

LET ME GROW!

A REALISTIC VIEW INTO THE WORLD OF YOUTH

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HIS HOLINESS POPE SHENOUDA III
Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark

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Our Youth, both in Egypt and abroad, experience many emotions and have great potentials. **They are in need of someone who can enter their world and offer support without imposing on them and affecting their personalities.** They need someone who can understand their innermost secrets without bias or prejudice. They need someone who reciprocates their love and appreciates their emotions and values. They need someone to support them without being an obstacle to their growth and to guide them without usurping the right of steering their own lives.

Father Tadros Y. Malaty

Ottawa 1987



IT'S SO DIFFICULT

STILL A VIRGIN

“I thank God that I was able to say “no,” and that I am still a virgin, but I think of how close I was to saying “yes” and how hard it was to say “no.” Passion is tough to fight¹.”

The above commentary indicates a deeply felt yearning of youth all over the world to remain pure. A yearning towards growth and maturity, yet they often forfeit this yearning due to the increasing pressures on them. This pushes me to write - somewhat candidly - to all youth and to all who interact with them.

As time goes by, my heart yearns to meet our youth in Egypt and abroad; wishing to delve into the depths of their minds, to touch their lives, their senses, their feelings and their behavior; to break into their private world for the sake of establishing a friendship between them and the Lord. I feel the necessity for a meeting between youth, spiritual leaders, and scholars such as parents, priests, Sunday school teachers, psychiatrists, etc. on a level of mutual respect and with a loving open heart and a mind that is broad with sincere knowledge and which is enriched by practical experience.

At such a level, adults can become acquainted with the world of youth rather than viewing them with prejudice and a pessimistic point of view. Likewise young people can understand the world of adults in a wise and mature standpoint.

I believe that we often make mistakes regarding our youth. Not many are willing to listen to them, to open up their minds and share their feelings in a spirit of wisdom and understanding. Not many are willing to enter their private world with love and appreciation instead of belittling and criticizing them.

LET ME GROW

One of the overwhelming pressures our youth face is that many of them feel that their parents do not understand their feelings, especially the psychological and sexual ones. Young people feel that their parents do not give them sincere love based on

¹ Cf. Joseph McDowell: *What I Wish my Parents Know about my Sexuality?*, 1987, p. 28.

appreciation and acceptance of them as *persons* who have their being, with independent growing personalities. They feel that their parents want them to become obedient balls of clay, so that they can form them according to their personal wishes. As a result youthful hearts silently cry out to their parents saying, "Let me grow!"

THE BODY AND SEX

Young people suffer from the pressures exerted by the feelings and demands of the body. In a questionnaire conducted among 305 adolescents in the U.S.A., 304 stated, "premarital sexual relations are one of the three most important issues occupying today's youth¹." A teenager wrote that young people spend 17 seconds in every minute, occupying themselves with thoughts of their bodies, and sexual feelings.

There is a great pressure on young people because of the fast emotional and physiological growth that is taking place during adolescence. This pressure causes some young men to look at all females as nothing but sex objects, and even more young men think that life as a whole is merely related to sex. These ideas usually lead to confrontation between parents and teenagers, each condemning the others point of view concerning life.

Some parents, in an exaggerated response to what is occurring in their teenagers' lives, associate the characteristics of defilement or non-seriousness in life with being young, while young people associate the rigidity of life and the barrenness of mind with being an adult. This causes a gap between the two generations that gets in the way of effective communication between young people and their parents.

I DON'T WANT TO BE ODD

Peer pressure plays a part in exerting pressure and strengthening the characters of young people, especially during adolescence. The teenager is looking to be accepted, loved, and treated as a mature person. He or she usually follows the fashion of others in hair styling or clothing. He or she may also play certain music or go to specific parties in order to feel a sense of belonging. Other activities may include smoking, taking drugs, or premarital

¹ *Ibid*, p. 63.

sexual relations. These acts are not committed out of conviction or prurience, but rather to prove his or her existence in the world of adolescents. A young person may participate in such activities to avoid peers' accusations of being "chicken," "mommy's or daddy's baby," "naive child," "inexperienced," "homosexual," etc. Teenagers commit these acts to avoid being called such names because being ridiculed by others is totally unacceptable in their minds. Such pressure exerted by others can be stronger than their own emotional or physical needs.

In his observations in "Preparing for Adolescence," Dr. James Dobson stated that *the majority of youth, who take drugs, used them for the first time, not because of a desire to try them but under severe pressure and ridicule from friends*¹.

I'M INFERIOR AND I'M LONELY

There are two problems that the adolescent may face throughout their teenage years. These problems are feelings of inferiority and loneliness. **These feelings of inferiority** can arise because they imagine that they do not have an attractive body, they are less intelligent than their friends, or that they are not as wealthy as their friends. These feelings may dominate and control the teenager. Moreover, they are ashamed to talk to their father of confession or their friends, so they try to hide these overwhelming feelings. One of the ways of denying these feelings is by forming relationships with the other sex so that they might feel better about themselves, whatever the consequence. They do this not for the desire of mere physical contact, but the assurance to themselves and others that they are beautiful, intelligent, attractive and worthy of love. Thus, they move quickly from one relationship to another with the other sex, aiming to overcome some feelings of inferiority that reside in their deepest thoughts. For that same reason, they might also join and belong to "a group of adolescents," forming their life according to others, even if they personally dislike that group's behavior.

As for **the feeling of loneliness**, the teenager often feels great internal loneliness, even if surrounded by many who give him

¹ Dr. James Dobson: *Preparing for Adolescence*, p. 63.

great love and affection. They feel that members of their family, teachers, or friends cannot enter their world and are unable to share their feelings or to acknowledge their abilities, talents, and personalities. They feel as though everyone deals with them only on a superficial level without realizing their capabilities, thus they throw themselves into the arms of a teenager of the other sex who have the same feelings, thinking that they are the only one who understands and shares their feelings. This occupies their imagination until they throw themselves upon a second person, under the impression that the first one was deceitful and dishonest with them. They go from one person to another, trying to fill the emptiness in their lives and remove the feeling of loneliness.

I WANT TO BE FREE

One of the pressures that destroy the lives of youth, especially in the period of adolescence is their wrong view concerning religion. Many think that religion is deprivation, repression, and a bond that destroys the pleasure of freedom and joyful living for the sake of uncertain future matters. In addition, they see religion as duties and formalities. Thus, they escape religious life to lead a permissive sexual life without control and without feelings of guilt. These young people need to realize the depth of faith as being a realistic relationship with the loving and patient fatherhood of God. Such a realization requires maturation, constant growth and sanctity that would introduce a person to a love shared with God. This alone can feed the depths of the soul and fill it with joy in the midst of the troubles of modern life.

I WISH TO LEARN

Where do our youth learn about physical contact in its natural sense: from the media, school, or home? Some find that the media often shows relationships between teenagers without restriction or control but as a joyful and happy life without demonstrating its serious effects on the lives of the people involved. The lack of an adequate sex education either at home, at church, or at school is a complaint expressed by the majority of teenagers who learned about sex in the wrong way from their friends who are also inexperienced. Some scholars find that American school programs have emphasized the biological and functional aspects of sex

without paying any attention to its spiritual and moral side. Therefore, young people come to know how to experience and practice sex without the risk of getting pregnant and how to avoid the transmission of venereal diseases, without understanding the emotional consequences associated with a premature sexual experience.

Nevertheless, we find that the number of girls who are pregnant (before marriage) in America is more than a million every year, and half a million have abortions.

Both parents and youth lack the understanding of the genuine concept of maturity. Parents often resort to extremes in their behavior. Some ignore the growth of their children and like to believe that their children are still young and unable to carry any responsibility. They repress the moral and human development of their children. On the other hand, other parents like to think that their children have attained complete and sudden maturity, and consequently do not interfere in their lives. As a result, these young people become overwhelmed by responsibilities that are beyond their capabilities. This sudden belief that they are fully responsible and independent sometimes pushes them to leave home at an early age to start their practical life. In both cases, young people may find an outlet in sex, which provides an escape from problems and feeds temporarily, their psychological needs.

In the first case, youth who are deprived of their freedom find, in misusing sex, a means that they have rightly revolted against the family that wants to confine them within the frame of childhood, thus ignoring their independent personalities and their growth. **They think that in having sexual affairs they have reached the maturity of manhood or womanhood. In the second case, teenagers find security in making friends of the other sex.** They may also practice sex without control and may take drugs.

SEX HAS NO TASTE

In the early seventies, sex was astonishingly associated with the hippie movement. Sex was practiced in public places and streets to the extent that a girl and a boy were sexually inseparable.

A girl was once asked why she practiced sex in public. She said that the way she felt when she did it in public was very

different from the way she felt in private. They also did it in groups in order to attract attention. She further pointed out that such a behavior was totally unrelated to her life at home. Sex had lost not only its holiness, but its human and natural taste as well.

Another girl has had sex with more than one person in the same night. After this experience, she felt guilty and confessed that sex was not her aim, and it was not the demand of her body, but an act that she performed to possess men, even for a short while.

What I want to stress and clarify is that sexual problems today are entirely different from those, which youth faced a few years ago. For example, Dr. Harvey G. Cox¹ said that psychiatrists think that problems that youth faced were based on what they suffered and inherited from their parents namely restraints and inhibitions. As for today they are suffering from their feeling that sex has become meaningless without any passion; they do not feel the existence of their lover.

Sex has lost its essence and holiness and has become tasteless. This problem steals the morality of marriage and the desire of establishing a family and having kids.

Many youth have asked, “Why do we have children? Why should we be responsible for them? And why do we need them?” These questions reveal the loss of family unity. This is a simple picture, which reveals an idea of the tremendous pressure imposed on our youth. One internal pressure, through their emotions and bodily feelings, and the other from the surrounding circumstances such as family, friends, media, and/or priests. This is what pushes me to write with sincere love, not to shut them out from their own lives, but to help them to realize the holiness of their lives and their commitment towards their God, so they may enjoy the experience of the joyful gospels through ordinary life, a mature mind, holy emotions, and spiritual manners. These emotions are joyful to the soul without feelings of repression or depravation.

May the Holy Spirit reveal to us how adults and youth can meet as members of the same holy body, each with his role and message so that we can live harmoniously in different love tones

¹ J.C. Wynn: *Sexual Ethics in Christian Responsibility*, 1976, p. 27-28.

without discord in a symphony of love.

This is the new life with Jesus Christ the Savior of all and the Friend of ever one.



THE CHRIST OF THE YOUTH

MODERN ATHEISM

Two students met, one Egyptian from the school of pharmacology in Alexandria, and the other a German from the school of pharmacology in Germany. The first was speaking to the second about God, the Lover of mankind, who befriends and shares ones feelings. The German student ridiculed and laughed at the Coptic Egyptian student and looked down on her as uncivilized, because she still believed in the presence of God and prayed to Him. When the Coptic girl came back to Egypt, she received a letter from the German girl in congratulations, “You are lucky to have a God that supports you. I was ridiculing you, although I felt isolation deep inside of me.”

Why is it that young people wish to escape from God? Why do others seek comfort in His arms? In some youth, they have an idea that God is merely an isolated creature living in heaven that is moving mankind away from human reality. They perceive God as giving orders and commandments. ***Many youth look to God without any feeling of emotion, desire, ambition, weakness or fear. This is why they run away from Him and deny His presence.***

Once a man met another from Quebec, Canada. The Canadian man denied the existence of God. The first asked him, “What would you do if suddenly Christ came and met you?” He answered, “I would tell Him that I didn’t want to see Him.” This response reflects a view of God as oppressive to human liberty and ignoring the reality of man’s life.

This idea is far from the Christian reality of our living Christ. Our God is the living God that descended to our world, who is living among us and sharing our own nature so that we may find Him in friendship and love. He chose St. John from his disciples, who was only 25 years old, as his beloved.

“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth.” (Eccl. 12:1) This is not just a commandment of God, but it is asking youth to return to Him and avoid sin. It is a loving invitation concerning every boy and girl in which God is announcing His desire to meet continuously with them in a loving atmosphere.

He invited them to pour His love in them while accepting their love for Him. God is the love that feeds the hunger deep inside them. Only He can pass deep inside their lives and understand the secrets of their hearts. He stretches out His arms, not to condemn or criticize, but to embrace them and quench their thirst. He says: ***“If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink, he who believes in Me, as the Scripture says, from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living waters.”*** (John 7:37)

I AM ETERNALLY YOUNG

Christ was lifted on the cross, while He was young, died and arose as if He did not enter the aging stage, because He loved the youth. He wants all his people to live a young life, with a young spirit and heart. For it is said, “So that your youth is renewed like an eagle.” (Ps. 102:5)

Our eternal Christ has given us the Holy Spirit to make our insides young and never to experience a crippled childhood or the aging weakness, but to have the power of the continuous strength of the Holy Spirit. “The glory of young men is their strength.” (Prov. 20- 29)

The disciples and apostles of Christ lived with the strong spirit of the youth that conquered all weakness and affliction.

“I have written to you young men because you are strong and God abides in you. You have overcome the evil one.” (1 John 2:14)

“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:17)

“The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me.” (2 Tim. 4:17)

“O death, where is your victory? O grave where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55)

Our Christ *“who went forth conquering and to conquer”* (Rev. 6:2) does not want weak youth who have surrendered and are carried out in a coffin, lamented by others, yet He calls, *“Young man, I say to you arise.”* (Luke 7:14)

This is how our heavenly Bridegroom wants to see His Church alive and strong with His Holy Spirit, constantly young so that He rejoices in her as a youth rejoices in the wife of his youth.

(Prov. 5:18)

He sends His angels to her service to please her heart with renewable life. That is the gift of His resurrection, as He did with those who entered the tomb and saw a young man sitting on the right and wearing a white robe. (Mark 16:5) This youth declared His resurrection and asked them to tell the disciples to go to Galilee to meet with the risen Christ.

THE SPIRIT OF YOUTH

Youth is a state of the spirit and of the mind. It is not associated with any age. Is it possible to meet a young man who has aged internally due to an oppressed spirit, while an old man might be full of liveliness and vitality.

St. Clement's writings in the second century reveal the role of the Christian faith inspiring the spirit of youth. He lived his youth, looking for Him who can quench the thirst in his depths, who can feed and satisfy his mind, soul, and feelings. He went on extensive trips to many countries seeking satisfaction. Finally, he settled in Alexandria, where he met St. Pantenius, the Philosopher, and realized through his words and life "the mystery of true satisfaction."

St. Clement discovered Christ to be the nourishment of his ambitious young spirit and life. He expresses his thoughts saying: "*The sick needs a physician, the lost needs a guide, the blind needs sight, the thirsty needs a well of living water that whoever drinks of it shall never thirst. The dead need life, the sheep needs a shepherd, the sons need a master and all humanity needs Jesus¹.*"

Through his meeting with Christ this ambitious philosopher realized, that Christ is the secret of internal satisfaction, and the renewal of concepts.

1. The Spirit of Joy without Pessimism:

Youth, with their ambitious spirit, see the world as a place to enjoy a joyful life without pessimism. St. Clement saw, through his evangelic view, the graceful hands of God that created everything beautiful and joyful for the sake of mankind. He felt the touches of

¹ *Paedagogus*, 2: 9.

God's great love for man, not only in the creation of the world, but in everything that **God has arranged for the sake of our happiness and the pleasures of our hearts.** What is more wonderful is that even things that seem evil are turned to our benefit. This broad evangelic view is not colored by any pessimism and therefore, preserves the ambitious spirit of youth who lives in holy joy.

2. Everything is Beautiful

St. Clement did not see anything as being evil in itself, for everything that God has created is good and in harmony with everything else. God has sanctified the gifts of prophecy and knowledge so that they may lead mankind to real joy with God. How wonderful these expressions are: ***“God loves everything He created and God does not hate anything and is not hostile to anything¹.”***

The living youth who lives in the spirit of Christ adopts a holy and joyful view towards the world and everything in it. Towards the body and the sacred feelings, his sentiments and potentialities, towards marriage and family relations, and towards social life, etc. St. Clement strongly confirms that this is a result of a powerful evangelic spirit.

3. Human Freedom

St. Clement speaks about “human freedom” and God's sanctification of it. He created man and wants him to be a free “being.” He granted him unrestricted freedom. He does not force him to do specific work nor does he prevent him from certain conduct, even when man might want to oppose, attack, or even deny His existence. He leaves man with total freedom yet, as a Loving Father, He directs him without imposing anything and offers His grace and His power, which can enable him to renew his nature and will without oppression.

Our youth request freedom, and parents and clergymen sometimes destroy that freedom, while Christ wants them to be free!

Our youth are in great need of power that can support them

¹ The author: *The Divine Providence*, Ottawa 1987.

and our Christ is patient and compassionate and wants to help them.

4. Fatherhood

What impressed St. Clement is the great fatherhood of God. By nature, we are strangers to the Divinity, yet He loves us, embraces us as His sons and daughters, and we receive Him in love since He first taught us by His love. We carry Him in us since He first carried us in His arms. He lives in our hearts and announces His fatherhood and friendship thus lifting us to Him so that we might live with Him forever.

Young people, Christ loves you, He does not wish to smother you nor does He wish to destroy your freedom. He wishes to raise you as the rightful and free sons of God (John 8:36). He treats you as His people, wishing you to enjoy His lovable fatherhood while preserving your own personality, talents, and independence. He wishes to fill you with ambition, to feed your lives and quench your thirst through a constant dialogue, which neither parent nor guide can satisfy.

Many psychiatrists and youth counselors have revealed some harmful attitudes that youth encounter when dealing with adults. Adults usually do not recognize the psychological needs of young people and their desire to grow and enjoy personal freedom. We say that our youth are in need for Christ Himself, who is close to every soul. He is closer than any friend. He is a support to all youth, bringing joy to their hearts. He sanctifies their ambitions and satisfies every hidden or apparent request and need.

FAREWELL TO CHILDHOOD!

WELCOME TO MATURITY

RESPECT MY HONOR

As one reaches the early period of adolescence, he or she says farewell to childhood without regret. He or she is eager to experience the youthful life in his or her own view. The adolescents express a strong personality. They are often asked to return home at certain hours, not be with certain friends, or limit their conversations on the phone. **Parents are never tired of urging teenagers to study and they may give themselves the right to select their children's clothes or hairstyles.** Parents react this way out of love and concern for the well-being of their children. Teenagers consider that such overwhelming care does not merely destroy their liberty, but it is a kind of *social suicide*, which to some is crueller than death itself.

The personalities of young people, especially during adolescence, develop unceasingly until it is in its complete form. However, certain influences affect the development of a teenager's personality. Human nature is the most influential factor on a teenager's life. Also, the social surroundings in a teenager's daily life have a large impact on their personality development. In considering the social factor, the discrepancy becomes clear between the personality of the teenager who is brought up in Egypt and that of his counterpart in North America.

In Egypt, parents feel urgency for their children to obtain university degrees in order to succeed in their practical life. Consequently, they push them to study, even at the expense of their health, or the development of their talents, or specific potentials. On the other hand, parents in North America are more interested in developing the talents and hobbies of their children, such as swimming, music, reading, etc. They find this a useful measure that protects the growing adolescent, to a certain extent, from depravity. They are also aware that job possibilities are plentiful and a university degree is not a prerequisite for success. Such differences in rearing up children in both countries are reflected in the life of the teenager and the development of his or her personality.

In addition, a common factor deeply affects the personality of teenagers all over the world. Namely, it is the rapid physical growth and new sensations experienced concerning their bodies. In fact, these features are common among teens, and virtually affect their whole lives. Still we can say that most teenagers tend to think that life, as a whole is centered on passion and emotions.

Before talking about sex from a teenager's point of view, we would like to clarify the importance of the integration of his or her personality in all its aspects. This subject was simply discussed with some of our Coptic youth of Ottawa and Mississauga in Canada on August 1987 for two purposes:

First: These youth represent the first generation brought up in the Coptic Church outside Egypt. **They in turn must be well prepared to make themselves future leaders for the Coptic Church abroad.** These youth will become our bishops, priests, monks, nuns, deacons and servants of the church. **They may witness to the spirituality of the Orthodox Church in the West.** They should learn how to keep a balance between the needs of their human nature, which undergoes constant renewal from all aspects, without extremism, and their spiritual nature.

Secondly: This new generation needs to discuss candidly the implications of the Christian life. It is important to note that, while they live in the West and enjoy all its culture and thought, many Egyptian parents who have immigrated for the sake of a better future for their children want to bring them up in a Christian way. Some parents, however, are worried about the spiritual life of their youth. Some of them treat their children severely, fearing that they may deviate or become disengaged from the Holy evangelic life. Others are too strict because they hope to keep a tight rein on their children, lest they lose the chance of instructing them. A third group of parents are perplexed and vacillate between severity and leniency. However, I would like to address my words to the new generation rather than their parents. **Youth may realize the source of the development of their personality and therefore can achieve their goals in life.**

What we wish to emphasize is that this talk is directed to all

youth - in Egypt as well as abroad. For in spite of environmental differences, still all youth in all societies and across all ages have the same physical growth and the same needs. Though they may seem apparently different, in fact there are similarities within all youth wanting to be fulfilled.

YOU BEAR SEXUAL TRAITS... BUT YOU ARE NOT MERELY SEXUAL

If sex with all its sensations plays a main role in the life of youth, to the extent that it becomes the sole prompter guiding their thoughts, desires, and conduct, we soon find youth who get so obsessed with sex and its sensations that they indulge in it as though it was the last thing in life. This occurs at the expense of their studies and the development of their talents, as well as their social and family relationships. They seem to ignore the close tie they could have with God and the pleasure of entering into a holy partnership with Him. They seem to be careless about their eternal future and their heavenly inheritance. On the other hand, we find some that resort to the other extreme and consider sex and its sensations as an "impurity" that must be abolished. They consider that sexual emotions are sinful and must be smothered. They destroy every vitality and growth under the illusion of apparent purity, which is untruthful. **Young people, however, who live according to the Holy Spirit, may enjoy the virtue of discrimination. They give themselves happily to the Holy Spirit that He may guide their lives, and senses, to be sanctified and saved from destruction.** Therefore, they realize the source of having an integrated, mature personality and think of their growth in terms of holiness. Moreover, they do not rely upon themselves, nor do they live in discontent or doubt.

It is necessary to realize that each person has his own unique and integrated life, which cannot be fragmented. **It is impossible to divide one's life into isolated parts: one that is physical, the other psychological, the next logical, and the following social, or emotional, or sexual etc.** Life is rather, one whole being. Our lives are at home, school, work, or at church. We live our lives alone or with others. We eat, sleep, think, play, work, and worship. This one being or life has distinct multiple aspects, but they are harmoniously blended into one material which cannot be fragmented. **Therefore,**

every growth in one specific part of life affects the growth and development of the other parts in life.

Since we are talking about the human integrated life, it is adequate to talk about the Word of God who became flesh, and who entirely experienced the human life. He carried our human nature in order to bless our nature in every way and to sanctify our bodies, senses, and souls, as well as our spirits. St. Cyril says, "***He is the Savior of human nature, body and spirit.***" He sanctifies the body with all its senses, the soul with all its potentialities, and the spirit with all its powers.

TEND YOUR BODY...DON'T DEFY IT

1. Before the divine incarnation, there were two extreme views concerning the body. Some philosophers adopted the Gnostic attitude and considered the body an element of darkness; thus, they called for its destruction. Others edified the body, especially the reproductive organs, and worshipped it. Some phallic religions worshipped the sexual organs of the man since they were considered the source of life, while other feminist religions considered the womb and breasts of the women to be the sources of life¹. Consequently, nude statues of men and women were set up and female priestesses were in the temple, and this was done in the name of a god, and therefore practicing fornication.

The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Creator and Savior of the body, gloriously came to exalt the body. He was not ashamed of it but He was incarnated and became man. He carried our humanity as a whole to save it as well, rather than save the soul alone. Thus, our Savior granted us a holy view to our bodies as well as to that of others. In Jesus Christ, we look after our body and nurture it (Ephesians 5:7), as it will be raised and it will share with the soul the heavenly glories. **With this viewpoint, man deals with others not as beautiful bodies that satisfy temporary lust, but rather as members in the body of Christ (1 Cor 6:15,) and as temples of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 6:19; 2:16,17)**

2. The incarnated Word of God, the Creator of man, came to our world to heal the bodies as well as the souls and spirits of men

¹ Cf. J. C. Wynn: *Sexual ethics & Christian Responsibilities*, 1976, P 102

and women. He healed unlimited numbers, and granted His disciples the authority and power to heal in His Name (Matt 10:1). St. James told the believer to call for the priests of the church to pray over him in his sickness and to anoint him with holy oil in the name of the Lord. Hence his body is healed, also his soul through the confession of his sins. (James 5:14 – 16)

This wonderful picture confirms how the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church consider a believer. **He is not merely a soul, but a soul having a body that is not foreign to her.** This body represents integral part of the human being that has its role and needs and actually interacts with the soul in unity and harmony.

Therefore, the living youth who aims to have an integrated, mature and progressive personality must think of his or her body and that of others in holy terms since the body is a temple of the Lord Himself.

It should be tended and developed wisely and with understanding. Young people must not consider their bodies as a source of evil, but as a divine gift and blessing. Without the body, man loses his life on earth, while through it he carries out daily work including the material, spiritual, social, and family aspects of it. Through the body the soul cooperates with the mind and the heart and functions in harmony with them to produce every act or speech or thought or emotion springing from the individual as a whole.

Beloved young people, if you wish to have a strong personality, do not despise your body, do not underestimate its role and do not ignore its potentials. You cannot have any existence on earth without it and you cannot even deal with the invisible God without it. When you care for it, then you care for an inseparable part of yourself, as long as you proceed in a spirit of holy wisdom and reasons.

It does not surprise us to see the spiritual leaders themselves tending their bodies in the Lord. St. Paul advised his disciple Timothy, “*Bodily exercise profits a little.*” (1 Tim. 4:8) It was said that a hunter was surprised to see St. John, the Evangelic, playing with a pigeon. The saint, however, took the hunter’s bow and pulled the string until the hunter was obliged to tell him to stop doing this or the string would break. The saint then told him how he similarly

feared to strain his body or he may destroy it. This incident explains how a holy man should not neglect to give proper resting to his body. This urged St. John to put aside his labor for sometimes and enjoy himself playing with the pigeon. Pope Cyril VI was known for his spiritual zeal and he used to pray the liturgy of the Eucharist and the Hymns daily. However, he often went to the monastery of St. Mina in Mariout, where he used to go during sunset for long walks in the desert by himself glorifying God in his spiritual meditations and prayers. Thus, practicing both bodily exercises of walking, alongside the spiritual exercises of prayer.

3. Since the Orthodox Church considers the body with holy reverence, it does not deprive it of sharing in worship with the soul and the spirit. It considers that though a holy man worships the Lord by his spirit (John 4:24), still he practices worship through his body, soul, mind, and emotions etc. In this way, the body is both exalted and enabled to interact spiritually with the Spirit of God who abides in a man's whole being and not in the soul alone.

This spiritual worship, in which the body contributes in harmony with the soul under the leadership of God's Spirit, has a pervading influence and prevails an effect of peace on the body itself. We all know fasting and prayer both bring inner joy to the worshipping heart, and reflected beneficially on the body itself. Solomon says, "*A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.*" (Proverbs 17:22)

4. Since we are talking about the role of the body in the development of personality or contributing to its integration, we must point out to what teenagers undergo even in countries that are more progressive. A feeling of guilt will usually arise from the rapid changes occurring in their bodies as well as new feelings towards the other sex. Teenagers sometimes feel shy and unable to discuss these matters candidly with their parents or counselors. **During this stage, the family, school, as well as the church must be aware that their duty is to assure the teenager that these changes are God's good gift.** Through these changes the teenager leaves the stage of childhood and enjoys a stage of growth. They also have to help assure him or her that he or she has to accept the experience of maturity or puberty that occurs in multiple phases and not at once.

They have to explain that these changes prepare both sexes to make new families and to practice parental life (fatherhood and motherhood). The Holy Spirit who guides us does not destroy or condemn this bodily and emotional development, but rather sanctifies and guides it, to be more constructive.

Youth in the period of adolescence need to realize the aim of these changes. Thus, they would be able to accept them with an understanding heart and an open mind. **Hence, they may see in these changes the starting signal for the growth and development of their personalities as a whole, rather than allowing the practice of prurience or carelessness, and the irresponsible satisfaction of physical pleasure.**

NO, YOU ARE NOT UGLY... CARE ABOUT YOUR INNER BEAUTY

A young girl who had some traces of beauty once asked for our help in a bitter moral dilemma. As we were discussing God's love and care with her, she confessed bashfully that she found it extremely hard to discuss an aspect of her life with anyone. After sometime, she murmured that she suffered from feelings of inferiority because she thought she was ugly.

This is not a unique instance. It is a feeling that is frequently suffered by adolescents of both sexes. Many girls are convinced that they are not beautiful even though boys are attracted to them. Similarly, boys feel uncertain about their physical, intellectual, or even courting aptitude. Such feelings are disruptive to adolescents.

In the introduction of this book, we talked about the psychological pressures on teenagers especially their feelings of inferiority and disastrous feelings of loneliness. The majority of teenagers in both developed and underdeveloped countries experience these pressures. There would be no exaggeration when we say do they affect everyone from time to time in varying degrees, but they are very tough on teenagers to bear.

In his book "Preparing for Adolescence" Dr. Dobson¹ states that the feeling of inferiority, despair, failure, or worthlessness has a destructive effect on our personality. Eighty percent of teenagers are

¹ Dr. James Dobson: *Preparing for Adolescence*, 1984, p. 16, (*The Agony of Inferiority*)

dissatisfied with some features of their bodies that make them feel ugly or unattractive. Actually, this is a major problem that preoccupies their mind most of the time. Additionally, they think that the other sex does not like them. Dr. Dobson raised two other factors, which provoke this feeling: doubt in their own intelligence or lack of material resources.

Although problems caused by feelings of inferiority are suffered most frequently by youth, they also can affect adults whatever their social, academic, material, or physical status. Every person has needs. Since man is God's creation, he strives for superiority. A man may highly estimate himself, his potentials, his talents, or his power. He may, moreover, be beloved by millions of people or he may be respected and honored for his work or art, but he may see himself as worthless because, **he feels a great emptiness deep inside, which no one can fulfill.** This is what leads some famous artists to commit suicide.

Nevertheless, ever since the beginning of creation, God has granted man a developing soul so that he might have a strong personality, which can resist the destructive effect caused by feelings of inferiority.

