

Morality

Part One. Four Talks on CHASTITY and LUST

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§I. THE VIRTUES OF CHASTITY, PURITY, MODESTY AND VIRGINITY.

“Blessed are the clean of heart; for they shall see God.” (Matt., 5:8).

—“I beseech you therefore, brethren, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service.” (Rom., 12:1).

The Sixth Commandment: You shall not commit adultery.

The Ninth Commandment: You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.

Of all the disquieting moments human flesh is heir to, my friends, there is nothing that seems to disturb the conscience of us mortals more than the sins against the Sixth and Ninth Commandments. Due to ignorance or misinformation many people worry when there is no cause for worry. Others again do not worry when they should, and arouse their dormant conscience from slumber. Those who worry unnecessarily are usually those who confuse concupiscence and temptation with sin itself. Temptation in itself is no sin. Since the fall of Adam man is prone to evil. Concupiscence is but the aftermath of original sin.

Therefore, everybody should remember this: concupiscence in itself, like temptation, is not a sin. It is the mere tendency, the inclination, to sin. St. Paul speaks of this in his own members. He calls it a “sting of the flesh,” which wars against the spirit and keeps a man humble. “And lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me,” he says, “there was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me. For which thing thrice I besought the Lord that it might depart from me. And He said to me: ‘My grace is sufficient for you’.” (2 Cor., 12:7-9). It is only when this concupiscence is given free rein and left uncontrolled that it becomes sinful. It is then called the sin of lust. But when we retain control, or self-mastery, over our thoughts, words, and actions, we possess the beautiful virtue known as chastity.

Today, we shall first of all consider this key virtue, chastity, which is so necessary to make our daily conduct — our every thought, word and deed — pleasing to and meritorious before God. Meaning of Chastity.

— Most people have heard the words, chastity, purity, modesty, virginity and continency; but few Catholics even know the correct meaning of all these terms. Let us define them briefly: (a) Chastity or purity is a moral virtue or habit, which excludes or moderates the inordinate appetite of venereal pleasures, or concupiscence, according to the norm of right reason. Just as temperance and sobriety determine the proper use of food or drink, so chastity determines the proper control of our lower appetites. (b) Modesty differs again from chastity or purity. Modesty is that blush, that shame, that instinct, to be found in all people who are not utterly depraved, which prompts them to abstain from

improper words or actions, from unbecoming dress or conduct, to repress the curiosity of the eyes and the other senses, lest their chastity be violated. In German it is called "Schamgefühl," the nearest to which is our word "shamefulness." For example, after their sin of disobedience, Adam and Eve realized for the first time that they were without clothes. Their instinct of modesty was awakened. We might call modesty, therefore, the forerunner, the companion, the guardian, the teacher and protector, or the outpost of chastity. Whatever, then, is against chastity or purity, is also against modesty; but not vice versa. (c) Lastly, chastity differs from continency. Although continency is ordinarily understood to mean only the restraint of all venereal appetites (because these are the hardest and most necessary to bring under control), in reality continency is that virtue by which we bridle all concupiscence and every other immoderation, even in eating and drinking or whatever it be. Under the word chastity, we should also mention the terms of "virginity", "virginal chastity," and "conjugal chastity."

(1) Conjugal chastity avoids every thought, word, or deed that is not permitted in holy wedlock. It is that virtue which makes every Christian home so lovely, so happy, so sweet; and manifests itself so beautifully on the mellowed and chaste countenance of married people, who possess this domestic tranquility.

(2) Virginal chastity, again, differs from virginity. Virginal chastity restrains from all forbidden sensual pleasures. It is the virtue so highly cherished by every good man and woman outside of holy wedlock.

(3) Virginity, on the other hand, is that special jewel, that unspotted lily, that immaculate white garment, possessed by every man or woman who through life has preserved his or her body inviolate, unspotted by any willful Sin against holy purity.

Highly Cherished Virtue.

— This, then, my friends, gives us a comprehensive idea of the virtue of chastity, no matter under what term we speak of it, be it purity, modesty, continency, virginity, and so on. To learn how dear to the pure Heart of Jesus this virtue is, especially in the lives of the young people, we need but to turn to Christ's associates in His own early childhood. Both in childhood and adolescence Jesus associated Himself mainly with those whom He knew to be absolutely pure and beyond suspicion. His Mother was the spotless and most pure Virgin, even in her divine motherhood. His foster-father, St. Joseph, was and remained a virgin. His precursor, St. John the Baptist, who prepared the way for His coming, was and remained a virgin. His favorite Apostle was the virgin John, who later took care of His Virgin Mother, Mary.

His enemies accused Jesus of being a law-breaker; but He would never permit even His enemies to accuse Him of violating the virtue of chastity. Why this insistence on holy virginity, holy purity, in His own behalf and for His intimate companions in the very beginning of His life? Undoubtedly, to impress upon all His followers the high value and urgent necessity of the virtue of chastity, particularly in the beginning of our career on earth. For Jesus knew that, once self-mastery has been acquired, all other virtues follow readily; and with them peace of heart and mind, which are the safe anchors for temporal and spiritual happiness. This Jesus confirmed once more in His Sermon on the Mount, when He addressed the multitude, saying "Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God" (Matt., 5: 8).

