

GLIMPSE

How-to and Why-to

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If you go wandering through a substantial bookstore, one with lots of shelves, you will soon come upon the 'how-to-do-it' department. Carpentry, plumbing, electric, finances, cooking, knitting, computering, and weight-loss are a short list of the long ideas which experts have for our betterment and progress. There are also books about how to make and keep friends, on family-survival and even romancing. That reminds me of a book we had to read in senior year of the Jesuit high school. 'Modern Youth and Chastity' was the Catholic guide to everything we knew we shouldn't already know. There was an extensive chapter on the very touchy issue of kissing! It was a "how-to" book and especially 'what-not-to-do'.

Kisses should not be frequent; "KPH" we named it. Kisses should not be "ardent" but we never did figure out that how-to. The real kicker was the question about just how long one kiss should last. At the allowed one-kiss-per-hour, we figured one should last pretty long to make up for the long time for breathing. So one kiss should last as long as it takes to say "Grapefruit". We never could figure out why they suggested such a sour fruit. As budding lawyers and Jesuits, we noted that if one were to take a deep, really deep breath, one could say "graaaaaaaapefruuuuuit" for quite a while. How-to and what-to are good ways to sell books and TV shows, but there is something missing in all that and also in the bookstores.

The more important question to be asked and about which to be written is "why-to". Obviously the whys of plumbing and TV repair are rather important. Relationships, families, sexuality and prayer are more popular in the "How-to" sections, but the "whys" of these areas are less practical, but more interior. How to do things well is external and results in good feelings for the doer and the done-for. We say to the plumber, "Good job, and good man". He/she is good, because of the job well done.

Is a tree good because it brings forth good fruit? Is it a good tree first and so it bears good fruit? There are books written about reading Scripture as a giant

How-To-Do-It" volume from God. You can read all kinds of "dos" and "don'ts" and become an expert on Biblical-behavior modification. You can ask religions to inform you about how to do most everything. You can read sex manuals and relational instructive books and yet not comprehend the sacredness of other persons. If we do not get it touch with the "why" of these writings, then the "hows" and "whats" will ultimately fail.

We then arrive at the "why" of liturgy and other forms of prayer. Liturgy has its moves, bowings, kneelings, gestures and we all have had to learn them. They are much more meaningful if we interiorize the "why" supporting them. Why pray at all? I believe we pray at the liturgy, before meals, privately and in groups, not so much to remind God Who God is and how good God is and how God better keep up being good, but for a more personal reason. We pray to be reminded who we are. The "who" we are is more important and long-lasting than "how" we are doing this or that, even how we are praying. Prayer then is a celebration of our identities and if we fail to celebrate that we will forget who we are. The result of that forgetfulness will be why we go to the "How-To-Do-It" sections of as many bookstores as we can find. All the time, we will be looking for what is within us and that is our truth. We are creatures, loved by the Creator to do those things that reveal that Creator as well as the goodness of ourselves. It is only a Glimpse so count your kisses.