God opposes such feelings and helps us rightly regard ourselves as His special dear children. We have been given many blessings of abilities and lack nothing that is really for our good. The book of Genesis tells us how God has granted man dominion over all the earth (Gen. 1:26), and has granted him the ability to reason and to think freely. Thus, Adam gave names to all living creatures without having any previous experience. (Gen. 2:19)

When the prophet Moses, at the age of 80, experienced feelings of inferiority because he was slow of speech, he wished to quit the leadership of God's people and said, "*O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else you may send.*" (Exod. 4:13) God did not leave him to destroy himself by this feeling but gave him the assurance that he can find good support in Him. God said, "*I will certainly be with you... I'll be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say...*" (Exod. 3:12; 4:12) As he felt inferior due to a heavy tongue, God the Creator of the tongue gave him the words when he needed them. Similarly, when Jeremiah suffered from the

same feelings, God interfered and told him, “ *Do not say, ‘I am a youth. For I am with you to deliver you.’*” (Jer. 1:7, 8)

God’s concern about the well-being of His people is evident when He sent “manna” in the desert to feed their bodies, and “joy” to feed their souls; hence they could overcome the difficulties with joyful and intact souls. For the Bible says: “*Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*” (Ps. 90:14)

By the incarnation of the Word of God, we received an integral cure for our souls and spirits. He became one of us, carried the same nature and shared life with us on earth. Thus, the Creator of mankind helped us to restore self-confidence and have a high esteem of our humanity. Through the incarnate Word of God, man realizes the significance of his own being.

The glorious Son of God has lived among us and in us; through baptism He grants us the adoption to the Father. How, then, can we feel inferior?

He gave us all His love on the cross, what else do we need? The Apostle Paul says: “*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things.*” (Rom. 8:32)

The Lord’s concern about the well-being of man is evident in His gentle care, for those that were rejected and cast away: lepers, thieves, fornicators, tax collectors and lunatics. Indeed, even though He dislikes sin and cannot stand it, yet He loves sinners and the sick and wishes to heal them. He was also concerned about the psychological well-being of children and women since they are individuals who have their rights as members in the Church. He considers they have equal rights as adult men to work in order to achieve their goals, which correspond to their potentials and talents. When Jesus was a young boy, He told his mother: “*Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my father’s business?*” (Luke 2:49) Some scholars find in these word implications of revolution in the world of youth. A youth is a person who has his own being, personality and role in life. The Master obeyed His mother (Luke 2:51) and at the same time, He accomplished His mission.

May every youth realize that God, who has created him, is concerned about his life as a whole. He looks tenderly at the spiritual and psychological aspects as well as the bodily aspects. God's aim is that each youth is a living member in Him enjoying an intact soul. God does not leave adolescents to be destroyed by feelings of inferiority or loneliness since He offers them so much. For example:

a. He offers Himself as a personal Friend, walking closely to man; hence, it seems to everyone that God is only concerned about him. St. Augustine experienced this when he entered into the circle of God's love. Truly, man can sing with trust and joy: "*My beloved is mine, and I am his.*" (Song of Songs 2:16) **The incarnate Word of God came to establish a friendship based on a unique level that can satisfy every person.** He is the Friend who enters into the depths and understands our true feelings. He never ignores our feelings or despises us whatever our weaknesses are. On the contrary, we see Him encouraging and supporting us confirming His evaluation of each and everyone's personality.

b. He came to eradicate the spirit of despair and futility by focusing on all that is good and beautiful in man's life regardless of any evil side.

c. As the Creator, He holds our hands to draw us away from being involved in outward circumstances, and guide us to the care for our inner man. He wishes to declare His joyful kingdom within us, so that we may be proud of the inner glory that He establishes in our depths and of the inner renewal that is fulfilled by His Holy Spirit (Col. 3:10).

May all humanity - including teenagers - realize God's love for us! He is concerned even about our psychological needs. We should all meet such love with love for others and a concern for their well-being. In other words, we should be concerned about the psychological needs of others just as the Lord cares for us. I believe that young people, whether male or female, who play with the feelings of others of the same or of the other sex in order to satisfy their selfish emotions or ego, isolate themselves from the Spirit of Christ. They meddle with the future and inner well-being of others under the pretense of love and friendship.

A girl came to our church in Los Angeles to be acquainted with us. She came to hear people who speak in Arabic, because she was of Arabic origin. I had a chat with her and learned that she was an unbeliever. She had lived with more than one man, sometimes for months or years, indulging in a life of pleasure. I asked her about her inner feelings concerning her life. She answered frankly that she did not feel safe or secure since she lived with a man for years without any promises of stability. Her life apparently seemed to be filled with gaiety and pleasure, but according to her frank words, she was miserable and worried inwardly. When we talked to her about the Fatherhood of God, she was surprised to hear the word "*Fatherhood*" for she never tasted it. Her parents were divorced and lived in different states and she did not know where her mother was. We asked her if she ever inquires about them, and she replied, "Why should I ask, if one of them is sick, there are hospitals." We pitied the girl who had never experienced the sincere love of parents and friends, and who has not met with Jesus Christ to discover that. **He is the only One who can satisfy her soul and consider her as a dear child to Him.**

My beloved, may we meet our Christ who is concerned about our deepest feelings. May we carry Him joyfully in our hearts and invite everyone to enjoy with us the inner life filled with joy.

ATTEND TO THE MIND AND ITS DEVELOPMENT!

God, in His love, granted man dominion over the whole creation (Gen. 1:28). Man can, therefore, learn its laws, potentials and secrets; use it all for his own edification and growth, and for the progress of human's life. God created man as a rational creature to enable him to use his mind, and to serve humanity, rather than to hinder its function.

Young people leading spiritual lives know through God's Spirit how to develop the capabilities of their minds successfully. Joseph practiced wisely how to manage the house of Photiphar (Gen. 39:3-6) and how to lead the prisoners when he was a prisoner with them (Gen. 39:21-23). He also learned how to distribute grain not only throughout Egypt but also throughout neighboring countries (Gen. 41:37-44).

David was also successful not only as a prophet but also as a

leader of the army, as well as a king and a judge. God granted him wisdom, grace, and sober mind by which he succeeded in every work that he undertook. Thus, our faith is associated with the vitality and development of the mind, which we must use even when we worship in Spirit. (1 Cor. 14:15)

We can say that the development of man's personality - especially in the period of adolescence - necessitates the development of the mind along side with the other aspects of his being. Even though emotions appear then to have the upper hand, which is a natural matter, teenagers should couple this fiery emotion with wisdom and mature thought. This will enable them to lead a proper spiritual and family life as well as to promote their relationships with friends of the other sex. Possessing a sober mind is a gift of God. A sober mind supports our emotions, perfects them, and develops them, so that our emotions never deviate from their target, becoming a point of weakness that may destroy a youth's personality.

The period of adolescence provides an excellent opportunity, in which we can learn how God's hand is extended to grant us wisdom and sobriety. In the midst of violent emotions, we can live with our hearts and our minds operating harmoniously by the grace of God.

EMOTIONAL GROWTH

As intensifying feelings develop in the period of adolescence, young people might think that they have become a mere pack of emotions.

Some teenagers - even in liberal countries - imagine these emotions to be sinful. This drives them to abuse themselves. These emotions, however, are God's gifts, which are granted for the purpose of developing personalities and introducing young people to the phase of puberty. At this phase, his or her heart can open up and be filled with love for all humanity. This love does not have to be focused on one person from the other sex to satisfy a temporary passion, or seek to establish friendship with a limited group of peers. It is rather a practical kind of love that is directed to God and people. That is what St. Augustine reveals through his personal experience. He explains that those who enjoy strong and deep

emotions are more capable than others in practicing love for God and people through God's grace, although they are more vulnerable to going astray. **Consequently, emotions which are rejected by some people, when sanctified and blessed, they can be a good basis for a joyful life, successful and blessed marriages or for a deep virginal life.**

How can the emotions of a teenager be sanctified and help in developing his or her personality? We will postpone talking about this point in a separate article, God willing.

MATURITY AND SEXUAL LIFE

As we have said before, many young people imagine that maturity resides in the attainment of sexual experience and practicing it. In fact, many of them consider they have not parted with their childhood unless they have practiced the physical aspect of sex.

As we develop physically, psychologically and emotionally, the more we understand sex. Youth, therefore, need to realize the most important facts concerning this subject, are as follows:

1. Christianity bestows dignity and holiness to marriage and the marital relationship. It declares sex as one of the concerns in marital life. In its broad sense, **sex represents life that should be practiced in holiness and dignity and is in no way a problem that needs treatment.**

Some people diminish the value of sex as they confine it within limits of physical relations. **They need to consider it as a symbol of deep and inner love or as an opening of the heart towards all mankind.** In doing so, they can lead a man and a woman to unite together, as one person, and not just for mere physical contact.

2. Physical relations in marital life are beneficial, as they express unity not only at the level of the body and emotions but also at the level of the soul. St. Augustine¹ sees that **sin in sex does not arise due to the physical pleasure but due to the depravation of the will**, which binds man, and deviates sex from its holy purpose and transforms it into an evil passion.

¹ Cf. John J. Hugo: *St. Augustine on Nature, Sex and Marriage, part 2, ch. 2.*

3. The happiness of a couple arising from their physical contact is not caused by sexual desire, but by pleasure shared together. A pure person finds more pleasure in purity, and this sometimes exceeds that of another man who is deeply involved in prurience. A parallel example comes in the form of a man who is moderate in his eating habits and can find in food a pleasure that exceeds that experienced by a greedy man devouring masses of food. Sex in marital life, has consequently natural and pleasurable aspects. The deviation of sex from its goal turns it to be evil just as greed turns food into a sin, although food in itself is good¹.

St. Augustine distinguishes between natural desire, which is accompanied by holy joy and concupiscence, which springs from a corrupt depraved will. He also distinguishes between love, which is accompanied by tenderness and prurience with all the disorders it entails².

Since “sex” represents the core of the subject of adolescence, we would like to treat it more elaborately in a separate chapter and to examine its role in the development and integration of a teenager’s personality.

SOCIAL GROWTH

Our Lord Jesus Christ descended to our world to renew and develop the society of mankind. This was not done through a revolution, or through imposing strict laws, but He did so by renewing our inner life. We mention, as an example, how the Church faced the problems of society such as the problem of slavery. The leaders of the Church were not angry with the masters, neither did they provoke the slaves against them, but with love, they accepted the slaves as members of the Church. They gave them the same rights as their masters, even appointing some of them as bishops. They also honored their martyrs. Many masters, in the same spirit, liberated their slaves or treated them as brothers. Some slaves, in a spirit of loving obedience, succeeded in attracting their masters to faith. Thus, the Church offered solutions to social illnesses. By adopting a humble and gentle spirit, the Church cured deeply rooted social problems. Therefore, it is possible for all

¹ Rev. E.C. Messenger: *The Mystery of Sex and Marriage*, p. 22 ff.

² John J. Hugo, p. 79 ff.

members to meet through the renewal of inner life and love. Every member can be concerned about the group, eager to offer his life as a sacrifice for others through his union with our Savior.

Young people also, deeply revolt against social and human discrimination, especially during this period of fiery vitality. They try to create a world of their own in which they revolt against all types of discrimination, even that which may exist in the world of adults. We should not wonder if we see a teenager ignoring the family and social prestige and falling in love with a poor teenager who is not an equal in social or cultural statuses.

Sometimes, young people insist on becoming involved in interracial relationships. At other instances, we may find an educated boy asking an illiterate girl to marry him, or another boy wishing to marry a girl who does not share his religious faith. One possible explanation for such behavior is that this may be a reaction against feelings of inferiority. Teenagers may be trying to solve or overcome feelings of helplessness by reverting to revolt, violence, and rebellion. This reflects a disregard to mature and thoughtful deliberation and consequently hinders development of a strong adolescent personality.

If teenagers seek to develop their personalities, they should seek to develop socially, as well as physically, psychologically, spiritually, and sexually. They must realize that using apparent violence is most often a reflection of inner rebellion and lack of peace. They express their inner revolution by revolting against the values of society and the family. The teenager wants to establish a relationship with someone from the other sex who may differ from him in thought, culture or social circumstances, even different in faith just to express his revolution against his family or his society. Such relationships very rarely last; rather; they may end up with the destruction of both individuals because they are not based on the proper foundations of sincere love.

On meeting a young teenager, he insisted on putting the Holy Bible on the ground treading on it with his feet before his friends. When his Christian colleagues tried to stop him, he spit on the icons of the Lord Jesus Christ and St. Mary, and asked them to prove to him the existence of God. It did not take long to convince

this young man that what he did was not because he was an unbeliever but because he was a victim of his deep erroneous hidden feelings. In a calm atmosphere, we discovered that he was the only son of old parents, and that in their deep love for him they had ignorantly destroyed him psychologically. They wanted to make him an obedient tool, which they could move according to their desires, thus belittling his humanity, will, and personality. The youth felt that he had lost his “being” at home. This affected his ability to establish friendship with his peers. He tried to overcome this by revolting against moral and social values, thinking that by his odd behavior he could attract people’s attention and become a leader among his peers. Through our discussion, he faced the deep wounds of his soul and cried. He turned, with hope, to God who is the Lover of Mankind.

This picture of adolescent despair is repeated in various forms and degrees and requires great spiritual wisdom in dealing with it. It is necessary to guide youth to understand their inner souls so that they can realize that there is a value in social life, and that the capabilities of spiritual life are the real support to their personalities. Nurturing their souls enables them to grow rather than to destroy their spiritual lives or binding their thoughts and their freedom.

Very often, the rebellion of teenagers against the traditions and values of society is a result of bad experiences that they have had during their childhood. These experiences may have been at home, at school, or in Church. The child who does not experience the warmth of deep inner love, which is mutual between his parents, cannot feel comfortable at home; secure in the church, or in society as a whole, or even with God Himself. He perceives the whole world through his family that lacks love and life. This problem arises when teens do not feel the motherhood of the Church, which should be evident to them through the fatherhood of the priest and his spiritual love. The priest’s role is to seek out the deification of youth rather than impose authority, power, or just issue laws. Quite often, teenagers lose faith, from being preoccupied with what people say about them and because they miss real love in the life with their parents or in experiences with their church leaders.

Apart from laying the responsibility upon the family, church, or society for inspiring rebellion in some teenagers against prevailing social and religious values, moreover, we wish that our children realize their membership in society. They need to take decisions which touch their lives and develops their personalities while adopting a wise view that would enable them to develop and grow in all aspects of life. Thus, they can also share in the growth and progress of the group rather than revolt against it by choosing to behave in a way that would destroy themselves as well as the surrounding group.

DON'T NEGLECT YOUR SPIRIT!

During adolescence, the body passes through a critical period due to its rapid growth. This is accompanied by an intensification of the emotions and sexual sensations. Besides, there is an increase in the desire to impose one's personality on society and to enjoy freedom. In the midst of all this turmoil, an individual often forgets himself and his innermost self.

For the continuous growth of an individual's personality, especially in the period of adolescence, it is necessary to develop every facet of life previously mentioned above. This cannot be achieved without the continuous renewal of the inner life of every individual since it is the hidden root, which supports life including all its aspects.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to us so that we receive Him as a source of continuous renewal inside ourselves. He grants us His Holy Spirit by whom we can attain the new nature and the spirit of inner renewal.

Some thinkers indicate that the "self" of man carries three dimensions¹. The "*social self*" in which man finds "himself" through his relations with others, their opinions and their attitude towards him as well as their relationship with him. The "*oceanic self*" which is "one's" personality, including his potentials, abilities, and, various talents. Finally, the "*core self*" which the Apostles called "the inner man."

¹ *Young Adult Living, Palest Parries, N.Y. 1980, P.73 ff. (Identity of self and growth, by John McCall)*

The teenager can, through experienced counseling, pass from the “social self” i.e., from being preoccupied with what people say about him or her, to what is more important, i.e. to the “oceanic self.” Here, he or she is neither distracted by the praise of others, nor destroyed by their criticism. However, he or she is concerned with the development of talents and uses all his or her potentials to edify himself and the progress of humanity. The term “oceanic self” is used because it indicates the unlimited talents, power, and potentials, which if discovered, would make one feel that they are too vast to be used up. They are, moreover, deeply rooted - as an ocean - within his or herself.

However, our Lord Jesus Christ alone who sends His Holy Spirit granting us the opportunity to go deeper than the oceanic self. He takes us to the “core” of ourselves, illuminates our inside, thus we can discover the reality of our “inner man,” or the “core self.” It is then that we can realize that we are individuals who have an ultimate holy mission and goal in life. In this way, everyone realizes, especially in the period of adolescents, that he or she is not just anyone, but God’s child who is called by name to be His son or daughter. God calls us to establish a personal relationship with Him, and to enjoy the eternal inheritance in the presence of the Heavenly Father.

Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ opens a new field as he enters with us into our innermost to practice the right to live and deal with God as valuable persons to Him. This is possible through the continuing renewal of our inner life rather than through mere outward behavior or other shallow forms of expression, which lack spirit. This does not mean practicing inner worship without involving the body, but it means including all our being and its various aspects, in worship. This can be achieved through continuous renewal with the aim of developing into a well-balanced personality free of any exaggeration or going to extremes.

The life of constant spiritual renewal is positively reflected in the development of every aspect of the personality of adolescents. On one hand, renewal means supporting the body, since the believer must look after the body in moderation, and he must be concerned about his inner life and how it benefits the body.

On the other hand, constant spiritual renewal affects the psychology of the teenager. It grants him peace, joy, and happiness, which is the true food for the soul. This will enable the teenager to absolve any feelings of inferiority or loneliness. He discovers that the Creator Himself cares for him personally, exalts him to sonship, grants him confidence, and appreciates his human life. It is needless to elaborate in the virtues of being spiritual; however, its influence on the maturation of the mind is outstanding. Spiritual renewal spurs the search for knowledge of heavenly matters and practical daily life in a spirit of modesty. Through it, our children can taste family life in an atmosphere of true deep love. When youth feel this worth of true love in their Christian homes, this will satisfy their inner being. This can enhance their vision of marriage, family, life, and, sex. Later on, spirituality gives them the chance to be good Christians; rather than to escape or seek satisfaction through practicing depraved and dishonest relationships with their peers of the other sex.

Throughout the few years of our service, we have not found a person who continued to be corrupt while his family enjoyed a real and joyful spiritual life, and not merely practiced the formalities of worship or service without spirit.

Finally, we wish to stress that we all need, especially teenagers, to lead a fervent spiritual life for this enables us to develop.



LET ME GROW... GROW... GROW!

We often imagine the period of adolescence as a critical period, and as a path full of risks. At this time in their development, youth, struggle internally with the sensations they experience due to physical and emotional changes towards the other sex. The individual finds his or herself strongly rebelling against the family and sometimes against society and the Church. This rebellion originates from a wish to be treated as a mature person who has absolute freedom in thoughts and behaviors. Adults, however, consider that the adolescent is just passing through a phase of growth and consequently needs guidance, support, and strict discipline. Nevertheless, the indisputable truth is that adolescence is a period of intense growth, which takes place in many aspects: physical, psychological, mental, emotional, sexual, spiritual, etc. It is a period of continuous and fast evolution during which the teenager bids farewell to childhood, with its total dependence on others, and welcomes a period of puberty and maturity. He or she can practice freedom and becomes familiar with his or her role in life. This period of growth does not have to be a time of problems. Even though there may be troubles and difficulties that are introduced into the lives of youth and their relationship with their families and society, these difficulties can be worked out. In its essence, adolescents are “growing life” that grants humanity continuous progress.

LET US LISTEN TO THEM AND APPRECIATE THEIR VALUES AND THEIR THOUGHTS

It seems necessary, in this context, that every father and mother, and every priest and counselor consider teenagers as the living treasure of our society. They ought to be considered as people who seek a mature and free life. This attitude will enable adults to embrace young people lovingly and serenely. Consequently, adolescents would be able to develop their personalities and wills within a framework of reasoning and spirituality.

At this point we would like to clarify an important matter, which affects our dealings with young people, which is, their need for those who can listen to them in a spirit of love, concern, and

understanding. Youth are people who might not have reached maturity yet, but who are undergoing an important phase of development. **They are proud of their personalities, freedom, potentials and talents. They dislike being treated as children who are dependent on adults.** Consequently, they seek those who love them and can understand this tumultuous phase in their growth. Frankly, they need mature and wise adults, while adults need them too! Dealing with adolescents gives the inner self the opportunity to experience the life of youth, which seeks unceasing growth and continuous renewal. It seems as though adults need young people in their lives to experience the growth process with them and to interact together in a spirit of love, as members in the body of the one Christ. On the other hand, young people need wise adults to support them as they seek to explore this precious and unique period, and to enjoy continuous growth.

DO NOT PRECIPITATE OUR GROWTH... AND DO NOT IGNORE IT!

Some think that growth is a condition that is achieved in one leap! The belief is that once this condition is reached, one remains in it for the rest of his or her life. Actually, such misapprehensions arise from a perverted pride, which destroys life and buries the personality of man.

Unfortunately, parents themselves sometimes adopt this wrong concept. They consequently throw the whole responsibility on their children, as they believe that they have reached complete maturity. Under this heavy burden, some teenagers escape this responsibility by indulging, as an outlet, in sexual relationships, which are harmful to them in many ways. Sometimes parents even encourage or choose to ignore such conduct since they believe that such relationships are a sign of their adolescent's maturity.

These are some of the statements recorded by some teenagers from both sexes in the U.S.A.¹:

"Some parents... put pressure on their young person, and don't realize they are doing it. When a parent tells a young person to be mature, 99 % of the time he does not take the time to explain

¹ Josh McDowell: *What I Wish my Parents to Know about my Sexuality*, p. 58-59.

*what he considers a mature person to be. So, the young person turns to his peer's definition of "mature," in other words, engaging in sex. **Teens today need parents who will explain the differences between maturity and sexual relationships.***"

*"Sometimes I think a lot of teenagers become sexually involved because of their poor relationship with their parents. **If their parents pressure them with a lot of responsibility, they feel as if they can take all the stress away with a sexual relationship.**"*

*"I think that too many parents are pressuring their children to grow up too fast. **They then leave them alone and don't teach them that sex before marriage is a sin.**"*

In the middle of this turmoil, Josh states: *"We parents need to help our confused teens find that balance of being a kid living in an adult world. Let's not hurry our children to 'maturity.'"*

Just as some parents harm their children by regarding them as adults who have completed their growth and consequently flinging at them a responsibility, which might destroy their spirits and lives; there are others who also harm their children by completely ignoring their growth. Teenagers do not like to hear adults talking to them and using an all-inclusive expression such as "the kids." They feel that this is an insult and a humiliation. Each one feels that he or she is a person who has his or her own individuality, potentials, and independent personality. Each one feels he or she is not just one of the others as was the case during childhood¹. During this period, the teenager, male or female, finds it hard when parents asks him or her to bring a cup of water or to fetch him clothes etc. It is even harder in the presence of others. This is not due to lack of love towards the parents or due to an unwillingness to be helpful, nor is it due to pride or laziness as some accuse them of. Essentially, it can be explained by the youth's desire to confirm, in his own way, his maturity and growth before others as well as himself. As evidence, one often finds a female teenager who at one moment claims to be tired or is too busy to help her mother, and the next moment that same girl would be working

¹ Simon J. Thole: *The Ministry of Parents to Teenagers*, 1985, p.17.

seriously or seeking someone's help. Thus our children need to realize that we are aware of them and consider their growth as an unceasing and continuous growth.

WE ARE AWARE OF YOUR PERPETUAL GROWTH... WELCOME THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS

Teenagers often believe they can achieve maturity in one leap and thus reach the final point of growth. They thus seem to share their parent's illusion that growth has been achieved, not to mention others who insist that teenagers are still in their childhood. Maturity, for teenagers, means liberty and independence. They believe they do not need the guidance of others, especially their parents, and reject it as a sign of self-confidence and self-sufficiency. They wish to indicate that they have become perfectly well adapted to manhood or womanhood. Consequently, they are affected by illusory or utopian ideals concerning maturity and freedom¹. Such young people wish to live according to their personal inclinations and judgment. They may reject all forms of counseling offered by parents or other advisers, since they believe that maturity and freedom reside in the fact that **they are the sole judges who know how to handle affairs correctly. This narcissistic vision of maturity and freedom destroys the growth and life of the adolescent.** Narcissus is a mythical character that loved his own image so much that he kept looking at its reflection in the water until he died.

Freedom is actually the essence of growth and maturity. Youth, however, need to realize that it can be attained through learning to appreciate the growth and experience of others. Thus, while they themselves are growing, they need to open up their minds to their elders. They need to realize that they achieve growth gradually while accepting adults as part of their lives. Consequently, they will find that as problems and obstacles that face them enrich them, they can be further enriched through the experiences of adults.

Growth is a continuous action, which teenagers undergo through their interaction with others and their acceptance of the pain

¹ *Young Adults Living*, Paulist Press, N.Y., 1980, p. 11, *The Cost of Growing Up*, by Mathew O'Connell.

involved. As Dr. Dobson says, in his book, "Preparing For Adolescence," "When the embryo completes its growth it moves to go out of its mother's womb where it lived securely and where all its needs were naturally given to it without any effort on its part. Once it leaves the womb, the doctor holds its feet so that the child is in an inverted position until he screams, in order to be assured that his lungs are working. In this way the child enters the world screaming to practice his daily growth through laborious experiences, facing the world as though from an inverted position. If he had stayed in his mother's womb his growth would have been hindered and he would have died." Similarly, teenagers must leave the security and warmth of childhood to face the world. They need to do so through accepting, realistically, the implications of freedom, and not through adopting a narcissistic attitude towards it. This would enable them to overcome the troubles of life, as well as develop their personalities. They need to accept God's grace to support them and to accept the experience of others and thus benefit and be supported by it.

Human beings need Jesus Christ as a personal friend in the period of adolescence as well as in all the other stages of life. He or she needs Christ's support to help in continuous growth even though there is the possibility of passing through difficulties. Christ grants hope and the spirit of triumphant victory. The Apostle expresses this in his words: "*I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one.*" (1 John 2:13) St. Paul lived with such a spirit and he asked for continuous growth in Jesus Christ. He says: "*forgetting what lies behind, and reaching forward to what lies ahead.*" (Phil. 3:13) He is sure that all things work to achieve his continuous growth, as he says: "*And we know that all things work together for the good of those that love God.*" (Rom. 8:28)

TAKE OVER THE STEERING WHEEL... OBSERVE THE SIGNALS!

Adolescence is similar to a car driven by a person wishing to drive quickly through the city of incompetent childhood in order to arrive at the city of mature adulthood. It is the car of perpetual growth, yet its path is filled with dangers. Its driver needs the signals on the road to help him avoid detours that might fling him to

death.

Adults should not tear the steering wheel out of the hands of adolescents, neither should they impose nor force their will on their teens during that period of growth. They should only direct them and acquaint them with the potentials of their cars, to hand them a road map, to unveil dangers, and to offer supporting signals. Probably, the first signal adults would offer in supporting them on the road to growth would be to indicate that growth is an internal psychic action.

The constant action and overwhelming vitality that characterizes youth, and that seems to outweigh their physical potentials, is an adequate indication of this internal psychic action. Alternatively, it signals to their inner desire to proceed towards maturity as well as their eagerness to develop. The danger, however, is that they might be satisfied with the external evidences of growth to emphasize their manhood or womanhood, without being concerned about their inner life and the growth of their personalities. Such outward concerns are illustrated below:

First: do not be embarrassed to say “**No.**” **Adolescents fear saying “no” to their peers as they wish to be in conformity with them. They desire to copy blindly what other youth might be doing.** Some of the questionnaires answered by teenagers in the U.S.A., revealed that about 80 % of the drug addicts took drugs the first time just to try them and not because they were convinced. They were under the pressure of friends and did so to avoid the accusation of being kids (daddy’s or mommy’s boy) or of being naive, without experience etc.

As for premarital sex, here are some of the comments of teenagers¹:

“It is not easy to say ‘no’ under the pressure of a friend.”

“Some teenagers frankly admitted their fear of rejection by their peers, if they would not participate in sex.”

“Another reason that comes under peer pressure is the fear of being labeled ‘inexperienced.’ To some people that is the worst name you could call them because it implies childishness.”

¹ J. McDowell, p. 29-31.

Thus, under the pressure of friends, some teenagers behave in a way, which their own reasoning rejects, but which they assume would disguise them as being mature and adults rather than children.

Dr. Dobson¹ gives a practical example of peer pressure among teenagers and how it destroys their inner growth. He says that if you were going out for a jolly evening with four other youth and while you found the driver bringing out a bottle and taking a pill (drug), then quickly handing the bottle to the guy next to him, who would do the same, then the third until your turn comes; you might be hesitant not to take the pill. But one of them might say mockingly, “Come on sissy, what is the matter? Are you scared? Hey, guys, we’ve got a mama’s boy back here! He is afraid dad will find out. We didn’t think you were a big chicken! Come on baby face, try it this time!” And so on, one or more might mock and hurt the teenager. The words may differ from one country to another but the abuse is the same. At this point, the youth’s hands would tremble and his heartbeats increase and he would feel very confused. Maybe under this pressure, he would just swallow the pill, and this would be the beginning of the destruction of his life.

In more than one survey, youth such as those who exerted pressure on their friend to force him to join them in taking drugs or practice sex or become preoccupied with pleasures and parties at the expense of all the aspects of their lives were asked about their attitude towards a friend who would insist on saying “no.” The majority of replies conveyed the thought that **even though they mocked a youth to put pressure on him, they appreciated him and felt he was a born leader who could control himself as well as others.** The word “no” does not mean that the teenager loses his personal status. On the contrary, **it reveals his leadership potential since it means that he has a strong personality that enables him to lead others rather than be easily led by others even though against his will².**

Josh McDowell³ suggests thirty-seven ways of saying “No.”

¹ *Preparing for Adolescence*, p. 52 f.

² *Ibid*, p. 54-55.

³ *J. McDowell*, ch. 25.

A teenager could use these ways when his peers ask him to participate in premarital sex. McDowell was inspired to write them because of the writings of teenagers themselves. We will mention some of these ways, as well as certain quotations from the Holy Bible, which we have added:

1. Go to your Creator who created you. He knows how you can behave in a good manner (2 Peter 1:3, 4).
2. Establish a good relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, so that He can dispel your feelings of loneliness.
3. Learn and follow the ways of God's grace (1 Cor. 15:10).
4. Learn how to say "No" with diligence (2 Peter 1:5).
5. Think of the word of God "*Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" (Rom. 12:2)
6. Ask for good guidance (especially from your father of confession) (Prov. 6:20).
7. Escape for your sake as Joseph did (Gen. 39:9).
8. Beware of TV programs that make sex look appealing.
9. "*Bringing into activity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*" (2 Cor. 10:5) Do not allow the mind to wander away to what may lead to hurtful feelings or behaviors.
10. Stop the destructive meetings with others (Matt. 18:8).
11. Avoid petty things as they lead to bigger ones (Song 2:15).
12. Revise your goal in life from time to time and consult God Himself (Acts 9:6).
13. Try to establish friendships with those who can strengthen you spiritually. (Eccl. 4:12)
14. Don't think you're strong lest you fall (1 Cor. 10:12).
15. Be interested in developing your talents (2 Tim. 1:6).
16. Seek caliber and wisdom in your words and behavior so that others won't stumble because of you.
17. Avoid single meetings for he who approaches the fire of lust is burned by it (Proverbs 6:27, 28).

