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**THE CHURCH
AND YOUTH**



HOUR OF FAITH

REV. FRANCIS J. McPHILLIPS

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YOUTH AND THE CHURCH

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A series of Sunday morning talks given in August, 1947, on "The Hour of Faith," a coast-to-coast religious broadcast produced by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the American Broadcasting Company.

BY

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YOUTH ASKS ABOUT RELIGION

Talk given on August 3, 1947

It might be possible to prove that youth is the least understood age of man. The very young and the very old seem to live in worlds of their own, and the lives of mature men and women in most cases follow a pattern. It is what goes on in the minds of people on the threshold of maturity that holds the mystery. Let someone say that he "just cannot understand this new generation," and he is admitting that he does not know how young minds think, implying that they do not. It is not only that young people are confused about themselves, but perhaps the greatest confusion exists in the minds of those who are trying to understand them. It does nothing to help solve the riddle to consider people of college age sometimes as boys and girls who are old enough to go to college, and sometimes as men and women who are young enough to be still in school. Those who are far enough removed from their lives are apt to think that they live in the continual sunshine of dates and parties and athletic events, with only the occasional cloud of ex-

amination and the seasonal storms of final exams. But those of us who have the privilege of working with college students, who are given their confidence and know their heartaches, come to learn that young minds have a great capacity for worry, and realize how important it is to try to straighten out their tangled ideas; and for us there is no doubt that their agile minds are seeking the correct answers to many questions.

If a poll were taken among college students to learn what topics are most popular in their talks together, the answer would most certainly be: sex and religion. Youth asks about religion, and talks about it, whether he came from a home where religion formed a great part of his life, or whether he came from an environment where it was something to be scoffed at and to be found only in the lives of his neighbors. Youth always asks about religion because as he advances in the acquirement of learning, he is rightly taught to be sanely critical. In every department of scientific knowledge, he is taught to adopt a "show

me" attitude, and it is natural that he should submit religion to the same critical test. The unfortunate thing is that he so often receives an entirely false or completely inadequate answer.

There seem to be two chief reasons why so many students leave secular colleges with an antipathy towards religion. One is that when he has earnestly sought an answer to his question about religion, he has been given an answer that would not satisfy a reasonable mind. And the other reason, in many cases, is that there was a lack of sufficient moral courage in facing facts. It is foreign to our nature to easily admit guilt, and this is an important factor in the apparent loss of faith in so many of our young people. In pre-adolescent years it is not difficult to accept the notion of God and all that religion stands for—but as youth becomes aware of very real temptations, it becomes easier to deny the unseen God than to admit guilt and strive to change his life. In both cases, the argument for religion seems to have failed.

Strange as it may seem, it is often the most enquiring young mind today that finds the most confusion. For example,

a student in a secular institution of higher learning may walk through the portals of a building over which are inscribed in stone the following words: "Religion, morality and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged,"* and he may enter a classroom in the same building to hear a professor say that religion is outmoded, and the beliefs of his fathers but a remnant of ancient superstition. What is he to believe? His common sense tells him that if there is such a thing as morality, there must be a proper basis for it, and yet his professor of psychology may tell him that he does not possess a free will and therefore, he is not accountable for his actions. When one young man in such a course arose to ask the professor if it meant failure in the course if he had a free will, he was told that it was only necessary for him to forget his free will for three periods a week and everything would be all right! It certainly does nothing to solve the confusion in the student's mind to have men who are expert

* Inscription over Angell Hall at the University of Michigan.

in their own fields, speak as oracles on the subject of religion, of which they know little or nothing. It is not unusual for the student to feel a constant unrest and sense of futility about life in general. He has already begun to learn by experience that the attainment of certain goals that he thought would lead to happiness have left much to be desired, and he wonders why. All of his training is aimed at making him self-sufficient, and he learns to construe any dependence upon another as a sign of weakness; so he logically assumes that even to rely on God would be a weakness rather than absolute necessity following the very fact of his creation.

