

Kissing

Replies to Constant Queries.

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Is kissing sinful?

This is a question we have often been asked during our years of pleasant association with young people. Here we merely give a concise summary on the subject of kissing; later we shall elaborate on the subject.

We distinguish between kissing and kissing. Rather, let us say that there are four categories of kisses:

1. Kisses that are merely a sacred and lovely symbol used to express deep and beautiful emotion and are not, of course, sinful; the mutual kisses of mother and child; the mutual kisses of husband and wife; the kisses imprinted on a sacred object, such as the Bible, the crucifix, the ring of a bishop, the relic of a saint, the altar, the hand of a priest, et cetera; Kisses imprinted on some dear object, such as the flag of one's country, the soil of one's native land, the hand of a benefactor, et cetera, et cetera.
2. Non-passionate kisses – that is, those which are of such a nature as not to arouse the passions of a normal person – are not sinful in themselves, though they may easily prepare the way for passionate kisses, especially when indulged in by young persons of the opposite sex. In such kisses, real affection is felt but there is normally no exciting of the passions. A kiss of this type is not sinful at all, even if it be exchanged between a young lady and her gentleman friend. The engaged, in order to foster their mutual love, may make use of the non-passionate kiss and embrace; but they must remember that continual hugging and kissing, even of the non-passionate type, may readily bring on serious temptations, and so should be avoided.
3. Kissing for the thrill of it, because of the excitement (non-venereal) produced by 'an increase of pulse and respiration which causes a feeling of exhilaration' is not in itself sinful, if there is no reaction of the organs of generation; but such kisses, in certain circumstances, easily prove a source of danger because they prepare the way for arousing the passions. Kissing in a spirit of mischievousness, a stolen kiss, for instance, or forcing a kiss on a girl who resists, or kissing just because of the novelty of the act, is hardly a sin against the sixth commandment, but may offend against the virtue of charity.
4. Passionate kissing, just because intense or passionate, stirs up venereal pleasure and is forbidden under pain of serious sin. Kisses not at first passionate, ordinarily become so if prolonged for some time, so that really prolonged kissing is classified as passionate. In short, all kissing to arouse venereal pleasure is gravely sinful because of the intention. There is no slightest doubt in the mind of any decent man or woman that kissing between unmarried people becomes sinful when passion

takes over. Any normal person is fully aware that under certain circumstances, passion was meant by nature to take over. The kiss was by God and nature intended to make men and women grow passionately excited. The kiss is under those conditions the normal and natural prelude to physical union. We cannot say in general, then, that kissing is sinful or not sinful. We must take each case as it is.

I think you are too severe in your views about kissing, as expressed in replies given from time to time. (See following pages.)

As regards our views about kissing, they are really not ours. In all our replies we merely give, sometimes verbatim and sometimes in our own words, the teachings of moral theology and of those who are competent to write on the subject. And almost invariably, we purposely seek the less severe views on this subject of perennial interest.

When we received this query, we looked over the pamphlet rack in a church where we happened to be and found three booklets on purity, all with ecclesiastical approbation and the oldest dated 1936. We give an extract from each, about kissing chiefly:

- 1) 'Not every kiss or embrace between company-keepers is a sin, but they easily lead to what is sinful. Necking and petting should never be indulged in by those who wish to remain virtuous. "Of all the youth who go to parties, attend dances, and ride together in automobiles, more than ninety per cent indulge in hugging and kissing," says Judge Lindsey of Denver. His long and intimate experience with youth well qualifies him to speak. "Fifty per cent of the original ninety per cent indulge in half-way sex intimacies that wreck the health and morals alike... fifteen to twenty-five per cent of those who begin with hugging and kissing, eventually 'go the limit'," continues the Judge.'
- 2) 'The second great danger of cradle courtships is that of immorality – passionate petting, kissing, parking in an automobile in lovers' lanes and the like. When curiosity is strong in any department of the mind, experiments are likely to be set up to dissolve that curiosity. And constant, close companionship between boys and girls in courtship right at the time when curiosity about sex is strongest, is bound to bring the less disciplined into trouble.'
- 3) 'It is true that not every kiss or embrace between those keeping company is a sin. If it is not prolonged or passionate, and is not accompanied by any immodesty, it is not sinful, but even then, it can produce a strong tendency towards evil that must be seriously resisted. What is called 'necking' or 'petting' or 'soul-kissing', et cetera, is forbidden because such conduct is intimately bound up with, or inevitably leads to, indulgence in forbidden pleasure.'