These practical ways written by other teenagers seeking growth could help you in saying "No" to achieve continuous development and the growth of your personality in all its aspects.

Secondly: Understand the real meaning of manhood and womanhood.

In addition to the effect of peer pressure and how this directs

teenagers to be preoccupied with appearances rather than inner growth, the intrinsic desire of the teenager to appear to be self-dependant and to have an autonomous personality independent of his parents also has a deep influence. Being called “mommy’s boy” or “daddy’s boy” can have a detrimental effect on the psychological development of teenagers. No wonder the teenager becomes preoccupied, not by developing his personality, but by external matters, which seem ridiculous in the eyes of adults. A young person may consider it a big insult when his father questions him about his arrival home at late hours or his bad results at school or his acquaintances. Similarly, when a mother interferes in her daughter’s choice of clothes or hairstyle, a girl feels insulted. These insults, which insult the manhood or womanhood of youth, are considered as tools that destroy their personalities.

Dr. Dobson quoted two realistic examples drawn from his own personal life. The first example is drawn from the time when he started to neglect his studies and did not concentrate so that his grades began to drop. His mother told him that if he would not improve, she would not punish him by depriving him of going out on picnics, or by withdrawing his pocket money etc., but that all she would do is to accompany him to school to observe his behavior. He considered this a catastrophe or as he called it “*Social Suicide.*” He felt that in this way, he would lose his personality before his peers and other students. He therefore decided to concentrate on his studies immediately in such a way that amazed his teachers and peers who did not know the real reason of his progress.

The second example dates to the time his father attended his graduation ceremony and took a movie film of the occasion. He considered this as an insult since he could not accept to be “his dad’s boy” who wanted his daddy to take pictures of him. These feelings and others similar to them are only natural in the life of teenagers. These are healthy signs of their desire to enjoy their maturity and independence to some extent. The danger, however, is that this desire might stop here and be merely concerned with external social appearances while ignoring the development of the inner depths of the soul which promotes growth of the personality.

Man’s discovery of his innermost depths where the spirit of

God dwells, and his realization of his new position as the Son of God, as well as his recognition of God's plan for him grants him a sense of respect for his "core self" rather than for his external appearances.

The teenager realizes that the growth of his personality is not merely a matter of physical beauty or strength, academic success, wealth, or sweetness with others especially those of the other sex. It is achieved by a psychic satisfaction and his acquaintance with the reality of the depth of his influence on the life of his group due to his capacity to open up his heart to all people. Anyone who is only concerned with appearances constantly suffers dissatisfaction and emptiness, begging others' sympathy or praise or financial support. As for the person who is concerned about inner life, God Himself, who satisfies all, fills him internally. Thus that person overflows onto others from the sources of his inner love thereby realizing the words of the Lord Jesus " *He who believes in Me... From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.*" (John 7:38)

The teenager who experiences inner growth understands the words of the singer, "*The king's daughter is all glorious within,*" (Ps. 45) and realizes, with the Apostle Paul, the exalted plan of God for him as he says "*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love. He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.*" (Eph. 1:4, 5) As a result, the teenager feels that he or she is a source of pleasure to his Father. Jeremiah realized, when he was a boy, his role in life. He accepted it from God's Hands as it was said to him "*Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you, I have appointed you a prophet to the nations... Do not say I am a youth... For I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord.*" (Jer. 1:5-8) Thus the prophet accepted his mission when he was young and was ready to perform what men could not do. This gave a special taste to his life despite the difficulties he had to face all along the road. He carried the responsibility with all its troubles. By fulfilling a noble goal, which he accepted from the hands of God Himself, his personality achieved its growth.

This is an invitation to all mankind, especially those in the period of adolescence, to explore their depths and discover the glories of God in their innermost being and to realize their mission and the assistance of God's grace to fulfill it. Therefore, it will be possible to say: "*I am what I am, and His grace towards me did not prove vain.*" (1 Cor. 15:10)

Thirdly: Sex is neither self rewarding, realizing, or satisfying.

Harvey G. Cox¹ mentions two factors that have happened in recent years and that have transformed the role of sex in the life of teenagers. He says that sex has become a way of compensating and realizing the self rather than simply being an aspect of growth. **These two factors are: the lack of involvement of man in political life, and the appearance of the computer in a continuously developing form. These have greatly reduced human relationships at large.** There is no doubt that in the past, man generally felt he had a human and social role through his involvement in all matters occurring in his country, politically as well as socially. Nowadays, however, most people rarely play a vital role in either sector mentioned above. The computer, which is being continuously and rapidly improved has transferred work into the domain of machines, thus the human role has been greatly reduced more than ever before. **Another outstanding feature of the present era is the phenomenon of individualism even in worship².** We now live in the era of "*the individual,*" every person is interested only in his own life, his freedom and his pleasure. This is due to loss of family ties and social values which played vital roles in the lives of many in the past.

Sex had its holiness and was only practiced for the purpose of having a family. This was closely associated with a sense of responsibility towards unity of the family in the Lord. Nowadays, however, man seeks his own individual and egoistic pleasure. We should not wonder, if we find many who reject having children just because they do not wish to have any responsibility which would

¹ J.C. Wynn: *Sexual Ethics and Christian Responsibility*, 1976, p. 29f.

² *Ibid.* p. 38 f.

diminish their peace or comfort. This attitude has affected the concept of marriage since it has come to mean, for some teenagers, mere physical sex that can be enjoyed without any commitment by marital ties or responsibilities.

DO YOU WISH TO GROW? LOVE!

As mankind liberates from the self or ego through the Spirit of God who lives within him, his heart opens and accepts God, the Lover of Mankind, so that every man can find his peace within such a heart. This is the meaning of true inner growth, the growth of the personality in every sense of the word.

Essentially, growth is a switch from the desire that all may serve the “ego” and the desires to be the focus of all services, honors and generosity; to **the desire of being liberated from the “ego” in order to grant and give even himself.** In other words, growth is a true love journey during which man practices the work of the Lord Jesus Christ as a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:24) who gives himself freely to others by the grace of the Lord. This journey is a self-trip, which is not accepted by the ordinary man who considers it impossible and imaginary since it is unsuitable for a person living in this world. Therefore, those who have tried surrendering the steering wheel of their innermost being to the Lord Jesus Christ find joy and happiness through their Savior. **Consequently, they are willing to offer themselves to others. Instead of the “ego trip” which aims at monopolizing attention around the ego and serving it, they enjoy a “self trip” steered by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and influenced by His Holy Spirit.**

It is indeed, easy for a person to affect pleasantness, respect, and generosity to others. This could be a result of his financial or other external resources and/or with the evil intention of serving his own ego. In contrast, another person prays and asks for God’s grace to enable him to offer his innermost self to others. This is a gift that God grants to those who pray for it.

GROWTH AND EQUILIBRIUM

In the previous chapter we talked about the integrated personality of youth. Here, we would therefore like to present some examples that help to explain the meaning of real growth as

equilibrium in all aspects of the personality:

1-Youth in Egypt, sometimes suffer from psychological pressure in the period proceeding examinations. Consequently, some start studying the Holy Bible, praying, and spending longer hours in church under false pretenses. This does not spring from a desire for spiritual growth but from a desire to escape from studying under the pretext of being religious. Therefore, the priest (the father of confession) asks them to be devoted to their studies since it is a token in their hands that complements their spiritual struggle which goes hand-in-hand with their academic struggle.

2- The exaggeration of fasting foolishly leading to physical as well as spiritual harm is as harmful as the neglect of fasting or conversely resorting to greed.

3- The exaggeration of youth indulging in food and drink harms the spiritual life and could hurt the body as well.

4- The concentration of youth, on the subject of choosing his or her partner in life. They are so obsessed by this subject that it occupies their minds completely before they have achieved maturity whether mentally, emotionally, socially, or spiritually. The outcome is failure in their studies or underachievement besides impoverished spiritual growth. Sometimes this obsession causes some family problems as well. This is confirmed by statistics, in North America 50% of marriages between young people end up with divorce or separation within the first five years of marriage. Couples, who thought they were very happy due to mutual love, quickly found themselves standing before the court and accusing each other of various offences. Each one claims he had been deceived and had given his or herself to an undeserving love.

From these examples, it is possible to stress the necessity for adolescents to achieve equilibrium in all the aspects of their lives in order to promote inner growth.

PHYSICAL GROWTH IS A DIVINE GIFT... ATTENDED BY PROBLEMS

The rapid growth of the body in the period of adolescence is a divine gift. During this period, a person bids farewell to childhood to experience a new and mature life gradually. At the same time, he or she faces problems and difficulties as noted in the following

examples:

1- **Feelings of inferiority:** teenagers are very sensitive about the way their bodies are growing. They compare themselves with their peers, as they fear they might be ugly, and lack physical beauty. Sometimes, a girl might find that she is not growing as fast as the others and becomes worried. She is not aware that growth adjusts itself with time. She might imagine that she is taller than others, and that she might not find the suitable man for her who is taller, and who might marry her. A boy might think that he is immature, especially from the sexual side, so he worries; or that he is shorter than his peers or fatter and thinks he might be exposed to their sneers.

Psychiatrists ask teenagers to realize that everyone has his or her own special beauty, even if one has certain sense of physical imperfections. This will emphasize, in the young person's eyes, what God has granted him or her, whether that be physical or specific potentials associated with intelligence or arts etc. Teenagers also need the wisdom of their parents, who should confirm their love, appreciation and pride rather than ridicule certain imperfections even in good humor.

From the spiritual aspects, a proper spiritual education enables the teenager to concentrate on inner beauty and to consider that everything God has granted him or her is good and blessed for growth. The work of the Spirit of God in the life of a teenager provides continuous support to his or her growth and maturation, filling one with strength and hope.

2- **Quick physical growth:** Some young people might grow faster than others so that some teenagers might find themselves odd among peers of the same age. They do not know how to establish friendships with others because they see them as immature kids compared to them. At the same time, they are unable to make friends with those of their size but who are older since they treat them as children because they are younger and less mature. Such youth need special support at home, at school and at church, to ensure their psychological well-being while considering their rapid growth.

3- **Physical growth requires great energy;** therefore,

teenagers tend to be fond of eating. Thus, they are often accused of being greedy and insatiable. On the other hand, energy and continuous movement, accompany bodily growth. As soon as they return home, they need to rest and sleep so they are accused of being lazy and uncooperative with the family since they do not give their parents a hand in house work.

4- Signs of growth usually show in a girl earlier than in a boy. The rate of growth is also quicker, so that at the age of twelve, the girl looks like a “young lady,” while a boy of the same age looks like a “young boy.” This matter causes a temporary repulsion between both sexes, and they refuse to mix together, each group living in a world of its own. Thus while girls consider boys of their age to be young kids and accuse them of childish behavior, they consider themselves young ladies who have delicate temperaments. After a while, however, growth in both sexes increases, and as new emotions surface towards the other sex, each gender begins to desire to explore the world of the other sex.

5- The appearance of psychological problems are buried in the innermost being of some teenagers and might drive them to overeat. Although this seems to provide an outlet for them, it makes them become fat and consequently exposes them to added psychological problems.

All the above problems and others similar ones require careful attention from parents, priests, and counselors. They need to be handled with love and appreciation and in a way that fits the youth’s particular nature to ensure his or her compliance. On the other hand, young people need to realize the truth about their growth, and the meaning of maturity, puberty, and freedom. They need God’s assistance so that His grace may fill them and grant them inner enlightenment. Therefore, as problems are solved they become opportunities for true growth. Hence, teenagers can feel the holiness and seriousness of life and accept it with joy and pleasure even in the midst of troubles. They seek God’s friendship and feel He is the Savior of their souls and lives in their innermost being. In this state, they are able to sing the song of victory with strength and hope, saying, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*” (Phil 4:13)

QUESTIONS TO REVEAL THE EXTENT OF YOUR GROWTH

Everyone, especially in the period of adolescence, needs to be very frank, and to ask himself or her self about the truth concerning the growth of his or her personality. He or she needs to answer questions such as these:

1. Do you demand complete freedom at home without wishing to be serious and bear responsibilities?
2. If you feel mature, are you too quick to judge and hesitate internally when making a decision?
3. Do you set yourself up as the only judge in all matters? Do you turn to God and cry for His guidance? Do you accept the advice and experience of your parents and your father of confession? Are you satisfied with asking the advice only from those of your age?
4. When you face a problem, do you react too quickly to solve it?
5. Do you follow those of your age and imitate them, fearing they might reject you? Or do you make your own decisions, drawing upon your innermost self even if your friends do not like it?
6. Do you wish to appear as a hero before others? Or do you seek continuous growth, which is based on confronting difficulties and problems with an open mind, depending on the divine grace? Do you take advantage of daily experiences as a source of growth?
7. Do you like to be the center of people's attention and regarded with high esteem, especially in the presence of the other sex? Or are you eager to serve others for the sake of helping them to grow spiritually and attain salvation?
8. Are you eager to give without the expectation of any reward?
9. Do you seek what is for your own pleasure? Do you know the cost of love and yet pay it?
10. Do you know the depth of your own spirituality? Do you question yourself to check and discover your goals?

After you have answered these questions, if you feel the need for true growth, cry to God. He is close to you, eager to see you, and to be your Friend who seeks your salvation.

ADOLESCENCE AND THE BODY

Some of the important questions that occupy the minds of the present generation are:

- *Since we have a body, why suppress its desires and feelings?*
- *Does Christ and the Church demand young people to ignore their physical existence and deprive the body of its needs?*
- *What is the harm to Christ, the Church, or society, if physical relationships can occur by mutual agreement and without hurting anyone?*
- *What is Christ's attitude towards the body, its emotions, and sensations?*
- *Do youth need sexual experience to ensure their success in marital life?*
- *Is it practical to expect young people to live in angelic purity?*

We would like to discuss these questions in this chapter and the following ones. Let us start with the body and our attitude towards its desires and feelings.

THE BODY AND HUMAN LIFE¹

God did not create us as a mere soul or a mere body, but He created us as a unique kind of “being” who has astonishing potentials. This “being” shares a soul or a reasoning spirit with the heavenly creatures and thus is not satisfied with temporary matters but aspires to the infinite. At the same time, this unique “being” has a body, which is inseparable from his being in its entirety. This body possesses instincts and sensations, and has demands, which need to be satisfied. The body needs to be fed by many pleasurable indulgences or prurience rather than food alone. Nevertheless, there is no duality in this unique “being” or in his nature. **Man has one existence despite the great differences apparent between the features of his soul and those of his body.** When mention is made of the creation, when God made man in His image and according to His likeness (Gen. 1:26), the reference is not to the soul alone, without the body, but to the sum total of the human being. Fr.

¹ *The same author: (in Arabic) Love; Its Meaning and Degrees, Ch. 3, “Love and the Body.”*

Gregory of Palmas, influenced by St. Irenaeus and St. Gregory of Nyssa, said: *“the name of man is bestowed on what is both body and spirit, it does not exclude either of them.”*

The body is not merely the dwelling place of the soul that occupies it until it leaves it for good. It is a part that shares with the soul everything, including the heavenly glories. So that when the body will appear in its new form, fit for eternity, it will share its sufferings and it’s failing. Consequently, it will share the soul’s joy in eternal glory or condemnation. **Athenagoras**, in his book *“On the Resurrection,”* confirmed this for he said:

“If the nature of man as a whole includes, generally, an eternal soul and a body that befits it, then God has not made man according to the nature of the soul alone or according to the nature of the body separately. However, He has created man composed of both, whereby he passes through life - by means of the soul and body - and attains one goal common to both. Consequently, man possesses both factors from birth and throughout life. Thus, he is necessarily one being, composed of both soul and body. He bears the experiences of both and he works to satisfy the demands and arbitrations of reason or of feelings and sensations to realize - in their sum total - one final goal...”¹“

Tertullian also said:

“Indeed the soul cannot pass alone through life, for we cannot isolate even our thoughts from our body, even though they are mere thoughts... and what occurs in the heart is the result of the activity of the soul within the body, with the body, and through the body”².”

The body does not only reflect the inner soul, but the soul cooperates with it and they interact inseparably. We should not, therefore, wonder when the Bible refers to man sometimes as “soul” and sometimes as “body” with such an attitude, the Church sees man, in his entirety soul and body, sanctified to God, and where the Holy Spirit dwells through the sacraments of baptism and the chrism. Thus, man is liberated and can enjoy his entirety, the new

¹ *De Resurr. 15.*

² *De Resurr. Carnis 16.*

life in Jesus Christ, while witnessing to God's Kingdom that dwells within him.

Knowing the truth about our body, with all its capabilities and potentials, as well as being acquainted with its role in human life, is an essential matter. Such knowledge and acquaintance affect our attitude about life, love, marriage, family, sex, and our expectations in this world.

THE BODY, BETWEEN DEIFICATION AND REPULSION

In our discussion of the "Integrated Personality of Youth," we indicated two extreme attitudes towards the body and its needs. These attitudes have existed throughout the ages although in different forms and moods. There has existed a trend to deify the body and bow to it in complete surrender, as though it were the core of their worship, life, and love. On the other hand, there has always been a trend to repulse and abhor the body. To consider the body an enemy that should be destroyed.

Long ago, some people worshipped the male and female sex organs as they deified the body. Their religions, known as phallic religions, are old in history. During the days of the prophet Ezekiel, many girls and women prostituted themselves in the temples of Baal as part of their worship. They believed that engaging in sensuous pleasure was a way of worship (Ezek. 20:30). In Greece, the goddess of beauty, Aphrodite, was worshipped. In the age of the apostles, some lived in a permissive atmosphere which corrupted human life as a whole. Physical passions steered the lives of many, so that the body, soul, and mind were totally devoted to prurience. Such people are referred to as those whose gods are their bellies (Phil. 3:9), or whose gods are their bodies, in everyday language. It is clear, from the above statement, that young people, who are now demanding free rein to physical passions under the pretext of personal freedom, do not represent a new trend or case in the history of mankind. This trend is merely a natural extension of thoughts adopted by many throughout the ages. Such a trend reflects an attitude that ignores the value of the spirit, mind, and all noble human capabilities. It moreover, subverts the entire human "being" reducing him to a body propelled by instincts and physical passions which are uncontrolled or sanctified.

In every age, an opposing trend or attitude, which is equally dangerous, is the trend of denial of the body. This trend advocates the denial of the body, since those who adopt it believe that they are mere spirits that have been condemned to live in the body, temporarily. Consequently, the body is antagonized, and the desire to destroy it, especially the sex organs, is prevalent. They considered sex organs as factors of darkness, corruption, and unseemliness. Many who adopt this attitude have exaggerated to the extent that they have claimed marriage to be similar to official adultery, since it recognizes physical relationships within its order.

THE SACREDNESS OF THE BODY

The body is God's good creation and it is not fit to abhor or resist it as an enemy to be conquered. We should not, either, consider it a prison where the soul has been condemned according to Plato. St. Paul regards the members of his body in reverence and awe, for he considers them members of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15). What others consider as degrading, he finds highly estimable and says: "*those members which we think are less honorable than those, we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.*" (1 Cor. 12:23) We should not corrupt these members or use them as instruments of lethal practice. They should be considered the instruments of righteousness unto God (Rom. 6:13).

The Church has always fought heretical thought embodied in the old philosophies, especially the Persian, who were hostile towards the body and considered it an instrument of darkness. In this context, the fathers made the following comments:

- *We should not shy to name what God has not shied to create*¹.

St Clement of Alexandria

- *Human nature should not be a source of disgrace, but it should be a source of esteem*².

The body proceeds from God, and what He allowed to be created is part of His work... note how man was fittingly called a "body" for God's specific and ultimate end is to realize the good

¹ A Group of Authors: (in Arabic) *The Body, Purity and Love: Publications by Lights*. 1983, p.24.

² *Ibid.* p. 24.

of man's body and soul and not that of the soul alone¹.

Tertullian

- *The body, originally the theme of God's art, is created with the capacity of enjoying God's power and following His model².*

St. Irenaeus

- *Do not listen to those who claim that the body is not God's creation; because those who believe that it is foreign to God, and that the soul, as it were, dwells in a strange receptacle, corrupt it by adultery.*

What defect do they find in this astonishing body? Does it lack beauty? What has not been created excellently in it?

Do not say that the body is the cause of sin, for if it were, then why have not the dead committed sin?

The Body does not sin by its self, but the soul sins through the body.

Be compassionate as your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Do not defile it by adultery, and do not pollute your beautiful vesture; if you have washed it now by repentance, wash it while there is time³.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Thus, our body is not an enemy to be resisted, but we should, according to **St Augustine**⁴, love it just as a husband loves his wife, and as Christ loves His Church. He comments on St. Paul's words in Ephesians 5:25-30 and says that the real Teacher invokes men to love their wives as they love their bodies, and at the same time as Christ loves the church.

This body, as well as all its members, is God's creation. It has deviated from its goal due to sin and passion that result from a deviated will. God's Word is concerned with the sanctification of the body, for He carried our body without shame. Therefore, we can fully invoke Him and say: "*You blessed my nature in You*⁵." **St. Clement of Rome** says: "*God has lifted us up to Him with love!*

¹ *De Reasurr. Carnis* 5.

² *Adv. Haer.* 5:3:2.

³ *Catech. Lect* 4:22,23.

⁴ *Purity. Ch.* 19-23.

⁵ *Liturgy of St Gregory, the Theologian for the Coptic Church.*

Due to love, He carried us, and Jesus Christ has granted us His blood, and granted His body to our body, and His soul to ours¹.” The same meaning is conveyed by **St. Irenaeus**: *“Thus God saves us through His blood, granting His soul to ours, and His body to ours, filling us with the Spirit of the Father to unite God and man and to share his life².”*

God, who loves you, has not stripped you of the body that has become a burden to your soul because you have corrupted it by sin; but instead He sent His Only-Begotten Son, the Creator - clothed in this body. He came in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3), but without sin. He came and struggled in your name to grant you victory and holiness on the condition that you put on God and hide in Him and react positively to Him. **St. Ambrose** says: *“Jesus Christ the Lord, by fasting and isolation, aimed at healing us of our attraction to greed, He accepted, for our sake, to be tempted by the devil in order to teach us how to conquer him.”* **St. Cyril, the Great**, says: *“Christ conquered the devil and crowned the body of mankind with wreaths of glory and victory.”*

Through the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnated Word of God, we have become victorious and holy; our bodies have become sanctified in Him, they are His members (1 Cor. 5:16).

THE ATTITUDE OF OUR FATHERS TOWARDS THE BODY

While the Gnostics attacked the body - especially the sexual organs - as an element of darkness, the Early Fathers stressed the holy, evangelic viewpoint. They clarified the misinterpretation by the term “uncomely” that St. Paul uses to indicate these organs. St. Paul said: *“our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.”* (1 Cor. 12:13) Before that, however, he said: *“Which seem...”* (1 Cor. 12:13) as though this is an every day colloquialism, since people think the body is ugly while it is sanctified and has *“more abundant comeliness.”*

- *Jesus Christ reveals - in a very helpful way - that in the body of His mother there is nothing shameful that is chaste (nihil*

¹ Eph 1:49.

² Adv.Naer 5:1:1.

pundendum esse quod castum est)¹.

- *It is impossible for God to create something ugly “inhonestum” among the members of the human body, especially before sin*².

St Augustine

These members, no doubt, were at first esteemed “*honesti*”. Yet, the Apostle calls them “*inhonesti*.” Thus, what God made “*honesti*,” the apostle calls “*inhonesti*.” We ask the reason for this. If it is not the effect of sin, what can be its cause? **St. Augustine** goes on to assert that it is unlawful use, the use of these members in a way, which is not subject to the laws of temperance, that is filthy, and not the members themselves. For not only have these members been kept in excellent integrity by celibates and virgins, but also holy married people, fathers and mothers, have used them solely for the sake of the regeneration, so that this natural exercise was in no way filthy, because it was subjected, not to lust, but to reason³.

- *St. Paul rightly says: “which seem, and which we regard as,” indicating that the description arises, not from the nature of the things themselves, but from the common opinion. For nothing in us is dishonorable, seeing that it is all God’s work. Thus, what in us seems less honorable than our genital organs? Nevertheless, these organs enjoy great honor. In addition, the very poor, even if they leave the rest of the body naked, cannot bear to exhibit these members naked... Woe to the intemperate who brings reproach upon the handiworks of God!*

For sin is not allotted to the thing itself as a part of its nature, but the transgression emanates from the human will.

St. John Chrysostom

THE HUMAN BODY AND ITS PASSIONS

Man with his body and soul represents ‘one being,’ caring one nature namely, ‘the human nature’ where the body and soul do not lose their inherent nature as they are welded together and function harmoniously in reciprocal activity in every decision whether tangible or emotive or abstract. Why then does the apostle

¹ *De Genesi ad litteram* 9:16.

² *Contra Julianum* 4:8.

³ *Contra Faustum* 29.

moan on account of his body? Why does he say: “*the body of this is death*” (Rom. 7:24) “*which lusted against the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:17, 1 Peter 2:4)?

It is necessary to distinguish between the human body “*Soma*,” as God’s good creation and the flesh “*Sarkis*,” when it denotes physical lust that destroys the holiness of both the body and spirit. It enslaves man’s whole being, body and soul, thought, and emotions, feelings and capabilities as well as talent to thoughts of prurience. This urged the apostle to distinguish between carnal man and spiritual man, not to indicate that the former is a body without a soul and the latter a soul without a body, but to indicate that the first has subjugated his whole being to prurience and has surrendered the reins of his life to it as though he were nothing but body. As for the spiritual man, he has surrendered to the power of the Holy Spirit and thus has become spiritual without discarding his body. **St. Augustine** says: “*He who is not spiritual even in his body becomes carnal even in his spirit*¹.”

When man becomes carnal, the body is not to be blamed alone, because the soul shares in the guilt. Jesus Christ says: “*For out of the heart (inner man) come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, and slanders. These are the things which defile the man.*” (Matt. 15:19,20)

St Augustine confirmed, on more than one occasion, that the cause of failure is the deviation of the will away from its correct path².

PHYSICAL CHANGES AND ADOLESCENCE

In our talk about adolescence as growth and life, we noted that the new physical, emotional, and sensory changes that accompany this period are beneficial. God, to enable man to lead a developing and active life and move towards maturity by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has been entrusted with the steering wheel.

We have indicated some psychological problems that are

¹ *A Group of Authors: The Body, Purity and Love: p. 21.*

² *St. Augustine says: “there would have been no evil deed unless there was an evil will prior to it. And what could begin this evil but pride, which is the beginning of all sin?” (De invidie Dei, 14:13).*

sometimes the outcome of these changes. What we wish to clarify here is that many adolescents - in both the East and the West - are worried and inwardly disturbed by the changes that occur very quickly to their bodies. What is happening however, to both sexes, reveals the greatness of the Creator and His wisdom, since he prepares them to move gradually towards puberty and maturity, and therefore, prepared to be mature parents in the future.

These changes are accompanied by new chemical reactions in the body. The outcome takes the form of new sensations experienced towards the other sex, and these increase and become part of the youth's total being. At this stage, feelings of purity are lost to the extent that youth imagine that life has suddenly become unclean. Often a sense of guilt sets in. What we wish to confirm here is that if feelings and sensations are delivered into God's hands, they prepare one to lead a well-balanced conjugal life, filled with blessings. Moreover, they set aright the love of God in the heart. Thus, these feelings are essential and necessary to whether one chooses to lead a holy conjugal life or an ascetic celibate or virgin order.

In truth, sex is neither a sin nor a sacrilege as long as it plays its rightful role and submitted to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, grants holiness, wisdom, and growth. This will be further discussed in the following chapters.



LOVE...

A JOURNEY OF THE SOUL

THE THIRST FOR LOVE

The word “love” has always occupied the thoughts of mankind, from birth to death. We would not be exaggerating if we said that it is the only matter, which accompanies us even after death, since “*charity never fails.*” (Cor. 13:8)

Many people keep searching for love; they thirst for it and hope that others love them and that they could pour their love on them. A fervent believer constantly prays that when he reaches the highest degree of true and deep asceticism, he would be wholly absorbed by God’s love. He offers his heart aglow with love and, as it were, a fiery piece of coal. Similarly, a husband wishes to love his wife and be the object of her life; just as a father, teacher, son, brother or friend all wish to love and be loved. It is possible to say that even those who are prurient and criminals yearn and desire love despite their lack of expression.

Nevertheless, love is a confused concept in the minds of many. These people are unable to distinguish between love and emotional tendency, or social or passionate inclinations. In fact, they often conceal their utilitarian or egocentric drives behind a show of love. Consequently, they may even deceive themselves by appearing holy and may not realize their evil motivations.

LOVE TRANSCENDS HUMAN LANGUAGE¹

It is so difficult to define love! This is because love is actually deeper than anything else that can be expressed by human language. It is difficult to translate love by mere sentiments for it is a way of life, reflected in every action, whether apparent or concealed. We can say that love is an opening up to everything and everyone, so that the heart receives all, since God lives within man’s soul and within all His creation. Therefore, one accepts all mankind joyfully and wishes to offer his or her own self to others without expecting a reward. This is a holy act and results from man’s union with God, through love (1 John 4:8). The Lord

¹ *The author: Love, its Meaning and Degrees. Ch 1. Our Need for Love (in Arabic).*

sanctifies the soul and all its potentials, the body and all its sensations, instincts, and emotions, as well as the human will. Therefore, man, in his entirety, becomes a flame of inextinguishable love.

Leo Buscaglia, professor of learning at the University of California, insisted on teaching the subject of “love” and opened a class, which he named “*the Love Class*” in spite of people’s ridicule. After three years, he stated that he could not find a definition for love since he considered that any attempt created boundaries to the object; while love has no boundaries. He admired the words written by one of his students who said, “I find love much like a mirror. When I love another, he becomes my mirror and I become his. Each mirror reflecting the others’ love, in which we see infinity¹.” In other words, love is like a light that shines between two parallel mirrors. Each reflecting the light on the other side so that they show an infinite number of sources of that light (such as a candle or lantern). Another student said: “Love is offering one’s self to others.”