St. Anthony, who loved this virtue so dearly, was visibly rewarded one day when the Blessed Mother herself presented her Divine Infant into his arms. Saints Agnes, Philomena, Cecilia, Lucy —

all young girls — offered their lives in martyrdom rather than violate this holy virtue. In the Lives of other Martyrs we read that not only brutal men, but even savage beasts maddened with hunger and turned loose upon the helpless Christians who awaited their martyrdom in the arena, lost their ferocity, and were subdued unto gentleness and meekness by the sight of pure and innocent manhood and maidenhood.

Even the ancient pagan Greeks and Romans, who were noted for their lust, had their vestal virgins in testimony of the human instinct to reverence and prize whatever makes for purity and chastity. So great was their reverence for these vestal virgins, even though only outwardly so, that if a conquering hero returning from glorious victories was having a triumphal procession through the streets of the city and a vestal virgin came his way, the procession was halted in reverence to her, and the conqueror paid her public homage.

Considered even from a merely natural standpoint, it is far sweeter and more profitable to lead a chaste life than to be in the thralls of impurity. How often do we not read of a young man or woman committing suicide, after having led an immoral life! But you never read of a young person ending his or her life through misery of mind and wretchedness of heart brought on through the practice of purity and self-control. Hence, for physiological and psychic reasons alone, a sensible young person will keep the mind clean, the heart pure, and the imagination away, as much as possible, from matters of sex.

Many non-Catholics, who have not the religious training that we have, from a mere interest in their personal comfort and wellbeing, from an instinctive appreciation of modesty, and as a strong factor towards self-control and self-possession and towards ensuring future happiness, ease and contentment, aim to keep their minds pure and their hearts chaste. Their native good sense tells them that this cannot be attained, except through a rigid check, a severe and unrelenting guard, over their sensuous leanings and sexual appetites. In consideration of all these motives, both from a natural and supernatural standpoint, the author of the Book of Wisdom (4:1-2) could rightfully cry out: “O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory: for the memory thereof is immortal: because it is known both with God and with men. When it is present, they imitate it: and they desire it when it has withdrawn itself, and it triumphs crowned forever, winning the reward of undefiled conflicts.”

Virginal Chastity Regained.

— Many of my listeners are doing so perhaps with a heavy heart. Already, their many past transgressions against this virtue may lead them to cry out with St. Paul: “Unhappy man (or woman) that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom., 7:24). In consequence, there may be such who are wondering if, through their past lapses, they have forfeited the dignity and honor of virginal chastity forever; or if lost, can it ever be recovered somehow? And if so, in what manner?

The answer is contained in the same Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans: “The grace of God, by Jesus Christ, our Lord” (Rom., 7:25). It is true that the Church has made no explicit pronouncement upon this point. But St. Augustine, one of the greatest Doctors of the Church who in his youth and before his conversion had been guilty of shameful excesses of impurity, says a comforting word, when he declares, that “virginity, which has been lost, may be recovered by a long practice of chastity” (see Meyer’s “Youth’s Pathfinder,” p. 122). Added strength to this view of St. Augustine is found in the life of St. Margaret of Cortona (died 1297). She is known as the St. Mary Magdalen of the Order of

St. Francis. After her conversion from a scandalous life of immorality, Our Lord drew her closer and closer to Himself by the bonds of divine love. The stronger their holy friendship and union grew, the more tender and endearing were the names with which Jesus addressed Margaret. At first He called her His “dear little sheep,” which He had found again. Then, in loving gradation He called her “His child, His daughter, His beloved, and finally, His spouse,” assuring her at the same time that her place in Heaven would be among the virgins, whose glory she would share. No matter what be the theological value or non-value of this legend, there is at least a great deal of real comfort and genuine encouragement here for every God-loving soul who has been unfortunate after the manner of St. Margaret, but who, like her, wants to give whatever remains of her love and devotion entirely and forever to Jesus, the pure Lover of penitents, as well as of innocent virgins. In addition to St. Margaret and St. Augustine, there is another consoling fact. It is this: beneath the Cross of Jesus, as He was dying upon it, as His Precious Blood oozed forth from His sacred members, not only was Mary the spotless one, but immediately next to her stood also Mary, the penitent one. Following, therefore, the example of Christ, no position or vocation in the Church established by the same forgiving Lord should be closed to a repentant soul, be it honorable wedlock, or holy priesthood — just as St. Augustine was not barred from the priesthood, nor St. Margaret of Cortona from a religious sisterhood.

Conclusion: Never to Have Sinned Is Sweetest.

— But sweet as is the forgiveness of sin on the part of God after the fall, the consciousness of never having seriously violated holy chastity and virginity, thanks to the grace of God, is a joy infinitely more soothing and delicious. Mary Magdalen was indeed happy at having been pardoned by Jesus after her fall. But Mary, the Mother of Jesus, must have been unspeakably more happy for never having sullied her innocence and purity with the least shadow of guilt.

But if it is too late for us to be happy after the manner of Mary Immaculate, then we must strive earnestly to be happy after the manner of Mary, the Penitent. If our innocence is still unsullied, then let our one ambition in life be to merit the eulogy pronounced by God upon Mary, namely: “You are all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in you” (Cant., 4:7). At all events, either for innocence preserved or for innocence regained through penance, let us cultivate an ardent love and tender devotion to Mary, who invites all sincere lovers of purity, saying, (using the inspired words put into the mouth of Wisdom personified): “Come to me, all ye that desire me. I am the Mother of fair love... In me is all grace,... all hope of life, and of virtue” (Ecclesiasticus 24: verses 26, 24 and 25). Amen.

[Footnote: If your Bible is not a translation from the Vulgate and Septuagint, (e.g. the Douay Version) you will find the quote marked as Ecclesiasticus 24: verses 19 and 18.]

