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# **Human Love, Its Meaning and Scope A Phenomenology of Gift and Encounter**

by  
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The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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## Foreword

*Alfonso Lopez Quintas*

As with everything human, love is richly varied and therefore complex. To truly love and to enrich our existence with a corresponding dignity, we must devote time and energy to reflecting on the meaning of authentic love, the demands it makes upon one, its relation to the highest sense of freedom, and the values each of us considers "ideal" for our lives.

To provide a solid basis for this crucial topic of love a brief but intensive ethical treatise is needed for the issue is distorted today by a thousand and one misunderstandings and prejudices. Mere sex information is insufficient. Rather a preparation is needed which will join the many forces latent in one's person: the instinctive and the spiritual, the basic impulses and the great ideals which give life direction and meaning.

Learning in this complex and decisive matter cannot reasonably be left to chance, for it concerns the deepest commitment of each person. As educating means inspiring person with the high values, this book aims to show the importance and greatness of the highest of values: a love that is sacrificing, generous and altruistic. Due to certain interpretations which reduce love to mere eroticism, there is a need to clear the horizon so that the main outline of what presently is understood as human love in the foremost anthropological and ethical studies can be clearly seen.

All great values create a field of attraction drawing sensitive people who look therein. The task of the spiritual master or guide consists in suggesting how they can immerse themselves in this magnetic field. The rest is left to the values themselves – to their power of attraction. Every value must be fulfilled, for we are all called to take them on as criteria of our actions.

Like all true ethical works, this book is not intended to dictate actions, since its primary objective is to stimulate freedom in its readers. It aims merely to awaken the feeling produced upon encountering a high value, which lifts one to what is best within oneself, to the highest fulfillment and beauty.

This attempt to clarify the high value of human love and enable its proper understanding is integral to the educational movement entitled: School for Thought and Creativity and its dual goals, namely, to learn to think precisely about life and to live creatively at all levels.



## **Preface**

*George F. McLean*

This work by Alfonso Lopes Quintas enters the great human battle to uphold human dignity and carries off the task not only with success, but with a brilliance that amazes and enthuses. The battle is often envisaged as between understanding the human person either as an animal or as an angel. Most choose one or the other of these and then head swiftly to an easy but destructive exit.

On the one hand, much commercial profit is to be made if the most explosive passions of sexuality can be reduced to physical gratification and then exploited. Those less mature and struggling to find their way in life are particularly prone to being abused in this way. Society is rightly insensed by child abuse in all its forms. Amazingly, it fully accepts the abuse of adolescents and young adults through commercial twisting of their minds and hearts. In this the social sciences can too often be complicit through their tendency to look for data that is certain because physical in nature and therefore available to animal experiments and to theories that does not exceed the human imagination.

On the other hand, and in reverse, some would shy away from the bodily and especially sexual dimension of the human person in fear of the powerful passions they entail. This may be less a matter of those who could dismiss the physical for the spiritual, than of parents unclear about their own sexuality and who feel incapable of helping their children cope with its fundamental and emerging dynamisms in their own process of development and of transition from home to marriage.

In this work Professor Lopez does not accept either extreme or facile solution. Instead, he wades into the fray that all this entails, takes both dimensions of the human person and welds them together in the special unity that is the human person. On this basis he proceeds to show how couples can build together a love, a home and a family in which all can truly flourish.

Professor Lopez is especially well suited for this as an outstanding professor of philosophy at the famed Comillas University, a member of the Spanish Royal Academy, and an outstanding musician deeply experienced in the creation of things beautiful. He is moreover a priest who has devoted all his resources to the development of youth development and programs of preparation for marriage which are widely dispersed in multiple languages from Argentina to Russia.

Uniting all these personal resources, he is able to identify the cultural pitfalls which tempt and threaten young persons on all sides in their search for identity and community, maturity and deep love. But it is characteristic of this book that he considers this alone to be less a matter of protection than of the development of a positive appreciation of the amazingly rich and varied process by which mutual attraction, when promoted in broader ambits of value, can enable physical attraction to evolve into love and commitment between the two as persons. In this process sexuality comes to fruition in passion that transcends self and is fully generative.

This positive vision is developed progressively chapter by chapter. It is the needed, but generally missing, vision which can enable people, especially young people, to navigate the swift currents within and the obstacles without so as to find and fulfill the meaning of life. Seldom if ever has the whole process been evolved with so intensive an integration of all dimensions of the human person, such depth of meaning, and so exalted a sense of human destiny. It is truly the light that is needed by all who would mature humanely and all who want to help the young in their battle to find the way to live in love and reflect this in family and community.



## Chapter I

# Love as Meeting or Encounter

The best way to solve problems caused by misconceptions regarding love is to know completely what a human being is and the conditions for one's full personal development. As love is an aspect in the life of the person, the better one knows the person, the deeper one can enter into the nature of love, what it implies, its demands, risks, gifts, and the horizons it opens.

But, how can one learn about the human person, how can one get to the bottom of what each of us is? There are a thousand theories about human life, varied and sometimes clashing. There are a multitude of supposedly valid opinions, all wanting to predominate and impose themselves. Is it possible to choose the right path in the midst of this whirlwind of opinions and currents?

### **The Role of Scientific Investigation as a Neutral Point of Departure**

One approach which can serve as a point of departure for such understanding is to follow the discoveries of science. If we take into account only our own opinions, the ideology of a political party, or even the teachings of our religion, we will never find a common platform upon which to discuss because each one has its own strong stand. It is very difficult for people to change their attitudes in ethics, politics and religion, since to a large extent these are determined by a thousand influences and carry sentimental attachments. That is why very competent people hold quite different, and even conflicting ideas on these matters.

Science, on the other hand, has no personal motivation; its research is impartial and should draw the assent of anyone with sufficient knowledge to understand its results. The scientist establishes hypotheses regarding what is real and by experimentation tests whether or not this explanatory project is confirmed. When confirmed it is accepted by the scientific community as a basis for the search for other knowledge, until another, more precise, hypothesis is established. In this way science is a broad common search for the truth regarding what exists.

In fact this research process is limited to certain types of reality. Ethical, political, legal, aesthetic and religious questions cannot be the object of scientific research. Nevertheless, science can provide ethics with basic data regarding human beings to help discover how one should behave in order to develop correctly. This data can provide a meeting point for all who wish to lay the foundations for an ethical consensus regarding the correct path in life.

### **The Person as "A Being for Meeting or Encounter"**

Through lengthy study and risky experiments biology shows that the person is a "being of encounter". Juan Rof Carballo, member of the Spanish Academy and Doctor in Medicine, has explained this as follows in some well-documented works.<sup>1</sup>

Premature infants are not fully developed persons if one considers the state of their enzyme and nerve systems. Even those born after nine months, are but half-way through gestation and in a state of immaturity. The Creator arranged this early arrival surely for the mothers' relief. But there is another, far more weighty reason—so weighty indeed that if we consider it well it is powerful enough to change our whole mentality. That is to enable the new born to complete shaping his or her physiological and psychological being in relation with his or her environment. The baby's environment is, first and foremost, his or her mother, then the father, older brothers

and sisters, the home. Here is where we find the great value of relationship, not as one link supplanted by others in the formation of the human being, but as a constituent factor of the whole. It is not that I exist and afterwards make contact; rather, if I do not make contact I am not living as a person.

Nowadays biologists stress that a "web of affection" must be established between mother and child, an area of protection and shelter. They, therefore, recommend that mothers, if possible, breastfeed and care for their children themselves. Washing a baby is not just making it clean, but protecting it. Breastfeeding is not just nourishment, it is the basis for an ambit of tenderness which is fundamental to all later development of this human being. We have here the first encounter a child establishes in his or her life, the proto-encounter which is primary and model of all those to follow.

Based on this example, the child later will establish other types of encounters: with their environment, people, language, school friends, family traditions, works of culture, and values of every order. One develops according to the quality and quantity of these encounters. If the child is unable to make contact with anything or anyone his or her development will be hindered; he or she will be spiritually asphyxiated and destroyed as a person.

### *What Is an Encounter?*

But, what strictly are encounters that make them so important to the constitution, development and perfection of persons? Sometimes we say: "I was walking along and met a friend". We mean we saw him, greeted him, and spoke for a while. But we cannot affirm that we truly encountered him. The encounter is not merely seeing, greeting and talking. When we travel on a crowded bus, we are very close to others, but we do not encounter them. There would be no sense in saying to the person whose elbow is digging into my ribs: "I am going to confide in you." Undoubtedly he would tell me to keep it to myself, because there is no intimacy there. I might add: "But we're so close. . . ."—indeed we are far too close, but this neither implies nor generates intimacy. On the contrary, it invites aversion: we wish the others could step back. Extreme proximity is not in itself an encounter, even less so impact for which we employ the term: collision.

What, then, is encounter? It is urgent that we know, for this is what turns us into people and enables us to develop fully. All of us come from a personal encounter and are destined to establish other encounters. Nothing is so important in our life as encounters, but hardly anyone stops to explain exactly what, strictly speaking, is an encounter. It is a mingling of two realities to their mutual enrichment. I have certain possibilities of explaining a topic; you have others; I give you mine and you give me yours. We take them both up actively and develop a dialogue: This is an encounter. You and I join together to generate something new: an exchange of opinions, of ideas and feelings; clarification of a subject; perhaps the development of our friendship. This dialogue is something new and fertile which has grown from joining together the ambits of our lives. I say ambits because you and I are not mere objects; but realities endowed with the power of initiative. We can begin a dialogue, communicate our ideas to others and receive theirs in return.

A person extends far beyond the boundaries of his or her bodily field, which can be measured, weighed, or analyzed scientifically. The person as such is not limited by his or her body, but extends further. One influences others and is influenced by them, retains the past and plans the future, skims over events or probes their meaning. Note this well: a person is a field of reality, an ambit. One is corporeal, and because of this one's activity is subject to certain limits. But, since persons are spiritual, they can go far beyond their bodily limitations.

The human body has the same conditions as an object: it can be located, measured, weighed, touched and scientifically analyzed. But it is not reducible to an object, because it forms a vital part of the person. The body is an expression of the whole person. When I tell a joke and you smile, in that smile I see your whole person looking at me. The whole person vibrates within the body. Nowadays, it is not possible that we first know the body and then infer that inside there is a spiritual reality; body and spirit form a unit that cannot be separated. Hence, it is unfair to state that man "has" a body: the body is not a mere object and cannot be an object of possession or disposal. A human person is bodily or corporeal at the same time and for the same reason that he or she is a person.

