

protocol matters

Cultivating Social Graces in Christian Homes and Schools

Sandra Boswell

CANON PRESS



Moscow, Idaho

Sandra Boswell, *Protocol Matters: Cultivating Social Graces in Christian Homes and Schools*
© 2006 by Sandra Boswell

Published by Canon Press, P.O. Box 8729, Moscow, ID 83843
800-488-2034 | www.canonpress.com

Printed in the United States of America.

Cover design by Paige Atwood.

Cover photograph by Mark Lamoreaux.

Front Cover: (From left to right) Kallie Kohl, Jordan Hoffman, Naomi Gray, Elizabeth Ryan, Mac Jones, Tyler Evans, Asela Nieuwsma, and Caleb Struble.

Back Cover: Mac Jones and Kallie Kohl

06 07 08 09 10 11 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the author, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Boswell, Sandra.

Protocol matters : cultivating social graces in Christian homes and schools / Sandra Boswell.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-1-59128-025-5 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-59128-025-7 (alk. paper)

I. Etiquette for children and teenagers. I. Title.

BJ1857.C5B635 2006

395.I'22--dc22

2006022099

I lovingly dedicate this book to the youngest ladies in my life, my granddaughters Ambeisa and Kamarebe; to the noble-hearted Boswell gentlemen, Bud, Brad, Tyler, Brock, and Kusiima; and to my parents, who insisted that their children politely put their “best foot forward.” May the children in my life be inspired likewise.

Contents

Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	xi

Part I: The Meaning and Purpose of Protocol Training

1. What Is Protocol Training?	3
2. The Purpose of Protocol	11

Part II: Teaching Protocol to Children

3. Teaching Protocol in the Home	19
Respectful Speech	20
Thank-You Letters	23
Children's Parties	25
Other Manners to Live By	26
Table Manners at Home	27
Protocol for Dining Out	32
Conclusion	34
4. Establishing a School Program	37
Anatomy of a Successful Program	37
Training Classes	41
Building Support for Your Program	44
Key People and Their Duties	48
What about a Grade School Program?	62
Conclusion	65

Part III: Protocol Training Topics

5. Food for Thought: Notes on Table Manners	69
Eliminating the Guesswork: Casual to Formal Table Settings and Foods	76
Conclusion	102

viii	6. Social Navigation Skills	103
	Conversation Guidelines	105
	Levels of Relationships	107
	Social Conversation to Avoid	111
	Other Conversation Tips	112
	Benefits of Proficient Conversation	116
	Introductions	116
	7. The Right Moves	127
	Right Moves and Gender	127
	Exceptions	130
	General Escorting Moves	131
	Dining Situations	136
	Receptions and Parties	138
	Toasting	140
	Stepping Out: Theatre, Opera, Ballet, and Concerts	143
	Conclusion	148
	8. Public Appearance	149
	Personal Grooming: The Proper Foundation	151
	Dressing for the Occasion	158
	Conclusion	200
	Epilogue	201

Part IV: Four Contemporary Essays on Protocol

Manners—Ronald W. Kirk	205
Boy Meets Girl—Tom Garfield	209
Manners for Boys—Douglas Wilson	213
Modesty Revisited—Wendy Shalit	217
Appendix: 16 House Rules	223
Selected Bibliography	227

Acknowledgements

The Lord's frequent choice of weak and imperfect vessels to display His grace is always amazing and delightful to behold, for it reflects His strength. A sense of inadequacy rightly accompanied me while writing this book, and I greatly appreciate and admire the capable people who made this publication possible.

This was a long project, and many people, especially my family, provided steady support. I am also indebted to many people who originated or added to the content throughout the years and along the way. This book is theirs as much as mine.

I have been blessed by the teaching and influence of faithful Christians. Some I know well (my precious family and in-laws), and others less well (such as Joanne Wallace and like-minded authors who advance His beauty in manners), but their kindness and expertise helped educate and encourage me in His gracious ways over the years. I hope you will sense their fragrance, along with Christ's, on the pages of this book.