§II. THE SIN OF LUST.

“Know you all this and understand, that no fornicator nor unclean person has inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” (Eph., 5:5).

From the moment of our conception, my friends, we have the germ of good and evil implanted within us. When we attain the use of reason, the battles of life begin. From then on until our dying day there is a dual struggle going on within our being, each inclination striving to gain the mastery over us. The one aims at the higher, the nobler things of life — the chaste, the pure, and the beautiful. Opposed to this is that other power which Sacred Scripture calls “the beast” the animal

nature within us, ever-striving to overpower our spiritual nature. This lower element of our nature constantly tends to the unholy things of life, and craves to satisfy those baser appetites.

These struggles become more violent as we grow into adolescence until the closing years of our teens, especially. Usually, after the age of twenty or thereabouts, one or the other of these dual powers will predominate. The stronger of the two will determine most of our thoughts, words and actions thereafter. Should the evil predominate, only a miracle of God's grace can liberate us from its meshes. Yes, any person so ensnared can truly cry out with St. Paul: "O unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God, by Jesus Christ, our Lord" (Rom., 7: 24-25). Proposition.

— Under the Sixth and Ninth Commandments, we call this dual struggle within us between the good or bad, virtue or vice. The virtue we call chastity, the vice we call lust. In our previous sermon we have already considered the virtue of chastity under its different aspects. Today we turn to the unpleasant phase of this dual struggle. In other sermons to follow we shall consider the sins of the flesh and the occasions thereof, more in detail; but today we will speak of them under the one common term, namely, lust.

Definition.

— What do we mean by the word, lust? It is defined as an inordinate, unnatural love of the pleasures of the flesh and of the senses. Contrary to the opinions of some, not all pleasures of the senses are forbidden. Divine Providence has prepared many pure and innocent pleasures for us — pleasures that are necessary to entertain us, to repair our strength, to preserve our health, to sustain us in our weakness, and to relieve our ills. For example, we have the sensible pleasure that goes with well-prepared food or drink; the sweetness of sleep in a cozy bed; the exhilarating sensation after a good bath; the beautiful aspects which nature and God's creatures present to our eyes; the sweet and harmonious strains of music, etc. Any such pleasures, when they are not excessive and are enjoyed with a proper motive, are praiseworthy and legitimate.

But it is different with the pleasures of the flesh and of the senses, in relation to the organs of sex, when they are contrary to the purpose for which God created them. We then call these pleasures "sins of the sense," or sensuality. There are other terms by which we designate these sins, due to their peculiar malice, with which all intelligent Catholics should be familiar.

There is, for example, the sin of immodesty, the sin of impurity.

- (a) If the complete sexual satisfaction is sought by oneself alone, it is called self-abuse.
- (b) If it is an intercourse of sexes between single or celibate people, it is called fornication.
- (c) If one or both are married, the sin is called adultery.
- (d) If they are closely related, though not married to each other, it is incest.
- (e) Unnatural sexual relation between persons of the same sex, or of the opposite sex, is called sodomy — after the biblical city of Sodom, which was destroyed by fire and brimstone on account of these unnatural sins.
- (f) Finally, sexual transgression with an animal is called bestiality.

But all these sins, by whatever name you call them, are classified under the one term, lust, of which Holy Scripture says “that they who do such things shall not obtain the kingdom of God” (Gal., 5:21). Nature and Gravity of Lust.

— St. Jerome and St. Alphonsus give it as their opinion that nine out of every ten persons in hell owe their damnation to the sins of lust. Be that as it may, it seems probable that about that proportion of sacrilegious confessions are reducible to the sins of the flesh — either on account of lack of proper contrition or on account of failure to confess sins properly through false shame or pride. The reason why so many are lost on account of this sin, is because this sin so completely overpowers its victim that the unfortunate soul clings to its charms and pleasures to the last. Thus, dying unrepentant, it becomes for him the unpardonable sin.

The Dignity of Man.

— It is only after we understand the dignity of man that we realize fully the gravity of these sins.

(1)

“We are, first of all, creatures made to the image and likeness of God, endowed with understanding and free will.” Through Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, and the other Sacraments, our bodies, says St. Paul (1 Cor, 6:15), become “members of Christ,” nay, “one with Christ.” “Know you not,” says St. Paul (1 Cor, 3:16 and following), “that you are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwells in you? But if any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are.” This body is one day to arise again from the grave, either in glory or in shame. What, therefore, can be more degrading, more debasing, than to pollute this body with the sins of lust and sensuality?

What would you say if a man should come here (into this Church) before God’s sanctuary and profane this temple with shameful crimes and abuses? But what of these crimes in comparison to those who profane the living temples of the Holy Ghost — their bodies, the dwelling places of their souls for whom Christ shed His Precious Blood, and died the ignominious death on the Cross?

(2)

Secondly, to ascertain how displeasing to God the sins of lust are, we need but to look at the terrible punishments He has sent to those who have committed this sin. Was it not this vice that caused the deluge (Genesis 6)? Was it not the sins of lust that brought down fire and brimstone upon the infamous cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed all the inhabitants thereof (Genesis 19)? Was it not lust that caused the death, through the sword of Phinees (or Phinehas), of 24,000 Israelites in one day (Numbers 25:6-9), that effected the extermination of almost the entire tribe of Benjamin (Judges 19 & 20), and which drew so many evils upon the house of David (2 Samuel 11 and subsequent chapters)?

