Manners, Morals and Children

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Introduction

Over the past decade I have given a variety of talks to numerous audiences dealing with issues of raising children. Early on, I put my thoughts into written form, and I thank those who sent me valuable suggestions and those who urged me to assemble the material.

Some of the material that follows is re-worked versions of the following published materials: "The Father's Role in Home Schooling," in Mary Kay Clark, ed., *Catholic Home Schooling* (Front Royal, VA: Seton Home Study School Press, 1993), pp. 185-199. Study Guide for the Encyclicals *Veritatis Splendor* and *Fides et Ratio*, published by Familia. Scripts for the *Millennium Evangelization Project*, on Christian Marriage and Catholic Social Thought (1997).

In the appendices I reprint several articles, with the kind permission of the publishers: "Children in Church: an Important Distinction," *Envoy* (Sept.-Oct. 1997), 44-45. "Chastity Before Marriage: A Fresh Perspective," *The Catholic Faith* (September-October 1998), 14-16. "The Virtue of Purity," *The Catholic Faith* (March-April 1999), 31-33.

Contents

Part I: How to Have Well-Mannered Young Children

Manners and Morals

The old caricature of the heavy-handed and much feared father had its obvious problems, but today all too many fathers, including very sincere and dedicated fathers, are taking too laid-back an approach to discipline. I have worked in various classroom settings for many years and have become somewhat of a fanatic about a well-ordered classroom. It makes for a happier and more effective teacher, and it is what children really do want even though they appear to want just the opposite. That appearance is deceptive—they are begging for order. Our classrooms today all too often are inundated by unruly children, who then command most of the teacher's energy. Even an exceptionally competent and ordered teacher will soon become frustrated because classroom discipline problems are so deeply rooted in the uneven discipline of home life.

Perhaps the most important aspect of a good system of discipline is knowing what to expect from a child. Generally the expectations of parents today are far too low (though ironically the expectations in terms of achievement, at ever earlier ages, are often far too high). Children are capable of being well-mannered. One ought never look upon their children misbehaving in church, in a restaurant, or at the shopping center, and say "they're just kids." There are plenty enough legitimate situations for them to be "just kids."

The child's capacity to be well-mannered is analogous to a key feature of our moral life. We all have a tendency to misuse our freedom (to sin), a tendency called concupiscence in the theological tradition. But we have a capacity to resist this t tendency. As William May has put it, "we can do as we ought." Similarly children have a capacity to resist the tendency to be unruly. In both cases, we are happier when we rise above our lower appetites.

Interestingly, these two areas of our lives—manners and morals—affect and mutually condition one another. Of course there can be well-mannered thieves just as there can be ill-mannered saints. But in general a well-mannered person has made a lot of progress in developing good habits, and some of those good habits are already not just in the realm of manners, but in the realm of morality.

For instance, it is a matter of good manners to tell the cook "thanks for making this," to tell the person who drove you somewhere "thanks for taking me," and to congratulate the winner of a game. But when these good manners become habitual, one is also developing some of the moral virtues themselves, such as the virtue of gratitude. Or, the child trained to regularly ask adults "what can I do to help" is not only practicing good manners, but is developing the virtue of generosity.

In a word, manners are distinct from morals, but often the dividing line is thin. The two endeavors are closely related and mutually condition one another.

The Method of the "Pre-Emptive Strike"

A Method with a Guarantee

Let's get practical, immediately. How would you like to have well-mannered children in 14 days? I have a virtually-guaranteed method—and an easy entrance into this area for fathers—that I call the "method of the pre-emptive strike." The core of this method is to develop very concrete and clearly written out sets of standards or procedures for various situations, which will then be used *ahead of time, preemptively.*

Get ten large size file cards—one for each key setting that the family encounters regularly: family meals, driving in the car, shopping, attending church services, bedtime, etc. The spouses together develop a set of standards or procedures for each setting, and list them boldly on each respective card. For example, some standards one might put forth for one's children when attending church are: stand straight; don't fidget; fold your hands when kneeling—and the like.

The father must introduce this method to the children. He must be the "procedural manager"! While the method will work without the father's involvement, the 14-day guarantee does not then hold! In single-parent families, when the mother is the authority figure, it may take more time.

Over a period of three or four days, the father gradually introduces the new standards for each situation. For instance, before getting in the car (or pulling out of the driveway) the father goes over the procedures and has the children repeat them. He will also need to indicate the consequences for violating a procedure—more on that later.

Although the father usually is not home during the day, having his authority as the backbone of the system is essential. When a child is having particular difficulty with some situation, then the father can run through the procedures before going to work, and can review them upon returning home. I have occasionally called home during the day to talk to a child who was struggling with a particular procedure.

This is called the "method of the pre-emptive strike" because it anticipates problems in advance, which goes a long way toward avoiding them in the first place. Most parents work the other way around. They are not consistently clear about the standards to which they wish to hold their children, and then throw somewhat of a tantrum of their own when they see their children acting like brats! I'm sure you have done this, and know how ridiculous it looks. In fact, my own inspiration for this method came when I myself was throwing a fit over unruly children—I suddenly "looked down" on the whole situation and realized how silly it looked. I was angry at the children, but mostly angry at myself for not having a good preventative method.

Suggested Pre-emptive Guidelines/procedures

Remember: a) Go through these guidelines with children *beforehand*—that means before dinner, before starting the car, before going into Church, etc. b) Gradually have the children learn the procedures so that *they* can recite them upon request.

These are my suggestions--be sure to tailor them to fit your own children and their needs. They will work well for children 21/2 years old and up. Younger than that--be patient!

Build a file card for each situation. Don't start all the situations at once—choose one at a time, taking three or four days to introduce it, and gradually add on, perhaps a new situation every two weeks.

At the Table

Before dinner, ask, "What can I do to help?"

Don't start eating until prayers are said.

Always tell the cook "thanks for making this."

Eat with your mouth closed.

Always say "please" when you need something. No reaching.

No aggravating (kicking under the table, unkind comments, etc.).

Sit up straight; don't rock on your chair.

Don't leave the table without permission.

Older children: say at least one intelligent thing during the meal.

When the meal is over, ask, "May I please be excused?"

Remove your plate to the appropriate place.

In the Car

Use the bathroom before getting into the car.

Everyone wears a seat belt.

No loud noises—never disturb the driver.

Don't ask "are we there yet"—mom or dad will tell you from time to time how far it is.

No aggravating the person next to you.

In Church

Parents: Don't forget the religious book bag.

When standing stand straight, hands at side, or crossed in front or in back.

Don't lean on the pew.

Don't fiddle with your hands and face.

When kneeling, fold your hands, and keep them away from your face.

Don't aggravate your brother or sister.

Family Games

Everyone plays till the end—no quitting.

Everyone congratulates the winner.

No grumpy attitudes—be a good sport.

No aggravating

In the mall

No running**.**

No shouting.

Hands held behind your back in stores (You may never touch anything in a store without permission}.

Speak politely to those who speak to you.

Company--and whenever you are in the presence of adults

No "playing shy." Don't hide behind mom.

Always introduce yourself to a guest. Say, "Hi, my name is…, welcome to our house."

Always answer an adult if you are asked a question. Speak clearly.

When an adult leaves, say "goodbye, it was nice to see you."

When receiving a gift (birthdays, Christmas)

Always say “thank you” or “thanks a lot.”

Always open and read a card first if one comes with a present.

If you do not like the gift, keep your feelings to yourself and say “thank you very much.”

If you already own what someone gives you, don’t say so. Say “thank you very much.”

Bedtime

No getting out of bed. Once mom or dad says goodnight, you are not to be seen again.

No talking to one another after _____ o'clock.

In the morning, don’t come out until _____o'clock.

Quiet time

Stay in the place assigned to you.

Busy yourself with quiet activities—reading, drawing, sleeping.

Quiet time is not over till mom tells you it is over.

****Overall***

No whining—put this on every card!

Obey immediately--one strike and you're out of here to quiet-time land.

“Yes Ma'am, Yes Sir.”

Regularly ask, “What can I do to help?”

Say please and thank you, the magic words.

For Home-Schoolers

Have your “uniform” on the mornings of school days.

Treat your teacher(s) with respect.

Sloppy or incomplete work will be redone.

...and additional procedures tailored to each home-school setting.

Summary

Some final reminders about the method:

- Be sure Dad is involved. Again, when a child is having trouble in one area or another, Dad can go over the procedure-list before work, and this will be an enormous help. Plus, when violations occur Dad can be in charge of at least some of the consequences (see next section)—for instance, if a child needs to practice behaving in the car, Dad can attend to that practice-session.

- Be creative—don't follow my suggested lists blindly! Taylor the lists to fit your own situations.

- Introduce the lists gradually—to do this all at once would be overwhelming for kids and parents both!

- Spouses need to be in regular conversation, honing down their own version of the method for their own unique children. This project can actually be a great "marriage-builder" that turns the tables on problem-children as "marriage-busters."

The 14-Day Guarantee Checklist

Fathers especially, be consistent with the "pre-emptive strike method" and stick with it!!! Remember, a 14-day guarantee or your money back. But you have to do your part--here's a checklist:

_____ Are you going over the procedures *regularly,* before each dinner, each car trip, each trip to church?

_____Fathers, are you behind the method? Are you the initiator, with your wife following through?

_____Are the children memorizing the procedures so that they tell them to you upon request?

_____Are you working together on this, having agreed on the procedures and the consequences?

_____Spouses, are you spending a minimum of 20 minutes together each day, all alone, to discuss problems and work toward solutions? This is essential throughout the marriage, and especially important when embarking on a new effort like this method.

Consequences

Each family, of course, has to work out its own system of consequences for misbehavior. The most oft-asked questions I get in regard to this method have to do with consequences, and in particular with corporal consequences.

I have no inherent objection to striking a child, but more often than not the parents who do so regularly are at wits end.

Their child is out of control, and striking the child produces the opposite effect—an even more defiant child. There is an interesting irony here: Parents strike their kids because the parents are not in control and are desperately seeking control. But if you are in control of your kids, you won't *need* to strike them. The method of the pre-emptive "strike" solves the problem by putting parents in control. Save corporal punishment for rare occasions—when a child speaks rudely to an adult, or puts his life or another's life in danger. Then, such methods retain their efficacy.

What consequences should be used then? They must be immediate, and they must be pro-active. I offer two specific suggestions.

1. The time-out method is highly effective. It lets the child know that he is not welcome to be with others unless his is willing to act in a civilized way.

- Be *very* firm, though not angry, in sending (or taking) the child out. Do not listen to any arguments. This is non-negotiable.
- Be clear about how long the time-out is to last. Have an electronic timer to set in the child's time-out space. The child may not come out until the time is up.
- Firmly let the child know that they may not hit or destroy objects in the time-out room. If they want to cry and scream, they may bury their head in a pillow and do so.
- In some instances have the child do some job during the time-out, such as cleaning part of the room, or doing some task outdoors.
- When the timer rings, they must come back out.
- When the time-out is over, very clearly go over what the violation was and that it will not be tolerated. Ask for an apology.

I have seen many parents try the method of "*ignoring* the screaming kid who is throwing a fit." This advice is very wrong-headed! If one is in a public place, like the grocery store, it is highly annoying to other customers. If alone at home, the parent must put up with these ferocious beastly noises. The key is to *remove* the child temporarily from civilization. If a child throws a fit in a public place, *drop everything* and remove him immediately. If he can calm himself down out on the sidewalk or in the car, then try again. Otherwise, you may have to just head home, and get the child into a rather long time-out.

