

**Some Holistic
Principles & Practices**
in the Life of a Total Person

Rev. Anthony Ton

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& Practices**
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Introduction

‘L’homme, cet inconnu’ (human being, this unknown) is the title of a book written by a French physician, Dr. Alexis Carrel (1873-1944), literature Nobel Laureate of 1912. Even without the knowledge and learning of Dr. Alexis Carrel, we may realize this truth: it is almost impossible to understand and know the human being in its physical body, intellectual mind, and spiritual soul. Human beings appeared on earth in the birth of a baby, and human beings have always been in search of more information, better understanding about the self, about others, about temperament and character, about the universe, and about spiritual beings. Generations have passed to generations this knowledge and learning, and yet we are never completely satisfied.

Therefore, what I am going to write here serves only as my individual collections. I do not attempt to trace the sources which, at times, are difficult to know in regards to the author, the origin, and the place. (I hope some learned and interested persons will do that for us). I want only to quote inspirational ideas, meaningful thoughts, and valuable experiences. I hope that we may learn from others, that these may serve as our teachers in a sense -- as our companions in the journey in

order for us all to walk together in that long journey of life, to share in our human condition and to live happily and steadily. That is what Confucius, a great Chinese master, said: *‘When there are three in a journey, at least one must be your teacher’*.”

I am a Catholic priest from Vietnam. As a child, I was reared in a Confucian education system, though not by much. I grew up in a Catholic faith community and later, I had opportunity to study counseling psychology. There are issues related to religion, concerns of the youth, and other problems in life that I cannot find adequate answers. All these issues force me to reflect and think, providing me with the opportunity to develop **this holistic approach in the life of a total person.**

I have presented this holistic approach to various groups of discussion, adult and youth, American and Vietnamese, religious and lay, and I received encouragement to put it into book form. Now, here is my first attempt of presenting it to you, my dear readers.

I hope you take time to read and to make comments and observations so that my writing will be free of prejudice and errors.

Thanks immensely.

Rev. Anthony Vu hung Ton

Chapter 1

State of the question

1.1

Classification of Religions and moral systems

There are many religions in the world, and within each religion there may be various denominations and branches. There are many different traditions and customs in human society, some of which contradict each other at times. In industry and technology, there are different methods and programs that do not agree with one another. In art, there are ways of decorating that vary from artist to artist. All of these examples speak loudly of human actions throughout generations, of human expression in various colors and tastes.

Being white or black in skin, you are still a human being. Monogamist or polygamist, you still want to build up a family. Calling the Supreme Being God, Lord, Jehovah, Yahweh, Allah, King of kings, Lord of Lords, Buddha etc...you still accept the reality and existence of a being far superior than humans, whose presence and life we haven't been able to be in contact with, let alone experience. We name that relationship between the Supreme Being and us as 'religion', the way, the principle, the 'Tao'.

Generally, religions of the world may be classified in three categories: 1. pantheism, polytheism, atheism, 2. duotheism, 3. monotheism.

1. 2

Pantheism, polytheism, atheism

Polytheism is a system which contends that the world is governed by many gods and goddesses, such as a god of love, and a god of earth. Pantheism believes that everything is both a spirit and a god: rivers and mountains, fire and water, thunder and lightning, and snakes and whales are all gods. Therefore, we must worship everywhere and respect everything.

The moral system based on these beliefs contains many superstitions and tends to scare people off because of certain doubts. Even today, quite a few people feel scared of unknown forces and guilty of sinful conditions beyond their power, their doubts stemming from the fear of "just in case something might happen."

With new discoveries in nature and the universe, as well as new inventions in technology and the sciences in so called 'civilized' or industrialized countries, few people practice polytheism or pantheism. Instead they adopt an opposite system of belief: atheism, which does not put faith in any spiritual powers but in human minds. Atheism places hope in the power of technology and the sciences. As a result, morality is reduced to fundamental humanism according to the local customs, traditions, culture, and environment.

Atheism is the outcome of materialism that tends to believe in whatever things that can be seen, touched, smelled, tasted, or felt. Materialism is also that which may be experienced by scientific methods or proven by the logical mind. Human beings are exalted as the source, origin, and ultimate purpose of themselves. They are the final reason and meaning of the life on earth already present here and now. According to atheism, there is nothing after death, no existence after death, no eternal life.

1. 3

Duothoism

Duothoism is a system of beliefs that accepts two principles that govern the universe. These two ideas are from opposite origins and guide in opposite directions: devils/angels, god/demon, good spirit/bad spirit, right/wrong, good/bad, body/soul, positive/negative, male/female, masculine/feminine. The body is considered bad

and/or sinful. All things good/spiritual are whatever has to do with the soul.

The moral system based on this duotheism usually looks down upon, if not condemns, the human body and all pleasures, as well as the interests that are related to the body. At the same time, it highly praises the value of ideas and actions that are connected with the mind and spirit. The human body is considered a prison for the soul. Plato, a great Greek philosopher of the 4th century B.C., and St. Augustine, a very gifted Catholic bishop, both represented this dualism. Plato was surrounded by Greek polytheism and St. Augustine was educated in the Christian monotheism.

Many religions in the world adopt and accept this principle of dualism and naturally, most moral systems follow suit.

1. 4

Monotheism

According to monotheism, there is only one God who created the universe and continues to govern it with divine providence. He also created human beings and gave them commandments to keep. All religions that originate from Judaism, including Christianity and all forms of Catholicism, Protestantism with all denominations, Orthodoxy, as well as Islam, belong to this group of monotheism.

The moral system in these religions comes from the commandments that God spoke from on

high through his messengers, the prophets and the clergy, whom he had chosen and sent out, ordering people to faithfully observe them. These commandments are written in the Bible, in prayer books, and handed down orally in the doctrine expressed in catechisms and/or prayers from generation to generation. All these writings are considered sacred because they contain the word of God, teaching humanity and serving as the golden rule for human happiness in this life and the eternal bliss to come. These writings and teachings must be explained and interpreted by experts such as the clergy, religious men and women, scribes, canon lawyers, and biblical scholars, in order for the common folks to receive and understand God's message. That explains why there have been so many denominations and factions. God seldom appears in person to teach and preach as He did in the cases of Moses and Jesus. There have been several people who have claimed to speak in God's name but falsely taught God's laws. We may use an example from our time to illustrate this point. Recently, there have been reports of Mary's apparitions all over the world. The official authority of the Catholic Church, though, remains very reserved in acknowledging all these apparitions.

The history of mankind records the fact that there were many wars provoked and engaged in the name of God and for true religion. In reality, many innocent people were sacrificed and many lives were taken for such nonsense. Only years later was it discovered that it was a mistake created by political maneuvers and exploiters. It was a sin committed for personal gains of leaders and their groups.

In this book, we do not intend to find out about the roots and origins of religion. We want

only to propose something practical, such as a holistic approach in the life of a total person. I hope that we will not contradict any teachings of different religions. What we write here does not claim to be the teaching of any one master or founder of religion. They are my own reflections based on my experience in life, and they are accompanied by the observations of others who have gone before us in our long journey. We are all seeking peace and happiness, aiming towards the ultimate purpose in life.

Reflections and discussions

1. What is ancestor's worship? Is it a religion, morality, or a superstition?
2. What do you think of this statement: "*Are all religions as good*"?
3. Is Buddhism a polytheism or monotheism?
4. Is Confucianism just a moral system? Buddhism a philosophy? Taoism a metaphysics?

Practical suggestions

1. Have you met a person of different denomination or religion and talked about it? Relate this experience.
2. Find a person of another denomination or religion to discuss atheism, polytheism, duotheism and monotheism.
3. Do you believe in divination, astrology, palm reading, psychic reading, or star gazing? Why?

Chapter 2

What is the holistic approach?

2.1

General observations

According to general understanding, people seem to accept the dualism in reality by one way or another. For instance, consider the human being as a composition of both body and soul. All that can be seen, touched, and sensed belong to the realm of the body, and all others must belong to the realm of the soul. The crux of the problem lies in the realm of the mind, the intellect, which largely depends upon the organs of the human body and cells of the brain as to where it should belong.

The holistic approach in the life of a total person believes that each human being is

constituted of three components: body, mind and soul.

2.2

Body

First, let us take a realistic look at the life of the human body. From birth (the womb) until death, (the tomb) we need to eat, drink, rest, and sleep. We have to learn how to eat, speak, open, close, think, reflect, to reason and to react, discern right from wrong, to make a decision and act, to gain self-sufficiency and self-control, and to be responsible and self-aware. At birth, we wish the mother to be healthy and the baby to be beautiful. Health is the primary concern for living. Only when we are healthy and strong can we think of ways to make money and become rich and famous. Nobody wants to be perceived as weak, ugly, sick, or handicapped. Everybody needs to eat well, sleep tight, and dress in a comfortable, if not fashionable, manner.

Please take a look at your budget of the money you would spend every day, every week, every month, every year. How much energy you would use? How much time you would waste in regards to protecting your health and developing and building your body strength? Is there anyone out there totally pleased with his/her health status or body condition? Even world athletes still exercise every day to get in better shape and form in order to win more over others.

The sciences in general, such as physics, chemistry, and medicine in particular, have had the same goal to help keep our body healthy and strong, to prevent and cure diseases. In these sciences are laws relating to life and the living conditions of the human body. Usually, God does not immediately nor personally reveal these laws, but endow capabilities and faculties in the human brain and intellect so that they may search, inquire, compare, reason, and reflect in order to come up with practical conclusions and useful decisions. However, time also tells us that discoveries and conclusions of this generation may be altered, corrected, and changed by the next. At any rate, these laws of nature and conclusions from the practice serve only as small steps in the right direction into the immense universe. It is likely that we have seen a tree in the dense forest and not yet seen the whole wilderness. The more we take time to search and inquire the macrocosmos, the more we learn that this universe is beyond all understanding: sun and moon, stars and galaxies -- how can we reach them all? And how about the microcosmos of the human body, with tiny little cells, the atoms and molecules unseen to the naked eyes? The more we search, the more wonders we discover. How can we trace back to the roots and origins of all these?

In this domain, we need to pay special attention to the bias and prejudice based on external appearances that could easily be perceived as the whole person. Consider race skin as divisive, and the disabled body as an outcast, unwanted. To correct these mistakes, it is helpful to know a saying in Vietnamese from of old:

“It is better to have a good piece of lumber than a good look of the varnish, better to have a good person with a deformed face than a beautiful person”.

Remember Helen Keller of the United States of America. She was born blind, deaf, and mute, but later she became a famous model for people who could overcome all physical obstacles in order to develop a mature mind and spiritual values. She had an excellent mind and high-spirited soul in a disabled body.

Speaking in regards to the body, we need to accept the reality of *‘might makes right’* as a normal rule of the thumb. Whether it is between people, between families, between organizations, or between nations, we need to admit that bodily beauty and physical attraction easily mesmerize people’s eyes and hearts, as well as have an impact on people’s minds and decisions. History records many senseless murders as a result of physical beauty, and reality tells us that some movie stars want to exploit or be exploited because of their physical beauty and attraction. It sells and draws the crowds and receives big bucks from the people.

The body is what science and medicine are concerned with and what physicians, doctors, and nurses pay attention to. Through the senses, we receive emotions and sensations -- how to be sad or joyful, happy or miserable, comfortable or disappointed, excited or depressed. Please take note that even animals have these emotions and sensations, though at different levels.

While health and beauty are concerns of medicine, human beings are a composition of body, mind and spirit. Everything that comes from or

happens in the body also will impact the mind and the spirit. Recently, I heard a saying like this: "*we are or become what we eat or do not eat.*" It helps to note that some animals feeding on grass and vegetables, such as deer, rabbit, and buffalo, are tamer than bears and tigers feeding on raw meat. Others are mixed in the group.

In a sense, fasting and abstinence from eating meat in religious practices reflect the belief that the human body has an impact on human mind and spirit. We fast in order to have more control and balance in our body, that our mind and spirit may have some say over our body. We fast so that we may save some money for the poor, save time to spend in prayer and communication with God, and to serve the needs of others.

2. 3

The Mind

a.) how it develops

If it is true that nobody wants his/her own body to be ugly, unattractive, or weakened by diseases, it is also true that nobody wants to admit to being stupid or uneducated. On the contrary, everyone wants to be smart, intelligent, wise, knowledgeable, and clever.

First, a child is in contact with the outside world by senses such as the eyes, ears, hands and feet, and nose. He/she wants to put everything in his/her mouth, wants to touch everything with hands and feet. When learning to speak, the child

asks his/her parents tons of questions about what is right or wrong, good or bad.

After the first experience of learning at home, the child continues and expands learning at school from teachers, from peers, in the labs, and in the library. The child learns about nature, the universe, interpersonal and social relationships, and about humanity. School is the appropriate environment for the child to develop mental capabilities through teachings from teachers and guidance from counselors.

b) developmental progress

The child learns everything that concerns psychological, emotional, social and personal growth and development. Philosophers from of old such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotles, Confucius, Mencius, as well as psychologists of today such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Jean Piaget, B.F. Skinner, Rollo May, and Erik Erikson have studied and proposed theories about that growth and development. However, it is difficult to understand the human body, let alone the human mind. That is why in the history of the human race, there have been few willing to spend the time and energy to do research and study human behaviors. All the newest discoveries in human psychology in America are still greatly lacking. On one hand, we should be glad of the new and significant progress in this century. On the other hand, we need to be very careful when applying these principles and discoveries to real life, as we may not realize much of the human heart. We are like the blind people who tell their story about an elephant by touching only one part of the pachyderm.

In America, some psychological tests are used for understanding human behavior and evaluating skills and abilities. Big companies and corporations need to use a battery of tests to make sure their employees are qualified for the job. Schools also administer various quizzes to guide students in the right direction. Seminaries apply personality inventories to discern the vocation of their applicants and candidates in the service of their communities.

The most popular test in America is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). During the 50 some years of its use, it has generated a great deal of discussion and controversy among psychologists, counselors, and educators. Most people probably agree that the MMPI serves as a valuable instrument with up to 60%-70% accuracy in the American population with the western culture and civilization. The most risky situation comes when it is used in colleges, universities and seminaries to admit candidates and applicants from other cultures and countries. It implies different assumptions if not biases and prejudices.

c.) observations

The traditional education system seems to consider straight A students as good people. However, we read in the book of Psalms: *“The human heart and mind are a mystery too deep to know” (Ps 64: 6)*, or the Vietnamese saying: *“We may fathom how deep a river is, but how can we fathom how deep and secret human heart may be?”*

The mind is the realm of culture and education, a specialty for teachers, counselors, psychologists, and therapists. Through education

and counseling we learn what is right or wrong, intelligent or stupid, smart or idiot, educated or uneducated.

We believe that animals share with us some level of intelligence in spite of the fact that some people think that animals have only instincts. Some behavior modification followers used lab experiments to prove that dogs, cats, rabbits, mice, monkeys, doves and other animals may be trained to execute precise orders given. This drives to the point that they are endowed with some kind of a mind and an intellect. They remember and learn in their minds and know how to be glad and miserable in their bodies.

The Roman people used to wisely say that *“mens sana in corpore sano”* (sound mind in sound body): when the body is healthy, so is the mind, and vice versa when the mind is sound, so is the body. Many physicians have noticed that perhaps 90% of patients suffer from mental anguish than from bodily causes, and quite often doctors have to prescribe a placebo to induce the effect of cure. It seems as if people who work mentally are more likely to get sick than people who work physically. This is probably because there is a lack of balance.

d.) is ignorance a bliss or curse?

The traditional education system in general, and the Vietnamese culture in particular, used to adopt a very negative attitude which included exercising many threats, menaces and punishments. Nowadays, with the new concept and direction in education, especially in the Western world, the positive attitude prevails with encouragement, rewards, and support. Even religions that used to prohibit and condemn now

tend to develop gifts and talents, with mutual support and love in cooperation and communication.

In Vietnam, parents want to send their children to the best school, achieving the best academic results. Students with lower grades are considered underachievers and unfulfilled. There is a Vietnamese saying *“It is no good to have skills but no virtues,”* but in reality, students are proud of the diplomas and degrees they have received, though these do not guarantee jobs and employment, let alone become useful people to the society. There are people who fail academically, unable to secure a degree or a certificate, but became successful in the community, leading an exemplary life to the next generation. On the contrary, there are people who had all kinds of degrees and training, but could not finalize their dreams and visions except on their lips. They end up giving hell to those around them. Some even falsify documents to prove their ego and continued to live those lies.