In our own day, whence arise the many plagues and misfortunes that afflict us? Pestilences and contagious diseases; so many sudden deaths, bloody wars, tempests and storms, floods and drought; so many disasters, as fires and earthquakes, which ravage cities and provinces. In all of these can be seen the hand of an angry God, who strikes and chastises us. “Believe me,” says St. Thomas of Villanova, (died 1555) “they are also in punishment of intemperance and the frightful lust of mankind.” God’s mills grind slowly, but surely; and severe chastisements of this nature God employs only as a last resort, in order to draw His wayward children from evil and sin. Fatal Consequences to the Individual.

— Furthermore, the individual addicted to the sin of lust brings both spiritual and physical ruin upon himself. I quote from a doctor of authority: “The entire nervous system, the emotional and religious life become deranged. The body loses its vigor and resistive powers, while the mind forfeits its robustness, alertness and resourcefulness. Many a youthful and beautiful complexion, florid appearance, sprightly gait, graceful carriage, and easy manner, are hopelessly ruined by this unnatural practice; many a brilliant mind is shorn of its power of initiative, spirit of enterprise, glow of originality, fire of enthusiasm, by the same suicidal habits. It sickens the imagination, deadens the emotions, and brings on depression of spirits, melancholy, despondency and despair, and extinguishes every spark of religious enthusiasm.” There is no crime too low to which a man of lust will not stoop. Hardly had the wise Solomon become unchaste, when he offered incense to idols and became an apostate. King David, from an adulterer, became a homicide. What about Martin Luther, King Henry VIII of England, and Napoleon of France? It was lust that started them all on their career of apostasy, infidelity, murder and ruin. Why so many infidels in the world today, who mock everything holy, everything pure, if not because they are steeped in the sins of lust? O frightful plague of religion, of society, of so many individuals!

Conclusion.

— Realizing the evil consequences, may I exhort you to fly from and to detest every avenue of approach to this sin? Every pastor knows, and God knows, the many temptations that are flaunted before us at every turn in the world today. For this reason, holy Mother Church is most generous in dispensing the graces of God to fortify us from being drawn into this maelstrom of lust which surrounds us on every side. In turn, there is something refreshing, amidst the present whirlpool of filth, to see those untold numbers of beautiful souls, young men and women as well as elders, in every walk of life, who in spite of evil surroundings still retain the beautiful virtue of purity and chastity.

These realize that we are never sure from an unexpected attack. Hence they combat these powers of evil by practicing the virtue opposed to lust, namely, chastity — that most beautiful of all virtues, the flower of good morals, the honor of the body, the glory of both sexes, the foundation of all sanctity. Chastity elevates man above the angels, and renders him, so to say, similar to God. Let us pray often to God for this holy virtue; then rest assured that He will never refuse us the graces necessary to fulfill what He commands. Fortified thus, we can say with St. Paul: “I can do all things in Him that strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13) Amen.

§III. OCCASIONS OF SINS OF LUST:

THOUGHTS AND LOOKS.

(Newspapers, Pictures, Movies, etc.)

“Out of the abundance of the heart

the mouth speaks” (Matt., 12:34). — “I fear lest, as the serpent seduced Eve by his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted, and fall from the simplicity which is in Christ” (2 Cor., 11:3).

Man, my friends, is made up of body and soul. Unlike all other creatures, he is endowed with intellect and free will. Through his soul, he becomes reasonable and free, master of his own actions. It matters not how strait the gate,

How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate,

I am the captain of my soul. (William. E. Hanley).

Yes, endowed with intellect, immortal and allied to the Angels is man! For, as the Psalmist declares: "You have made him a little less than the Angels." On the other hand, through his body, man is related to inferior creatures, and even to the very dust of the earth. Hence these two elements, the material and the spiritual, body and soul united, forms man. But there must be one head, one master, that must dominate and rule. Which shall it be? You will say that it is the soul and reason, of course. And what is to be the subject of this rule? You answer that it is the body. It is the body that must obey.

But now take a glance at those steeped in lust and impurity. In such, the soul is degraded to the position of a servant and slave of the body and of the flesh. The right order is inverted. Passion controls, and reason obeys. To avoid this inverse order in our lives, of the body domineering over the soul, God has given us the Sixth and Ninth Commandments as guides. In these He forbids not only the sinful act itself, but also all those factors that may lead up to the sinful act, or prepare the way for it. The latter group, we shall begin to consider today. We may call them the avenues of the enemy's approach, or the occasions for the sins of impurity. Our Catechism groups them under the following heads, namely: thoughts, desires, looks, words, and deeds. Today we shall take up thoughts, desires and looks.

Thoughts and Desires.

— Our enemy's first avenue of approach is through the intellect, by placing before us thoughts and images against holy purity. These thoughts and images, however bad they may be, are not sinful if not followed by bad and willfully entertained desires. St. Paul and others of the greatest Saints had violent temptations of this nature.

These thoughts may even be accompanied by a certain sensation of pleasure without becoming sinful. Concupiscence is an effect of original sin; and it is in us, in spite of ourselves. But it is in our power not to give consent, either to the thought or to the sensation of pleasure. It is in our power to reject both as soon as we are conscious of them. In case we do, these thoughts are not only not sinful, but may be even meritorious. Such, for example, are the thoughts that so frequently confront us, like a mist, like a cloud, passing over a clear sky.