Let us suppose that an enquiring young man comes to the conclusion that he has an immortal soul and that God does exist, and therefore, he should make an earnest effort to find out just what religion is, and what part it should play in his life. Is it possible for him to be satisfied with the answer that religion is only a philosophy of life, and that it does not really matter how he serves God? He has a right to a more direct and truthful answer than that religion is merely a philosophy of life, or a

rule of conduct, or some sort of organization to which good living people are supposed to belong. As long as it is left as something that no one really understands, or is so poorly defined that even atheistic communism will fit the definition, what wonder is it that he chooses to leave it alone and casts about for some other means of establishing a rule for his life? As long as religion is presented to him as something sentimental and essentially emotional, he can put it aside and try to be happy without it. But if he can be shown that it is as reasonable as anything he can find in a science book, he is more apt to strive to see what it means, and what effect it will have upon his present and future life. It is so important for him to be given the right answer because he is at a stage in his life when he is learning reasonable answers for every other question, and he will not be content with less in the matter of religion. The thinking youth is not a crowd-follower, and many a man has aspired to an idealism in his youth that he never attained in his more mature life, and the reason that he lowered his sights may well have been that he was never given the

proper reasons for pursuing his lofty ideals. It takes courage to fight a long battle, and such courage can be born only of conviction. Give the youth the right answer, let him see that it is reasonable, and he will work to find for himself the conclusions that flow from it.

When the query is made: "What is religion?" youth will accept the simple and entirely reasonable reply that religion is the bond that exists between man and God. Give him to understand that the term religion indicates the relationship between man and God—just as the term friendship stands for definite relationship between men, and the term love for the relationship between husband and wife, or parent and child—he can understand that a disobedient and ungrateful son is a sorry spectacle, because there he can see the great love of a father being set aside by a foolish boy—and he can just as easily come to see that if God loves him there is a definite obligation for him to return that love, and so religion can no longer be for him

something that he can take or leave alone, as he chooses. If he opens a text-book on religion and finds religion defined as "a system of truths, laws and practices which man recognizes and observes in paying worship to God"*—he may learn for the first time that freedom of religion does not mean exactly what he thought it did. If there are "truths, laws, and practices" concerned in this matter of worshipping God, and if they have been revealed to man by God, then man is not free at all in determining what to do to worship God and give Him a proper place in his life. He learns that freedom of religion can only mean that each man is free to worship according to his conscience, but he must still use the intellect that God has given him to search out the way that God wants to be served, which is another way of saying that it is not sufficient to give God what we are pleased to give Him, but we must give to God what God has said He wants.

*Dr. Paul Glenn's "Apologetics," published by B. Herder, 1932.

YOUTH ASKS ABOUT FAITH

Talk given on August 10, 1947

One of the most famous storage-rooms in the world is Fibber McGee's "hall closet." The familiar crash that always attends its opening has delighted millions of people time and time again, because everybody owns one. It may be a piano bench, or a dresser drawer, or a small boy's pocket—but everyone has a catch-all for odds and ends. No one knows precisely what is in it, but its contents are things that just might come in handy sometime, and its owner would always be embarrassed if it were suddenly opened and the contents spilled out. For some reason, chiefly because of a lack of understanding, many of our young people today think of faith as a sort of intellectual "hall closet," where odds and ends of things that cannot be accepted by a reasonable person are stored away, just in case that they might be true. There is no doubt that many students in our secular colleges completely divorce reason and faith, and think that they have nothing to do with each other. It has never occurred to them that faith in God is very much akin to confidence in man and that both are

valid means of acquiring knowledge. I am supposed to believe that the student who walks into the office is John Smith and that he comes from Kalamazoo, simply because he says so, and I am expected to believe this just as completely as I accept the fact that he has blue eyes and is wearing a sports jacket—but he cannot understand why anyone should be expected to believe in the Blessed Trinity, simply because Christ said so, even though the testimony of Christ has been accepted by reasonable men for nearly two thousand years.