From all this we draw the decisive conclusion that encounters takes place between ambits, not objects. Whereas objects are juxtaposed or collide but do not meet, only ambits can intermingle, offer each other possibilities and take up those which are offered.

This offer can be made by people, but also by certain realities which are neither people nor mere objects. A piano is an object: it can be measured, weighed, played, moved . . . , but it is also an instrument which offers the pianist possibilities for creating musical forms. When the piano is joined with the pianist as an ambit forming a field of possibilities for creating music an encounter takes place, the fruits of which are a new ambit; namely the musical piece played. Similarly, a boat is an object, but also an ambit: it offers possibilities for conversing, going for a trip, sailing and fishing. It is the same with the sea, which offers us possibilities of sailing, swimming and fishing. Hence, when a boat takes to sea for the first time, there is an impact, which on a higher level is an encounter. Consequently, the launching of a boat is a symbolic act which is followed by a banquet.

This discovery of ambits opens up the possibility of creating a multitude of encounters in our life, not only with people, but with non-personal realities which take them beyond being mere objects. Human life is enriched when we learn to see people and even many objects as ambits. On the other hand, human life is depleted when we tend to consider all beings as objects, as mere means towards our ends. This idea of encounter sheds much light upon love.

### *Conditions of an Encounter*

We now know what an encounter is, and consequently that human life should be a web of encounters to be extended indefinitely. But, how is an encounter constituted? If it is neither by mere impact nor by juxtaposition, but an intermingling of ambits giving place in turn to another ambit, it must be difficult to achieve. Offering one's own possibilities to another person implies opening one's spirit and generosity, a wish to share and to create something together. Taking the possibilities which the other offers me implies, for my part, a capacity for listening and the humility to admit that I am in need of help.

In an amorous encounter, the lovers must offer frankly all the possibilities which make up their being. If I do not show myself to you as I am, when you notice this you realize that I do not wish to make you a gift of my real person, but only of a false copy. I hide something of myself and keep something back. This lack of honesty on my part makes you mistrust my promises of love. You then close in on yourself and are unable to give yourself sincerely. By not giving ourselves to one another, we cannot intermingle the ambits of our life and do not encounter each other. We may feel an erotic hunger for each other due to a largely superficial liking. This hunger possibly may lead to "intimacy" in the sense of sexual relations, but this is merely bodily and does not engender true friendship because it is not an encounter.

Married people sometimes confess that they live together and have normal "intimate" relations, but are not "friends". Here intimacy refers to a merely corporal gesture which is not a living expression of personal intimacy, an intermingling of two personal ambits.

A personal ambit is not reduced to the bodily sphere taken superficially, nor to all that we commonly understand as a love life, with its mutual attraction, yearning for sexual union, and pleasurable feelings. Instead a personal ambit covers the whole field of reality we evoke when we pronounce a name: such as John or Mary. John sees Mary as a pretty face, a shapely figure, a pleasant smile. He enjoys being with her, conversing, accompanying her; he dreams of being with her in a more intense, sexual way. Undoubtedly he will promise her eternal love. What is the value of this expression? John may be quite sincere, yet his love can be extremely poor. Does it mean for him a personal encounter with all that implies, or is it reduced to a passing relationship, as pleasurable as possible, but with no intermingling of his personal ambit with Mary's? This is the decisive issue. The human person is "a being of encounter", which as an encounter, is based on a certain measure of personal love.

If John declares that he loves Mary, when in reality what he loves are the qualities which he finds pleasing, then he loves himself and the delight and enchantment these qualities produce in him. If these wane or disappear, due to time or illness, or no longer seem pleasant because his senses are dulled by repetition of the stimulants, John will say that the love has disappeared. In fact, this love never existed for the other person, but only for himself. The sexual attraction was only erotic hunger. One who is attracted to another person in order to satisfy one's own hunger never reaches that person; one does not form any personal ties with the other, who is reduced to a means for one's own ends. Here one does not abandon one's solitude: The erotic exchange is reduced to an exchange of two solitudes, it is a self-interested union which is very far from personal love.

One who gives oneself up to eroticism is searching to fulfill one's needs, whereas the person who loves gives all one has. These are opposing attitudes; and what is decisive in human life is always the attitude one adopts. This basic option determines everything, as will be seen in another chapter.

### **At The Crossroads: Choosing Generosity vs. Egoism**

Let us review the steps taken. We have distinguished ambits from objects, and concluded that an encounter is an intermingling of ambits. This intermingling presupposes love, which requires the decision to join with the other person as such, not only with some of their qualities. If I love only some quality in a person, I stay within my egoistic solitude; where eroticism starts from egoism, love comes from generosity.

We know the origin of these two forms of relationship, but where do they lead, what are their consequences? We will look at this fully in the next chapter when describing the process of vertigo and ecstasy. Here we will say only that eroticism produces, first, feelings of exaltation or euphoria, and then disappointment, sadness, bitterness and desperation, whereas ecstasy incites exultation, enjoyment, enthusiasm, happiness, peace, protection, and rejoicing. These are the affectionate reactions produced in one's soul by the process of vertigo and ecstasy. Ecstasy is the basis for the highest of unities; vertigo destroys all elevated forms of unity.

We are now deep into the study of how to establish a personal encounter and how this is made impossible. This analysis reveals the laws governing the development and the disruption of

personal life. If we know these laws, we can foresee what will happen to us when we adopt one of these attitudes over the other: egoism or generosity.

Have you ever asked yourself why we encounter each other? Obviously it is because we see values in the other person. These values attract us so that we approach each other. And for what do we approach each other: is it to take these values as means for our satisfaction or as a revelation of a person whom we would like to know? From this alternative emerges two possibilities: that of delivering ourselves up either to vertigo or to ecstasy. This is the major crossroad: if we accept fully what this means we will become fully mature, for we will have the power of discernment. That is the concern of the following chapter.

## Texts

F.J. Sheed stresses that the modern person is easily drawn by the attraction of sex life, while barely reflecting on the meaning it must have in his or her life. To go about it intelligently, each person should analyze carefully what it is and what is the goal of each actions he carries out, each activities he embarks upon, and each decisions he takes. Otherwise, his or her life will be meaningless, literally senseless:

I am aware that to the modern reader it may seem quaint and antiquated to ask what something is for. Rather nowadays we ask what can I do with something? However, the first principle for the intelligent use of a thing is to know what it is made for; in fact, this is almost one of the first principles today for intelligent abuse. If we wish to falsify something, it is wise to know what it is we are falsifying. Asking what nature means seems to be a good beginning for a discussion.<sup>2</sup>

If we reflect on the meaning of a love life, we find that love's target is to establish unselfish unity between people. Such unity is made impossible by egoism, but is fostered by the wish to serve. This is skillfully pointed out by José María Cabodevilla in his *Carta de la Caridad (Letter of Charity)*.

The egoist looks always to his own benefit, either blatantly or shrewdly. The egoist always looks out for himself, putting himself at the center of his world: sacrificing any other love in favor of love of self, and sacrificing, in fact, any true love for the sake of a fantasy. A Hindu mystic when sleeping dreamt that life was only happiness; when he awoke and realized that life is only service he began then to serve and learned that only service is happiness.

This is happiness of shared love, the happiness of seeing a love that has matured and become vigorous; it is the happiness of love which gives itself and rejects nothing.<sup>3</sup>

## Notes

1. Cf. "Medicina y actividad creadora," *Rev. de Occidente* (Madrid, 1964). *El hombre como encuentro* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1973). *Violencia y ternura* (Madrid: Ed. Prensa Española, 1977).

2. Cf. *Society and Sanity* (New York: Herder, 1963).

3. *Op. cit.* (Madrid: BAC, 1966), p. 270-277.



## **Chapter II**

# **Ecstasy Establishes Encounter, Which Vertigo Destroys**

Let us situate ourselves at the crossroads about which we spoke at the end of the previous chapter. In life we can initiate processes of vertigo and fascination or processes of ecstasy and creativity. How are these initiated, where do they lead, and what are their consequences? Looked at more closely this will provide the light for discovering and understanding in depth a thousand circumstances in our life. This would make possible a great power of discernment, which is a sign of maturity.

### **Fascination or The Process of Vertigo**

Let us start with the process of vertigo. If I adopt an attitude of selfishness in life, I consider all around me as a means towards my goals or ends, the objects of my interest. I am the center of the universe and reduce everything to the role of satellites around me. Realities which I consider more worthy than others are privileged objects, but objects all the same. When I encounter a reality with some outstanding quality, I feel drawn towards it and want to control it and use it: my ideal is to control in order to enjoy. When I control something which stimulates my instincts, I feel euphoric, exalted. I think I am going to achieve rapid emotional fulfillment. But this is a false illusion, for I am soon overtaken by deep disappointment because the attractive reality I hold cannot intermingle with me since I have reduced it to an object. Because I cannot encounter it I do not develop as a person; and on realizing this I become disappointed and saddened.

This sadness is continually repeated because I persist in my selfish attitude; hence it becomes enveloping and distressing. Distress is the sense that everything I need to fully develop as a person is hollow. On leaning into this void, I suffer a kind of spiritual vertigo. Because I have lost the capacity of turning back towards life by a radical change of attitude, this vertigo gives way to desperation. Desperation is the bitter state of mind produced by seeing that all exits towards realizing one's own self are closed. This bitterness leads one to destruction, physical or moral, one's own or that of others.

None of this refers to those suffering from psychic depression, but to those in perfect physical health who give themselves up to the fascination of possessing what inflames their instincts.

### **Creativity or the Process of Ecstasy**

The other process – that of ecstasy – is a quite different attitude. If I am not selfish, but generous, I do not reduce those around me to serving as means towards my ends; I respect them for what they are and for their calling. This respect is not limited to taking each reality in its full value, but joins with them in developing their interior possibilities. The generous person respects different realities and collaborates with them. When one enters into a relation with a reality which offers eminent qualities and is attracting, one does not try to control it for one's own use. One approaches it to deal with it but keeps a respectful distance. It is precisely in being close, yet at a certain distance that a field of play (an exchange of possibilities) is established between both realities. This fruitful exchange is the encounter.

If, for example, I am particularly attracted to a person because of some quality he or she possesses, I let myself be dazzled by the gratifications such quality promises. I want to control the

person and take as much advantage as possible. In this I lower them to a mere support for this quality. I do not take them as the center of initiative, I do not qualify them as a partner, but quite simply attempt to control them and subject them to my radius of action. On the other hand, if I let myself be drawn by this quality and take it as a vital expression of the person possessing it, I begin to act friendly toward them: I encounter them. By such an encounter I enrich my personality and tend towards full development. When I am aware of this I feel enjoyment and exaltation.

