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Youth
AND
CHASTITY

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By The REV. PAUL TANNER.

Youth and Chastity

(Adapted from "Marriage And The
Family" by Dr. Jacques Leclercq)

BY THE REV. PAUL TANNER

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Youth and Chastity

Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption. But he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting. (Gal. VI, 7, 8)

SAINT PAUL, in these somber words, is but repeating the analogy used by Our Lord Himself in His sermon to youth, when he spoke of the physical impossibility of growing grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles. There is an inexorable, intrinsic, inevitable, causal relationship between sowing and reaping. It is precisely this simple but overpowering truth that gives youth its profound significance—as you sow so also shall you reap.

Ordinarily one is loath to discuss Youth and Chastity because of the nature of the subject; too much reticence fails to enlighten, too much explicitness may scandalize the innocent. Yet with confidence in our Blessed Mother, we ask her guidance in striking a happy medium in considering this virtue which she has come to personify in Western culture and in Catholic hearts everywhere.

The importance of chastity to youth today is obvious, for on all sides—in the gut-

ters and in the universities, in back-alley pool rooms and fashionable drawing rooms, among the illiterate paupers and the educated wealthy, we see not merely the honorableness but even the very possibility and morality of chastity challenged. Four centuries of steady secularization of life have so far separated the ethics of modern man from Christ that he is without the basic principles upon which to evaluate chastity, and foolishly believes that the psychiatrists and the sociologists are supreme authorities in the matter.

We applaud a great sculptor who produces, in cold inert marble, a beautiful statue; we honor the genius of the painter, who with oil and pigments produces a beautiful canvas; we reverence the memory of a horticulturalist who by skillful cross fertilization and selection has added some new flower or fruit to enrich our lives. Yet how trifling is the creative labor of the sculptor, the painter or the naturalist when contrasted with what occurs each time a child is born! Its parents become creators with God Himself in producing a new life—the incomparable dignity of man's procreative powers can be estimated only from the sacredness of their end result. Because the very existence and conservation of the human race itself finally depends on these same procreative powers, their significance transcends all merely personal and individual interests.

Youth is Puzzled

DESPITE these truths, youth today is everywhere taught by word and example to make light of chastity. The pages of history and literature, daily experience and observation, the records of courts and venereal clinics all point to the terrible fact of prevalent unchastity and the singular frailty of mankind in withstanding carnal temptation.

Youth is puzzled by this, and understandably so. According to the teleological viewpoint, the universe is the handiwork of an intelligent Creator Who designed all creatures to achieve a definite end. Now one would normally suppose that it would be easier for a creature to act in accord with the natural laws of its being, than to act against these laws. Why then does man have such difficulty with chastity? Is it because it is unnatural, as many modern teachers of youth claim? Is the common materialistic explanation of evolutionism or Freudianism which frankly insists that man's natural condition is such that the role of passion is mighty and the role of reason but feeble and inconsistent, the correct one, or merely a plausible error?

Perhaps in few other matters do we find a clearer distinction between the historic Christian concept of human nature and that of the materialistic modern man. Let us not assume too readily that all Catholic

young people appreciate the radical difference in outlook between their philosophy and that commonly accepted. What is the reason given by historic Christianity for this strange weakness of human nature?

Original Sin Weakens Us

THE doctrine of original sin is a dogma of faith and as such eludes philosophical demonstration; yet it is at the same time an historical fact of primary importance, without which no rational comprehension of human nature is possible. Original sin, of course, does not mean a personal, deliberate transgression of the law of God; it means rather the effect in us of the sin of Adam, who, as father of the human race, was endowed with immortality, with his reason and will in perfect control of his lower appetites, and with Divine grace. Through him these prerogatives were to have been transmitted to his descendants, but by his sin he lost them for himself and us as well. As a result of this privation, man today comes into the world with his nature weakened, that is, deprived of supernatural grace, subject to death, and with his lower appetites in rebellion against the reason and will. It is most important to observe, however, that concupiscence, while often the occasion of sin, is not in itself sinful; nor does original sin, as Luther held, so corrupt our nature as to leave our

reason incapable of understanding, our will without freedom, and our whole nature evil. Let me emphasize again that original sin does not render us unable to observe the natural virtues—specifically, in our consideration, chastity. Hence, there is no such thing as a defeatist attitude among Christians regarding human nature. With the aid of divine grace, a sound environment, and common sense enough to avoid courting temptation, man can live chastely.