2. A second highly effective method is simply *practice:* if a child violates a procedure, have him practice doing it right. Let's take as an example how to handle kids who are resisting procedures for behavior in Church. This is from my article on the topic published in *Envoy* magazine (for the whole article, see the appendices).

A) On Sunday, go over the list of procedures before leaving for Mass, and on the way to Mass. Tell the children that—your choice here—a) they will get a special prize if they succeed, such as an extra donut for Sunday breakfast, or b) they will lose something, like half of their Sunday donut, if they bomb out.

B) Here goes! Remember one important rule: you must be vigilant—toward your kids—during Mass. This will take away some (or a lot) from your vigilance toward the Eucharistic Christ, but He'll understand perfectly. Too many parents ignore the children—"if she's not throwing a fit and making too much noise, let well enough alone—kids are kids." Your children deserve, and are capable of, a lot more. Be vigilant.

C) If all went well the first Sunday, consider it a special blessing. But let's assume things don't go so well, especially if bad habits are already formed. (My home parish church is called the "Chapel of the Incarnation"—some kids are habituated to it being the "playground of the Incarnation!") Don't blow your top; say a prayer, and start again.

D) The second week, repeat everything from the first week--with one addition. Explain that the only way to become good at something is to practice, so hold one, two or three (your choice again) very short practice sessions during the week. Have them practice sitting and standing properly. They will get the point: you are dead serious about this new gift to Christ. Be sure to practice the night before (or in the morning if you are the rare well-organized family on Sunday mornings).

E) With the second try at Sunday Mass--and don't forget to go over the expectations (or "procedures") on the way to Church—you'll be surprised at the improvement. But let's be realistic and assume there was a major or minor disaster. Plan for this, and be ready to have a practice session *after* Mass *in* Church. If they didn't think you were serious before, they'll know you are now. Be vigilant.

So, there's an example of how to apply the "practice" method. This can also be done in many of the other areas of family life. In the next section I give another example.

The Aggravation Machine

The equipment children carry around with them includes a small black box, visible only to them, called the "aggravation machine." It has a big dial on it, and at any time the child can crank up that dial just to the point where he gets his sibling to go berserk. When children get older (10 or 12) they can trade in their aggravation machines for a bigger model. Then their aggravating can get seriously out of hand. In fact, sibling tensions can become so fierce that they remain well into adulthood.

Parents can easily put a stop to this. On every file card discussed above they can put "no aggravating."

If two children in particular have gotten into a real "aggravating rut," the parents must make a special card just for them--a personalized set of procedures for how to treat each other. Parents must go over this card with the children three times each day--more if the situation is really out of hand. The *pre-emptive* approach is of the essence here.

Make it very clear--put it right on the card--that when one comes complaining that the other has aggravated, you are not going to take sides in the dispute, trying to (impossibly) find out who was most at fault. When there is bickering/aggravating, both of the bickerers/aggravators pay the price**.**

A Few More Thoughts on Virtuous Families

A Little Note on Having a Large Family

Each couple must conscientiously discern, using the virtue of prudence, God's will as regards family size. But some couples become convinced too soon that they cannot handle more than two children. Their two children use up every bit of their energy. But it only gets *easier* with more children, for the older children set a wonderful context within which to guide the younger ones.

For instance, at Mass each older child can be "in charge of" a younger child. It's great seeing an older child remind a younger one of the procedures to follow. Same thing at the dinner table—the older ones set a good (usually) example and the younger set follows suit.

A delightful anecdote: at the University of Dallas where I work, we had numerous students from the Ostermann family of 14 children. When the last one graduated, the press did lots of interviews, with the obvious question "where did you find the energy?" I loved the response of Mr. Ostermann: "One child takes all your time and energy, what difference can 14 more make?"

Self-Esteem

Perhaps the greatest threat to a good system of discipline is a noxious idea that has run rampant in our culture: that self-esteem is the most important goal to strive for in raising children. This is a rather deadly idea because is gets right in the way of discipline—when you must be firm with children you simply do not feel as though you are helping their self-esteem, and so you will draw back (and be quite ineffective).

Here are some typical examples of self-esteem-ism (quotes from an editorial by Leonard Pitts, Dallas Morning News, Oct. 4 '95 p. 21A):

> James Windell, *Eight Weeks to a Well-Behaved Child:* "When parents criticize a child, the child's self-esteem gradually erodes."
>
> Dorothy Briggs, *Your Child's Self-Esteem:* "Blame is at the core of emotional disorder and low self-esteem."

> Thomas Gordon, *Child* magazine: October: says that blaming children for their misdeeds causes them to feel "inadequate, unloved, or unjustly accused."

Don't get me wrong—self-esteem is obviously an absolutely crucial component of a healthy human being, but here is the catch: it is not an end in itself. If you try hard to help someone (or to help yourself) have self-esteem, you will probably fail. Self- esteem is an *end product*, something that comes about as a result of having done other things—like discipline—well. It is very much like happiness. Most people who try hard to be happy fail. Happiness comes about as the *result* of a well-lived life. It cannot be pursued in and of itself. Rather, if you lead an ordered life, you will simply find yourself to be happy. Likewise, if children are properly raised, which especially means being challenged to live up to good objective standards of conduct, they will simply find themselves to have high self-esteem. Another catch: they often will not tell you how happy they are!

The Family Council Meeting

There is a lot of trial and error involved in the pre-emptive method. The important thing is not having a perfect system, but rather that a consistent program exists and is in a constant state of upgrading. Part of the constant upgrading in a family is the "family council meeting," held regularly (e.g., every Saturday after breakfast.) This is a time when all the older children along with mom and dad can vent their complaints and problems. Such a meeting serves the purpose of a "mini-retreat" where everyone can stand back and look at difficulties a bit more objectively. It is most helpful for children to know that they can voice a complaint, and that the complaint can be intelligently discussed (outside the context within which the complaint arose). When complaints arise during the week, have the children write them out and put them in a special jar for the upcoming family council meeting.

The Family Meal

Every night is ideal, but try for at least twice a week—a full 45 minutes together. Turn off the TV!

Consider learning some new prayers for before and after the meal.

Get the children in the habit--see the list of procedures above--of saying one intelligent thing during the meal. As Aristotle said, inferior minds discuss things, mediocre minds discuss people, superior minds discuss ideas. Dads, a suggestion to motivate such "superior minds": take a new vocabulary word, tailored for your children's ages, and challenge them to use it in a sentence sometime during the meal.

After the meal, or before dessert, take ten minutes to do some "fun" academic work together. Memorize, a line at a time, important documents like the Gettysburg Address and the first part of the Declaration of Independence. Try memorizing easy poetry. And read stories from William Bennett's *The Book of Virtues* and *The Moral Compass*.

It will take your children time to adjust to such a family meal, and to break the "eat and run" habit. Remember to use the list of pre-emptive procedures *before the meal.* Be fair—let them

know in advance what your expectations are, including the expectation that they stick around after eating to ingest some “soul” food .

How to Stop Kids from Whining

I have begun a national campaign to stop whining! You know the placards that say “thanks for not smoking?” In my home a similar placard says, “thanks for not whining.” Don’t allow kids to whine in your home! Whining saps precious energy from parents. You get so used to it you don’t know that it saps energy from you. But the good news is that it doesn’t have to happen. How would you like to have all that energy back?

To prevent whining at home, use one of two methods, or a combination depending on the circumstances.

1. The “try again” practice method for minor instances of whining. Just tell the child to try again in a human tone of voice.

2. The “super-quick time-out.” Tell the whining child "we do not listen to whiners. Go to your room and come back when you are ready to speak in a normal voice."

Within 14 days (there’s my guarantee again) you will have no whining children! Your faith in humanity will be restored, and you will be amazed at how much extra energy you have. Whining kids sap energy out of us. Join my national campaign!

When your children have friends over, make clear to those friends the "rules of the house" which include no whining. You'll be surprised at how easy it is to get these kids to not whine, even though they might do it a lot at home. Kids don't really *want* to whine. It's a bad habit. They are happier with themselves when they are being more fully human.

"Couch Time" for Spouses

It is so easy for busy spouses to avoid one another, especially to avoid delicate issues. Life is so busy that they can easily distract themselves from little problems in the marriage, which then can easily become big problems.

The solution is an absolute commitment to spend at least 20 minutes a day with just each other--just sitting on the couch together. For my wife and I, it's taking a walk around the neighborhood. Problems won't be solved immediately. But the *context* is set within which problems can gradually come to the surface and gradually be solved. At times the 20 minutes will be spent in small talk, or very little talk. It is all right to avoid a problem for a little while. But again, the *context* is present for the problem to come to the surface, be confronted, and solved.

Going to the Opposite Extreme of Authoritarianism--a Warning

In our culture today, given the emphasis on a misunderstood notion of self-esteem, children are all too often raised without decent manners and morals. They become little “autonomous units” doing their own thing, with their parents (and then, sadly, teachers) wrapped around their little fingers.

Hence, most of what we have focused on thus far is a method for helping children be more disciplined. However, there is a particular danger into which parents using such methods can fall.

Well-intentioned parents can go to the opposite extreme and become rigidly authoritarian, lacking tenderness and love. Granted, this is not a prevalent problem, but I've seen it happen in a number of instances. It is important to hit the middle point, the “mean,” between excess and defect, between authoritarianism and spinelessness.

How can you tell if you've hit the mean, the right balance? You might be succeeding in having well-mannered children, but how do you know if you've become excessively authoritarian? Ask yourself these questions: Is there plenty of laughter in the family? Is there plenty of affection? Do you exchange kind words to your children regularly? Do your children look forward to seeing you? Do they talk to you freely?

If not, you may have gone too far in the opposite direction. Your children may become hesitant or even afraid; always thinking you are about to criticize them for something. There is a great section in the pope’s encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* that can help get a good perspective in this regard.

On the one hand, the Catholic moral life rejects the notion of autonomy—the notion that we each decide for ourselves what is right and wrong. But the Church equally rejects what is termed in the encyclical a heteronomy—that is, a moral system in which an alien God imposes his moral law on us from the outside in a purely authoritarian mode. God’s laws are not just “rigid and authoritarian.” They are built to be friendly to our nature; they are built for our ultimate happiness. Even though we may rebel at times against them, when we align ourselves with them we know we are much happier.

> ...obedience to God is not, as some would believe, a "heteronomy," as if the moral life were subject to the will of something all-powerful, absolute, extraneous to man and intolerant of his freedom. If in fact a heteronomy of morality were to mean a denial of man's self-determination or the imposition of norms unrelated to his good, this would be in contradiction to the Revelation of the Covenant and of the redemptive Incarnation. Such a heteronomy would be nothing but a form of alienation, contrary to divine wisdom and to the dignity of the human person. (41)

Article 41 of the encyclical goes on to note that the Catholic moral life steers between the extremes of *autonomy* and *heteronomy.* The encyclical uses the term “participated theonomy” to indicate the middle point, the “mean,” between these extremes. The fancy term “participated theonomy” simply means that God’s law is placed *within* us, and is good for us, friendly to our being (we *participate* in it). It still is a law, and is still absolute—no relativism here—but it is a law that is made by a loving God who wants us to be happy and respects our uniqueness and our freedom.

How does this apply to raising well-mannered children? In avoiding the spineless methods that lead to autonomous kids—kids who do what they want to do—we must also avoid heteronymous methods that are alien and authoritarian. Firmness, yes. But also lots of love and laughter, and a good dose of flexibility. Then our kids know that our firmness is rooted in genuine love for I them as unique individuals.