Joy and happiness have various degrees. We reach the higher degrees when we feel enthusiasm on encountering realities which offer us great possibilities of realization. If I play on the organ a Bach chorale, which is a prodigy of peace and depth, I become enthusiastic because I realize that I am shaping a perfect work and participating in its immense wealth. I shape the chorale, and the chorale shapes me. It is a double sided or reversible experience. In contrast, if I control a reality I have a linear experience: I act, reality is subjected to my performance – it does not perform on me. Such lineal experiences, which are typical of vertigo, may be intense, but they are very poor and create nothing of worth. Reversible experiences, however, enrich one's life to the full because they stimulate a fruitful dialogue which offers great possibilities for acting with meaning.

This explains why enthusiasm is translated into a feeling of deep inner happiness which inspires and stimulates one to act, carrying out the process of building one's own personality. This achievement affects not only one's own personality, but that of everyone one encounters and all the ambits which enter into play. The process of ecstasy or encounter leads to true personal life and, at the same time, to true development of life in the home. This is the key to explaining a number of decisive phenomena in society.

This is seen clearly in the experiences of vertigo and ecstasy.

### **Vertigo and Ecstasy as Direct Opposites**

There are various types of vertigo: that of ambition for power, leadership and glory or that of drunkenness and drugs, eroticism and speed. They differ, but coincide in that at the beginning they make no demands upon one; they invite one to let oneself be carried along by one's instinctive hungers, promising everything, but in the end taking all away.

Similarly, there exist several types of ecstasy: that of sports, aesthetics, ethics, or religion. All have in common that they are at first demanding, they promise everything and in the end do give everything. The process of ecstasy demands generosity. All creative acts carry some measure of unselfishness. Only the selfless person declines to take the attractive reality as a consumer object and accepts it as a partner, whereas the selfish man plays to win at all costs. He takes all as a game, a means to increase his economic assets and his prestige. He thereby lowers the ecstasy of sport to the pure vertigo of pure competition. The non-sportive competitor lowers his chums to the level of opponents to be conquered at all cost. From such manipulative degradation comes violence. Sport unites and molds when it is ecstasy; it separates and deforms when it is vertigo.

Because it is undemanding, vertigo seems to give great rewards to anyone who would surrender him- or herself to it, but that is pure illusion. Vertigo gives nothing; instead it seizes people, subdues them and sweeps them into the void. Those who allow themselves to be blinded by the false promises of vertigo are dreamers, whereas those attracted by the insistent call of ecstasy are full of hope. Being a dreamer is very different from living in hopefulness. By giving way to the fascinating suggestiveness of vertigo one feels euphoric and confuses this with true enthusiasm. One looks for happiness in the circle of possession which dazzle and inflame one's

instincts, and soon is plunged into sadness. Unamuno, in his *Diario Intimo* (Intimate Diary), confesses that he suffers the affliction of selfishness and adds: "I shall never enjoy happiness again, I have a premonition." <sup>1</sup> This is natural because egoism forces one down the slope to vertigo. The person who gives himself up to vertigo wants to have everything quickly and drowns him or herself in misery.

From his own experience Dostoyevsky knew the pull of vertigo in games of chance. In his novel *The Player*, he recounts that an old Russian woman had lost all she had at roulette, and comments: "It could not be any other way; when someone like that ventures along this path once, it is as if they were on a toboggan sliding down from the top of a snow-covered mountain. They go faster and faster."<sup>2</sup>

Persons who give in to such fascination or vertigo believe they are asserting themselves and gaining personal independence, but soon they find themselves enveloped in a whirlwind which tosses them about. In L. Dreyer's splendid film, *Dies Irae*, a young girl and boy, joined in an impossible love, go to a lake and jump into a small boat. "Where are we going?" asks the young boy. With resignation the girl answers: "Where the current takes us." As there are no currents in the lake that could drag a strong person, the image refers to the powerful currents of vertigo of a passionate love that one cannot control.

At first, this destructive fascination promises boundless freedom without norms or orientation, but it ends up in one's subjection to the worst of slaveries. "Where are we going? Where the current takes us."

Ecstasy links one to what is precious and makes one truly free. It fills one with expectations and enthusiasm, and guides one towards fulfillment. It gives no empty exhilaration, but serene exultation; it does not intoxicate, but generates enthusiasm; it does not take one out of oneself, but elevates one to what is the best within oneself; it does not produce a gloomy freedom which separates one from others, but joins one in a genuine community of life.

The violent disequilibrium of vertigo, on the other hand, is destined to destroy one and others. Hence, it destroys life in common, reducing communities to a mere jumble of unconnected individuals, mere masses. Where the community is impregnable, the mass is easily controlled. Thus, the first step of the tyrant who wishes to conquer a people without bothering to convince them is to reduce communities to masses in order to control them. This is carried out by decreasing as much as possible the creative capacity of the people constituting these communities. This is done in a manner as simple as evil, namely, by setting people on the spiral path of vertigo leading down to nausea and despair.

We must be very careful with the freedom we have in a democracy. If it is taken as freedom to give in to different forms of dissolution, then it is a cunning trap because, under the pretext of freedom from the bonds of rules, taboos and repressive customs, it takes away the only real human freedom, namely, that of creating spheres of relationships which are the birthplaces of our development as persons.

Those who would manipulate us always swim with the current; they pander to our instincts, for example, to our search for freedom. They promise liberty, which in reality often is the tomb of real freedom.

Analyzing the dual experiences of dissolution that is vertigo and of ecstasy sheds light on many details of our life with others. It enables us to understand, for example, the deep reason which leads people and groups to confuse the two, despite the fact they are poles apart. Experiences of ecstasy have been long enjoyed great prestige since all culture stem therefrom; it is their strength which maintains a culture and gives it drive. By linking ecstasy to the destructive fascination of

vertigo, however, an attempt is made to adorn such dissolution with a dignity and relevance it is far from having. Inducing people to identify the frenetic elation of vertigo with the serene elation of ecstasy is a gigantic fraud. It leaves particularly the young deeply confused and incapable of choosing what is suitable to their healthy personal development.

### *The Confusion of Vertigo and Ecstasy as an Inversion of Values*

In fact, by confusing vertigo and ecstasy, values are inverted, the scale of values is upturned, and lowest comes to be considered the highest. Undoubtedly pleasure is a value; but friendship and the procreation of a new personal life are much higher values. But which is given priority in today's society? Bergson spoke, in his time, of an "aphrodisiacal" society. It would be even more true to say that our society is hedonistic, taking as an ideal in life the accumulation of easy satisfactions, placing pleasure at the top of the scale of values. This inversion constitutes a most dangerous revolution because it distorts reality, which avenges such alteration. Its revenge is to hinder one on one's way to fulfillment, because it is thwarted through one's own lack of moderation. As the process of ecstasy which perfects man begins with generosity and respect, any perversion of its reality constitutes an assault that renders the ecstatic movement impossible from the beginning.

One who throws oneself into the destructive fascination that is vertigo in search of immediate pleasure and assumes absolute freedom to alter the ranking of the various values loses both liberty and happiness. In contrast, one who heads towards ecstasy adapts his freedom to reality in order to reach fulfillment, thereby attaining true liberty and happiness. Happiness and liberty do not give themselves to anyone who tries to take possession of them directly. Instead, they give themselves as an extra to whoever devotes his life to carrying out his vocation and mission. Gustavo Thibon puts it thus: a person of low quality searches for happiness, whereas a noble person searches for no more than being human.

Self destructive vertigo and ecstasy are openly opposed. They respond to contradictory attitudes: vertigo to egoism, ecstasy to generosity; and they lead to totally different goals. By destroying the encounter vertigo annuls one's creative power, diminishes sensitivity to the highest values, and prevents the creation of high forms of interaction with the realities of one's surroundings. This gnaws at the very root of true culture, since culture is all that humans do to establish a high level of integration with the surrounding reality. Ecstasy, on the other hand, by stimulating the encounter, increases one's creative power for self development, sharpens one's sensitivity to values, and generates a high level of unity.

As fascination with self gratification, vertigo fixes the eye upon immediate gain, leading one to choose at every moment whatever satiates one's instincts. It leaves no freedom with regard to the highest values. Ecstasy frees one from attachment to each interesting moment and enables one to select anything which will take one towards the ideal of his life.

In view of the conflict between the dissolution of vertigo, on the one hand, and ecstasy, on the other, the confusion between both experiences can only be the result of ignorance or malice. Ignorance disqualifies those who would assume the role of spiritual guide. Manipulation is always bad, even when it attempts to bring one to the good; but it is much worse when it tries to degrade in order to control the young and inexperienced.

## *Identifying Vertigo and Ecstasy in Eroticizing Publicity*

In many sex information programs there is a great confusion between vertigo and ecstasy. Love is spoken about generally, without specifying its type, whether mere eroticism or personal love. As a result the word "love" throbs with all the positive echoes of human relationships, but in fact deceptively points to eroticism. Often love is not mentioned, but affection and communication in order not to give sexuality full scope. Thus everything is surrounded with strategic ambiguity. Affection and communication refer to high levels of human life and any young person would read into these words certain noble values. But one would not realize that in this context they have the meaning of merely a self-satisfying relationship, not one that creates stable and fruitful ties. There is no reference to the realization of a relationship that is valuable and fruitful in itself, giving life to others and to new beings. The sexual activity it encourages is limited always to producing pleasurable, immediate and fleeting sensations; it is mere eroticism.

The writers do not show this or mark its distinction from personal love, but talk simply of sex relations, of communication and affection, of feeling good together. Such words gather together all the values which have always turned the word love into a haven full of mystery and lure, but use this as an open invitation to throw oneself into practicing sexual activity which does live up to the full scope of the word "love". This exchange entraps thousands of unwary persons who give themselves up to a self destructive spiral of vertigo trusting that it is ecstasy. Sliding down the slope of fascination they soon realize, with disappointment, the magnitude of their error, but may no longer have the strength to rectify the direction in which they are heading.