I owe much to dear Nancy Wilson for her shared vision on the importance of Christian kindness, order, and good manners. Without Nancy's invitation to teach protocol at Logos School, her friendship, her dedicated involvement when I was discouraged by my rusty writing abilities, and her very patient labors (without complaint) in wading through my first rough drafts, this book would still be in the drawer. Sharon Howell, a fellow protocol teacher and friend, supported me greatly during the process of publication and I toast to her across the miles. She too understands the importance of godly manners in our everyday lives, and her life reflects His

X beauty. I would also like to thank Katie Boswell, my niece, and Ellen Helsel, a talented friend, for their early suggestions.

Tom Garfield and Scott Oplinger, two of Logos School's many outstanding gentlemen, were a joy to work with as they unselfishly forwarded the idea of turning a small school booklet into a book available to a broader group of people who might benefit from its material. Like all true gentlemen, they are not at all "stuffed shirts," but instead are a pleasure to know. I am also grateful to Donna Grauke for her enthusiasm and our enjoyable time together in the Logos protocol program.

Lastly, I want to thank the gentlemen at Canon Press for all they have done, especially Douglas Jones for making this book possible. I appreciate his confidence in the project, his lack of pressure, his kind words, and his joyful willingness to encourage people like me. Thanks also to the multi-talented Jared Miller for his focus, corrections, and final proofs.

The Lord's gracious beauty indeed draws us to Him and fills us with the joy of life. He teaches us how to live well, and His beauty shines through His faithful people not only by their kindly decorum, but by the timely helps they generously give to others. That He does such amazing things for His own good purposes, and to confound the world's strong, should reassure each of us—especially those just beginning to explore the path of protocol's kindness.

Introduction

IF WE ARE serious about the quest to discover, recover, and pass on the essential tools of learning to our children, we must look back to successful examples not only in academics but also in the cultural and social arts. A well-rounded education must also be a social education. Protocol—the social codes and skills of kind conduct and deference to others—is one art which everyone should learn in order to become a truly mature and well-educated person. Sadly, it is much neglected in our educational systems, and today, more than ever, it merits renewed attention.

Traditional protocol contains a plethora of “how-to” particulars that yield easy treasures, and indeed, protocol’s little gems are worth recovery. Many teachers of protocol, however, fail to recognize that Christian principles inspire numerous rules for behavior in common social situations. For example, the apostle’s instruction to regard others more highly than oneself plays out in many established manners. We should thus see protocol training as providing useful skills and prescribed procedures that help us to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel in our relationships and in social situations. When such knowledge is rediscovered, it transforms behaviors, characters, and cultures.

Of course, once we *find* something of value, the next step is *holding it fast* so it isn’t lost or stolen. Good training should inspire the next generation to hold fast and apply the knowledge it has gained so it will not be forgotten or neglected. John Milton Gregory has said that this step is essential to any “successful education.”

Your recognition of protocol’s specifics and its advantages will increase

xii as you read and consider the *Ps* and *Qs* presented in this work. (Some of us are quite fond of the expression “mind your *Ps* and *Qs*” because we heard it often as pint-sized children). The *Ps* and *Qs* of course refer to the nuts and bolts of protocol, but those two letters also suggest some of the major themes I am trying to communicate. I advocate, without hesitation, *Ps* of preservation and promotion of Christian standards. I have also included preparation and presentation ideas to help you teach young people duties in proper public behavior. You will find proven protocol techniques throughout the work. I trust you will note other important *Ps* as you read these pages, and that you will find it a genuine pleasure to gather ideas for equipping your children to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel in their everyday lives and relationships.

This brings us to the *Qs*. The information you glean from these pages is designed to quickly answer questions you may have about teaching common courtesy, and to help you avoid mistakes so you may begin your quest for a quality program with confidence and practical wisdom. Resources and suggestions for younger children and ideas for high-school age students are included to inspire training ideas and reduce any qualms you might have about your preparedness.