Experience has taught us that there are people who were well educated at schools with books but did not know how to behave and relate with others. There were people with the power of life and death over others, with strategies and plans, who could never enjoy inner peace and security in their lives. Why? There were believers who could recite their catechisms, knowing by heart doctrines of their religion, quoting the Bible by chapter and verses, arguing with adversaries and refuting their arguments successfully, yet they did not truly understand their faith, let alone practice it and live up to it.

We may also notice conflicts between religious and civil laws and regulations, between what is right or wrong and what is bad or good. Take the case of abortion which is legal and permissible in the United States of America, but it is a serious sin in the informed conscience of those rightful people. It is a transgression against God's fifth of the Ten Commandments: "*Thou shall not kill*". Look at the trial of Jesus. He was condemned to death according to the Roman and Jewish law. He did not commit any sins or crimes, other than the fact that He claimed and stated that He was the Son of God. That is a truth which people of his time, as well of all times, could never understand and accept because of their lack of sincere faith and pure love.

Both the Romans and the Chinese have the same proverb that states "*Ignoranti nulla cupido*" (there is no desire to those who have no knowledge). Confucius has this to share: "*Say yes when you know, say no when you don't: that is true knowledge*". Jesus makes same statement in the Bible: "*just say Yes or No: anything else you say must come from the devil.*" (Mt 5: 37). There is a Vietnamese saying "*Speak up if you know, and if you don't, stay put and listen*".

2. 4

the soul

a.) observations

Every religion centers on the soul, at times at the expense of the body, and at the same time equals the mind as an exercise if not an extension of the soul. In my opinion, within the holistic approach, the soul is an essential and integral part of a human being as much as the body or the mind.

In the order of the universe, we notice a systematic level of living beings. First it is the vegetative life in things such as plants and trees, then sensitive life in animals that have feelings and emotions, intellect and memory. Finally in humans, there is a spiritual life which makes us superior to other creatures and which helps us discern what is bad or good, what we should or should not do. Perhaps we do not fully understand the animal world to comprehend or assess their abilities of sensing and knowing. In my opinion, animals have a very keen sense of feeling and a delicate way of knowing which we as humans fail to fathom. Dogs have more acute hearing. Doves carry mail to the exact addresses without much confusion. Owls and bats can see at night much better than we can. Only recently have we begun to appreciate the contributions of police dogs, dolphins and whales swimming on command, lions, tigers, and monkeys performing so intelligently at the circus. This indicates that they must have some intellectual mind, some sense of feeling in order to know what to do at the instructions of trainers through rewards and punishments.

Religions in general, and moral systems in particular, usually consider the mind as part of the soul. In education, smart brains and geniuses are well received, highly praised, and rewarded, while there is not much evaluation of highly spiritual souls and generous hearts.

Democratic countries tend to stay neutral in the matter of religion by adopting a policy of separation of state and church. The consequence might be that political maneuvers take advantage of the delicate situation for the pursuit of their own agenda, to further the amoral if not immoral causes, an atheist if not anti-religious status.

b.) suggestions

The soul is the basis for spiritual principles and moral values, helping us to discern what is good or bad, right or wrong, and should or should not through the voice of our conscience and common sense. This is the realm of religion and a specialty for the clergy and religious people through their years of studying and training about religion and of practicing faith.

We all want to be moral, religious, and spiritual. Nobody wants to be called little devils, though we all feel pressured and tugged as St. Paul experienced, *“I do not do the good I want to, and I do the evil I do not want to”* (Romans 7: 19).

Although human beings may be hiding secrets difficult to understand, they must pass through many changes such as illness and disasters in the body, forgetfulness and stupidity in the mind, unwilling and untamed desires in the soul.

As long as we live, we may be affected by various diseases and illnesses. Pantheism considers illnesses and diseases as punishments from angry gods or impacts from spirits to revenge or make up for the sinful past of parents whose actions children are ultimately responsible.

Therefore, they invoke prayers, sacrifices, offerings, talismans, and incantations.

Now with the discoveries of medicine and the progress of sciences, it is the virus that causes illnesses and diseases. We need to prevent from being in contact with the virus. Prevention is better than treatment. Medicine's objective is to search for the cause of each disease and illness, using medication, surgery and antibiotics for effective treatment and cure. But we know for sure that no matter how much progress the sciences make, no matter how modern and developed the medicine becomes, there is no way to know all the causes. It seems that once an illness or a disease is tempered by a medication, a new one makes an appearance. In the old days, illness and disease were thought of as punishments from angry gods. Sudden deaths were attributed to acts of god or demoniac possessions. Nowadays, it is to each his/her own illness and disease: even cancer has many forms, shapes and causes. Furthermore, there is no unanimity and agreement in medicine. Oriental medicine is different from the western, naturopathology is in disagreement with chiropractice, and two physicians may not have the same opinion on treatment and diagnosis. That's why it is always wise to ask for second opinion in important matters of your life.

For years, the sciences were believed to be all-knowing, medicine was trusted as all-powerful in regards to human life. Recently, even the American Medical Association agreed that most illnesses and diseases were more mental than physical and biological. Prayers and devotions do speed up the recovery of the patient, as well as the psychological environment being helpful, as the saying goes: *"a laughter is worth ten treatments."*

Now people rush into psychological treatments, emotional rational therapy, hypnosis, Zen, transcendental meditation, encounter groups, novenas of prayers, prayer chains, and pilgrimages in search of a miracle.

In spite of all that, human beings still consider themselves as weak, vulnerable, and fragile. In the past, healing and cures were believed to be miracles. Grace, the power of gods, and divine interventions then, were attributed to the progress of medicine and pharmacy. Now many people make pilgrimages to distant lands and holy places with the hope for a miraculous cure from terminal diseases. News media once in a while report wonders and miracles here and there. Some clergy preach and conduct sessions of prayer for healing. In every religion there are sacred places and holy shrines. Pilgrimages are still very popular and attractive in spite of the expenses involved in time and money. There have been some miraculous cures, some profound healing, but how about those who made the pilgrimage but were not cured, those who made novenas but their prayers went unanswered? There must be some people who became disillusioned and frustrated.

The objective of all religions is to help people avoid temptations in the world, not to do evil, not to go against the voice of conscience, not to transgress God's commandments. The purpose of all religions is to guide people in the right direction, to make them holy, to support them in the way of justice and charity, joy and happiness.

Religion is not the opium for the people as stated by Karl Marx, the forerunner of Communism. It is the foundation of human peace, the integral part of human joy and happiness.

Human beings become miserable for lack of harmony when the only thing they do is to run after material possessions for the biological body, after selfish motives and desires in intellectual mind. They forget or abandon spiritual values and priorities that respond to the innermost desires and longing of human heart and soul. Through the observance of moral principles and religious practices, they may experience inner peace of mind, and happiness in eternal life.

Reflections and discussions

1. Do some research about discriminations in regards to race, nation, language, and slavery in the history of mankind.
2. Compare advantages and disadvantages of these political systems: monarchy, democracy, dictatorship.
3. Take note of some abusive expressions in your community: King-subjects relationship, master-servant attitude, boss-employee interaction, even when words are not in use.

Practical suggestions

1. In our daily living we use words in general without much discretion e.g. everything is good, such as good clothes, good car, good neighbor etc...

Make a list of ten phrases including the word 'good', try to understand its real meaning and replace it with the proper word. e.g. good car means it starts right off, runs smooth, it's quiet; good clothes mean high quality fabric, nice color match, modern style; good neighbor means s/he is easy going, happy go lucky, friendly.

2. Take an inventory of actions in your body, mind and soul:

a.) Daily use of time:

Body: eat, drink, sleep, rest, play, recreation

Mind: read, watch TV/video, listening to music

Soul: prayer, reading religious books and magazines, movies, sharing in groups, visiting the sick monthly use of money

b.) Use of money

Body: expenses for food and shelter, transportation, clothes

Mind: inspirational, educational books and magazines

Soul: tithing, charitable donations, good will contributions of time and talents

c.) Gifts, talents and skills

Body: give a hand to help out or to harm, 7 corporal works of mercy

Mind: self help or develop more skills

Soul: work for justice and peace, 7 spiritual works of mercy

d.) Daily time table (log in) of all activities through the day from getting up in the morning to going to bed in the evening:

Make note of each activity to see whether it belongs to the body, the mind or the soul. e.g. offering the new day to God (soul), wash, shower (body), breakfast (body), newspaper/listening to news radio (mind). Then watch out to see what is lacking and make efforts to make it up.

e.) Make a special examination of conscience (moral inventory) about some habits you may have which might have become an addiction, such as four main vices -- drinking, gambling, drugs, and sex. How about Radio and TV, Videos, Computer, Internet.

Chapter 3

Some principles of holism

3.1

Introduction to general Principles

These are some expressions of general principles in the holistic approach. We do not want these to be golden rules. We do not anticipate them to serve as a model to any religion, to question any belief system, or doubt any moral system. Therefore, if there is some coincidence or misunderstanding, it must be pure happenstance without our premeditation or/and planning. These are the results of our personal reasoning and thinking. It is normal and expected if you disagree with some of these statements because we are somehow blind in a sense-- searching in the long journey of life and truth. At best, we only know one particular way, seeing at one particular angle. What we are to talk or write about are only our reasoning and conclusions from our limited

experience and contact with a number of people, though they bear the name of 'principles', of 'conclusions'. We invite you to read and react, giving us input and remarks so that together, we may learn and improve our understanding.

Now let me propose 3 general principles and 6 conclusions or deductions from those principles.

3. 2

The First Principle: General Principle

The total human being is a composition and integration of body, mind and soul. Any effort to analyze and separate each component is considered artificial, defective, and wanting.

Conclusion 1:

Whatever a human act may be, it must be the result of all components of the body, mind and soul.

Let us look at some situations.

I am writing these lines and you are reading them. My hand is writing and your eyes are reading (a function of the body). I am thinking of the ways to write in words, and you read in order to understand the thoughts in my brain. I hope that you believe that these thoughts are right (a function of the mind), so that I can continue writing and you continue reading and nothing else (a function of the soul).

Our body may feel hungry so our mind thinks it is time to meet the needs of eating and

drinking. But, our soul acknowledges the fact that we want to fast and have abstinence from eating and drinking in order to save some money and give it to the poor. It is the body, the mind, and the soul which together make a decision as to whether or not to eat. That is a human act, a decisive action from the total person.

Conclusion 2:

We are responsible for and are really happy with a human act that comes as a result of a decision from the total person.

We become miserable when there is an imbalance among those three components. We are not ultimately responsible for an action when some of these components are lacking.

There are people who eat and drink excessively without being able to think in their minds of grave consequences. Their souls are not strong and firm enough to resist these temptations. How can they be happy? There are people who act according to their emotions and feelings of their bodies, to their likes and dislikes without much time in thinking and discerning in their minds. There are also people who, being so determined to pursue an ideal, follow a direction, forget to be in touch with the reality of life, and then collapse into a depression. All these lack a balance and harmony in their living and lifestyle.

A person who wants to commit his/her life to another person in marriage, while in reality s/he only loves the body and material possessions, does not really understand all the rights and responsibilities of that relationship. Should they be confined to that bonding for a lifetime?

Some highly motivated souls, always dreaming of self-sacrifice in the service to mankind in hospitals and leper colonies, may actually try to escape unpleasant situations at home. Is that really an ideal mission?

It is a delicate and difficult task to determine when there is or is not a balance and harmony among these three components in a particular situation or person. However, what we want to say here is this: each human act must be a result of decision from the body, the mind, and the soul in order for a total person to be responsible. That is true maturity and full responsibility.

3. 3

Principle II

The ideal and perfect form of human understanding is to learn and to know all aspects of body, mind, and soul. The greater learning we gather, the better it is for us.

Quite often, we say that we know this or that person while in reality, what we know is their name, their face, their age, their external appearances, and where they live or work. We do not really know their personality, temperament, character, mind and soul, personal life, feelings and attitudes.

Many young people go out on dates and have the wrong perception of knowing each other by going to bed together. They do not realize that while they may know the body somehow, they do

not know their minds and back grounds, their souls, spiritual values, and moral standards.

Conclusion 3

Each one should respect the special realm of other experts in their proper domain as we live in this multicultural and diversified society.

Masons should know their own skills and respect the skills of carpenters. Electricians should show respect for plumbers. Physicians need to be knowledgeable in medicine, clergy should practice what they preach, teachers should study hard to become learned and educated. Do not be too proud of your limited learning. This proves to be truer in civilized countries than in countries where the leaders are idolized.

Conclusion 4

Each one should respect his/her own expertise and domain, and not step on another's foot. Never consider yourself as knowing it all.

Everyone is a little reflection of God, the source of all truth, goodness and beauty. We should not have the attitude of considering others as inferior. Under the guise of free expression and free press, self-control and self-confidence, some popular personalities (movie stars, athletes, and political figures,) have a tendency to speak on various issues, claiming to know everything, thinking that others knew nothing. That is a great misunderstanding.

Conclusion 5

We should not and must not evaluate a person, or determine the character of a person, on the basis of some gestures or actions with few words or thoughts.

Here we need to recall a teaching from Confucius: *“It’s not enough for you to do good for your whole lifetime; yet if you do evil for one day, there is enough of evil to spread around.”* Another statement from the same: *“If you spend your lifetime in doing good and by chance you happen to do one evil, you will be remembered by that evil.”*

How can we justify the use of some pictures on the newspapers, the TV screen, or videos to present the whole person or the whole life? Under the mask of freedom, the mass media has more than once distorted the truth, by not actually reporting it. How can a quotation sum up a person’s whole life? How can one picture be used to portray the whole history of a nation, of a family?

Conclusion 6

To be holy is to be wholesome and to be wholesome is to be holy.

To be wholesome means to finalize all your potentials, to actualize all your gifts and talents in the body, mind, and soul. When one part is not fully actualized, you run into an unhappy condition. You risk an imbalance and disharmony in your life.

In our society, there are plenty of people who are very successful in the realm of body but fail

terribly in the realm of the mind and the soul. Suicide is an act of despair in the lack of courage and balance. The individual is unable to face the challenges of pain and suffering, unable to cope with the difficult situations in life. Suicide might bring some temporary relief in the mind and body, but it certainly brings a lot of pain of suffering to the family. How can you be sure that there is no life after death? What if it does exist? Do you want to avoid suffering in this world and then suffer in eternity?

Many a hero and great people are not intimidated by threats of death, self-sacrifice for the noble cause, or prisons, because their mind is clear and their soul is high. They can hold on to their integrity of personal character and be in constant happiness and joy. Nobody can take that inner peace away from them.

There are no two people who can be totally identical in body, including twins. There are no two people whose minds think and reason exactly alike. Our soul was created by God individually. Therefore, the sum of these three components cannot be the same. Each individual person needs to develop skills, actualize potentials, and finalize capabilities in order to become wholesome and holy. No one has to become someone else or be as holy as another saint or hero.

3.4

Principle III

Human life is a continuum without stops in the various stages of development. It is a result of a covenant relationship between heaven, earth, and humans, rather than as a

consequence of laws, regulations, and prohibitions from a contract system.

There is a natural tendency in us to see what is outside, to make evaluations based on prejudice, to judge from personal bias. We easily put labels on others, while taking credit for what appears to be worthwhile.

The ideal and purpose of all human life is to know the self and others. It is to know the universe and the environment as the Confucian concept of *"knowing thyself and others, to know heaven and earth, to know the positive and the negative, to know when to be firm and when to be soft."* That is true knowledge.

In order to know someone, we need to learn about the life story of that person, from birth to the present. We have to be able to trace all the relationships of that person to others. That is why it is delicate and difficult to really know a person. Therefore, do not rush to put labels on people. Do not hurry to make a judgment based on a few actions and words. Do not give them lectures when we do not know enough about them, if we haven't *"walked a mile in their moccasins"* or haven't been in their shoes. Jesus said, *"Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. The measure with which you measure will be used to measure back to you."* (Mt 7: 1-2)

Reflections and discussions

1. What is a covenant? What is a contract?

2. What is the difference between 'being holy' and 'being wholesome', 'being moral, spiritual' and 'being religious, pietistic'?
3. In what consist true happiness and peace? What is success?
4. Should we approve and support 'doctor assisted suicide,' 'euthanasia', or 'death with dignity'?