Therefore, before we should be disturbed over evil thoughts or desires, we must be certain of three things:

- (a) the thought or image must be intrinsically immodest or impure;
- (b) we must be conscious of its presence and take pleasure therein;
- (c) we must give our free consent to the thought or pleasure.

If one or other of these conditions is missing, there can be no grievous sin. But when all three conditions are present, then our thoughts are sinful, and very often grievously sinful. For, says Christ, such a one has already committed the sin "in his heart." This important fact is frequently overlooked, when people examine their conscience for confession and neglect to mention the sin of thought. Sins of Looks.

— Next to our thought, come our sight and hearing and our other senses. Our eyes are frequently called the “mirror of the soul.” For, it is through the eyes that objects from without are mirrored in our minds. Also our eyes may reveal to others the thoughts that are entertained within the mind. Frequently, without a warning, our eyes may fall upon an object that is indecent. If we immediately turn away from that object, we may incur no guilt. Even willful looks of curiosity may not in themselves be sinful; but they readily expose one to the danger of sin. For example, a curious and indiscreet look led David to fall (2 Samuel 11:2 – the book is called 2 Kings in the Douay Bible), the chief of Sichem (or Shechem) to outrage Dinah, the daughter of Jacob (Gen., 24:2), the two men who threatened to attack the chaste Susanna (Daniel 13), and so on. So grievous, therefore, may the sin of sight become that it is equal to the act itself. For, says Our Lord, “whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt., 5: 28). And St. Augustine tells us that he knew persons of such eminent sanctity that he would have been less surprised to see an Angel fall than these holy persons; and yet they fell and were lost on account of immodest looks.

Bad Books and Pictures.

— Most people’s actions, and this is especially true with the young, are mere repetitions of what they see others do. For that reason, there used to be a popular saying: “As the parent, so the child. As the father, so the son. As mother, so the daughter.” But in our day, when the fireside is no longer the place where children gather for their recreation and social hours, when the home is rather a place to eat and to sleep in when there is no other place to go, there are other outside influences that are equally as great as, if not greater than, the influence parents exercise in moulding the physical, mental, and moral future of their children. And of all the unbridled commercialized influences that have been instrumental in bringing morality, especially amongst the young, to such a low ebb as we find it today, there is nothing more destructive than the immoral picture magazines, cheap books, and the moving picture traffic, as we find them at present. [To which list we must now, of course add television and the whole range of audio-visual and computer based technologies, including the Internet.]

To confirm these statements, I visited one of our local “respectable” newsstands, similar to those that are commonly found in every community all over the land. On its shelves I discovered more than 15 pornographic magazines, that reek with lewdness, filth, and immorality from cover to cover. In the same newsstands, you find circulating libraries of books, amongst which cannot be found one out of a hundred that is fit reading matter for respectable people. And yet, we find that our own Catholic people frequent and patronize these places without qualms of conscience. [How much worse is the situation today? Is there a newsstand ANYWHERE near you and your children that is not replete with pornographic magazines and newspapers? Even many ‘non-pornographic’ magazines are now over-flowing with salacious and corrupting words and images.]

Next to these magazines and books, which lead people to sin against the Sixth and Ninth Commandments through the sense of sight, we must mention in particular, our modern moving picture theatres. There, lewdness and sex have been depicted upon the screen in such a manner that the movie colony at Hollywood has fallen into ill-repute the world over. Even the players themselves there fell so low in their morals that one writer describes the colony “as so rotten that it stinks.” In some foreign countries, as in Ireland, as high as 80% of American movies are banned from the country because of their obscenity and indecencies. [Oh how much worse has the television and movie industry become in the intervening years!]

As advocates of the Legion of Decency, we do not condemn all movie pictures. Every new discovery in art or science can be used for good or evil. Visual education, too, can be productive of much good. But the evil lies rather in the industry itself, as it has been conducted, than with the individual movie houses. The reason is this: in this country four or six motion picture producing companies control, not only the production, but the distribution of nearly all movie films as well. Through their "block" and "blind" booking, these companies oblige the distributor to buy blindly in a block, without previous inspection and without any right of selection or discretion, whatever is sent to him locally. Those too in control of production are commonly people without any religion, and are frequently opposed to all positive religion.

And lest we be accused of exaggerating the physical, mental and moral harm that moving pictures are doing, let us hear from a nationally recognized authority. His name is Henry James Forman, who published his findings in 1929 after an exhaustive study. He entitled his book: "Our Movie-Mad Children." He estimates that the movies touch the lives of 250,000,000 people every week. The average weekly attendance in our own country is nearly 80 millions, of which 23 millions are young people under 21 years of age. These 23 millions of children spend at least two hours each week in movie theaters. Twelve millions of these children are 14 years or younger, while 6 millions are seven years or younger. Seventy per cent of the pictures reviewed had for a dominant theme crime, sex love, violence, or horror, with 449 crimes being noted in 115 films taken at random. [How much more time is spent by today's young people and children in front of the 'cinema at home' – the television? How much worse (or better, if you will,) do you honestly think today's movies are compared with the ones which caused Father Crock such alarm? Sadly, the Legion of Decency was overwhelmed by the Hollywood flood of indecency, and no longer exists. But there are local organizations striving to maintain decent family values in our society of today. Are you a member of one of them? Are you at least PRAYING for a return of common sense to our hedonistically driven media?]

Effects on Children.

— Here are the results upon the minds and bodies of these children (from Forman's book).