Some basic "procedures" for avoiding heteronomous parenting:

- Whenever possible, whenever the need is not immediate, give children advance warning of something they need to get done. Otherwise they will resent the interruption.
- Be sure you are clear in your requests—politely ask them to repeat what you have requested to make sure there are no misunderstandings.
- Speak kindly and calmly—even when being firm.
- Show gratefulness to your children for their cooperation.
- Without falling into the "constant reward for everything" syndrome, at times do special things or give special things as rewards not so much for a specific task they've done but for being overall great children.
- Don't ever "break a child's will." Using harsh methods, this may bring perfect compliance, but the behavior will have been forced on the child, rather than the child choosing the right behavior.

More on this last point: Note that God never forces the right behaviors on us. He allows us to choose it. He is *training* our will, rather than *breaking* our will. Consider this example: A strong willed child leaves a task undone. The parent could harshly beat the child until the child agrees to finish the job. Or the parent can allow the child to choose between finishing the job and losing some other privilege. In the latter case, without being wishy-washy, the child genuinely chooses the good.

A Note on Mom and Dad's Relationship as an Example

Couples can easily fall into somewhat harsh, uncaring patterns of behaviors with one another. It is not too uncommon to hear couples speak to one another in rather nasty tones of voice. This can become habitual, to the point where the lack of kindness is not even noticed. But the children will pick up on this alienating type of behavior. Couples need to speak kindly and politely to one another as a model of how a man treats a woman and a woman treats a man. Of course, every couple will have the occasional spat—but don't let this happen in front of the children, or at least only rarely.

Part II: Getting Through the Teenage Years

Distinguishing Individual*ity* and Individual*ism*

In charting the difficult course of parenting for adolescents there is a very important distinction to make: the difference between individual*ity* and individual*ism*. It is very easy to confuse the two. The former is a great good, affirmed by the Church. The latter—an individualism that says "I can do what I want"—is a great evil.

To help young people—and ourselves—understand this, consider an analogy. To be a good sportsman or musician, one wants to be unique, not the same as everyone else. But to be unique, one must first learn the basic skills of the sport or the instrument. Only on that solid foundation can you then go on to become truly unique. Any superstar will agree.

Or try this analogy: think of the house of your dreams—maybe a beautiful log chalet in the mountains or next to a stream. You want it designed uniquely—no one else will have a house quite like this one. But the house will only be as good as the foundation! And the foundation will not be unique—it will follow the standard rules for building a good foundation. Has anyone ever shown off their house to you by bragging about the beauty and uniqueness of the foundation? Rather, they show off its unique features. But if you don't have a solid, standard foundation, your unique house won't last very long.

In the moral life, too, we want to be unique persons. But we must build that uniqueness on a solid, standard basis. A central theme of *Veritatis Splendor* is that our uniqueness and freedom as individual persons is not only compatible with our having a common, universal human nature, but that our genuine freedom is only found when we align ourselves with this nature.

> ...universality does not ignore the individuality of human beings, nor is it opposed to the absolute uniqueness of each person. On the contrary, it embraces at its root each of the person's free acts, which are meant to bear witness to the universality of the true good. (51)

The Lower Limit—and No Upper Limit

The foundation of the moral life might be called the moral foundation or moral "bedrock". One ought never violate the moral norms in this bedrock. However, what about *above and beyond* this bedrock? There is a lower limit—so is there also an upper limit?

Remember the rich young man in Jesus' parable? He told Jesus he was already following all the commandments, and wanted to know if anything else was necessary. He was really hoping there would be an upper limit, and that it wouldn't be too high. But there is no upper limit, and this is what allows for the incredible diversity and uniqueness of each person striving to live the Catholic moral life. We all should share a common foundation, avoiding all the evils that Christ, through the Church, prohibits. Above that, the sky is the limit. This is the open-ended life of virtue where uniqueness truly flowers. No one practices the virtues in exactly the same way—we each bring our uniqueness to them.

> ...the fact that only, the negative commandments oblige always and under all c1rcumstances does not mean that in the moral life prohibitions are more important than the obligation to do good indicated by the positive commandments. The reason is this: the commandment of love of God and love of neighbor does not have in its, dynamic any higher limit, but it does have a lower limit, beneath which the commandment is broken

> [there is no upper limit to the life of virtue, but the moral bedrock provides a lower limit under which we must not fall if we are to stay in right relation to God, neighbor and self]. (52)

One of the most important truths you can communicate to your children as they grow into the teenage and young adult years is, that there is a "lower limit" beneath which they should not go —avoid evil at all costs. What if someone forces you to go below that limit? What if someone exerts enormous pressure on you to violate an absolute norm—even at risk of your job, let's say?

At the heart of the Christian moral life is the conviction that it is better to die than to do evil.

> Finally, it is always possible that man, as the result of coercion or other circumstances, can be hindered from doing certain good actions; but he can never be hindered from not doing certain actions, especially if he is prepared to die rather than to do evil." (52) (The theme of martyrdom with which the pope ends this text is amplified in the third part of VS, 90-93.)

This is an excellent truth to instill in your children, especially as they grow into young adulthood. A great motto to reinforce in them is "I'd rather die than do evil." Think of the famous story of St. Maria Goretti, who was willing to die rather than engage in unchaste acts with a demanding young man. Another pithy way to put the motto: "You'll make me do evil *over my* dead *body."* (Entrepreneurs out there--how about a new WWJD gimmick? OMDB!)

Seeking a strong sense of unique personal identity—individuality—is natural to young people. In this quest they invariably start to question things, and "push" their limits. All too often they fall straight into individualism—"I can do my own thing, I make up my own moral rules." Let them know clearly what the lower limit is—they desperately want this to be reinforced in their lives even though they may often seem to be totally uninterested in it, even in rebellion against it.

What are some of these "lower limit" norms? They would include:

i) Do not abuse your sexuality--save the marital act of sexual intercourse for your future spouse. This is a great gift to yourself and to your spouse.

ii) Obey your father and mother. You may often disagree, and there may be some battles, but the bottom line is that you are living in this household and are not free to do whatever you wish.

iii) Speak the truth to your parents. Don't lie, don't cover up.

iv) Attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.

v) Be honest in school—don't cheat your way through a course that is not your favorite.

The "lower limit" is pretty straightforward. How would you distinguish this lower limit from the "upper echelons" of the moral life, some of those expectations that are more in the realm of ideals rather than moral absolutes?

The many virtues are instances of the higher reaches of the moral life, to which there is no limit —virtues like magnanimity, patience, forbearance, endurance, and on and on. You want to speak about these virtues with your teenagers and young adults, but they are not in the same category as the absolute norms.

To recall the house analogy—the builder can give you absolute answers about your foundation, and about its absolute importance—but he cannot tell you exactly how to design your house. He can point you in many right directions, but the plan for your dream home is yours. I

Some examples: the virtue of purity requires a great deal of effort and prayer. While one can be expected not to break the absolute norms regarding sexuality, the development of a pure mind is a lifelong project. Likewise, acting charitably is a lifelong project that cannot be "absolutely required" of a young person, or any person. There are many actions contrary to charity that are forbidden, but the full life of charity is a unique, personal lifelong journey.

Application to the Practical Order: House Rules

We have been speaking here primarily about moral norms, in relation to the virtues, but the key point, the key insight, can easily, and helpfully, be extended to general "house rules" as well. You can build a list of "lower limit absolutes" that simply will not be tolerated in your home. Then, list some "upper limit" expectations that you urge your teenagers to do, but cannot and ought not mandate absolutely.

There is an incredibly effective and sound psychological technique at work here. You are letting your teenager know that *they can easily get away with rebelling against your expectations.* Their natural proclivity—at different intensities in different adolescents—to rebel, to set their own course, *has an outlet.*

Then, when it comes to the "lower limit absolutes," it is much easier for the adolescent to toe the line, having already "done his own thing" in the "no upper limit" realm.

What should you put in the lower limit list? Everyone's list is going to be different, but here is a model to consider

The Lower-Limit Bedrock:

- Let us always know where you are going.
- Be back at the agree-upon time.
- Be at Mass on Sunday.
- Check with us about any major purchases or changes to your living quarters.
- Absolutely no alcohol
- Absolute minimum GPA in school _____.
- Types of music and literature prohibited in this house: _____.

- Basic standards of cleanliness of one's room and clothes.

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How about *Upper-Level Expectations?*

- Work to your full potential in school.
- Set a great example for the younger children--meals, in Church, etc.
- Take one of the younger children under your wing and help with his religious ed
- Help with extra things around the house and yard
- Etc.—you get the idea!

These high standards are *exhortative,* not strictly required. The Church exhorts us to live the highest ideals of virtue, but the basic rules for being a Catholic are set pretty low. Likewise, parents can invite their adolescents to live our high ideals, while being very realistic about the basic absolute rules.

Just as the Church's method is very psychologically—and spiritually—sound, so too this method for adolescents. It makes sense; it is friendly to our being.

Sunday Worship and the Rebellious Teenager

Imagine (or recall) a situation where your adolescent, or young adult, starts questioning the value of Sunday worship. He goes on to say that he is not sure he believes in Christianity anymore—he is "searching" and feels he ought not have to go to mass. How might you respond?

One response is to note that even if he were to reject Christianity he would still be obligated *by the natural law* to worship publicly in some way. "The celebration of Sunday observes the moral commandment inscribed by nature in the human heart to render to God an outward, visible, public, and regular worship "as a sign of his universal beneficence to all.'" (CCC 2176)

A second response fits under the fourth commandment. Imagine a young adult who has rejected the faith. Whether he is living at home, or visiting home (Christmas or summer) he must follow the standards of your home, established by his parents whom he is obligated to honor. One of the most important standards is "in our home, we honor God at mass on Sundays." This will be a genuine "pain in the neck" to him, but always remember that good and responsible parents *have* to be pains in the neck from time to time.

Note that in using this method, you are focusing on the *natural law,* not on the truths of the Catholic religion or any other religion. The natural law is analogous to a set of instructions that the manufacturer of a product puts in the box. It lets you know the right way to make the product

work. We tend to want to "figure it out on our own" but we are happier when we follow the manufacturer's instructions.

The natural law is God's set of instructions inside us. We know the natural law almost instinctively, and we can also grasp it and understand it using our reason (not faith). Let you children know that whatever choices they make about religion, they are bound to follow the natural law *as human beings.*

More often than not, the reason young people (and others) rebel against the faith is because they want an excuse for some immoral behavior, be it immoderate use of alcohol so as to be "cool," or immoral sexual behavior, or cheating through a difficult course in school. It is very convenient to suddenly have a faith crisis: "I'm not sure about Jesus and the Church—and so while I am in this crisis I don't have to follow the rules of Jesus and the Church."

Big logical error!!! Even if you end up abandoning Jesus and His Church, you are bound by the natural law. Imagine a drunk driver telling the relatives of his victim that he's "not a religious person" and so doesn't have to follow "Christian" rules about drinking, Balderdash! Drinking and driving is a violation of the natural law written on the hearts of all. So likewise, your adolescent cannot say "I'm not sure about Christianity any more, so I can cheat, or fornicate, or get drunk." That's rationalization!

Once a young person realizes he can't use his "faith crisis" as a convenient excuse to create his own moral universe, more often than not he will no longer have a *reason* to question or abandon his faith. And them the faith will be an excellent aid—an essential aid—in following the natural moral law.