Practical suggestions

1. Make a list of at least 10 people whom you believe to really know in regards to body, mind, and soul.
2. Make a list of 10 people whom you admire or like. Give the reasons why. (This may come from the previous list).
3. Make a list of 10 people whom you hate or dislike. Give the reasons why.
4. Report 1-2 situations where you were suffering in body or failing in material dealings, but still maintaining spiritual joy, or 1-2 situations when you were well off financially but lacking in joy and peace.

Chapter 4

Applications in Religion

5. 1

What is religion?

Religion is a relationship between God and human beings, a two way street through which God reveals himself to mankind so that human beings may be able to find God. However, in reality, each religion puts strong emphasis on guilt versus virtue, sins versus good deeds, avoiding evil versus accomplishing good.

Religion brings hope to immortal life and eternity. Religion also canonizes saints, proclaiming great heroes and heroines as examples and role models for us to follow while condemning vicious and sinful acts of evil doers. Believers hear more about prohibitions and restrictions than positive reinforcements and advice. They have more guilty feelings than uplifting feelings of peace and joy.

The Ten Commandments have 7 'Thou shall not' and 3 'Thou shall'. It seems, then, that we are more affected by the negative than the positive.

When listening to preachers delivering sermons, we tend to like the ones with fire and brimstone, ones with words of eloquence instead of simple homilies with the sharing of life experiences, reactions, and feelings.

4. 2

What is Sin?

Legally speaking, sin is a breaking of the law under which one is supposed to operate and act. Each country has its own code of laws. Each city, each organization has its own constitution and by-laws, policy and regulations. It seems that people spend too much of time and money explaining, interpreting, enforcing, and protecting these laws. At times, they take advantage of them to find fault with each other and punish one another. Quite often, laws of one place are in contradiction with the laws of another place. E.g. marriage in regards to monogamy or bigamy, traffic directions and correct driving lanes, guidelines about fasting and abstinence, drinking, smoking, recreation, gambling etc...

The purpose of the law is the common good. Its rigid and strict applications, though, may result in disastrous effects. In order to have right applications, we need to understand the law in all its context of spirit, purpose, situation, and detail. We need to know a law in its entire context in order to pursue the common good. We cannot always accept the Roman statement *"dura lex sed lex"* (although strict it still is a law, which implies that so far we must obey).

Upon knowing the law, we need to have the intent to break it or go against it in order to be guilty or sinful. These are the two essential requirements of sinfulness: *knowingly and willingly*. There are mitigating situations, such as immature minds in grown up bodies, mental patients, senile elderly, or lack of consent when being pressured, forced, or depressed.

Some clergy have the tendency to split hairs, spending a lot of time speculating about how serious, grave, mortal, or venial a sin may be, only to end up confusing the penitent, making them more scrupulous or guilty.

On the contrary, some psychologists, sociologists, and counselors do not think much of laws in general. They have no sense of sinfulness and consider nothing to be absolute or sinful as long as there is a sense of comfort. They argue in these words:

a.) you need to go with your feelings

b.) you need to listen to what your heart has to say because your mind cannot understand (le coeur a des raisons que la Raison ne connait pas)

c.) feelings are neither right nor wrong, but only inner reactions of a human being with a beating heart and a thinking brain

This latter tendency leads to a dangerous implication. It considers human beings as their own masters, having the right to decide, to punish, and to reward. According to this reasoning, the moral system is reduced to a relative value system, subject to local customs and cultural traditions. I

hope most of us agree with a statement made by Pope Pius XII: *“the greatest danger of our time is not to have any awareness of sinfulness.”*

Some say that it is OK to steal from the government -- the rich have too much already, that it is OK for boys and girls to make love as they feel fit. If that is the case, then everything will be relative, dependent on personal judgment and prejudiced bias.

4. 3

Civil and Religious Authorities

The United States of America wants the separation of state and religion. This does not allow religion to exercise influence on the government, nor allowing the state to meddle with religious affairs. This separation ends up being too far in the extreme position of polarizing social environment. It shakes the family roots and turns the moral values upside down by equalizing the moral concerns.

Let us take a look at abortion and euthanasia. Each religion teaches a respect for life. It is a moral teaching that is connected with the foundation of human and social life. It is based on the principle of human conscience and common good. It is not a matter of isolating the religious institution and keeping the government away from it. Many countries have used this concept of the separation of state and religion to allow abortions at will and approve of doctor assisted suicide. They consider these actions as the individual's

inalienable rights that cannot be impeded by religion. The net result is that they have witnessed a moral decadence. The youth are abandoned, senior citizens neglected, and families broken.

There is another issue and concern that needs to be addressed: sex education and birth control counseling at schools. Schools are under the pretext of educating students in all areas, including the sexual. They are teaching children everything about it, but the physical body is not the whole person. The total education is to educate the entire person: body, mind, and soul. Take a look at books in the library and at teaching materials in the classrooms. We can easily find all kinds of instructions about physical aspects, about techniques on having sex. We do not find as much about making friends, developing one's character, expanding one's abilities, or growing mature and actualizing one's potential. No wonder children of today take advantage to enjoy selfish pleasures without responsibility, especially when they have free access and service to birth control pills at school clinics. We are sending the wrong message. It is funny and even paradoxical -- on one hand, parents have to say YES or NO when children ask to have their earlobe pierced or to have immunization shots. But the parents have no say about birth control and abortion. In doing so, the government has taken over the parents' responsibility and invaded the realm of mind and soul of the youth.

Socialist political systems with communist and materialist philosophy proclaim the freedom of religion in theory. They pretend to stay neutral in religious matters, but in reality, they interfere and impose on religions under the pretext of national security and public interest. Some atheists even go

as far as to state that they need to protect their own rights as atheists, that they do not allow religious believers to express themselves in religious practices in public. Think of the tension about Christmas displays recently.

4. 4

Daily Living

The above remarks are about the application of the holistic approach to religion and politics. In our daily living we may also notice the relationship between body, mind, and soul.

First, take an inventory of the things you do each day to your body, mind, and soul, such as spending time, money and energies to make your body strong and beautiful, educating your mind, and nourishing your soul. I think that you will be greatly surprised to know that you have done too much to your body and not enough to your mind, let alone to your soul. It is likely that you wait until you run into problems, difficulties, and danger in life before you pray. No wonder you lack harmony, balance, and peace in your living.

4. 5

Belief or Faith? Faith in Your heart?

When you want to join a religion or some denomination, your utmost concern is that you may not know enough about that religion or

denomination. You may be apprehensive and have doubts or reservations. Here we need to make a clear distinction between 'faith' -- an inner attitude -- and 'belief' -- an intellectual expression in words. These are two different concepts with two different meanings. The inquirers have faith. Their inner attitude of the heart belongs to the Lord, but their mind probably does not grasp the meaning and implication of all the beliefs. The cradle believers know by heart a lot of prayers, they are aware of laws and regulations, they practice religious exercises and pietistic devotions, but they do not always have a strong faith. Faith is a gift from God that helps us to believe in Him totally so that we may love others. Naturally, faith comes from our heart, but it is expressed through actions since we are human beings with a body, a mind, and a soul. *'Faith in your heart'* means that it is rooted in your heart. It does not imply that you need to keep it to yourself and not express it.

4. 6

Clarification of some words

There are a few words that cause some confusion and misunderstanding and prompt us to make sure that we know them: spiritual, moral versus religious, pietistic, and even superstitious. Those who go regularly to church or a pagoda are perceived as religious. Those who offer sacrifices or donations may be pietistic, but they may not be moral when abusing their power, spiritual when disliking their neighbors or when treating their employees unfairly and unjustly. In the meantime, there are people who never set foot in a church or a pagoda, never know how to say a formal prayer in public, but they are loving and lovable, caring and

compassionate, fair and just. These are really moral and spiritual people, worthy to be God's true children.

There is a Vietnamese saying that goes like this: *“some may pray to Buddha on their lips (to show that they are religious), but harbor weapons in their hearts (to hurt others).”* We read similar sentiments in the Bible: *“these people honor me only with their lips”* (Isaiah 29: 13; Mt 15: 8).

4. 7

Seasonal Converts

There are always seasonal converts in every generation and in every land. These are people who became converts because of political motives. Having the same religion of the leader may gain them some political advantage. The history of the world records many times over that the religion of a political leader is also the religion of the people. Roman Emperor Constantinus, once converted to Christianity, made the whole Roman empire Christian. King Henry VIII, opposing the Pope in Rome, detached the British kingdom from European influence and established a religion on his own, Anglicanism. Each dynasty coming to power in Vietnam and in China also brought about the change or switch among Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, paganism, atheism, and socialism. People en masse put their blind trust in leaders, considering them to be gods.

So, how can we know for sure whether a religion is right or wrong, superficial or superstitious? Here, we do not pretend to give an answer that may be found in the catechism or in a book of instruction on religions. Instead, by using the holistic approach, we want to state that the true religion is one that acknowledges the combination and composition of human beings as one body, mind, and soul. True happiness consists relies on the fact that we must follow God's commandments based on the entire person.

4. 8

Lip Service?

Some question the reason as to why we should go to church or to the pagoda to pray. Some even wonder why we cannot pray at home in our room in bed. Some youth quote from the Bible to justify their actions: *"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites! They love to stand up and pray in the houses of worship and on the street corners, so that everyone will see them. I assure you, they have been already paid in full. But when you pray, go to your room, close your door, and pray to your Father who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you. When you pray, do not use a lot of meaningless words, as the pagans do, who think that God will hear them because their prayers are long. Do not be like them. Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him."* (Mt 6: 5-8).

Actually, those who quote those words seem to use these to justify their laziness, to cover their lack of faith in God, lack of love for their neighbors,

lack of desire to follow God's commandments. Absolutely speaking, God is everywhere and we can worship Him any time in any place. However, we are human beings with a body, mind, and soul. The soul can be united with God no matter where it may be, but we live in community with others in a family or a society. We need to be together.

The body needs a suitable place conducive to prayer and worship, just as it does for meals and for rest. We do not eat everything nor drink anything at any place or time. The mind needs an appropriate environment for concentration and prayer. When we eat meals, we need a comfortable place for us. A Vietnamese poet stated that a *“good drink may not taste good if there is no good company.”* (Tan-Da).

Ceremonial gestures, lyrics, and hymns in a communal gathering help create the proper environment. Saints and holy people may not need that kind of environment to lift up their minds to God, but we do. Nobody wants to chat and entertain in a public market place.

When coming to a church or a pagoda, we show our solidarity with others. We show that we are members of the same body, that we are God's children, sharing the same destiny, making the same journey in faith-hope-love toward eternity. Worshiping together at church or in a temple is like a family gathering for meals -- we have a chance to visit and talk, to share and communicate.

Faith is then a total part of a person: a soul trusting in God, the mind believing in His teachings, the body doing what is right and just, fair and harmonious.

According to the holistic approach, we find it unreasonable when someone feels guilty for missing Sunday Mass. The fact is that someone missed Sunday Mass, but the crux of the matter is the reason why. Was it because of laziness or negligence? Lack of transportation? For being sick? Each act should be viewed in its totality and entirety.

4. 9

Distractions

Many people complain that they are distracted quite often during their prayers. It is something they talk about but cannot do much to change it. If it is true that we are distracted quite often, it seems normal and nothing to be alarmed of. However, we need to trace the roots, to find out the reasons of our distractions, and look for ways to remedy the situation. It is quite logical that you have distractions when you pray on the streets, at the public market, when the radio, TV, and music is on, when you are knitting and crocheting. In order to avoid distractions, we need to remove these obstacles. We need to stay away from the sources of these distractions as we say in the Act of Contrition: *“I firmly resolve to avoid the near occasion of sin.”*

4. 10

Is Religion Boredom?

No matter where or when you live, no matter what culture or civilization you belong to, you must have heard complaints about religion as boredom,

going to church as wasting time for production. Many parents bring along their little children to worship with the hope that when they grow up, they would be familiar with religion. Only later do they find out that the children have become indifferent to, if not against, religion. If they still have a religious ceremony for their wedding, or send their children to religious schools, they do so most likely for formality, in order to please their parents. It is for social reasons rather than for religious convictions and beliefs.

Some even put the blame on the clergy and teachers, thinking that the clergy is not well organized and creative in their preaching, that teachers are not well trained and skilled in educating. Playing the blame game and making excuses in reality do not help. On the contrary, this kind of attitude may even backfire due to the poor image of the clergy and teachers as leaders and educators of the community. The best total approach is that parents become aware of the issue and be concerned of their children's interest and future. They should cooperate with the clergy and teachers in order to meet the intellectual and spiritual needs of their children. When parents do cooperate with physicians and nurses in regards to the physical health of their children, good results take place. It is only logical for them to do the same in regards to their children's intellectual and spiritual needs.

A good example is needed to make the point. When children do not want to eat certain nutritious foods and want to eat a lot candy and sweets, good parents do not allow such behavior if they do not want to spend a lot of money later for dental care, for doctor's visits because of lack of adequate nutrition. At times, parents need to encourage

children to change their diet, to try on something new and different. Other times, parents have to require children to finish their plate, to eat all they have taken before dessert. When children get sick, they need to take medicine that can be tasteless or bitter. But bitter pills help. It works the same with education: children are not completely free in choosing their favorite subjects. They need to fulfill general requirements before they can choose their specialties in order to have balance and harmony in education. There must be an order, a discipline and a balance also in spiritual and moral life. It cannot be total freedom. It is a fallacy when people say that we should let the children grow up and make up their minds as to which religion they want to adopt. To love is not the same as to pamper or to give in. Remember that parents want to give the best to their children, though at the time, the children do not realize it.

Take note that many prayers and devotions, as well as spiritual readings, are for adults which children cannot understand. Clergy and parents need to take time to explain these to the children according to their age and level of education. A word of compliment is in order to praise the efforts of many Christian churches that adapt their worship and religious education to the children's level. Children want to be active and personal, not just passive and inactive. We should hope that other religious institutions will imitate that example and model of action, and do not cling to their outdated customs and practices which cannot satisfy children's minds and ways of learning in our society.

Physical needs of the body, along with the intellectual needs of the mind and spiritual needs of the soul, take time to develop in order for human

beings to grow according to age, character, personality, society, and culture. Religious faith as spiritual nourishment has to be nurtured and adapted to individual needs and tastes.

We may notice that on any given Sunday at a Catholic Church in America there are not many young people at Mass. If there are some, it is very likely that they are not very active in participation either. The youth need to know the meaning and reason of what they do before they get involved and active. They are willing and eager to take the time and to make sacrifices if they are convinced of the good outcome for themselves, and for others to grow. Ask young people why they stay home or why they go to other churches and you will know what you can do to attract them.

If our religion is to be God's true religion, it must be a religion of life, joy, hope, and happiness. It cannot be a boring one.

Reflections and discussions

1. Share your thoughts about this statement: God loves human beings so much that if there is a need to punish them. He will do so for some time and release them to heaven. Consequently, hell is a fabrication by clergy to invoke absolute obedience.

2. Is it true that all religions are based on guilty feeling rather than love and mercy?
3. Should we separate or join together civil and religious authorities?

Practical suggestions

1. What sin are you afraid of the most? Why?
2. According to the religion you practice, or the faith expression you adopt, are you willing
 - a.) to die for it?
 - b.) to tithe, giving 10 % of what you have in time, talent and treasure?
 - c.) to do nothing, being indifferent or neutral?
 - d.) to criticize the clergy as they are not qualified? to be judgmental of the community because of frictions and factions?

Chapter 5

Applications in Love

5. 1

What is Love?

If it is true that the human being is so unknown, it is even truer that love is a mystery! It seems as if languages are unable to describe the mystery of love. Love varies from person to person as they understand it, expressing it on their own, depending on each time, each place, each country, each culture. Xuan-Dieu, a Vietnamese poet, beautifully expresses the human longing in these words:

*“How can you live without love? Without missing
someone or longing for someone? Life is meaningless
without love.”*

We all want to live and to love -- to live in abundance and to love in great length.

Jesus tells us about His purpose of living here on earth: *“I have come so that they may live and live in abundance.”* (Jn 10: 10). Apostle John gives us this definition of love: *“God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them.”* (1 Jn 4: 8.18)

But what is love? How do you know that you love others and that they love you? In particular, how do you know your love and their love to be sincere and honest? In this matter of love and relationships between humans, there have been many poems and songs praising love, many films and videos depicting love stories, and thousands of books and magazines written about love. You may find instructions and teachings about love relationships through religions and moral institutions. However, it seems never-ending and enough. St. Augustine expresses rightfully the human longing: *“Lord, you made us for you, and our heart remains restless until it rests in you.”*

5. 2

Stating the Issue through some introductions

Here, I want to propose a few questions and issues that are of great concern to the youth as they cannot find adequate answers elsewhere.