(1) First, after attending such pictures, scientific tests were made of a group of children selected at random. The physical disturbances, indicated by increased restlessness in sleep, averaged 4% in girls and 26% in boys; while individuals registered as high as 90%. In all cases, the increased restlessness lingered over a period of several nights, while the normal work at school was disturbed for days after attending the movies.

(2) The emotional reactions were found equally as great, registering five times as great in children as in adults. Due to the excitement caused, it was found that the pulse had jumped to 140, instead of the normal pulse rate of 80; in individual cases it reached 192. In the opinion of a noted neurologist, the scenes of horror and tense excitement produce an "effect similar to shell-shock," which eventually "amounts to an emotional debauch, sowing the seeds for future neuroses and psychoses" — which, in our language, are forms of insanity.

(3) The moral harm can scarcely be estimated. The sex appeal; the racketeers, the flaming passion and high-power emotionalism so featured in the movies, may easily nullify every standard of life and conduct set up at home and at school for the child. What a crime this "greed for profits on the bodies and souls of little children!" No wonder the Manchester Guardian of England, referring to our American movies, should suggest: "The United States has agitated against the trade of opiates in

the Far East. Would it not be well for her to act as vigorously against the corrupting influence that comes from her own shores (through her moving pictures)?" No wonder, then, that according to a conservative estimate (Commonweal, May 5, 1933) there are at least 55 millions of intelligent people in this country, who never go to a movie theatre, because the pictures are "below the level of their intelligence."

Likewise with reason, therefore, did a group of Catholic women, under the National Council of Catholic Women, condemn the movies in the following caustic terms: "We find the average film reeking with vulgarity, crammed with lewd dialogue, disguised under the term of 'wisecracking.' We find immorality exalted; gross spectacles presented in the form of realism. Divorce is upheld as an ideal condition; faithfulness between husband and wife is looked upon as something unusual. Films deal with the lives of morons, rather than of decent men and women. The gangster and horror pictures have given place to the production of the most immoral films of all time." [But what of today?]

The Legion of Decency.

— Justified, therefore, was the Catholic Church as a whole, unitedly to organize her "Legion of Decency," under the capable leadership of the Most Rev. Archbishop McNicholas, O. P. [Since this magnificent organization no longer exists, (see above) what follows must be read as a clarion call to TODAY'S Catholics (and other good citizens) to mobilize their resources to rally society to the promotion of the common good.] Everyone knows the nature and intent of this organization now. Other religious bodies and organizations have united with us in this campaign. A good beginning has been made, but only a beginning. The producers in Hollywood have promised a reform. [This came, briefly, but now Hollywood has degenerated to previously unheard of levels of filth and depravity. Am I really telling you anything you didn't already know?] There are signs of improvement from that source. But we cannot stop there. This is only one angle of the work of the Legion of Decency. Our campaign must go on until all sources of corrupting influence are checked. [Amen.] We must go on until our news-stands with their bookshelves and magazine counters are cleared of filth and corruption; until our schools, colleges and universities remove from their teaching staffs those whose doctrines are demoralizing and corrupting the minds of their pupils. [Amen.]

This is your work and mission, you fathers and mothers, you older men and women! It is not the youth of the land that is seeking a lower standard of morals than our forbears. It is their elders that are preparing and pointing the way. It is true that thirty years ago [around 1910] the average criminal's age was forty. Today, those who glut our penal institutions are nearer twenty years of age, or even less. But where must we look for the causes of the youthful criminal? Is it not in our lewd advertisements in our daily newspapers, books and magazines, placed there for profit? In our theatres where crime and racketeering, where vice and immorality, are extolled and virtue flaunted? Is it not in our many schools of learning, where teachers are deliberately misleading youth from the high principles of living, offering in their stead unbridled license as the guiding principle of life, self-indulgence and self- gratification as its goal? These teachers of youth declare, that neither the criminal nor the ordinary citizen has any freedom to determine his own acts but that everything is predestined by his heredity and experiences. What respect can the pupils have for religion, what reverence for authority, human or divine, when their teachers sneer at the "myth and outworn superstition," as they call it, of a personal God? When the young are told that the Ten

Commandments are only a man-made code of etiquette, the crystallized will of a group, and not the revealed law of God, binding upon the conscience of man?

Are we forgetting George Washington's wise warning, that "reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle"? Have we forgotten the proverb: "It is hard to take out of the oak the twist that grew in the sapling"? Here lies our responsibility.

And our cause is not entirely hopeless. There are signs of an awakening in many quarters. "The very presence of a widespread alarm and concern for youth is a sign of health. When public men and women are voicing the need of safeguarding the youth of the land, it is an indication that the Nation is becoming aroused to the evil influences threatening the young. When business and professional men, clergymen, parents and teachers are beginning to give thought to the problem, that fact alone begets the well-founded hope that youth, with 'its illusions, aspirations, and dreams', will come through the perils of the new age victorious" ("Nation's Youth Problem," by J. I. Corrigan, S. J.). [There ARE signs of hope today too. Many organizations exist in various countries 'to fight the good fight for Community Standards, Family Values, and genuine Light. Have YOU joined up with them?]

If we elders will not protect youth against this modern exhibition of "greed for profits" which preys "on the bodies and souls of little children," there are signs that youth will soon refuse to follow us. They will set out to chart their own future course. The heart of American youth is still sound. "Our young are fired with stronger idealism, higher ambitions to climb greater heights than ever before. They are charged with a courage to dare, with ambition to achieve, with nobility to strive, with inspiration to win, what their forefathers could not achieve." What hopes for America, with her 40 and more millions of children and adolescents! "What a picture they make as they troop off to school, day after day, 231/2 millions strong to our elementary schools, 5 millions to our high schools, and 1 million to our colleges and universities." There is yet hope for the future — if not in our elders, then in our youth. We still retain confidence in modern youth, whose heart and mind are moulded after God's own plan. [This was true! The generation to whom these words were originally addressed is the generation that sacrificed, fought and died to overcome the tyranny of Nazism,

Fascism and Japanese Imperialism.