After 18 (but read this before that happens!)

Should parents "interfere" in their children's lives after age 18? Or just let them be? The *Catechism* offers some judicious advice. On the one hand, "Parents should be careful not to exert pressure on their children either in the choice of a profession or in that of a spouse." On the other hand, "This necessary restraint does not prevent them...from giving their children judicious advice, particularly when they are planning to start a family." (CCC 2230)

Be *pre-emptive* about these things: talk about them early on, when they are not even an issue. Your advice can be divided into two categories: those items involving Truth itself, and those practical items more on the side of common sense. Issues about marriage and sexuality fall into the first category. Advice on finances would fall into the second.

In category 1—Matters of Truth—here are 5 matters that you should discuss just prior to your young adult's 18th birthday.

A. Do not cohabit before marriage; do not fornicate.

B. Marry within the Church.

C. Be open to children and raise them in the Catholic faith.

D. Do not use artificial contraceptives.

E. Tithe.

I will lead you through some points on A and B. On point D, may I highly recommend that you and your young adult listen together to Prof. Janet Smith's readily available tape *Contraception--Why Not?*

A. Cohabitation

If your young adult decides to cohabit, what should you do? Be sure to let them know *ahead of time* what you will do. Don't wait until a disaster happens, and everyone's passions preclude rational and civil discussion. If you have waited, calm down, be rational, and be civil.

The Kansas Bishops have produced a fine letter on cohabitation, and it would be a great text to read together with your young adult(s). It is available on the Internet. This is an eminently practical document and notes all the reasons why cohabitation is dangerous.

You for your part must spell out what the consequences would be of cohabitation in terms of family relationships. At the least, make it clear that you as parents, and other younger family members, will not in good conscience be able to visit their place of residence. At the same time, however, make clear your continued love and willingness to forgive.

B. Marrying Within the Church--Invalid Marriage

First, something that is *not* invalid. If your son or daughter would like to marry a baptized person who is not Catholic, that does not constitute an invalid marriage. Catholics recognize the validity of Protestant baptism, and with proper dispensation (through the diocese) a Catholic can marry a Protestant—a "mixed marriage."

Invalid marriage means, among other things, marrying outside the Church. The theology behind this is spelled out in several appendices of this book. As with cohabitation, you must make it clear that you cannot in good conscience attend an invalid marriage. Further, you cannot in good conscience *recognize* it as a marriage. Note that it is a matter of being true to your conscience, a conscience informed by Catholic doctrine on love, sexuality and marriage. Ask that your conscience be respected.

Part III: Special Material for Fathers

The Father's Role of Headship in the Family

According to the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, in the document *The Church in the Modern World*,

> The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity. But if it is to achieve the full flowering of its life and its mission, it needs the kindly communion of minds and the joint

> deliberation of spouses, as well as the painstaking cooperation of parents in the education of their children {#52).

The very next line of the document says: “The active presence of the father is highly beneficial to their formation.”

While one of course is a father at the conception of the first child, he must work to *become* who he is—just as a person initiated into a religious community must work to become who they are. In each case, one must work at being faithful to the new kind of life now possessed.

Many people who were raised as Catholics experience, as adults, a kind of conversion to the faith they already possess, a whole-hearted affirmation of the Church and the sacramental life. A similar conversion occurs for many fathers. They of course are committed to their family, but a part of their heart—often a significant part—lies elsewhere. Writer George Gilder has described how men have a natural impulse to be free and unfettered, a tendency to be “barbarians”, and how they must sacrifice this impulse to hearth and home—to the values of the family.

This task is made especially difficult in our own society for a whole host of reasons. John Paul II, in *The Role of the Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio,* F.C.), devotes a special section to fathers, in which he says:

> Above all where social and cultural conditioning so easily encourage a father to be less concerned with his family or at any rate less involved in the work of education, efforts must be made to restore socially the conviction that the place and task of the father in and for the family is of unique and irreplaceable importance {F.C. #25).

Fathers need to convert fully to the gift they possess; as John Paul II says, “the man is called upon to live his gift and role as husband and father” {F.C., #25).

What impact does this idea of “conversion to the family” have on education? The education of one’s children is no longer just one more item in a long string of exhausting duties. Education is so essential a part of the child’s life that, regardless of the kind of schooling chosen by the parents, the father becomes integrally involved in the whole process. As John Paul II says,

> ...a man is called upon to ensure the harmonious and united development of all the members of the family: he will perform this task by exercising generous responsibility for the life conceived under the heart of the mother, by a more solicitous commitment to education, a task he shares with his wife... (F.C. #25).

If parents have chosen a public or parochial school, it is essential for both parents—not just the mother—to be integrally involved with the educational process. Those who get the most out of a school system are the ones who are constantly involved in the whole process, both at home and at the school. (And it often occurs to such parents that if they are already so involved in education, why not home school and get the additional benefits?)

The Breadwinner's Attitude Toward the Mother

Fathers—even those really committed to their families—may easily suppose that it is the wife’s task to be most involved in the educational process of the children. Of course she is going to be more involved as regards amount of time spent. But, I submit, both father and mother must be

equally involved in the task itself. Consider this analogy. In pregnancy and childbirth, the mother obviously spends the greatest quantity of time. But the qualitative aspect of the project itself requires an equal donation of energy and commitment from both parents. So too with education. It must be a primary commitment for both, even though that commitment will be lived out in different ways that involve different quantities of time. The father should never have to say "my wife does most of the work when it comes to the education of the children."

It is extraordinarily easy for the husband to fall into the mistaken way of thinking in which he considers himself to have the really important and challenging work and his wife who stays at home to have the easier job. Husbands need to reverse this way of thinking! Wives and mothers have the more important role as well as the more difficult role. As George Gilder has put it,

> The woman assumes charge of what may be described as the domestic values of the community--its moral, aesthetic, religious, nurturant, social, and sexual concerns. In these values consist the ultimate goals of human life-- all those matters that we consider of such extreme importance that we do not ascribe financial worth to them. Paramount is the worth of the human individual life, enshrined in the home, and in the connection between woman and child. These values transcend the marketplace *(Men and Marriage* [Gretna, LA: Pelikan, 1986), p. 168).

Likewise, Pope John Paul II recognizes that "the true advancement of women requires that clear recognition be given to the value of their maternal and family role, by comparison with all other public roles and all other professions," and speaks of the "original and irreplaceable meaning of work in the home and in rearing children" (F.C., #23) .Add to this the task of being the primary moderator of the home school! In a word, a crucial contribution to the home school on the part of the father is his attitude toward his wife. Needless to say, children pick up very quickly on the quality of relationship between their two parents and are profoundly influenced by it.

The Father's Role in Teaching Religion, Chastity and Purity

It is essential for the father to teach, or at least co-teach, his children about religion. Due to the inherent differences between male and female, women have a more natural proclivity to enter into an attitude of worship before their God. Men have to surrender a hefty portion of their ego to do so—and this is no easy task. But it is absolutely crucial that the children see their father doing this. They must see their father pray and they must hear their father speak and teach with pride about that noblest possession of the Catholic home school—the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. As John Paul II says:

> The concrete example and living witness of parents is fundamental and irreplaceable in educating their children to pray. Only by praying together with their children can a father and mother—exercising their royal priesthood—penetrate the innermost depths of their children's hearts and leave an impression that the future events in their lives will not be able to efface (F.C., #60).

The pope then quotes Pope Paul VI's appeal to mothers, and then to fathers:

> And you, fathers, do you pray with your children, with the whole domestic community, at least sometimes? Your example of honesty in thought and action, joined to some common

> prayer, is a lesson for life, an act of worship of singular value. In this way you bring peace to your homes: *Pax huic domui.* Remember, it is thus that you build up the Church (F.C., #60).

(In this last sentence, we find a cardinal tenet of Catholic social thought: that the proper role of the laity is to build up the Church not chiefly by doing "churchly" things in the parish, though in this regard the donations of those who have time are of inestimable value; rather, their role is to bring transcendent truths to bear in the home and in society at large.)

When children see their father taking his religion seriously, they learn that religion is not in "the woman's sphere"—it is in the sphere of all who acknowledge themselves to be creatures rather than their own gods. They learn that freedom is not "doing your own thing," being autonomous, but rather a gracious surrender to a higher truth. We are most free when we are bound to the truth.

On the practical side, as regards religion, I would suggest combining the catechism, the Bible and good biographies of Christian heroes. When my children learned the catechism, they memorized one or two questions per day. They would greet me when I came home with the answer to their assigned question—a most successful technique. And an added bonus: the answers to the catechism are in finely crafted sentences, the memorization of which facilitates the child's knowledge of grammar and composition as well as of the faith.

In the context of teaching religion, it is important to note the father"s irreplaceable role in educating toward chastity. John Paul II connects this role to one of the principles of Catholic social thought, the principle of *subsidiarity,* which among other things asks that tasks which belong to a particular rung of the societal ladder, such as at the family level, ought not be taken over by higher levels, such as the State. Rather, the higher levels should serve the family and give them help (*subsidium*) in carrying out their appointed task.

> Sex education, which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them. In this regard, the Church reaffirms the law of subsidiarity, which the school is bound to observe when it cooperates in sex education, by entering into the same spirit that animates the parents (F.C., #37, emphasis added).

The pope goes on to note the central role of chastity is such formation:

> In this context education for chastity is absolutely essential, for it is a virtue that develops a person's authentic maturity and makes him r her capable of respecting and fostering the "nuptial meaning" of the body. Indeed, Christian parents, discerning the signs of God's call, will devote special attention and care to education in virginity or celibacy as the supreme form of that self-giving that constitutes the very meaning of human sexuality (F.C., #37).

What practical steps can the father take in his children's education to chastity? First, be a real man and, 'toss', the TV. Do this literally if you can, but if you are like me, at least put it on wheels and keep it in the closet most of the time (baseball is better on radio anyway). If there were only one thing you were allowed to do for your family, this would be the optimal choice. It will educate to chastity and to many other virtues as well.

More directly, talk to your children about the virtues, and keep chastity and purity in the front line. When teaching the sixth commandment, explain its meaning for them, namely, that God wants them to respect their bodies and to respect their sexual organs in a special way. You must be very concrete with your sons as they grow toward and through puberty.

Define purity in clear terms. Talk about how to refrain from playing with themselves, with a language that is humane and that will not produce excessive guilt should they fail. Ask them at regular intervals, "how are you doing with purity?" Don't get mad at them if they are struggling with it but encourage them, letting them know that God will be patient with them but also that God wants them to master their desires. When saying goodbye to your adolescents, on their way to school or wherever, try to be more creative than "see ya later." Try "keep a pure mind," or, "follow the natural law."

No doubt all this is a challenging task—but keep the lines of communication open. They will know that you are there willing to answer big questions when they arise. In all of this, you will find *yourself* strengthened in chastity as well. Stress to your children (and to yourself) that being chaste is a truly heroic activity.

When your children become adolescents and start paying attention to members of the opposite sex, some have suggested that, after appropriate discussion, you give your sons (mom can work with your daughters) a special ring—a ring of purity—as a sign or reminder that they have pledged to God that they will remain chaste.

Fathers, as heads of your families, you are performing the most important of all tasks in your life. For as the Holy Father tells us, "The future of humanity passes by way of the family" (F.C., #86).

For further practical suggestions regarding chastity and purity, two articles are included in the appendices.