The mystery in the mind of the student who asks about Faith concerns itself with what the term means, and why it should be so important. For the term itself, he has only to open Webster's dictionary to find it defined, according to Roman Catholic theology, as: "A supernatural virtue by which one believes on the authority of God Himself, all that God has revealed or proposes through the Church for belief." So divine Faith is the holding of some truth as absolutely certain because God, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived, has spoken it. It is not

merely a feeling or a suspicion or an opinion, but a firm, unshakable adherence of the mind to a truth revealed by God. There is a story told about a man who was strapped in an electric chair; he was about to die, and when he was asked if there was anything that he would like to say before the switch was thrown, he replied, "Yeah. In a few minutes, I'll know what youse guys are guessing about." If anyone is *guessing* about God, or the truths of eternity, then he does not have faith. A few months ago a young woman student made the interesting statement that there was nothing wrong with her faith, because she believed "practically everything" that the Church teaches. I wonder if she would have felt complimented if someone would tell her that he trusted her in *almost* everything. We either have confidence in a person, or we do not—we either believe in *all* that God has revealed, or we do not have faith.

One of the great barriers to the modern youth's acceptance of Faith, is that he too often regards it as something which would stifle his freedom of thought. It is true that there is a certain line that he cannot

pass in the investigation of the truths of faith, but that does not mean that his intellect is hobbled. Once a man is convinced that the message he receives is from the one who is supposed to have sent it, and that he has a true copy, then he cannot question the message itself without questioning the truthfulness of the sender. So if he should be convinced that God Himself revealed something to him, and he may make every sort of enquiry to prove that to himself—then he may not question its truthfulness without offering insult to God. Believing in the Divinity of Christ, and being completely convinced that He revealed the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, there can be no further question in his mind about the truth of the doctrine concerning the Trinity without offering insult to Christ Himself.

When the student asks about the meaning of faith, he often does so in a manner that implies that it is something to be ashamed of in this scientific age. As a matter of fact, reason and faith go hand in hand in learning supernatural truth. Even though divine faith is a gift from God which enables us

to accept Him and all that He has revealed, nevertheless, it is reason which leads us to it. Reason alone is not sufficient to enable me to embrace all that God has revealed but it does tell me that the acceptance of the proposed doctrine will not do violence to my intellect: reason cannot always make me understand the "how" of a truth, but it can satisfy my mind that God revealed this truth and therefore, it must be so. Reason might be said to have about the same relation to Divine Faith that it has to human love. Students accept this comparison because practically every one of them has had to listen to a friend singing the praises of someone with whom he was in love, until he himself becomes quite anxious to meet her. The result of that meeting is very apt to be summed up by the well-considered opinion; "Well, she seems to be a nice girl, but I fail to see what he finds to rave about." He fails to see because that mysterious thing called love is affecting one and not the other. His powers of observation are functioning, but one concludes that he is not "sold" on her. In just such a way, one may use his intellect to examine revealed truths, without

ever having his will moved to want to make the revelation his own. Divine Faith is not merely an assent of the mind; it is also an act of a loving will influenced by God's grace. Arguments can lead a person to admit a fact that he had previously denied, only if he can be shown with a sort of "twisting his arm" argument that he was very evidently wrong. In arguing about material things, or the laws of nature, one proceeds from the question to the answer on a bridge made up of arguments from reason, or practical demonstrations, that are so evident that they cannot be denied. In the discussion of supernatural truths the same method is used, except that there is always a gap between the final argument or demonstration and the conclusion, and this gap must be filled in by faith. Sometimes it is a very narrow little gap, such as might be in an intelligent man's mind about the existence of God—and sometimes it stretches for quite a distance, as in the acceptance of the Blessed Trinity, or any of the other supernatural mysteries that have been revealed by God. In some cases, all that the intellect can do is show that the

doctrine has certainly been revealed by God. It is at this point that Divine Faith, as a gift of God, comes into the picture. Here is where the powers of the intellect come to the end of the line, and the will takes over. One might say that the helping Hand of God is stretched out to help the favored one over the gap, and it is up to him whether or not he has confidence enough to grasp it. I remember a professor of philosophy telling us in class that faith is "a genuflection of the will"—meaning that unless the will bows down and humbly accepts the help of God, it would never be possible to complete the journey and arrive at the full acceptance of Divine Revelation.