How about kissing? Will you kindly explain why it is so dangerous and all that?

A woman has written the following article on a subject that is of interest to young men as well as to young women and it is so sensible, so clear, so instructive, that it deserves to be widely circulated:

'I get a great many letters from young girls who want to know what they shall do about the kissing proposition. They say that it is practically a case of no kiss, no beau, for the young men who take them about demand a good-night kiss as pay for their courtesies, and if they refuse, it is, indeed, goodnight, in the slang phrase for they never see these osculatory youths again. (To osculate is to kiss.)

‘Now the innate modesty and delicacy of those girls revolts at yielding their lips to men to whom they are not even engaged; to men who do not even pretend to be in love with them. It violates their sense of what is proper, but, at the same time, they do not want to be regarded as prudes or Puritans. Still less do they desire to be wall flowers left out of all the fun and parties, and numbered with those forlorn damsels who never have any attention from men.

‘So the girl is torn between her instinctive sense of what is right and her knowledge of expediency, and she wants to know what she shall do and how she shall answer the eternal argument of man when he is trying to persuade a woman into doing the thing that he knows she should not do. To kiss or not to kiss, that’s the question that troubles her.

‘There can be but one answer to give a girl to this problem. It is no, no, no! A maiden’s lips should be kept inviolate, and the first man’s kiss that is pressed upon them should be the kiss of love from the man she expects to marry. For a girl to give her lips to every Tom, Dick and Harry who takes her to a moving picture show or escorts her home from a dance is something unthinkable...

‘It is a pity that girls can never be made to realize that the most alluring and attractive thing about them is the aura of innocence and un-sophistication that surrounds them. It is the whiteness, the untrodden snowiness of their souls that is their chief charm, and they never make so fatal a mistake as when they throw this away.

‘If girls were only wise enough to realize how fascinating aloofness is, and what an appeal unsullied purity makes to the masculine imagination, they would keep every man at arm’s length at least until he had come out and popped the question. They would not think for a minute of putting up with cheap familiarities from men that rob them of their freshness and make them little shop-worn bits of humanity that have been pawed over like the goods on a bargain table. Girls should never forget that it is the shy and shrinking violet that is man’s favourite flower not the brazen sunflower.

‘My girl correspondent says that she does not know how to answer a man when he begs her to kiss him and tells her that there is no harm in it, and that his arguments make her feel foolish because she seems to be making a great ado over very little matter. There is one answer that every girl can make to a man’s request for a kiss.

‘She can ask him if he would like his sister to kiss any man goodnight who happened to call on her. She can ask him what he would advise his sister to do if his sister were in her place. And she can ask him if he would like to think that the girl that he is going to marry some day had kissed a hundred men who were mere casual acquaintances.

‘Such questions will make any decent man writhe. A man will tell his own sister quickly enough what he thinks on the subject and his own lips would grow cold and stiff on his sweetheart’s if he remembered that her soft young mouth had belonged to a long procession of men before him.

‘Girls can never bear in mind too constantly the fact that not all men play fair with women, and that men are not always just or logical in judging them.

‘A man might spend hours, days and months persuading a girl to do something that is wrong, and have a contempt for her ever afterwards for yielding to him. He will argue down her every instinct and scruple and principle against kissing him, and the minute she does he will lose his reverence for her as for something utterly fine and delicate...

‘Girls should also bear in mind that a wedding ring on the hand is worth a basket of them in the dim distance, and that the girls who have the most beaux generally get the fewest and the poorest makeshifts of husbands. A girl observes that those girls who are free and easy in their manners, who exact no sort of respect from men and permit them to indulge in familiarities and take liberties with them, girls who drink and smoke with men, and listen to and tell off-coloured stories, girls who are good sports – these girls are what we call popular, and are generally surrounded by a horde of men. Especially while they are young and good looking, and full of high spirits.

‘But what the girl does not notice is that this type of young girl very seldom marries, and when she does she almost invariably marries a crooked stick who wasn’t worth picking up. The fast girl, the girl without modesty or delicate womanly reserve, may be the kind of a girl that men like to play with, but she isn’t the sort of woman that they want for a wife and for the mother of their children.