Appendices

Appendix 1: "Children in Church? An Important Distinction" Reprinted from *Envoy (Sept.-Oct. 1997), 44-45.*

I. The Catholic Church loves and welcomes children at Mass!

We should expect and welcome the full range of humanity at Mass. We expect and accept those who are tone deaf and those who spontaneously add a perfect harmony to a hymn. We expect and accept those who can afford to dress well and those with clean but more modest apparel. And likewise, we should expect and accept both the elderly individual who might drift off during a long homily (and even snore!) and the young child who can't restrain from expressing himself during the communion service ("this is too long.").

A friend recounted to me a particularly splendid example of a child's involvement. In church on Good Friday he was explaining to his 4-year-old son the ceremony in which the faithful touch or

kiss the wood of the cross as a sign that they are ready to follow Christ. His son squirmed out of his arms to the floor, and with a determined look and the exuberance of a soldier before battle, shouted “I'm ready!” But whether disturbances are delightful or not (the crying baby prior to being taken out), they are par for the course.

The Eucharistic liturgy is the “source and summit” of the Church's life, and the whole Church is welcome! One can develop the habit of focusing on the liturgical prayers, and not allowing every disturbance to be a distraction. Instead, such “disturbances” serve to remind us that we are at prayer as a true community, as the mystical body of Christ, not as an aggregate of autonomous individuals.

II. The Catholic Church encourages manners as well as morals.

The child who causes a disturbance at Mass should be a child who is in the process of being well-trained in good manners. This training process is at times arduous, but as long as it is in gear no one should be bothered by the occasional slip-up. It is analogous to the moral life: we wish to see children in the process of being well-trained in moral virtue. The occasional sin in the midst of this process is to be expected and tolerated as part of the child’s moral growth and development.

What is to be strongly discouraged is the allowance of children in Church who are not in the process of being well trained. Until this process has begun, parents should keep such children out of Church. Too many parents today have been stymied in their attempts at raising well-mannered children—stymied by a contemporary milieu that says “let children be children” and convinces parents that they will destroy their children’s self- esteem if they make them tow the line. “And besides, they are so cute. ...”

It’s not cute at all, but rather a severe disservice to the child’s *real* self-esteem. Self-esteem is a great good, but it comes as a *result* of being well-mannered and striving for virtue.

III. How to do it? A fail-proof method.

First, remember that if your child is already out-of-control to any degree, it will take a bit more time and patience, but it *can* be done—it *must* be done!

Second, if the mother is going it alone, it can be done. But in the numerous cases where fathers are present, their involvement is *critical.* Fathers, you are the ones in charge of putting this method to work.

Third, this method is for children 21/2 years old and up. *It really can be done this early.* Until that time, a loud or obnoxious child simply needs to be taken out of Church. If this happens constantly, consider a nursery or going to separate masses so one parent can stay at home with the child.

OK, let's get to the method itself:

A) LIST on paper the expectations you have of your children. Your list should include the following, with some variations of your own:

- ➢ When standing stand straight, hands at side, or crossed in front, or crossed in back.
- ➢ Don't lean on the pew.
- ➢ Don't fiddle with your hands and face.
- ➢ When kneeling, fold your hands, and keep them away from your
- ➢ face.
- ➢ Don't aggravate your brother or sister.
- ➢ And, a special item on the list for parents: don't forget to
- ➢ bring the religious book bag. Leave out Dr. Seuss, and include good picture bibles and lives of the saints. A set of holy cards for the young ones to look at works well.

B) Explain the list to your children a week before you intend to start having these expectations. Go over it every evening, at dinner or before bed. By the end of the week the children should be able to recite most of them on their own. *Emphasize that this new behavior is a special gift they are giving* to *Christ.*

C) On Sunday, go over the list before leaving for Mass, and on the way to Mass. Tell the children that—your choice here—a) they will get a special prize if they succeed, such as an extra donut for Sunday breakfast, or b) they will lose something, like half of their Sunday donut, if they bomb out.

D) Here goes! Remember one important rule: you must be vigilant—toward your kids—during Mass. This will take away some (or a lot) from your vigilance toward the Eucharistic Christ, but He'll understand perfectly. Too many parents ignore the children—"if she's not throwing a fit and making too much noise, let well enough alone—kids are kids." Your children deserve, and are capable of, a lot more. Be vigilant.

E) If all went well the first Sunday, consider it a special blessing. But let's assume things don't go so well, especially if bad habits are already formed. (My home parish church is called the "Chapel of the Incarnation"—some kids are habituated to it being the "playground of the Incarnation!") Don't blow your top, do say a prayer, and let's start again.

F) The second week, repeat everything from the first week—with one addition. Explain that the only way to become good at something is to practice, so hold one, two or three (your choice again) very short practice sessions during the week. Have them practice sitting and standing properly. They will get the point: you are dead serious about this new gift to Christ. Be sure to practice the night before (or in the morning if you are the rare well-organized family on Sunday mornings).

G) with the second try at Sunday Mass—and don't forget to go over the expectations (or "procedures") on the way to Church—you'll be surprised at the improvement. But let's be realistic and assume there was a major or minor disaster. Plan for this, and be ready to have a practice session *after* Mass *in* Church. If they didn't think you were serious before, they'll know you are now. Be vigilant.

H) You're on your way to having well-mannered children! Congratulations! Once the process is started, it will soon be all downhill. Bask in the compliments you will get from other parishioners —you deserve them! And remember, if you have a number of children, it only gets easier with the little ones imitating the well-mannered behavior of the older ones.

I) Once children are well-mannered, it's easier and more enriching to teach them how to participate in the Mass. With the youngest ones, start with the *gestures* that are part of the Catholic liturgy—children can easily latch on to these and look forward to them.

J) This method—I call it the method of the pre-emptive strike—works well in all areas of children's lives: in the car, at the table, birthdays, shopping at the mall, bedtime—you name it we've got it.

Appendix 2: Practical Marriage Issues

Baptism and Marriage

Let's start with the relationship between *baptism and marriage.* Canon Law teaches us that only baptized individuals can marry in the Church. Why is this? At baptism, a person is literally *grafted onto Christ.* The person's natural existence, already a great good, is now infused with a new vitality, called sanctifying grace. This grace is God's very self, His love, poured into the person's heart.

Of all the philosophies and theologies that describe who man is, this certainly is the most stunning. For according to this view, small, weak and contingent human beings—like you and I —are bestowed with an great dignity: *they actually participate in the very divine life itself.* While not actually becoming gods, they partake in the very essence of God as they share his divine life.

In Catholic theology, this bestowal of divine grace is made possible to sinful man through the redeeming love of Jesus Christ. And this redemptive love is given to each individual through the sacrament of baptism. While God in His infinite power and wisdom certainly can save people in other ways, baptism is the *ordinary means* by which the individual person is affected by Christ's redemptive love. And a fitting means it is: water, as literally a cause of death and life, is the perfect symbol for two phenomena that occur in baptism--death to sin, and rebirth into the life of grace.

By Baptism, then, we are grafted on to Christ. *Only such* a *person grafted onto Christ would be ready or fit for sacramental marriage.* Marriage as a sacrament signifies the union between Christ and the Church—it would not make sense for a couple *not already grafted onto Christ* to be capable of symbolizing and making present Christ's covenant.

Hence, the Church holds that only a baptized person can contract a sacramental marriage. Those who are not baptized can still have many goods in their marriages—but they have natural, not sacramental, marriages.

Having established the relationship between baptism and marriage, several questions and difficulties arise.

First, what about the status of someone baptized in a Protestant church? What is the status of Protestant marriages?

The Catholic Church fully recognizes *validity* of the sacrament of baptism as celebrated in a Protestant denomination, even though Protestants themselves often have a different conception of the meaning and nature of baptism. How can this be? Catholic doctrine holds that the sacraments cause grace not due to something we do, but due to the action of God acting through the sacraments. God will act through the sacrament so long as we do not put an obstacle in the way. The sacrament, then "works" on its own. Baptism causes what it signifies—the healing of our wounded nature—regardless of how fully we understand what is happening. Technically, this idea is called the "efficaciousness" of the sacraments. The sacraments operate *ex opere* operato —"by the work [not by our efforts] worked" [they cause grace].

In this light, the practice of infant baptism makes sense. The infant can place no obstacle in the way of God's grace working through the sacrament of baptism, healing the infant's fallen nature. So long as the sacrament is properly administered, it "works" (that is, God works through it), *ex opere operato.* Later in life, the individual might place obstacles in the way of God's grace—then, the sacrament received as an infant will not bear its fullest fruit.

Granted the validity of Protestant baptism, what is the status of a marriage that takes place in a Protestant denomination? Through baptism, the Protestant believer is grafted onto Christ, and is actually grafted onto the one Church of Christ, even though he is only partially incorporated into that one Church. Hence, when two Protestant Christians marry, that sacrament also works *ex opere operato,* assuming they promise to each other a permanent, exclusive union. God creates the sacramental, indissoluble bond between them.

Protestant theology does not recognize the sacramentality of marriage, even though they still take marriage most seriously. So something has happened to the couple—the bond—that they may not be fully aware of. But so long as they put no obstacle in the way, there is a valid sacramental marriage.

The Baptized Non-Believer

What we just covered is "happy" news because it means more people are included in the gift of the sacraments than is often supposed. Another difficulty that arises is on the more tragic side, the case of the "baptized non-believer." What is a baptized non-believer? Someone who, through baptism (usually as an infant) is grafted onto Christ, yet later in life rejects the faith. Then, when it comes time to get married (now we have two baptized unbelievers), two possibilities arise, which we will treat in turn.

First, the couple may decide on a civil marriage. Now we have already noted that a non-Christian couple who believe in the objective nature of marriage have a "natural" marriage with a "natural" bond. Will this particular couple have a natural marriage? They may very well, given their faith crisis, also not hold to the objective nature of marriage, in which case they have a "secular" marriage and the question becomes moot. But *could* they have a natural marriage?

The Church teaches that this is an impossibility. Due to baptism they are grafted onto Christ. Hence, they are "fit" for sacramental marriage. They cannot undo their baptism and revert to the natural, much less secular, level—any more than a person equipped to go into outer space could change his mind and take a backpacking trip. They are only capable of a sacramental marriage. When you get baptized, it affects your whole being, like it or not! Should they decide on a "natural" marriage, they are contracting something that is metaphysically impossible, even though they may remain under the illusion that they have some type of marriage.

Second, the couple may wish, often for family reasons, to have a Catholic wedding. What is the parish priest to do? On the one hand, they don't really believe in the truths of Christianity, and so he ought to refuse their wish. On the other hand, the fact that they want a Catholic wedding, even if only for social reasons, means that they retain *some* tie to the Church, and the priest may see their forthcoming marriage preparation as an ideal time to re-evangelize them. What a dilemma!

There is no easy answer, but John Paul II gives some wise advice:

> ...the faith of the person asking the Church for marriage can exist in different degrees, and it is the primary duty of pastors to bring about a rediscovery of the faith and to nourish it and bring it to maturity. But pastors must also understand the reasons that lead the Church also to admit to the celebration of marriage those who are imperfectly disposed.

The pope then notes that a couple considering marriage invariably connects them to God's will and to his grace, even if this happens implicitly, in a less than fully conscious way. For marriage is part of the order of creation. "They have thus already begun what is in a true and proper sense a journey towards salvation." Even if their motives are *purely* social, they can be accepted for matrimony in the Church, for they "at least implicitly consent to what the Church intends to do when she celebrates marriage."