If it were not for this gap in the bridge, our acceptance of revealed truths would not be a meritorious act because it would not require any true submission at all. If I should tell a student that I have a red, white and blue fountain pen in my pocket, and he is willing to believe it because I say so, then he is complimenting me on my truthfulness, and that is pleasing to me. And if he should tell a friend about this unusual pen that I have and insist that it is true, simply be-

cause I have told him so, he would be pleasing me every time that I knew that he repeated the story. But if he should insist on seeing the pen before he will believe it, then he is doubting my word, and when I take the pen out of my pocket to show it to him, I destroy his ability to please me in this particular instance—he then merely accepts a fact because it has been proven to him, and that item of knowledge that he has come to accept as true means nothing to me. In like manner, when I say God is a trinity of persons, I do not ask in this life to see and to understand how He can be one God and at the same time three distinct persons. I believe simply because by historical arguments or proofs I am certain that God has revealed this doctrine, and because He said it is so, I believe and know it is so. Many a student who questions the necessity of faith as the first essential for pleasing God, has never stopped to think that faith belongs exclusively to this life. He will sit right straight up in his chair when he is told that there are no atheists in hell, and that no one in heaven believes in God—and yet this is true. And after his first surprise at the apparent

contradiction, he can see that he must agree that if there is a hell, the souls who are there must be very much aware of God; and that all the souls in heaven are actually in God's Presence. And he will further agree that there is a vast dif-

ference between the soul in hell cursing a God whose existence he cannot deny, and the living man accepting God and Divine revelation. The soul in hell knows something that he cannot contradict, the living man possesses faith.

YOUTH ASKS ABOUT THE CHURCH

Talk given on August 17, 1947

Shortly before the close of the recent semester, one of the students stopped by the rectory with a problem. It seems that he had been attending a movie with some of his pals, and the news reel showed a scene at St. Peter's in Rome, where the Holy Father was being carried in on an ornate chair; he was clothed in a rich cope and wore the triple crown which is the symbol of his office. Apparently nothing was said about it at the time, but the incident touched off a great argument when the boys got back to their dormitory. And the problem of my young friend was to try to explain to the non-Catholic students that there was no inconsistency between the magnificence of that scene and the known poverty of Christ and His Apostles. His friends argued that if the Pope is the successor of St. Peter, then all the splendid trappings were out of place; and they went on further to contend that they could accept the teachings of Christ without benefit of any organized Church, and that all the money spent on the erection and adornment of Churches could better have been given to the poor. This, of

course, led to a pretty thorough going over of the entire mission and structure of the Church, and my young friend felt that he hadn't done a very good job of explaining his position as a Catholic and wanted to know where he failed. As a matter of fact, he did a pretty good job with the question of why churches are built, because he reasoned that God has given man dominion over all material things, and the highest use to which they could be put would be the service of God. He remembered that pagan people, without any revelation from God, had erected magnificent temples; and he was able to point out to the boys that the Temple of Solomon wasn't exactly according to God's own plan. But he felt that he had failed in trying to show how the Church as it exists today carries out the plan of Christ for our salvation.

He might have found a simple illustration by considering the difference between a rose-bud and a rose. If one had never seen a rosebud, he would be quite impressed with the first one that he saw; and should he see it again after it was

full blown, he might have difficulty in believing that it was the same object. But it would not be so hard to show him that while some things have changed in the bud, there is no essential difference between it and the rose in full bloom, and that the little bud had come to a new beauty through a progressive development. And so the Church today is no different in essentials than it was when it was founded by Christ on His Apostles, but it has merely developed under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. In the history of God's relations with man, it could be pointed out that He has never used extraordinary means to bring men to Himself when the ordinary would suffice, and so the splendid church buildings, with their stained glass windows, and the organ music, and the liturgy of the Sacraments, and the vestments of the priest all are the ordinary means that man uses to make it easier to pray to God. Like the unfolding of the rose, the development of the Church was a process that was intended from the beginning; and it would have been far more strange if it had not occurred.