Question 1: Is it sinful for boys and girls to kiss one another?

Question 2: Is it OK to have intimacy and sexual relationship when two people are really in love? Is virginity worth to be saved until marriage?

Question 3: Is it sinful or harmful to practice masturbation?

Question 4: What about birth control when married couples want to foster their marital happiness, promote sexual satisfaction and release tense emotions?

Question 5: Do women have absolute right of abortion as this has to do with their own bodies?

I think you must have heard or read about these arguments, both against as well as for these issues. This may confuse you and you do not know whom to trust anymore. I discuss these issues in length in the books I have written and published.

Here, I want to give some excerpts from some books I wrote in Vietnamese.

5. 3

Question 1: Is it sinful for boys and girls to kiss one another?

**Excerpt #A: PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE
pp.183-184**

One of the most frequently asked questions is whether or not it is sinful to kiss between boys and girls? Should boys and girls kiss one another?

In order to give an adequate answer, we need to propose some questions. Have you ever kissed babies or parents? Are you criticized or blamed for hugging children? Do you feel excited when holding

hands of brothers and sisters? Naturally, you said 'no' to all of these. However, when kissing or being kissed for the first time by a boy or a girl, you felt something strange, nervous, somehow guilty, and at the same time excited and thrilled. That is what you need to think about. It may be a voice from your conscience to warn you about the action of kissing. There are good and holy kisses, as well as bad and sinful kisses. There are kisses that convey love and intimacy, and there are kisses that are done with bad intent, of taking advantage or to abuse. We invite you to examine yourself, your life in order to kiss or not to kiss.

From these questions we may draw some conclusions: kissing is a sign of an internal attitude of friendship, of loving. There are holy kisses (Romans 16: 16) and there are sinful kisses (Matthew 26: 48-49). Kissing may be social when friends meet, or it may be sexual and seductive as it is portrayed in movies and on TV. French kisses are reserved for lovers and spouses.

Therefore, when boys and girls meet and get acquainted, they may exchange a social kiss, not a sexual kiss. In many countries, kissing is mostly reserved to married couples at home and in their bedroom, rather everywhere anytime.

Excerpt #B: TALKS TO THE YOUTH ABOUT LOVE
Is it OK to kiss when in love? pp.134-138.

That question is camouflaged skillfully under the word 'love'. Taken at its face value, that question would garnish a positive answer 'yes'. We might agree with you if everything means exactly the way it sounds. But it is camouflaged under the word 'love'. I want to turn around and ask you a question: What is love? What is real love? You

seemed to be embarrassed a little bit. You say: “when two people feel loved and loving, missing one another when not together, eager to be together all the time, that is love”.

I may answer you by saying that this is an infatuation, an emotional feeling, a biological thrill and sensation, and not necessarily real love. In general, when boys and girls first meet, they should not kiss except for social purpose. Then gradually, when they know one another better, they may exchange kisses, but still without sexual implications.

There is a big difference between kisses of spouses and kisses among friends. Friends kiss one another on the forehead, on the hair, on the cheeks, or on the hands. Spouses exchange French kisses or do whatever help them to express mutual love, or lead them to sensuous affection and sexual intercourse. Some people watching TV or movies have a tendency to equate all kisses as the same. But this is a myth and a fallacy.

When (in my book) we describe love in progress, we say that kissing is a sign of two people starting to be serious, to express love for one another. Boys use kissing to test whether or not girls really love them. Girls accept being kissed and start kissing to say that they feel loved and loving. This is the first step for mature boys and girls to think of a their future wedding and plans to get serious enough to marry. If they do not think in that vein, it is better for them to go separate ways than to continue and run into a dead end.

Love is a continuum of actions expressed in various steps or stages. You may say that you are in love or not in love, but you can hardly tell at

what step or stage or level you find yourself in. You can easily make yourself a fool without knowing it.

None of us think of ourselves as stupid. We all think we are smart and intelligent until we learn from sad experiences paid for by sweat and toils. As long as we live, we realize that there are no two mistakes or failures alike. These are the results of a Canadian magazine, *Adolescence*, in 1956. 40 years have passed but there has not been much difference. The magazine asked this question for the survey: is it sinful to kiss? 90% of boys said 'yes', 5% 'No', and 5% 'No opinion', while 50% girls said 'No', 40% were unsure, and 10% said 'No'.

That is a remarkable observation. Most boys know full well that it is sinful to kiss a girl and half of the girls said 'No'. Girls seem to be taken in easily by the magic power of kissing. They think of nothing sinful. Usually they protest at first, saying "I am scared. Please stop. Let us just love one another. Do not risk committing sins. I don't like it". Boys are fully aware of the sinfulness of the action and play cool by convincing girls in these lines: "There is nothing to be afraid of. See how much we love each other. Don't you feel excited and thrilled? Nobody, nothing can stop us from loving one another! I am so glad you understood me. We will be forever in love".

But these are just words, sweet and kind words without real deeds. A kiss might play like bait to trap innocent souls and make them victims of disguised little demons. How sweet a kiss may be, but who knows whether it is only sugar coated.

5. 4

Question 2: Is it OK to have intimacy and sexual relationship when two people are really in love? Is virginity worth to be saved until marriage?

Excerpt #A: PREPARATION FOR CATHOLIC MARRIAGE. pp. 178-183.

Should we try it out first?

Here and there, people have said that before marriage, the engaged couple needs to know one another in all aspects. They need to test one another by trying to work out everything, including the sexual experience. Such talk has more to do with seducing girls, trapping them in an awkward situation, than really knowing them. There should be nothing against acquiring good information and self-education even in sexuality, but with guidance and counseling, not haphazardly on their own, thinking they know everything and are capable of teaching one another. In order to show that there is nothing to hide, it is fitting that both should have a thorough physical examination to make sure that there would be no biological obstacle in their sexual life and expression. Other excuses may be used ultimately for the purpose of self-indulgence with sexual gratification.

When there is true love between two responsible people, when there is harmony between body and spirit, it is only fitting that both feel loved, loving and lovable. Love does not consist only on excitements and sensations. In marriage, the husband and wife, loving one another totally and deeply, will have thousands of ways to express that mutual love, to exchange ways of loving and caring. When lacking of love, they may be physically close,

yet there will be no excitements, no feelings at all. At times sexual intercourse serves as a responsibility to be fulfilled, a debt to be paid, a penalty to be rendered. In reality, at the beginning of the married life, there may be some minor adjustments in physical closeness and in sexual expression. But with a little love and care and a lot of trust and confidence, both husband and wife will achieve total satisfaction. It is only in marriage that people are totally satisfied in mutual understanding and deep communication. Sexual exploitations before marriage always leave scars in the soul, nervousness in the body, and anxiety in the mind. It is because of the guilt from the sin they committed. It is the voice of conscience that gives them warnings. It is a quiet but powerful voice.

We have had a long conversation in this regard because nowadays, there are so many magazines and books that seduce the youth by giving wrong information and advice. There are so many dangers now waiting for you to be trapped! These dangers are hidden under the excuse of good information and advice, of procuring happiness and joy, the art of loving and caring. It attacks the traditional value system that is labeled 'Catholic' and 'conservative'. However the Catholic morality has done nothing but uphold the human respect and dignity, protecting the moral values and priorities.

The best answer to those false accusations is found in the Bible: "*The law of the Lord is perfect, giving new strength, trustworthiness, wisdom, and making people happy.*" (Ps 19: 7-9). Only when we follow the law of the Lord can we find happiness. God, having created us body and soul, knows full well what we need to be happy. He gives us laws to

help us. In a similar way, it is like the instructions a manufacturer writes in a manual. When an engaged couple respects and protects one another according to God's law, they are doing something really good for themselves: joy for the present and happiness for the future.

Statistics reported that those couples who engage in premarital sex have a lot of sexual problems after their marriage. After defloration of a girl, most boys would ask these questions: if she is so easy with me, she must also be easy with other boys, too. Even in shotgun marriages with the pregnancy, the couple finds something lacking in their journey of love. Psychologically, boys who play the field before marriage are likely to continue to do so after. Non-virgin girls easily have sex with others, especially when abandoned by their boyfriends.

Excerpt #B: From TALKS TO THE YOUTH ABOUT LOVE, pp. 142-145. Is virginity worth a thousand talents of gold?

According to the medicinal knowledge there is a hymen in female genitals covered by the 'labia majora' (outer lips) and 'labia minora' (inner lips). The hymen blocks the way to the vagina and the uterus, having an opening for the menses bleeding. This opening varies from person to person, some having more than one openings. Ordinarily, when having sexual intercourse for the first time with penetration, this hymen should be broken and bleeding occurs. It is usually called defloration or virgin bleeding. Some girls may have a strong hymen that can be stretched without being ruptured completely. It is called the hymen, believed to be a sign of virginity. Even in medicine, doctors are not hundred percent sure whether or

not a girl has lost virginity. This hymen can be broken by heavy exercise in sports such as biking, horse riding, dancing, or even falling.

Virginity is part of the whole life of a person with body, mind, and soul. It is not to be confined to this little membrane called the hymen, or whether or not there is bleeding at the first sexual intercourse. Many girls still have physical virginity but not necessarily emotional and spiritual virginity. They do not stand a chance to be good wives or happy ones. Few girls, having lost physical virginity because of a fatal mistake, regained their emotional and spiritual virginity and proved to be happy and joyful.

We advise you not to be curious for no good reason. If necessary, you may have a physical exam for both of you when experts can share right information with you. Do not play doctor. It is not your expertise. However, some boys and girls want to play doctor, fooling around with their bodies, kissing, touching, heavy petting, and finally having sexual intercourse. These are the lines they use: "Sooner later we will be husband and wife: why should we stop showing love to one another? You are mine, and I am yours: we should belong to one another in mind, heart and body, too. Don't you realize that we love one another enough?" or "Let us be pregnant and have baby and our parents will agree."

Your pride is hurt, your love is idolized and idealized. That's when you give in easily to pressure.

You may say that hymen is just a little, tiny biological membrane in your body. But here we are talking about the whole person: body, mind and spirit, not just the hymen. That is the question.

At times the lines boys are using are to test the girl's heart. How can you be so sure that you will marry one another? In reality, many boys leave after having satisfied their sexual curiosity. If they agree to marry you, they do so under pressure rather than true love. Would you expect such a marriage to be a happy one?

When boys and girls have sex in secret, they always carry with themselves a guilty feeling: it cannot be an expression of total and caring love. Boys are active, aggressive and strong, while girls are passive, easy and agreeable. Recently, psychologists, counselors, and tribunals agree that there is such thing as date rape. I think that is the case here.

We want to call attention to those engaged couples who think and feel in love. Be responsible for your actions, for your planning toward the future, and for your marriage.

I think a girl should know that sometimes a boy wants to get turned down. Let me tell you what I mean. My girl finally gave in and it seemed like I liked her better when she wouldn't.

I think what happened was that it was nice to dream about how it would be when we got married. Now I don't dream any more and no matter how hard I try, I can't make myself feel about her like I used to. I may still marry her but I am wondering if I wouldn't admire a girl better and love her more if she wouldn't let me.

I think another thing is I lost my sense of pride. I used to congratulate myself on how I could keep my self-control. Now I can't. Sure I like it, but it really isn't all that great that you should

think less of yourself, is it? Why don't you tell the girls they may be taking something very nice away from the same guy they think they are being nice too.

There is an age-old question that goes "Why do men play around with girls who will and marry girls who won't?"

One answer is that they want a life-mate that brings out their best. Here is a wonderful letter about that. It is from a Minnesota mother who wrote it for girls everywhere. She sent it asking if I could use it in one of my columns. I'm glad to pass it along because I think it is loaded with wisdom.

Dear Teenage daughters:

You ask, "Why should I save myself for marriage?" I wish I could get you to back off long enough to think of what might be good for the boy in his total development.

What if he needed something more than he needed sex, and you had a chance to give him this one thing and you didn't do it? One thing every man needs is strength. Strong men are not those who have always gotten what they want. The truly happy man is one who is developing his inner strength. He does this largely by self-control and he must do it if he is to be successful.

As a mature woman, you will want a mature mate. If this boy is the right one, then you want him to be the greatest man he can be. You want him to be strong in every way. Wouldn't it be too bad for you both if you weakened him by saying "Yes" when you might have made him better for the future by saying "No"?

There is an old line I have read often in advice columns to teenage girls. It is that she should say, "If you really loved me, you would want to protect me". How about turning that around and saying to him, "Because I love you, I want to protect you. I want to help you grow. I think I can help you more by not giving in".

5. 5

Question 3: Is it sinful or harmful to practice masturbation?

This is a very delicate and controversial issue for which teenagers in particular do not find adequate answers. Even adults disagree on this matter. We will quote the opinion of Rev. Charlie W. Shedd first, then we will add our own comments and observations.

a.) opinion of Rev. Charlie W. Shedd

Excerpt #A: From THE STORK IS DEAD, pp. 70-73

MASTURBATION – GIFT OF GOD.

Let's start with a definition: "Masturbation: self-production of an orgasm by exciting the genital organs".

The reason for beginning here is that some young people actually do not know what it means. Usually these are among the younger teens. Sometimes they are late bloomers -- those who

develop slowly. Let's state it clearly: masturbation is sex by yourself.

Probably no phase of sex is fuzzier in more minds. Here are some examples of the mis-truths, half-truths, and confusion. Most of these letters are from young teens. But one writer is a college sophomore.

My big brother says you will go crazy if you do it too many times. How many? I can't even read a magazine without thinking about this. Do you think I might be some kind of sex fiend? I heard that if you do it too often, you might as well not get married because you couldn't do it right. Please tell me if that is so...My mother found this magazine in my room and she raised so much Cain I was mortified. Then she showed it to my father. He said that if they ever caught me again he would beat me terrible. I am so scared...I have tried to stop and even promised God I would. But it seems like the harder I try, the worse it gets. My friend said everyone can tell when you do it by the way you hold your mouth. Is that true?

This could go on a long time. So let's get it out from behind the haze for an open look. There are several things you should know.

- Masturbation is practically universal.

No matter how we define it, this is a very common practice. Medical authorities tell us that practically all boys do it. No one knows for sure how many girls, and some could care less. It isn't for them. Still, some do, and I receive letters from both sexes. Some of those shown above are from girls. They worry about it too. Yet the majority of the ones who write to me are well within the range of normalcy.

Alright, then, what is normal? That is the crucial question in many minds. Unfortunately, there is no quick answer because each body is different. So I would rather tell you about the bad and the good, and then have you decide for yourself.

- Masturbation has its negative side. It can be very bad

“When?”

When it is “compulsive-obsessive”. The dictionary says that a compulsion is a “feeling of being irresistibly driven to the performance”. Obsession is defined as “persistent preoccupation with an idea”.

How that applies to masturbation is that you better be managing it rather than vice versa. If you let it control you, that’s bad. If you sidestep your difficulties rather than face up to them, that’s bad. If you resort to self-solace when you need a firm hand, that’s bad. If you go backward when you should go forward, that’s bad.

Remember, the doctors said it is a natural part of *growing up*. Those last two words are the key. You be the one to decide. Do you think you are progressing naturally, growing up normally?

- It is important for you to understand fantasy.

When I was a boy, an old doctor friend told me something that helped. He said, *“You can never control who knocks on your door. What you can decide is who’s coming in”*.

The truth is that most minds have some perfectly awful thoughts. Don't be surprised what comes knocking. You never need to be shocked at these things if you know how to chase them away.

Here are some test questions for judging: "Are my thoughts harmful to me or to others? Do I picture scenes of violence and over-aggression? Are my desires perverted, twisted, or way off the normal?"

Whatever you think, be honest! Evaluate the good and evil in you as openly as you can. Then, if it's just too much, take it to someone who can. But don't come unglued too soon.

- Masturbation can be a positive factor in your total development.

This can be an important part, a very personal, strengthening part of your self-identity. To know that you're your system is capable of these amazing physiological reactions can be a good thing. This is especially true if you are a young teenager. You must learn to be grateful for your body and think of it as your friend.