Despite all this, there is a bottom line beneath which the couple ought not be admitted: "...when in spit of all efforts, engaged couples show that they reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated. ..."

Marriages with non-Baptized Persons

What about members of other, non-Christian, religions? What happens when they marry? Not being baptized, they cannot really have a sacramental marriage—even if one member of the couple is baptized. Their marriage can be a natural marriage, with a great many natural goods, not least of which are the children that may issue forth.

At this point, however, we might note that even a natural marriage *participates* in the one, objective reality of marriage, which ultimately is a sacrament. It helps to see natural marriage as an incomplete portion of the one marital reality. Hence, God's grace can flow into marriages that aren't strictly speaking sacramental, just as God's grace can affect and save someone who,

through invincible ignorance, is not baptized who still strives to lead a good life on the natural level.

What happens if one member of a non-Christian couple converts to Christianity? Apparently this happened with some frequency in the early Church, for St. Paul answers this precise question in his first letter to the Corinthians (ch. 7). Imagine the non-Christian member wanting to get out of the marriage, now that the partner has made such a radical change in life; imagine in addition the new Christian wanting a new marriage—a sacramental marriage—with a Christian spouse.

Since there is no sacramental bond, technically, the marriage is dissolvable. But Paul gives sound practical advice. If the non-baptized spouse wants to stay in the marriage, then the believer should oblige. Paul notes that "the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife"—and vive-versa. But if the unbelieving partner wants to divorce, Paul says, "let it be so"—again, there is no sacramental, indissoluble bond. This privilege has come to be termed the "Pauline Privilege."

What about the tragic situation, which happens all too often in our secular society, of the couple who are married in the Church, but whose marriage later becomes extremely unstable, to the point that one or both spouses consider divorce?

Assuming that the original marriage was valid—that the couple knew what they were promising, and promised freely—then the bond is indissoluble. They may get a civil divorce, but remain married.

Appendix 3 On Participation at Invalid Marriages
(reprinted with permission from Envoy magazine)

I think I am going through a Catholic parent's "worst nightmare"...

Let me guess--your son just announced his intention to marry, and then added that he would not be marrying in the Church.

Right, and I don't know whether to support him or not. I have expressed my serious reservations, but I also don't want to alienate him.

You can support him *and* support the truth about marriage at the same time, though it's no easy task. You are right in making clear that you cannot support his choice to marry outside the Church, and at the same time you must convey that they love him as much as ever. He will invariably balk at this--"how can you say you love me and not support my own choice regarding marriage." But stick to your guns.

This is going to sound pretty strange at first, but in the eyes of the Church *there will not be a real wedding*, even though he will be legally married. There is no real wedding to attend! Of course, there is some type of ceremony, and lots of presents and a reception, but all that is *the absence of*

what ought to be taking place. If you ever heard the classic theological dictum that "evil is the privation of a due good," here you have a perfect instance of it.

You're going to have to unravel that a bit!

We must start with the relationship between *baptism and marriage*. Only baptized individuals can marry in the Church. Why is this? At baptism, a person is literally *grafted onto Christ*. The person's natural existence, already a great good, is now infused with a new vitality, called sanctifying grace. This grace is God's very self, His love, poured into the person's heart.

In Catholic theology, this bestowal of divine grace is made possible to sinful man through the redeeming love of Jesus Christ. And this redemptive love is given to each individual through the sacrament of baptism. While God in His infinite power and wisdom certainly can save people in other ways, baptism is the *ordinary means* by which the individual person is affected by Christ's redemptive love. And a fitting means it is: water, as literally a cause of death and life, is the perfect symbol for two phenomena that occur in baptism--death to sin, and rebirth into the life of grace.

I think I've got it--but what is the connection to marriage?

Only a person grafted onto Christ would be ready or fit for sacramental marriage. Marriage as a sacrament signifies the union between Christ and the Church--it would not make sense for a couple *not already grafted onto Christ* to be capable of symbolizing and making present Christ's covenant. Hence, the Church holds that only a baptized person can contract a sacramental marriage. Those who are not baptized can still have many goods in their marriages--but they have natural, not sacramental, marriages.

But for those who *are* baptized, they are "built" for sacramental marriage--I think I'm putting all the pieces together--and so if they try to have just a civil marriage, they are doing less than they are built for.

You've got it. This is the tragic case of what is called the "baptized non-believer"--someone who, through baptism (usually as an infant) is grafted onto Christ, yet later in life rejects the faith. Then, when it comes time to get married, they cannot undo their baptism and revert back to the "natural" level--any more than a person equipped to go into outer space could make a quick change of plan go scuba diving. The only true marriage they are capable of is a sacramental marriage. When you get baptized, it affects your whole being.

Now I see the full meaning of the term "invalid marriage." And I think I see why parents can't cooperate in such a thing. But let's get down to brass tacks--does the Church *forbid* them to attend?

The Church does not formally forbid them to attend--this is a classic example of where the Church really does respect the individual conscience of each Catholic. But the conscience must be *informed*, and in light of the truths we've been discussing, I think it's pretty clear that the conscientious Catholic will do two things: keep showering lots of love on the individual people involved, and find a very clear way to communicate that they cannot *cooperate* with this "wedding."

Great--but you're evading the real issue--some authors have said that it would be just plain wrong to attend, because attending means you are cooperating.

Two key rules to keep in mind. First, we may not *formally* cooperate in evil. That is, we may not help someone do something wrong with the intention of promoting that wrongdoing. If the parents attended, they would not be guilty of such formal cooperation in evil, since they do not *intend* to promote and favor the invalid marriage.

Second, in our day-to-day lives we invariably involve ourselves in *material* cooperation with evil. The landlord forced to rent to a cohabiting couple, for example, contributes materially to their evil. But he does not *formally* contribute to it. Now an all-important rule of thumb: we must keep our material cooperation with evil *as remote as possible*. In our consciences, we must decide to keep as far away as we possibly can from any material contribution to evil.

Now apply this to the invalid marriage. To actually *help out* with the wedding would be material cooperation far too proximate, and easily interpreted by others as formal cooperation. So you do not contribute financially to the wedding, and dad--I know this is hard to hear--does not give the bride away (if this were your daughter, not your son). *In your conscience* you must determine the best way to communicate that you are not formally cooperating.

Some theologians have argued that attendance itself is tantamount to formal cooperation. While it would be fine for some people to decide that in their own consciences, I do not think it to be an absolute rule for all--attendance is material cooperation. There are all sorts of situations in which we *attend* events while distancing ourselves from substantial portions of what goes on at those events. You attend a niece's graduation ceremony even though the speaker is a pro-choice feminist; You are supporting your niece, not the speaker, and you refrain from genuine applause at the end of the address. As a member of the audience who freely chooses to come, you are materially cooperating in the commencement exercises, a portion of which is evil. But you keep that material cooperation remote, lest there be any suggestion of formal cooperation.

When you use the word "evil" the message really hits home--but still, isn't it a bit harsh to call an invalid marriage an evil?

Remember, evil is a *privation* of a good that ought to be present. Like we said before, the invalid marriage *isn't really a marriage*. Sure, a lot of fancy stuff is happening, but again, that is just a big signal that what *ought* to be happening--a sacramental marriage--*isn't* happening.

And maybe if parents take a firm but loving stance, their child may come to his senses *before* the "big day"--or I guess I should call it the absence of the big day.

That's the hope! It may or may not work, but certainly without a firm stance the chances of conversion are diminished. And finally we must remember that when we do the right thing, we do it not primarily to achieve good consequences, but just because it is right.

What about the status of someone baptized in a Protestant church? What is the status of Protestant marriages? And what if my son wants to marry a Protestant?

Let's save that for the next column!

OK--but one more thing: is there anything we do to prevent these disasters from happening in the first place?

Be *pre-emptive!* Talk about issues like cohabitation and invalid marriage early on, when they are not even an issue--I think around the time of high school graduation is a good time. Explain what your expectations are in regard to marriage. Make crystal clear that there is plenty of room for individuality--you are not going to pre-arrange your child's wedding!--but that there are a set of basic norms *beneath which our family simply does not go*. One of these norms involves marrying in the Church.

Also make it clear what the consequences of violating these norms would be. Make it clear that you cannot in good conscience *lend support to* an invalid marriage. Further, you cannot in good conscience *recognize* it as a marriage. Note that it is a matter of being true to your conscience, a conscience informed by Catholic doctrine on love, sexuality and marriage. Ask that your conscience be respected.

Many parents would fear that such a method interferes too much in the young adult's life. They want to be more neutral.

There's no such thing as neutrality here. By *not* "interfering" a very clear method is being sent: do your own thing. In other words, a very definitive moral philosophy is being taught, called relativism.

And the word "interfere" is misleading. No one's freedom is being taken away. Rather, the young adult's freedom is being enhanced, because he or she can make choice based on the full spectrum of options. Too often, children are never even instructed in the *rationale* behind the Church's teaching on marriage. When they "do their own thing" it is not an informed choice at all.

In conclusion, the *Catechism* offers some judicious advice. On the one hand, "Parents should be careful not to exert pressure on their children either in the choice of a profession or in that of a spouse." On the other hand, "This necessary restraint does not prevent them...from giving their children judicious advice, particularly when they are planning to start a family." (CCC 2230)

Appendix 4 The Virtues of Purity and Chastity: an Undivided Heart

We can only arrive at our ultimate end, the Beatific Vision, if we are purified--here on earth or in purgatory--of everything that is incompatible with God's grace. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes, "purity of heart is the precondition of the vision of God" (2519). St.

John of the Cross compares our souls to windows, which unless pure and clean cannot fully receive the light of God's love or see that light. The pure heart is the undivided heart, that wills what is true loyally and unreservedly. For the pure of heart, all goods of life are ordered under the highest good. Only when so ordered do those goods retain their lustre; when these goods are out of due order, they become spoiled (impure) goods.

The *Catechism* notes that the pure of heart are those who "have attuned their intellects and will to the demands of God's holiness, chiefly in three areas: charity, chastity or sexual rectitude, love of truth and orthodoxy of faith" (2518). We most often think of purity as connected to the area of sexuality, and rightly so; sexuality is so central to our humanity that impurity in that area is not uncommon. Hence, the *Catechism* mentions it specifically as the second of the three key areas of purity. But note that the first area is "charity," and this area is far-reaching. Charity here refers to God's love poured into our hearts (grace), by which love we are capable of loving ourselves and loving others. Loving ourselves means being concerned about our final beatific end, and ordering our lives nd. Loving our neighbors as ourselves means being as concerned about the rest of the community reaching their final goal as we are about ourselves reaching it.

Hence, charity is all-encompassing, and as the first of three areas to which the virtue of purity is pertinent, it suggests that a pure heart must accompany all our actions. Purity concerns not only unchaste sexual thoughts but thoughts of envy, greed, covetousness, pride, and so on. Such thoughts compete with God for our loyalty, and hence we need to be vigilant over them lest they gradually possess us, taking priority over God. The fact that “chastity or sexual rectitude” is singled out, as the second area of import for the pure of heart, indicates the special challenge which sexuality provides for most people. Much of what follows below, while pertinent to a variety of other virtues, will be specific to the development of chastity.