This book, of course, contains much useful protocol information (especially in Part Three), and I hope it will help you gain an increased appreciation for this handy little tool known as protocol. However, this is not a comprehensive “etiquette book” per se. It is intended, first of all, to raise awareness of our culture’s ignorance about protocol and to provide a solid grounding for teaching, studying, and practicing protocol from a Christian perspective—Parts One and Four provide much-needed discussion in this area. Second, this book is oriented toward those who need a crash course or refresher lessons in protocol so that they may begin training their children and young adults in protocol. Part Two focuses on implementing such training at home and in school, while Part Three provides an overview of the basic content that students (and teachers!) will need to know.

This book primarily discusses the why, what, and how of teaching protocol to children and adolescents. You’ll discover it is a pleasurable and rewarding task for all involved. There are many faithful people quietly laboring in small classrooms and homes with a caring eye to the future and a loving heart for the next generation’s welfare. (If you are still reading, I suspect you are one of those people, or wish to become one.) As with so many small duties, those who remain faithful will find a wellspring of sat-

isfaction in their work because faithfulness in little things has its own valuable rewards. It is my hope, along with those who made this book possible, to see more children trained in the knowledge of practical protocol, so they in turn may embrace, apply, preserve, and enjoy the standards given to them.

You will discover it is always an enriching experience to work with other gracious souls who understand the importance of a Christian worldview in protocol training and who look forward to the next generation's welfare. For more than twenty-five years I have been given delightful opportunities to teach and be involved with protocol programs for various groups, in both public and private schools. This work contains ideas and materials from these associations. I also had the privilege to teach protocol to high-school students at Logos for several years. This classical Christian school has established one of the best programs in which I have taught. It is well organized, thoughtfully run, and lots of fun for everyone—you will find their innovative and trustworthy example to be worthy of your attention.

I owe many thanks to the dedicated people at Logos, and several other kind people including family and friends, for this book. Teachers, directors, parents, and others have greatly encouraged and helped me put pen to paper. They asked me to share my ideas, resources, and methods. We hold a similar vision to encourage other parents and teachers to use ideas and materials we have found helpful to children. If this work helps you and your children to better demonstrate small, kind duties with increased confidence and grace, then time spent on this project will have been worthwhile. If it assists you, as a Christian, to remain *ex fide fortis* as you teach the social arts to the next generation, then those of us involved in this publication will rejoice. Thank you for the honor of considering our ideas. It is a pleasure to share them with you. May God, through His Son, grant you willing learners, and fill your hearts with wisdom and joy as you labor with forward vision.

Part I

The Meaning and Purpose of Protocol Training

What Is Protocol Training?

WHAT COMES TO YOUR MIND when someone mentions the word *protocol*? Some people immediately sit up a little straighter; some think of stuffy, formal, official, state occasions; others imagine holding a teacup with a raised pinky finger. On far too many faces—especially young faces—the word just produces a blank stare. How extraordinary you are if you can help them fill in the blanks!

Of course, most people have some idea of what's what in the world of propriety and social codes, but perhaps you have wondered why we should emphasize protocol. Does it really matter? I hope this book will answer those questions as well. First, let's consider some closely related vocabulary words to recover a better understanding of protocol training and its importance in our lives. The various words and their origins can give us valuable insights into the realm of social conduct. This, along with a review of certain biblical principles, will help clarify what protocol is and what it is not. For Christians, the purpose of protocol—contrary to contemporary zeal for success, power, and status—is the development of relationships, self-discipline, and kind behavior toward others.

Protocol is a broad term for “preferred, correct codes of conduct” in general, but it can also specifically refer to the official procedural rules of conduct in state or diplomatic contexts. Thus some etiquette books have a chapter reserved for the “protocols” of official state occasions. The word also has broad application in many other areas, in its simple meaning of “correct, conventional procedures to be followed when doing something, so that it will be done consistently and with ease of cooperation” (e.g., safety

protocols, data transmission protocols, international agreements or treaties, and so on). The word has a positive connotation of actions or ceremonies that should be performed, rather than what is forbidden. Other than these connotations, however, it is difficult to distinguish protocol from etiquette, though some define protocol as the “forms” of etiquette, and etiquette as more specific rules or practices.