Then, masturbation too can be a preventive to things getting out of hand. There is another old saying I learned in my teens. It helped me and I pass it along in the hope that it might help you. This is the word: "It is better to come home hot and bothered than satisfied and worried!"

So what does that have to do with masturbation? What it has to do with teenage masturbation is that teenage masturbation is preferable to teenage intercourse!

The chances are that you will need some release. Dates, dances, parties, swimming, riding

in the car with a girl, watching this lovely thing walk down the hall, listening to a record, television, reading a book, thumbing through magazines – these all can turn you on. It would be a very unfortunate person who didn't have some sex feelings in today's sex-oriented society. So be glad you're that way. Accept yourself as you are. Then use the best brains you've been given to keep growing positively.

- Which brings me to what I told my own children.

What I taught them is that *masturbation is a gift of God*.

What if the past generation had simply been blind to the truth? What if this was really the wise provision of a very wise Creator? What if He gave it to us because He knew we'd need it?

Let's not kid ourselves. Many of God's blessings become curses when they are not used intelligently. But like so many other things, it is really up to us. I told my children that they could make it evil or use it for good.

So that brings us to the crucial question. You know whether you want to be good or not. You know if you're sincerely interested in doing right. If you are, then this is the test for whether you're still with the healthy.

Question: Are you embarrassed about your performance? In your own presence, how do you feel about you?

So long as masturbation is not humiliating, so long as it helps you to keep on the good side of sociable, so long as you can accept it as a natural

part of growing up, then you thank God for it and use it as a blessing!

b.) opposing opinion

The strongest opposing position comes from medicine. Since Hippocrates of Greece, the forerunner of medicine until the 20th century, masturbation was always condemned by medical groups. In middle of the 18th century, a Swiss physician, Dr. Simon Tissot, published an entire book dealing with the negative consequences of this vice of masturbation. He stated that wasting a drop of semen is more harmful to your health than bleeding forty drops of blood. At then end of the 19th century, a medical convention in Europe, and a Medical Journal in America, repeated Dr. Tissot's position, stating that masturbation is harmful to your health, reducing you life span as well as your memory, causing venereal diseases, epilepsy and possible mental disorders. Even recently in the Questions and Answers, some physicians discourage masturbation as it is considered a bad habit.

From the religious viewpoint, the story of Onan in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 38), and the writings of St. Augustine and St. Thomas have been quoted as condemning masturbation. In the Hebrew Bible, it is the duty of brothers to keep the family name and heredity. Onan, not willing to marry his sister-in- law and so produce children for his brother, spilled the semen out to the ground when having sexual intercourse with her: he was killed by God. The Christian Bible, considering procreation as the main purpose of marriage, always condemns masturbation because this act does not fulfill the procreative aspect. Recently, with the new understanding of human psychology

and new discoveries in human sexuality, some theologians and moralists, Protestant and Catholic alike, no longer consider masturbation as harmful or sinful. However, the traditional and official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church has always stated that masturbation, homosexual activity, premarital sex, divorce, adultery, and fornication are all sinful outside of marriage. They do not conform to God's law and order when creating male and female. Human genitals are created for procreation and are not toys or objects for pleasure alone.

c.) what shall we say?

At first hearing, Rev. Charlie W. Shedd's opinion sounds attractive because it stimulates the youth psychology and feelings under the good words of growth, gift of God, and normal understanding. He concedes that masturbation may be good with proper use or bad with abuse or misuse. But that is the exactly the point. How can you discern what is right and what is wrong, especially in sexual matters when so much emotion and feeling is involved. At times, the sex drive is considered more powerful and urgent than one's survival instinct.

We learned from experience that all addictions begin with little things. Alcoholics start off with few social drinks. Drug users get penalized even with few experiments. We may venture to say that masturbation could become a bad habit before we know it.

Besides, good intentions and noble purposes cannot, and usually do not, justify our actions. We should not steal in order to help the poor. We

cannot accept briberies in order to have extra money for good causes.

Please also note that our whole person, including body, mind, and soul, is created by God. It is a gift of life from God, not just genitals or masturbation. God created us male and female (Genesis 1: 27). Good use is when we follow God's laws, bad use when we do not. We disagree on the statement Dr. Charlie W. Shedd made that masturbation is a gift of God.

As an experienced parent, Dr. Shedd advised his children to enjoy masturbation as a gift of God. As a Christian counselor, we realize that pure hearts and pure minds help the youth enjoy the truer joy, the long lasting happiness and inner peace.

In our opinion, the biggest harm in masturbation is fantasy, an imagination which French people call the *'la folle du logis'* (the mentally insane within).

Perhaps at the outset, when a child is growing up and curiously touches his/her genitals, he/she experienced some physical excitement. It was some emotional thrill and there was no harm, guilt or sin involved. But gradually, they realized that they had to think and talk dirty, to visualize sexual pictures, and fantasize about the opposite sex. Then there must be sin and guilt. Jesus said: *"Anyone who looks at a woman and wants to possess her is guilty of committing adultery with her in his heart."* (Matthew 5: 28).

Catholic moral theologians, such as Eugene Kennedy and Charles Curran, contend that masturbation is not sinful at all. At best, it is just

venial. To agree with that position means encouragement for masturbation.

We opt for a holistic and middle way approach. We believe that the spirit of the law is more important than the letter of the law, that the attitude is often more important than the action. Therefore, we want the youth to have a comprehensive understanding of the growing process: to have self-confidence and self-control in expressing feelings and emotions before engaging in the act of masturbation or, as a matter of fact, any sexual expressions. To each his/her own. It's the purpose of the clergy and counselors to help others to know themselves, to develop and actualize their potentials and use their gifts accordingly. I don't think we can set up an absolute rule about masturbation. A prescription may be good for this patient but not so for another. If you insist on our personal position, we think our emphasis on the harmful impact of fantasy and imagination would have spoken it clearly.

Another excuse for masturbation is a line that people use a lot: *"everybody is doing it"*. That must be too vague a statement, too ambiguous an implication. Even statistics do not agree. How do you know that everybody is doing it? Still, even though everybody is doing it, it does not imply that it is good. Many people may have allergies, colds, flus of all sorts. Do you want to catch these?

Quite often the medical reason is proposed to justify the excuse for masturbation because it does not do any harm. Granted, masturbation does no harm to your body, but how about your mind and your soul? Only recently has medicine reported no harm from masturbation, in spite of the fact that

for generations it has. How can medicine be so sure today about what was wrong in the past?

It is true that counseling and therapy admit bad impact from obsessive compulsive masturbation. Theologians do not completely agree on its merits or sinfulness.

If you want a brief statement of our position, we would venture to say that masturbation may not be harmful in this limited situation: to express yourself sexually, without guilt or sexual fantasy. "Maybe" is not the same as "should". Hope you understand what we are trying to say here.

5. 6

Question 4: What about birth control when married couples want to foster their marital happiness, promoting sexual satisfaction and releasing tense emotions?

a.) "Why do Protestants believe in birth control?"

Excerpt #A From THE STORK IS DEAD pp.142-149.

I am a Catholic engaged to a Protestant. We are both very religious. We are going to be married next Spring and we get along well except when we talk about birth control. We argue over it all the time. I have told him what our Church permits, but he says it isn't good enough. His sister married a Catholic and she got pregnant right away. He says

he doesn't want to have a baby so soon because he has two more years of college and then law school. It takes a long time to get started after that.

I can see how he feels because I am going to work so he can finish. We have argued about it so much that we avoid the subject now but we both know we will have to decide something before the time comes. One of my friends who works in the same factory with me has a priest who told her she should make up her own mind. I was brought up very strict and I don't know if I should. Suddenly, while I was reading one of your columns, I decided maybe it would help if I asked you to explain why Protestants believe in birth control. I have never heard it explained by a Protestant minister. Mark said he never had either. We both thought it would be a good idea because we just keep going over the same old points.

I forgot to tell you we are both nineteen. Our folks are all for us but they have different ideas too, since they are both very strong in their own churches. We would appreciate any help you can give us.

You sound like a wonderful couple. I would like to help, but before we talk about birth control, let's look at something else. You and Mark need to face up to one basic difference in your churches. You say that you had a strict Catholic training. Then you may have been taught that the Church decides what is right and wrong. Mark, as a strong Protestant, has been taught something else. He was trained to think the Church exists to help *him* decide what is right. That is a very important difference. What you need to determine is the answer to this question: "Can God, as we understand Him out of our different backgrounds, speak to us

together?” As a Protestant minister, I feel this is your only hope.

The most successful Catholic-Protestant marriages I know are like this: They have created a Church in their heart together! This is their real Church. Their other two churches are for the purpose of strengthening this Church in their home. If you and Mark can do that, then I see your marriage as hopeful. If you can't, I think you would each be better off married to one of your own faith. Your religion means too much to each of you to weaken it in any way. If you can strengthen it together, then you will really have a great thing.

With that as a background I can now tell you why Protestants believe in birth control. Perhaps it would be fairer for me to say, “Here is why *this* Protestant believes in birth control”. Against our “think for yourself” training, no Protestant can speak for all the others. But I believe these reasons are a fair summary of what most Protestants believe.

- 1. *We believe that God gave us the sex act for many reasons.* The creation of children is only one of these. Some other reasons are: two people enjoying God's gift together, the spiritual union of two soul expressing their love to each other, the physical and emotional well-being of both individuals, the strengthening of the marriage vows through frequent coming together, rest, joy, fun, excitement, cleansing of minds and hearts, and other things too numerous to mention. Birth control makes these blessings possible more often.
- 2. *Complete freedom from fear is important to full expression in the sex act.* A woman, subconsciously worried about pregnancy, may

hold back more than she should. This may be a deterrent to her total enjoyment. It may also cause the husband to feel that something is lacking. Sexual intercourse combines both relaxation and abandon when it is right. We hold that birth control contributes to sex as it was intended by its Creator.

- 3. *Planned parenthood makes better sense.* Spacing children is wiser than having them as they happen. We believe this is true attention-wise, money-wise, room-wise, education-wise, and almost every-wise. It seems to us that planned families have a better chance of being happy families.
- 4. *The mother's health is all-important.* Having children too close together is not good for a woman. Emotionally and physically, the demands of her life can be better handled if she is in top condition. If she feels better, her husband will. This is one more reason why we believe planned parenthood is right.
- 5. *Adjusting to each other is important before a third party comes into the picture.* There are so many little things to be worked out between you two. To work these things out without interruption may be very necessary. One or both of you may need full attention at first. This, of course, is one of the saddest things about having to get married. Many couples, denied that first time together alone, have paid for it in heartache later.
- 6. *Sexual frustration needs to be cleared in early marriage.* People like you come to the altar with a lot of self-denial in your background. This is admirable and we are glad you have high

morals. But when it becomes legal, you need to enjoy what you have been waiting for. It is true that you can still have intercourse during pregnancy. But no couple's sex life can be at its best during this period. You should be free to empty the storehouse of restraint. It will make you better people in the future. (Once I conducted a personal experiment in counseling. Whenever I had a case where the husband was unfaithful, I inquired about the marriage circumstances. It was amazing how many of these men had to get married. I couldn't help asking myself this question: "Do you suppose he didn't get all the sex he needed in their early marriage?"

Like I said, these are just a few reasons. I hope they will help you toward a wise decision. But don't ever forget this: What you think doesn't matter nearly so much as what you think God thinks! You should love each other so much that you want this above all else for each other – *perfect harmony between yourself and God!*

b.) Our response

First, let us admit that birth control is a hot controversy and debate among people with different ideas and backgrounds, Catholic as well as non-Catholic. Tons of books and magazines were written about this topic. Many theologians, moralists, and clergy people have dealt with this issue and concern. But there hasn't been a consensus or unanimous agreement. How can we treat it within a few lines and pages? The biggest and main difference lies in two key words and concepts "birth control" and "birth regulation/family planning". The difference starts off with the use of words, then implies various

positions, purposes and methods. As the history of mankind may show us, birth control began when men were selfish, looking for their own sexual gratification. They were afraid of not having enough excitement, afraid of discipline and sacrifice, unwilling to be bothered with children, afraid of lacking adequate luxury or convenient facilities and utilities. Birth regulation or family planning comes from a responsible attitude of those who want to be parents, aware of their contributions to the community and society and to God's family, the Church. Birth control groups have the position of restricting children to a minimum, using all methods or devices available. Birth regulation's position is that all children be born out of love of loving parents, and there will be no unwanted pregnancy or children, physically, emotionally. Birth control uses every method that prevents pregnancy, considering all methods as good and as available. If the woman happens to get pregnant, abortion will become an option. Birth regulation considers children as the fruit of the husband and wife union, a joy to the family. At times it may imply some sacrifice, but never too heavy to carry. The loving spouses use only natural methods that promote and enhance their unity and communication to express their mutual love according to human dignity. Not all methods are recommendable for conjugal love and dignity.

What we wrote above has to do with psychological understanding of the birth control issue. Few people want to make that fine distinction between birth control and birth regulation. Now let us address the issue from a Catholic viewpoint because now, only the Catholic Church teaches birth regulation through natural method.

The most recent document of the Catholic Church is the Encyclical "Humanae Vitae" promulgated by Pope Paul VI on July 25, 1968. In this document, the Pope teaches that it is not permissible for Catholics to use artificial birth control methods, and that the natural methods of birth regulation are recommended. The reason is that God, being wise and loving, entrusts into human union a new life. Through sexual intimacy and the union of husband and wife, the couple has an opportunity to cooperate with God. Conjugal love is more than just sexual intercourse, although the sexual intercourse is the ultimate expression of that union when husband and wife become one in mind, body and soul. There are thousands of ways for a husband and wife to express and celebrate their love when they truly love one another.

Let us take a closer look at the 6 reasons promoted by Rev. Charlie W. Shedd. We may agree in principle as they sound as if they really mean well -- to express love and communication between husband and wife. We make such a statement because we notice a fine line and a big difference between 'reasons' and 'excuses'. The 6 reasons mentioned above have two sides: on one side, they are supposed to promote and enhance love; on the other side, they disguise selfishness. It is rather difficult to know where there is true love and where there is selfishness. That is the real danger which may trap innocent minds and lonely hearts.

We make such a statement because statistics continually show that industrialized countries, where all artificial birth control methods are available, have the highest rate of marriage break up, divorces, abortions, rapes, sexual diseases, and crimes. We need also to note that commercials and deceptive ads have lured

teenagers into this vicious circle, and they end up ruining their lives. They play the sex game, hoping that nothing will happen. They do not realize that by doing so, they became sex objects and no longer human persons.

For this reason, we agree that both should practice the same faith, belonging to the same Church. At least they share something in common.

5. 7

Question 5: abortion.

Abortion has become not only a human concern, but also a hot political issue. Many books have been written, many people have discussed it, and still, it is a great debate and a perennial controversy. We think it would helpful to give only a few quotations for reflection:

“If a man loses reverence for any part of life, he will lose his reverence for all of life”. (Albert Schweitzer)

“Vice is a monster of so frightful mien, As to be hated, needs but to be seen; Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face, We first endure, then pity, then embrace.”

(Alexander Pope)

Abortion is a big business about women's abuses.

“Our bodies, ourselves???”

5. 8

Special Case: Masturbation

We want to pay attention to a special case. Masturbation: is it harmful or sinful to masturbate?

In order to give an adequate answer, we want to go back to the history of medicine, to the moral teaching of religions, especially in recent years. For centuries, both medicine and religion condemned masturbation as both harmful to the body and sinful to the soul.

Monotheistic religions, such as Judaism and Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism), quote the story of Onan to condemn masturbation. Genesis 38: 8-10 relates this story: Onan’s brother died childless, leaving a young wife who according to the law of Moses should be given in marriage to his younger brother so that she may produce offspring for his brother. Onan’s father asked him to follow Moses by taking his sister-in-law and having sex with her, but each time they had sexual intercourse, he withdrew and ejaculated outside to the ground. The Lord was displeased and killed him. Now biblical scholars explain the death of Onan as result of disobedience to God’s law through Moses, and not as result of coitus interruptus or masturbation, an age old birth control.

In the 18th century, a medical convention in Europe agreed with Dr. Simon Tissot, a Swiss physician, to condemn masturbation as harmful to

the human body, causing acne, skin itching and odor, dilated pupils and dark rings around the eyes, nose bleeding, asthma, unusual heart murmurs, and insanity.

a.) Historical Development

Since the 20th century, medicine has made a lot of progress and has noticed that masturbation is not be harmful to the human body. Human physiology studies show that there is no side effect to the marital sex life such as myths about premature ejaculation, frigidity or impotence.