The diametrically false concept of human nature taught by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Enlightenment and upon which the moderns predicate all their fantastically unreal beliefs about man's nature is far more responsible for the modern cult of unchastity than anything else. It is the old story of fools rushing in where angels fear to tread.

II

WITH the effects of original sin on human nature understood, let us analyze the nature of human love and observe therein certain intriguing distinctions and relationships. St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*, I-II, p. 26, a. 2) defines love briefly as "complacency in the appetible object." Appetible object means simply anything that appeals to us as good and desirable. "The first change wrought in the appetite," continues St. Thomas, "by the appetible ob-

ject is called *love*, and is nothing else than complacency in that object. From this complacency results a movement towards that same object and this movement is *desire*."

There are three forms of human love that have been traditionally recognized and acknowledged by all men; namely, physical love, sentimental love, and spiritual love, all three having in common the notion of attraction to the appetible object. Physical love corresponds to the physical appetitive faculties and it is here, together with the desire of eating and drinking, that the sex appetite finds its place. Sentimental love rules the domain of feelings and affections. Spiritual love rules in things spiritual.

Dom Leclercq, in his *Marriage and the Family*, says:

"Let us here restrict physical love to the meaning that it usually has: the movement of the sex-instinct that tends toward self-gratification. People who are in love realize at times that it is more sentimental than physical. This is the well-known distinction between the heart and the senses: the heart can be involved more than the senses, or the senses more than the heart. Cases are met with where the love is divided: on one side the heart is involved, on the other the senses. With regard to spiritual love, it seeks in the beloved being the good in itself. Since goodness, in itself, is realized

only by God, spiritual love finds its perfect expression only in the love of God.

Distinct, Not Disunited

“THE three forms of love are thus clearly distinct. Yet if they are in themselves distinct, in practice they are less so. For man is unified being, and the diverse elements of which he is composed, are fused so well in the unity of his being that, though it is possible for us to discern their diversity, it is less easy for us to determine their limits . . . There is continuity from one form of love to another: from physical to sentimental love; from the senses to the heart, and from the heart to the mind. Nor do we know man well enough to determine with exactness the share of the senses, heart, and mind in each form of love.

“The distinction and interconnection between the three forms of love throw light on a great many things that would otherwise remain obscure.

“The sexual instinct is the direct source of what we call physical love. Yet the sex instinct is not isolated from the rest of human life. A love may begin by being chiefly physical and then blend with so many sentimental elements that sentiment at last predominates. Esteem for those whom one loves may even introduce spiritual elements into such love. A love may also begin by being purely sentimental without arousing

any sexual interest, and carnal desire may afterwards well up. Again, a love may begin by being a pure love of friendship, occasioned by mutual intellectual attraction, only to blend later on with sentiment and to end up in the flesh. Without even being aware of it, man is constantly mounting and descending the ladder which leads from the physical to the spiritual and vice versa.

Differences Between Sexes

“THE distinction between the three forms of love accounts for certain differences between man and woman that are matters of daily observation. Man is more inclined toward physical love. Taking the word in its usual meaning, the sex instinct will be said to be more developed in him; on the other hand, woman’s affective needs are greater. Where the man wants physical pleasure, the woman wants tokens of affection and the acts of endearment that express it. Misunderstandings arise frequently between husbands and wives for lack of adequate appreciation of this matter. . .

“The complete human love, that which must find its nourishment in marriage, is one in which the three forms of love combine to take hold of the entire. It ought at one and the same time to be spiritual, sentimental and physical — engaging the heart, the mind, and the senses. . .

