No. 42.

On the religious education of children.
Deut. 6:7. "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

This is a most solemn and important charge. The dispensers of the laws had communicated to the people the commands of God concerning these religious institutions, these laws and customs, by which they were to be distinguished from other nations and to be made the instruments of Heaven’s designs towards man. But Moses did not stop here. He knew that the truth of the knowledge and the had imparted to his people, might be lost, or become corrupted. The times of them might become faint, or the remembrance of them weak, if they were not by some means remembered. He therefore charges them with earnestness of solemnity to inculcate these instruc-
times when their children, to repeat every one again, it is their duty to impress the lessons we had taught them; that thus all the benefits of this institution might be transmitted in an unbroken succession from age to age. We had thought the Pattern! To bring up our children in some verses of education, my mind, as it were, in a state of education, I propose nothing more than the mere instruction of good habits of morality & religion. Respect that you have done enough for your children when you have clothed them, when you have given them the means of comfortable & reasonable support, when you have furnished their minds with knowledge of the various species of intellectual improvement. This thing is still wanting: the may have all these the yet become very bad members of society. Religion is wanting. I mistrust it, the young blossoms of hope, when you smile upon it, your face is round your table, will almost inevitably be withered & blasted.

It is of immense importance to fix religious impressions on the mind; while it is. yielding. We can receive impressions. Why is it that the fruit promise of early life so often hangs only the bitterness of disappointment in matured years to those who have trusted to gullily on confidence? In most cases, it is because the young heart has been suffered to ripen and expand without the influences of religion. After it has been matured, while among the false & guilty pleasures of the world, the loss of innocence, that we used to gage upon, is no delight, still we thought it almost heaven. As we changed for the ragged countenance of vice, for once more the expression of simple, pure, faithful feeling, is not, perhaps, hard. Contests in the contest of passion, are in the arts of delusion. Who has not seen the heart, in childhood was full of innocence, love, & bright hopes, wrenched by the contamination of vice, is polluted amidst the toils of ambition? The sweet spirit of infancy & its associates fell As the sun set, haloed the breast of youth, was but too often expelled from its dominion by the absorbing interest of the active & stirring world? If, as in such case, nations the light of the dawn was considered.
as an uncreated being, with glances from the throne of God, & returned. He then, when the terrestrial curtain arose, 

Now my sons, if you would use one of the most effectual means of saving your sons, from the cruel disappointment, of your children from such accursedness & ruin, impress on their minds, very early, very often, till it becomes engraven in their souls, the sense of God & of sacred things. If you cherish the growing buds of virtue in your offspring, they may grow into the flowers of immortal bloom in the paradise of God, if you neglect or crush them, the time will be & come when you will shed these tears, which are the bitterest that can be wrung from men, these tears of parental affection and grief over the ruin of parental hopes. If you take care to pour the minds of the young to virtue to furnish them with the principles & practice them in the habits of wisdom, sound morality, what is to be expected from them but ignorance. God, education, therefore, as it be the wall of defence around the hearts of the young, is a subject to which no father or mother can be indifferent. Ask the attention of parents, particularly, & if there a parent, he will refuse attention, while it amounts to some of the methods by which the minds of children may be best formed to religion.

1. As soon as your find your children capable of estimating in any degree the value of the different objects, and draw their notice, impress upon their minds a sense of the superior importance of religion. From this first dawn of reason, inspire them with the possession of the truth & value of religion. By this, do not mean, that they are to be made thus merely by the force of authority, or even by parental authority, but in consequence of early impressions only; even though these impressions be stamped by the hand & not the 

2. When years have brought them wisdom, wage has ripened their judgment, then they must welcome religion on the strength of its obvious evidences. But what I mean, that when the understandings have become matured, & before the mind becomes fixed, be taught to feel that the subject of religion is a most important subject, & that it involves interests dearer to them, than any act the object of
While the emotions of their young hearts are just coming forth, fresh, and eager, while the degenerating, dissipating spirit of the world has not dried up the fountains of grace and ardent affection, seize the happy moment to fix in their minds the most generous affections on some objects which are permanent and good. The common objects of the world by themselves, can supply.  Xenophanes cannot make children estimate the full value of religion, you cannot stretch their young minds to the full dimensions of so grand a subject, as their vision is too weak to view the vast and measureless path on which man must travel through eternity. It is necessary that their infant minds should be able to do this. But you can if you will, while the avenues to their hearts are yet unoccupied by bad passions or debasing interests, to secure them a place there among the grand objects of your great creations. 