‘That is why you are so often surprised at the marriages that men make. Men whom you have known of as ‘gay rounders’ bob up with a wife who is a Sunday school teacher. Men who have been noted chorus girl chasers go to some country village and marry girls who never saw a brighter lamp than a kerosene lamp. They don’t want the lips on which a thousand kisses have rained. They want the lips that have never been kissed at all.

‘And don’t be misled, girls, into making the mistake of believing that because a man asks you to kiss him it is any indication of his being in love with you. A kiss is no guarantee of affection. Judas betrayed his Lord with a kiss, and every black-hearted traitor of a man who ever betrayed the faith of an innocent and trusting young girl began his devil’s work in the same way, with a kiss.

‘The primrose path that leads to perdition for women is paved with the kisses of men. The thing that no money could have hired them to do, that no argument could have persuaded them to do, they have been kissed into doing. For it is no flight of the poet’s fancy when he speaks about women being made drunk on kisses. It is a literal fact, and that is why no girl is safe who permits men to kiss her.’

Can a girl be too strict as regards kisses, caresses, and other familiarities with the young man she is keeping company with?

First of all, there is a big general rule for company keeping. Such things as holding one another’s hands, sitting on one another’s lap, kissing, caressing, fondling, embracing, and other familiarities are very dangerous. Such actions work slyly though directly on the nerves of the body and render them morbidly sensitive; they arouse emotions and passions that are anything but proper, and waken and stimulate thoughts, instincts, feelings, desires and, but too often, even actions that are positively indecent. It is a clear case of leading oneself into serious temptations, which frequently end in a fall. That is why these things are usually sinful, that is why there is no truth in the assertion: ‘There is no harm in it.’ Now, that is, the big, general rule.

That is why it is clear that no girl can be too strict in these things. If a young man is dissatisfied with the maidenly modesty and prudence of a good girl and insists upon tokens of affection of the kind mentioned above and will break off his friendship if he does not get them, then simply let him go. The true Christian gentleman will admire and love a girl all the more for her firm stand in matters of modesty. And such a one will be an ideal husband. It is perfectly right for you to be very strict. May God bless such girls! They are truly wise.

When a young man is keeping company with a girl with the intention of marriage, does he do wrong in kissing her? Is it a mortal sin to kiss in a passionate way when keeping company? When is a kiss a sin and when is it not?

Lovers who are engaged to be married may exchange respectable marks of affection and love, in a moderate degree. A modest kiss is one such mark of affection.

But it must remain modest, and must not become willfully passionate and sensual and, hence, grievously sinful. It will easily become thus sinful, if repeated often at the same meeting. One friendly and pure goodnight kiss is not dangerous for engaged couples. But it ought to be sufficient. The passionate and lingering kiss, or the so-called 'soul kiss between lovers', is a mortal sin, because it offers the occasion and inducement to grievous sensual emotions and gratifications.

Relative to the question as to when kissing is sinful and when it is not, it may, in general, be said that whatever conduct exposes you or your partner to the proximate danger of yielding to impurity in thought, desire, feeling, or action is a mortal sin. And if you say that passionate kisses do not involve this danger for you or your companion, you are grossly deceiving yourself. Such an assertion makes one think of a dulled conscience and a blinded soul. Incipient or advanced lovers who are not yet engaged to be married should not at all indulge in kissing and similar demonstrations of intimate and ardent love since their relations are not close enough to warrant it. If they embark at so early a stage upon these amorous practices, there is every danger that they will proceed from what appears innocent and modest to what they know is not, and the magnitude of the harm and disaster that will ensue to both parties will probably outrun all their calculations.

We believe that the above gives principles that will enable you to act rightly in all circumstances that may arise. We add, however, as a serious warning, that, though there may be some who have no evil thoughts or desires whatsoever in kissing and 'petting', they may be the occasion of gross sins of immoral thoughts, desires, and emotions to their partners. Remember this safe and simple rule: 'Never do anything, when the two of you are alone, which you would be ashamed to do in the presence of your parents; or which you would be ashamed to reveal to your parents.'

Is it a sin to give a boy friend a good night kiss after you have spent a pleasant evening together?