Will WE, their descendants take up the fight and once more restore decency to our public media?]

In the words of the poet, let us close with a tribute to youth:

How beautiful is youth! How bright its gleams,
With its illusions, aspirations, dreams!
Books of beginnings, story without end,
Each maid a heroine, and each man a friend!
All possibilities are in its hands,
No danger daunts it, and no fee withstands;
In its sublime audacity of faith,
"Be thou removed," it to the mountain saith.
And with ambitious feet, secure and proud,
Ascends the ladder, leaning on the cloud.
Amen.

§IV. OCCASIONS OF SINS OF LUST:

WORDS AND ACTIONS.

“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matt., 12:34).

— “Uncleanness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becomes saints” (Eph., 5:3).

Everything that is necessary for the proper care of the body, so that it remain clean and healthy, is allowed, and is no sin. Everything that is done for wicked pleasure, is forbidden, and is a sin; be it in thought or desire, in looks, in words, or in action. These are mostly known as the sins of the senses — the “avenues of approach,” as we called them in our last discourse, or the occasions for sins against the Sixth and Ninth Commandments. First of all, since the soul or mind should control the actions of the body in rational creatures, the evil one begins by directing his attack upon our thought-life. Evil thoughts may arise like a sudden mist, and try to disturb us. But, as we said, these thoughts are not sinful unless they are willfully entertained. And by prayer and determination of will we can control these thoughts and dispel them before they become sinful.

Next to thought, Satan plans his approach through the eyes. Jeremiah calls the eyes the “windows through which death enters.” Salvian (the fifth century Christian writer) calls them the “mines of the soul.” For, as the strongest rocks and walls are blasted by mines, so, by fixing the eyes upon dangerous objects, the soul is instantly confronted with impure thoughts and desires that cause the destruction of holy virtue. St. Bernard, therefore, says: “A true sign of chastity is caution in looks, and he who is dissolute in looks, you must conclude, is also unchaste.”

Proposition.

— From sinful objects or looks follow evil thoughts and desires; and from these proceed also evil words and actions. For, as St. Matthew wistfully says, quoting Our Lord, Jesus: “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matt., 12:34). What these sinful words and actions are in relation to chastity, we shall discuss today.

Immodest Words.

— St. Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians (5:3) tells us: “Uncleanness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becomes saints.” Elsewhere (1 Cor. 15:33), he further warns: “Evil companionships (communications) corrupt good morals.” For, once the eye has grown evil and thoughts become corrupt, the sense of speech is not slow to express in words what is in the minds of people with whom we associate. Who has not heard the saying: “Like begets like”? Or: “Tell me with whom you go, and I will tell you what you are.” In other words, he that sees alike, will think alike; and they that think alike, will speak alike; and from thinking and speaking there is but one step to doing alike.

No one knows human nature better than Jesus, our Savior, knew it. And for the question under discussion He left us the parable of the prodigal son. This wayward son had become impregnated with evil thoughts and desires through bad companionship. Through his conversation with others he had heard of the liberties he might enjoy away from home. His home surroundings became distasteful, and he became restless. He asked his father for his inheritance — something he was not entitled to until after his father’s death. “He went abroad,” says Scripture, “and wasted his substance, living riotously” (Luke, 15:13). Upon his return, his brother states it more explicitly, by saying he “devoured his substance with harlots” (Luke, 15:30).

Here Our Lord points out every step that is taken by one who falls into grievous sins against the Sixth and Ninth Commandments. Had this young man not listened to the evil conversation of his

wicked and corrupt companions with whom he associated, his downfall would have been averted. And yet, there are those who think lightly of the immodest conversation that is carried on daily by and around them. You frequently hear them say: "Oh, we don't mean any harm by it. It is just in fun." But not all those who hear that filthy talk, will go away and believe "it was all in fun." In their quiet moments, the things they have heard will recur again and again to their minds. It becomes a scandal to them; and like the prodigal son, it may be the beginning of a coming downfall, a life of sin. Hence, without making any distinction, whether any harm is meant or not, Sacred Scripture, through the mouth of the Apostle, forbids all immodest language, saying: "Let no evil speech proceed from your mouth" (Eph., 4:29). "Put away filthy speech out of your mouth" (Col., 3:8).

Bad Actions.

— Speak no evil, do no evil! Or the reverse: speak about immodest things, and there is but one step to doing impure things! This brings us to another question which a Catholic priest would rather not speak about, but would prefer to pass over unnoticed. But were I, from false delicacy, to leave some of you entrusted to my care in dangerous ignorance of or in doubt concerning certain sinful acts, I might incur blame for serious injury to your souls and one day hear from God the awful sentence: "If you do not announce My word to man and make it known, I will require his blood (his soul) at your hand" (Ezech., 3:18).

First of all, we must proceed to answer some of our objectors, who do not agree with us on what we call forbidden or sinful actions.

Objection 1.

— "Why," they say, "insist upon an impossibility? Nobody keeps quite chaste. You don't understand what life is, until you've tasted life. Give me a man who has had experience, and then he can talk, if he wants."