“The Church, while according physical love its place with a calm boldness that is

found in few civil codes, has undertaken the stupendous task of restoration and sanctification of marriage through its efforts to spiritualize even this love that brings the sexes together. It has never ceased to teach that the main thing in all love, its nobleness, its purity—even in the case of married love—is the union of souls that together tend toward God.”

Cannot Be Separated

THIS useful distinction as well as inter-connection of the three forms of love offers a convenient yard-stick to measure the insufficiency of certain popular concepts regarding love that are playing havoc with the peace of soul of youth and adults alike. First there are those who try to separate the three forms; and secondly those who err by not distinguishing them from each other.

Of those who stupidly try to make a complete separation of the three loves, we have first of all the misguided souls who think they are true to their marriage vows if they carry on sentimental attachments with others but do not go as far as carnal intercourse. The flirt simply does not know human nature, and by trifling with the senses and passions as play-things, develops a narrowing egotism that robs her home of happiness and her marriage of the joy it normally should provide.

Another deviation consists in making love wholly a matter of sentiment and attaching no material importance to physical fidelity. The celebrated romance *Manon Lescaut* by the Abbe Provost is the predecessor of thousands of sloppy novels and movies reiterating and popularizing this error. When material infidelity loses importance and people forget that senses, heart, and mind are linked together, the divorce mills race.

Must Not Be Confounded

THE opposite error, confounding the three forms of love, which we might call pansexualism, is liable to be the fault of overly-rigorous people. "A mild form of this error is found in those good souls who are so impressed by the ravages of passion that they are unable to see a man and woman, especially if they are young, engaged in close and familiar conversation without at once thinking the worst. Such an attitude may entail serious consequences of an undesirable nature, for it can give rise to a prudence so excessive that it becomes impossible for young people to get well enough acquainted before marriage to realize what they are doing when they marry."

Sigmund Freud was not a moralist, but a physician who specialized in neuro-pathology and developed a technique for the treatment of neurotic patients called psy-

choanalysis. Non-professional popularizers have distorted Freud's original successful error, so that he stands today as the symbol of pansexualism.

Pansexualism, properly so called, consists in reducing all human activity to the sex instinct; it makes of it a kind of obsession that defiles the noblest aspirations and the most tender sentiments. Sex, of course, plays a very important role in the life of mankind, and furthermore, owing to the unity of the human being, all our tendencies are inter-linked. Pansexualism, explaining all there is to human nature solely in terms of sex, is in error, first of all, because it assumes that man is a simple being, whereas if there is one thing we are sure of about human nature it is precisely the fact that it is complex and that there is in it a great deal more than we know. Furthermore, pansexualism confuses the two entirely separate ideas of cause and condition. Because certain physical conditions predispose man to certain attitudes, as for instance, hunger to grouchiness, it does not follow that hunger inevitably compels a person to be grouchy. Chastity can be a condition for contemplation, for example, without being its cause.

III

NOW to come back to our main theme: what are the prerequisites of chastity?

We have examined carefully the distinction and interconnection of the three types of love in man, and have also indicated that chastity corresponds to human nature and should be entirely possible of achievement. The sad record of man's history, however, shows a general failure of achievement. It is the part of wisdom to examine these causes of failure and, by avoiding them, achieve the laws of our nature. The prerequisites of chastity may be classified under four headings: social, physical, moral and spiritual.

The social causes of unchastity include all those social conditions that force youth to live contrary to nature. It is estimated that at least in our northern countries youth reach sexual maturity at about the age of twenty and sometimes later. Yet for most of them, the problem of chastity arises much earlier. For many, indeed, it arises from childhood, when there can be no question of a natural difficulty of chastity. The majority of youth are affected by a sexual precocity which does not come from nature, but from the influence of the human environment, if not from its corruption. The difficulties which they experience in keeping chaste before the age of twenty do not arise from nature, but are contrary to nature.