The confusion between the dissolution of vertigo and ecstasy has strategic motives (which would not be accepted if stated) to control people in every aspect: economically, politically, ideologically, ethically without being noticed. Rudolf Affemann rightly condemned this:

Sophisticated sex information very often is no more than the outer form of information. Its purpose and success are figured by consumption. The same may be said, in general, of all sexual initiation understood as a business which, apparently, aims to help the human being attain a more scientific and complete capacity for sexual experience. The least that can be stated is that the main incentive, by the person offering is gain, and by the person receiving is satisfying a need through sex consumption.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Antidote to Manipulation*

At this crossroads we can take either the road down to vertigo or up to ecstasy, but present day publicity tries to hide the latter and confuse it with the former. Is there any antidote to this seductive misrepresentation? Nowadays it is almost impossible for young people to protect themselves from the manipulators who infiltrate homes and minds. This powerfully overwhelming influx of manipulation disheartens many parents and teachers. It must be emphasized that it is possible to mobilize an efficient antidote to this seduction. The antidote consists in three measures:

1. *Being alert*: knowing first hand the strategic resources of manipulation.
2. *Thinking clearly*: becoming accustomed to using language in a precise manner; distinguishing between what is different and relating things that are complementary; and asking questions. Thinking with precision is a difficult art that must be learned as a child. Nowadays it is

scarcely developed and no time should be lost in doing so if we wish to move with certain freedom in this turbulent age.

3. *Exercising all of one's creative capacities*: The person who lives creatively discovers from his or her own experience the ranking of each value and develops a special sensitivity for the highest values. To live in a self creative manner is to establish bonds with others, each of which illumines the meaning of the realities on which it is based. If one experiences deeply a work by Mozart or Michelangelo, one is tremendously free before anyone who would diminish their value. If one is loyal one will have pity on whoever tries to persuade that being loyal is simply a matter of having stamina. One knows for oneself that being loyal is light years ahead because it means being ready at all times constantly to create what one once promised.

The person who adopts these three measures is ready to face seduction by the manipulators. But this is not easy; it requires a slow and systematic apprenticeship. New times require new methods and an age that enslaves young minds with a flood of information, often with an underlying purpose, requires proven forms of education.

These pages offer some keys to the bases of such education. One of these is the distinction between a destructive vertigo and ecstasy, from which derive many of the things to be explained in the following chapters.

### *The Contrast of "Vertigo to Ecstasy" Is not the Same as "Good to Bad"*

The terms "vertigo" and "ecstasy" have different meanings and greater flexibility than "good" and "bad", "vice" and "virtue". Not all processes in the descending spiral of vertigo imply a moral wrong at each phase. Playing bingo one day is a morally neutral action, but becoming addicted to this type of game means letting oneself be carried by a fascination for easy earnings, without commitment to constructive activity. Simply waiting for exciting sensations diminishes willpower along with capacity for initiative. One borne along by fascination for gambling has not yet fallen into moral wrong and has done nothing that constitutes an ethical anti-value, but they constantly runs the risk of so doing. The force of any fascination which compels can lead to the neglect of unavoidable duties, to risking money beyond one's means and to compromising one's family life.

The dissolution of vertigo is not identified with ethical wrong, but neither is it detached therefrom; usually it leads to it in one form or another. Each instance of the downward spiral of vertigo provokes others, and restrains or renders impossible the personal development of whomever yields to it. Once it prevents one from developing one's personality it becomes a moral wrong.

Discovery of the fact that the modes of dissolution found in vertigo overlap each other is necessary in order to guard against serious risks which are aggravated by public leaders who proclaim a hatred for drugs while fostering such other types of dissolution as games of chance, eroticism, ambition for power, immoderate desire for wealth, etc. Some years ago, those in charge of public health condoned taking "soft drugs" as "progressive". Reality lost no time in taking its revenge, revealing that the cultivation of this selfish attitude in search of immediate satisfaction is insatiable, as it knows no limits and leads to breaking all boundaries. The step from "soft" to "hard" followed inexorably.

But it is not just a step from one type of drug to another. Any encouragement of selfishness, of the easy way of always and only seeking pleasure, is the starting point for taking drugs. This is noted by psychiatrist, Rudolf Affemann:

The number of young drug addicts increases by leaps and bounds every year. One of the reasons is the drain caused by sex consumption. In principle . . . a series of sex possibilities is now available to the consumer with no evaluating concept of perversion and anomaly. One can change partners in succession, then choose between individual or group sex, between heterosexuality and homosexuality, with several variations and sex combinations available. Of course, such sexual behavior leaves no place for a long-lasting marriage, stable family or state based on this type of family. But, even without taking this into account, many people would set off on the road to intoxication and very soon to drugs as well, or to put it less conventionally to the control of human life and sexuality through medicines since no type of consumer sexuality is capable of offering the well-being guaranteed by drug intoxication. Only one thing can compete, namely, the happiness of personal love.<sup>4</sup>

We have seen the importance of knowing the laws of human life and how to foresee what happens when certain processes are put in motion. Frequently, human beings who indulge in all kinds of satisfactions fall into certain processes of dissolution or vertigos without seeing in them anything ethically wrong. They are right that these are not, in principle, morally wrong, anti-values, or in religious terms "sins". But they judge poorly in taking for granted that falling into such a downward spiral of vertigo has nothing to do with moral wrong. Though vertigo is not equivalent to evil (nor ecstasy to goodness), it stimulates breakdowns in behavior, which often have a negative ethical meaning. To have an ambition to learn and control situations is consonant with being human and ethically good. To try to learn everything about someone in order to put all on file and be able to control them is ethically wrong. It means lowering them to the condition of object which is unjust (unless their behavior becomes an issue of public safety). In contrast, to analyze physiologically and psychologically in order to help cure one with no ambition to rule them is the path of ecstasy and thus positive.

The study of ecstasy and the destructive process of vertigo enables one to see quite clearly how an action can be ethically wrong in some cases and good in others. A biological act can have a negative value one day and a positive value the next when there is a marriage ceremony in between. This is because marriage is far from being a mere ceremony; it establishes a relationship between those making a public commitment to create a stable and fertile union. Within such ambit or sphere of union sexual relations contribute to constituting a field for interaction which surpasses the scission between what is mine and what is yours, between my interests and your interests. By establishing personal intimacy, "intimate" relations have a positive value which is lacking when they serve only such selfish ends as satisfying erotic hunger and enjoying passing satisfaction.

### *The Meaning of "Vertigo" and "Ecstasy" Is more Flexible Than That of "Vice" and "Virtue"*

"Vertigo" and "ecstasy" do not boil down to "vice" and "virtue", respectively, but they are closely linked. Vices are habits which hamper creative experiences and, consequently, the proper development of the human personality. We say a door has a "vice" when something prevents it from opening or closing smoothly. Analysis of the self-destructive process of vertigo shows that in it one can act quickly and even euphorically without the blundering of a "vice" in the ordinary sense. However, one is not thereby headed towards perfecting one's personality, but in the contrary direction. Vice favors the drift towards personality destruction; it hinders personal fulfillment. The

dizzying ease with which one acts when corrupted by some fascination often is given a positive value. The analysis of the nauseous process of vertigo puts us on the alert against confusing the easy slide towards destruction with the laborious effort to uplift oneself.

In the light of this analysis, it can be seen that virtue is not a prudish, bland or weak attitude. On the contrary, virtue is shown as a "virtus", that is, as a strength which gives man wings to fulfill the demands of creative activity. The virtuous man is the one who has acquired the habit of replying positively to the call of real values and of establishing active interchange with them. It is this active aspect of virtue – laborious while joyous and enthusiastic – that emerges in an analysis of the ecstatic process. In contrast, the two sides of vice – elation and depression, ambition for immediate gains and a total loss of hope – are obvious in any close analysis of the processes of dissolution that is vertigo.

Acquiring a vice does not mean, principally and automatically, committing a deed which is ethically reproachable. It implies merely that the path of destructive fascination rather than that of development and creativeness has been taken. This road easily leads to failing, by action or non-action, in the ethical duties our times impose upon us. One who knows the logic of vertigo and ecstasy does not make the mistake of thinking that duties and laws are imposed from outside; they emerge from one's own reality which, as personal, day by day must appropriately shape its own being.

Deep understanding of the process of ecstasy and of the dissolution that is vertigo helps us discover that to decide whether an action is good or bad, virtuous or vicious, we must base ourselves not on other people's views, but on our own reality. One who reminds us of a rule does not create it, but helps us to delve deeply into ourselves and discover the requirements of our own full development.

Once when invited to give a conference on "Human Love" by a group defending the practice of free love, I began by noting that I was not trying to remind them of rules and give moral advice. My task was simply to help them discover the inner links in the processes carrying one to fulfillment or destruction. I explained the experiences of vertigo and ecstasy, and concluded that they have to guide their own lives and constantly make choices. "The self-preservation instinct will make you choose the path of construction rather than of destruction." The support of eroticism which had been expected to follow the talk never materialized; instead one participant simply said: Now I know how to distinguish between a caress which is erotic and one which is personal; between committed and self-interested love; I now have a key to guide my daily life.

That is what is decisive: to have correct guidelines for discerning what enriches and develops from what impoverishes and sterilizes. The distinction between the dissolution of vertigo and the creative process of ecstasy is one such guideline. But fully to understand this, we must hold the human ideal up to the light, for at each moment I am heading either towards vertigo or towards ecstasy, according to the ideal I adopt in life. Everything depends on the ideal, namely, the achievement or non-achievement of my personal goal. This we shall see in the following chapter.

## **Texts**

1. F.J. Sheed gives us a strong suggestive warning about the risk in undervaluing the seductive power of sexual potency. His book, *Society and Sanity*, appears to have been written in view of the way this question currently is being dealt with on television, in leaflets and in books. It is strange that, on the one hand, to indoctrinate people into throwing themselves unhesitatingly into the practice of eroticism, sexual forces are considered a trusted and pleasant resource available for

use as we see fit. On the other hand, when such forms of sexual activity are shown live at the theater or in movies, totally unrelated to personal love and hence taken out of context, they are linked dramatically with various forms of violence and aggression.

What clouds almost every discussion relating to sex today is that no attention is given to its demonic energy. The majority of sex reformers writing on this subject treat it as if it were a cute little animal to be played with and then put back in its basket until picked up again for play. But sex has nothing to do with this. In its beauty, magnificence and savageness it is more comparable with a tiger, but even at its mildest it has nothing of a domestic animal; sex is not for play. It would be nearer the truth to say that it is not man who plays with sex, but sex that plays with man. The game can end disastrously because it starts with force and can become uncontrollable. Even without reaching this extreme, it can turn into a great tyrant, attacking the individual and poisoning all one's human relationships.

The ancient Christian writers, St. Jerôme, for example, annoy us with their frantic and interminable tirades against women, but at least they knew sex was frenetic. This frenzy always exists and anyone who does not perceive this should renounce completely from writing about sexual matters.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

1. (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1970), p. 123.
2. (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1980), pp. 126-127.
3. Cf. *La sexualidad en la vida de los jóvenes* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1979), p. 99.
4. *Op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.
5. Cf. F.J. Sheed, *Society and Sanity* (New York: Herder, 1963), p. 104.