In their discussion of the

Church, it seems that the boys considered it from every angle, and the Catholic student found himself confronted with three chief objections: in the first place, his friends argued that they were doing just as good a job with their lives as if they went to church, and they stoutly maintained that they were just as good as the people who are always going to church. My young friend scored here because he pointed out to them that being "good" does not mean just avoiding positive evil, but that to be really *good*, one must fulfill the purpose of his existence—and if God wanted man to worship Him, in Church and according to the teaching of the Church which Christ had established, then one could not be really good unless that were accomplished. The second objection that they were agreed on was that the Church seems to stand between man and God, and that could not be good. They had neglected to consider that some things are separators, and some things are binders—each stands between two ends, but one is intended to be an insulator, and the other is planned to draw the ends closer together and to insure that they are not sep-

arated. And on this point it is strange how often someone will speak of the Church as standing between man and God when the individual wants to do something that is forbidden by the Church. It is not too difficult for the young man or woman to see the reasonableness of the Church as long as its laws do not infringe on his "freedom"—or shall we better call it license—but when, for example, he wants to marry a divorced person, then suddenly the Church begins to stand between God and him. The third objection that was raised is that since there is still so much trouble in the world, after nearly two thousand years of the existence of the Church, then it has failed in its mission and no one needs to bother about it any more, and the sooner we begin to look for some other means of bringing peace to men, the better off we will be. This objection always comes up when people are confused in their minds about the reason for the establishment of the Church. It is true that the Church does teach the principles of social justice, as a part of its mission, but the real reason for the founding of the Church was not to begin some sort of glorified

social agency that would occupy itself exclusively with righting wrongs among men, but Christ established His Church to be a means of salvation for men. It is the first function of the Church to bring to men the teachings of Christ and to administer the Sacraments. The Church should certainly strive to bring peace among men, but the real purpose of its existence is to bring peace first between man and God and to lead man to his only real and lasting home, which is heaven.

As the evening wore along, the hardest question that was proposed to my young friend was to explain the authority of the Church. It stood as a condemnation to say that the Church is authoritarian because that seemed to imply that to belong to the Church is to sacrifice one's freedom. No one likes to accept authority, and this is especially true of the young. Older people who have been battling along with the world's problems for a while, sometimes welcome someone else taking over—but not youth. He wants to think things out for himself and to feel that he is his own master. In the discussion no one stopped to think that much of the unhap-

piness in the world comes from the insecurity that follows the absence of authority. If I sincerely want to please someone, and there are before me a number of tasks that might be done to please him—then to be told which one he wants me to do is not destroying freedom, but it is directing my activity with certainty. If someone would interfere with what I knew to be the will of the one whom I want to please, then, and only then, would my freedom be curtailed. But since the only freedom that I really want is to do the will of God, and if He has appointed someone to tell me what He wants me to do, how can that destroy my freedom? A teacher in the classroom has authority vested in her, and when she leaves the room pandemonium is apt to reign. Anyone who would dare to assume authority would be squelched. But if she appoints a moderator before she leaves, she has left her authority in someone. Christ possessed authority in His own right and Scripture tells us that He spoke "... with authority and power" (*Luke 4:36*). His people had accepted the law of Moses, and accepted Moses as the lawgiver, but Christ was not afraid to

say: "Moses, by reason of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to put away your wives; but it was not so from the beginning. *And I say to you ...*" If Christ had ascended into heaven without leaving His authority to anyone, then all authority of any Church is assumed, and rightfully resented. But what did He mean when He said to His Apostles: "As the Father has sent me, I also send you"? (*John 20-21*). It could only have meant that He was leaving His authority in the Church and that this authority was to continue was assured when He said: "And behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."

Well, all this rehashing with my young friend of the students' discussion about the Church made one thing very evident to us, and that is that youth is interested in the Church or he would not be so anxious to talk about it. And it also pointed out pretty clearly that most of the criticism leveled against the Church isn't a condemnation of the teachings of the Church at all, but simply a rejection of what uninformed people think that the Church teaches.