That depends upon many things. If it is a pure, modest, friendly, passing kiss and does not give rise in either party to impure thoughts, desires, or feelings that are consented to, it is not a sin. But those who are not yet engaged to be married should not indulge at all in kissing or in similar demonstrations of intimate love. Don't, don't! It is dangerous. Protect yourself and the young man you love by refraining from all undue familiarities. If not sinful now, it may soon become so and lead to harm and disaster that will outrun all your calculations. Don't! A young man with the proper sense of virtue and honour will always respect his friend's concern for her modesty and innocence as manifested in the observance of this important 'Don't!' He will love her all the more for it. He will look upon her declining even 'a mere kiss' as a convincing sign of her great shyness and fear of being gradually beguiled into the loss of what she considers – and what he also considers – her greatest treasure. Be sure of this: a girl who is easy and ready to grant un-maidenly privileges to a young man loses just that much of his respect and rightly so. Such a young man will just naturally conclude that she is ready to lend her lips to anybody who comes along – and has doubtless already done so. No good Catholic gentleman wants such a girl.

How does a girl refuse a man's demands for privileges (in dating, company keeping) and still hold his attention?

You want to keep in circulation with Catholic fellows. You dread the very thought of becoming a permanent member of the unmarried ladies' club. But because of the problem of straying hands and your own 'Hands off' policy, the fellows do not date you any more. And you have yet to find a suitable and workable answer to the question asked above.

The question is not an easy one to answer. True enough, it is easy to say what a girl should not do. She should never do anything that is sinful herself or permit anything to be done to her, which would make her accessory to the sin of another. Sin is the greatest evil in the world; and not for the whole world and everything in it may we commit sin.

A girl should not do what so many girls do in the mad world of today – she should not sacrifice her womanhood in order to get and hold a man.

One girl wrote out this very good advice. 'Without being prudish, a girl can be habitually virtuous. With this habit of virtue, she will ward off advances, refuse kissing and necking, all as a matter of course, as a matter of good sense and good taste. She will set standards for the boys of her acquaintance; and if they do not want to live up to those standards, she will consider it a good riddance if they betake themselves elsewhere. She will remember that it is up to the girl to draw the line as regards petting, et cetera, and that she can always tell a boy 'where to get off.' A chaste girl can make a boy keep hands off, if she wants to. She knows that 'nothing makes a woman more esteemed by the opposite sex than chastity.' She will never compromise.

'And if the boy is worth knowing, he will accept her high standards with respect and admiration.

'The boy you have dated three or four times, let us say, is a friend, but he does not yet share your heart. So you are perfectly correct in refusing a kiss, even if it is so annoyingly insisted upon. Say 'No' and stick to it. As for 'parked cars' and sun bathing together, such things are taboo, whether he is the one-and-only or not.

'Emotions and passions are like sparks within us. Disturb them and you are liable to get burned. Also, when something is easy to get, its value soon dwindles and its desirability fades. When a girl's kisses are free for the asking, she risks the loss of not only her own good reputation, but also her charm and appeal. If a boy demands 'necking' as part of the date, he shows that he has no respect for you. You are just a plaything to him. Then certainly, he's not worth dating, is he?

'So be independent of such individuals even if it means week after week without dates for a while. It is much better to be popular with God than with men, for God's love is true and everlasting, with the promise of eternal reward and happiness. So stay on the 'pedestal of pure womanhood' where God has put you and ignore the techniques of modern dating. Remember that purity and integrity are a girl's most precious possessions. Be a girl with honour, and some day you will date a very special young man. Like the others, he will ask for a kiss – as most fellows do – to find out what sort of a girl you are. When you refuse, this fellow will accept your decision without question or argument, and in his heart he'll be saying, 'This is the kind of girl I've been looking for, someone to be proud of. Easy on the eyes, but not easy on the take.' He'll honour and respect you and learn to love you for what you are. And you will suddenly discover that he is sharing your heart, and be glad you kept your little 'treasure of love' just for him.'

The above advice to us from a girl who has learned a lot through reading and experience and who is doing much to get other girls to keep themselves on the 'pedestal of pure womanhood' is certainly instructive. But, you will say, it is again telling you what not to do and is not solving your problem.

‘Suppose that I will then be not only without dates for a while,’ you say, ‘but never get any date again. Suppose that I then never date a very special young man’. ‘Suppose they all pass me by and leave me alone on that “pedestal of pure womanhood”.’

Very well, suppose it all. Remember that God’s love is everlasting. You’ll probably escape so much more than you miss. But whatever you do, refuse to fall in line with the ideas of modern dating in order to get and keep a boy friend and, as a result, step very low off your pedestal and cheapen yourself and let yourself be pawed over and commit sin.