Then, what is love, if we are incapable of defining it? We will attempt, however, to present some of the aspects that reveal the nature of love:

1. Love... is the deliberate and wise opening up of the heart.

Love is the opening up of the heart to others. When we use the term “to others” we do not indicate a certain person but we signify everyone. If possible, since an open heart is characterized by love, it springs from within and overflows onto everyone, even though this is a balanced act. St. Augustine confirmed that; although he lived for the first ten years a life of frolic, which was far removed from love. He was an adventurous lad and leader of boys who stole from the neighbors’ gardens. He then poured his heart into lust for an unclean woman. Later, he experienced the opening up of the heart judiciously and stated that love has its own system or order. Loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and power, and loving our parents are two different types of love; loving our children is a third; and a husband’s or wife’s love is different from

¹ Leo Buscaglia: *Love*. N.Y. 1985. p. 12.

the love of friends or colleagues.

2. *Love out of Necessity*

Love is the liberation from the ego or self. A lover is one who is not centered upon himself and his ego so that he is only concerned with his own financial, moral, or emotional interests. Such a person seeks egotistic satisfaction under a veil of love.

Many, who appear loving, tender, and generous, are in reality working to satisfy their ego. An example will serve to explain how these people's intentions have been revealed. One youth was suffering from a feeling of estrangement in a foreign country, so he met a girl and confessed his great love and feelings for her. He spent big sums of money merely to end his loneliness and satisfy the void within himself. Such a person is an egoist caring for his own feelings and love. Consequently, when he decided to marry this girl he was quickly exposed. His wife soon discovered the depth of his feelings and his selfishness, which disturbed their lives. They fought constantly, and finally family life was disrupted.

This frequently occurs to youth as they often feel they are imprisoned by their family life. They wish to be liberated and to escape from this sense of entrapment. When they meet another who suffers from the same problem they believe that they belong together because they are in love, while they have actually met on the grounds of necessity and deprivation. Each one seeks to find what would compensate for his or her family problems. As a result, a new problem emerges and is added to the former problems, since they are emotional allies but on an unsound basis.

3. *Love... an internal journey to offer the self¹*

Love is the journey of all life. The goal of this journey is to enter the self to understand the reality of its core and its existence, and to recognize its mission. Consequently, mankind will not seek to be satisfied through others, nor will he beg others to fill his inner void by praise, emotions, or services etc. Therefore, he will seek to be internally satisfied so that his love can overflow onto others. He

¹ Joseph & Lois Bird: *The Freedom of Sexual Love*, Image Books. N.Y. 1970, p. 95 (*Love is the act of giving oneself*).

offers his “self “ wisely and consciously as his Savior has done, granting His own Self to His beloved.

4. Love... Life's Symphony

Love is a harmony of human life in which man's outward behavior conforms with the pulsation of his holy heart, his tender and sincere feelings, his deep blazing emotions, his dedication to work, and his upright thought. In other words, love transfers man into a harp with different strings, which produces one symphony of life. A life that is wholesome, integrated, and developing in all its aspects since it is mature and serious.

5. Love... God's inspiration

Love is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. He alone can lead us into our very depths. He can enlighten our inner vision to help us discover ourselves. He renews our being and opens our heart as an offering.

Although God has created man in His likeness to bear the feature of love, man needs to be united to God to be blessed with this feature, which He grants. Man needs to nurture this love in his depths and protect it from deviation. In this context, the Early Fathers of the Church said the following statements:

- *God is Love and He is the Source of all love. St. John said, “Love comes from God,” “God is Love.” (1 John 4:7, 8) Therefore God has made love one of our human features and said: “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love to one another” (John 13:35). Thus, if we have no love in us, we have changed the stamp, which makes us develop in God's image¹.*

St. Gregory Nazianzus

- *He who wishes to talk about love is committed to talk about God Himself, for holy love is man's way of imitating God and His resemblance within His human limitations².*

St. John Climacus

From the above statements, we can distinguish between comprehensive love coupled with emotions so that it can share in

¹ The author: *Brotherly Love*, 1964. p. 9 (in Arabic)

² *Love*, p. 21,22.

the pains and joys of others, and lust which confutes man to his ego. This lust allows him to live to satisfy his own desires and is infatuated by them under a veil of love. In this situation, man buries his “self “ in indulgence, which is far removed from truth, knowledge, or serious commitment.

BEWARE OF THE JOURNEY OF THE EGO

We have said that man often deceives himself more than he often deceives others. This is true because while indulging in his selfishness, serving himself, and requiring physical pleasure or honor or wealth, he thinks that he is loving, generous and helpful to others.

It is necessary to distinguish between the “core self “ and the “ego” to avoid deception, for love is “*the journey of the self*” and not “an ego trip.” Through love, we delve into our inner depths to discover the core of our being and to recognize our status as children of God and our mission in life. We discover within us the “*kingdom of God*” (Luke 17:21), “the kingdom of love.” We find God, the Lover of man, setting up the kingdom of His love within, so that the inner “core” self opens up to include - if possible - all, in God’s love. This inner journey abolishes the ego.

We can present two signs that warn man against the “ego trip”:

1. Beware of demanding others to be a copy of yourself

A person who requires others to be a duplicate of himself because he loves them, who wants to shape all those around him according to his personal wishes, and tendencies, is actually reverting to narcissism with all its deadening selfishness. Similarly, parents who do not participate in broad-minded discussions, characterized by love and true intentions to listen with concern to their children, destroy their personalities. They demand their blind obedience and submission as they seek to shape youth according to their selfish and personal interests. So that a father, who dreamt of attaining a certain scientific degree or of being promoted to a certain social post, and who has failed or succeeded in this context, often drives his children to attain what he has realized, or failed to realize. At the same time, there is complete disregard to the personal merits or wishes of the children, their personality,

tendencies, inclination, talents, or potentials. If the children insist on rejecting their parents' wishes, they are considered stubborn or rebellious since they refuse their parent's "loving advice." At others if the youngsters are immature they are accused of being retarded, irresponsible, and a failure, thus ultimately destroying their psyche and personality. This also happens frequently when a priest or parent, or any other leader is convinced of a certain path of ascetic worship or trend of devotion. He consequently drives his children and urges them to follow the same path without considering their personal powers or talents.

Such impositions are especially conspicuous in marital life when one parent often requests the other party to be an identical duplicate in every way, rather than be a complementary counterpart. This leads to the destruction of both selves.

Difference and contrast are so marvelous throughout the journey of love! Each one of us should accept the other just as he or she is, even though we are committed to guide each other. This acceptance should be practiced while observing personal tendencies and talents. Through love, differences can be integrated and harmonized to produce a singular special, beauty, which has not abolished a certain personality or merged it in others.

The following story¹ about a school in the forest will serve to clarify the paragraph above. It is said that once a bird, a fish, a rabbit, a monkey, and a deer got together and decided to start a school. They themselves were the board of directors who set the curriculum. The bird insisted that all should learn to fly since it is a useful and beautiful job. The fish insisted on teaching swimming, the rabbit on burrowing, the monkey on tree climbing, and the deer on running. The birds got an "A" in flying, but failed in the other subjects, which became a real problem. Birds excel in flying, but when they try to burrow holes their beaks and wings get broken, so it is a waste of time and self destructive. Consequently, teaching them other subjects than flying is harmful.

This symbolic story clarifies God's gifts to His creatures,

¹ *Leo Buscaglia p. 44.*

especially man. God grants every creature what suits it. But we, under the name of love, insist that others be a copy of us; ignoring personalities, gifts, and talents, which make each one basically different. These differences do not diminish or increase one's status but they create, rather, a sort of integration and harmony among God's creation.

This apostolic spirit is strongly conveyed by St. Paul, who said: "*Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit.... being many members, are one body.*" (1 Cor. 12:4)

2. Beware of material offerings without involving the heart or the soul

The second sign of true love is man's concern for harmonies between internal and external offerings. Many parents give generously to their children without being concerned about their children's feelings, so that they might, at the same time, describe them as stupid, lazy, irresponsible, or failures. Such accusations destroy the youth's psyches, and cause them to leave home and be deprived of all parental financial aid, in order to secure their freedom and honor, which they esteem to be more precious than anything else. For the same reason, we find some husbands accusing their wives of lacking love and warmth; wondering why this should happen in spite of all the material luxuries of life they have offered them! Actually, these wives abhor lavishness when it is accompanied by insults that stifle the joy in life. On the other hand, some wives accuse their husbands of not appreciating their love and hard work. A wife who spends all her day arranging and cleaning her home, as well as preparing delicious food, is often tired and sullen by the time her husband arrives. She does not realize that he needs his wife's heart more than a clean home or good food.

Therefore, all mankind need inner love, a comprehensive heart and a soul that is self-giving rather than materially supportive. During one of our visits to the U.S.A., I met a wife who insisted on divorcing her husband, as he was uninterested in her or in the home. At the same time, we learned that this husband had bought a piece of land for one million dollars and registered it in both their names. "Doesn't that prove that he loves you?" I asked. She answered: "I want his heart and not the million dollars!" And she insisted on

divorcing him, because love cannot be estimated in terms of money!

Man thirsts for the love and interest of others. In the play “Our Town” a young girl, Emily died and came back to life on her twelfth birthday. She found her mother busy preparing her birthday cake, her father busy in his office working on papers, and her brother involved in his own business. The girl returned to God and said: “Take me away from the world. I’ve forgotten the sufferings of man, for there is no one who looks to anyone else.” It is true that Emily’s mother was busy with Emily’s cake, but Emily did not want the cake. She wanted her mother to sit and listen to her, to tell her how much she loved her, to reveal how much she cared for her. **Rather than having a birthday party, she wanted to confirm her personality.**

It is appropriate to stop here and reflect on God’s ways with us. How he pours Himself and His love on us. He offers Himself with His gifts so that we receive Him and He receives us as people who possess their own special potentialities. He wants us to be individuals who love Him and whom He loves, which exchange views with Him as friends and lovers while feeling self-assured. He calls us by our names, as He has called Zachaeus (Luke 19), to enter our homes and hearts.

Would it not be wonderful to know how to deal with our children, friends, colleagues, superiors, and strangers, just as Christ Himself deals with us!

LOVE... A SELF-TRIP

We have spoken about the goal of love as being the entry into the depths of the self to discover it and offer it joyfully to others. This journey, which man cannot undertake without the assistance of God’s Holy Spirit, is an inner act though it does not ignore the external reality. A believer meets exterior difficulties and problems and is committed to face many sacrifices, therefore **the road is narrow (Luke 13:24), yet it is cheerful and gives peace to the soul.** This is so, because sacrifice is offered as a partaking in the sufferings of Christ, and a gain rather than a loss, since it aims at serving others. St. Paul sought joyfully to be a slave to others in order to gain many souls. He counted his slavery as an internal glory, rather than a humiliation, for he considered this was sharing

with Christ in His sufferings. With every labor, the Crucified Lord in our heart is glorified, so that the believer shares in His sufferings, thus transforming human pains into a source of consolation through resurrection and its joys.

Such insight grants the soul internal liberation, since man lives to donate. His donations flow unceasingly, even though he is empty handed, as he gives love that springs from the depths and for which many have a thirst. Through love, he is free and no exterior force can impede his flowing current, neither can time destroy him, nor can the behavior of others close his heart. He lives freely through his inner donations, pouring himself through his Crucified Lord for everybody. St. Paul therefore said: *“Though poor, yet making many rich, as having nothing, yet possessing all things.”* (2 Cor. 6:10)

Love is a journey of the soul along the narrow paths. Yet, it is a sweet path, which, is constantly renewed, and liberating, for a true lover desires in his devotion to achieve the measure of the stature, which belongs to the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). He prays daily to forget what lies behind and reaches forward to what lies ahead (Phil. 3:13), counting all he gave as nothing due to the sincere desire to share in the nature of love which is in Jesus Christ. In this way, man forgets all worldly fatigues and sadness. He turns inwardly to find Christ reigning within him and overflowing with love to all. With such an attitude we live our whole life, practicing love through the constant renewal of our concept of life and of others. Therefore, everything within us and around us seems to be new every day.

It is possible to state that the reason for the increase in the rate of divorce is that marital love is established on external factors rather than based on one’s discovery of the self? Therefore, a person who focuses on physical beauty, academics, social status, or financial merits, quickly discovers that love reverts into hate after marriage. Neither party can tolerate the other as each demands the satisfaction of his own ego, even though pretending to give freely, and the end result is dissatisfaction. However, when love is established on a true desire to offer one’s self, sincerely, to the other party in Christ, then this desire is blessed and develops with time, in

spite of differences that might arise. Each spouse offers his or herself to the other and they appreciate each other. Such love never ages; it is actually renewed by the Spirit of God, sweetly and joyfully, even in the midst of troubles.

LUST... NOT LOVE

The children of God, who do not respond to the Spirit of God and to the Spirit of divine love, that receives all divine potentials to sanctify and develop them, lose control of their powers. These people are diverted and turn to the worshiping of other gods, one of which is the “ego.” Such deviations are embodied in evil physical practice with one’s self or with others. No wonder we hear about a boy who loves a girl to the degree of worship - according to everyday speech - so that she reigns over his heart. He finds that she is a picture of ultimate perfection, reason, beauty, and goodness, and consequently feels that life without her is unthinkable. In this way, the lover makes a god of his beloved to the extent that all imperfections are either justified or denied. She is considered his greatest love. She is righteous and satisfies his mind, emotions, and often his sexual needs. However, if he examines things carefully, he will find that he loves his ego and defies himself, realizing this through his beloved who gives him some temporary satisfaction. This is true and is often proved by the hate he expresses towards her as soon as he gets to know another one. He quickly despises the former and believes that she deceived him.

The Holy Bible provides many examples of people who have diverted true love away from its source - God - and turned it into lust, which arises from the ego:

1. A love that turns into hate!

Amnon truly believed that he loved his sister Thamaar. During this love, he became gravely ill. Amnon was ready to pay any price in order to indulge in sexual intercourse with her. However, as soon as he fulfilled his lust he “*hated her very much... for the hatred in which he hated her was greater than the love which he had loved her.*” (2 Sam. 13:15) What kind of love is this that switches into deep hate?

2. A love that leads to prison!

The story of the upright young man, Joseph and his master’s

wife, clarifies the distinction between love and lust. St John Chrysostom said, “How could the Egyptian woman, who loved Joseph, accept to harm him?” The reason is that her love was evil. His love, however, was not the same kind of diabolic love as hers. In fact, he loved her in a way that St. Paul recommends, consider what Photiphar’s wife said: He insulted me and considered me an adulteress, he wronged my husband, and mocked all those of this house and betrayed them before God. Someone who loves Joseph could not have uttered such words. In fact, she loved herself more than the love she had for Joseph.

As for Joseph, who loved her, he tried to warn her and convince her that she was being impulsive. He tried to advise her and reveal to her the nature of her passion in order to quench her lust, and said to her: ...”*my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has in my hands*” (Gen. 39:9). In this way, he reminded her of her husband, to embarrass her.

He did not say “your husband” but used “my master” to awaken her conscience so that she might realize her status and that of the one she loved... she was his master’s wife! This was as though he was telling her “Shame on you for loving a slave! Consider whose wife you are! Who you’re mixing with! Before whom are you standing despised and rejected!” He rebuked her through his words: “*He has put all that he owns in my charge,*” as though saying, “He is the kindest person who has ever dealt with me, so how can I betray him in the dearest thing to him? He has made me second man in his house and has not kept a thing from me but you.” With such human words, he begged to elevate her mind and convince as well as embarrass her. He even stressed the important point: “Because you are his wife, how then can I do this great wickedness?”

In spite of all his attempts, she did not benefit and continued trying to tempt him because her lust was driving her, rather than love. Her real emotions were revealed when she accused him falsely and sent him to prison mercilessly, like a wild animal attacking an innocent prey.

Did Joseph behave in a similar way? On the contrary, he

never reported her behavior. In fact, from what followed, he revealed his good intentions and love to her. So that even when he had to explain why he was imprisoned he refused to mention anything, and said: *“Because I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews and here I did not work so I was put in jail.”*

He never accused her of adultery. Usually, when a person is wrong, he does not blame himself and does not wish others to reprove him. Consequently, Joseph is to be admired for his piety and refusal to mention the sin and lust of this woman. Even when he became ruler over Egypt, Joseph never reproached her or spoke of her unjust accusation!

Notice how he was concerned for this woman? **She never showed love towards him, yet showed madness as she sought to satisfy herself, rather than to love Joseph.**

Actually, a loving person is one who only desires the good of his or her beloved. Otherwise, even if he performs thousands of loving acts, he becomes a fiercer enemy than anyone else¹.

3. Love that leads to the disobedience of the commandments of God

Adam deformed his love for Eve when he diverted it away from God. St. Augustine said that Adam was not tempted as he was wise and mature. He knew that if he ate of the forbidden fruit he would not become a god as Eve claimed. The apostle said: *“And it was not Adam who deceived, but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression.”* (1 Tim. 2:14) Hence, Adam fell because he loved his wife greatly but away from the periphery of God. Such diverted love became an obsession to please his wife even if that destroyed both of them.

In the same way, King Solomon’s diverted love for heathen women and the worship of idols led to his fall. The Holy Bible says: *“But King Solomon loved many strange women with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, and Ammonites... Solomon clung to these women in love, when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart to other gods”* (1 King 11:1-11). St. Augustine commented by saying that he obeyed them to please his own lust.

¹ The author: *Love, Its Meanings and Degrees*. “Love and lust.”

This is in line with the common saying that “the slave of passion is more submissive than a white slave.”

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT!

Since we are talking about love and how it can be distinguished from lust, it is also necessary to distinguish between true love and “**Puppy love.**” A person often meets someone of the other sex and experiences a sort of comfort or harmony. This might be due to the other’s physical beauty, or special talents, tactfulness, social adeptness, or even piety. This type of love is termed “Puppy love” since the person is entrapped at first sight.

Such an experience is an immature one and involves a number of dangers:

1. Marrying the image rather than the person!

A person often sees another and loves him or her not as another person but for his image, talents, or certain attitude. One marries these aspects and is shocked to discover later on, that he or she cannot tolerate that person! On the other hand, wise marital love is founded on the discovery of one’s innermost depths, as well as the study of the other person from every point of view and in his or her entirety.

2. The ignorance of Divine Providence!

Wise marital love is not founded on “puppy love” or infatuation, but by one aspect and depending on altering and reforming the other aspects later on. God, who promotes marital union, is prayed to guide and grant the couple the “sanction of marriage” which is “marital love.” That should be the first step in choosing one’s life mate.

3. Hurried marriages!

Puppy love often conceals a selfish aspect in a person’s life. A quick choice during a first meeting signifies an inner thirst, which is satisfied impulsively. A marriage, which quickly follows upon this first meeting, is not based on love and soon fails. Dr. James Dobson said¹ that it is a fact that fifty percent of all adolescent marriages end up in divorce within the first five years. What a

¹ *Preparing for Adolescence*, p. 95.

tragically high percentage! It means that half the number of those who believed to be in love and were highly proud of one another quickly realized the illusion they had fallen into. They experience bitterness and misery as they wonder how their reciprocated love has switched into hate, anger, and conflict within a few months?

DISGUISED INCLINATIONS AND THE PRETEXT OF LOVE

We have tried to distinguish between true love, lust, puppy love, infatuation, romantic, or imaginary love. It is also essential for the adolescent to avoid other devious inclinations that bear the label of “love,” of which the following will be mentioned¹:

1. Possessive love

Adolescents often practice the love of the “ego” or “**possessive love**” under the pretext of love. At first, they are driven by a wish to discover one’s influence on the other sex. They, therefore, experiment and play different roles, under different masks. They behave and dress in a way that would emphasize their physical beauty, or power, intelligence, sweetness, and docility, and sometimes their harshness or severity. In this way, they exhibit themselves to one another because they are deeply proud of themselves. They wish to confirm to themselves that they are admired and wanted by the other sex. They do so because they consider others as being merely mirrors reflecting their strong and lovable personalities.

The adolescent boys wish to emphasize their manhood. Consequently, as soon as he finds a girl who admires him, he imposes his will on her at once. To ensure her enticement, he may sometimes be very gentle and seek to please her; while at other times, he may pretend to be harsh and ignore her. In both conditions, he does not seek to be constructive but rather wishes to prove to himself that he can rule over someone and be worshipped. This explains the fights and competition among adolescents who exaggerate about their conquests due to their wish to attract attention.

Young girls, similarly, often engage in what they consider as

¹ Dr. François Goust: *En Marche Vers L’amour*. Paris.

love in order to awaken boys' desires. They may even challenge their very manhood or influence them just for satisfying possessive inclinations and assuring one's "ego" before others.

As an example, a girl was introduced to a boy living in the same neighborhood; he constantly followed her and confessed he "worshipped" her. When asked who this certain boy was, we were astonished in finding out that this same boy had flirted with many other girls! Each girl believed she was the only beloved one. He was deceiving each girl just to play the role of the hero who caught all the girls. This satisfied his ego in his own eyes and before his friends.

2. Romantic Curiosity!

Sometimes adolescents pretend to be in love and exaggerate in the role of lovers just out of curiosity about romance. Each one wishes to learn about the other as an undiscovered secret. Each one knows that romantic love is the key that would admit them into the secrets of the other sex and the emotions and thoughts involved.

3. Love, an Illusion

Some adolescents draw a picture in their imagination of the person of the other sex. This picture is the sum total of old experiences, coupled with imagination. As soon as the adolescent meets a person of the other sex he quickly imposes that preconceived picture over the newcomer. Consequently, the love he practices is directed at the picture in his mind rather than at the actual person before him. Soon he is tied in marriage, since he believed that is the only suitable person he could ever love. The picture, however, is rapidly dissipated and the person before him is totally different from that which the lover believed he was dealing with under the illusion of love.

4. The Search for Experience

A girl who seeks a bold boy, who wins her love, creates one of the most dangerous problems often faced in marriage. Once she meets that great enticer of women, who is embodied by experience, she falls for his manhood and vitality. She believes that she is the only beloved one and that although many wish to be his wife, he rejects them and wants only her. He confesses that he has known many as a pastime but now is repentant and asks her to accept him

as a respectful husband. He could be sincere in his love on account of her purity and spotlessness, while she loves his frankness. Nevertheless, if he is not repentant with the aim of attaining eternal life and salvation, that love will quickly deviate or be practiced violently so as to destroy the peace of the family.

These are only a few simplified instances that may serve to explain how a person often deceives himself and sanctions his diverted inclinations. He wishes to believe, at the same time, that he is on the right path of love!



YOU CAN'T TRADE ME... I'M A HUMAN BEING

IMPULSIVE... REBELLIOUS

Generally, young people are confronted with two accusations: first, that their emotions are too strong and their reactions too intense, while tottering between the two. Sometimes, they are extremely rough; and at other times extremely sweet and gentle. Secondly, that they bear a grudge towards the older generation, represented by parents or counselors. They therefore rebel and resist advice and consider elders as stiff and set in their ways, which are irrelevant to modern life.

ENDLESS TEARS... FOR A DEAD DOG!

Some people consider the impulsiveness of youth a sign of immaturity and lack of experience. Often, adolescents react strongly to situations, which they themselves recognize as trifles, later on in their lives. They are, moreover, extreme in their fears and leisure, exaggerating all things beyond their actual dimensions. Consequently, they often regret decisions they had previously taken deliberately.

Dr. James Dobson cited an incident that actually happened to him, as an example. He remembered one of his saddest days during adolescence - at the age of thirteen. His father picked him up from school by car and drove silently. He seemed grave and then said: "Jim, I've got some painful news for you, but I want you to behave manfully." Jim asked: "Is mother alright?" His father answered that she was fine. Then he told Jim that his dog "Pippy" had died. Jim could not take it as he felt that he had lost his best friend. Dr. Dobson then described how bitter he felt for the rest of the day, how he buried him in the garden, and isolated himself to write an epitaph lamenting his beloved "Pippy¹."

Such a situation frequently occurs in an adolescent's life due to rapid emotional developments taking place. How, then, can young people deal with this aspect of growth?

1. Strong emotions are a gift... not to be destroyed

¹ Dr. James Dobson: *Preparing for Adolescence*, p. 141f.

There is no doubt that such strong emotions, and their expression of eagerness and jealousy, are actually strong active potentials granted to man. These emotions need to be developed and directed sensibly to promote a person's maturity and wisdom. Conversely, these emotions may be suppressed so that they suffocate the mind and utterly destroy a person's energy. Alternately these emotions may be given free rein so that they may develop into immaturity and the person remains a spoiled child for the rest of his or her life. This means that youth should not be cautious about their emotions, reactions, keenness, and jealousy. They should not ignore them either, but they should learn to hallow them through the Holy Spirit who can help them and be the secret reason for the growth of every aspect of their life.

King Solomon asked youth not to live in suppression. On the contrary, they should live happily and joyfully because of God's gifts. Yet, they should be wise and consider the day of the last judgment as a day of rewards to them who have faithfully used God's gifts, to rather than a day to be feared and dreaded. He said: *"Rejoice young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulse of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things."* (Eccl. 11:9)

Strong emotions, as well as enthusiasm and jealousy, are one of the signs of spiritual sublimity, psychic health, and balance. This is true not only of adolescents' lives but of all true Christians. Fr. Pishoy Kamel beautifully expresses this thought, by saying: "A Christian does not know senility."

2. Fiery jealousy... not rashness

It is necessary that a young person distinguishes between enthusiasm or holy jealousy and impulsiveness and rashness. Bishop Piemen said: "A rash youth is one who is driven by his reactions, and reactions are primitive instincts. All primary reactions - according to psychological terms - can provoke and produce reactions. These reactions are results of provocations, and therefore of a weak and lowly nature. They lack the characteristics of civilized man who is typically an objective, clear-sighted, deep

thinker, not prone to hasty judgment¹.”

Jesus Christ had a calm, modest spirit (Is. 42:2; Matt. 12:9). Yet, he was a blazing fire, unquenchable by any worldly resistance. He grants us this Spirit so that we may carry this fiery feature of truth in us. He says: “*I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!*” (Luke 12:49) This fiery Spirit was at work in the apostolic era, and even those who were scattered due to persecution and great oppression, “*went about preaching the world*” (Acts 8:4). Suffering could not quench their blazing jealousy or spiritual enthusiasm for God, since the Holy Spirit renewed their youth as the eagles, and they were never quenched. (Ps. 103:5)

Finally, enthusiasm, jealousy, and emotion can be constructive if they are sanctified. If they are misused, however, they are diverted into bitter jealousy, dissemination, and opposition. This misuse of emotions is what St. James warned us against. (James 3:13-17)

3. Expect that your impulsiveness or frustration will be altered

Adolescents should be careful not to take any rash decisions when they are highly aroused and experiencing strong reactions. They should be patient and realize that it is only a temporary state, since they will definitely calm down emotionally. On the other hand, if they feel frustrated, they should not get confused or scared since they will soon recover their high spirits.

Such anticipation - a switch in heated reactions or frustrations - helps to alleviate the difficulty faced by the adolescent battling to overcome harsh emotions and brings peace through the Lord Jesus Christ. Adults, too, should not be hard on young people. They should realize a youth's need for gentleness and patience. Probably when adults remember that they have gone through the same phase and have experienced similar restlessness and contradictory reactions and emotions, they will realize how much they welcomed helping hands, opened hearts, and broad-minded and wise support.

It is so necessary to understand that the feature of strong reactions is a natural characteristic of adolescents. It should not be

¹ H.G. Bishop Piemen: *Social and Adolescent Problems 1983, p. 113 etc (In Arabic).*

ridiculed but treated lovingly and gently.

4. Do not take impulsive decisions... emotions alone are inadequate!

As we have said before, when young people are exposed to strong emotional stress, they should postpone taking decisions until they bring their troubles to the Lord. They can start a frank dialogue with Him through prayer and Bible reading and observing a state of purity and worship. They will find that the Word of God is a spiritual guide, initiator, and weapon. They could also turn to their fathers of confessions, counselors, and parents to benefit from their experience.

Therefore, they will be able to sustain their emotions and reactions by serious thinking. This is necessary since emotions alone, which are fickle, cannot help in forming final decisions.

The following words, by **Fr. Lactantius**, will conveniently conclude this part of our discussion. He spoke about emotions and human reactions and said:

“There are three reactions - or aroused states - which may confuse man’s mind. If these reactions occur, he felt tense and forgot true, honorable, or responsible conduct. These reactions are revengeful anger, lust for wealth, and sensuous lust. These three evils should be strongly resisted, as they are wicked roots. They should be quickly uprooted to allow the implementation of virtues in their place.

Stoic philosophers demand the complete amputation of these feelings, while Aristotelians demand their repression. Neither is correct, however, since emotions cannot be completely uprooted. As they are naturally implanted within us, they are there for good reasons definitely... They cannot be repressed either, for man cannot live without emotions. We now wish to stress that emotions should neither be uprooted nor reduced. They are not intrinsically evil but God has implanted them in man for a good purpose. Hence, they are naturally good and have been granted to protect life. They become wicked, however, when misused. For example, courage is good when used to defend one’s country. Yet, if used against one’s country, courage becomes evil. In the same way, reactions (emotions) become virtues when used for a

*good goal. Conversely, if they are misused, they become evil*¹.

I NEED YOUR LOVE, KINDNESS AND APPRECIATION!

Although adults complain that adolescents have fiery emotions, which make them impulsive and constantly wavering, we cannot deny the responsibility of adults - especially parents and religious leaders. These people contribute, in varying degrees, in the inflammation of adolescent emotions as well as their delinquency. When parents deprive their children of love in their childhood, they deprive them of their emotional equilibrium. Consequently, they experience an inner void, which they wish to satisfy by any means and at whatever cost.

A young girl, who does not feel her father's love, tenderness and concern, enters the phase of adolescence feeling a great chasm between her and her parents. This could be the case even though the father works hard to satisfy the material needs of his family and strives to raise its social level. What the girl really thirsts for is her father's free love where she finds herself the core of his love, esteem, and pride. Inwardly, she seeks self-appreciation and confidence. Such a girl looks for love and does not find it. At a young age, she would probably meet a young man, whoever he is - who would utter words of admiration which make her throw herself in his arms. She might quit her studies and forget all her spiritual and social principles. In so doing she does not wish to indulge in immorality; she only seeks to confirm to herself that she is wanted and accepted by others. She seeks to find her parent's lost love in an adolescent of the other sex or in a much older person. She wishes to be his companion and to stick to him. A bitter battle begins when he requires her to be immoral with him. There is a strong inner need for love she has been deprived of and that is attainable at the cost of losing her purity and chastity. Thus she has to choose either to please him who satisfies her needs, or refuse at the risk of deprivation! Under such strife, she might fall, or cry, repent and decide to disrupt the relationship at any cost. One of the youth, however, said that he always refused sexual relationships, but when he started indulging in them, his desire was insatiable! It is clear that we cannot absolve ourselves of our responsibility before God

¹ *Lactantius: Epitome of the Divine Institutes, ch. 61 (concerning human passions).*

and our children. For by depriving them of fatherly and motherly love, we push them into being emotionally delinquent. This will be very hard to deal with - for both children and parents - later on.