Etiquette, as I have said, overlaps broadly with *protocol*. If, however, we want to distinguish them, we may think of “etiquette” as referring to the specific rules and practices in social (as opposed to diplomatic) protocol—learned “dos and don’ts” in a broad social context. For example, some particular rules could be about which is the correct fork to use, or what to wear to a White House dinner. *Etiquette* comes from an old French word for a “notice” or “label.” Tradition has it that King Louis XIV and his head gardener were continually irritated when, during parties, the king’s guests ignored verbal warnings to keep off the grass in his gardens. So the king issued an order “to keep within the etiquette”—the posted signs stuck in the ground to mark approved walkways. Thus, one could think of the word as having a negative connotation of protecting something by prescribing primarily what is *not* to be done, though it certainly also includes positive rules. Today’s etiquette largely reflects common sense and, according to one dictionary, “social observances required by good breeding.” Instead of the archaic word *breeding*, I prefer the term *training*, because it emphasizes clearly that etiquette is taught and learned.

Manners also comes from an old French word, but differs from etiquette in that it signifies a person’s expressed and habitual social actions. In the singular, “manner” is the way in which anything is done. In a general sense, it means our habitual social behavior—and how that behavior matches up with the conventions of etiquette and protocol. Proper training encourages good manners everywhere and all of the time, emphasizing their ability to cover a multitude of personal imperfections. As one writer has said, “Good manners are not a sign of weakness; they are a symbol of strength.”¹

Polite, *courteous*, and related words suggest polished, courtly, and cultured refinement in social behavior. They also have connotations of grace and thoughtfulness toward others over and above mere conformity to the rules of etiquette. The etymology of *polite* includes the meaning of “polished,” while *courteous* originally meant behavior worthy of a noble court. Farther back, the root is in “a cultivated garden” (Latin, *hortus*). The histories of

1. Nat Segaloff, *The Everything Etiquette Book* (Holbrook, MA: Adams Media, 1998), xvi.

both words remind us that laborious efforts and cultivation produce a desirable outcome; they imply a work in progress with a hope for the future. If we desire to have courteous and polite children, we must labor to produce such results.

Decorum is a charming, slightly old-fashioned word that should be used more than it is today. I first heard this word when my mother spoke about people she admired for their upright, moral behavior and poise. The word sounded very impressive and I wondered where a person could find such a grand thing as “decorum.” My mother used it properly because it refers to someone of good moral character who respects and practices what is right, decent, and fitting. Decorum reflects honorable conduct, manners, words, and dress. It comes from a Latin word for “that which is becoming”—a concept much needed by parents who desire to aid their children’s comeliness through good protocol training. Decorum is decency and goodness as opposed to rudeness, licentiousness, or levity. It adds connotations of ethics and morality as well as the idea of fitting behavior to the occasion—that words or actions may be right for certain contexts but wrong for others.

Social arts is contemporary-sounding but its roots are old. The Latin word *socius* means “companion” and obviously involves community interaction that takes us beyond close family relationships. *Art* comes from the Greek word *artunein*, “to arrange,” suggesting “the making or doing things by human skill that have form and beauty.” Art involves the mastery of certain skills to attain beauty. To master the many codes of protocol is an art that takes consistent practice, but it also has consistent rewards.

These definitions present a kaleidoscope of related meanings that define the world of cultivated social uprightness. They remind us that right training in protocol takes time, labor, and studied application. Parents and schools who devote time and effort in training produce more considerate, happier children, with God’s blessing. For Christians, protocol training is a necessary labor with wonderful results in their children’s self-discipline, habits, relationships, and behaviors. This stands contrary to the worldly goals of status, power, and success, which many people try to attain by using social codes as tools for selfish ambition.