Since we mentioned above that sin is the greatest evil in the world, it might be well here to quote this striking passage from [Blessed John Henry] Newman’s Apologia: ‘The Catholic Church holds it better for the sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fall, and for all the many millions on it to die of starvation in extremest agony, as far as temporal affliction goes, than one soul, I will not say, should be lost but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one willful untruth, or should steal one poor farthing without excuse.’

But what you want to know, and what so many other girls want to know, is how you can, despite such refusals, hold his attention.

The surest way of still holding his attention, as is implied in the above, is your very refusal of concessions. If that does not attract him, then his going is good riddance.

In addition to that primary requisite, the following suggestions may be helpful:

1. Be charming and pleasant, smart and as well dressed as possible, clever and attractive. Make virtue attractive and yourself attractive with it. Everybody knows from bitter experience that high courage is needed to be consistently good. All admire virtue because virtue is essentially admirable.
2. Men, as a rule, are much less willing to marry than are women. That is why there are, so they say, more Catholic bachelors than there are Catholic spinsters. Therefore, since most marriages are brought about by the young woman, when you meet a good Catholic man whom you think you would like to marry, go about the business of tactfully, intelligently, and virtuously interesting him and, after you are sure he is the man for you, subtly persuade him to believe that he wants to marry you and with chaste and charming womanly wiles get him to propose to you. Don’t wait for the young man to take all the steps. Employ the approved and maidenly arts by which the interest of a man is won. Make the natural and quite proper overtures to marriage.
3. Be a good listener. A man wants a good audience. Instead of chattering so much about your own interests, listen to him with sympathy, interest, understanding. Encourage him to talk about his plans, his ambitions, his struggles. Let him feel that from you he can always get courage and encouragement in breasting the world. A man wants his future wife to be a good listener, a restful influence, a centre of peace, an inspiration, an audience.
4. Occasionally invite the young man to your house and entertain him for the evening; let him see your home and feel that you can make his home a centre of peace. Cook him a good meal and serve it in your home; he will expect you to prepare good meals for him after you are married. Let him see, too, how delightfully natural and good you are to your folks at home – and how neat even when not dressed up.
5. Go with the man to the places to which he likes to go and do the things he likes to do. Do not be selfish. Forget your own preferences. Do not insist that he go to places he does not care to go to or

do things he does not care to do. Sensibly and prudently, keep him from spending too much time and money on you. Still, a certain generosity towards the girl with whom a man goes out is a good guarantee of his generosity towards the woman he will marry.

6. Do things together: walk, ride, go to the movies, attend concerts, lectures, church; read the same books, cultivate the same hobbies, et cetera. Try to find enjoyment in doing things together, simple, inexpensive, interesting things.

7. If you remember that the best of human beings are often weak, men disappoint girls and girls disappoint men and that both men and women are too often foolish, if you don't expect perfection from the man you are going with, you will forgive him if he is guilty of a frailty or of a venial sin. You will remember that to err is human, to forgive, is divine. Just as we must daily ask God to forgive us our trespasses, so we also have frequent need to forgive one another our trespasses. If the wrongs done, even if they greatly hurt your vanity and convenience, are really at worst only venial sins, not only forgive them but forget them. Better still, take practically no notice of them. Do not let them disturb the course of your friendship. Even a more serious trespass, if it is but rare, if it is but an occasional lapse of weakness, had better be gracefully forgiven and forgotten. If he sinks so low as to do the sort of things that are mortal sins, sorrowfully but firmly turn away and find someone better.

Remember that unmarried men and women may not deliberately accept or procure sexual pleasure in any way. It does not make any difference how common the sin is, how easily it can be committed, how generally it is done, or how briefly the forbidden act is enjoyed. Deliberate sexual pleasure has no place in courtship. It is forbidden under pain of mortal sin. And, let us plainly add, impurity before marriage not infrequently may engender infidelity after marriage.

From all this advice to girls, some might get the impression that the boys are a bad lot, that they are always to blame. We do not wish to give such an impression. As girls must be on their guard, so, too, the boys must be on their guard as regards the girls. Just to bring out this point, we quote the following from Dorothy Fremont Grant's 'SO! You Want to Get Married!' (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1947.)