Adolescents who were seeking the love and kindness of their parents wrote the following words¹:

- *Dad, I love you for who you are as a person. **You don't have to buy my love with your monthly checks.***

- *I fell into the trap of looking for love in sex because **my family was not meeting my need for love.***

- *Teenagers are just like everyone else. They have many needs, desires, and fears. They need to feel loved and to express love. If their homes and families don't provide the love and attention they crave, they always seem to find someone who will. **They need someone to make them feel accepted and secure.** In many cases families today are falling far short of meeting these basic needs of their young people.*

- *I am someone who really doesn't talk to my parents that much (especially my dad). What I would really like to say is that I love them a lot. Even though I may not show it, I do love them. Also **I wish my mom would say she loves me more often than she does, but I think it's something every kid wants to hear often.***

- *Mom and Dad... **I needed you to tell me that I was unique, that I was special.** I needed to be given the tools to live as an adult in an adult world... I need my parents to tell me that I was okay. You did everything for me and it was the worst thing you have done... **why did you reject me so much?***

- ***I Love You.** These three words were never used in our home and because of this **I was afraid that nobody would ever love me, or worse, that I might not ever be able to love anyone.** But I have discovered **that Jesus loves me so much** that He died on the cross for me. I know that there is hope. I can now freely say that I love you and mean it from the heart. I hope that you find Jesus too.*



¹ J. McDowell: *What I Wish My Parents Knew About My Sexuality*, ch. 11.

SUBLIME SEX AND INTERCOURSE

The word “sex” has different implications for many people. Some understand the word as bearing noxious implications, which should not be discussed. They associate it only within the periphery of mere physical intercourse, or with ugly sights and pictures produced to excite sexual lust¹. If we consider “sex,” however, with Christian eyes, we will realize the following:

1. Sex, in its broad sense, represents the strong bond of love and feelings that holds the married couple together into one wholesome unit, excluding all others.

2. Sex is a means to open up one’s heart thus allowing all the aspects of one’s personality to develop and become mature.

LOVE AND PARADISE

The Bible tells us that at the beginning “*God created male and female.*” (Gen. 1:27) Jesus says: “*He who made them at the beginning made them male and female.*” (Matt. 19:4) This simple and basic fact reveals the Christian understanding of sex as a divine plan. Man has not created it, but mankind has always existed as males and females ever since the beginning of creation with the divine purpose of forming a human society that is “*very good.*” (Gen. 1:31)²

Our first parents lived in Paradise, “*And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed*” (Gen. 2:25). This reveals our holy concept of the whole body as being granted as a good and divine gift. This understanding reflects a holy attitude towards all the aspects of human life. Before the fall, our first parents lived a heavenly life in Paradise. Everything within them filled their hearts with joy. Some believe that they practiced marital life on the level of physical relationships and intercourse. They did so according to God’s word. “*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh.*” (Gen. 2:24) Also, “*Be fruitful, and multiply, and*

¹ Erwin J. Kolb: *Parent’s Guide to Christian Conversation about Sex*, Concor dia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1967. ch. 1.

² *Ibid.*

replenish the earth and subdue it.” (Gen. 1:28) Yet this relationship was based on the desire of each party to offer his mind, soul and body to the other, and not with the selfish desire to quench egotistical lust. This means that the relationship bore the features of sacrificial love rather than temporary lust. It also bore the real spirit of union in its most perfect picture of marriage. In this sense the inner depths adhere together as well as the two bodies. This led Adam to say: *“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”* (Gen. 2:23)

Through this heavenly concept, we see the holiness of the body and marital physical relationships. As a result, we observe the following:

1. Feelings of shame are not part of God’s work (Gen. 2:15), thus man should not be ashamed of that which God has created¹. That is why the Hebrew word corresponding to *“clothed them,”* (Gen. 3:20) is “labash” and not “hasah.” **The first means “to adorn” or to clothe them to make them attractive,” while the second means “to hide something shameful or conceal ugly nudity².”** Both mean to cover nudity, but the difference lies in the purpose of the act. Even after the fall, Jesus Christ has granted us new life and re-instituted the sanctity of marital life. Therefore, the “sacrament” has become an integral part in Christianity and allows couples to unite and share a love in which no one else can participate. They join together in a unique relationship of love, as they become “one flesh.”
2. It is as though each has a deep need for the other, and according to the holy word: *“It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him”* (Gen. 2:18). Eve corresponded to Adam in the sense that they were created equal, **each needing the other as individuals**, each possessing an existence and esteem. **They complemented one another and were companions sharing life and love.**
3. We have seen in the section about “The Integrated Personality of the Adolescent,” that the sexual relationship between parents according to **St. Augustine**, gives pleasure without

¹ *The Missing Dimension in Sex, Ambassador College Press Pasadena, California, 1971.*
p. 15.

² *Ibid, 30.*

concupiscence or lust. Such pleasure is sweeter than the sensations experienced by a prurient person practicing depraved sex. **Christian couples find pleasure and sweetness in their life and in their physical relationship, which they practice in moderation.** It is the pleasure and sweetness experienced by those who do not abuse sex and who, according to the Holy Bible “*Let (their) fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of your youth*” (Prov. 5:18). Also, “*Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of the life of your vanity, which He has given you under the sun, all the days of your life.*” (Eccl 9:9)

THE SEXUAL INSTINCT IN A BELIEVER’S LIFE

The sexual instinct, which moves within us, is an integral part of our existence. It is not an evil that we should discard, or an impurity to be despised, or a defilement to be ashamed of. On the contrary, it is part of the work of God, the Creator of all good things. **He has granted human beings sexual instincts to enable them to interact, unite, develop, and be secure.** As a human being develops, his or her sexual instincts develop as an immense power in his or her life. . It is essential, however, to entrust it into the hands of the Holy Spirit - the giver of sublime purity.

Freud drew people’s attention to the “*Libido*” or passionate energy as being the driving force steering man’s life from the day of his birth and until his death. Other modern psychologists, however, do not accept this exaggeration. Freud divided a human being’s life into different stages on the principle that he or she is a sexual force. Although such a division is no longer wholly accepted, we will mention it to clarify the relationship of sex and human life. Besides, this will enable us to illustrate how love can be sanctified especially in the period of adolescence and puberty.

1. **The Stage of Suckling** (during the first year after Birth): The Libido concentrates on moving the child’s lips to suckle his mother’s milk. If someone gently strokes the child’s brow, the child moves his or her lips to suckle.

2. **The Anal Stage** (during the second and third year after birth): In this period, the child is toilet trained. The human being, at that stage, is completely taken up by his body. Hence, it is often called the, “*narcissistic stage.*” As we said before, Narcissus is a

mythical youth who worshipped his image and looked at it intently in a stream until he died in that posture. So, that, in this stage of development, a human being is enamored with his or her “ego.” The child believes the whole world should bow and be at his or her service. Everything around the child seems to belong to him or her, even parents and other people’s possessions. He is the prisoner of his “ego.”

Human beings, in the stage of adolescence or puberty, often become narcissistic again. Sadly enough, they seek to find their own image in others, as they wish that others would follow their own whims.

3. A new stage sets in as soon as the previous period is over, and this is known as **the phallic stage**. In this stage, the “Libido” is centered on the genital organs. This sometimes disturbs parents as they find their children fondling their organs. They scold them in a way that fills the children with feelings of guilt and fear. This fear, moreover, soils their attitude to all the body and especially the genital organs, and affects a person even in his future marital life.

Parents should be careful not to ruin their children’s attitude towards their body at this stage or the forthcoming ones. When a young girl of eight looks at her naked suckling brother, and inquires about any part of his body, her parents may accuse her of being “naughty” as she speaks of certain prohibited things without shame. Such an attitude drives the girl to equate sin with sex and to draw the conclusion that everything impinging on sex is a sin.

4. **The Oedipal Period:** (From three to seven years of age approximately): During this period, the child is interested in his parent of the other sex and is attracted by him or her while being in conflict with the parent who is of the same sex. This is the pre-school age, when the boy becomes his “mother’s young man,” and the girl “her father’s spoiled daughter.” The boy demands his mother’s attention and cannot tolerate the father since he wishes to have her wholly to himself. Similarly, the girl demands her father’s attention and is jealous of her mother since she wants to possess him totally.

Sometimes adolescents and adults go back to this oedipal period. Sadly enough, husband’s demand that their wives become

mothers to them, or vice versa. In such a condition, the husband wishes to possess his wife, just as he had owned his mother before, in order to become her spoiled child and shoulder off responsibilities. Similarly, a wife wishes to possess her husband, just as she had owned her father, who would spoil her and absolve her of any commitments.

5. **The Latency Period:** (From the age of seven until the onset of puberty, so that it includes the early period of adolescence): During this stage, each sex is attracted to his own kind as has been mentioned in the third chapter. Boys will want to play with boys, and girls with girls. At the same time, each will be inquisitive and seek timidly to discover the other sex.

6. **The Period of Adolescence**¹, during which all this is altered and youth find themselves in a new situation; developments are taking place in the body and are accompanied by new sensations and feelings towards the other sex. There is a predominant feeling that the whole world has changed and sex becomes a central issue in life.

This sudden and unexpected change is often perceived with a sense of guilt. The adolescent, who was living in a state of childish innocence and enjoying a calm body and simple underscoring feelings, is filled with shame as he or she experiences these new developments. Before God, his parents, and society, as well as before himself, the adolescent starts to think that he has become evil and unworthy of living with Jesus Christ any more.

With such bitter feelings invading the adolescent, he or she may revert to any means to conceal them, such as excluding or isolating one's self to keep away from God and people. In this way a person struggles alone to control one's self, repress one's instincts, deprive the emotions, and antagonize the body. Since the adolescent is not involving his or her physical members in sin, people consider that person an innocent saint while he or she feels evil due to the inner conflict and volcanic turmoil within. This feeling often leads youth to prurience in its worst aspects. They lose control and escape their conscience by denying their faith and

¹ *The author: Love; its Meaning and Degrees ch.2 (Love and motivation). In Arabic.*

cursing purity and uprightness.

In this context, **St. Augustine**¹ said that we could not describe everyone who controls himself or avoids lust, or seeks purity as being upright. For many have sought purity at the cost of something else. An adolescent may go to friends of the same age seeking information about sexual life. These young people would offer what they have learned through an inadequate choice of books, films, or experience, which has been mingled with immature and wild imagination. In this way, the adolescent is led to prurience and recklessness. This may not be apparent to society as it could be concealed inwardly.

The role of the church and the home become of outstanding importance in such stressful periods. The adolescent realizes that the father of confession listens to him with love. The feeling of fatherly and motherly concern as well as the sympathetic understanding of the parents prevents youth from turning to their peers for information about sexual life, which could expose their development to danger or even destruction.

The spiritual father - with the help of parents - opens his heart to his children to enable them to express their emotions and sensations. They can consequently ask about anything they find strange or impure. They are, moreover, granted the wisdom of the Holy Spirit that turns their energies into holy instruments. This wisdom adequately builds up their soul and serves as a wonderful liberating force guiding them to love God and people constantly.

The need to feel comfortable with one's body and all its energies is so vital to our children. In fact, this need is essential for every person. It enables one to be aware of the body's sanctity and value. It leads to the realization that everything in the body is originally pure. Consequently, adolescents can share St. Augustine's concept that energies that have been wickedly used can be transformed, through repentance, into powerful love to God, the Church, and all mankind including enemies.

¹ *Contenance, 27.*

THE HOLY FATHERS AND THE OTHER SEX¹

At present, the whole world seems to be preoccupied by honoring women, granting her equal rights with men, as well as studying all her demands. At the same time there seems to be an attempt to degrade and dehumanize women. This dehumanization is evident in the commercial advertisements and pornographic literature where women are used for marketing purposes. The art of emphasizing the feminine body is an integral aspect of propaganda and marketing. This unconsciously instills in the minds of youth the impression that women are mere sex objects. The focus is on physical beauty rather than the human element and the personality in its various aspects.

In Christianity - as we have seen - sex is a sacred matter, created by God, the Maker of all good, in order to assist in the development of man's personality, the family, and the group. The differences between male and female are basically founded to be complementary. Each one needs the other, not to quench a personal pleasure, but to complement the work in every way - physical, emotional, psychological, social, or family wise. Neither is preferred over the other. The Apostle Paul explains this as he said: "*in Christ.... there is neither male nor female*" (Gal. 3:28).

When St. Clement of Alexandria² spoke about the differences between love and lust, he indicated that real love dispels passion. He asked us to raise our eyes to the Lord, the Creator, when we look at a beautiful woman; we are then enabled to see the sublime beauty that has created the lovely human soul.

St. John Climacus³ stated the same principle and said that he knew a person who lifts his eyes towards God upon seeing a beautiful woman to thank and praise Him for His beautiful creation. In this way lifting his mind away from material things and raising his heart towards God the Creator of man. Thus, the same source that causes the destruction of some becomes a blessing to others.

If God has granted beauty to women, He has not done so to give men a tool whereby to quench and satisfy their passions. This

¹ The author: *Love: its Meaning and Degrees*, ch. 4 (*Love and Lust*).

² Cf. *Stromata* 4:18.

³ *St. John Climacus: The Ladder*.

is an attitude that is rejected by the human soul and women themselves. In fact, women mainly wish to be the subject of real love and appreciation. She wishes to help her husband in managing the home and the rearing of their children. She wishes to be tied to him through the Holy Spirit in true love through Jesus Christ. She wishes that they might live in one spirit, mind, aim, and will. In this spirit, she and her husband can live a blessed marital life and have blessed children.

The holy Fathers constantly emphasized the membership of females in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ and their active role in the church. They do so to give them esteem, so that men may see them as perfect creatures worthy of all respect than mere physical bodies. St. Clement of Alexandria¹, as well as other holy Fathers, told us about perfect women who exceeded men and played active leading roles in the Church. For example, Judith saved her city; Esther saved her people, Susanna who conquered the two old judges by her purity, and Miriam, the sister of Moses, who led the people in a song of praise.

SPIRITUAL EDUCATION AND SEX

From our previous discussions, we can draw some main guidelines specifically related to the teaching about sex within a spiritual framework:

1. **The Christian attitude to correct sexual education is based upon the Bible.** The Holy Word presents mankind as “*male and female*” living as a marvelous entity. The female was formed from the first man’s side while he was sleeping in Paradise. It was as though he was incapable of working without her, needing someone to help and support him, so that both could achieve God’s purpose in creating mankind. Otto Piper said, “Through marriage, the couple can achieve a coordinated job to serve God. This endears each in the eyes of the other in a deep and constant manner².”

This attitude is evident in the Holy Bible and has been recorded at a time when the world was deep in perverted and dangerous sexuality. In fact, the phallic organs were worshipped

¹ Cf. *Stromata* 4:19.

² Wynn: *Sexual Ethics & Christian Responsibility*. 1976, p.103.

and prostitution was practiced as part of the sanctity of the temples.

2. **Sex itself is not a sin.** The sin is the abuse of sex and the deviation from the purpose for the creation of mankind. Sex is God's gift. He has granted it to us to preserve mankind and develop humanity. In our homes, we should present correct concepts about sex so that our children will not turn to the streets to get distorted facts and information.

A child is born with an instinctive thirst for knowledge. This thirst increases constantly and as long as there are secrets that are of concern to the child, he or she will by any means possible uncover the truth. The human being also desires to become acquainted with the world around him or her, and the world that is beyond our imagination. The child deals with his body and often asks his parents about the way he was born, the differences between boys and girls, the names of different parts of the body etc. These matters could be very embarrassing, but the child asks with the aim of gaining knowledge and out of curiosity. Many of these questions are spontaneously answered in rural eastern societies where the child is surrounded with nature. He sees through childish and innocent eyes the mating of animals and birds as well as the birth of such animals. Those who live in the cities never see these events.

3. **Sex is not restricted to physical practice.** It carries a deeper meaning of "**relating**" and "**communicating**." This does not mean that physical practice in marriage has no value. Rather, it means that union through the body is enacted due to inner union and as a person offers himself to the other. Each offers their being and personality. According to Kosty Bendelly, sex gets "**humanized**" and rises above the level of an "**object**" used by a person. On the contrary, love is interchanged in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and appreciation even though there could be differences in certain ideas or preferences.

4. **The above understanding of sex transfers it into a source contributing to the development and perfection of man.** This is supported by all those concerned with the problems of youth, especially during adolescence. To illustrate the emphasis put on this concept, we will mention the following extracts from the book on "*Young Adult Living*:"

- *We come to learn how to use our energies, to love in ways, which allow us, and those around us, to develop and strengthen our characters and our potentials in order to promote them. The goal of sexual activity is to build mutual life and concern¹.*
- *Every journey ends in man's return to his home. Where is the home of personal development in the journey of life? The home is my "self." I, as a whole being, not only what I am now, but what I dream to be in the future. Development touches my various aspects, i.e. my body, my mind, my self awareness, my self appreciation; as well as the esteem I attach to my personality and my capacity to achieve certain posts and make decisions; my ability to endure disturbance and pain; and my ability to form relationships with others. These features, and many others, form the unique person that is "I." Therefore, we do not consider sex as a problem that needs to be solved; we rather, consider sex a creative power, which is ours².*

Hence, sex covers a broad spectrum of meanings. It means a heart blooming with love and enabling mankind to practice sex through the Spirit of God, and the sacrificial offering of himself to others through Jesus Christ. This is done with a big heart and an open mind rather than through mere physical intercourse practiced between the married couple.

Jesus Christ who does not restrict sex to physical relations but extends it to something deeper, explains this broad and deep concept of sex. He commands us not to look at a woman lustfully (Matt. 5:28).

5. We do not ignore our human reality as beings with a body. Although physical, sexual practice undertaken without personal sacrificial involvement does not last and could, moreover, distort life in the eyes of the second party. It could be an expression of one's love and the sacrificial offering of ones self. This is expressed in different ways and the physical sexual demonstration cannot be ignored. Love does not affect the thought and language only. It impinges on the body as well. The love of Jesus Christ was declared to us through his descent in the flesh. He gave His flesh as

¹ *Young Adult Living. Paulist Press. N.Y., 1980. p.30.*

² *Ibid, p.31.*

a sacrificial offering of love to sanctify us. Parental love is conveyed through kisses, hugs and tender embraces. Thus, every sort of love has its own way of physical demonstration. Even through our worship to God, we worship him in spirit and in truth, without ignoring the contribution of the body. In the same way, we conceive conjugal intercourse as a holy expression of inner union with God.

6. We have indicated that knowledge is a vital matter to our children. We should offer adequate knowledge that does not distort their understanding of sex or drive them to seek it in the streets. Knowledge however, is incapable of sanctifying human life or of preventing sexual delinquency. Besides knowledge, mankind needs spiritual assistance from God. This can satisfy his depths in a way that would turn him away from seeking prurience. Together with family life, spiritual support plays an important role in instilling the correct value of sex in the lives of our children.

ABSTINENCE AND SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Why does God order that couples abstain from intercourse on certain occasions even though He has said that sex is sanctified? This happened, for example, when preparations were made to receive the Ten Commandments (Exod. 19:15). He instructed them to wash themselves after intercourse and the consideration that a person is impure until nightfall (Lev. 15:16), this is another instance of such commandments from God Himself.

Why does the apostle ask couples to abstain willingly to devote themselves to worship (1 Cor. 7:5)?

Why does the church law demand abstinence in the first three days after marriage?¹

Why does the church practice the order of churching of women, and do not allow women to partake in Communion for 40 days after the birth of their sons or 80 days after their daughters are born?

Why is it necessary to abstain from intercourse a day or two before communion?²

We answer these questions below:

¹ See Rev. B.C. Messenger: *The Mystery of Sex & Marriage*. London, p. 153.

² St. Jerome: *Ep 48 ad Pammachius*.

1. Many of the orders mentioned in the Old Testament have **a symbolic significance besides a hygienic aspect** in the same way as some animals and birds are described as being pure or impure. The Bible however, states that all of God's creation is good, and that God saw that everything is good (Gen. 1). Impurity here indicates abstinence for hygienic reasons. God also desired his people to abstain from participating with others in offering sacrifices to heathen gods.

2. Abstinence from intercourse for the first three days of marriage has two purposes: the first is that each party gets psychologically oriented to meet the other after a period of gentle companionship. This is especially useful since **the couple is often exhausted physically and psychologically, during the period preceding their marriage**. Secondly, it helps to stress that **marriage is a relationship based on love and not physical pleasure**.

3. Abstinence, as a preparation to fasting or worship does not mean that marital intercourse is unclean. It indicates, rather, that it is a form of breaking the fast. Hence, abstinence stresses the strong intention granted by God **to control oneself**, which is practiced when abstaining from specific food in terms of fasting.

It should be stressed that these relationships when practiced in their normal context are neither impure nor sinful. They are, however a form of breaking a fast. Therefore any abstinence should be performed by mutual agreement of both parties and for the purpose of devoted worship. In this way, abstinence represents spiritual exertion towards a person's development. If abstinence is imposed because sex is considered unclean, this is considered a form of mental depravity as well as a breach of faith. The holy Fathers, in both the East and the West, have opposed and attacked the return of the Gnostic attitude, which refutes the body and sex.

We wish to stress that the Church honors and sanctions virginity and asceticism, yet it does not diminish the value of marriage. Otherwise, there would not have been the holy sacrament of marriage. Neither would the apostle equate our relationship with Jesus Christ and marital life. Virginity and asceticism are ways of consecrating oneself to worship or service without being pre-

occupied with marital life and its commitments.

4. The order of *churching of women*, not allowing women to partake in Communion never implies that giving birth is unclean. Even in the Old Testament Jewish interpreters explain that the women could have been guilty of intolerance due to the pains of labor¹. If birth giving were a sin, it would never have taken the form of a celebration or a feast, which is the usual result. The Bible says: “And Sarah said, God has made me to laugh, and Abraham made a great feast the same day Isaac was weaned.” (Gen. 21:6-8)

In the Coptic order, the church declares her joy at the birth of a child by offering special prayers and hymns on the eighth day after its birth. The prayers express thanks to God and praise Him, also asking Him to bless the life and growth.

TEACHERS AND SEXUAL EDUCATION

1. Sexual education does not consist of mere facts and information, which parents, teachers, or other educators present to adolescents. It is rather, an experience perceived by the adolescent ever since his childhood and through his contact with his parents. The family is the first school that lays the foundation of all the spiritual, social, human, and sexual concepts in a child’s life. The child is aware of all that goes on in the hearts of his parents, whether they exchange real love, mutual appreciation, and inner concern towards one another, or that their marital life ends at the door of their bedroom. The warmth of marital life is the first active teacher who presents the facts of correct sexual education. Through it, the adolescent perceives the possibility of attaining this warmth in a practical way. Without such love, the adolescent seeks and confuses love, lust, and sexual play.

The endurance of marital love between parents in spite of family problems and obstacles are a true source of support to an adolescent.

The following are some comments made by adolescents, as cited by Josh McDowell².

- *Mom and Dad: Thanks for staying together through “thick and*

¹ *Messenger*, p. 77.

² *Josh McDowell: What I Wish My Parents Knew About My Sexuality* p. 70 f.

*thin.” You have taught me that real love is about - commitment!
Thank you both.*

- *Thanks for instilling in me a healthy self-image by loving each other and loving me so much. Which has really helped me to love other people and look forward to marriage. Thank you for keeping your love fresh and working at it every day. Through watching your marriage all these years I have seen the reality of God’s love.*
- *Dad, thanks for staying with us through the hell that our home has been, with mom’s illness and depression and our rebellion. I have never known anyone like you.*
- *I feel so blessed by God that He made you my parents. You have been the two best models in parenting, in marriage, and most of all in Christianity. May I be able to pass on what you have taught me.*
- *I thank you that your love for each other has set such an excellent example for my brothers and me in our future relationships.*
- *I especially appreciate my dad’s love for my mom and us kids - it makes me realize that God must really be a great Father.*

From the above comments, and other similar ones, the role of mutual interactions between parents, and its influence on the life of adolescents becomes clear. If these interactions are founded upon Jesus Christ, they bear the significance of true love and mutual respect so that the adolescent discovers “the new life in Christ” evident in the life of their parents. It is evident in worship, in the church, and before visitors as well as in the actual and daily interactions carried on by day and night. It is reflected in the joy of interacting between the parents and their children; they serve in the attraction to our Lord Jesus Christ. He consequently responds to the Holy Spirit and becomes an active member who has learned to sanctify life in all its aspects - including sex and marital life.

2. An educator - whether a father, mother, teacher, or a counselor - presents sexual information with honesty, devotion, and in truth. At the same time, it should be presented wisely so that it adequately corresponds to the needs of the listener and which are determined by their age, personal conditions, environment, etc. **The answers offered to a child of sex differ from those offered to an adolescent who has asked the same question. The two answers**

should represent the truth.

In other words, the educator should know how to simplify the same facts and present them to each age in a corresponding adequate manner. At the same time, each parent or educator should know the limited knowledge offered without arousing their curiosity to know more than they are capable of understanding. Generally, it is essential to use words and terms very carefully and in a way that preserves the sanctity of the hearer's thoughts as well as their purity and innocence.

3. Since the facts presented deal with human life itself, the element of trust in the educator is vital and plays a great role in the lives of our children. It is vital that parents win their children's confidence and friendship from childhood so that they are able to instill correct sexual education during adolescence. **They need to practice how to discuss things with their children lovingly and respectfully, never taking their thoughts lightly.**

4. Sexual education is an aspect of human life as a whole and therefore strongly related to the instructor's own spiritual life. Any instructor, who lacks constructive spiritual thought, will intimately fail to achieve his or her goal since the facts offered would lack life and spirit even though they are the simple truth. **All youth need to be supported by the grace of God so that He may lead them to a holy life.** The role of the instructor is to offer this free gift of grace by being a living testimony. Through interaction with such an instructor, the adolescent learns to emulate his model. **Thus the instructor or teacher is the practical example followed by the adolescent.**

5. An instructor or teacher should be fully aware of his or her duty to provide guidance and support through love and friendship, rather than through tyranny and arbitrariness. **We should assist young people in driving their boat wisely, yet our role is not to take over the paddles or rudder.** We should assist by clarifying the direction and by handing over the map and compass, drawing their attention to dangerous crossings and destructive areas¹.

¹ Dr. François Goust: *En Marche Vers L'Amour*, Paris.

J. McDowell¹ classifies some of the answers given by adolescents and provides several wonderful chapters in which adolescents reveal, in their own words, their need for the wise and loving guidance of their parents. Some of these revelations appear under the following titles:

- **“Love Me:”** *Mom, Dad, I need to know you love me and accept me.*
- **“Listen to Me:”** *Just talk to me. Listen to me. Try to understand me.*
- **“Trust Me:”** *I need to know you trust and believe me.*
- **“Talk to Me Early:”** *Talk to me early and often, and tell me what I need to know.*



¹ *Josh Me Dowell. p. 77, 85, 123.*

ADOLESCENCE AND THE HOLINESS OF MARRIAGE

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

When we discuss with adolescents the holiness of sex we should mention the meaning of marital life and the reciprocal relationships it encompasses between the husband and wife. This relationship is significant on the physical level as well as on the intellectual and spiritual level. Physical relations, i.e., sexual ones, between human beings differ from those between animals, since **mankind is the only species that recognizes the meaning and holiness of marital life.**

Animals - especially the baser ones - practice physical relationships instinctively so that they are controlled by nature. Consequently, mating in animals occurs at a certain season - or seasons - in the year when they undergo a biological change. At this time, the female responds instinctively to the male without any intellectual involvement. On the other hand, human beings do not engage in any natural relationships unless love and emotions are involved. These relationships are governed by spiritual, cultural and social concepts shared by the couple. Couples consider that sex bears a far deeper meaning than mere physical practices. This deep relationship involves love that reflects God's love, just like all other instances of love. If this love is interpreted in terms of lust and pleasure, its whole significance is destroyed. In marital life, physical relationships are not aroused in a certain season instinctively. On the contrary, a man is attracted to his wife due to intellectual and emotional interaction. Similarly, the wife does not respond instinctively but in answer to mutual emotional and loving involvement.

Animals do not need to have a family where mutual love can be practiced. They are actually born; as a result of instinctive physical mating and a few seconds after birth, they walk and suckle instinctively. On the other hand, a human baby takes a year or more to learn to walk. He or she needs to be taught everything and develops a well balanced being as a result of the concern and love

offered by the family¹. A child is born as a result of love and emotions, and continues to need love until the onset of puberty. In fact, this need for love prevails throughout his or her whole life.

THE COMMUNITY OF LOVE

The Holy Bible presents a vivid picture of the first marriage to take place after Creation. The marriage of one man and one woman is blessed by a sense of physical and spiritual union. This marriage represents the sanctified aspect of harmonious human life. It illustrates real love that is founded on cooperation and unity, rather than on selfishness or the personal enjoyment of a temporary pleasure.

God has created man in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27), to share His love. He wants man to talk with Him and listen to Him in a deep and wonderful relationship of love and friendship. Man would be eternally attracted to the original source to practice true love of whom he is but a picture. God gave Eve to Adam in love so that both may share in community of love and to participate in God's love. This is possible not only on a personal level with God, but on the level of the community, which involves sharing love together, in God. This ensures a continuous interaction, as each one loves the other through the divine love. The Holy Bible explains this by relating the creation of man in the image of God to the presence of distinctiveness and complementation between both sexes. "*So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female, He created them.*" (Gen. 1:27)

Even after the fall, God wished to reveal His love and asked His people to be united with Him. Therefore, He represented marital life as a reflection of God's relationship with them, so that they become His spiritual bride (Isa. 5:1-7; 54:4-8; Jer. 2:2, 2:23; Exod. 16:22). God considered that when His people turned away from Him, it is similar to the act of the bride's abandonment of her bridegroom. In this way, God has elevated man's concept of marital life.