like the chambers in the garden of Eden, watch around the entrance & suffer no enemy to their happiness to go in. Almost there; you can & you ought to give to your offspring early impressions in favor of what you consider as of the first importance when the gentle spirit is pure & lovely as the flowers, which throw its fragrance on the breath of morning, you may & it is your duty to guide its aspirations, however feebly they may be, to noble and lofty objects. I return to energy, though it be but little, on the side of another side, the first emotions of the heart is, give them to good purposes, to induce by a holy as character to the first emotions of the youthful soul, to the first. This is it. In youth, every difficulty to affect this. Remember them to your children, every object is new, every pursuit yet unsifted, every object still unexplored. There are, when these youthful years begin to express their feelings, tastes, that their affections are shooting forth, it is your easy to guide them a right, to set them in a proper section. You may make them feel, though not fully, yet in some degree, that there is a place in the heart that shall never be quenched; that all things are beautiful & grand; that there is power & attraction, the soul, and more attractively the soul go on, almost there; you can & you ought to give to your offspring early impressions in
that there are principles of virtue, not with carrying
in the world to a better and a more enduring home. I
you cannot make children understand all
in favor of these ideas, as much important, and believe
in. Children can do it as well as yourselves. They have a high opinion of
understanding, great wisdom,
which is associated with all their ideas
of reverence. By therefor an almost every case,
what you teach them to esteem, they will esteem, what
you teach them to consider important, they will
consider important. What you respect they will now
be to them objects of contempt and derision. And then for a moment what power you have over your offspring. 
Let me entreat you to use this power well to use it in giving them a fixed and decided impression in favor of religion and sacred things, even before you have instructed them in religion; or, before they understand its value and reasonableness. Let not all the
profit and earnestness be engrossed by their amusements, their dress, or by common trifling objects; but teach them to feel that there is something better than these things,
even though they cannot comprehend what it is. Never
let them see you treat religion sacred things with contumely; but to do as if you were to treat them so in their presence. I
remember their hearts are warm and their instincts are
rapidly forming. A single action, a single word, may
work on their young affections and bring upon them a
stain that years cannot wash away. It is impossible to
of religion. You will plant that will result in coming years the rich fruits of prosperity; you will
defect of satisfaction of seeing a family case
on it, growing up around you.

2. But it is not enough to give your children early impressions of the importance of religion; you must also
place communication to them religious instruction. This
is a task, what it requires so much as we are able to
discipline to execute well, profitably. It is an important
question; how may religious instruction be best conveyed
to the mind, which is formed from the age, just beginning
to form themselves, or how may we most effectually
present the subject of religion to children? In
answer to this question, I observe, that we should select the most plain, simple, and direct ideas concerning
sacred subjects to bring before the young mind. This
rather than reasoning should be pressed in the attention.
of children. In their earliest years you should teach them that things are so, rather than why they arise. The first important point is to fix their attention on what they observe in themselves, in their fellow creatures, and in the world around them. Demand that they always tell you their feelings and thoughts simply and frankly. Encourage them to do this confidently and without the least reserve. Let them see your eyes that young beasts, that you may notice the wonders of the earth and air, and the shapes of the child who will find the elements of the future social religious man. These elements may be moulded into a most harmonious form, a form in which the adult parts begin to unfold themselves is a time of immense importance to the character of children. It is at this critical period that you must help them to observe and distinguish their own feelings and affections, and to compare them with the feelings and affections of other people, and to bring these to the thought of the sense of the difference of goodness and of the connection in which they stand with the world around them. These deduce from them the principal duties of social morality, the duties which relate to themselves and their neighbours. Bring in the aid of simple and engaging examples to enforce your instructions. Then you may direct their attention to the beauties of nature, teach them to look at it, and make them the more by observing its details. Here you should remember that those objects, which are all familiar, and have for a long time been observed, have become familiar to you, have the charm of novelty. Therefore, in the most common scene you may excite their curiosity, interest, that all the flowers springing up beneath your feet, the trees, while it is still in winter, under the canopy of heaven, the clouds with all their glories, the stormy winds abroad, its fury and its might, almost every object will, in nature, may be of use in engaging the attention and awakening the thoughts of children. And when you have excited their imaginations and caused their curiosity, then is the favorable moment for asking them, whence they arise of all this beauty, of grandeur, of order and of reason in them. Then tell them simply and plainly without any elaborate demonstration that there is a Being who thinks, who shall exist, who may the scenes of that, the Being is called God. Represent this Being to them, not as an austere master, or an inexorable judge, but as a Father who loves and provides for his creatures, and blesses them more.
kindness than the tenderest parents can show their children. I believe there is no character in which God can be presented to the minds of children with such a happy effect as in the character of a parent. It engages all the associations of love, association, & attaches them to the person whose operations they are taught to see every where around them. Thus you may impress upon their hearts, that the same affections which they cherish towards you, their earthly parents, they should cherish in a much higher & finer degree towards Him, who is the common Father of all. It is true, the conceptions of children concerning God must be at the best, extremely inadequate; but so likewise are the conceptions of men, if you despise the task of giving your offspring instruction concerning this subject, because the cannot fully comprehend it; for the same reason the same instruction may be always despised. From this it is easy to proceed to others. You may teach them that at a time when the dark night of ignorance and vice had settled over the world, when men were ensnared in fear, doubt, & uncertainty, it pleased the Lord to pour with beams of divine light on that midnight of darkness; as He was abroad over the earth, that He sent the Messengers of His love, to instruct man
possessions take so deep a hold of the heart, as seldom to be eradicated. When you see your children, address them, when everything is roaming around them, if they seem to enjoy existence with a careness, then more especially impress their thoughts with the idea of you. Teach them that the goodness of the young heart is quickly forgotten, as the fountains of love speedily would soon dry up. Thus by making religion appear lovely to the young, you will make them feel that the chain which binds them to the bright beam of their happiness.