'Girls early come to the realization that they have a mysterious 'power' over boys. But their exercise of it is often miserably abused. Deliberately the girl drops her hankie or her compact for the mere 'pleasure'... of bringing him to her feet so that, at her leisure, she can give him a swift kick. Not without reason are some boys, and some men, wary of girls and women. Deliberately the coarse girl will play one boy off against another merely for the 'pleasure' of receiving their competitive offerings for restoration to her favour. (And, by the way, it is still good form for boys to confine offerings to flowers, candy, and books!)

'As deliberately as such foolish girls act I have put the word pleasure in quotation marks, because this sort of pleasure is illicit and immoral. It is essentially dishonest, cunning, and cruel. The little tots would call such a girl 'a dirty cheat', and without exaggeration. This is the girl who deserves to be packed away on the shelf forever.

'It is true that by woman's very nature she does have a 'power' over man, a moral power. The moral tone of society is set by woman, not by man, because she is the natural guardian of moral virtues; this is a portion of her high calling. Except by physical force, no woman is involved in an immoral act against her will. Therefore, the standard of conduct between boys and girls is the major responsibility of the girl. There is a real truth in the expression, 'She led him on...'

A survey among Catholic high school boys and girls in one city 'indicates that unexplained warnings and verbal 'don'ts' fail to convince the majority of adolescent boys and girls that there is any danger in what they consider 'musts' or routine necessities of any successful dating system. 22 per cent saw absolutely nothing seriously wrong in necking and petting, and 24 per cent claimed that such indulgences are 'not necessarily' wrong, while 9 per cent believed that 'petting only' is wrong.

'From the reasons given to support their judgment of these actions, it is evident that the average boy and girl are completely ignorant of the nature of the psychic and physical factors operating in the sex urge.

'While the majority saw no need for necking and petting on a date, as many as 341 seniors considered such behaviour a 'routine part of a girl's relationship with boys'. Though nearly 100 seniors considered such behaviour 'cheap' and 'disgusting', none of the 1,042 who responded in the negative gave any ethical principles or moral reasons for their stand. Only one 17-year-old boy came close to any substantial insight into the problem when he stated: 'After you go with a girl for a while, you realize this isn't the thing that counts.' (America, July 14, 1951, pages 377-378).

Do you think it right for a boy to expect a kiss after a date, as if it were a reward for taking you out?

Once upon a time, a good Catholic wrote to me and said, among other things:

'Father, when I go out with boys, I don't care to do the things that some do. You understand what I mean, don't you? I mean about parked cars, certain 'shows', et cetera. Then, about kissing. I do not think it is really proper for a boy to expect a kiss after about the third or fourth date, as though this were his reward for taking me out. I want the boy to have the highest respect and courtesy for womanhood. Is this the right way of thinking? As for myself, at the moment I do not care to go out with boys any more. I did have the desire to, as is only natural for a girl, but now I would rather play tennis, volley ball, et cetera. (Maybe she might share these activities with boys.) Why must there always be that cheapening element in company keeping? Isn't it a remote preparation for marriage, which is truly a beautiful and sacred state?'

Another Letter.

'I am twenty years old and am going with a good Catholic boy. I don't go in for heavy petting, maybe just a goodnight kiss or one or two more. Am I right in believing that if no passions or emotions are aroused, such kissing is considered safe? If the passions or emotions are noticed in yourself or in the other person and you quit immediately, is there any sin involved? What sort of sin is involved, if any, as regards the thoughts and feelings (maybe desires) that go with some kisses and that sometimes come when you are just out with a boy or perhaps by yourself? Are these temptations? Or how can you distinguish? How would you confess these sins?'

'Am I right in believing that if no passions or emotions are aroused, such kissing is considered safe?'

It might be possible for a non-passionate kiss, such as you mention, to be exchanged between a young lady and her gentleman friend. If so, it is not sinful at all because, as we are presuming, it is of such a nature as not to arouse the passions of a normal person. It is this non-passionate kiss and embrace that the engaged may make use of, very moderately and briefly and not too frequently lest there be serious temptations, because in order to foster their mutual love they have a right to show each other certain marks of this love. But because a kiss between a man and a woman is a symbol, a

sign of deep affection, and the expression of the man's and woman's desire to bind that affection in marriage, it should rarely be tolerated in the case of a casual companion. To say goodnight by means of the symbolic expression, which is the pledge of undying love is quite out of place. Don't! And it is never safe. A kiss begun in friendship can easily end in passion.