Jesus Christ, our Savior, spoke about marriage and its

¹ *Ambassador College Press: The Missing Dimension in Sex, Pasadena, California 1971, p. 61.*

holiness, as a return to a life of Paradise before the fall (Matt. 19:4-16). He offered Himself as the Bridegroom of His people (Mark 2:18-21). He declared love as His commandment and Law (Gal. 6:2). A love that revealed itself as being completely self-giving and which Christ explained, in His words, on the eve of His crucifixion: “*Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*” (John 15:13). These words reveal that self-giving love is realized in a most wonderful way through marriage, when each one offers his life to the other (Eph. 5:21-32).

THE HOLINESS OF MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS IN PARADISE

Some people interpret the sin of Adam and Eve in Paradise, as the final achievement of the physical relationship between them, since each got to know the other physically. St. Clement of Alexandria, in contrast to many earlier great Christian Fathers who did not mention this point, presented such an interpretation. St. Clement stressed that evil is not synonymous with physical interaction but with its practice before maturity¹. Our first parents became sexually involved prematurely and before obtaining the blessings of marriage². St. Clement did not, however, consider this interpretation final, but yet a possible one as he said “probably³.”

St. Clement also stressed that human reproduction is an act of creation carried out by the Almighty. Therefore, He would never degrade the soul and pull it down from a higher state to a lower one⁴. The Creator has always been concerned with protecting the legality of the marital relationship in itself⁵.

The commandment is to “*be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.*” Some of the fathers, such as St. Augustine, tried to distinguish between the physical relationship that existed before and after the fall. Before the fall, these relationships created a sort of joy similar to that experienced by someone who is moderate in his food or who is sincere in his purity. This joy is not lost when the will is

¹ *Stromata* 3:18.

² *Ibid* 3:15.

³ *Ibid* 3:15, 94.

⁴ *Rev. E.C. Messenger: The Mystery of Sex and Marriage*, p. 46.

⁵ *Ibid* 47.

controlled, neither is it a source of diversion or corruption. After the fall, however, human beings have found in physical relationships a sort of passion that is difficult to control. **St. Augustine** concluded that **sin does not exist in the practice itself, but rather in the corruption of the will, which urges man to practice sex incorrectly.**

Some interpreters consider that the feelings of shame that overwhelmed our first parents after the fall were the result of a conflict between reason and a rebellious lust that could not be controlled. They felt that they had lost their preternatural gifts, especially that which armed them with immunity against lust or wild desire¹.

LOVE IN MARRIAGE AND VIRGINITY

Marital relationships are not confined to physical interaction for this is only one of the many aspects of life. They convey the meaning of unity between the couple on the intellectual, emotional, and self-giving (sacrificial) level, as well as on the physical level. Each person offers “his or herself” to the other. In this way, love is declared through physical interaction as a sign of opening up one’s heart to promote joyful self-giving. **Love is not a service to another, neither is it practiced to satisfy the ego or quench a personal pleasure focusing on it.** Mutual understanding of physical relationships on this basis allows a couple to participate in marriage as a sacrament of true love - otherwise it fails.

With such a viewpoint, we are enabled to understand marital relationships and the physical interaction involved. It is a viewpoint that does not destroy the holiness of the soul or its purity. **St. Augustine² realized that a couple does not lose their (spiritual) virginity and purity as long as they are not controlled by delinquent passions.** They behave in a natural way to achieve the aim of marriage, i.e., bearing children, even after interaction or birth giving.

We do not deny the effect that physical virginity has over spiritual virginity. It has the same influence that fervent spiritual

¹ *Ibid* 50, 54.

² *De Civitate Dei* 14:26.

fasting has on the meekness of the soul. Such practices are especially strengthening; i.e., physical virginity, fasting, etc.; when they are observed with a spiritual, broad-minded, and wise attitude as well as a heart filled with love towards God and men.

It is necessary to stress here that marital relationships do not destroy the virtue of inner virginity. Inner purity can be maintained as long as a person experiences these interactions with love, sacrifice, and devotion to others rather than egoistic or lusty desires. Moreover, it is only by the free gift of the grace of God and His support that a person can understand the real value, meaning and practical application of marital relationships. This understanding enables a couple to live together by the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ our Lord. Consequently, they become one with Him, experiencing the fatherly love of God which embraces the home as if it were a small church. This is why marriage is considered a “Sacrament.”

Marriage is an “*emblem of love*” evident in man as a complete entity. It encourages the virginity of the soul and emphasizes it. This is explained by a couple’s need to unite with God who is the source of all love. They wish Him to reign over their hearts so that they can live, understand and are satisfied by His great love. As love develops within, they are able to offer it. In other words, the growth of our relationship with God grants us love. This enables us to live in purity whether we remain virgins and celibates or get married. We, therefore, do not consider marital relationships shameful or unclean as some people claim. Actually, these interactions involve inner depths that surpass the limits of the body.

At this point, I wish to clarify that the sexual and physical lust that some youth indulge in tends to spoil their outlook to life including marriage. They consider the latter as totally sexual in the narrow physical sense of the word. Often, young people fail in their own marital life, since they focus on “sex” when deciding on and selecting their lifetime partner. It is vital to let the heart bloom with love and enlightenment through the Holy Spirit. This helps a person to be acquainted with his “core self” so that he or she can offer it to others. It is also necessary to recognize the qualities of the other sex so that they can meet in an act of mutual self-giving, spiritual and

mental unity, as well as physical unity. This also enables each person to give the other what is right and worthy of him or her while feeling personally satisfied.

The view of the Early Church concerning marital life and its relation to a celibate or virgin life may be summarized in the following points:

1. The Fathers of the Church have always been singularly moderate in their praise of celibacy or virginity, as they did not ignore the holiness and honor of marriage. Speaking about the latter, they emphasized the virtues of the former. In the third century, **Methodius of Olympia**, praised virginity in “*The Feast of The Ten Virgins*” while refuting any condemnation of marriage. He said “*It seems clear to me that while the Holy Bible introduces the concept of virginity or celibacy into the world, it does not cancel marriage completely... since God still creates man everyday and since this occurs through marital union. Therefore, would it not be rash to condemn human reproduction in which the Creator does not hesitate to participate, using His Holy hands!... How stupid it is to forbid marital union while we envisage the presence of saints and martyrs in the future and after us!*”¹

The sanctity the Church observes towards marriage and the reproduction organ is stressed by the fact that it forbids anyone who castrates himself from accepting any holy order, even if he has vowed celibacy. This started the dissensions between Pope Demetrius of Alexandria and Origen, who had accepted to enter the priesthood after he had castrated himself².

2. Some heretics, who refuted virginity while praising marital life, expressed another extreme attitude. This view appeared in essays alleged to be by St. Clement³. The Fathers, therefore, stressed the sublimity of virginity while they spoke about the sanctity of marriage.

To end our discussion, at this point, on the holiness of marriage, we will quote some of the words by **St. John Chrysostom**, the monk:

¹ *Banquet of Ten Virgins*.

² *Fr. Malaty: Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church, Ottawa 1978 p. 32.*

³ *Clementines Homilies 3:68.*

■ *How can they become one body? Just like a piece of choice pure gold that mixes with another kind of gold? Truly, a female receives a part of the best in man to unite with joyfully. As a result, there is tenderness and vigor, which lead her to unite with her man and give birth to a human being. The child, consequently, is a bridge, which unites the three into one. I know that someone feels embarrassed on account of my words but that arises from their own unseemliness... Why feel embarrassed from that which has been honored... You are incriminating God who has ordained these matters¹!*

■ *Surely, if marriage was condemned, St. Paul would not have called Christ the Bridegroom and the Church His bride².*

Since we address ourselves, here, to all our beloved adolescents rather than to married couples, we do not wish to elaborate on marital life. However, having discussed the sanctity of marriage, it will be adequate to clarify the concept of manhood and womanhood in marriage. This is vital as it enables us to set down the firm principles of marriage, which would ensure the development of a holy intellectual frame of mind towards this subject.



¹ In Colos. hom. 12.

² In Eph. hom 20.

MANLINESS AND FEMININITY IN MARITAL LIFE

BETWEEN MANLINESS AND FEMININITY

There is a widespread feeling in society, that premarital relationships are a natural human right. This belief has encouraged many adolescents to indulge in many obscenities and irresponsible behavior veiled under the name of 'love.' There is, also, a surmounting trend to disregard sexual differentiation under the claim of "equality between men and women." These two trends co-exist as a natural result of degrading sex of its sanctity.

Let us consider how God has elevated man's status in every possible way. He has created us in His own image and likeness. He has renewed his nature and set him up as His son in order to allow him to partake of the blessings of the divine life and eternal glory. **Although God granted both sexes equality in nature as well as in honor, yet He retained the differences between them in order to ensure the ultimate entirety and wholeness of human life.** Consequently, we should honor the entire human entity with all its various aspects, including sex, as a wonderful mystery of human life. On that account a man should honor his manliness, while a woman should honor her femininity. Both sexes should be aware of each other's respective honorable status.

The difference between the sexes is one of God's good blessings. The Holy Bible says, "Man and woman created He them... and God knew that all He did was very good" (Gen. 1:27-31). These differences are apparent on the psychological, social, and spiritual level; and not only, on the mere biological one. They contribute towards supplementing each other's being in all respects¹.

This belief has led some people to object to the expression of "the opposite sex," which is used to indicate a different sex when speaking about one of them. They consider this to be a "**misnomer**"

¹ Erwin J. Kolb: *Parent's Guide to Christian Conversation About Sex*, Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis 1967. 14.

and prefer to use “**the other sex**” or the “**complementary sex**”¹. It also helps to underline that each one finds in the other what answers his or her needs as long as they live together in the Lord and as they become one body. This helps to explain why “*man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife.*” (Matt. 19:4; Eph. 5:31)

In order to honor one’s sex and at the same time appreciate the other’s, it is vital to understand the deep meaning of manliness and femininity. Male adolescents need to be aware of the constituents of manliness as well as those of femininity. Likewise, women should be acquainted with their own underlying features as well as those of the other sex. This understanding would enable both to grow and develop into maturity while avoiding delinquent trends. Some people conceive that the reason for delinquency - in its various forms - is often due to husbands who are not manly. This also accounts for unsuccessful marriages. Similarly, problems may be due to women who are not feminine. The reference to males or females is not used here to indicate mere biological features; but rather, to indicate that husbands do not know the significance of manliness in marital life or that wives misconceive femininity. Neither is aware of the other’s needs.

MANLINESS IN MARITAL LIFE

1. “Manliness” often means “leadership” to a man. He associates it with dictatorship in the form of issuing orders and making final decisions.

The Bible stresses, “*The husband is the head of the wife,*” (Eph. 5:23) so what does “head” denote here?

Man is the head in the sense that he devotes all his energy and potentials to serve the body. This devotion promotes its peace, growth and continuous development. Manliness resides in keeping control wisely and faithfully, and in being willing to bear responsibility at all times. It implies humility rather than gruffness, arrogance, or tyranny. In actual fact, a head does not exist without a body. It is responsible for it and has to cater for its emotional needs and not merely for its material ones. More essentially, however, is the task of the head to be “self sacrificing” in the sense that it

¹ *Ibid.*

devotes the self to others, through God, lovingly and joyfully. Therefore, manliness or leadership is transformed into a sacrificial love rather than a mere giver of services or material or emotional grants.

Manliness does not imply authority and the right to issue final decisions¹. On the contrary, it implies shouldering responsibility, leading lovingly and devotedly just as the Lord Jesus gave Himself and laid down His life for the sake of His bride (the Church).

A man is the head of the family. He is the one who strives willingly to lay down his life, joyfully, rather than become a tyrant or dictator.

Wise leadership, through the Lord's help, is characterized by optimism and hope². It reflects joy and gladness over the whole family. Many believe that a mother, with her gift for motherly emotions and gentle femininity, is the one who is primarily responsible for the happiness of her family. Although this is somewhat true, the father bears a considerable role in instilling the spirit of hope, trust and security in marital life since he is the true leader. His efforts are translated into sweetness and tenderness, which fill the home with joy.

The above picture of devoted leadership that grants joy is stressed by advice directed to the bridegroom, in the Coptic liturgy. The ceremony says: "*It is your duty as a blessed son; who is strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit to receive custody of your wife, at this blessed hour, with a sincere intention and a pure sound spirit and soul. By His grace, you have to persevere and seek what is good for her, to be kind and eager to do all that gladdens her heart*³."

2. Some husbands relate their misery to the frigidity of their wives who cannot respond to them on the physical level. They feel that this is unjust since they deserve it in return for their hard work and generosity. They fail to realize that these responses do not constitute love to a wife. A wife does not surrender her body unless

¹ Joseph & Lois Bird: *The Freedom of Sexual Love*, Image Books, 1967, p. 63.

² *Ibid*, p. 65.

³ *The Coptic Offices: The Mystery of Marriage*.

she feels that her husband protects it, as well as her whole life through his sacrificial devotion and love¹. She wishes him to be a committed and active leader, overflowing with love.

Many women complain of the feeling that their husbands are not involved enough and consequently request to get divorced or be separated. They feel that they have no man who provides support or inspires trust. Actually, a wife needs to feel secure and confident in her marriage. She needs to draw upon her husband's strength, since he represents a living pillar she can lean on, by God's help.

We are aware, however, how in some cases the wives do not really seek support although they complain of the lack of it. They struggle gruffly with their husbands to attain responsibility and control. In this way they leave no chance for their husbands to demonstrate sacrificial leadership. Nevertheless, a wife can establish true confidence in her husband by fulfilling her role as a woman. Thus she can give him the chance to bear the responsibility².

FEMININITY AND MARITAL LIFE

1. If a man represents the "head" that cannot be severed from the body, then it needs a body just as a body needs a head. Similarly, a wife represents the "heart" of the family; "*all the heart.*" The family needs a master head blessed with a spirit of responsibility and self-sacrifice to plan and provide for it just as much as it needs a heart to embrace everyone. The wife needs a man she can trust, on account of his total commitment to her. She does not need him because of any deficiency in her, but rather to help him achieve his needs. **She does so by offering her "love," which seems to indicate how their needs are varied, integrated, and reciprocated.**

2. Manliness is a concept that is often misunderstood when it is described as tyrannical. **Similarly, the submissiveness of a wife is misinterpreted when it is considered a form of humiliation.** This misunderstanding led St. Paul, the apostle, to clarify that submission in marital life is "glorious," since it bears the

¹ *Bird, p. 64.*

² *Ibid, 145.*

same resemblance as the submission of the Church to Jesus Christ, who gave His life in order to win her as His glorious Church (Eph. 5:25, 26). In the same way, a wife returns her husband's love with love on account of his sacrificial attitude. She bows lovingly and submissively as she willingly bears the responsibility of the family.

In this context, we quote the great words of **St. John Chrysostom**¹:

■ *Women, submit to your men as is appropriate in the Lord,” (Cor. 3:18)... He did not say: “Submit for the Lord’s sake,” but he said, “in God.” By that he intended to praise women rather than men.*

He did not ask them to obey as slaves, or according to what is only natural, but he asked for obedience “through the Lord.”

Love is a man’s domain, whereas submission belongs to the women. If every party fulfills his or her commitments, things become stable. A man will love his wife so that she learns to love him. Similarly, through her obedience, a man learns to be meek and gentle.

Do not boast that a man loves you... for God has made him love you so that you can obey him easily and submissively. Do not fear submission, since submission to a loved one is not an obstacle.

■ *So that a husband does not despise his wife, notice how he honored her and joined her to him by uniting with her... He made her of man’s side. This stresses that she is part of his body.*

3. When speaking about the sexes, we mentioned how the world was taking great steps to grant women, throughout the world, their rights. At the same time, however, we noted how the media often spoiled the world of “women” by exploiting her beauty for marketing and propaganda. This degradation ingrains the idea that a woman is nothing but a sex object in the eyes of some adolescent boys. They see her as a puppet or toy created to please men. Consequently, she is not considered a fully human person. Some boys even consider her a mere “child producing machine.”

At the same time, there are many women, namely those who are mothers, who spoil the image of men or male youth in the minds

¹ Fr. Malaty: *Brotherly Love*, 1964. p. 258 - 259 (In Arabic).

of their daughters¹. They present males as monsters who demand nothing but sex. This engenders hatred of men in a growing girl. In marriage, this takes the form of mistrust.

As a result of erroneous upbringing, some girls believe that men are, by nature, physically corrupt. A girl may believe that all a man seeks is her body, so that she offers it as though it were a grant or donation. Such an attitude damages marital relationships.

Some mothers also dishonor their own sex so that their daughters grow up with an inferiority complex, which leads them to grieve for being born as girls². It is the duty of a mother to demonstrate practically that the family needs one head (i.e. a man) and one heart i.e. (a woman), each supplementing the other to achieve reciprocal self-realization. A woman truly becomes a woman in the deep sense of femininity by the help of man. She achieves her being by giving her whole “self” and not only her body. She gives her man her heart that lives by God. In this way, she achieves her ultimate femininity that is deeply satisfying. Through love they become identical, so that both become one, and so the womanly entity is realized. This is also applicable to virgins or nuns who experience spiritual and sacrificial love. They do so because they love the Bridegroom who satisfies their spiritual femininity and their need to pour their sweet and perfect love into Him.

May everyone become aware of God’s good creation. He has done very well to create us as males and females since it enables the perfection of human life. **The ignorance of the deep implications of manliness and femininity damages marital life.** Moreover, it causes divergence and delinquency. Such matters will be dealt with under the title of “Sexual Depravity.”



¹ *Bird*, p. 71.

² *Ibid.* p. 78.

EVANGELICAL CHASTITY AND CONTEMPORARY YOUTH

1. Is it possible for contemporary youth to lead a chaste life as the Bible demands? In other words: does the commandment to be chaste still apply now, in the twenty-first century, as it did in the first century? Is it an order that applies to all or is it directed to specific people?

2. What is purity and chastity in the eyes of our Lord?

3. Does Christ, our Lord, demand youth to deprive themselves of the necessities arising out of their physical existence?

AN IMPOSSIBLE YET SWEET COMMANDMENT

The Bible's command to be chaste appears to be impossible to some people. Yet to others, it appears to be sweet and enjoyable. Does it then, concern a specific group rather than everyone?

A few years ago, during a friendly meeting between a young bishop and non-Christian statesmen, the latter were surprised to know that the bishop is chosen from among monks. Moreover, he has to lead a chaste life all his life. This led to the question: Is it possible for a person to be celibate, without marriage, all his life?

For many people, it seems to be impossible for a man to live without indulging in any sexual and emotional interactions with the other sex. These impulses are considered to be natural instincts, as they do not differ from other physical requirements such as the need for food, drink, sleep, and bathing. That is why marriage has been established!

Many years ago, at St. George's Church, in Sporting, Alexandria, a young man came up to me to confess. It was the first confession in his life. In his confession, he said: "Do you believe there is one chaste youth among all those gathered here? It's impossible to find even one! If you wanted, you would find that after the meeting, they went to corrupt places to spend the night." So that, he believed, they were hypocrites as they came to the meeting just to ease their conscience. According to him, as soon as they left the church, they indulged in perverted relationships as a natural part of human life. Several weeks passed by before the same

youth came in again for confession. He said to me: “I am astonished at the extent of corruption I have lived in. I believe no one can live in corrupt physical relationships since they are so ‘disgusting!’ I now believe truly that none of the youth here would throw himself in this dirt.”

This actual incidence repeatedly recurs and reveals how a sinful person, justifies his fall by considering it a natural unavoidable matter. He also likes to believe that everyone else shares this weakness, which arises from human nature and the stress of our times. However, when that same person experiences the sweetness of chastity and its rewarding joys, he gets disgusted by corruption and believes chastity to be the law that is natural to living human beings.

We are not surprised, therefore, when we find that more than one million girls in high school in America are pregnant each year due to the pressures on and claim to human weakness. According to Dr. Dobson, many of them have been forced to leave school, or have lost their academic careers. The majority of them believed that premarital relationships were bound to take place since whoever did not practice them were accused of sexual abnormality or incompetence or naive childishness.

Under such circumstances, is it possible for a contemporary human being to lead a chaste life?

We cannot deny that the chastity proposed by the Holy Bible appears almost impossible to contemporary Youth. For the commandment clearly says: “*He who looked on a woman to lust after her commits adultery with her already in his heart*” (Matt. 5:28). In contrast, many find it natural to indulge in such premarital relationships! This command, which appears so impossible, becomes a natural one that brings sweetness into a believer’s life if he is aware of the following issues:

- ❖ ***The implications of chastity in Christianity.***
- ❖ ***God grants chastity.***
- ❖ ***Potentialities of the new person.***
- ❖ ***Transcendence of the heart to heavenly matters.***
- ❖ ***Constant immunity against temptation.***

A. THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHASTITY IN CHRISTIANITY¹

1. Chastity arising out of maturity rather than incompetence!

St Augustine distinguished between the chastity of mature youth who seek to attain it and the purity of incompetent babies. He saw how youth often struggle and fight for chastity. These young people might fall yet stand up again, and they might be wounded in the process yet never despair. Thus, **every struggle is a sign of maturity, energy, and love even if it is accompanied sometimes by failure.**

It is sad to find that many youth despair quickly once they weaken and give in. They quickly believe chastity to be impossible. Such despair often leads from one sin to another and ultimately leads to complete surrender in the spiritual battle.

We have previously noted how the sexual instinct is a powerful force, which some people excite and arouse perversely and in a manner opposed to its original purpose. Alternately, it may be repressed temporarily and when it gets out of hand it becomes self-damaging. The children of God, however, elevate the sexual instinct and, by the help of the Holy Spirit transform it into an instrument promoting spiritual growth. Moreover, and contrary to what many believe, the promotion of sexual instincts into an instrument of love that works and is truly self giving and filled with the Lord, does not mean that the person is never again faced by evil thoughts and sights... What actually happens is that the Holy Spirit tills up the thirst of the soul and all its potentials, as well as that of the body and its instincts. This is so true that a person overflows with pure love and is ready to sacrifice his life for all his brothers and sisters. His aim is not to satisfy his instincts, or to experience any carnal pleasures, but rather to love indefinitely and without discrimination. So that a believer is not deprived of the pleasure of victory and conquest, which qualify him or her to earn the eternal crown, the Holy Spirit does not save him from battles with evil thoughts.

It is the prerogative of the body to be attacked by its desires,

¹ The author: *Love: Its Implications and Degrees: ch. 4 "Love and Lust" (in Arabic).*

and it is within the power of the Holy Spirit to absorb this rebellion and to color it with the new dye. In this way, desires are transformed into the unlimited potentials of love and self-giving. As a result, young people can attain their former power and are armed with their earlier rebellion yet they seem to have become greater and stronger. This new picture or phase transcends physical boundaries, and the soul soars to fill life with prayer, service, study, and honesty.

The Holy Spirit makes the eye simple, so that the whole body is illuminated. As a result, when the eye is exposed to evil, the body no longer yearns or surrenders to lust. More accurately, the Spirit veils the sight and the person prays to the Lord for his protection as well as for the tempter's well-being, that both may be sanctified in the Lord.

Such is the meaning of mature purity. It does not imply any return to the purity natural to babies who never commit delinquent acts in normal human conditions. It implies rather the acceptance of a mature, innocent childlike life that is supported by the Holy Spirit and the Cross. All things that are impure or false are cut off, as it were, with a knife, and the Spirit grants us power, to enable us to struggle and fight evil.

This spirit of mature purity involves a battle waged by the believer who carries his cross. This spirit explains why evil thoughts never represent a chance to rest but rather offer an opportunity to conquer.

During such struggles, the believer progresses from one spiritual level to the next higher one. As long as he fights loyally, in spite of his wounds, he receives spiritual blessings.

It seems useful to mention the temptation to which Joseph was exposed. His mistress ordered him, begged and threatened. He was isolated from family, church, Bible or advisor, but the Lord sanctified his eyes so that he could only see a chance to conquer by the help of God the Almighty.

It becomes clear why a young child or an incompetent adult is not considered chaste in the true sense of the word. As for youth who struggle to attain and interact with God's love, these might fall into temptation. This is not, however, a sign of their corruption or

impurity. For purity does not imply avoiding temptation only, but it implies loving God and despising sin and fighting sin to the end as well.

A chaste person falls seven times and stands up again, not due to insensibility or irresponsibility, but due to a life that is inspired to struggle and fight, and which is supported by constant prayer and yearning for chastity.

The old adversary of man fights young people who have been granted instincts and tempts them. They are challenged to fight against adultery, lust, and the countless linings of the world. Under such temptations, young people can attain the crown of chastity if they are armed with the grace of God. They also need to continue in prayer, confession, and communion. **Although they may often be attacked by evil thoughts or give in to temptation, they can still conquer.** In the process, they may scream in pain and misery, yet they do not despair or surrender. Through firmness and prayer for grace, they persevere and, finally, attain a vanquisher's chastity rather than that of an incompetent person.

2. Chastity: Love and Fullness!

It is necessary to distinguish between positive and negative chastity. Some believe that chastity simply means refraining from adultery, or just avoiding any bad habits or delinquencies that arouse lust. They believe it just involves enforcing discipline on one's eyes or other instincts to prevent them from interacting with their emotional and physical sensations. Moreover, they try to avoid provocative people, places, or circumstances. Or they simply avoid preoccupying their minds and hearts with sexual emotions, feelings, or deliberations. All such attempts are negative aspects of chastity. If one's concept of chastity ends at this point, one can never attain it. Chastity will then seem to be an enormous mountain that can never be treaded by man. Moreover, it will seem to be a fanciful illusion that has never been attained or experienced by human beings. Such negative concepts have often shattered the struggle of people seeking chastity. They have led people to lose sight of the sweetness and value of chastity.

On the other hand, positive chastity is an inner power, a holy gift granted by God. It means uniting with God and loving Him in

adoration so that the heart is enriched with His love and the soul is filled up with the riches of His grace. As a result, the believer overflows with love and spreads joy without seeking anything personal. Chastity does not involve the repression or exclusion of emotions, sensations, or instincts. Rather, it implies overflowing fullness. It is a strong liberating power that sets all these potentialities in their right context and direction.

A believer distinguishes between chastity and repression. Christian chastity is a positive one that teaches a person to be cautious yet not to despise sex. On the other hand, repression is a negative unrealistic attitude dominated by a veiled egoism.

Christian chastity is not a form of “taboo” that prohibits and deprives man of joy and peace. On the contrary, it allows a person to enjoy unrestrained love that brings true happiness to the soul. Chastity is an attitude adopted by the whole human being so that his whole existence is attracted to the act of sharing and giving. St. Clement of Alexandria stressed this point to indicate that chastity does not relate only to the physical aspect of man.

B. GOD GRANTS CHASTITY

Young Augustine lived an intemperate life for many years. He thought chastity was an impossible thing. However, when he heard of St. Anthony the Great, he regretted this thinking, as he became aware that God is powerful and grants chastity. He found in the Word of God, in Jesus Christ, - his food and drink (John 6:35), his Shepherd and his life (John 16:11; 11:25), his Friend and his Bridegroom who satisfies his soul and fills his inner being. **St. Augustine**, therefore, ran to Him and poured out his soul to complain how his own ‘self’ has spoiled God’s good blessings. He expressed his feelings in these words:

Oh God... since without You nothing is created, we therefore become nothing as we move away from You and become sinful and corrupt!

Oh, how miserable I am! Darkness surrounds me and although You are the Light, I have hidden my face from You!

Oh, how miserable I am! I have wondered several times and although You are the Comforter who grants peace, yet I have

moved away from You!

Oh, how miserable I am! I have faced many foolish temptations, and although You are the Truth, yet I have not asked your advice!

Oh, how miserable I am! I have followed many ways that have corrupted me and although You are the Way, yet I have never followed that direction!

Oh, how miserable I am! Death is destroying me with many blows, and although You are Life, yet I have never been with you!

Oh, how miserable I am! I often fall in evilness and nihilism, and although You are the Word, which has created everything, yet I have separated myself from You, You without whom I could have never been¹.

A human being's state is pitiful since lust, under different forms, attracts and enslaves him. It makes a person forget his honor, development, and immortality for the sake of a temporary pleasure. Strangely enough, he knows that lust does not satisfy his inner depths and that it turns him to dust (Gen. 3:19).

That is why Christ has come to draw him away and make him heavenly. The Lord wishes to sanctify human beings with his Holy Spirit so as to set up within them the kingdom of His heavenly joy.

On behalf of helpless humanity, St. Paul screamed, "Oh wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24) He felt the attraction of earthly pleasures and lust and the extent to which they enslave a human being who surrenders and indulges in matters, which both his mind and thought reject. He therefore said, "*For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that do I... but I see another law in my members, struggling against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members*" (Rom 7:15, 24). It is true that lust is powerful to such an extent that it drives a person to act against his will. He hates anyone to see him sin and even drives his own act out of his mind since it disturbs him! Because of that, Christ came to our world and bore our nature. He came to elevate us as He elevated His disciples Peter,

¹ *The author: To you, Young Brother (in Arabic).*

James, and John. He wants us to enjoy His glory and light, so that the world diminishes in our eyes and our hearts are opened up by love for the One who draws us, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to His glory. We will join Peter and say, “*Master, it is good for us to be here.*” (Mark 9:5)

We do not deny the power of lust, but we do believe in the living Christ who grants the power to make us live in true freedom (John 8:36). He appoints us to be kings and priests of God (Rev. 1:6), and so restores honor to our humanity, gives strength to our will, and transforms our earth into a heaven. Finally we get to know the joy of His heavenly kingdom, which is the pledge of eternity. In this way we live by Him in holiness since He is Holy.

C. THE POTENTIALITIES OF THE NEW PERSON

On one of the South Sea Islands, in the burning heat of midday, an old drunkard entered the bar of an old hotel. He ordered a drink but no one was willing to serve him. To make fun of him, an old sailor finally said, “I’ll buy you a drink if you return to the table, go down on your hands and knees, and walk on your fours - like a dog - to the bar, barking and asking for a drink all the while¹.” Under stress and desire to drink the man accepted this ridiculous act in spite of the sneers of those present. He degraded his humanity and imitated the acts and sounds of an animal just for a drink! This could well be the picture of a person who surrenders to lust.

History informs us of Anthony, the great Roman emperor, who forgot his honor and throne in order to join his beloved Cleopatra. He pursued her, but never won her and ultimately lost everything. The story of Van Gogh, the famous painter, is another example that is frequently repeated. He became so infatuated by a theatre girl that his senses were completely dominated by his lust. He even cut off one of his ears when she asked him to do that. Finally, he entered an asylum where he committed suicide in 1890².

Such incidents appear exaggerated and rare, yet they convey man’s misery when he is a victim of lust and humiliated by earthly pleasures. This often costs him his honor, growth, and sometimes

¹ *Paulist Press: Young Adult Living, NY 1970, p 76.*

² *October (magazine) article: Why Stars and Artists lose their Desire to Live, 5/11/87.*

his own life.