YOUTH ASKS ABOUT THE FUTURE

Talk given on August 21, 1947

No other institution is more exclusively concerned with the future than the college and the university. It is true that grammar schools and high schools also have as their chief function the preparation for the future, but in our American way of life, the attendance at these schools is considered a part of the child's normal development. Not everyone is expected to go to college, and the time and money that is expended for a college education can only be considered an investment for the future. If it were absolutely certain that the world would come to an end in two years, it is very probable that the children would be still kept in school, but our colleges would be empty. And that is why the student in college is so concerned about the future. Youth wants to be able to dream dreams that are not nightmares, and he has a pretty tough time doing that if he reads the daily papers. There are a lot of ex-GI's in school these days who have their uniforms neatly stored away, and their service ribbons and battle-stars in a little box in the top dresser drawer in their rooms at home, and they

want to keep on thinking of them as souvenirs. If they could only be sure that they would never have to wear them again, they could have their dreams and work with confidence to make them come true. But when men who are wiser than they in the affairs of the world give up wondering whether or not there will be a war, and start guessing how long it will be before it is a reality, it becomes increasingly difficult to prepare for the future. And their own experience has taught them that if there is another war, there will be precious few pamphlets dropped, and probably not many bombs—because it won't take very many, not of the kind that men now make. When they turn aside from their books to glance at the daily paper, and see there the repeated stories of the atom bomb and the bacterial warfare and supersonic planes, it is not very easy to get back at the studies that are supposed to pay off in four or five years.

When youth asks about the future, he is not too much disturbed about knowing that nations are finding it hard to agree, but he does ask what the

leaders of nations are doing about it. It is small consolation for him to be told that some strong nations are going to make it impossible for other nations to ever fight again—he would be much more reassured if he could be told that all nations were cooperating in their plans so that no nation would ever *want* to fight again. And when he is told that the UN, or some sort of a World Court is going to make his future secure, he cannot help having the feeling that there is something missing in the picture that is needed to make the plans work. And all the plans that men devise to bring peace into the world are doomed to failure when they leave out the important consideration of man's relationship to God. If it were not for this all-important factor, then the future world would be black indeed. But no matter how chaotic the affairs of men may become, God is still serene in His Heaven, and there is no reason for anyone being discouraged, especially in the matter of his personal future. Some years ago, I drove a friend of mine to the airport so that he might take a plane for a distant city. It was a very bad morning with an overcast

sky, and it was with considerable misgiving that I saw him leave. In a few days however, there came a letter from him saying that as soon as they cleared the overcast, they rode all the way to their destination in the light of a clear winter sun. All the trouble had been on the ground, and though clouds and rains may spoil good times and often make serious trouble for men, they have never been known to affect the sun. God is more unchangeable than the sun that He made and all the trouble in which we find ourselves, is right here on the ground.

It is the constant teaching of the Church that man is made for God and that the State exists for the individual and not the individual for the State, and so in its basic teaching, it is opposed to every form of totalitarian government, whether it be Nazism, or Fascism, or Communism. The pictures that came out of the torture camps of Buchenwald were not pleasant to see, but according to the teaching of the Church, every body in those horrible piles had belonged to a man who was just as precious in the sight of God as the general of any army, and as long as he retained conscious-

ness, he was able to fulfill the purpose of his existence, though surely not in the way that he would have chosen. There is no such thing as a "Forgotten man" in the sight of God—it is only men who forget men.

So when youth asks about the future, he can be given a cheerful answer only if he is willing to consider his whole life, giving its own importance to both the present and the future. Maybe things do look pretty black right now for a peaceful world, but it is still possible for men to begin considering each other as children of God and then peace would be assured. But even if they fail to do that, the present is all-important because wherever I find myself there is a job to be done, and if that job happens to be doing the necessary studying to get a degree, then God can best be served by doing that as well as possible.

Have you ever stood on a street corner and watched traffic pile up into a snarl because some car made a wrong turn? The worse the jam, the more difficult it is to see what is causing it, as long as you remain standing on the corner. But if you could just run upstairs in some building and look at the same scene from

a third story window, the chances are that you could see immediately what was causing the tangle. And if we would try to look at some of the troubles of our lives from "Upstairs"—if we would just try a little harder to see the confusion in the world as it appears to God, and as it will appear in the light of eternity, there would be no reason for despair, but every reason for joyfully trying to live as perfectly as possible the time that has been allotted to us. If one is determined to do the will of God and to be always faithful to whatever task is set before him, he is making sure of the success of his future.