'If the passions or emotions are noticed in yourself or in the other person and you quit immediately, is there any sin involved?'

If it was a non-passionate kiss, as mentioned above, a token of honourable love, such as may be lawful even between persons of the opposite sex, and if the kissing was really not done in order to arouse venereal pleasure, and then you notice passions or emotions in yourself or in the other person and you quit immediately and do not consent to such passions and emotions, there may be no sin involved. But you who are asking are the girl in the case and are perhaps not aware that the young man is naturally much more passionate than you who are inclined to be merely affectionate and distantly maternal.

You do not know what is going on in that young man's interior. He may be giving willful consent to thoughts, desires, and even to the most vehement feelings. In that case, he has committed a mortal sin and you co-operated in it.

It may still not be a sin for you, because you never thought that an innocent goodnight kiss would lead to anything like that.

'What sort of a sin is involved, if any, as regards the thoughts and feelings (maybe desires) that go with some kisses, and that sometimes come when you are just out with a boy or perhaps by yourself?'

If you give willful consent to such thoughts, feelings, desires, that is, if you rest in them with content, are glad you have them, make no effort to banish them but rather entertain them, you commit a mortal sin. Kissing of a passionate kind which stirs up venereal pleasure (and really prolonged kissing is classified as passionate) is forbidden under pain of serious sin. A kiss may be the spark that will blow up the highly inflammable passions of youth and start a raging fire that cannot be put out. A man can be rushed by kisses into brutal things, and a girl can be kissed into anything, to the lifelong shame, regret and remorse of both and often to the ruin of the girl besides.

'Are these temptations? Or how can you distinguish? How would you confess these sins?'

As a learned author says: 'Here it is wise to distinguish between what is merely a natural phenomenon and what is a temptation. It is entirely natural for a normal person at given times to experience carnal imaginations, thoughts, feelings and desires. It would be a sign of abnormality or constitutional disorder if he did not experience them. But those experiences are not as yet a temptation by any means. They become a temptation only when there is added to them the approach of lust, or the lure to indulge in them unlawfully. This lust constitutes the temptation. As long as it is not responded to or dallied with there can be no question of sin, however strong the natural phenomenon may be.'

Try always to avoid doing things that do not at all have to be done and you know will bring about such temptations. And when the temptations do come as come they will in spite of everything, quietly resist them with prayer and attention to other things.

When a boy and a girl are keeping company, is it all right for them to kiss each other?

In his book, 'Those Terrible Teens' (New York: Declan X. McMullen 1947), Father Vincent P. McCorry says some very plain things about the sign that does not signify. To begin with, he says that if you saw strange man enter a street car or bus, pay his fare and then proceed to shake hands with everyone in the car or bus, you would say that the poor fellow was either crazy or inebriated. Why? Because he was using a familiar sign that was meaningless. The people of our civilization recognize the clasp of hands as a sign of friendship. So, too, in the civilized world, which we know, the kiss is a gesture and a contact which is understood to be the sign of love. As such a sign, the kiss reaches its perfection when it is exchanged between a man and a woman who are bound together in the union of true love. Such a kiss is a sublime and holy thing.

Our age, which has deified love of the sexual sort, has simultaneously debased and degraded the love sign, the kiss. No one will pretend that a girl can love every young man with whom she associates, yet they keep assuring her with all propriety she may kiss any boy with whom she spends an hour or an evening. Well might we blame a girl for making herself so sickeningly cheap. Yet in our own day, it is only what the smart contemporary world, what Hollywood and the popular magazines and the beastly advertisements tell her to do. We know that Our Blessed Lord, in His own life, said some strangely harsh things about the world and the devil and their conspiracy against weak flesh. The plain, discouraging truth is that for many a boy and girl today the kiss is no longer a sign of love. It is no longer a sign of anything. It is either a brutal, physical sport, or – God save the mark! – a payment. It is a degrading idea that the girl is somehow indebted to the boy for taking her out, and that the coin of her payment is the kiss. The suggestion bears a distinct and malodorous resemblance to commercialized vice. For Catholic girls, nothing more need be said.

We now quote verbatim the last three paragraphs of this classical chapter of an excellent book that you should have:

'The kiss exists, now, for its own sake, without relating to meaning of any sort. It is sought, given and exchanged, not to express and glorify a gorgeous reality, but to yield a momentary thrill. The kiss used to rise up from the heart; now it is chained to the body. It used to incarnate the highest aspirations of two who loved; now it embodies the lowest desires of two who lust for one another. The kiss was once a poem and a song; now it is a kind of silent blasphemy. So ends the modern history of the sublime sign of love.