About ten years ago, Philip Keane wrote about the constant increase in the number of premarital relationships, especially among those breaking their marital commitments. He said: [There is a prevailing opinion that the percentage of premarital relationships, which go beyond actual marital ties, has become exceedingly high in the past ten years. From incidents taking place on campus parties where wives are bartered etc., such statistics are reinforced. The increase is particularly remarked in the USA where premarital relationships have also involved women in this century, and particularly in the last few years. This indicates a surprising change that is accounted for by the increase in American males who have indulged in premarital sex (this is estimated as 80-90 percent). Out of all females born before 1900, only 14% have engaged in premarital sex. Among those born in the 1920's, and around that period, about 36% have been involved. Among those born during the Second World War, the number has reached 81% of young girls.

An outstanding aspect is that the number of woman engaging in premarital sex is now almost equivalent to that of men. This indicates that such practice seems to have become more acceptable now than in the earlier part of this century. Previously men practiced such relationships with fewer women who were accessible, as they were often, whores.

It is difficult to convey a complete account of the percentage of sexual relationships practiced by married people with other partners. Such statistics are harder to get a hold of than those dealing with premarital sex...

According to statistics by Kinsey, sex practiced by married people, but with other partners, is estimated as reaching 50% among married men and 26% among married women. He notes that the percentage among active believers is much lower than that¹.]

From the above comment, it is possible to see why people may be in despair. A believer, however, is aware of the new potentials that have been granted to him and which enable him to practice chastity gladly and joyfully.

¹ Philip Keane: *Sexual Mortality, A Catholic Perspective*. NY. 1977. p. 101-102.

Jesus Christ stresses that a person whose thoughts are carnal transforms his whole life to earthliness and becomes carnal. On the other hand, a person born of the spirit allies his heart and thoughts to spiritual matters and so transforms his life into a spiritual one (John 3:6). In the latter case, a person has the same body as normal people so that he experiences the same natural instincts, needs, and desires. Nevertheless, he is, transformed in every way into a spirit. This is due to his being born again, through baptism and through the interaction with the Holy Spirit who lives within him. In such conditions, the body and spirit co-exist in harmony and respond to the Head who is, Jesus Christ. As a result, a believer bears the thoughts, feelings, and sentiments of Christ Himself. This is what is explained as the “*new man*” (Eph. 2:15; 4:24), he who renews his wisdom according to the image of his Maker (1 Cor. 3:10), and who is renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16).

The feeling that it is impossible to obey the commandment of chastity arises out of our ignorance of the Holy blessings granted to us. St. Paul the apostle screamed and complained of his dead flesh (Rom. 7:24), because its passions conflicted with his spiritual desires (Gal. 5:17). When he became aware of God’s gifts, he expressed joy arising out of a life rooted in Christ. He related his practical experience as he said, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*” (Phil. 4:13)

St. Paul distinguished between a carnal person, a natural person, and a spiritual one. The carnal person entrusts the driving wheel to physical passions, which control all his instincts, thoughts and even his soul so that they become servile and degraded. The natural person attempts to elevate himself but is overpowered by his human nature. The spiritual person seeks refuge by having faith in the Lord. In that case, God’s spirit works within him so that his struggles are crowned with conquest, joy, and gladness.

Dear youth, focus your eyes on the strength granted to you by the Lord. This will fill you with hope. This act is far more rewarding than considering sin and passion that overwhelm the soul and sadden it. An Abbot once said to **St. John Cassian**, “*rather than sit next to corrupt places, let us inhale the beautiful scent of Christ.*”

D. TRANSCENDENCE OF THE HEART TO HEAVENLY MATTERS

We have stated earlier that a Christian's life rejects the negative aspects of chastity, since Christianity rejects deprivation and repression. It seeks to elevate man and leads him to pray for heavenly matters so that his soul rejects corrupt issues. Christianity teaches a person to accept the work of the Holy Spirit within him rather than surrender and be consumed by evil passion, which destroys the will. Christ alone can raise man on eagle's wings, to set him free and lead him from strength to strength (Ps. 84:7), and from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18) in order to enjoy grace (John 1:16). In this way, all the inner potentials become preoccupied by the heavenly glory within the heart (Ps. 45:13), which blesses the believer daily. Everyday he enjoys a new heavenly insight that supports and sanctifies him rather than exposes him to lust which destroys the soul.

It is not enough to reject our physical deliberations and rebelling against the lusts of the body. It is far more effective to liberate the self so that it can attain heavenly yearnings. These heavenly yearnings can absorb all earthly and physical lusts. **St. Augustine** explained how to do this when he said:

- *How can these thoughts or deliberations die unless our minds reject them, and our bodies refuse to submit to them and be their instruments? We should strive to be chaste earnestly, sublimate our thoughts, which attacks us, in a certain way by carnal desires, **to joyful insights revealing heavenly matters.***

Such endeavors enable a person to be liberated from the flesh and be totally dissociated.

We can achieve such a state if we listen "well" by God's help. He has commanded us, in the words of his apostle, to ask for the things of heaven where Christ reigns¹.

St. Augustine

Often, we find young people, and even elderly men, who despair or get deeply frustrated when they find they have surrendered to their passions. This despair exposes them to further temptations and failures, so that despite their grief they are unable

¹ *Contenance, p 60 (in Arabic) translated by Fr.T. Malaty.*

to achieve chastity.

At this point, the role of the father of confession is of outstanding importance. He can assist people to turn to positive heavenly matters, which are the love of God and the peace of His Holy Spirit. He has to teach them that God is able to dispel this war.

A sinner needs the support of a tender father to convey the fatherhood of God. He should not cease to pray fervently immediately, he will feel that God's grace has filled him up and carried him away to the truest love.

On the other hand, if a sinner is harshly reprimanded or lectured, concerning his sin and its effects, his heart quivers and he may never attempt to change his ways. He will quickly relapse and may become far more wicked and violent.

This explains why our earlier fathers and monks devoted their lives to **preaching hope to sinners**. They gently offered them the positive aspects at first, as the sinner's heart became filled with God's heavenly love, they were transformed into pure chaste beings.

- *Great is the person who passes through the fire of earthly lust while he contemplates the joys of heaven!*
- *A pure person is one who dispels love by love, and who quenches material fire with spiritual fire.*
- *A pure person is one who subjugates his members completely to his spirit rather than one who simply controls the body to keep it clean¹.*

St. John Climacus

- *May the love that unites you with God remain great, so that you are not captured by the fragility of corrupt love².*

St. John Saba

E. CONSTANT IMMUNITY AGAINST SIN

As long as we live in our earthly bodies, we will constantly be faced by the attacks of its passions. These feelings are its natural rights, yet they should not dominate us. As long as we are alive, we

¹ *The Ladder 15:11, 3, 10.*

² *The author: Love, ch. 4.*

will not have attained perfection. This does not mean that passionate deliberations exist powerfully within us, but rather that these feelings creep slowly over us and deceive us so that we accept them unknowingly. The worst scenario is when the struggle may be so fierce that we surrender to lust, or are deceived by the claim that we have already lost our chastity by merely having to fight it. This leads to despair.

St. Augustine says,

[Although no perfection can exist without a struggle between chastity and evil, yet until now there still is “the flesh that lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17). It is sufficient to oppose the evil that attacks us.

If we approve of evil, then, “out of the heart proceeds what defiles man.” By rejecting it through chastity, evil lusts cannot harm us although they may attack the passion of the spirit.

Within us there is the lust to sin, and by opposing it we do not complete the circle of evil. Its presence, however, indicates that we have not completed that of goodness either.

Evil passions find a response in us whenever there are illegal pleasures. We do not answer these passions, when our thoughts oppose them and obey the Word of God (Rom. 7:25)¹.]

By the sacrament of baptism, the passions of the body are crucified and we become a new man whose nature loves Christ’s sanctity and obeys His Law naturally.

According to the Apostle, “*our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed so that we should not serve sin.*” However, if a person surrenders or is careless and accepts the decrees of the old crucified man, he falls under the power of lust. This is what the apostle warned us against when he said, “*Count yourselves dead to sin (that is oppose it). Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body so that you should not obey its lusts. Neither give your members as instruments of righteousness to sin, but give yourselves to God, as those alive from the dead, and as instruments of righteousness to God.*” (Rom. 6:12,13)

Dear youth, our faith states that we have actually been

¹ Contenance 7, 8.

“buried with Him by baptism unto death... knowing that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that hence forth we should not serve sin.” (Rom. 6:6)

- *Some people praise those who are naturally incompetent... but those who have become martyrs, since they have severed their evil thoughts with a knife, as it were, are far greater¹.*

St. John Climacus

- *Our main task is to struggle against sin or the passion to sin to prevent it from dominating us. It is clear that by surrendering to it, we lose ourselves.*

Sin is in us, yet we do not allow it to dominate us. Its passion is there, but we do not have to obey it lest it overpowers us².

St. Augustine



¹ *The Ladder 15:21.*

² *Contenance 7.*

THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE THOUGHT AND EVANGELICAL LIFE

CHASTITY APPLIES TO EVERYONE

Chastity is a principle that does not specifically apply to a certain group, nor does it only concern monks or nuns in a monastery or a nunnery rather, it is a principle that is shared by all the believers, whether they are married or are youth. Chastity is a way of life offered to everyone. Struggling youth can taste it as they battle their passions by holding the Lord's strong hand so that He may sanctify them. Good husbands experience chastity by conceiving the Lord, as the only true Bridegroom of their souls. Therefore, they feel that the wife is not a mere tool that satisfies temporary passions, but is a holy vessel. She is the partner who shares with her husband unity in Christ's holy body. Monks and nuns experience chastity as they are carried away, by divine love.

FIRST: THE THOUGHT AND ITS SANCTIFICATION

I wish to achieve sanctified thoughts but my attempts are futile, as I even fail to get rid of evil corrupt thoughts. They stealthily creep in or arise from within, without my will. I try to overcome them but am unable. They even dominate me when I am asleep and relaxing, and often impose themselves as I work or am wide-awake. What can I do?

1. **First of all, you should never despair.** Corrupt thoughts must necessarily come to you as long as you are living in the flesh. *"The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit lusts against the flesh, each struggles against the other"* (Gal. 5:17). However, a person who loves God and who is resolved to walk in the way of Christ, refuses entertaining these thoughts or surrendering to them. He dismisses them at once and never negotiates. *"As for youthful lusts, flee them"* (2 Tim. 2:22). The safest way - then - is escape. Whereas, if you surrender for even a few moments, you will find it harder to fight or dismiss lustful thoughts the following day. They are like an unwanted guest who is hard to get rid of once he has arrived. By surrendering, corrupt thoughts gain a stronger footing in

the heart day by day. It will mean that you have surrendered the driving wheel of your own self to them! Once you have given in to corrupt thoughts, they will be entitled to reappear occasionally then to recur often. This is because they have become ingrained in the subconscious and it is difficult to tear them out.

What we have said in relation to our thoughts is also applicable to our instincts. Every instinct that is exposed to a corrupt experience retains its memory in the subconscious and it is used repeatedly to tempt a person to fall and surrender. This is what drove a youth to say bitterly; “Don’t you find that once you have started to practice sex you are unable to stop? What you do is just go on, and on, and on.”

Therefore, escape is a sort of strength, which enables a person to cut himself off from an endless chain of mental and physical experiences. A person needs to tell himself “No” by the help of our Lord Jesus Christ, remembering all the while that sin is a murderer whose victims are strong (Prov. 7:26).

Once a respectable and elderly man came up to me and confessed he was guilty of adultery. I thought he was referring to a passing idea he considered as adultery. I was terrified inside and the tormenting silent question was: “How can such an old respectable man commit such a sin?” On meeting the late Fr. Michael Abraham, he said: “You have been exposed to this incident at the start of your service for two purposes: first, to make you aware of human frailty, whatever a person’s age, and the need to be tender in treating it, especially when dealing with youth. Secondly, so that you have to be cautious yourself, since as long as we exist in the flesh and however pure we are always been on account of our purity, or our age, or work (as priests) we’ve always got to distrust our bodies.”

Another time a young girl, in her twenties, confessed bitterly that she had committed a sin with a seventy-years old man. She said: “He has sent me to confess as he is embarrassed to meet you. Through carelessness, he had submitted to the temptation.”

Let us therefore flee from any temptation, regardless of position, experience, or age and in order to avoid the corruption of our thoughts.

Now, if you have actually surrendered to corrupt thoughts

and if they dominate you, do not despair, instead be cautious so that you do not complicate matters through accepting, willingly, more ideas. As for those that already dominate you, you need to fight them courageously. You will be strengthened by the knowledge that the Holy Father sees your humility and accepts you. He takes account of every sacrifice you make, however small, to keep your thoughts pure. *“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication.”* (1 These. 4:3)

Remembering death and the Day of Judgment may be useful training. The purpose is that a careless person may not be convinced by love, and needs to be driven to repent by using a mixture of fear and trust and then, finally, by being loving.

2. **Thoughts may not be lustful at first.** In fact, they are often deceptive and may take the form of dreaming to which a person surrenders during his waking hours. Thus, he thinks endlessly about the future, his dreams, and hopes. Usually, however, he ends up by leaving the real world and existing in a dream world filled by a mixture of passionate and lustful feelings!

3. **One of the factors that lead some people to corrupt thinking is anxiety and having no trust in God.** No wonder, then, if many complain about the dominance of unclean thoughts especially before examinations. In spite of their great preoccupation with their studies, their anxiety drives corrupt thoughts into their minds. They wish they could find the pleasure to escape their actual circumstances. In such cases, prayer is essential to receive peace from God. He alone can fill you with inner joy and. He is the strong medication that heals a believer of these thoughts.

4. There is a traditional saying that **“A lazy mind is Satan’s workshop.”** Naturally, the mind is an active faculty that works within us. It either builds or destroys, it either does good or evil. Peace-of-mind is not achieved by doing nothing; since the mind cannot in normal circumstances, take leave of work. Yet, in the intervals when the body is resting or sleeping, the mind chews over all that its owner has experienced and offered as food during working hours.

Young people who get too involved in pleasure and entertainment, who spend time in provocative places and corrupt

gatherings, cannot be expected to develop sanctified thought. During periods of rest or sleep, their wills weaken. In contrast, **young people who have served themselves spiritual food can be expected to enjoy sanctified thought during periods of rest or sleep.** Therefore, spiritual readings, studying the Psalms and reciting them, as well as studying the writings and lives of the saints are greatly strengthening. All these exercises are stored within a person, and can be drawn upon in time of need and hunger.

SECOND: THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE SENSES

St. John Saba said:

- *Dear brother, who seeks earnestly to live in God and be in touch with the Holy One who knows no sin. Listen to me lovingly, and forgive my frailty.*
- *Organize your thoughts, dear brother and beware of them, since through them the death of the inner person may enter... turn away from contemplating human beauty that does not last, by contemplating God. Close your ears from listening to all that is corrupt by listening to the mysteries of the most powerful! Beware of corrupt smells... replacing them by the sweet smell of Christ! Close your mouth cautiously... and protect it... speak with God and talk to the Creator! The fifth sense is the touch, should be entrusted to God the Keeper, and you should pray for chastity in all your movements and contacts, that God may protect you from unclean thoughts!"*
- *Everyone who now wishes to preserve himself and his conscience from evilness has to preserve these senses, he has to entrust them into God's hands since He is the supporter of the weak.*

God has blessed you with instincts. Without them, you would lose your vitality as a human being with instincts and feelings. Your instincts differ from any other earthly living thing because God has specially given you a will. This will is an outstanding power and is largely responsible for controlling your instincts.

If you want, you can promote these five instincts or senses so that they operate as powerful potentials. Ultimately, they will drive you to enjoy living with the Lord. On the other hand, you can, if you want or if you surrender, lower them into the depths of

degradation by dawdling in corruption and believing that chastity is not a trait that can be enjoyed by beings that have such instincts as yours.

What I wish to stress is that if you, as youth, suffer due to sex and have no will to control your eyes, ears and the rest of your senses; then know that the defect does not arise due to their existence but due to your will, whether they are sanctified by the grace of God or not.

But how can I direct my senses to operate in a Godly way when my whole being is burning with passion?

First: we do not demand you to shut your senses or repress their energy within you. On the contrary, we ask you to liberate them after you have been sanctified. This will sanctify your instincts and will lead you to spiritual growth. It is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies the senses and instincts and He is not far away but within you. He lives within you, yet you do not respond to Him!

There is a need, therefore, to interact with the Holy Spirit. You can do that through prayer and by asking Him to fill your heart and illuminate your senses. The Church teaches us to pray daily and to recite in the third hour: *“Your Holy Spirit, O Lord, which you have sent to your holy disciples and honorable apostles in the third hour, that same, O Good Lord, do not tear away from us, but renew Him within us.”*

St. John Chrysostom likened the spirit of man (a child) to a city¹. Its doors are the senses, through which citizens come and go. By that, he meant that through the senses, thoughts could be corrupted or improved². The keeper at these doors is the Cross of Christ that is decorated with precious stones and gold³. These are the gates of good through which only righteousness passes. (Ps. 118:20)⁴

St. Anthony the Great said:

[The Holy Spirit helps a person to carry out the

¹ *An Address on Vainglory, A Right Way to Parents to Bring Up their Children; trans. by M.L.W. Laistner: Christianity & Pagan Culture. N.Y. 1967, ch. 25.*

² *Ibid 27.*

³ *Ibid 28.*

⁴ *Ibid 28.*

commandments that he learns, and helps him to drive away passions arising out of his “self” and independently of the body, or the passions that have attained it through the body.

The Holy Spirit also teaches a person to preserve his whole body - from the head to the toes - in harmony.

Therefore, it preserves the eyes so that they see in purity!

It preserves the ears so that they listen in peace... and do not enjoy gossip or slander of others!

It preserves the tongue so that it only says what is good and gives due importance to every word so that nothing lustful or corrupt is mixed in with the words!

The Holy Spirit preserves the hands so that they move naturally, are raised in prayer, and are charitable and generous.

It also preserves the stomach so that it sets proper restrictions for food and drink that are sufficient to feed the body. In these ways greed or lust, do not lead to sin.

The Holy Spirit preserves the feet, so that they walk according to God’s will and do good works. In this way, the whole body is used to doing good and becomes subjugated by the power of the Holy Spirit. It will gradually turn and share - to a large extent - the features of the spiritual body which it will achieve on the day of the Great Resurrection¹.]

Spiritual exercise: Study the prayers of the third hour and pray them aloud privately, or say parts of them especially in the periods between classes or lectures.

Second: The struggle to sanctify the senses. St. Anthony stressed that although the Holy Spirit is the Source of sanctification, the struggle to achieve perfect purity necessitates the joint struggle of the soul and body as they both assist each other to repent.

St. Paul also said: “*You have not yet resisted unto blood*” (Heb. 12:4). It is clear that the Holy Spirit will operate within us according to our interaction with Him, and that is evident in our effort and struggle. We have said that the first element in our struggle is prayer and fervent request that the Holy Spirit may fill up our lives endlessly. So that prayer and our own effort and struggle, to preserve our senses from all that may expose them to

¹ Letter 1.

temptation, will enable us to liberate them while we know that they will find fulfillment in doing God's will.

Different ways to train our senses are suggested below:

1. To Train your Sense of Sight: St. Augustine considered that this is the first link in the chain of sin.

(a) Avoid places that expose and weaken you to certain people even if that arises out of your own inner impulses rather than as a result of the other person's presence. **Such escape is not a sign of being a coward.** It indicates courage since you are opposing strong inner impulses. Do not, however, stop at this negative stage but be keen to repent and pray and seek to enjoy living with Jesus Christ. In this way, your eyes will become humble and will never stumble due to anyone.

(b) **Do not search, with your eyes, provocative sights...** and remember that even David, the prophet and the Psalmist, sinned as he surrendered to one careless glance.

(c) Do not linger with your eyes, which arouse your passion, but always remember that you are looking at your brothers and sisters. When a girl tempted St. Pachomius in his youth, he told her, "Are my eyes those of a dog so that they would lead me to sleep with my sister?"

(d) **Do not cheat yourself by saying that you are contemplating beauty for its sake,** because beauty lies in ultimate benevolence. Therefore, be cautious because lust may be concealed within it and you never know!

(e) When you feel your eyes are not comfortable when they see a certain person, which you meet daily at work, or under certain circumstances, **lift your heart up and call upon the name of "Jesus Christ" who will sanctify your sight.**

(f) **Put icons of Jesus Christ and the holy saints in your bedroom and on your desk.** These will remind you of the holiness and pure lives of those portrayed.

(g) **Beware of cheap books, magazines, web sites, and films** that exploit provocative and uncouth incidents and sights... know that your time is too precious to be wasted in such matters!

(h) **Do not depend on your actual spiritual strength,** so

that you confidently allow your eyes to stray; you believe that you are strong, so do not stumble. A spiritual youth once confessed to me that he had gone to provocative places but that he felt that he never felt any temptation. A few years later, the same youth confessed and complained bitterly how he was now struggling against the old sights he had seen years ago and which had not affected him then. A time of weakness had come now, and they were imposing themselves. They danced before his mind's eye and led him powerfully to destructive, evil thoughts. It was like a deposit of corrupt experience, which he had accepted in the belief that he was strong.

2. To Train Your Sense of Hearing:

(a) Avoid the company of reckless, scornful people as much as possible; otherwise, your hearing will be filled with evil sarcasm, provocative jokes or words. These words will creep out upon you in moments of weakness when your inner will is off guard, such as when you are asleep or sick or physically worn out or indulging in day dreams!

(b) If you love music then you have found a way that has led many into a deep union with God. Through the beautiful church hymns, the soul could find self-redeeming and fulfilling food!

3. To Train Your Sense of Taste: You should observe a balance between the needs of your stomach and your health and the physical efforts you practice.

4. To Train Your Sense of Smell: Remember not to overdress or indulge in earthly matters. Rather, seek to pray and try to sit up with the Lord through the night. This will transform you so that you become the beautiful aroma of the Lord to all who are saved (2 Cor. 2:15).

5. To Train Your Sense of Touch: Especially in crowded places, lift your heart towards God and preoccupy your thoughts with Him. Invoke His name.

Finally, may the Lord constantly remind us that all our members and all our senses are His own. We are His children who were bought with a precious price. That is how much we are worth? This understanding will encourage us to transform all our potentials so that they may function according to the perfect will of God.

I NEED YOU TO TRUST IN ME

REBELLION AND THE GENERATION GAP

One of the most important problems that impinge on the life of youth is caused by the unjust accusation that they often rebel against and disobey their parents, society, and sometimes religion. Adults believe that this accusation is actually true and becomes apparent in the youth's desire to make decisions without seeking their parents' advice - especially during adolescence. Young people also insist on choosing specific clothes and hairstyles that are very different from those of previous generations, besides listening to music, which some adults describe as violent and rebellious. Moreover, some young people insist on not sharing in family activities that include social, cultural, physical, and sometimes spiritual aspects. They prefer joining their peers and claim that such activities are personal matters and that, consequently, it is not the right of the family or society to impose participation upon its members. Such behavior is, obviously, ridiculed and disliked by the older generations. However, it is noteworthy to realize that such trends are not an outcome of the twentieth century. They are, rather, universal inclinations conceivable in the depths of adolescents of all generations and which some label as the '*generation gap*.' Every new generation wishes to set for itself its own standards and concepts. These standards are often rejected by the preceding generation.

LISTEN TO ME. TALK WITH ME

1. What has been mentioned above and other similar behavior do not indicate that new generations are characteristically rebellious. Those same youth who appear rebellious towards their families prove to be submissive and obedient to the groups they belong to or to friends they love. They can be very gentle and sweet outside home, so why do they behave rebelliously towards family and society?

We may see that what we call "rebellion" is actually an inner conflict caused by the desire to grow and feel independent, as well as to enjoy freedom and express one's personality. Young people undergo a conflict between those positive and real desires

and the childish traces that are still theirs and which affect their inner being. Thus, they wish to enjoy total freedom while they are actually incompetent to bear the responsibilities involved in the process. The conflict that arises from such a condition is revealed in the form of rebellion of youth against the family and society.

Such rebellious behavior is like a cry proceeding out of youthful hearts asking parents to respect their growth and maturation. The following words express frankly these youthful pleadings¹:

- *I need to know you trust and believe me.*
- *I would like to see more parents open up to their kids, and become friends with them.*
- *I wish they would have more trust in me and know that I would never lie to them, and that I love them.*
- *There are so many things I want to say to my parents: Let me grow up! Repeated 49 times.*

2. The rebellion of youth stresses the existence of a world of their own which has its own values, concepts, trends, preoccupations, and ideals. At the same time, adults wish to draw them into their world and use pressure, sarcasm, or contempt in the process.

Some examples may serve to clarify the above: a mother often feels hurt when she finds her daughter speaking secretly on the telephone to a friend for long hours, discussing private matters. Sometimes her relationship with her mother is discussed with that friend while complete silence is observed in the daughter's interactions with her mother. A wise mother should, ideally, realize that her daughter has her own world, which satisfies her feelings and sentiments. At the same time, the daughter considers that her mother belongs to an older generation which has its own experience and which is ultimately different from her own and hence is unable to comprehend the world of the younger generation.

So much wisdom is therefore needed if we are to penetrate the world of our children and experience the facts of

¹ Josh McDowell: *What I Wish My Parents Knew about My Sexuality*, California 1987. Ch 13.

their existence. Real love based on mutual respect is vital in this context.

3. Our children need to understand the concept of obedience. It does not involve humiliation or repression; neither does it imply the loss of human liberty under the dictatorship of adults who issue orders and restrictions.

Obedience is a form of dialogue based on reciprocal love and willingness to exchange experience. Each person wishes to respect the other regardless of differences in age, ability, or experience. The Lord and Creator of us all asks us to be obedient and encourages us to carry on a dialogue with Him. This is done in such great love that elevates the significance of man and makes him realize his individuality and potentials. It is said that God spoke to Moses the prophet, as a man talking with his friend (Exod. 33:11). In many instances, God asks us to talk and argue with Him (Isa. 3:5). So that He starts a dialogue with man, while we sometimes lose such a chance with our children.

Josh McDowell cites remarks made by some adolescents (and their parents) conveying their sincere desire to carry on such a dialogue¹:

- *I need you to create an environment in which I can safely share my experiences, feelings, and failures.*
- *Teens show a tremendous need to be able to share feelings, and especially failures, with their parents. They are saying. "Please ask me about my frustration and confusion regarding my sexuality." A child needs to see and experience God's grace and forgiveness in every area of life - especially in the sexual realm. One of the best ways for our children to learn and see God's grace in action is through us, their parents.*
- *When kids do not feel free to talk to their parents about sex, they rebel as a way of communicating to them their needs.*
- *I wish I could talk to you about the things I fail in, not just the things I succeed in. I need you to tell me you care.*
- *They do not know who I am because they have not taken the time to find out.*

¹ *Ibid. Ch 17.*

- *I love you. I really wish we could be more intimate and open with one another. If you could listen to me rather than convince me of your ability, I would feel much more complete. I love you.*

4. I wish we would realize that obedience does not involve subjugation. A young man who trains himself to discuss matters with his parents with due love, respect, and seriousness will learn from them the spirit of leadership. In this way, the younger generation is able to take over when the time comes. They are ready to bear responsibility and take initiatives wisely. In turn, they will be ready to deliver the same spirit to the next generation. In this way, **children are graduated from the home, which is a school, and become mature parents, priests, leaders, and servants characterized by an open-minded leadership.**

In one of our meetings with young people, an adolescent who had been recently transferred to Alexandria by his employer came to attend the meeting. He appeared aggressive and sharp, arguing and discussing with pointed power. At the end of the meeting, Fr. Pishoy Kamel whispered: “this fellow could one day be a leader serving youth.” This eventually materialized and the young man attracted many youth to the church as he opened up his heart to them.

5. So as to create an environment full of reciprocal respect and appreciation, it is essential for both adults and youth to distinguish between development in the level of intelligence in the life of human beings and that of intellectual development that is realized through constant experience.

Young people often feel that they have intellectually matured during adolescence and that their intelligence equals that of their parents and might exceed it. Parents need to be aware of such feelings, as it would enable them to win them over. On the other hand, adolescents should realize that, even though they have attained a certain state of intelligence and intellectual maturity, their growth is still lacking constant trials and experiences. Such a realization enables a living human being to develop intellectually in a constantly ongoing process. As long as he is in the flesh he is exposed to new and various experiences. Young people can then respect their parents’ experience and expect to attain a similar state

of constant growth.

6. Adolescents often feel that their parents have actually begun a dialogue with them, and desire their friendship. At the same time, however, they feel that this friendship arises out of a sense of weakness and urgency. This confusion may occur as they remember the violent dictatorship their parents practiced with them in their childhood. Such a memory is hard to erase however, many parents try to change their behavior later on. That is why it is necessary for wise parents to practice gentleness and encourage friendly conversation from the very early years of their children's lives. **They do not need to wait until they reach adolescence.** A gentle dialogue should arise out of a sense of inner need and not out of any urgency or fear lest their adolescent children should become delinquents.

Adolescents need to carry on a dialogue with their parents from an early period and according to one of them: "My parents didn't know when to start teaching me¹."

7. Parents request their children to be obedient and accuse them of being rebellious without realizing that such conduct has been infused from them. This is true since parents who are disobedient to God or to their own parents, counselors, or superiors sow the same spirit in their children's lives. It has been said that "with what measure you use, it shall be measured to you again and even more," and also "just as you do, the same will be done to you."

The devotion and obedience of parents to God as well as their constant prayer for His guidance has a direct impact on children. Besides the mutual respect of parents for each other and the avoidance of slandering others, such conduct is instilled in children from the very early years of childhood.

8. **The rebellion of youth is often a natural product of parents' ignorance of their children's talents.** Consequently, they ask them to perform tasks that are inconsistent with their potentials. This occurs in such instances as when a doctor requests that his son study medicine even though the latter is gifted as a writer, a musician, an engineer, or a manual worker etc. such impositions

¹ *Ibid.* Ch 18.

inspire a sense of failure in youth who consequently express rebellion as a sort of outlet.

9. **The constant criticism of parents**, rather than supportive encouragement and emphasis of positive aspects in their children or the expression of pride and praise before others, drives children to be in a state of self-defense and to adopt a rebellious spirit.



YOUTH AND THEIR OWN WORLD

Many families complain that their children demonstrate greater allegiance to their friends than towards them. The fact is that youth - especially during adolescence - wish to spend most of their time with friends. They communicate together whenever possible, so that they would call each other and speak over the phone for long hours, discussing what is important as well as what is trivial. At the same time, they may only spend a few minutes with their parents. It often seems as though they wish to attend parties or spend long evenings with their friends rather than help their parents in any kind of housework.