Sigmund Freud put a great deal of emphasis on sexuality and implied sexual meaning into every human act. Now psychologists and counselors not only do not condemn masturbation, but even encourage it as a sexual tension release, a variety in marital sex life, a way to have sexual gratification without worrying about pregnancy.

Based on new discoveries in medicine and observations in psychology, some clergy say that masturbation is not sinful, especially in growing adolescents who want to explore their body, or in married couples who cannot be close physically and want to express their mutual love.

The majority, however, are in agreement with the statement of the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

“To form an equitable judgment about the subject’s moral responsibility and to guide pastoral action, one must take into account the affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety, or other psychological or social factors that lessen or even extenuate moral culpability” (no. 2352)

b.) Our Comments

From some historical background, we have these observations and comments:

a.) For centuries, medicine has erred, thinking that each drop of semen must be the result of 40 drops of blood, that each drop of semen is a little human 'homunculus', waiting to enter the mother's womb to be nurtured like a seed planted in a garden. For centuries, medicine made the mistake of attributing terrible physical consequences to masturbation. How can we be assured that medicine would be free from mistakes this time in the 20th century and the future generations?

b.) Though psychology has made some substantial progress recently, there is still much to be desired. Psychology has the reputation of changing its positions constantly and swiftly. How can it be trusted? A few decades ago, psychologists considered homosexuality as abnormal, as something to be corrected, alcoholism as bad habit resulting from the past behaviors, abortion as abominable. Now the official American Psychologists Association defends, if not encourages, homosexuality as normal, condemning alcoholism as a disease, while considering abortion as simple a surgery as tonsillectomy or appendicitis.

c.) Religion gives us, the believers, the golden rule. Everybody agrees that "to love God and love your neighbor as yourself" is the ultimate point of human life. But, it is important to know how to love God above all in reality, how to love the neighbor as your family, in the neighborhood, and at work. Is it true that to love God, we cannot carve images or statues, or we need to offer sacrifices, to

contribute donations and money? Is it true that to love neighbor implies that we should obey superiors without questioning, follow input and suggestions from inferiors without reservations?

d.) We all want to glorify God, but it is amusing to think of the fact that everyone considers him/herself as the only messenger from God, while others being at the door. So many wars of religion in the past already denounced that reality. Recall the Chinese Rites dispute in the 19th century to realize that Church's laws and regulations are very limited and relative. In the Hebrew Scriptures, it was taught "*an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*" (Deut. 21: 24). Adulterers should be stoned to death (Lev. 20: 10), but in the Christian Scripture, Jesus invites us to love one another as a distinctive mark of being his disciple, to forgive one another up to 70 times seven times (Mat. 18: 22). He even forgave the adulteress woman who was condemned by eyewitnesses (John 8: 1-11).

For centuries, religion used the popular scientific knowledge of the time, contending that the earth was flat or square against some scientists' argument. Some religions even considered woman as an inferior human being, not having some quality of mind and soul. How would anyone dare sustain such a position now?

The supreme and absolute law "to love God and neighbor" will never change, but its applications and implications must be adapted and adjusted to the current society and community. In the Old Testament, men were blessed by God to have more than one wife, while in the New Testament, Jesus wanted all to return to the original status of marriage unity and indissolubility of husband and wife. Catholicism is not the only

religion that can bring joy, peace and happiness to all, but each religion should make efforts to reflect God's way, life and truth through the voice of conscience and common sense.

Now let us go back to the 5 questions as stated above and try to provide some answers.

5. 9

Some Answers

a.) Question 1: is it sinful for a boy and a girl to kiss one another?

How can we tell if you are in love and in real love? When boys and girls go out on dates, can they really know for sure if they are in love and whether or not they are in true and real love? How can they tell that they love one another in body, in mind or in soul? Psychologists observe that a boy usually expresses his love in a physiological, biological, sexual way more than a girl. He may make sacrifice in terms of his physical energies in order to conquer the soul of a girl. A girl usually appreciates the things that belong to the soul more than a boy, and she can accept sacrifice in her mind and soul with the hope of not losing him.

There is saying that goes "*boys go for sex, girls go for love*" or a Vietnamese saying that sounds like "*girls desire (natural) gifts (& skills), boys beauty.*" Love is more than just beauty and gifts, but there must be a balance between body, mind, and soul. Kissing is an expression, a symbol

of love, and not necessarily a sign of true love. It is crucial to discern where there is true love from false love. Some say it is a love for the moment (when there is passion and emotion), in this place (where there is nobody around), at some parts of the body (where there is excitement and thrill), and for this reason (when there is money and fun). This last explanation may be fitting for the next question too.

b.) Question 2: when we are deeply in love, can we express our love in a sexual encounter, giving ourselves totally?

How can you say that you give yourself totally when in reality, they may be only some passing emotions in your heart, some temporary thrills in your body? Are you sure you are of one mind and one soul? If not, how can you say that you give yourselves totally to one another?

Thinking twice about that statement, you may realize that it is a fallacy. Under the same words, people may mean different things. You may love for this moment or for good, in body, in mind, or in soul, giving to one another now or in the future. This is a stark reality: when in love, people are so caught up with it that they no longer have good judgment and balance to make up their mind. They act very much like being intoxicated -- no longer are they lucid to see things clearly. No alcoholics think that they are drunk. No criminals believe they committed a crime.

c.) Question 3: is it harmful or sinful to masturbate?

We have spent considerable time going back to the history of development of the issue. We realize that there have been many changes in positions and developments in this matter. It is

expected to have more understanding and discovery in human physiology and sexuality that may affect our body, mind, and soul.

We need to reaffirm the Catholic teaching in the Catechism that masturbation is a small piece in the big picture of human life, an action among the many which should not be judged separately from others. We need to take into consideration all that have to do with a person's life, upbringing, circumstances, reason, and behavior.

d.) Question 4: birth control

This issue needs to be put into the whole context of the holistic principle. Birth control might not do much harm to the body, but might do so to the mind and the soul. Let us talk about the body. Statistics show that there are about 50 millions women in the world using birth control methods. Let us consider that half number use the Pill which costs \$15.00 a month on average. You can see a huge amount of money that the pharmaceutical companies have collected. They need to spend a fraction of that money to advertise, promoting their products and to get their message across. Only recently were the side effects discovered. Now in America, no doctor would prescribe the pills to women older than 35 years of age or have been on the pills for more than 3 years.

Know the side effects of the pill before you jump into using them. Ask people who used them to make sure you understand all complications. The pill has an impact on changes in your body, mind, soul, and finally, your life and your love relationship.

The most important impact is probably this: when married couples use the contraceptive methods, knowingly or unwillingly, they turn one another into sex objects for pleasure and lessen respect for human dignity. They have become disposable: loving when useful, despicable when useless. Birth control easily leads to extramarital affairs, to marriage break up, separation, and divorce as a fact of life in the industrialized nations.

Take note, however, of the difference between 'artificial birth control' and 'natural family planning'. Quite a few people receive information given to them by doctors and nurses about artificial birth control, but are ignorant of natural family planning. You will be delighted to learn more about and discover this natural family planning method. I invite you to contact a local office of the Natural Family Planning for further information about classes.

e.) Question 5: is abortion an absolute right of women?

Medicine and religion disagree on when human life begins -- when is the exact moment a fetus is viable to be human being? Almost all religions consider human life starting at conception and show respect to that human life in its various forms, from the womb to the tomb, including the unborn and the elderly. Medicine perceives the fetus as a mass of cells and tissues and treats abortions as one of many surgical procedures as tonsillectomy and appendectomy.

The women's liberation movement claims absolute rights for women and wants absolute

rights on their bodies and abortion on demand. As a matter of fact, nobody has her absolute right on her life or body. We were created by God through the caring love union of our parents. Nobody has the absolute right on her body to have abortions on demand. Abortion and birth control serve as signs of a lack of true love and total commitment to one another. It shows a lack of personal responsibilities to be mature persons and caring parents. Abortion and birth control mentality tells us that there is not much personal involvement and permanent dedication in love from two free people. They want to take advantage of one another, and they want to take leave of one another when there is some inconvenience or obstacle. They do not show respect to God's calling them to serve Him in their family.

This lack of personal responsibility is leading our society to a precipice in which the elderly are not respected and the disabled are to be looked down upon through death with dignity or euthanasia.

All this happens because there is no more principle and practice of the holistic approach. People no longer consider life as a gift of God, that God created them body, mind, and soul. They pursue material gratification and sexual desires, creating new idols for themselves. In a sense, they equalize themselves to be gods, having absolute rights on their life and on other people. That is the true original sin making them equal to the Creator.

Reflections and discussions

1. Take note of some definitions on love.
2. What is true love?
3. What is the ultimate purpose of human life?
What are the reasons for marriage?

Practical suggestions

1. If you are in love and engaged, jot down the reasons why you love your boy/girlfriend. Report the pros and cons about your love relationship from your parents and friends. Explain more in detail.

2. If you are married, take an inventory of moments of joy and excitement, as well as incidents of sadness and obstacles in your married life. Try to find some of the reasons and come up with solutions.

3. If you are not married, how do you feel when going out, holding hands, kissing and touching one another? Were you scared, excited, confused, relaxed, joyful, at ease and at peace? Why?

4. If married, each time you engage in sexual activities, do you take time to give thanks to God for the gift of sexuality? Do you pray for God to keep you in mutual love and fidelity?

5. If you are parents, do you consider your children as the fruit of marital love, or an accident of failed birth control?

Chapter 6

Applications in Education

6.1

General observations

First, we want to make some personal observations and comments about the educational systems in Vietnam and in America.

Vietnam is a country that had to struggle and fight for its independence throughout two thousand years of history, going through many wars against foreign forces as well within civil rebellions. It is poor in regards to material resources, but rich in the cultural heritage of human and social relationships. The way people are addressed in a conversation such as Mr., Mrs, Miss, etc...These words originally meaning Grandpa, Grandma, Aunt etc...reflect a value system that honors the family tradition in the society and includes everyone in an extended family.

The United States of America is a country recently established. Except for the war of independence, it has enjoyed peace and freedom, equality in rights and responsibilities. Its vast fertile land and democratic government system seem like a dream and a promise land for many people. Its emphasis on success in free enterprise and trade, free speech and liberty for all, somehow has shaken the roots of human value and moral concept. The way people are addressed and dressed show that somehow there is not much difference among them. There is no caste system.

The Vietnamese education system is based first on Confucianism that emphasizes moral principles and human dignity, as well as a balance and harmony between three essential elements from nature and nurture (heavens, earth and human) into the human being. Children need to learn how to behave before learning how to read and write. There is a Vietnamese saying that goes like this: *“You need to learn discipline first, then letters”*. The purpose of education is to train people into mature and responsible human beings, to build up character and personality as they say *“Today we practice what we learn at school so that tomorrow we may be helpful to the society.”* As Vietnam lacks libraries with books and writings, their industries haven’t been advanced, most of the learning consists on the practice and rehearsal of memorization, learning by heart. There is not much creativity in the way of teaching. It is basically hand me down education and passive.

The American education puts strong emphasis on techniques, results, success, diplomas, and degrees. You are successful when you have a good job, and a nice house with everything you want for conveniences, and extra money to spare or save.

6. 2

The School system in Vietnam and in America.

American schools, especially public schools, concentrate more on specialties and technicalities.

The American Constitution makes a clear separation of church and state, a distinction between civil and religious authorities. It gives a chance for some people who interpret the law in a restrictive way to not allow moral teaching at schools, to enforce discipline in the classrooms. That's why there is consistently discipline problem at schools. Parents invoke too much right for privacy and self-determination for students so as to undermine the growth and development of children. Remember that while they are growing, they still need some protection and cannot be allowed to grow at will.

A French philosopher and educator, Hippolyte Taine, said: *'tête bien faite est mieux que tête bien pleine'* (it's better to have a head well trained/done than full). We may venture to say that the Vietnamese head is *'well done/trained'* and the American head is quite *'full of knowledge'*.

In Vietnam, besides the hours students spend in the classroom learning various subjects, they must engage in extracurricular activities and group projects, or even help around the house and the neighborhood, babysitting at home or cleaning the streets. Even when children reach the legal age, they still need to stay with parents at home and help with chores and expenses. Children may have enough educational background, but they still need to be trained in the family discipline and live in harmony with each other. The positive effect is that there is unity and mutual support within the family. The negative effect would be that there is less chance for creativity and independence.

The American family wants to train a child to be self-supportive and self-affirmative through freedom and independence. Some children want to move out on their own before the legal age of 18 years. Few children between 18-21 years of age still live at home or are still under parents' influence. The positive aspect is that they know how to handle things on their own, but the negative is that it might be too lonesome and risky.

When confronting the world challenges on your own, especially at that young and immature age, without much of experience or exposure to the real world can be scary. You may be fooled or trapped unknowingly. Take note of influences of the mass media of TV, radio, records, music, dancing bars, liquors propelling the youth into the wrong side of life.

In English we say "*Money talks,*" though it cannot say very much. In Vietnamese, we say "*You could buy every thing with money.*" It applies squarely in America more than in Vietnam. Sports, movies, theaters, and the music industry have all created giant idols and imaginary role models. On one hand, American society acts as if according to atheism, not believing in God. On the other hand, they worship new idols created by money and mass media. They refuse to worship the true God because they have these idols that human imaginations have fabricated. In the past, people carved statues in rocks and stones, in wood and in bronze as objects of their worship. Now they have new idols in blood and flesh and muscles.

I think it is Blaise Pascal who said this:
"Sciences without conscience are nothing but ruins."

6. 3

Civil and Religious Authorities

Since there is a separation between Church and state, government and religion, civil and religious authorities, students at schools are not taught basic spiritual values and moral teaching. All the education does at school is instruct and teach skills. The new revolution in electronics and computers turned human beings into robots. They become slaves to machines and technologies. Videotapes and Internet communications have intruded family life, causing frictions and disasters.

Many parents had to give up, not knowing what to do in this regard, excusing themselves for the fact that they do not know the new language of computers or are too busy working at different jobs. It would be very much like your buying a new car and turning the ignition key over to your teenager because you are not a mechanic. Or it would be as if you give money to a housekeeper to go shopping without telling her what to buy and what you need. Or it would be signing your name away in a blank check for someone else to use at will.

In reality, it is essential that parents are aware of their rights and responsibilities as primary educators of their children. Their authority should not be at risk of conflict with the school. Most students are not mature, knowledgeable, or experienced enough to completely be on their own. Children may have more information, more skills, more technologies, but probably not much more experience in life. They do not have enough maturity and responsibility to deal with the thorny

problems or complicated issues. No matter what, parents are the ones who love their children the most, who care for them the best. Dear Parents, trust your children and help them to grow and develop. Dear Children, trust your parents to learn from them precious lessons and experiences in life, in order to avoid dangers and risks in life.

6. 4

Public versus private schools

The imbalance of the public education system prompted many parents to send their children to private schools. There, they had better discipline and moral value teachings, although they had to pay a hefty price. The dilemma may find its way home when parents cannot afford the tuition at private institutions. Note also that the problems that arise from too much freedom in a birth control environment, in what so called sex education, read sex information, and finally in gang activities, drugs, alcohol use, guns. We sincerely hope that parents work with and cooperate with teachers in order to educate children. Do not let them get loose at will or you have to bear consequences later.

Parents need to work really hard in order to keep up with new toys, new tools, new gadgets, new instruments. It's a pity when it comes to parents from other countries who made a living here. They have to work twice as hard.

Public schools in America only teach children sciences and technologies. Religious communities and churches need to educate children in the ways of faith and moral upbringing,

and parents have to form them in character and human dignity by examples and words. In the past, in the United States of America, Wednesday was designated for religious organizations and social activities. Children had a chance to learn about the Bible, about religious beliefs. Now that precious time has been invaded by new interests such as music, drama, computer, dance, and ballet.

It's a big dilemma to find enough of time for everything! It's up to parents to make a decision on priorities, on what to choose or reject in order to provide a balance between needs of body, mind, and soul.

6. 5

Obstacles and Difficulties

We run into some real obstacles and difficulties. On Wednesdays, when children are rushed into classrooms after having spent all day long at school, they may be there physically, but their minds wander around like zombies.