In the tragedy of Hamlet, when Polonius bade farewell to his son Laertes, he gave him a great deal of sound advice for his future, and concluded his list of precepts by saying, "This above all: to thine ownself be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man" (Act I, Scene III). It is good advice, but only when one understands what is meant by being true to one's self, and when a sufficient reason is given for the faithfulness. The advice to be true to yourself is trite and meaningless

unless you understand what it means. It means that one lives his life without compromise with evil—that one never talks himself into violating his conscience; and that he acts always as he knows he should, without regard for the cost. The idea of being true to one's self in its best meaning is that one should always live in conformity to his most noble ideals, and that no matter in what environment he finds himself, he will be able to control the circumstances, rather than let them control him.

During the war I met a man who was in a service school after spending fourteen months in the South Pacific. He told me that the greatest trial that he had had to bear was that he had not been able to assist at Mass or receive the Sacraments for about nine months. As an example of the type of conditions under which they were living, he told me that on one occasion, a Marine Chaplain was flown in to say Mass for them and before he left, he gave my friend a

handful of rosaries to be distributed to the Catholic boys. He left them on the table next to his cot overnight, and the next morning all that was left of them was the chains—the rats that infested his sleeping quarters had taken a liking to the beads and had eaten them! But the remarkable thing about his story is that he had found a little place in the jungle that reminded him of a painting of the "Agony in the Garden" that was on the wall in his church back home—and on Sundays, he used to slip away to that spot and recite his rosary, and read the epistle and gospel for the day. And that story, better than anything else that I could say, illustrates what is meant by being true to one's self in the very best sense. There is no medal on that man's chest today for his devotion to his ideals, but the ordeal finished, he knows in his own heart that he was able to control the circumstances that for many must have been a reason for sinking to a lower level.

YOUTH ASKS ABOUT THE HOME

Talk given on August 31, 1947

A friend of mine who is a doctor once told me about helping two men prepare for a trip through Mexico and Central America into South America. They were going to travel by automobile, and it was very definitely a trip of exploration. The doctor helped them to prepare by giving them the necessary "shots" to ward off tropical disease, and he also gave them a short instruction in first aid. During the course of this preparation, they told him that they were looking for a third man to accompany them on their journey, but that they were having difficulty in finding the right man. When he asked them what sort of a man they were looking for, they gave him a long list of necessary qualifications, including the items that he would have to be of good health; that he must have the right kind of a disposition; would have to be able to contribute his share of the investment necessary; and that his interest in the project would have to match theirs. When my friend remarked that he thought that they were being quite particular in their choice of a companion, they answered

in unison: "Why, Doctor, we may have to live with this man for two years!"

The story always comes to my mind when I open the door of the rectory to admit two young people who are planning to get married. Anyone who has had very much to do with helping young people knows how identically this scene repeats itself—there is something about such a couple when they walk in for the first time, that they do not even need to tell the nature of their errand. The visit is of tremendous importance for them, but they could have saved themselves the worry of how they were going to get the conversation started, because that "something" tells all about their problem as they walk into the room. In these days, unfortunately, too many actually "just want to get married" and they are not thinking in terms of starting a home. All of the qualifications that each should possess for such an important venture are buried under the all-important "We love each other," and the future is supposed to take care of itself. The two men in the story were so careful because they might have

to keep their companion with them for as much as two years, but many young people are willing to enter into a contract that by its very nature will last until death, which may be fifty years away, and all that they think is necessary is that each one wants to marry the other.

Sometimes it does happen that a young man or woman drops into the rectory to talk about marriage in a serious way, and all of the questions could be boiled down to the simple query: "What chance do I have of being happy in this marriage?" If there is a newspaper in the room and it can be seen out of the corner of your eye, it is pretty difficult to give an optimistic answer, because the chances are that one will see story after story of divorce and broken marriage, and in every account, there will be listed the foolish and selfish reasons that caused the failures. The best answer is the question: "Why do you want to get married to this particular person?" And it is really amazing to hear some of the answers. They are always intended as compliments, but when a young woman gives the answer that it is because he is so fine, and good, and that he is just the type of