3. Teach your children religion by your example. This is the most effective way of teaching them serious and important truths. To a child nothing is so powerful as some impressive lesson, as the example of a parent. If your words of instruction to your offspring will be dull instead of better if they be not reflected from the face of your life. Your children will observe what you do much more narrowly than what you say. If they will remember it longer. No matter how much reverence and learning you speak to them of God and sacred things, no matter how appropriate and impressive your instructions may be, if in the mean time they see you living without them, habitually disregarding religion and giving all the energy of your souls to trifling pursuits and passing objects, or

Any line of your lessons will be obliterated from their minds, they will readily conclude that you have been wearing a mask before them, and have played the hypocrite; in short, that you have taught them not to care, or that you do not believe yourself. From the moment they have this impression, they too will play the hypocrite, they may learn the lessons, and you gave them, but they may listen, while you address them; but then, the parents thus become the betrayers of the child to see these whom I have appointed the guardians of the young, by the bad instruction of these little beings, by their every good propensity, and might stir up the generous soul of the youthful beast. And on the other hand, the world does not find such a more delightful scene, than that of his friend a more delightful scene, than that of his friend, a more delightful scene, than that of his friend, a more delightful scene, than that of his friend a more delightful scene, than that of his friend a more delightful scene, than that of his friend a more delightful scene, than that of his friend a more delightful scene, than that of his friend, a more delightful scene, than that of his friend a more delightful scene, than that of his friend.
you teach them, exemplified in your life. 

the most grave of all sins are those which you, yourself, committed in the commonwealth of settled faith. if you manifest a deep and heartfelt reverence for the Sabbath, let the house of worship, yea, even the institution of religion, if you have by your conduct that the duties of piety are open to the citizens of every age, yea, you say, that they will feel that every word and truth you have taught them as sacred truths, for it shines brightly in your life. 

from thence a lesson will be reflected in their hearts to ask the world will not easily slip away. 

very few, very few, are aware of the power of parental example. you are not apt to remember sufficiently what devotion of soul your children display, to know how they will imitate generations. to their parents would it be considered a treasure. they have in the play of their lips, how they may go to use this treasure. the innocence of childhood smiles upon us like the face of reason. 

and to this enemy the armed steams upon it, the character of self. But when this enemy is come in the person of a parent, what shall we say? 

each parent I would leave to their own thoughts. if anything be not dead, they will need no contention. make up your mind, if sufficiently forever. What shall you teach them? and hand them your children. Read them in the lessons of virtue. 

path of prayer, the shedding care of guilt should be changed. 

truth is in Heaven, yea, and not in. This do not give them a bad example. have respect for their young forming minds. in their presence let passion be calm as the mildness of morning, let kindness mix in with the livery. let your whole behavior be a mirror before they may adjust their conduct by from their habits. the lesson of once and all others. should be written in letters of gold. y placed centermost before the eyes of your children. it is. let your life prove to your children that you love religion. 

I crave this paper, given you a few thoughts on the religious education of children. know there is no parent who does not feel that the subject is one of almost unequalable importance. that ever means of promoting so desirable an object would be enough by itself. 

Do not consider your children mean by that light which shows them as beams in the heaven. the possessors of the pleasures of the world. but remember that they have a higher destination. is not doing to think that when the hand of life has taken them shall have an end of the entire. by the voice of the church, disposed to them instruction that be thrown in silence. they shall come forward in the stage of life to fill the places of those who have you.
before them, that thus the generations of man succeed each other, as the waves of the sea roll one after another, till they break and die in the shore. It is dominating too to reflect, that in some children or deformed the best interests of society, that the country looks to them for support of its future, if unprincipled minds their patronage. But more than all, it is most elevating, solemn, thought, that in each of these children you are diminishing your knees by praying around your fire side, there is an inductive step, that shall make be extinguished, that they are young immortal, that they are for better, better than the fowls or the devoured of the earth, that they are heirs of eternity. Who can think of your children, therefore, think of them as destined to live forever, remember too that on one it will depend in no small degree whether that order exist which shall be happy. Would it not swell your heart to meet at the bow of God, the child whom you yourself had made? Would you not shed tears, as you saw the face of your offspring, as you smiled so affectionately when you found those eyes the store house of affection, as if they would ask you why you could so purely bring them to the world?
At home, Nov. 24th, 1819, afternoon.
At home, April 15th, 1827, forenoon.