By this time you may have noticed a very basic issue at stake in these definitions. The definitions of protocol and its related terms all include, in one way or another, the assumption of “correctness” or conformity to standards. But what is the source of these standards? Whose principles are best in protocol training? How and when do we, as Christians, practice

“correctness” and to whose tune do we march? After all, in certain cultures, protocol dictates that women occupy rooms separated from the male family members, or that men will not touch a chair seat after a woman has vacated it, or that eye contact with a new acquaintance is rude. Religious principles and worldviews have influenced different social rules in different places and among different groups of people—this fact alone highlights the great importance of protocol. Even in our own culture, everyone displays various combinations of manners we recognize as good or bad, and we must ask ourselves whose protocol should influence *our* manners, and what standards are worth teaching our children.

Who determines protocol’s codes? Judith Martin, the noted protocol writer of traditional “Miss Manners” fame, answered the question, a bit tongue-in-cheek, this way: “I do, that’s who.”² Although she is one of our most authoritative and entertaining etiquette writers, and her delightful humor satisfies most readers, this response begs the question on a serious level. The real issue behind this half-serious answer is one reason why the study of protocol has encountered its current difficulties in our society. A secular society suffers from lack of order based on God’s truth—and this will be felt not only in laws, but in personal ethics and conventional social behavior.³

The question “Whose standards?” must be answered before parents understand what protocol is, and thus before they can know what to teach. Happily, the answer is neither hard nor obscure. We have inherited a rich system of protocol standards from our Christian ancestors. Christ’s principles have steadily advanced though the centuries, deposing false standards, as His kingdom progresses in the hearts and minds of more and more people.

American protocol has deep roots in the Christian worldview, because earlier Christians followed biblical precepts and applied them to all areas of life.⁴ Cornelius Van Til’s observations are worth noting: “Man’s conception of goodness and ethics cannot take precedence over God. And, for

2. *Miss Manners’ Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior* (New York: Atheneum, 1982), 12.

3. Francis Schaffer, in *The Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), discusses the fact that there must be some source of authority. Christians recognize God as this source, and that His laws apply to every area of life. When people attempt to remove Christ’s standards, it disturbs the peaceful social order.

4. While there are many discussions of the Christian influence on American social and family order, a good example is Edmund Morgan’s 1966 expanded revision of *The Puritan Family*. Morgan’s book describes the mandates of respect, good manners, and

the Christian, this rests on a specific conception of the nature of God and Christ.”⁵ The invisible boundaries constructed from biblical principles and standards cannot be forgotten or surrendered in any realm, including the protocol of social actions, the manners, and the etiquette we employ.

For Christians, then, the answer to “What and whose protocol?” is easy from one perspective but challenging from another. It is easy because eternal truths prescribe standards that never change. These good standards rest on the nature of God and include principles of respect, deference, kindness, and consideration towards those around us. For example, we are told to “Honor all people” (1 Pet. 2:17). Commands like these are enduring principles in Christ. True, how they play out in particular social codes will sometimes vary, but the basic concepts remain constant.

The challenge for today’s Christian is that current tides of social norms are resistant to biblical standards, and it requires discernment and diligence to stand against the flow. Still, our duty is to acknowledge and maintain in our protocol training the “old paths” which we have inherited from a more Christian culture of the past. This does not mean that protocol can never change, but it does mean that the old paths are the best place to start.

Christian definitions of protocol must include inherited standards that demonstrate sincere respectful social actions towards others. Therefore, we maintain, promote, and practice rules that demonstrate honor, consideration, deference and humility.⁶ Neglect of such standards in protocol diminishes Christ’s influence in society and creates what we might call

honor towards others as part of early American practices in pursuit of a biblical social order. (See James Jordan’s review of the book in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 4, no. 2, 170.)

Another example of strong Christian heritage is the moral lessons and codes of conduct in the original McGuffey’s *Eclectic Reader* series, published in 1836 and 1837. McGuffey was a Christian preacher and educator whose Christ-centered books sold by the millions and were intended to influence the young reader’s manner of behavior. Its influence indeed permeated our culture as it taught thousands of American children reading and moral lessons. Children were trained in duties of Scripture-inspired behavior and etiquette as they learned to read. Practical codes of behavior were the norm, not the exception, throughout reading lessons: avoiding rashness, being kind to others, having gracious speech, and being punctual were common expectations for children. McGuffey believed in lesson books that promoted “practical application.”