man that she has always hoped that she would be able to marry, she is in reality giving a list of very selfish reasons, and none of them really would justify the marriage. On one occasion, just one, a student gave the perfect answer when she said: "Because I think that I can make him happy." It was the perfect reason because it was so unselfish, and if all she would ever demand of marriage would be the chance of making her partner happy, there could be no failure. Everyone agrees that love must be the basis of a happy marriage, but it is not often enough understood that love is essentially unselfish, and that it is always based on "giving" and never on "getting." It would be a strange thing indeed, to find the story of a man or woman who was seeking to have a marriage set aside because he felt that he had not been able to live up to his part of the agreement, but every story of a broken marriage carries the accusation that the other person had failed to give to the one who considered himself wronged, what he felt that he had the right to expect.

Great efforts are being made these days to acquaint young people with the idea of marriage,

and whenever special courses or marriage clinics are advertised for college students the response is so great that usually some method of limiting attendance has to be devised. And there is no doubt that much good does follow a practical consideration of the difficulties that may be encountered in the married state. As a rule, it is not so much what is said that causes these courses to be harmful, but what is left unsaid. In most cases, the presumption is that marriage is a man-made arrangement, and that as a result of trial and error it seems best for our particular form of civilization that one man and one woman should live together, as long as they find happiness in their union. And it is further presumed that since man has made the rules for marriage, he may also make whatever exceptions are necessary to insure the happiness of the persons involved. What is completely ignored is that God is the Author of marriage, and that He is the One who makes the rules. According to His plan, marriage is a vocation and has as its first purpose the establishment of a home and the founding of a family. It is this plan of God that demands that there be

the union of one man and one woman, and that this union be broken only by death. Upon no other foundation can a happy and lasting marriage be established.

One of the duties of a priest who is preparing a couple for marriage is to give them some instructive talk about it. And it is customary to divide the talk into two sections, considering marriage first as a contract, explaining here the rights and duties that each acquires; and then speaking of it as a Sacrament, to recall the purpose that

Christ had in raising matrimony to the dignity of a Sacrament, and to point out the graces that accompany it. The first part is not very easy or pleasant to give, because it is necessary to speak of the moral laws that govern marriage and the priest knows very well that law alone will never insure the happiness of any marriage. But the Church is very anxious that no one should undertake the obligations of the married state without knowing precisely what these obligations are, and so the priest must face a couple who are very much in love with each other and suggest the possibility of difficulties in their life together,

and point out how they are to be solved according to the moral law. It is much easier for him to speak of marriage as a Sacrament, because here he can tell of the helps that Christ has planned for them by way of sacramental graces. He reminds them of what they learned in their catechism lessons years before—that the special helps that flow from the Sacrament are the graces that they will need to bear with each other's weaknesses and to bring up their children in the fear and love of God. Here there is no closing of eyes to real facts—it is recognized that neither is getting a saint for a life-partner, but a human being who may have more than his share of faults. And the significant thing that they learn is that the grace of the Sacrament is not to *reform* the other, but to enable each to bear with those faults. Just as a sun-glass is able to gather the rays of the sun and concentrate the very mild rays into a burning intensity, so marriage sometimes has a tendency to magnify rather harmless faults into crimes that break up a union; and one of the sacramental graces of the Sacrament of matrimony is to enable the partners to keep a proper perspective, and to avoid

seeing imperfections as malicious attempts to bring unhappiness into married life. And it is important for them to remember that the other special grace is to enable them to bring up their children in the fear and love of God. This of course presumes that they are entering marriage in order to establish a home and to have a family.

What answer then, is to be given to the young couple who walk in hand in hand and ask about marriage. If they "just want to get married" and haven't given a thought to anything beyond a brief honeymoon, then it is a kindness to tell them that no matter how much they love each other, they won't be able to "let the rest of the world go by" for very long, and they are due for a rude awakening. But if they have thought about the future and are concerned about establishing a home and having a family, then it is easy to reassure them and to tell them to disregard all that they have heard and have read in the newspapers about unhappy marriages, because Christ Himself anticipated their plans and has arranged to give them all the special help that they will need through the Sacrament that they are to receive.

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