But there are few young people of twenty who are able to marry. Nor is nature

responsible for this. If social conditions prevent the vast majority of men from marrying when they should marry, it is the development of society that is at fault. . .

Family Circle Is Normal

THE family circle is the normal environment in which youth should find relaxation. In a goodly number of families, however, it is so dull that young people seize upon every opportunity to seek diversion outside the home. Again, society, not nature, is to be blamed for this.

A fairly large number of young men are forced to remain for months, and sometimes for years, deprived of all family surroundings. This is the lot of immigrants, seamen, and soldiers in wartime. Nature, however, has nothing to do with this.

Sometimes we find young men, students or clerks, who are unable to observe chastity in ordinary life, remaining chaste without difficulty during the entire period of their military service. Why? Simply because they are leading a physically healthy life. The physically unhealthy life which they ordinarily live, shut up in an office or immersed in their studies the whole day long, is not to be laid at nature's door. Others become corrupt in the army. Nature's doings? Not at all; it is the fault of human environment.

Youth are beset by ingenious incitements to lust, especially in the cities. Veritable industries, backed by great outlays of capital and manned by a huge personnel, have no other object than to excite the sex instinct and thereby make profitable lewd types of entertainment, the sensational and the pornographic press, etc.—is nature to be held responsible for this?

Close consideration of the matter, therefore, leads to the conclusion that the difficulty of chastity often proceeds from causes extrinsic to man's nature.

Physical Prerequisites

THE physical prerequisites of chastity are happily becoming more and more common among youth; such obvious things as a sensible, nourishing diet, omitting, rich, spicy, fattening, indigestible foods; regular, long hours of rest; light, clean clothing; frequent and vigorous outdoor physical exercises; the avoidance of alcohol, nicotine, opiates; periodic and thorough medical examinations and the prompt care of minor infections, etc. All this amounts to living as close to the laws of nature as possible. The terrible war years brought back into vogue the physical austerities advocated traditionally by Christian ascetics, for a tough body is a common sense aid to chastity, as well as personal and national asset.

THE *moral* prerequisites of chastity include such obvious things as disciplining the will and the imagination, and learning to disregard as silly the occasional phantasms offending against chastity. The avoidance of filthy minded and foul speaking associates is simply the decent thing to do. The cultivation of a generous, urbane, sincere personality, a loyalty toward parents and other superiors, is a positive step that removes from one's character the opposite characteristics in which the seeds of unchastity can develop. There are two special virtues that a chaste youth must practice, perhaps unconsciously, if he would persevere. They are not popular, in fact, rarely spoken of today. They are modesty and prudence.

Modesty

MODESTY is a virtue whereby one feels repugnance to what is coarse; hence, it is opposed to public display of one's intimate life, especially in all that concerns sexual life. Modesty is a kind of moral discretion. It extends, moreover, to a great many other things besides sex. Refined persons are, for instance, modest about their good actions; they do not desire publicity. There is a lack of modesty in relating to everybody the events of one's intimate life. Modesty is a form of delicacy.

With regard to sexual life, modesty induces a person to conceal whatever is brutal

therein and to be circumspect in speaking of it. Knowing the irritability of the sex passion, we can easily grasp the importance of modesty. "A sense of shame," writes Professor Forester, "is the greatest protective force we have in the sphere of sex." Modesty removes all that is of a nature to over-excite the passions. Now the chief task of sexual education is not to draw the attention to sex matters, but to distract it from them. For this reason the pedagogy traditional in Christian circles is more concerned with protecting youth from unwholesome stimulation and with developing in him ideals than it is with physiological information.

Many public schools in the United States, practically all Y's and similar public-supported, so-called non-sectarian agencies, have for several decades engaged in a senseless campaign to destroy the sense of modesty in youth in the misguided belief that by bringing these things out into brutal clear light they will toughen the minds of youth against temptation. The experience of the Church which has dealt with this matter for twenty long centuries among all peoples of all climes and conditions, as expressed in recent papal encyclicals, should enlighten these fatuous social-workers who have ignorantly ruined the chastity of hundreds of thousands of American youth in the years just passed.