Answer.

— As to the impossibility, we know that there is a large group of clean men and women composed of Catholics and non-Catholics alike, who conduct themselves quite as they should. They come to marriage, or even live out their whole life of single blessedness, without their purity ever losing its luster. There is still another group larger than the first, who, either through ignorance or through human frailty, have done wrong once perhaps, but never again. These quickly regain their friendship with God, and lead pure and noble lives the rest of their days.

Again, it is quite true that keeping oneself chaste involves the sacrifice of one experience, but it means the gaining of a better experience. For example, if I never had smallpox, I miss the experience of the infection of smallpox. Yet, is it not better to have experienced good health without the experience and marks of smallpox? Hence, you may answer the impure: "I agree that I have sacrificed one experience; but I have also gained one. And so have you. But the one I have gained is by far better than the one you have had. I have got nearer to true manhood, you nearer to animalhood."

Objection 2.

— Another fallacy you often hear is this: "A certain amount of indulgence is good for you. It quiets your nerves."

In reply we say:

Go and ask any reputable doctor whether it “is good for you.” He will tell you that our social diseases and nervous exhaustion, about which we hear a great deal today, are due to sexual debauchery. As to “quieting your nerves,” he will tell you that just the contrary is true. Why does every instructor for prize fights and athletics advocate the very opposite, namely, complete abstinence? The fact of the matter is that sexual indulgence is a short, acute shock to the nerves, leaving its scars and searing the conscience. But virtue’s experience “is like a glow, not a flash; an experience of happiness, not of mere pleasure.”

In every age there have been those who held that ever so often it was good, nay, even necessary, to ease one’s concupiscence, either through pollution, self-abuse, or intercourse with others. This is one of the trump charges which the lecherous and impure love to make, especially against the chastity of priests and Sisters.

Here is a story to the point. A certain anti-Catholic speaker was making these very charges against priests and Sisters. Amongst other charges he made this statement: “It is impossible for any man to remain pure for six months at a time.” A man in the audience arose, and asked the speaker this question: “You are a married man with a family, are you not?” “Yes,” was the speaker’s reply. “You just told us you recently spent nine months abroad on business, while your family was here at home, did you not?” “Yes,” was again the reply. “Then,” said the man in the audience, “I pity your wife and your children.” The audience caught the point, and booed the speaker from the platform.

These people deny the possibility or the advisability of continency. Do you know the meaning of that word? Continency means the positive abstention from all carnal pleasures under all circumstances. This does not include those nocturnal or periodical emissions, which are natural for a healthy, normal person of either sex. We affirm that physicians are in almost unanimous agreement with the statement of Dr. Henry Stanton, a recognized authority, who says: “Strict continence is neither injurious to health, nor does it produce impotence {as some contend}. While self-denial is difficult, since the promptings of nature often seem imperious, it is not impossible. It is certain that no youth will suffer physically by remaining sexually pure. The demands which occur during adolescence are mainly abnormal, due to the excitements of an over-stimulating diet, pornographic literature and art, and the temptations of impure association.” Of our own strength, yes, it might be physically impossible. But, says Our Lord “My grace is sufficient for you.” (2 Cor., 12:9). “The grace of God, by Jesus Christ, Our Lord.” (Rom., 7:25). And so counsels the Wise Man: “As I knew that I could not otherwise be continent, except God gave it, I went to the Lord, and besought Him with my whole heart” (Wis., 8:21). Prayer, then, gives us the added strength needed.

Objection 3.

— But our adversaries are persistent. Their next reply is: “Well, after all, these actions are but natural.”

The answer:

But this is only a half-truth, and that is why it sounds so plausible. In man, endowed with intellect and freewill, such actions uncontrolled are only partly natural. They correspond to instinct, which we have in common with the animal, the brute. But if they are duly controlled and properly governed by reason, they are fully natural. For actions through instinct go all the way in an animal, but only part of the way in man. Hence, to follow instinct and not reason would be to cut away the very part that makes man human — that which makes our acts human acts. Therefore, continency,

or control of sensual appetites by reason and instinct combined, is natural, and self-indulgence is not.

Even aside from a supernatural standpoint, let us not be misled by these false prophets of self-indulgence. Listen to this remarkable document. In accordance with the best medical opinion of the world, the following Bulletin (known as "General Headquarters Bulletin, No. 54") was issued from the American Army Staff in France, on August 7, 1918: "Sexual continence is the plain duty of members of the American Expeditionary Forces, both for the vigorous conduct of the war, and for the clean health of the American people after the war. Sexual intercourse is not necessary for good health, and complete continence is wholly possible... Commanding officers will urge continence on all men of their commands, as their duty as soldiers, and the best training for the enforced sexual abstinence at the front. Instruction, work, drill, athletics, and amusements will be used to the fullest extent in furthering the practice of continence. By command - of General Pershing. Official: Signed: Robert C. Davis, Adjutant General, James W. McAndrew, Chief of Staff."

Finally, if "it is but natural," then why the feeling of remorse that follows every abnormal sensual satisfaction? Why call it a temptation or sin at all, if it is but natural? Why call "each maid a heroine, and each man a friend," who overcomes that evil propensity, if it is but natural? Why, if the opposite is but natural, does Tennyson cry out in Sir Galahad:

My strength is as the strength of ten,

Because my heart is pure.

Nay, rather "blessed is the man that endures temptation," says St. James, "for when he has been proved, he shall receive the crown of life." (James 1:12.) Amen.