5. Dr. Rousas Rushdoony discussing Van Til’s observations in *By What Standard?* (Tyler, TX: Thoburn Press, 1983), 82–83.

6. The following passage, from Charles Spurgeon’s *Morning and Evening*, is a gem. Spurgeon comments on Philippians 1:27 (“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ”): “The word ‘conversation’ does not merely mean our talk . . . but the whole course of our life and behavior in the world. What sort of conversation is this?”

“boundary disputes.” The boundaries of protocol can become blurred within one generation, causing a divide between those who uphold the forms of social respect and those who forget, ignore, or try to change them. Today there are those who seek to remove the ancient “stone markers” in attempts to redefine correctness and goodness in protocol. Those who hold fast to virtuous ways are commendable for their good work, and God will likely bless their efforts.

More and more people today realize this need to hold fast to biblically-defined ways, and to train their children in its codes of kind conduct. Increasing numbers of protocol training programs are springing up. Many homeschool parents now include etiquette instruction in their curriculum to prepare their children to live well with others. Practical lessons, such as how to write thank-you notes, how to address adults properly, and many other polite manners, add a distinguishing poise and admirable decorum to a young life. It is a delight to interact with these children and observe their calm exhibition of self-control and thoughtfulness.

I have tried to describe to some extent what protocol training is, but we also need to consider briefly what it is *not*. Protocol is not a panacea for all social ills. It is only as good as the standards behind it, and as the earnestness of those applying it. While compliance with protocol may dispose a person towards a more cordial posture, training is not a guarantee of a sterling character and upright heart. Protocol can be (and has been) arrogantly misused for selfish purposes. Some call this “gilded hypocrisy” or just being “hoity-toity,” but protocol’s underlying principles are not at fault—rather, it is the person who is misusing them. Therefore, the cultivation of the right attitudes behind respectful behavior is as desirable as learning the codes themselves. Rules applied without right attitudes produce rigid emptiness.

Another of protocol’s limitations to keep in mind is that it cannot be followed inflexibly. There are times when it is best to be “impolite.” Children need to understand that life is full of situations where conventional

In the first place, the gospel is very simple. . . . There should be about our manner, our speech, our dress, our whole behavior, that simplicity which is the very soul of beauty. . . . The gospel is a very fearless gospel. . . . But the gospel is also very gentle. . . . Let us seek to win others by the gentleness of our words and acts. The gospel is very loving. It is the message of the God of love to a lost and fallen race. Christ’s last command to His disciples was ‘Love one another.’ O for more real hearty union and love to all the saints; for more tender compassion towards the souls of the worst and vilest of men! . . . For His sake, for our own sakes, and for the sake of others, we must strive day by day to let our conversation [behavior] be more in accordance with His gospel” (Evening devotion for May 24th). Rules of kindness, love, respect and deference to others governed our Christian forefather’s manners. Their influence is still with us today.

politeness is not necessary or is even wrong. For example, it is better to turn away abruptly, and give one's reasons for doing so, than to participate in conversations of mean gossip or ridicule. This is superficially rude to the group, but truly considerate toward the person whose reputation they are damaging. A child should be taught not to speak to strangers or to respect a stranger's request to get into a car. This is not rudeness but prudence—do not confuse politeness with mindless compliance, or an appropriate rebuke with impoliteness.

Christian protocol is one of God's lovely means of grace. We all need much help in learning how to behave graciously towards one another, and protocol provides a simple means to that end—rules that demonstrate respect, kindness and brotherly love. So, what is protocol? It is a system of orderly codes that aid the development of social character and culture. It establishes behavioral habits by which we treat others with honor, deference, consideration and kindness. Its Christian content provides glimpses of Christ's example to strangers and brothers alike. The everyday details of protocol may seem mundane or of small importance, but their impact in a community and society is great. Protocol matters!