### Chapter III

## The Direction of One's Life Depends Upon the Ideal Which One Follows

In the previous chapter we found ourselves at the crossroads; we can direct ourselves towards the dissolution that is vertigo and destroy our personality, or follow the path of ecstatic experiences and fully develop ourselves as persons. Experiences of the nausea of vertigo stem from an attitude of egoism, whereas experiences of ecstasy stem from a basically generous attitude. We can adopt such different attitudes because we direct life towards very varied, even conflicting, ideals. This direction decides the entire meaning of our existence: our desires, plans, attitudes, accomplishments – everything depends on the ideal we adopt.

### The Need to Choose a New Ideal

It is time to deal with this question seriously since in the West for almost a century we have not decided on a well determined ideal suitably adapted to our humanity. For four centuries Europe ardently pursued the ideal of developing knowledge in order to increase power and to raise the level of human happiness to the maximum. Different fields of knowledge were cultivated frenziedly in the conviction that theoretical knowledge translated sequentially into technical knowledge, and this into control of reality, production of artefacts, comfort and well being. It was innocently thought that such progression could be raised to the nth degree, so that very advanced theoretical knowledge would generate a correlative measure of technical knowledge, theme control over reality and ultimately happiness.

This "myth of eternal progress" inflamed Europe, enabling it to achieve resounding successes in various orders, but finally it broke down tragically into the First World War. Amazing theoretical and technical knowledge led whole nations not to maximum happiness, but to disaster. In the post-war years many thinkers called emphatically for a change in thinking, namely, for replacement of the modern ideal with one that is more suited to the being, vocation and mission of humankind. Such replacement never occurred and the second world disaster struck.

After 1945, humankind was in constant fear of the Cold War and of severe warlike conflicts. Seventy three years after the first Great War we still have not changed the ideal and remain undecided between our attachment to the old ideal of "knowledge for power, power for enjoyment" and the desire to turn towards a true humanism worth living and dying for.

Such indecision weakens us when it comes to educating a new generation. We complain about the chaos today, of apathy in wide sectors of youth, and failure in the manner of focusing life on family, professional, artistic, political and religious issues. This is tragic, but quite understandable, for how can youth be imbued with the great values of life if the ideal was shattered in the two world wars and no faith in it remains?

I may selfishly lean towards ideals of knowledge, power and enjoyment, but I cannot forget that such ideals ended in provoking a catastrophe, which proved them false. The falsity of this ideal lies precisely in the last part of the "myth of eternal progress." It is true that theoretical knowledge makes possible technical knowledge which gives control over physical reality and produces work-saving appliances and well-being. But for whom is this well-being? For centuries it was understood that this meant the well-being and happiness of each individual and each social group, taken separately from one another. Hence the feverish race of men and nations to increase

knowledge and power. But the increase of power gave rise to a consciousness of being superior to others; when employed for one's own ends, this inspired several campaigns for extending one's happiness at the cost of other's; and the resulting conflicts turned into a raging whirlwind.

### **The Appropriate Ideal Is That of Unity and Solidarity**

If we want to lay real foundations for a solid peace and a social order adapted to human beings in their full scope, we must turn our ideal around. Knowledge, power, control of reality must be put in the service, not of each particular individual and nation for their private ends, but of a common action for the many people and nations. Though this may appear to be a minor adjustment, it has the power of transformation for totally changing our mental coordinates, our direction and our scale of values.

A new life corresponds to a new ideal. If we adopt the ideal of egoism and direct our powers and possibilities towards satisfying our egoistic interests, we fall onto the descending spiral of vertigo which leads almost inexorably to destruction. I say "almost", because humans never totally lose their freedom and capacity to change direction. But these diminish as we advance along the path to vertigo. If we devote our whole being to the welfare of others, to establishing true forms of community, living in an open and committed manner, we head along the path to ecstasy which will develop us to the full.

One may ask why the ideal of unity and solidarity are adapted to one's being. This question is important because the choice of an ideal is decisive and must not be made carelessly. If I choose an ideal simply because it responds to my taste or personal leanings, it will not be related to the rest of life. I choose the ideal of unity and solidarity because it responds to the reality of being human, which, as we saw, is a "being of encounter" that constitutes a very high form of unity. To create high forms of unity we must form relationships with other realities and accept the possibilities they offer. One lives, develops and perfects as a person through engaging one's life with that of others.

We rebel against this demand of our personal reality when we are selfish and retreat into solitude, thereby acting against our true being and falsifying it, for no man is an island, as the English poet, John Donne, rightly observed. One who sullenly isolates oneself is embarking on the descent into vertigo and abandoning oneself to destruction, whereas in opening oneself generously to others, one enters the path to ecstasy which leads to fulfillment.

We now see clearly that the ideal of selfish isolation blocks one's development and suffocates, whereas the ideal of unselfish surrender lifts one to the peak of perfection. We must look further into how this change of ideal transforms everything, how to carry out this transformation and how the aspects of a person's life are altered when one changes the ideal?

### **A Change of Ideal Alters One's Whole Life**

#### *It Changes One's Basic Attitude to Life*

Taking as one's ideal for life the establishment of high forms of unity means, firstly, changing one's basic attitude to everything that surrounds us: instead of control, respect; instead of lowering the value of people, maintaining and fostering it. My goal will no longer be to have you at *my* mercy, as a means to *my* ends, but to recognize your personal independence which enables *you* to collaborate in my life as you so wish.

### *It Changes Behavior*

By changing my basic attitude, I change my whole conduct. By not trying to control you, but collaborate with you, I do treat you not with arrogance, but with humility; I do not lock myself in the solitude of selfishness, but open myself to your life with generosity of spirit and gratitude.

This generous and grateful opening to the environment makes me attentive to all the values I assume in life. This attentiveness makes it possible to respond positively and responsibly. One who can respond to the invitation of a value is responsible for the consequences; one who does not respond to values is irresponsible.

Thus understood, responsibility implies a readiness for sacrifice, because what is valuable can be assumed in one's life only by fulfilling certain demands, which basically require an act of generosity. Loss of a sense of sacrifice is one of the major dramas of the 20th century. For two centuries sacrifice has been interpreted as repression and reduction of one's true self. This mistake can destroy the roots of our personal life as creative. As every sacrifice implies grading two or more values, it is not a loss but a rise to a higher level of accomplishment. Knowing how to distinguish clearly between the various values and to give priority to the highest is the heart of the human virtue of responsibility.

### *There Follows an Increase in Initiative*

By this change to unselfish ideals I behave responsibly, for this transforms me from an indolent, passive, noncommittal state to one that is active, enterprising and full of initiative. By developing respect and receptiveness to values I am able to encounter all that is valuable: people, communities, language, institutions, cultural works, scenery, etc. With this my life becomes dynamic and acquires strength, for encounters are a source of energy, decision, feeling, beauty and light.

Willpower alone has little value, but linked to a high ideal it gains irrepressible energy. Some would maintain that in humans "strength comes from below", from the pulses of instinct, that the spirit is limited to directing and controlling in some measure the elementary forces surging from deep within the human being. As with a steam boiler generating energy, the spirit and, therefore, the intelligence, operate merely as a safety valve. This concept of man ignores the existence of ideals as driving ideas giving impetus to human life and its meaning. Anyone who has ever dedicated his or her life to a valued ideal knows what torrents of energy spring from this attitude of surrender.

### *Values*

By directing life towards a high ideal, one learns to see everything in perspective and from a proper distance without being buried in every minor detail. Such distance or perspective enables one to discover the meaning and value of each attitude, option and activity which have value and meaning when they bring one closer to the ideal. Their meaning and value will be ever higher the more they enable one to reach the goal of one's existence.

The discovery of this link of the ideal with value and meaning provides the right criteria for putting our scale of values in order. If we wish to be genuine and accomplish the vocation and mission assigned us by our ideal, we must take as the maximum value not the achievement of the

easy satisfaction of immediate and fleeting pleasures, but rising to the best within ourselves which comes about by creating valuable personal relationships. Hence, our highest endeavor is to grade values: pleasure is certainly a value, but not the highest; to have full meaning it must be integrated within the process of personal realization.

### *Feeling Reality Relatively*

Changing one's scale of values changes one's outlook on reality. This is decisive in one's development as a person. If I appreciate that encountering a reality is of much higher value than controlling it, I will make a great endeavor to discover the conditions for this encounter and see clearly that it is not possible to encounter objects. With objects it is possible to juxtapose or collide the way a ball-point pen is juxtaposed to the table, but does not encounter it. If suddenly I leave the room and, on turning the corner, bump into somebody, this is a collision not an encounter. The collision with a person is reduced to a collision of two bodies. If, after recovering from the commotion, I offer my apologies to the person with whom I have collided, a personal relationship is begun. In the case of a friend, I greet him warmly and, doubtless, we both laugh about the incident, thereby enhancing the encounter. The encounter takes place only between realities with initiative, capable of offering possibilities for play and adopting those that are offered. In the previous chapters These realities were termed "spheres" or "ambits of reality".<sup>1</sup>

The fruit of this intermingling of ambits is a relational reality and is therefore unique in the world. All reality which is the fruit of an encounter is unique, even though there may be millions of similar realities. A human being is not the mere result of a production process, but the fruit of an amorous encounter between persons. For this reason one is not reduced to a number in the human species, but has one's own name; the person is unique, unchangeable, irreplaceable. "Look at the roses again - said the fox to the little prince - You will see that yours is unique in the world." "The time you lost because of your rose makes your rose so important."<sup>2</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine the high level attained by beings of the universe. Let us think, for example, of a piece of bread. It is the result of a process of production, certainly, but is made from the fruits of the earth, among which is wheat. I place a simple grain of wheat in the palm of my hand. Can anyone in the world produce this grain of wheat? Millions of ball-point pens and thousands of cars can be produced in one afternoon, but a grain of wheat does not ripen in one afternoon: wheat is not manufactured.

The farmer receives from his elders the art of tilling the earth and a few seeds. Trustingly he puts the seeds in mother earth and waits patiently for the rain to moisten the earth and bring nutrition, and for the sun to ripen the plant. When the countryman, seeds and earth, rain and sun, and the ocean which evaporates the water, and the wind which sweeps it along in the form of a cloud, all come together, one day the miracle occurs when the grain emerges and the wheat ripens. This simple grain of wheat is the fruit of a union, which we can well term encounter. Hence, it is heavily symbolic; that is, it refers to the realities which fruitfully intermingled the potentialities and created it.

