; 2. Everybody likes, 3. trusts, 4. supports an honest man; 5. A man must be honest to succeed in business; 6. Honesty brings self-respect and happiness. Against these six points he gives the following answers:

1. He'll get to heaven, of course, if there is one.
2. A lot of people in town hate Dad bitterly because a few years ago he was honest enough to tell the ugly truth about a certain prominent citizen instead of being a hypocrite.
3. I've heard Dad called an old cheat and skinflint more times than I can remember, and my eyes have been black about it almost as many times.
4. Dad ran for county treasurer a few years ago and got snowed under by a slick liar.
5. Dad's had his nose to the grindstone ever since I can remember, trying to make a bare living for his family. He's old before his time. So is Mother. She's never had fine clothes nor gone places and had a good time. She's always had to scrimp and save.
6. Dad has self-respect, but I've never seen him happy; only worried.

The other side of the picture, the penalties for being dishonest, the lad disposes of by similar reflections taken from the life of his father's rival, who, if he is going to a possible hell is having a keen time doing it; who is jolly and well-liked, but slippery; who draws plenty of trade; who made himself financially as a state senator; who seems always happy and, apparently, not conscience-stricken in private.

There's the case. Unless someone can solve it for him, the youngster has about made up his mind to go crooked and be happy. What's wrong with the picture?

"Post hoc, propter hoc." The boy lays his father's failure to his honesty; a casual observer, with the same data at hand, might conclude that the father's lack of a sense of humor had something to do with it. In the case of his rival, the lad can hardly credit to dishonesty the back-slapper's popularity.

But let that pass. The boy disposes of the real, fundamental motive for honesty with the skeptic's negative doubt; he looks for his reward in temporal things, vain and not fully satisfying in themselves. Not finding it there, he should conclude to the necessity of a heaven and hell in which complete justice is fulfilled.

There is the argument. The inborn desire for justice and happiness, found in every man's heart, is a philosophical argument for an after-life in which things are evened up. Backed up by revelation, by God's promise of heaven and threat of hell, the case is complete. The gap in the poor boy's training is that he has not been shown the proof that God made these promises. Apologetics gives that. Catholic education shows you why you should believe. Moral chaos results from the line of reasoning the boy follows out for himself - and the intellectual authors of much of our crime are those "leaders" who destroy faith and preach Humanitarianism instead of Christianity.

PRAYERS: Deceased - Mrs. Kerndt, grandmother of Rev. K. M. Healy, C.S.C.; Frank Kerjes' father; the father of Arthur, '28, and John Mitiguy, '29. Three special intentions.