The third area of purity as adumbrated in the *Catechism* is “love of truth and orthodoxy of faith.” In a sense, this third area (like the first) is all-encompassing. It invites us to see all of reality *whole*, through the prism of the Catholic faith. It invites us to think and act *within* the Tradition. Echoing G. K. Chesterton’s sentiments on orthodoxy, to think inside the tradition is far from a “humdrum and safe” thing to do; rather, it is a daring adventure. It is easy to be a heretic--just follow any thought that comes to mind, or follow any passion and justify it by saying that you’re just “being yourself.” The real adventure is orthodoxy. As we examine sexual rectitude (chastity) we are not being prudish and narrow-minded. The Church’s guidance leads us on a daring adventure, one many people would laugh at--as a defense mechanism.

Purity at the Heart of Chaste Action

We saw from the text of the *Catechism* that chastity is a virtue that falls within the larger purview of purity. Purity means having every area of life ordered under the highest good, God and eternal life with Him. Chastity refers to that purity as it affects our sexuality. The chaste person is in control of the sexual drive, and uses it to love others rather than to use others.

Within the virtue of chastity we find purity appearing again, this time in a narrower sense (though far from insignificant). By the virtue of purity, used within chastity, the mind and heart are made clean of lust. Through patient practice, cooperating with God's grace, and with the help of the sacraments, people young and old alike can get their minds "out of the gutter" as it

were. There is an enormous freedom in not being bound to impure thoughts. One is free to treat others as persons, for their own sake, not as objects of passion. You are poised to truly give the gift of self to the other, instead of treating the other as a means to your own sexual gratification.

Many are under the false impression that various impure thoughts that flow through our minds are basically innocent. So long as we don't act on them, or plan to act on them, there is nothing wrong with these thoughts. However, there is an important distinction that is missing here: the difference between an impure thought entering the mind, and the choice to dwell on that thought and take pleasure in it. The impure thought that enters the mind is neutral. Entertaining the thought is not. The choice to dwell on and take pleasure in the thought *is* to act on it. Christ emphasized this when he taught that looking at a woman lustfully--that is, truly entertaining impure thoughts about her--is equivalent to adultery.

Furthermore, is it not the case that those who entertain an impure thought--itself an unchaste act--go the next step and engage in solitary sexual acts? And is not fornication or adultery an all-too-common next step? Why not get directly at the root of the problem? An impure mind, perhaps affected by pornography, is what would lead to self-stimulation. People have a natural, innate knowledge that masturbation is wrong, despite the countless advice columnists and popular psychologists who insist it a perfectly natural form of relaxation--"be comfortable with yourself," they opine. People have an intuitive knowledge that an energy--sexual energy--made for the giving of self to others, is being turned in on the self. And couples who do this with each other have a natural sense that they are not engaged in mutual giving, but simultaneous taking.

How to break the vicious cycle? Sheer will-power tends not to work, because it generally does not get to the root of the problem--impure thoughts. Once such thoughts are "invited in" and "entertained," one is on a trajectory toward orgasmic release. Those who are able to effectively "stop short" of a solitary sexual act are nonetheless left frustrated. How to break this frustration?

Developing a Pure Mind

A pure mind is the answer. But for many people, developing a pure mind is an arduous task. What follows are some practical suggestions for working on the virtue of purity.

*First, recall the essential distinction. The impure thought that enters the mind may well be neutral, so long as a person does not *intentionally* put himself in a situation that invites the thought. There is no reason to feel guilty about such thoughts. Again, it is the choice to dwell on the thoughts that is inordinate and sinful. As the *Catechism* notes, "Emotions and feelings can be taken up into the *virtues* or perverted by the *vices*" (1768; and see the whole section on the passions from 1763-1770). So, it is important to have the right goal: it is unrealistic to think that impure thoughts will or should altogether vanish. They might even increase. Rather, the goal is to avoid entertainment of the thoughts.

*Once one has a clear *intellectual* grasp of impurity and purity, an interior *conversion* of the heart, a turning toward the true and the good, is needed. This may be one of the more terrifying moments in the Christian's life--old habits die hard-- but the terror is mitigated by the fact that one is turning toward a person, Christ, who is a *friend*. Plus, Christ is the one helping you to turn

to him. Only by his grace can conversion occur. As Pope Pius XI noted in *Casti Connubii*, "God does not ask the impossible, but by His commands, instructs you to do what you are able, to pray for what you are not able that He may help you" (section IV, #31).

* In regard to conversion, it is a good idea to read and meditate on the key texts in the *Catechism* about conversion. Start with 1427 through 1433. Then follow through on all the marginal notes, as well as the Scriptural texts that are given.

*Once the process of conversion has begun in you, realize that it is an ongoing process that must be renewed on a daily basis. Here are a number of practical aids. If you have a spiritual director or someone with whom you could comfortably discuss these matters, then by all means use such help. But for the many people who presently have no such assistance, the following steps might help in getting off to a good start.

a. Begin each day with a short prayer asking for help in keeping a pure mind.

b. During each day you will be besieged by impure thoughts crossing your mind. In fact, they may initially seem even stronger than before. For when you were in the habit of surrendering to them, they were less oppressive. As you confront them head on, they may seem virtually overpowering. Should this happen, interpret it the right way, as a sign that you are on the right track.

c. Find a variety of techniques to ward off the temptation to dwell on these thoughts (again, their mere presence is neutral). The first technique is very concrete and physical: if possible, change your physical position or activity. If sitting, stand up and walk around. If you are lying in bed in the morning and these thoughts beg for entertainment, get up.

d. A variety of spiritual techniques can then accompany the physical ones. The "Jesus Prayer" could be repeated: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Also, consider short lines from the Psalms or other favorite prayers. Consider this verse from Psalm 51: "A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me." Repeat the beatitude "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Another helpful technique involves music: find certain songs that inspire you, and play them "in your mind" whenever impure thoughts begin to oppress--it is a great deterrent.

e. A rosary, or a small finger rosary, readily available in your pocket, is a great "weapon." Repeating short prayers with it, or saying a decade of the rosary with it, lends a concreteness to your efforts. Note that all such "techniques" *replace* impure thoughts with pure thoughts. And the replacement is more than just a sound psychological technique; it is a replacement that invites Christ's grace as the force that ultimately will conquer impurity.

f. Hence, remember that what are called "your efforts" are really your willingness to cooperate with Christ, who is doing the work of purification within you. He takes the initiative, he develops the virtue in you, you cooperate with him. Also, there are many Saints to whom you might pray (not least of which is St. Joseph).

g. In the past, impure thoughts may have been so common that it was impossible to keep track of them. If you confessed them in the sacrament of reconciliation, it was probably under very

general terms. Now is a good time to keep track of those times that you fail, and when you receive the sacrament, mention to the priest the number of times you dwelt on impure thoughts. (Unfortunately we also encounter at times a priest who doesn't think the issue is important. A prudent response is, "These thoughts separate me from Christ.")

h. It will be very important to avoid those occasions of sin that invite impure thoughts. Make a list of those items that are seductive, and make a clear decision to avoid them. In the area of sexual impurity, it is critical to distance yourself from all seductive materials. Also, be alert to the "soft" porn that can show up just about anywhere you look.

i. Also specific to the arena of sexual purity: For the unmarried, it is of course natural to be attracted to members of the opposite sex, and to think about them. But it is critical not to think of them in terms of satisfying sexual passion; otherwise, one's choice of a marriage partner may be based on a purely physical standard. Physical preferences are natural and to be expected; but potential marriage partners ought not be treated as objects. For the married, it is important to think only about one's own spouse, lest one fall into the habit of coveting someone else. During conjugal relations, develop the habit of thinking only of one's spouse.

(*A parenthetical addendum on impure thoughts primarily for males: The typical male finds himself easily aroused--by pictures that come his way in newspapers and magazines, other images in one's mind (such as past memories), other women he sees, and his own girlfriend if he has one. It is such a commonplace phenomenon that he often thinks nothing of it--he may even be somewhat proud that he does not take it the next step, to a solitary sexual act. But, generally speaking, arousal doesn't "just happen"--it is in many instances an outward sign that he is taking pleasure in an impure thought, entertaining the impure thought (there are exceptions here for highly sensitive people). It is precisely such solicitation, such entertainment, that needs to be brought under control in order that he be equipped to truly give of himself to his spouse or future spouse. Focus on the term "taking pleasure"--it suggests pleasure is being taken from a place it ought not be taken. *It belongs only with one's spouse or one's future spouse*--anything else is quite literally adulterous (see Matthew 5). Arousal can and should take place in *her* presence--it is the physical manifestation of a pure reaching out to the other in self-gift. In sum, the male has a very clear criterion for knowing when entertainment of impure thoughts is taking place. The good news is that he can truly master his passions thereby preparing himself for true self-giving to the other.) A good rule of thumb: if arousal begins to take place, within five to ten seconds one should be able to make an abrupt change mentally (again, see "c" above).

j. So much for the practical tips, at least the basic ones. Each individual can tailor these to fit distinctive needs, or come up with one's own practical methods.

Failure, Forgiveness, and Starting Again

What happens when there is a relapse in your conversion? As a result, work on the virtues of chastity and purity seems so overwhelming that you give up all together. Slow down, go to confession, re-commit yourself to Christ, and start over. Here's a great text from C. S. Lewis on this, specific to sexuality:

> We may, indeed, be sure that perfect chastity--like perfect charity--will not be attained by any merely human efforts. You must ask for God's help. Even when

> you have done so, it may seem to you for a long time that no help, or less help than you need, is being given. Never mind. After each failure, ask forgiveness, pick yourself up, and try again. Very often what God first helps us towards is not the virtue itself but just this power of always trying again. For however important chastity (or courage, or truthfulness, or any other virtue) may be, this process trains us in habits of the soul which are more important still. It cures our illusions about ourselves and teaches us to depend on God. We learn, on the one hand, that we cannot trust ourselves even in our best moments, and, on the other, that we need not despair even in our worst, for our failures are forgiven. The only fatal thing is to sit down content with anything less than perfection (*Mere Christianity*, Book III, chapter 5).

On that last point about perfection, here's still another great Lewis text, this one a reflection on Christ's startling exhoratation to "be perfect as my heavenly Father is perfect":

> I think [Christ] meant 'The only help I will give is help to become perfect. You may want something less: but I will give you nothing less.' Let me explain. When I was a child, I often had a toothache, and I knew that if I went to my mother she would give me something which would deaden the pain for that night and let me get to sleep. But I did not go to my mother--at least, not till the pain became very bad. And the reason I did not go was this. I did not doubt she would give me the aspirin; but I knew she would also do something else. I knew she would take me to the dentist the next morning. I could not get what I wanted out of her without getting something more, which I did not want. I wanted immediate relief from pain: but I could not get it without having my teeth set permanently right. And I knew those dentists; I knew they started fiddling about with all sorts of other teeth which had not yet begun to ache. They would not let sleeping dogs lie; if you gave them an inch they took [a mile]....
>
> Dozens of people go to [our Lord] to be cured of some one particular sin which they are ashamed of...or which is obviously spoiling daily life (like bad temper or drunkenness). Well, He will cure it all right: but He will not stop there....He will give you the full treatment. (Book IV, ch. 9)

The full treatment is the development of the full life of virtue--a never-ending quest. The encyclical letter *Veritatis Splendor* has a spectacular text about this (article 52). It notes that there are certain moral norms that ought never be violated--a "bottom line" beneath which you just don't go. The last six of the ten commandments are examples--don't commit adultery, don't steal, etc. But above and beyond the moral norms is the full life of virtue, and here there is no limit. That's where the real action is in the moral life.