Besides, we need to examine the content of our teaching and think twice about our staff. Most of those who teach CCD – religious faith formation - - are volunteers who do so for the love of God and of children. Few of them have received adequate training and background. Most teach whatever they were taught 20-30 years ago. We know that things have changed, including the way religion is taught and handed on. If we, adults, are not renewed and adapted to these changes, if we do not speak the

language of the time, how can we be accepted by children?

I want to talk particularly about the influence and power of money.

In general, we notice that the Protestant Churches are more efficient in organizing these religious education classes, in providing good teaching materials, in making better social adjustments and cultural adaptations. Personally, as a teenager, I used to go to Protestant churches to ask for free colorful images of the Bible, though I did not attend their services let alone adhere to their doctrines. Protestant Churches can do so because of the mandatory tithing requirement which is clearly prescribed by God in the Bible (Gen. 14: 20; Lev. 27: 30-31; Num. 18: 24-26).

Catholic Churches invite Catholics to voluntarily do sacrificial giving. Statistics show that only 60-70% of parishioners contribute something to the level of 1%-2% of their income.

A Protestant Church of 100 households has the income of a Catholic Church of 1,000 households, but the Catholic Church needs a much bigger facility, staff and budget. It seems strange that parishioners are more inclined to give sizable donations to build grandiose churches, but are reluctant to regularly contribute for the building of God's temples that are people.

We have heard of vocation crisis and clergy shortage in the Catholic Church and how lay people may give a hand to help. In the past, we didn't pay much salary to priests because they were not married. Now we need to pay decent salaries in order to attract qualified ministers. That's the crux

of the matter. Volunteers are well intentioned but not always well qualified! It's a vicious circle because if there is not much money, we do not have many qualified teachers. Because classrooms staffed by not so qualified teachers do not attract students, we notice the low quality of our education in faith and moral training. We want to make an appeal to everyone. Be aware of your support and contribution to the common good of the community. Don't pass the buck to the society or the Church or the circumstances. We all share the rights and responsibilities.

6. 6

Theological Concern

A delicate point needs our attention: ordination. No matter what, ordination makes a difference. Parishioners still respect the ordained more than to the lay person. Lay ministers need to work harder to earn that respect.

Recently in America, quite a few women demanded to be ordained for the service of God and His people as men are. This is a theological concern and thorny issue. Some said they should be ordained, others said they should not be. We think we are in no position to oppose or favor it. We want to emphasize the fact that each and all of us may contribute something to the common good according to our means and gifts, even without ordination.

6. 7

Balance in Education

The issue is how to balance and have a harmony in the education of body, mind and soul. Sports, games, traveling, gymnastics, and exercises train and form a healthy body. As the Romans used to say “*mens sana in corpore sano*” (*sound mind in sound body*). Music, arts, drama, and technologies train and form the human mind. Worship, prayers, Bible study, spiritual exercises, retreats, and meditations help us to find a meaning of life, harmony in the living, peace and happiness for the soul.

In the United States of America, after a long time of running for material conquest, people felt lacking in spiritual values. Even in medicine, physicians agree that chemicals may play some impact on the human body that needs input from mind and soul in order to get total and complete healing. In the past, the American education system put too much emphasis on technologies and skills. Now it requires students to spend some time studying human relationships in psychology, sociology, religion, and community life.

Nowadays, even though many people do not profess publicly the name of God or belong to a religious institution, they still pray to a Supreme Being, a Higher Power. They all agree that communication with the Divine helps to contribute to their mental and physical health, to the happiness and peace in their mind and soul.

6. 8

Essential Education

Recently Robert Fulghum, a teacher and minister of Seattle, Washington, published a book to become a household title ALL I REALLY NEED TO KNOW, I LEARNED IN KINDERGARTEN. Essentially, all we need to know is this: share everything, play fair, don't hit people, put things where you found them, clean up your own mess, don't take things that aren't yours, say sorry when you hurt somebody, live a balanced life. That is the essence of any education system. The golden rule is applicable to everyone everywhere every time. What we need to do is to take time to apply these rules to our lives.

6. 9

What shall we do now?

If you are student, take a look at your time table, at the subjects of your study to see whether or not they reflect a balance in regards to body, mind, and soul. If not, consider how you can make necessary changes to implement the balance.

If you are parents of students, have a nice talk with your children. Encourage them to choose subjects that will reflect a balance of their studies, attend PTA meetings, conference with your child's teachers, and raise concerns and issues in this regard.

Teachers, teach students these spiritual values without quoting religious precepts of any denominations. Everyone is free to advise a student to be honest and truthful without invoking the 8th commandment of the Jewish and Christian Bible. Everybody can tell and help others to respect property and individual rights without mentioning the 6th, 7th, 9th and 10th Commandments.

Clergy, take the time to learn more about the progress that has made its way into our society, be it electronic, nuclear, computers, or the Internet. Do not condemn a priori recent changes and new discoveries but look at needs of the time and society and the demands of this consumerism mentality in order to challenge people to keep a balance of body, mind, and soul. In the meantime, you need to speak the language of this age, make adaptations and adjustments to the next millenium. To be called as messengers of God, to be His prophets, is an honor and privilege, but it is also a difficult vocation. Quite a few have committed themselves to serve the Lord, and even sacrificed their lives. Some left their own families to pursue that lifestyle and fulfill that noble ideal.

How about you?

Reflections and discussions

1. What does it mean *“first discipline, then learning”*, or *“ignoranti nulla cupido”* (ignorance is bliss)?
2. What is freedom of speech, freedom of thinking, freedom of religion?

3. Evaluate the power and value of money in our society, political system, religion, and education.

Practical suggestions

1. If you are parents, set aside 5-10 minutes a day to have a personal talk with each child: chat, confide, advice. Do not gather all children together as you would in the army or at court, except when there is something related to all – which is an exception.

Take note of the balance of needs between body, mind, and soul. Do not put too much emphasis on physical needs or mental education at the expense of spiritual values.

2. If you are teachers, spend time with slow learners, those students with special needs and problems: try to understand their situations in order to help them. Slow learners are not the same as stupid or stubborn, and smart students are not always good and nice.

3. If you are clergy, try to learn idioms and slang of the community, code words for various expressions. Do you have time for the youth in general and the juvenile delinquents in particular? You would be surprised when you found out that you were somehow out of touch with their reality.

Chapter 7

Signs of maturity

7. 1

Statement of the Issue

Our 6th conclusion in chapter 3 regarding the principles of a holistic approach states: *“to be holy is to be wholesome, and, to be wholesome is to be holy”* (p.39)

However, how can you be holy? What can you do to become wholesome? Are you holy when saying prayers all day long? Are you mature when getting big, holding some position in the community, or growing old? This conclusion does not deny the fact that each religion considers itself as the right and official one while looking down on other religions as false and wrong. This misperception has caused so much misunderstanding and conflict that it has triggered wars of religions, persecutions because of faith, and divisions among nations according to religions or denominations. If the essence of Buddhism is mercy and kindness, the greatest commandment of Judaism and Christianity is love and justice. If the main teaching of Confucianism is universal love, then we have reason to believe that when we all

practice what we preach in every religion, we may attain peace and happiness. That is when we become wholesome human beings and holy as God's children. It's really funny when we notice that everyone considers him/herself as God's favorite at the expense of others, thinking that God has sided with him/her, and that God always acts on his/her behalf alone.

How, then, can we recognize a holy person? How can we identify a mature person? And how can we become mature, knowing what to do and what not to do?

7. 2

General Criteria

Based on the general principles of the holistic approach, we want to propose some general criteria about maturity: whenever there is a balance and harmony between body, mind, and soul, there is maturity in that person -- a holiness of a saint and the wholesomeness of a hero/heroine.

In reality, few people can achieve that level of holiness and wholesomeness. Most people make some sort of decision and act according to some aspects of life. As human beings with a body, mind, and soul, we think, we feel, we speak, or we act from the body, mind or the soul.

7.3

When the Body Acts

There are times when the body acts alone, without the mind or the soul taking part in it. That is when we act out of instinct according to the emotions, along with our senses. We eat when we feel hungry, we drink when we feel thirsty, we cry when we feel sad, and we dance when we feel joyful. At school, in the counseling office, we hear constantly these lines: *“feelings are neither right nor wrong”* or *“go with your feelings”*. In general, these are instances when we act based on external stimuli: love because of the beauty, getting mad because of misperceptions, buying because of pride and ostentation, belonging to a religion in order to be seen, going to church when feeling like it, or staying home because it’s rainy.

7.4

When the Mind Operates

There are times when the mind operates without the body or the soul taking part. This happens when we do a lot of thinking and reasoning, calculating about pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages. There is a fine line between ‘a reason,’ ‘an excuse,’ or ‘a rationalization’. We make a lot of decisions because of what our parents liked or dislike, because of our friends’ approval or disapproval, because of rumors and even of the advice from counselors, teachers and clergy. Do not take me the wrong way on this.

We need to listen and take into consideration our parents' words, our teachers' and clergy's advice, and our friends' support. But, the buck stops here with us and with our final responsibility of bearing the consequences. That's what maturity is about. We are on our own.

The riskiest part of all this is when we tend to make a decision to please our friends, teachers, parents, mass media and propaganda, commercials and advertisements. We usually say that s/he is good or must be right because s/he is my friend. We need to reverse by saying that because s/he is good or right, s/he should be my friend. Jesus said: "*Whoever is not against us, is with us.*" (Lk 9: 50) In reality many people argue the other way around, saying that whoever is not with them must be against them. It creates more walls and barriers, making more enemies in life.

7. 5

When the Soul Decides

There is also a time when the soul decides without much participation from the body and the mind. Here and there, we have heard of stories of saints and heroes and heroines who could go days and months without food and drink. They were not attached to their families, and they were untouched by persons of the opposite sex. We admit that these are exceptions. Now let us talk about us in general.

We may think of instances when the soul decides without participation from the body and the soul. Going to church when being sick or eager to

be baptized without much knowledge about the religion. Some people join religious communities without learning about their new way of life, and some people get married without really loving, let alone truly knowing their spouse personally. Some even say that they will eventually learn all that once committed to the new life. What a mistake!

7. 6

Practical Conclusion

Now, how do we know when a decision is mature and right?

First, ask yourself whether or not you have feelings, emotions, or sensations in your body. Do you like it or hate it? Do you become sad or happy in the prospect of that action? In your mind, you need to deliberate and discern all the pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages, whether it is wise or unwise, right or wrong, reasonable or unreasonable, acceptable or unacceptable.

Naturally, we cannot always go through these steps in making up our minds and taking a decision. But, we want to make an analysis of what usually should take place for a better grasp of the process. In reality, somehow we go through one or all of these steps without knowing about the whole process, explicitly or implicitly. A decision is not totally human, not really mature, when we lack one of those steps or factors.

Maturity does not depend on age, education level, culture and civilization, social status and position. People like Buddha, Lao Tse, Confucius,

Moses, David, Daniel, Jesus and many others were wise and mature long before age. Some people, although advanced in years, never learn to be wise and mature, being fooled over and over again. Some people go through the second childhood, never really grown up. Some without degrees or diplomas prove to be wise without books, intelligent without being intellectual, wise without accreditation. Some Catholic saints, without attending schools or university, reached a perfect level of communion with God, not to be pressured by any adverse forces. There are people who still suffer a lot with all comforts and conveniences. Finally, there are people who prove to be selfish and coward with all power and authority in their hands.

Mature people act according to their beliefs and have harmony between words and works. Their life reflects their convictions -- always happy and peaceful. Mature people are willing to accept the changes of the time. They are equal in moments of sadness and moments of joy. They know what to expect from life. They are not too proud or too humble.

We sincerely hope that each of us will make efforts to renew ourselves, as the saying goes "renew today, renew tomorrow, renew each day". Each day we renew and make progress so that we may reach the maturity and happiness of our dream in life.

Reflection and discussion

1. What is a saint? A hero/heroine? An idiot? A coward?
2. How can we notice a mature or immature person? A wise or stupid person?

3. What is the purpose of religion as you know it? Is it true that each religion has its own purpose?

Practical suggestions

1. Recall an important decision you recently made and how you came to make it. See how much a role the body, the mind, and the soul played in making that decision.

2. Who would you consider as mature and a model of your life? What do you admire most in that person?

3. Who would you consider as holy, wholesome? Do you want to be like that person? Why?

Addendum A

Stages of growth and development
of a mature person

A. 1

In General

We want to present a summary of concepts of developmental psychology in dividing the human life span into stages of growth and development. We chose the number 7 as a symbol and a point of reference, knowing that no real number is accurate to represent human life. Recently, some studies in biology have reported that human cells gradually change and are replaced one by one so that every 7 years our body has all new cells that did not exist 7 years before. Interestingly, the number 7 is also a mysterious number in the Jewish and Christian Bible.

We stop at the age of 50, thinking that all the changes must have taken place in the first 50 years. In the years to come, there will only be repetition of the past. Also, there has not been

much study or research in psychology in regards people older than 50 years for the very reason that only recently people could manage to live beyond 50, thanks to new progress made in medicine and nutrition.

Let us tentatively divide human life span as follows: Stage I: infancy (1-7 years), stage II: childhood (7-14 years), stage III: teenage (14-21 years), stage IV: early adolescent (21-28 years), stage V: young adolescent (28-35 years), stage VI: young adult (35-42 years), stage VII: adult (42-49 years). Golden age (50 years and more): supposedly mature and responsible.

As human beings, we are also social beings in a community of human beings. We are born and nurtured through the loving and caring environment of our parents. We grow and develop within the family, and then gradually come in contact with the rest of society through school, Church and work. The purpose of all education is to 'lead' (*latin: educere*) someone into something, to break open their potentials, to form them into mature and responsible people. Although each of us should remain independent, responsible, free and autonomous, we must receive some impact and influence from others. We may have reacted to that impact or influence by rejecting it, accepting it, being indifferent to it, or adapting it into our lives. In each stage or step of development, everyone must have a 'significant other' in our life, though we may not be aware of that at the time.

Also, take note of parallels observed by people who practiced the holistic approach in regards to the similarity between our relationship with parents at home, teachers at school, and our relationship with God at church. That is probably

why God is named 'Father', 'Parent', life giver, Creator, and Supreme Being in most religions.

Now, let us study each stage of growth or step of development one by one.

A. 2

stage 1: infancy (1-7 years)

From the moment of birth until the minute of setting foot in school, children consider parents as everything in all aspects of eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, speaking, thinking, behaving, working, resting, praying, and believing. Parents are that significant other and are almost the absolute and perfect one to the child.

This stage may be divided into three periods: a.) biological period when the child learns how to eat, to sleep, to walk, to talk (1-2 years); b.) angelic period (3-4 years) when the child listens to parents and obeys them absolutely in everything. This is really the time we can consider the original blessing instead of original sin; c.) starting up period (5-7 years) when the child starts getting around to the neighborhood, getting acquainted with their neighbors, anxious to go to school, eager to learn everything. They are touching everything and asking questions about everything. It would be impossible to require children of this age to sit still, not to talk or to ask questions, to touch something, or to run around. They seem to have endless energies and curiosity.

Exhibit I: The small dot represents the child, encircled by parents in a much bigger circle. The small dot will get bigger and bigger.

The Catholic Church baptizes, or sanctifies, babies right after birth to signify that both natural and supernatural life should go together. Babies have the privilege of sharing the honor of being God's children, citizens in God's Kingdom, members of God's family, the Church.

Some argue against this practice, saying that babies should not be baptized as they have no sins at all and that they will make a decision to accept the Lord as their personal Savior at the age of discretion. We may respond by saying that although babies have no personal sins, they need to be included into God's family as soon as possible, just as much as a baby being born belongs to a family, a race, a country without being asked first. But it is a privilege and a right for that baby to belong. As long as we live we will be free to exercise our rights and responsibilities. However, our freedom is not unlimited. Nobody was free to be born or not to be born, to be black or white. This does not imply that we are less free. We have our lifetime to exercise our freedom. Each day, we need to be aware of our rights and responsibilities, to renew our decision to live, to love and to be happy and hopeful.

A. 3

stage 2: childhood (7-14)

Children go to school at this age, beginning with the primary grades through middle school and junior high. This age is for rapid growth and

sensitive development. The most significant others for this age group are teachers at school. They take the place of parents in teaching academics, in enforcing moral code, and in imposing authority.