'Like every other portion of the noble human body which the most high God first lovingly formed out of the slime of the earth, the lips are a miracle and a meditation. The lips of the infant draw life from its mother's breast.

The lips help, throughout life, in the normal, necessary functions of eating and drinking. The lips play their part in the wonder of speech and in the equal marvel of silence. The lips make a straight line of courage in adversity, and softly part in the rare moments of surpassing joy, which this poor world affords. The lips whisper the act of contrition, and open to welcome the white flake that is Christ Jesus. The lips will taste a last anointing with holy oil, and – their last loving sign, please God! – will be pressed against the crucifix in the very article of death. The lips will be gently closed by loving hands, and will open again one day to sing forever the rapturous praise of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Is it all right for them to kiss each other? In her excellent book, 'SO! You Want to Get Married!' Dorothy Grant says among other things:

'What about kissing?

‘All right, what about it? We may as well meet this ever-pressing question right off.

‘Instead of ‘ganging up’ with their own kind during the initial moments of a party, why don’t boys and girls go right to it and kiss? If there is no harm in a kiss why be ‘bashful’ about coming forward? Why not kiss under a brilliantly lighted chandelier instead of out in the moonlight behind the honeysuckle vine? Why not?’

‘A girl would kiss her father before a room full of people. Why not a boy?’

‘Can it be because maybe there is harm in a kiss?’

‘Of course, kissing dad is old stuff. Kissing a boy is definitely a kiss of another colour – usually quite red. Why?’

‘Because there is as much potential harm in kissing a boy as there is potential harm in human nature. How bad can you be? Do you know? True, dad is an old hand at the business. He has been kissing mother for years: but that’s the point – it is mother whom he has kissed. There was a first kiss between mother and dad, probably the kiss that decided dad to give mother his name, his heart, and his life.

‘As far as the girl is concerned, in truth, there may be little harm in a kiss because usually a girl is less tempted than a boy. But a kiss that leaves her unmoved may be a mortal sin for him, and a portion of the guilt of that mortal sin will be hers because she permitted the kiss. None of the guilt is hers if the boy without the least encouragement has taken the kiss by force, but a decent boy seldom does this.’

Therefore, the degree of ‘harm’ in a kiss must be measured by the circumstance – under the chandelier or behind the honeysuckle vine. As Father Furfey points out in his book, ‘This Way to Heaven,’ a kiss ‘may be anything from a beautiful act of supernatural charity to a mortal sin of impurity’. It is questionable if a kiss delivered behind the honeysuckle vine is likely to be a ‘beautiful act of supernatural charity’.

‘God has endowed our sense of touch with certain pleasant reactions. Why? So that within the bonds of matrimony, a man and a woman will unite, “two in one flesh” for the procreation of children. Within the bonds of matrimony a kiss, a caress, are essential preliminaries to this complete union of man and wife. Outside the bonds of matrimony a kiss, a caress are just as appealing to the senses, but in this circumstance physical union is a mortal sin.’

And in the concluding chapter of this excellent book, ‘SO! You Want to Get Married!’ the gifted author, Dorothy Grant has these practical remarks:

‘When I suggest you refuse advances in the interest of being popular and sought after by the right kind of boys, I am remembering my ‘dates’. Memory insists it is true that if you are ‘hard to get’ you will be sought by the kind of boys you want to know. Of all the young men who ‘dated’ me, only one kissed me of my own free will. That one I married.

‘If and when the others took a kiss contrary to my will – boys will do that – they had dated me for the last time. It was much more pleasant to spend an evening at home with my mother or with a good book than spend hours on a ‘date’ with a boy who refused to understand that ‘No’ meant ‘No!’ Memory serves me well on this point.

‘Nor did I stand by this moral principle just because these words are found in the dictionary. Far from it. These were principles, which mother said were worth defending and I believed she knew what she was talking about. Who could know better than mother about such things?’

‘Every age has its superficialities, but fundamentally I do not believe the girls of today are any different from the girls of my teen days. Human nature does not change, nor do the divine and natural moral laws change from age to age.’

(Thanks to The Queen’s Work, Saint Louis, Missouri.)