Such phenomena are natural because young people live in a world of their own. A world where they feel they belong and in which they find those who share the same feelings, sensations, and interests; those who respect their views and discuss matters with them, while they often find their parents shrug mockingly at their opinions. This is often the case when parents believe that certain matters are a waste of time and only serve to divert their children's minds away from their studies and what concerns their future.

It is necessary to realize the following:

1. **Human beings suffer from the feeling of loneliness, which destroys their psyche and personality.** They may have families who care for their well-being, and friends whose company they enjoy. Yet, in spite of that, they feel lonely in their innermost being. This leads many to aspire for 'communication' as a vital factor in their lives. These aspirations are important at all stages and all relationships are based upon them. They are as water is to plants without which they die. Every person feels separated from others by, as it were, "a great gulf." Therefore, he or she needs communication to overcome this gap and reach others, and over which others¹ come to him or her. Consequently, he or she experiences an effective presence in their company. These apparent means of communications bear inner implications in a person's life and have deeper bearings than their exterior meaning. The former

¹ *Josh McDowell: What I Wish My Parents Knew About My Sexuality, California, 1987, 51.*

are known as '*meta-communications*' and promote the growth and maturity of a human being's personality, thus leading to self-realization¹.

Hence, our children's inclination to communicate with others is a healthy sign. It denotes the firm desire to grow and realize one's self. It is not our right, therefore, to repress or destroy it. **We should, rather, help them to control it wisely and judiciously and this can be achieved through the expression of love and gentle discussions.**

Why do we speak of this need for adolescents to communicate as if it were an evil phenomenon? We accuse them of wasting their time in matters that are futile, of their nonchalance when it comes to what impinges upon their studies and their future. We also accuse them of ingratitude as they wish to spend long periods of time communicating with others compared to the time they spend with us.

At the same time, we ourselves spend a lot of time communicating with others. We do so for long hours to fulfill the lives we live in our own world. We do so especially with those who respond to our thoughts whether these are cultural, artistic, or spiritual.

If we study the history of the church, we will find an unlimited number of instances that reveal man's need to communicate, even in the case of spiritual interaction that takes place between the leaders themselves or those of great stature. It is relevant to mention here how St. Maximus and Domadios were closely attached to each other. They were the sons of king Valendius and they helped each other in observing a highly spiritual devoted life in order to live angelically in caves. When the older brother died, the younger one cried and could not tolerate life without the other. He, therefore, requested St. Macarius to pray that he might join his brother. These prayers were answered because the Lord saw his tears and saintly feelings, so that his soul departed on the third day after his brother's death.

¹ Josh McDowell: *What I Wish My Parents Knew About My Sexuality*, California, 1987, 65.

The bonds of friendship and true love intimately tied St. Apollo and St. Abib. They lived to support one another, each instilling the Lord's love in the other's heart...

St. Pachomios realized the significance of communication among monks living in the Lord. He, therefore, organized them to live in twos or threes in every "cell." He claimed that when one would fall, the other could support him and pull him to his feet.

It is clear that mankind, whatever the age and spiritual stature, needs 'communication' to practice humanity. It is true that there were times when devoted monks would spend weeks or months, and sometimes even years, without seeking or meeting any one. Yet, they practiced communication in their innermost being and offered love to God and men all day long. They carried humanity within them, sharing its pains and praying for it.

2. We sometimes wish to impose upon our children the need to communicate with the world of adults only, and to be acquainted with its thoughts, values, and trends. Adolescents, on the other hand, find the world of adults to be inadequate since in that world there is no one to listen to them or to appreciate their point of view or even discuss matters lovingly. As a result, they quickly demand to be set free from the bonds of a world that seems to be foreign to them.

A strong sense of the 'ego' is often one of the reasons that drive adults to draw youth to their world. They do so in a most erroneous and repulsive way. Parents wish to tie their children to their own way of life, to their own future, personal desires, and ideals. They do so without any consideration of the specific potentials, talents, or personal assets that their children possess. They urge their children to realize their own goals since they consider themselves successful in the eyes of the younger ones. They seem to ignore every aspect of their children's personalities.

3. Depreciating the world of our children may drive them along two paths:

(a) **Self destruction and deadening the spirit of leadership or initiative within them.**

(b) **Overwhelming rebellion and sarcasm against and at all that relates to the previous generation.**

There is a deeply felt need to listen to our children attentively, with all our hearts and minds. We should guide them with love and moderation, so that we are neither too lax nor too tough and forceful. We should be aware that they **learn through both our experience and their own**, with all the mistakes involved. It is worth remembering what we were like in our youth, living in a world of our own, and comparing whether conditions and facilities have changed or are still the same?

4. It is worth realizing, youth as well as adults, that the development of our personalities is an ongoing, never ending process as long as we practice a life of constant renewal in our Lord. Such development is based on communications, not in the narrow sense of the word, which conveys external interactions and constant conversations and discussions, but more specifically in the sense of communicating with others on the principle of accepting others as they are. Thus, we do not require molding others in our image or according to our whims; neither do we seek to be satisfied at the cost of their development and constant growth.

In other words, **first: we do not require molding others according to our own thoughts**, but rather accept their personalities, potentials, and personal talents. If the 'ego' drives a person to be eager to see himself in others, then that 'ego' is capable of killing that person as well as destroying others. That is what we have observed happening in family life when a husband seeks to cast his wife in a special mold so that the product is an identical image of him. The result is failure and destruction. The husband then ends up counting himself deceived and cheated by his wife. This is because it is impossible to transform a person into the other party's image. The same thing occurs if a wife desires to act similarly and transform her husband, or if parents do that with their children.

It is essential to realize that God has created this beautiful world full of variety and integrated perfection. Every person is a special tree or plant that has its own system and growth enabling it to produce adequate fruit. Our job is to try to understand others and respect their talents and potentials just the way they are, rather than attempt to mold them according to our own ideas. **To be able to**

understand others, it is necessary to know our own depths first, and then it is possible to respect the depths of others. To appreciate the ‘self’ in us will enable us to appreciate the ‘self’ of others.

Secondly: we do not seek temporary satisfaction at the cost of hindering another’s development and constant growth. This is a principle of love which should be the motto of all our communications whether with those of our world of adults; or with youth, or with those in other worlds, that is between adults and youth or vice versa.

One of the youth wrote about his first experience in practicing premarital sex and said that he assured the girl of his love. He then asked her to give herself to him to prove her love. After intercourse, he felt deeply sad, as he knew he had cheated her out of her purity and chastity. He wondered about her hurt feelings when he would forsake her and end their relationship. Such sick contacts can be lethal as they are practiced at the cost of their development and salvation.

DEALING WITH “THE NEED TO COMMUNICATE”

On the social level, our youth need groups of people who are young, spiritual, healthy, and progressive. Groups, which have the capacity to love and to be open-minded, so as to attract young people to the kingdom of God. In this context, the role of the Church becomes of outstanding importance, as it should seek attractive, spiritual, and youthful leaders. These leaders would be able to satisfy the minds of youth and assist in developing their personalities in every way.

On the spiritual level, which is inseparable from the social level, the need to communicate is actually a matter that impinges on a human being’s life. Whatever his or her age, culture, potentials, and social status, everyone needs to realize his or her personality through communicating with others. Our Lord Jesus Christ dealt with this problem in its essence. How did He do so?

The need to communicate is the offspring of an inner void. A person seeks another person to satisfy the feeling that he or she is a source of attention and consideration. Although many people may be around, who care for and admire him or her, there may be a

feeling of inward isolation and a need of something that satisfies the depths. A proof of that is the desire of famous personalities and stars to commit suicide in spite of the millions who admire them. This admiration and popularity is incapable of filling the inner void. The living Word of God however, is the only source capable of reaching the depths of a human being. It has come to start inner communication between the soul and heaven. Its action consists basically of satisfying the inner depths and offering a taste of heavenly joy. For example, St. Anthony lived alone in a cell in the mountains, that behavior stunned philosophers. They found him happy and supported and as though fully satisfied. When they asked him to reveal the secret of his happiness in spite of the lack of company or medical help or books, he stated that he did not live in his cell alone for he had God's company. God was with him, so that he bore the whole Church in his heart, and even the whole world. This was due to the great love he had, so that he could share in everyone's pain and pray fervently for each one. Thus, he never felt lonely or in need to communicate.

The family is generally considered to be the first teacher. If the father satisfies all aspects of family life, the family can enjoy communication among all its members through God. Therefore, children can feel satisfied and warm as well as happy and joyful. If that state of satisfaction did not exist, the children would have felt deprived and empty and would have sought perverted, external means to satisfy their need to communicate.

Through a true and deep relationship with God, young people can experience their status as children of God. **They would not experience any desire to be honored or praised by anyone and would not beg for any kind of sympathy, since they overflow with love and are a loving source which marks every aspect of their lives and touches all their friends.**

THE WORLD OF ADULTS

We have mentioned how some adults ignore the need of their children and wish to draw them from their own world into the world of adults, often using violence and sarcasm. We have explained that this creates a hatred for the world of adults and opposition to all that is related to it.

Conversely, we often find adults who revert to the 'life of adolescence' and live as teenagers, so to speak, behaving like them morally and sexually. They seem to seek their own pleasures and wish to satisfy their feelings at the cost of their social, spiritual, and family ties. Such adults cannot attract adolescents. On the contrary, adolescents despise adults who forsake their world and join the world of youth. In other words, these fallen adults lose their own lives and the respect of other adults as well as adolescents. Moreover, they represent bad examples of adults.

It is better for an adult to remain in his or her world while thinking progressively. One should open up his or her heart to adolescents, be supportive and extend ones hands to promote their growth while lifting them up to the fullness of maturity.

The following is an image presented by **St. John Chrysostom** in which he draws a similarity between child education and the teaching of walking. He said that a wise teacher bends down to be like a child and gives his or her hand to the child, then walks a few steps with him before leaving him suddenly. This action is repeated several times until the child learns to walk. The teacher bends down and walks with him, yet he or she does not become a child, even while supporting, teaching, and promoting his growth. This is done with love and care. In the same way, **we should bend down towards our children, stretching out our hands lovingly and humbly, so that we may walk with them along the path of constant growth.**

If an adolescent errs and falls, it is necessary for the person wishing to pull him up to be steady on his own feet first. According to **St. John Chrysostom**, he should then bend down slowly until he holds the hands of the fallen one and lovingly raise him up, so that the rescuer bends down, not to fall with the other, but to rise together with him.

We end this part by confirming our appreciation of the world of youth as well as that of adults. The sanctification of both through our Lord enables the growth of everyone so that all may proceed towards the Ultimate Ideal who is our goal in life.



SEXUAL DEPRAVITY

I have attempted to emphasize the positive meanings of sex and chastity in the earlier chapters. I have not focused on the negative aspects since we wish to offer support to every wounded soul, and the hope of recovering a holy life through love. Now, I feel it is my duty to write, somewhat briefly, about sexual depravities in order to expose them, so that young people are enabled to avoid them. Moreover, this might help those who have already fallen into this path.

THE INCREASE IN THE SEXUALLY DEPRAVED

The first case of "AIDS" was discovered in the summer of 1981 in America¹. This was followed by extensive studies since it was and is considered as the most serious health problem in the world, in the present century². This disease is most often transmitted by abnormal sexual intercourse. It could also be transmitted through normal intercourse where one of the parties has already been contaminated through previous relations with an infected person³. Many people have considered this disease as a warning to all humanity that is eagerly consenting to sexual depravity in all its forms, and accepting it as a natural condition and a right. This discovery of "AIDS," however, has led some people to be greatly concerned and hence to study sexual depravity more deeply. The spread of premarital relationships, extramarital intercourse, and other forms of sexually abnormal practice is a phenomenon that has increased in the past few years. This trend seems natural since people have ignored the positive and holy meaning of sex and the body. The advocate of egotism, and individuality rather than the adoption of generous loyalty to the group has also encouraged its growth. Above all, depravity is the result of man's ignorance of God's free gift of grace by which sanctity can be attained.

¹ *British Medical Journal*, vol. 294. 25 April 1987. P. 083 (*ABC of Aids* by Michael W. Adler.

² *Ibid.* p. 1085.

³ *Ibid.* p. 1085.

As we have stressed several times earlier, man needs to be satisfied inwardly. This is the only condition which cultivates a holy life, filled with joy and light heartedness, and wherein man practices flexibility and enjoys the tenderness and fulfillment of God's fatherhood.

If we study ancient history, we will find mothers indulging in sexual depravation due to an inner void. This indulgence is concealed by a show of religion. Otto Karrer¹ stated that some nations considered sex as life and have attributed sex to God since he is the creator of life. Some have even associated the sanctity of holy places with brothels, while statues and pictures of male and female genitals were found in the altars, where they were worshipped². E.G. Messenger mentioned³ that the Greeks and Romans sometimes worshipped the gods by offering unholy gifts, which the gods considered holy such as in the worship of the goddess Aphrodite. Even Mahatma Ghandi indicated some corrupt practices in his defiance of Hinduism. Although these practices disfigured the Indian temples, he still loved them⁴.

It becomes clear, from the above, that depravity is not a product of this century but it is, rather, a product of the inner void in man. Wherever he may be, and whenever man is depraved, he presents all the justifications for such behavior, and believes that in these he will find satisfaction?

FORMS OF DEPRAVITY

Sexual depravity takes many forms three are listed below:

- 1- Autosexual.**
- 2- Homosexual.**
- 3- Heterosexual.**

AUTOSEXUAL DEPRAVITY

We do not wish to discuss in detail sexual depravation, whatever its form. We only wish to clarify broad outlines and stress some positive treatment.

¹ Otto Karrer: *Religions of Mankind*, p. 128.

² J. Wynn: *Sexual Ethics & Christian Responsibility*. 1976, p. 2.

³ Rev. E. C. Messenger: *The Mystery of Sex & Marriage*, p.8.

⁴ *Ibid*: Otto Karrer, p.33.

Sexual practice undertaken by the person and with himself is usually divided as follows:

1. ***Sexual thoughts and fantasies***: We have mentioned earlier the concept of the sanctification of thought.

Man, normally, cannot stop thinking. That is why he needs to enjoy an inner holy life that issues holy thoughts.

Evil sexual thoughts that visit a person just before he or she goes to sleep reveal an inner void. Developing a positive attitude and applying it in everyday life should counteract these. The way for the Lord Jesus Christ is thus ready as the soul becomes eager to accept Him as the true Bridegroom that is able to fill up the mind. In this way, sexual thoughts and fantasies can be dispelled.

2. ***Nocturnal emissions***: as a natural result of surplus secretions, there may be nocturnal emissions for long periods. If, however, these emissions are accompanied by unholy dreams, it often indicates an unclean inner life. In that case, a person should check his life in the light of the Holy Spirit and admit that “*I sleep but my heart is awake.*” (Song 5:2)

3. ***Masturbation***: that means arousing oneself and then extinguishing it by any means.

The word is formed of two parts: ‘*manus*,’ that is hand; and ‘*stuprare*’ or to defile¹. The interpretation indicates that the act is usually practiced by using the hand. Others explain that the word comes from two other words: ‘*mas*,’ i.e. *male seed*, and ‘*turbatio*,’ i.e. excitement.

At present, some people attempt to state that such acts are natural. In addition does not represent any form of spiritual, physical, or psychic deficiency. Nevertheless, these acts do, undoubtedly, indicate the presence of a great inner void, besides a deviation from God’s holy purpose in creating sex. A person filled with grace finds rest for his body, thoughts, and sentiments. He, therefore, does not experience the need for such acts.

Adolescents are often attracted to these practices due to their ignorance of the concept of sex in its correct and holy sense. Friends who are just as ignorant introduce them to sex. Once they

¹ Philip J. Keane: *Sexual Morality, A Catholic Perspective*, NY. 1977, p. 59.

have attempted such acts out of curiosity, they continue to practice them especially when watching sexually provocative sights or reading books that are sexually provocative or when they are psychologically disturbed. Often, youth who have fallen into sexually depraved acts need to reinstate their self-confidence through God. Fear and lack of confidence are destructive.

Some practical exercises to overcome temptation are:

(a) To cry to the Lord, with all the heart, pleading for help.

(b) To change the environment... go out and go to church or to a friend.

(c) Read a favorite book, or contact a spiritual friend and discuss matters with him.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND AIDS

In the early seventies, a person asked me why does the church forbid sexual abnormality? What offence has a person committed if he is not naturally inclined to the other sex, preferring those of his own sex? In that same year, in December 1971 approximately, an American magazine announced the wedding of a man to another man! This trend increased and special clubs were founded to defend the rights of the sexually depraved /abnormal.

In fact, in some countries it became legal to get married to another person of the same sex. Such a trend is very dangerous and it is based on the logic that such cases are natural matters to people who have no hand in being what they are. The disease of "AIDS" has come as an adequate reply to this sweeping trend. It has come to warn against depravity and to scare those who play with sex and especially those who indulge in abnormal relationships.

A youth questioned about sex, and he replied that he had practiced it carelessly in the past. Since he learned about "AIDS," however, he learned to check himself.

We do not mention this with the purpose of scaring people, for we do not believe in holiness that arises out of fear or repression. We believe in holiness that arises from an inner richness and fullness, the sanctification of the soul and body, and man's understanding of his mission. At the same time, it is necessary to discuss "AIDS" as it is the topic of these times. It preoccupies and terrifies many people. We have preferred to write about it briefly

and have used the “*British Medical Journal*,” Volume 294, 25 April 1987, May 1987, and June 1987 as our reference; as well as “*World Health*,” June 1987.

THE AIDS DISEASE

The first case of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) occurred in the summer of 1981 in America. However, the virus, which caused it, was discovered in 1983. Aids, is a disease that causes the body to lose almost all its resistance. No treatment has been discovered yet and it is considered at present, as the most dangerous disease causing premature death.

Not everyone infected with the virus shows signs of the AIDS disease, and the carrier may be infected for two and half to five years before signs of AIDS appear.

After diagnosis, patients may survive according to the manifestations and stages of the disease. In America, a patient suffering from pneumonia survives for about nine months, while one suffering from sarcoma survives for about thirty-one months. In the UK, patients with pneumonia survive for about twelve and a half months, and those with sarcoma for twenty-one months.

Besides causing physical suffering and the person’s loss of immunity, this disease causes great financial loss. In New York, the estimated hospital cost for one patient is about \$134,000, whereas in San Francisco it is \$25,000-\$32,000. In the UK it is L7000-L20000. A drop further aggravates such financial loss in national productivity caused by premature deaths.

By 1991, the cost of Medical care of “AIDS” patients in America is predicted to be 162,000 million dollars¹.

TRANSMISSION OF THE VIRUS

The virus is present in the following fluids: semen, cervical secretions, lymphocytes, cerebrospinal fluid, tears, saliva, urine, and breast milk.

Transmission occurs in the following ways:

1. **By sexual intercourse, particularly abnormal sex** (In the UK 89% compared with 73% of the cases have been notified as

¹ *World Health, June 1987 (Jonathan M. Mann: The Global AIDS Situation, p. 16.*

homosexually transmitted.)

Transmission will occur through heterosexual intercourse as well as bisexual men. A man, who has been infected through homosexual intercourse, may in turn transmit the virus to the other sex during intercourse. That female will, in turn, transmit the virus to all those who have intercourse with her. It is clear, therefore, that sexual relations in any form represent a source of transmission and consequent danger.

2. By contaminated needles used for blood transfusion, especially among drug abusers.

3. From mother to child in the uterus, or possibly at birth, or through breast milk.

4. By transplanting contaminated body members.

The disease seems to have originated in South Africa where it was transmitted from the monkey to man through sexual intercourse. It was then transmitted through abnormal intercourse from South Africa to North America. and it now represents a threat to all those who engage in sex, are intravenous drug users, or receivers of contaminated blood.

It is advisable to reject blood transfusions from the following donors:

1. Any man who has had sex with another man at any time since 1977.

2. Drug abusers, both men and women, who have injected drugs at any time since 1977.

3. Hemophiliacs who have received unheated blood products at any time since 1977.

4. People who have lived or visited Africa, south of the Sahara, at any time since 1977 and/or have had sex with men or women living there.

5. Sexual partners of people in the groups mentioned previously. This includes single contacts as well as regular relationships.

“The National Blood Transfusion Service” has presented the above precautions in 1987.

The following is a statistical representation of AIDS in the USA and the UK up to March 1987.

AIDS in Adults in USA and UK up to March 1987

Patient groups	USA		UK	
	No	%	No	%
Homosexual men	20678	66	640	88
Intravenous drug users	5344	17	10	15
Homosexual men & Intravenous drug users	2433	7	8	1
Hemophiliacs	266	1	28	4
Received blood	602	2	12	2
Heterosexual contact	1184	4	25	3
Other / miscellaneous	1019	3	1	0.5
	31 526	100	724	100
	Men	93%	Men	97%

It is clear, from the above information and the announcement made by the University of California, that the danger of transmitting the disease takes place basically through sexual relationships, especially abnormal sex, as well as through intravenous drugs.



HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

All kinds of sexual depravity result from the presence of an inner void. This causes a person to move away from God's aim in creating sex. In so doing sex loses its sanctity and a person destroys his life.

Some people believe that engaging in sexual intercourse with a different sex is something instinctive and natural since it represents a physical necessity. Moreover, some youth try to justify premarital relations as a preliminary requirement preceding marriage. They claim that this gives a person practical experience of sex which is an asset in his future marital life.

Such claims are actually a pretext to veil the desire to enjoy sexual pleasure. Sadly enough, young people pay a tremendous price for this pleasure, namely:

1. **The destruction of emotions:** a young man who clings to a girl in order to achieve physical union, practices premarital intercourse regardless of any intellectual, emotional, social, or spiritual maturity. Both indulge in a temporary pleasure and imagine they have achieved true happiness and love. Soon, however, each forsakes the other and seeks a new, more attractive partner. In every instance of separation, feelings are destroyed and are often hard to restore.

In one of our discussions with a young girl, she spoke out frankly about her shattered existence. She was living with a young man and having sexual relationships with him. They spent frivolous nights with friends, yet deep down she lost all sense of security. That was not the first boy in her life and she did not expect him to be the last. She could not find, however, any kind of sense in such frivolity.

Some young people suffer from a sense of guilt after indulging in sexual relationships. This happens especially when it is the first time, as they realize that the relationship is a temporary one and has no real basis. When it ends, the party who might be emotionally involved is destroyed... some may suffer from psychological or nervous breakdown and need treatment.

Normally, one expects that the end of emotional and sexual relationships is marriage. Consequently, if a person is psychologically oriented for this end, and then fails to achieve it, a sense of failure overcomes that person. Naturally, such an issue affects his or her whole life and existence.

2. **The loss of the sanctity of marriage:** this is due to the fact that sex figures as the most important aspect of marriage to someone who has practiced premarital sex. The idea of pleasure, moreover, dominates his or her family life.

A married couple, who had previously indulged in premarital sex commented on their experience: The husband said, *“I never realized that I felt cheated until my wedding night when we got to our hotel room, as I was getting ready for the most romantic evening of my life, I looked in the mirror and realized I had already done this. What a let down! What was there to be excited about? This was nothing new. I felt like all the life had been drained out of me. That was the final deadening of the poison in my heart!*

As the months went on we got frustrated and uptight, sex used to be so much fun before we got married. What happened?

We struggled with it for almost a year. We had that ugly root of un-forgiveness between us, and the sin between the Lord and us. It was about to destroy us, so we went to some close friends and received counseling, prayer, and forgiveness from the Lord. Now things are as they should be¹.”

It is clear that premarital sex turns life into frivolity and wastes the sanctity and aim of marriage. This has several implications including the increasing wish, expressed by many, to abstain from child bearing. We asked a few people for an explanation and the answer was: *“Why have children? Why take the responsibility to spend on them and care for them? Why not spend our days enjoying freedom and leisure?”* Such answers reveal how far marital life has diverged from a life of sacrifice, generosity, and unity to a life confined to the search of egoistic pleasure that suffocates the soul. In this context, the ego is so dominant that it destroys nature itself (fatherhood and motherhood in this case).

¹ Josh McDowell: *What I Wish My Parents Knew About My Sexuality*, California, 1987, p. 173.

3. Premarital sex does not provide experience that serves as an asset in marital life. Conversely, it often paves the way to the destruction of reciprocal trust between the married couple and thus buries marital love. Couples who have gone through life - even through the engagement period - enjoying chastity can trust each other's loyalty. Even when conditions separate them and deny them sexual intercourse - as in sickness or due to travel - they are both sure of their loyalty through the Lord, and of each other's love which surpasses mere pleasure.

I remember my involvement in a marital problem during my stay abroad. For one reason or other, the couple had been living apart for about one month. The husband came to complain that his son had informed him that the mother brought home a strange man at night. She said, "You know how I can't live without sex!" His answer was, "Why have I kept loyal to you through this month, refusing to have any relationship with others in spite of our marital disputes?" The husband soon stopped trusting his wife and felt that if ever he had to travel or fell sick; his wife would cheat on him with another man!

In another case, a young man in his final graduation stage came to complain to me. He had a close relationship with a colleague for four years. He loved her and appreciated her conduct and nature. However, towards the end of that period, she gave in to him physically. Although this happened only once, he lost all his confidence in her. He felt that a person who surrenders her body - even to her fiancé - before marriage would be unable to control herself and preserve her chastity if exposed to another man's temptation. Many people, of both sexes, bear the same feelings: once one party falls - especially during the period of engagement - and engages in such relationships, the other loses the confidence that the other party has in him or her.

4. Premarital sex gives the person the experience of 'wishing for a change.' Sex is felt to be a personal right, which is practiced as a natural impulse without having to be committed to any kind of responsibility. Moreover, such experience cancels the wish to be associated and devoted to one person throughout life, or to live by God's grace and love that one person in order to achieve

unity in every way. The experience of *'wishing for a change'* creates a sense of instability and causes an increase in the percentage of separation and divorce. These experiences take place without any consideration of family ties or children's needs.

In the early seventies, an Egyptian girl was surprised to find that her colleagues in a University in North America disbelieved her when she stated that she lived with her parents... One of them said: "How could your mother live with your father for twenty-five years without changing partners?"

While we were visiting a Coptic family, we were introduced to a lady who was over fifty and who was newly wed. The man was the sixth husband in her life, in asking her about her experience, she said: "It's a profitable business!" Marriage had changed from being a wish for continuous change, into a profitable business venture to some!

5. As a result of premature and premarital sex, **a person loses his sense of true commitment even towards his children.** So that as soon as the children reach a certain age, the parent wishes to get rid of them in order to be free to enjoy his personal pleasures. This often happens even before the children have completed higher education.

6. **Premarital sex transforms a person into mere flesh, and his feelings and emotions crumble in the end.** This could be one of the principle reasons for loneliness. Multiple efforts are made by nations and the different groups to create a socially happy environment. They offer continuous services to meet the needs of different age groups. Seeking physical pleasure, however, confines man and destroys him inwardly. Such confinement breeds feelings of isolation, which become a problem that disturbs his depths and which is not a result of the surrounding environment. That is why psychological and nervous diseases are widespread in civilized societies. Civilization, however, is not the cause, but it is man's delinquency and his will to confine his life to the search of carnal pleasure that destroys him.

7. **Premature intercourse disrupts man's relationship with God; rather than developing an eternal love relationship with the Creator, man chooses to indulge in carnal lust.** That is

explained in the words of **St. Augustine's** when he said: '*Behind all forms of atheism lies lust,*' for when man surrenders to his egotistic lusts, he cannot taste the sweetness of the divine love. God, in that case, becomes a mere idea, or a fancy, or an isolated entity. Living in His heaven, God does not seem to share with man his life; neither can He understand the facts of his daily existence. That is how man attempts to relieve his pains of guilt and to deny faith.

Our faith stresses that God is a Father who does not demand us to live in deprivation or repression but he demands us rather, to live in fullness, joy and gladness. We believe He grants us wisdom and as He is the Almighty One who knows all things... He helps us to obey his commandments and enables us to abstain from all premature and abnormal intercourse. He is the Father who prevents His son from running out into the crowded street in his childhood and holds him until he gets older. That is because he loves His son and knows what is best for him. The Lord holds man away from the path of intercourse until he is spiritually, emotionally and socially mature. Thus, the Lord does not seek to repress us but, rather, to help us grow and develop.

Premarital sex is similar to tearing the buds in the spring, and the ultimate result would be evident when the autumn comes and the trees would have no fruit!

8. The alarming rise in the percentage of drug abusers among adolescents in the past few years is an international trend. Undoubtedly, it is associated with the liberal attitude adopted towards premarital sex. This attitude actually diminishes the adolescent's sense of security, family warmth, and stability. The ultimate result is that young people experience an inner void and attempt to escape by turning to drugs.

Some believed that being liberal and allowing premarital sex would create an outlet whereby adolescents can vent their feelings. They believed that in so doing, young people would lead a normal life untainted by sexual problems. What has actually happened, however, is that this liberality has been used in depraved relationships, which have not satisfied youth. On the contrary, they have revealed an inner void, which has been expressed by reverting to drug addiction. Moreover, some have failed in their studies, at

work, and family duties. Many young people have spoken frankly of the void that they feel and how they have lost the taste and meaning of life as well as their sense of responsibility towards anything.

We expected that this '*liberality*,' which is a form of laxity, would cancel the possibility of sex abuse. Surprisingly enough, we find that in all liberal countries, there is a continuous increase in the practice of abnormal sex. Formerly, conservative societies were accused of encouraging this condition as the result of repression and deprivation they imposed. Well, has liberality dealt with these problems? This question needs to be answered candidly, seriously, and wisely, especially that abnormal sex has become a fact. Moreover, its advocates claim their right to choose to marry someone of the same sex since they believe their state to be a normal human condition. They do not feel that they need treatment, but rather expect to be accepted and esteemed by society as well as by their own consciousness.

9. The denial of the sanctity of man and his relationship with God, his true Lover - if we can really deny that - allows widespread depravity. **This depravity takes the form of venereal diseases, some of which are extremely threatening to life.** Such diseases indicate the danger of the prevailing liberal trends, and reveal how sexual depravity can be destructive to health and family, as well as to the spiritual and economic well-being of society. As we have noted before, these diseases tax nations heavily, and reduce productivity, especially in such cases as the AIDS disease.

We wish to stress, finally, that young people are constantly in need of the Lord's support as He is the Lover of Mankind. We pray that He may live in them, and bless their every power, capacity, talents, and potentialities. Only then can they continue to grow and achieve their goals, through the grace of our Lord.