One last point for this section. Imagine the virtue of purity firmly in place. You probably will continue to experience impure thoughts, but now *by habit* you don't dwell on them. There may be some frustration at the realization that such thoughts are even remotely connected to you. While there is no sin involved here, this is a cross to carry, and can be turned in a positive direction: consider offering up the frustration for others who are struggling with impurity. Part of purity is a willingness to suffer: an undivided heart does not come cheaply.

Dating and Engagement: An Apprenticeship in Fidelity

The ideas above are for all people-- single, engaged, married, celibate. Now consider some thoughts on purity and chastity specifically for those who are engaged, or on the trajectory toward possible engagement.

There are many young couples who sincerely believe in the Church's teachings forbidding sexual intercourse before marriage. They know that fornication is intrinsically wrong, and are more or less well-versed in the numerous good reasons to back up this claim, based in both Revelation and the Natural Law, reasons that will not be rehearsed in this article. Such young people want to be chaste and fully intend to be chaste.

And yet, even such admirable young couples with the best of intentions find themselves in situations of grave temptation. Some yield to that temptation, sometimes with pregnancy as a result. One potential reason this occurs is a faulty attitude toward the Church's condemnation of fornication. It is seen as something to avoid, and to avoid for very good reasons. But it is still seen as a *negative* phenomenon: "we don't get to have this great expression of our love for another how many years."

Once it is viewed as a primarily negative phenomenon, it is all too easy--especially given the fierceness of passion between two people very much in love--to rationalize: we're mature enough to handle just one taste of it now. We want so badly to be a real married couple now, we'll act just a little older than our age. We can handle it. *It's not quite entirely fair that we have to wait*.

An entirely different attitude is needed. The experience of chastity as a negative phenomenon must be replaced with an experience of chastity as an entirely positive phenomenon. CCC 2350 wonderfully contains this positive message: "Those who are *engaged to marry* are called to live chastity in continence. They should see in this time of testing a discovery of mutual respect, an apprenticeship in fidelity, and the hope of receiving one another from God. They should reserve for marriage the expression of affection that belongs to married love. They will help each other grow in chastity." What follows is a meditation on, an unraveling of, that message.

You can't have a healthy marriage without chastity--that virtue by which we are in control of our sexual appetite rather than it being in control of us. And chastity is a tough virtue to develop. If it is not in full development before marriage, it's going to be very hard to develop after marriage. So, before marriage is the time to accomplish this very positive thing, the virtue of chastity.

This is a courageous thing to do, a positive thing to do. Males need to see it as the ultimate *manly* thing to do, and they need to take the lead in the couple's mutual accomplishment of *moral toughness*. Note the complete change in perspective: abstaining before marriage is not a matter of "sticking it out"--for with that attitude, what real difference does it make if you don't quite make it? Rather, it's a matter of *accomplishing, finishing, a great task*. It is an "apprenticeship in fidelity."

Consider some concrete steps for accomplishing this great task--and remember that no matter how far you've gone in the opposite direction you can turn around.

1. Avoid the near occasions of sin. Today this idea is often looked upon as quaint and prudishly out-of-touch with reality. In fact, it is a gem of practical wisdom and will go a long way in helping young couples with their special project. Concretely, it boils down to this: when spending time alone together, don't spend it *on your own*. Be together publicly--parks, malls, other social settings. This isn't prudish, it's realistic. You'll have more fun and will be free of that accusation, *"they're so exclusive*."

2. The next point is really an addendum to #1: Given there are some occasions when you are invariably alone together, be very sure they do not occur while using alcohol. St. Thomas put it well: Through excessive use of alcohol people willingly and knowingly deprive themselves of the use of reason which enables them to act virtuously and avoid sin (S.T., II-II, 150, 2). Shakespeare put it well too: "Oh, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That we should, with joy, pleasance revel and applause, transform ourselves into beasts!" (Othello, Act 2, Scene 3).

3. Don't develop an inappropriate emotional dependency on each other. This may sound strange--after all, you're in love, aren't you? Yes, but with a kind of "all-out dependency," that love quickly degenerates into a sentimental attachment that actually prevents you from really getting to know each other. Signs of such dependency: you talk for hours on the phone, and can't wait till the next call; if the call doesn't come you go into a crisis, thinking your friend doesn't love you; you think you must do everything, including studying, together; you plan your daily schedules to be in near constant contact. The logical extension of this immature dependency is undue sexual intimacy. You end up as two beings turned inward on each other in every respect.

4. This navel-gazing is just the opposite of what you want to accomplish as a couple considering marriage: you want to be outward looking, focused on making a contribution together to the world. Some married couples who succeed in developing this attitude don't even want to take a honeymoon--they want to get on right away with their contribution to the community. They take a vacation a year later to renew their commitment.

5. Avoiding a sentimental emotional dependency also helps you to see each other with some clarity, both in terms of strengths and weaknesses. Respective strengths are not over-glamorized. You can objectively discern whether you think you could live with the other's weaknesses, and simultaneously work on your own faults in light of the other's observations. You can truly develop the "hope of receiving one another from God."

6. As noted, the logical extension of an immature emotional dependency is undue sexual intimacy. Here's a good test to check whether a selfish preoccupation with your own passions (masqueraded as love) has crept into your friendship. Take one of those evenings together when some unforeseen circumstance causes a pre-mature ending to your time together, and as a result there was no physical intimacy. Be honest: did you feel cheated, as if it were a wasted evening? If so, passion has eclipsed the friendship, the physical has eclipsed the personal. See #1 above to avoid this trap.

7. Unmarried couples who have fallen into the habit of engaging in varying types of genital activity can, with courage and grace, do an about-face. Essential to the great project of developing chastity and purity is a turning away from a preoccupation with genital stimulation,

so that one is left free to treat others as persons, not objects for self- gratification. Any intentional genital stimulation prior to the marital commitment is a selfish preoccupation with one's own passions. In black and white: keep your clothes on, your feet on the floor, and no French kissing. Put otherwise, *avoid anything that arouses you to the point where you almost desperately want to go one step further.* Avoid the trap of the slippery slope.

Too many couples who have the best intentions easily get caught in that trap--and with one step after another, their resolve gradually vanishes. A direct about-face in attitude is required. The time prior to marriage is a time of preparation, a time to accomplish a great task: demonstrating to each other and to the world that you are not ruled by your passions. It is not "kind of unfair" to have to wait right at the time when sexual passion is so pronounced; rather it is eminently fair that so challenging a task be given right at that time. There exists an inherent commensurability between the difficulty of the task of preparation and the gravity of that which one is preparing for. If sexual passion can be mastered now, when that passion is at a certain height, it is mastered for a lifetime, a lifetime that will provide challenges of all sorts and intensities.

Encouraging such attitudes is also enormously important for helping young people discern whether their vocation is to marry or to remain celibate (entering religious life or the priesthood). Too often, young people think that if they have a good dose of libido, they probably aren't called to celibacy. But in point of fact, *everyone* is called to master sexual passion, in preparation for either the married state or the celibate state.

Only when sexual passion is under control is one fit to make a mature decision about *either* marriage or celibacy. With this attitude, there will be many more vocations to priesthood and religious life, many marriages with more stability and happiness, and many pre-married couples with much happier courtships.

One final suggestion for the "apprenticeship in fidelity." John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* 52 notes that "...there are kinds of behavior which can never, in any situation, be a proper response--a response which is in conformity with the dignity of the person." This article has focused on those acts incompatible with the apprenticeship in fidelity. The pope goes on to make a startling and profound exhortation: "Finally, it is always possible that man, as the result of coercion or other circumstances, can be hindered from doing certain good actions; but he can never be hindered from not doing certain actions, *especially if he is prepared to die rather than to do evil*" (emphasis added). One way to express this point is to say "I'd rather die than violate a moral norm." Or, “Violate a moral norm? Over my dead body.” This is a good motto for the apprenticeship in fidelity.

Chastity and Purity as Virtues

Purity is a *natural* virtue, meaning that it is accessible to all people of good will, be they Christian or not. However, Christians believe that the theological virtue of charity--God's own love and life graciously poured into our hearts--*infuses* all of the natural virtues. Hence, these virtues ultimately are only reachable with Christ's divine assistance, or grace. In the above points, this added dimension of God's grace is presupposed (though one could also develop a corresponding *natural* method for developing the virtue of purity).

As you practice the art of having a pure mind, you gradually will move from "acts of virtue" to "virtuous acts." The truly virtuous person is one from whom virtuous actions emanate naturally and with ease, just as fine shots flow regularly from the professional athlete, and fine sounds flow from the professional musician.. A person who is not necessarily virtuous can still produce individual acts that are morally good and properly ordered, but these acts do not flow from the habit itself of virtue. It is like the poor golfer who still can produce a number of superb shots throughout a round of golf; such shots, though, occur not because of but in spite of his rather awkward swing. Likewise, purity at first will exist in a sporadic way, in spite of the habit (vice) of impurity. Gradually, it will exist consistently, so much so that it will be unimaginable to you *not* to think purely.

It may be of interest to see how the virtue of purity "hooks up" with the four cardinal virtues--prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude. As you are working on purity, you are simultaneously working on all these as well. See the *Catechism* 1803-1811 for a brief treatment of the cardinal virtues.

a. Prudence as a moral virtue perfects the intellect in knowing the right kind of action in particular circumstances, and attaches itself to the other virtues so as to practice them in "just the right way." The right balance must be struck, and prudence is the ability to know that middle point. This middle point is technically called the "mean" of virtue; the mean lies between excess and defect. For example, excess in regard to sexual purity would be thinking that every sexual thought is evil, while defect would be thinking that so long as one does not act on a thought, the thought is fine.

b. The virtue of justice is the habit by which the will easily chooses to give others their due. Some examples of particular virtues which fall under the cardinal virtue of justice are trustworthiness, respect, honesty, loyalty, friendliness, obedience, and courtesy. When practicing purity, one also treats others as persons; for impure thoughts often turn other people into objects, means to our own selfish ends. Hence, justice demands purity, and purity contributes to justice.

c. The moral virtue of temperance (or moderation) perfects our appetites toward things pleasurable. Specific related virtues are chastity, sobriety and modesty--and purity fits here as well. There is a technical term for the appetite in us toward that which is pleasurable: the concuciscible appetite, not to be confused with concupiscence though they are related. By the wound of concupiscence we find it difficult to control our concupiscible appetite, as well as other appetites. It is important to note that the pleasurable is not evil; rather, it is the pleasurable when misused that is evil. Temperance allows us to use the pleasurable goods of the world in a proper and ordered way--exactly what the above method is for. Again, prudence assists temperance in helping find the proper mean between excess and defect. Someone who disdains material goods practices temperance on the side of defect, since the creation is good and meant to be used and enjoyed. But someone who takes various goods of creation and misuses them, or makes them into an ultimate end, is on the side of excess.

d. Finally, the moral virtue of fortitude perfects that appetite which makes us shun things that are difficult. The technical name of this appetite is the irascible appetite. For instance, if you see the importance of studying Latin, but feel overwhelmed by its difficulty for you, you are affected by the irascible appetite. Fortitude is the virtue allowing you to overcome this barrier and bravely set out to do that which is difficult--note how appropriate it is in the battle for purity.

In sum, in practicing the virtue of purity, one is simultaneously practicing prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude. That is why the tradition often speaks of the virtues as being "one," even though it is most helpful to subdivide them. The subdivisions make it possible for an individual to work on one portion at a time of the whole life of virtue. But note well that as you work on one virtue--purity in this case--you are simultaneously working on many others of which you are not even aware. And, other virtues to follow will actually then be quite a bit easier.

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