At times there is difference in opinions, views, and ideas between parents and teachers. Naturally, children listen more to their teachers than to their parents for many reasons. First, there is the change of environment and atmosphere. There is something new and exciting, not boring and monotonous as the routine at home. Second, there is always chance to learn more things. Ideally, parents and teachers should work together in positive cooperation in educating their children. Sometimes, though. Parents are so busy that they entrust their children completely into the hands of teachers because they don't feel qualified or sophisticated enough to teach their children. At times teachers, not thinking much of the parents' background, do damage to the authority of parents.

Exhibit II: parents being the big circle, while the child holding the position half and half: half way inside the family circle, half way out to the world through school, church, club and organizations. This stage can be divided into two periods:

- a.) 7-10 years: darling age: the child is eager to learn, probably because teachers are nice and gentle, always encouraging and supportive. It is fitting that the Catholic Church allows children

to make first communion at this age because the children are generally sweet, loving, obedient to their parents as well as to teachers. Children have no problems observing God's commandments and the Church's regulations. Some psychologists do not agree in allowing children to make their first confession for the reason that this might put a guilt trip on their naive conscience.

- b.) 11-14: pre teen. The child feels some uneasiness because s/he no longer is as little as before, yet not as big as others around. Here begins some changes in the physical appearance and body in order to enter the teenage years. The child is half way in and half way out: not so sweet yet not so naughty.

A. 4

stage III: teenage (14-21 years)

This is probably the most talked about and the most studied stage. Incidentally, this is the most changing and changeable stage. Biological changes taking place in the physical body. There are attitudinal transformations in the intellectual mind in regards to decisions that will affect the whole lifetime, such as what school they will attend, whether or not to get married, or to move out or to join the armed forces for others. This stage is called the full moon (15th day of the month) age according to the Vietnamese-Chinese tradition, the puberty or the teenage according to the American custom (thirteen-nineteen).

Exhibit III: parents being the bigger circle, children being the smaller circle separate and away. This stage seems to have two periods:

- a.) 14-17 years: Puberty, along with other biological changes in the physical body. For boys, the most noticeable change is in the voice. Some moustache, daydreaming and night wet dreams. For girls, it is the beginning of menstruation, breasts enlarging.
- b.) 18-21 years: pre adolescent: time for dating and relationship. You find the opposite sex attractive and you are attracted to the opposite sex. This helps you to decide to love someone special and get married.

The most significant other of this stage is friends, boyfriends and girlfriends. This is the time for dating and courtship. Usually, there is quite a difference and contrast between parents and children in ideas, opinions, views, and positions, especially in regards to friends and social relationships. May we suggest that parents should not forbid children to make friends but instead should take time to know their friends and their respective families. At times, children do the opposite of what their parents ask of them. They think that they should show their maturity, independence and growth.

The Catholic Church recommends the celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation at this stage, emphasizing the fact that the growing teenager should be aware of his/her own rights and responsibilities as members of God's family the

Church, as citizens of God's Kingdom on earth, as soldiers of Jesus' legion.

A. 5

stage IV: young adult or preadolescent (21-28 years)

At this stage, most people have finished high school or had had some college education. They are now employed and working. With some education, some diplomas or certificates, those who just enter the job market for the first time have the impression that they knew everything and that everything is quite simple and easy. This is the stage for creativity and originality, for new ideas and new agendas. The world is in your hands, so to speak. You have a tendency to look down on others, and you do not appreciate or respect your parents very much. There is a Vietnamese saying that goes like this: *"It is a blessing that the child is better off than the father."*

Exhibit IV: children being the smaller circle above and parents being the bigger circle under. We notice that history has had many revolutions. This is a time when great minds are engaged in discovery. They either were successful in their deeds or became great heroes/heroines and role models for future generations. Many companies succeed greatly because they tend to hire people of this stage. This is also ideal for getting acquainted

and married because you have a lot of energy, a lot of strong will, and are ready to take risk in making decisions. It is also true that both man and woman, having finished their studies, now pursue a career, follow an ideal, or create a home to their dreams.

In industrialized countries, young adults, because of the need to spend more time for professional training, have a trend to marry later. This creates a problem. After many years and many acquaintances, it is difficult to make a choice, especially when they have had sexual experience. The dilemma for them is that on one hand, they do not want to continue the relationship. On the other hand, they are afraid to make a commitment.

In the Catholic Church, the Old Canon Law of 1917 allowed marriage between boys of 16 years and girls of 14 years of age. The New Canon Law of 1983 only recommends that they should not be permitted to marry when they are too young. Most countries decide that 18 or 21 years of age as legal age for voting, paying taxes, driving, and marrying. To be of legal age means that you have the rights and also the responsibilities in your community. Some tribal people, because of primitive living, get married sooner.

A. 6

Stage V: adolescence (28-35)

There is a Vietnamese saying that goes like this: *“you are on your own, self supporting, at 30 years of age.”* If you have not made it at 30, do not have a job or a career, a profession or a position, you must be in trouble. It is trouble for your family and for yourself. Most people are settled at this age, being married or having some children. If they join a religious community, they must have professed their vows or have been ordained a clergy. Even if they join gangs, they must be leaders by now.

Exhibit V: both circles being of same size, apart from one another.

The most significant others at this age are children, disciples, foster children.

In the Catholic Church, this is the required age for ordination or profession of vows after some years of rigorous formation and formal training.

A.7

stage VI: adulthood (35-42 years)

During this stage, couples must have some children, and after few years of raising these young children, now they understand the energies and efforts of their own parents who in turn as

grandparents, love if not pamper their grandchildren. Grandchildren serve as bonds linking parents and grandparents because at one time, they were on their separate ways. At this age, we may sincerely understand forgiveness and reconciliation, willing to admit our own mistakes and failures of the past.

Exhibit VI: two circles representing two generations and two worlds approaching one another, having something in common, but still something apart.

The most significant others at this stage are children. They serve as a bond that links husband and wife, between parents and grandparents, between family and community.

The Catholic Church celebrates the sacrament of reconciliation or confession publicly. The experience of some teachers argue that it is too early to require children of 7-10 years old to receive the sacrament of reconciliation, as it might cause undue anxiety or a guilty complex. The Catholic Church also requires the annual reception of the sacraments of reconciliation and communion, somehow imposing involuntary obligations upon the conscience of the faithful. At this age, some people after having tried and erred, recognize their failures and are willing to repent and to renew.

A.8

stage VII: Junior citizens (42-49 years)

At this age, married people, having grown up children getting married or having children, enjoy the privilege of being grandparents. They are laid back and relaxed, willing to volunteer their time and energies to the community. If they happen to have their own parents still around 60-80, they will take good care of these, being grateful for labors of love in the past.

Exhibit VII: there is a harmony and happiness between parents and grandparents, symbolized in two circles wrapping around one another. The most significant others at this stage are the extended family in the form of community, church, social clubs and organizations.

A.9

stage VIII: Senior citizens (50 years and older)

At this age, you are finally settled -- mature physically, financially secure, emotionally stable, spiritually anchored. Since it does not involve many changes, it is well studied or written about. It is called the golden age because of the number 50.

At this age, most males, as well as females, may have to go through menopause. For some, it is toward its ending. Suddenly, you feel rejuvenated, more excited, more energized. But it may also involve some crisis because of new jobs, new adventures, or of past successes and failures.

This stage may be divided into 3 periods:

- a.) 50-57: menopause
- b.) 57-64: senior
- c.) 64-70: retirement.

At this age, you start talking about the past, remembering old memories and good old days. It is also the time to think of the future, eventually the future life to which you must get ready and prepared. Religion plays an important role in your life. Faith in God and in the future life becomes strengthened.

The most significant others are Clergy and the Church.

A.10

Development according to Stephen R. Covey

Recently, Stephen R. Covey's book SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE has made an immense impact on the people in education as well as in business through his speaking, writing and conferences organized through the country and the world. His assets were estimated to be in the millions of dollars. We highly recommend this book. Here, we want to compare the stages invoked

by Stephen R. Covey and the stages of development as we described so far in this Appendix A.

Stephen R. Covey divides the stages of development into three groups:

- a.) dependence b.) independence
- c.) interdependence.

Using these three stages of development as a frame of reference, we want to combine all as follows:

A.) Dependence:

- 1. Total: 1-7 years 2. Partial: 7-14 years

B.) Independence:

- 1. Negative: 14-21 years 2. Neutral: 21-28 years
- 3. Positive: 28-35 years

C.) Interdependence:

- 1. Partial: 35-49 years 2. Total: 50-70 years and older

Addendum B

Why do children have
different temperaments &
character?

B. 1

General Observations

First, let us notice that almost everything is relative when dealing with human behaviors. We cannot set up absolute principles or propose a general rule that will apply to everyone everywhere all the time. What we call general principles in psychology and counseling may prove to be true only about 70-80%. The bible of all counselors, therapists and psychiatrists, the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders), having gone through five editions (I-1952, II-1968, III: 1979, III-R: 1987 and IV-1994) made substantial changes in diagnosing mental and physical disorders of human beings. MMPI, being touted as the most reliable psychological test of human behavior, may only help to detect some

psychological traits, some tendency in human personality contingent upon the observations and comments of counselors and therapists. What we are writing here comes from our own observations and experiences as well as those of some others psychologists.

There is a Vietnamese saying that goes like this: *‘Parents give you birth to life, but God (Mother Nature) gives you your temperament and character.’* We ask parents not to be too much alarmed or guilty because your children do not act like you or someone in your family. *The personality of each person is the sum of all factors such as the climate where you live, food and drink, where you grow up, education through customs and mores, cultural background of a race or nation, spiritual values of your upbringing etc...*

We invite you to read a book on temperament and character by David Keirse and Marilyn Bates, PLEASE UNDERSTAND ME, published by Prometheus Nemesis Book company, California, 1984, revised 1998.

Here we want to study especially the birth rank of children in the family. This rank has a special factor that has a lasting impact in one’s life as to feelings, attitudes, actions, growth and development. Naturally this is all relative. We want to sum up the main points of theories proposed by psychologists such as Alfred Adler, Richard Jones, S. Schachter, accompanied by our own observations and comments.

B. 2

Child #I: First, elder, primogeniture: Daddy's child

Generally speaking, a typical family is composed of a father and mother and 4 children. The first child was brought forth when the newly wed couple was still fresh from their honeymoon and marriage. Usually, the husband has more say, more impact on the child than the wife. This is a simple way to detect who has power and authority in the family. Physically, the first child takes on the similarities and the likeness of the father. (S)he imitates the gestures, words, actions of the father, and usually follows the line of work of the father. Some statistics and studies even assure us that 90% of the first born children practice the same profession of the father or whatever he prefers.

At the puberty, (s)he has the tendency to rebel against his/her father, then when growing up returns to act like him. First daughters get along better with daddy than first sons. Born when parents were relatively young and inexperienced in family life, and not having siblings to play with and to learn from, (s)he is less creative or imaginative.

If the first child likes the mother or acts like her, it is believed that her influence, power and authority are certainly dominant. This may be the case when the father has to go away quite often for work or because of limited knowledge in academics and does not think of raising the child adequately. Or it may be that the wife, being so good and so qualified, does everything.

This remark is not meant to put the blame or the credit on anyone. It is just an observation in

order for the family members to be aware of so that adjustments may be made accordingly.

B. 3

Child #II: Mommy's child

The second child has a tendency to be like the mother as the first already claims the father. If there is love and harmony between husband and wife, brother and sister I & II are likely to get along fine. If there is conflict, confrontation, or argument in the family, they tend to reflect that situation, each one taking a side of father or mother.

If the second child likes the father or acts like him, there is good reason to believe that the influence, the power and the authority of the father, is dominant more than that of the mother. This may be the case of a mother being sick physically, or weak mentally, or not qualified in the society, or too busy making money or running around and so not having enough time for the family.

Some fathers do not understand why they have some bias and prejudice against the second child, while some mothers feel uncomfortable talking with the first child, especially at the puberty when children want to grow up and express themselves by keeping a distance from their parents.

B. 4

Child #3: the diplomat, the negotiator

Psychologists call the child # 3 the diplomat because (s)he plays the shuttle between father and mother and between siblings. (S)he needs to obey parents and to get along with brothers and sisters. Quite often, (s)he serves as go between to mediate husband and wife when there is a conflict, a need to report for better communication. (S)he is pretty neutral or at least trying to be, not like his/her siblings, the first and the second, or like the youngest, the spoil brat. (S)he makes efforts to please all and sometimes ends up by displeasing everyone. She comes up with compromises in order to bring about harmony while others are firm in their positions.

B. 5

The Youngest: the baby, the spoiled brat.

The youngest child is usually called the baby, the spoiled brat (in French: 'enfant gâté'), because being born the last, (s)he inherits everything from parents and older brothers and sisters. By this time, the parents are settled, having decent or more stable jobs, with some amenities and luxuries in life. As a result, they have a tendency to pamper everything on the youngest. The youngest inherits everything, including hand-me-downs materials, emotional, intellectual and spiritual gifts that were paid by hard labors and heavy sweats of their parents and siblings previously.

Being the spoiled brat, (s)he is likely to be pampered by parents and siblings, to be demanding, arrogant, difficult and irritable, not easily agreeable and getting along with others.

B. 6

The Only Child

The situation of the only child draws a lot of attention. As the only child, (s)he has all love from the caring parents. If parents live in harmony, (s)he is encircled with loving and caring people and grows up happily. If there is discord in the family, (s)he wants to take advantage of the situation for his own benefit.

(S)he is both the first and the last child. As the oldest and the only child, (s)he has no siblings to play with and to learn from, except to play with parents and learn from them. At times (s)he has the impression and feeling that the parents are his/her peers, and it is difficult for parents to level with him/her. There may be some disrespect at the puberty. As the baby (s)he is pampered all the way. (S)he is demanding, arrogant, always wanting for more and easily getting tired of everything. Parents agree that it is particularly difficult to teach and discipline the only child because (s)he is the only one. They would not dare to do so out of compassion and pity. That may be a considerable obstacle in education.

B. 7

The Big Family with Many Children.

It is more difficult to make observations when comes to a big family with many children. However, it is quite obvious in the case of the first and second as well as of the baby child. It is rather confusing to make accurate observations in regards to children in between. It looks very much like children taking turns to be the first or the second or the baby or even the diplomat. This tendency shows the influence, the authority, and the power of either the parents or the siblings.

Children born close to one another have a tendency to foster 'sibling rivalry', because they have so many likes and dislikes that they need to compete and overcome. Children born far apart from one another are more likely to get along better, to communicate better, on account of the instinct of becoming big brother and big sister in order to prove they are growing up and being mature.

B. 8

Practical Implications

To know the differences within members of the same family is to help us accept these and not to be critical of them as bad or good, better or worse. That way, we certainly can help foster better communication, to make possible adjustments, to promote harmony, to complement one another.

As a conclusion of this appendix on birth order, we need to approve something truthful about that saying that *'Parents give you birth to life, but*

God (Mother Nature) gives you your temperament and character”. Also, we may agree as psychologists remind us that there are no persons exactly alike in this world. Our character and temperament is the sum of all influences and impacts of all relationships, direct or indirect, as well as of all environmental and circumstantial factors. There is a Vietnamese saying that goes like this: *“being close to an inkpot you become darkened, being close to a lamp, you become brightened.”*

We ask parents not to be too alarmed when noticing the differences among the children, and not to ask them to become what you want them to be or to be exactly alike. We want to state further that we need to understand and accept temperament and character of others, although seemingly unusual or exceptional or different. No matter what, we have an impact on one another each time we entertain some relationship by words, feelings or actions. Nobody becomes a saint or a devil alone. We drag others along with us. As long as we live, we are related to one another. We are all connected.

for a conclusion

dear reader,

You have come this far. At this point, if you still think that *“l’homme, cet inconnu”* (human being, this unknown) still being a secret and unknown to you, don’t be discouraged. That is exactly our human nature as we suggested to you right at the beginning of this book.

By the way, it is our joy and pride if you happen to know yourself a little better, to know others a little more, in order to live in harmony, to understand your religion or faith more clearly, to commit yourself to the truth and the life. We are walking in the same direction of our long journey of life. We are all fellow pilgrims to become mature persons, to be holy and wholesome. We are still searching and looking, as we haven’t reached the ultimate goal of our human existence.

I invite you to share with us your feelings and impressions while reading this book. I hope we lend support to one another in our journey.

Sincerely,

Rev. Anthony Vu hung Ton

Rev. Anthony Ton
Pastor of St. James Catholic Church
1988-1999

**"To be holy is to be wholesome
and to be wholesome is to be holy."
(p.39)**

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