Modesty Could Be Hypocrisy

“**M**ODESTY, however,” says Dom Leclercq, “does not necessarily imply chastity. Indeed, this fact has been partly responsible for the popular reaction against modesty. In some aristocratic and artistic circles of modern society there reigns a mentality that restricts morality to respect for certain outward proprieties. Dissoluteness is condoned as long as it does not flaunt itself, and immorality is overlooked as long as a person remains decent in speech and external conduct. Modesty of this kind is really hypocrisy, although one may not see in it the homage which vice always renders virtue.

“Excess in modesty has in modern times found expression in an excessive prudence in the education of youth. The point was reached where boys and girls were left in total ignorance of all that concerns sex life; they were even carefully kept in this state of ignorance at an age when it could prove hurtful to them. The result in practice was that their knowledge of sex life was derived from chance experiences. This excess has produced a reaction, which in secular circles, takes the form of a brutal sex initiation, in connection with the free love movement and the rejection of modesty. Catholic circles, on the other hand, are returning to a more prudent conception

of the moral training which calls for a progressive and individualized instruction on this delicate subject; the duty of imparting such instruction is entrusted to parents in preference to others, and only in their default to teachers."

Prudence

MODESTY alone is not enough; prudence, the second of the virtues mentioned, is also essential and likewise held in much contempt by moderns, adults as well as youth. Can you frequent risque theaters, and remain chaste? Can you hold in esteem conversation which skirts the edges of adultery and infidelity and remain chaste? Can you wilfully recount filthy stories, enjoy lecherous allusions, double-meaning jokes and remain chaste? Can you read obscene books and impure romances and believe that your imagination will not be violated by impure phantasms? Can you frequent night clubs, listen to bawdy songs, witness sensuous dances and acrobatics and honestly believe that your innocence is not endangered? Can any youth engage in fondling and carresses, in long intimate endearing conversations in a darkened car and seriously claim that his honor and integrity remain unstained?

But why go on with this litany of modern imprudence which daily slays chastity? The chanceries of Bishops, the records of

juvenile courts, the dockets of criminal courts, the files of hospitals and mental institutions, yes, even the daily press, all contain the record of tears and misery, the lamentable result of this continued, stupid imprudence. Let prudence and modesty flourish once again, and the nasty pseudo-explanations will fall of their own viciousness. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap." (*Galatians* VI, 7)

Supernatural Aids

IT would be a serious oversight to close this discussion of the prerequisites of chastity without mentioning the strictly religious and supernatural aids, prayer and the sacraments.

"Indeed," says Dom Leclercq, "the efficaciousness of piety in the matter of chastity is recognized by all Catholic educators. So true is this that it has become a commonplace to say that daily Communion is the means par excellence for curing a youth of impurity. It is possible to explain this partly in a natural way, since the supernatural life develops the highest aspirations of the soul and thereby diverts one from sensuality. Those non-Catholics who are honest enough to admit the fact are given to explaining it in this fashion. Yet such an explanation does not account for everything. In particular, it fails to explain the

extraordinary effect of Holy Communion which ought, from the purely psychological viewpoint, to be less potent than the effect of reading or meditating. A lofty supernatural life enables a great many souls to preserve perfect chastity, even though they are beset with temptations and their life is frequently lacking in the hygienic conditions enumerated above."

In terminating this examination of a most important phase of the modern youth problem we may well recall the words of St. Paul (*1 Corinthians VI, 19*): "Know you not that your members are the Temple of the Holy Ghost, Who is in you, Whom you have from God; and you are not your own?" Reason alone disproves the diseased and degenerate dogmas of modern pseudo-scientists concerning the impossibility or undesirability of chastity. Faith reminds us that God, not ourselves, sets the premium, and that an infinite one, on chastity. "For he who sows in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption. But he who sows in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting." (*Galatians VI, 8*)

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