Something analogous can be said of wine. For this reason both bread and wine are so appropriate for symbolizing human friendship at a fraternal meal. The father of the family invites a friend to eat. He takes the bread, breaks it, hands it round and shares it. He pours wine into the guest's glass. Wine and bread symbolize perfectly shared friendship because they are already, from beforehand, the fruit of an encounter. This manner of seeing realities as meeting points of different elements expands and deepens our understanding of those with whom we must weave our lives. It

is amazing to think of the horizon of possibilities which open to our power to create valuable relationships if we see all that surrounds us in its full and correct implication.

The French philosopher and playwright, Gabriel Marcel, confesses in his *Metaphysical Journal* that at the start of the First World War, when his task was to inform families that they had lost a son, a soldier was for him no more than a name on a card to which he added a cross when the soldier died. When he contacted the family this unknown name took on life, and he became involved in a multitude of relationships. He was the son of these distraught parents, the husband of this distressed woman, the father of those destitute orphans. Thanks to this enrichment of his language, the idea Marcel had of each of the human lives involved in the horror of war underwent a radical change: each life was something unique, irreplaceable, incomparable. No mother who lost her son could be consoled by the idea that she could have more. The lost son would be missed forever, and could not be replaced by any other.

This way of seeing realities as unique, as the fruit of a group of relationships which happens only once in history, perfects our capacity to value daily life and its events in their full scope. By evaluating them correctly, our life becomes a web of encounters and, consequently, a meeting place, despite the hardships of daily existence.

Consideration of another person as unique and irreplaceable has great significance for one's love life? The person who sees in the beloved something unique for him or her, easily understands what specialists in ethics affirm, namely that love requires eternity; there is no sense in promising love for a certain period of time. To love someone, wrote Gabriel Marcel, is to tell them: "You will never die". In virtue of this, true love requires fidelity. When fidelity fails, love is broken. Faithful love creates relevant modes of unity which will last throughout time, because it is the source, in turn, of new motives for loving.

It is often thought nowadays that an everlasting love is impossible, that it is a risk to promise lifelong fidelity, that love does not withstand the buffets of time and the changes of sentiment. This is all very true when the love relationship is reduced to sentimental exuberance, to a mere exchange of satisfactions which like a fleeting flame fades on the instant, and creates nothing stable or of value. Add some creativity to your relationship and you will see the lasting strength your love acquires. As with good cloth, perdurance is a question first and foremost of quality.

When a love relationship is conceived and begun with a will to create together a relevant ambit of coexistence, it turns into a never-ending source of new reasons to love. It is possible that the reasons which drove both people to join together will fade with time. But this decline will not mean the eclipse of love, which will be stimulated by new reasons, possibly less intensely passionate, but closer to the nucleus of one's person and therefore more mature and noble.

### *Increase in the Appreciation of Life*

By evaluating or appreciating each person as unique and irreplaceable, the appreciation of life grows. If we see each human life, even the most humble, as the fruit of an unrepeatable encounter, we value it as something unsurpassable. In his *Heiligenstadt* testament, written as a young man when he thought he was dying, Beethoven confesses that he would have put an end to his life on many occasions because of the tragedy of his incurable deafness were it not for his love of music and virtue. In Beethoven ethical virtue and artistic creation were closely linked to his faith in man and the Creator of all talents. He was conscious of being a genius, but attributed this not to himself, but to the generosity of the Creator. He always was open to dialogue, humble and reverent, and never broke ties with God or man. "I have been given – he once confessed – the gift of living in a

world of undescrivable beauty and my life's task consists in conveying to men a reflection of such beauty through the language I master: music."

A few years before dying, in dire straits – totally deaf, a tragedy for a musical genius; almost completely blind, due to badly treated conjunctivitis; financially ruined; and even lowered artistically – Beethoven retired to a village on the Austrian-Hungarian frontier to "pay grateful homage and praise to the Supreme Maker". The result of this retreat was one of the highest summits in world art: his *Missa Solemnis*. One truly feels a shiver of emotion on looking closely at such human beings who are a source of meaning and beauty. But this beauty and feeling come from the encounter or deep union with values. Read the great Beethoven's will and you will feel the humane heartbeat of a noble person who fought bravely against an adverse destiny thanks to the spiritual strength given him at all times by the ideals of beauty and kindness.<sup>3</sup>

Returning once more to the initial idea: changing the ideal changes everything in life: attitudes, behavior, mood, perception of reality, scale of values, way of evaluating life and its events, all are transformed.

Replacing the ideal of control by that of solidarity perfects one inasmuch as it prepares one to create the highest forms of interpersonal relations, which are the different forms of encounter. Hence, the feeling of happiness aroused by the encounter of persons with each other and with the Creator. This was captured in an unparalleled fashion by Beethoven in the final part of his Ninth Symphony: "The Ode to Joy."

### *Perfecting the Intellectual Life*

The light shining on the field of play constituted in every encounter enables one to make another decisive change, namely, in one's intellectual life. The person who yearns for an encounter loves and respects reality: consequently, he or she is not satisfied with slipshod opinion but studies each reality and event with the most suitable concepts and terms. One whose goal is to establish ambits of life will take guard against affirming, for example, that a "woman has a body and must be free to do with it what she will", the phrase proposed by a certain Minister of Justice for legalizing abortion. He forgot that the body is not an object, and cannot be a possession freely available. The body is not owned by a person, whether male or female, but is as personal as the spirit and therefore is not susceptible to control. The new life is the fruit of an encounter, not a mere product of a manufacturing process. For this reason those who enter the encounter and give origin to this life cannot own or dispose of it.

One who engages in genuine encounters sharpens his intellectual life and avoids misunderstanding certain mental schemes as dilemma when they are only contrasts. One will never think he has to choose between the criteria we forge in our interior and the norms imposed from outside. One's own creative life warns one that human beings become truly autonomous when they are heteronomous, that is, when they adopt norms, criteria of action and values suggested from outside. Though in principle different and distant, external and strange, they can become intimate if adopted actively as rules of play for life and its encounters.

Precise thinking and expression suited to each form of reality is an art we should learn and practice. To make this possible, we must direct ourselves towards creativity, not towards control. This is the deep reason why precise learning and creative life are mutually stimulating.

### *The Cultivation of Virtues*

Once the ideal has been changed from control to creativity genuine intellectual life takes shape; then we realize that to establish true unity we have to adapt to the demands of the realities we wish to encounter. In order for me to encounter you, I must be truthful, honest, faithful, humble, open and magnanimous. If I am not truthful, I show that I do not want to share my intimacy with you; you do not trust me and draw away, which makes the encounter impossible.

Strictly speaking, the different virtues are powers or capacities; they are different ways of maintaining the capacity to establish valuable types of unity. Fidelity, truthfulness, patience, creative imagination, order, strength, generosity, silence, piety, magnanimity are all different forms of experiencing solidarity in love. Contrary to what has been said for the past two centuries, virtues are not the attitudes of a prudish spirit, but basic conditions for human creativity.

By changing the ideal, we change our way of behaving and acquire a special facility to embody the goal aspired in each action.

### *Arousing New Feelings*

This new spiritual direction changes the range of human feelings. By exchanging the ideal of control for that of unity, one experiences a pleasant change of feelings: vertigo is exchanged for exultation, sadness for happiness, anguish for enthusiasm, desperation for joy, bitterness for jubilation, destitution for support.

Feelings hold great importance for they detect the values or antivalues we adopt and the positive or negative direction our life pursues. The feelings aroused by ecstasy are a sign of one's rise to a high level of unity. Nothing is more important in the human structure than a maximum stimulation of enthusiasm for values and giving due importance to the inner joy aroused by taking up something or joining with someone who invites us to adopt the great values they encompass.

### *Conversion to Guide or Instructor*

One of the tasks of a new humanism and civilization we should establish today consists in re-evaluating correctly understood emotions: the series of feelings aroused by our full development. If we realize that feeling enthusiastic about values is a great virtue, we will arouse such feeling in others. Good spreads itself; it radiates and expands. Like beauty and truth, goodness longs to be shared. The person already sharing in them strives to acquire the skills necessary to transmit them accurately and attractively; he or she becomes a guide for the others. Such a guide or leader tries not to control, but to collaborate for mutual enrichment.

If we persevere in maintaining this attitude of generosity and enrichment, our life will be engulfed with happiness for, as Bergson said so beautifully, happiness is "a sign that life has triumphed".<sup>4</sup> There is no greater triumph than devoting oneself to doing good. Goethe used to recommend: "Do not delay in putting into play the forces of good"; and Paul, the Apostle, exhorted the first Christians: "Tire not of doing good". Supreme good is the foundation of the most valuable forms of unity, whose realization gives full meaning to our existence. Carrying this out should be our ideal.

## **Our Future Depends on the Ideal of Unity**

From the above one can see clearly that what is decisive at this moment is changing the ideal, overcoming indecision and choosing clearly and explicitly the ideal of unity and solidarity. Present research on various fronts is reaching the conclusion that the goal in life is the bond of solidarity. In politics the need to establish close and firm ties between peoples and even between continents is acclaimed. Biology underlines the need to establish a web of affection and protection between father and child. Clinical psychology stresses that the present problem is the meaning of life, which is achieved in personal love, helping others and unconcern for oneself.

Professor of Psychiatry, Aquilino Polaino, advised those who are depressed to help others and assured them that if they did so many of their problems would disappear and happiness would be restored. In many cases, depression has deep physiological causes and must be treated clinically. Often, being out of form is due to an excess of concern with oneself, being trapped in the closed space of one's ego.

We would do well to reflect on the ideal which directs and polarizes our life. One must ask, where is one's center; what ideal drives, directs and gives balance to one's life? If one does not find his or her balance, one should slowly examine the goal to which one's life is heading. Does it correspond in value to one's dignity as a person? These questions are decisive if we wish to build our life on a solid base and give it full meaning. Our being is dynamic, it is on the road towards realization, which is not all predetermined by nature as it is for animals. The cat, when born, instinctively knows its objective. It is sufficient for it to be carried along by the force of instinct to achieve the object of its existence. Humans must plan their objectives and pursue them. The power of instinct may collaborate, but has no directive force. Hence, for man it is not enough to surrender to the demands of instincts. These must be integrated by one's intelligence into an overall plan drawn up in accord with criteria which are not written in the genes. It is the person's great privilege to be compelled to lucidity in one's plans and to creativity in one's actions. But this entails great uncertainty, for should one's creative and lucid power fail one may waste one's life and even sink below the level of an animal.

But it must be asked where must one seek the true ideal of one's life: if born with it, how can one discover it? The answer is long and complex, but might be condensed in two observations. Open your spirit little by little to everything that is valuable. Allow yourself to be magnetized by values, go deep into their field and you will hear them inviting you to merge them into your life. Welcome them warmly, embody them, carry them out enthusiastically, interact with them, and they will be a source of light for you. This light will enable you to distinguish the scale of values and discern the fruitfulness of one over the other. Such discernment will inspire you to accord priority to the highest, for amongst the one that little by little stands out as the source of all the others will be the driving value, the Ideal. And when you give yourself up to this ideal, commit your life to it and meet its demands, you will discover increasingly its relevance and effectiveness in your life and will welcome it with greater intensity and devotion.

### *Forming and Activating Values*

The secret of human formation consists in immersion in the magnetic field of values. Once inside their sway, the main work is done by the values themselves, which not only exist but assert themselves. When I was a child, my mother used to say to me: "Take this bread and chocolate and give it to the poor person who has knocked at the door". I was reluctant because the man had a

long beard and frightened me, especially at night. My mother insisted: "He's not a criminal, only a beggar. Take it to him." My mother was trying to expose me to the power of the value of pity and to enable me to be captivated by its special spell, by the enchantment of any kind gesture. Soon, the poor man's knock at the door had me answering quickly without anybody telling me to do so. The knock had become the voice of the value of pity calling me. Becoming accustomed to responding to the call of values makes one "responsible" and raises one to a level of human maturity.

I should like to end this reflection on the ideal with a story. In the last days of World War II, many people from Eastern Europe fled towards the West to escape Russian rule. As a result several refugee camps were formed along what would later be the Iron Curtain. One morning, a man dressed in a white habit arrived at one of these, the legendary Werenfried van Straaten, as corpulent as he was kind. He spoke to them of a God who is love, and offered substantial aid and a message of hope. Among the refugees there was a girl, who is now a missionary in India. "That day I felt the vocation within me – she declared in an interview – I had never heard speak of love. Only hate and extermination had surrounded me. This Father revealed to me that there was a kingdom where people helped and loved each other. At that moment I decided to devote my life to serving that God, so noble and rich, who vanquishes hate."

The appearance of love in the gloomy surroundings of hate and misery signified for this girl the revelation of a high value. She felt her whole being drawn strongly by the call of that value, which offered immense possibilities for meaningful action. She did not doubt for one instant: that was her goal. She had discovered an idea – love – which for her was a source of true life, creative attitudes and meaningful action. In letting herself be drawn by this driving idea or ideal she understood that her life was to be directed towards it. Her vocation was decided.

Vocation, ideal, value, fullness of meaning and successful life all join closely together. The great scientist and humanist, Albert Einstein, felt this in his life and made the following confession: "The ideals which have lighted my path and time and again have given me the courage to face life with valor, have been kindness, beauty and truth." Seen properly, these ideals join together in a unity with love rightly understood and lived.

Without doubt, one who finds an ideal suited to his or her life possesses eternal light and spirit, because the ideal is a goal we wish to attain in the future. But from the future it returns to give the present impetus and meaning. An ideal is not a mere idea, but a dynamizing idea, on which hangs everything in our life. For this reason the manipulators who wish to control the very roots of our intelligence, our willpower and our feelings, put every effort into replacing our ideal of establishing personal relations of unity which inspires the processes of ecstasy, by the idea of serving ourselves, which sets us on the descent into vertigo. If we let ourselves be seduced by the serene voices of manipulating demagogues, we will be subjected to the worst of slaveries: that of the spirit. We will not be free to build our life perfectly corresponding to our most intimate and inalienable vocation.

On the other hand, the one who obeys the demands of his own reality as a person, rather than the dictates of the majority who dominate by manipulation, directs his or her whole life towards the ideal of creating relevant interpersonal relations. This direction frees one from attachment to immediate and passing fancies in order to become truly free, that is, free to be creative. We shall see this more fully in the next chapter.

## Texts

1. The German educationist, Josef Kantenich, based his whole work on the effort to achieve the "personal" and "communitary ideal". "As a psychologist, I can stress, in principle, that the secret of a young people's maturing lies in the development of the personal ideal." "The difficulties of youth are mainly overcome when young people find their personal ideal", and consequently, their real self.<sup>5</sup>

Each one carries within the image  
of what he aspires to be.  
Until he is,  
his peace is incomplete. (Friederich Rückert)<sup>6</sup>

2. The true teacher is a man with but one thought. Not many thoughts are required for in teaching either adults or children. . . . One single thought is enough. Naturally a certain variety is required also. But this should flow into one great thought.<sup>7</sup>

We must teach until the ideal becomes something operative, almost fascinating. How did Nietzsche express this? 'I want to know your great thought'. And what is the great thought of a community? It is what we call the communitary ideal.<sup>8</sup>

It sometimes happens that the point of departure for the ideal is the community itself since the ideal springs from it. When dealing with a certain theme, the teacher may notice a special sensitivity in children to values and a special facility for holding to them. This indicates that the spirit is keen to carry out the ideal. This spark must be enlivened until it becomes a fire and forms a common manner of thinking.<sup>9</sup>

3. Once a valuable idea turns into an ideal, the energy it radiates draws us to giving it life, enriching it and turning it into the point of reference for all behavior, the rule for authenticity, the impetus which dynamizes and gives meaning to our existence.

This process is well described by Héctor Mandrioni in his work *The Vocation of Man*.

In the history of each person there is a moment or period in which expectation begins to hear the voice of the ideal. Little by little or explosively, a value or a certain constellation of values stands out from kindred values and is felt to be more precious, intimate, particular and unique. As these values take shape in such a way that the rest become a simple backdrop, we experience an inner sense of radical ownership or secret complicity. It is as if we suddenly perceived that our deepest being was always made to carry out those determined values, as if they were a condition for our being, already installed before we became conscious of encountering them. They mature in us and with us, and now appear to be something which defines and differentiates us. In such an experience we feel the objective and subjective aspect of value. On the one hand, it feels like something that comes to us, something received and asking for recognition even while pulling and demanding. On the other hand, it is experienced as something that depends on our decision, on our effort and commitment.<sup>10</sup>

## Notes

1. For the meaning and scope of this term see my works *Estética de la creatividad* (Barcelona: Promociones Publicaciones Universitarias, 1987); *Vértigo y éxtasis. Bases para una vida creativa* (Madrid: PPC, 1987); *The Knowledge of Values: A Methodological Introduction* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1989).

2. Cf. A. de Saint-Exupéry, *Le petit prince* (New York: Harbrace Paperbound Library, 1943, 1971), pp. 86-87; *El Principito* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1972), pp. 86-87. A detailed analysis of this work is found in my book *Análisis estético de obras literarias* (Madrid: Narcea, 1982), pp. 223-265.

3. A direct translation from the German original can be seen in my work *Vértigo y éxtasis*, 2nd vol. of *Proyecto Líderes* (now *Escuela de pensamiento y creatividad*) (Madrid: PPC, 1987).

4. Cf. *L'énergie spirituelle* (Paris: PUF, 1944), p. 23.

5. Cf. *Ethos und Ideal in der Erziehung* (Vallendar-Schönstatt: Schönstatt, 1972), p. 186.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

9. Cf. *Grundriss einer neuzeitlichen Pädagogik für den katholischer Erzieher* (Vallendar-Schönstatt: Schönstatt, 1971), p. 166.

10. *Op. cit.* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Guadalupe, 1979), pp. 74-75.



## Chapter IV

# The Ideal of Unity with Others and the Achievement of True Freedom

In the previous chapter we saw that changing the ideal changes everything in our life. If my ultimate goal is knowledge in order to dominate and enjoy, I start down the spiral slope towards the dissolution that is vertigo. If I point my life toward knowing and in order to enable reality to better serve others take the path to ecstasy, with this turn my whole life takes on a positive color. I feel the enthusiasm aroused in my spirit on seeing that I am fulfilling my vocation, my mission.

### **A True Ideal Gives One Freedom**

Every now and then it is worth while looking inside oneself and thinking about the sort of life to which I am called: the ideal I should have in virtue of my own requirements. The philosopher, Xavier Zubiri said that ethical life begins when one asks seriously; "What is going to happen to me?" It is one's own decision, and one decides when one chooses an ideal which determines the thousand of decisions one has to make each day.

For example, if you are a young man attracted to a particular girl, you like talking to her, accompanying her, making plans together. Is the relationship to which you are called sexual apart from deep friendship, or personal commitment, generous surrender, the wish to serve, the desire to be fruitful together? If the latter your noblest part – the "little prince" within – will show that you are called to something else: to create valuable forms of unity in an encounter leading to human fulfillment. If so your inner voice urges you to treat this girl with respect because she is not reduced to a means for your ends, but is an end in herself and of absolute value. Only if you recognize in her such absolute value will you profess unconditional love, not subject to your greater or lesser interests. Only then will you be freed from bondage to your appetites and able to choose with the right outlook and to give meaning to your life.

This form of freedom is far above that which today is taken as supreme. Generally free choice is thought sufficient for ethical behavior. This conviction has spread because it gratifies our desire for the independence to impose our will without having to listen to the call of values. On the contrary, it is heeding the call of what is valuable and responding actively that makes us responsible; not to respond would be literally "irresponsible".

But is an irresponsible person free? When we take our life seriously and decide to give it full significance, we face the issue of ideals which, in turn, refer us to vocation, values and freedom.

### **Different Forms of Freedom**

It was an emotional moment when Berliners climbed the wall that divided them for 28 years. After bitter separation, they were to communicate between family members and friends: freedom here meant lack of prohibition, freedom from an obstacle. But, is every achievement of freedom limited to this? We should find out, because being free is equivalent to being fully developed as a person.

Being human is complex, because it is so meaningful. The person is truly fortunate who from an early age has a clear idea of what freedom is, how many types of freedom exist, which are real

and which false, which types of freedom lead to constructing one's own personality and which lead to its destruction.

It is not enough to talk in the abstract of freedom for that enables one who would manipulate us to twist concepts so as to use them for his or her own ends. One who loves truth, however, does not wish to rule them through a strategic abuse of language; therefore he tries instead to clarify concepts. How many types of freedom are there; what role does each play in our life; which is the highest? Here we are touching on the most delicate points of our existence, where our destiny is decided. Let us analyze this subject with the help of concrete cases, in order to obtain a series of precise conclusions which will be keys to interpreting life and guidelines for behavior.

### **Empty Freedom**

In the first place, we should know quite well what type of freedom is empty and thus lacking in meaning and value for human life.

The main character in the work by J.P. Sartre, *Le sursis* – "The Suspended" – goes to the station whence will depart all those mobilized to defend the mother country from the Nazi invasion. He should take the train, but in the end does not. He lets the train draw away, packed with young men, and returns to Paris. There he wanders the streets aimlessly, contemplates the Seine at length, turns thousands of thoughts around in his head, and feels himself invaded by freedom. He is all freedom; but finally he asks himself: "And what shall I do with all this freedom?" He felt his freedom to be empty; it led to no goal, nor was he inspired by any ideal.

A deserter is someone who breaks ties with his mother country. When a country is invaded by an enemy, there is complete mobilization for defence. Everything changes meaning. The goals in each life are subject to the great goal of defending the mother country. This is when the life of each citizen has meaning.

The protagonist in Sartre's work is not heading towards this goal, and everything he will do will be out of place and lack meaning. He will be a stranger in his own country, for he has cut himself off. He is free, but that freedom does not lead him anywhere that gives meaning to his life. Empty freedom is not the fruit of some achievement, but purely the result of the flight of a traitor. The traitor moves with absolute freedom, but, by so doing only drifts along on a dead star. Paris, all France, the entire world is a desert for him: empty freedom leaves human life desolate.<sup>1</sup>

### **Fruitful Freedom**

Fortunately, there is another form of freedom, a freedom overflowing with human life because it is linked with generosity.

In the beautiful work by Saint-Exupéry, *Land of Man*, two pilots find themselves able to do nothing to escape imminent death. They have dropped into the desert and are about to die of thirst. Their whole lives depend on whether the minute figure advancing on the horizon, turns his head towards them. He does and approaches. He is a Bedouin and offers them water. They gulp it down and, when satiated, one of the pilots addresses the man on the camel, the humblest person in the desert, and with emotion says:

You who have saved us, Bedouin of Libya, will be erased from my memory for ever. I shall not recall your face again. You are the Man and appear to me with the face of all men at once. You have never seen us before and yet you have recognized

us. You are the beloved brother. And I in turn will recognize you in all men. . . . You come to me bathed in nobleness and goodness, great Lord who has the power to give drink. All my friends, all my enemies within you walk towards me, and I no longer have a single enemy in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Two people from refined society, highly civilized, had left their people and had broken with the rest of humankind. They are about to perish, and a simple, unknown man renounces the best he has – the water reserves indispensable for crossing the desert – in order to save their lives. This generosity is seen by them as a miracle of freedom and reveals to them the greatness of man, of Man with a capital letter. Hence they are saved for the life of co-existence. "You are the beloved brother. And I, in turn, will recognize you in all men". Is this form of generosity and freedom found in man, or must be it acquired? In the latter case, what sort of achievement is involved?

### **First Forms of Freedom**

The examples cited show us that the notion of freedom is complex. It seems easy and clear, but when we try to evaluate it, it dissolves into a multitude of meanings. Contrary to slavery and imprisonment, the word freedom denotes being unfettered. It reveals affinity with "absence of ties". Being free means not being subjected, being able to move at one's own will. The difficulties begin in determining what one is subjected to and therefore from what one must free oneself.

The first liberation for which one strives is to be able to put into play one's physiological and psychic powers: moving, seeing, hearing, touching, thinking, remembering and loving. The paralytic feels tied, unable to give full rein to his yearning to walk by himself, to unfold energy, to travel, to reach those places he wishes, to take initiative; he does not feel free. The person who has health, but lacks the freedom to move in society, feels imprisoned. Although the prison may occupy the space of a city or a whole nation, the lack of freedom of movement provokes an uneasy sensation of suffocation.

Such confinement is experienced also, spiritually by those who feel subjected to pressures due to their ideology, politics, morals or religion. They wish to follow their conscience, but face a ring of hostility which turns each decision into a torment and a danger. Those who have lived moments or periods of terror in their life can never forget how vehemently they desired to be released from that insufferable strain.

Another form of spiritual slavery is imposed by manipulation of images and language. Without realizing it, millions of human beings are today reduced to slavery by those who shape their thoughts, their willpower and their feelings, and put them at their mercy. In democratic systems it is easier to lose one's inner freedom than it was in a dictatorship, because there oppression was obvious and one was on the alert, whereas in democracies one's freedom can be fraudulently taken away under the decoy of liberties conceded.

### **Freedom and Liberation from Bondage**

Freeing oneself from these physical and spiritual ties is so important for man, so basic with regard to gaining the meaning of life as a person, that the concept of "freedom from ties" is closely linked to human freedom. This is so close that, if we are not on the alert, we run the risk of thinking that every sort of freedom is a type of liberation from all that appears coercive and obligatory.

But is all that is obligatory coercive so that it annuls freedom? Clarifying this is decisive for the formation of the human being. Any misunderstanding on this point could leave us stumped, without the possibility of exercising our creative capacity and developing as free beings. We must be clear on this question.

An ethical rule, a musical form, a judicial law, a traffic regulation impose in some way on a person's will, condition it and restrict their freedom. If I accept a rule, a law, a form or a dogma I recognize that my freedom is not absolute.

This is difficult for modern day man to recognize for the important reason that the word freedom is nowadays a magic stone so prestigious that it seems to encompass all that is excellent in life. Curtailing, conditioning, restricting its radius of action is interpreted as an unjustified depletion of the very foundations of human life. Such interpretation is considered by many people as obvious, but we will see that this is far from being well founded, and it is very important that this be realized quickly. Is every type of limitation and channeling opposed to all types of freedom? In no way. One must channel one's existence along the path marked by duty and obligation. And one must do this in such a way that one assumes the obligation and the duty as one's own, that is, as something which not only does not limit one's freedom, but stimulates it. How is this link between freedom and duty possible?

When a young person discovers this, he or she takes a leap into maturity. Let us try to discover this for ourselves.

### **When Real Freedom Begins**

Our first form of freedom consists in our ability to exercise without any impediments our faculties of walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, relating, etc. But the exercise of one's faculties will be fruitless unless one takes account of what makes their action possible.

I can see, hear, move, and wish to travel, but if I have no plane I cannot fly. However, in order that we have access to a plane today, earlier generations have had to transmit to modern society an accumulation of possibilities. In Latin transmit is *tradere*, from which comes *traditio* or in English 'tradition'. Tradition then is not a dead weight on the shoulders of modern man; on the contrary, it is what makes possible his creative freedom.

A lack of possibilities implies a decline in freedom. One who cannot find a way to acquire for himself and his family the necessities of food and clothing, feels deprived of freedom. Hence, to go from extreme poverty to economic affluence is deeply felt as being a liberation.

Yerma, the heroine in the play by Federico García Lorca, lacked nothing except an ability to relate to her environment. But this left her spiritually asphyxiated or lacking in freedom. This led to real tragedy when, she physically asphyxiated her husband, Juan, to show him that biological life without freedom is false, indeed, a farce.

To feel free one must have different possibilities from which to choose. Thus, in childhood and youth the person with many opportunities and able to choose those he wishes is considered very free. He who offers new possibilities to others spontaneously is seen as a liberator, someone who increases freedom. Is this a fair evaluation? Perhaps not, because mere freedom of choice among many possibilities is not personal freedom, but only a condition for being free, as was the expeditious exercise of the faculties themselves.

One elects some possibilities from among others within the context of one's life. One's choice makes sense if it is well adapted to the requirements of one's development as a person. These demands are the same as those for a true encounter with others, since one lives as a person,

develops and perfects one's personality through encounters which are high forms of unity. Such unity is the goal and ideal of one's life. All one is and does, including one's capacity to act freely, should be directed.

This enables us to specify when true human freedom begins. The person who is capable of choosing at every moment what he should accomplish in order to gain his ideal is acting freely. The object of one's life is not simply to do what one likes at every moment, choosing between various possibilities as one's fancy dictates. For a choice may be capricious and not respond to any solid criteria; it could be but obedience to an instinct.

Certainly, this has some value and manifests a capacity to give different answers to the same stimuli. An animal cannot do this: when a hungry cat sees a fish it takes it automatically and eats it, unless some reflex condition persuades it otherwise. It does not choose, but reacts automatically according to a pattern preset by its species which takes care of its sustenance. A hungry man, however, may react differently before appetizing food: eat it immediately, keep it for later, give it to someone else.

Being able to choose is an extremely high faculty which is absolutely necessary for the development of a person as a being who is gifted with creativity. For this reason the greatest wish of children and young people is to have many and varied possibilities, the more the better, because having possibilities is indispensable to a life of human freedom and dignity.

### **Being Free Is Choosing in the Light of an Ideal**

They are right to strive for the possibilities to develop themselves as persons, but they will not achieve this unless they see that merely choosing among various possibilities is not enough to live a truly human life. Choices must be made in the light of a clear idea of what a human being is and what constitutes a vocation and mission in life. Freedom of choice must be oriented and directed according to the image of the person we are called to realize. Human beings can realize themselves freely in various forms. Freedom will be genuine if one's development responds to one's true vocation, to the most profound requirements of one's being. It will be unauthentic if one's use of it leads one away from the human pattern we should have been forming throughout our life.

What should this pattern be like? One does not become a person through rejection of others, but must establish encounters. Such encounters must be created: one must open oneself to others, receive the possibilities for living that the other offers and vice versa, and set up a common field of interchange. The creativity offered by an encounter, as with all forms of creativity, is dual and supposes at least two realities. Just as one cannot be fertile biologically by oneself, neither can one be creative on the personal plane unless one opens up to other realities and is ready actively to take up the possibilities offered. Thus, choosing in the solitude of one's own egoism is a vacuous freedom which is useless for constructing human life. Doing what one wishes without collaboration with others does not denote genuine freedom because human beings have been called to weave a life in community. Doing as one fancies implies freedom of manoeuvre. But while this has some value in that it implies exemption from external ties and a capacity to choose between various possibilities, it must be subject to another, higher value, namely, one's full realization. Without relating to this value, freedom is uprooted and infertile.

On the contrary, freedom as the choice of that which offers the possibilities for achieving the ideal is full, overflowing and genuine. When I choose something, not because it is pleasant or immediately useful, but because it suits the ideal in my life, I separate myself from what happens to be immediately at hand and escape being merged with that; this liberation is freedom.

For this reason freedom is basically an unselfish, disinterested or generous attitude. These enable freedom of vision as the capacity to see a concrete action in the light of the ideal which simultaneously inspires it and gives it meaning. The ideal pursued enlivens all of life, inspiring actions, directing them towards fulfillment, making one wish freely to accomplish what is one's duty. The person who feels attached to an ideal that is freely accepted knows how to see an obligation as a link to perfect development.

### **How to Gain Perfect Freedom**

Such free choice of duty can be made for various reasons; it is from this variety that different levels of perfection of liberty emerge. If I choose what I ought to as an obligation imposed on me by my own reality, I am free, but at an elementary level. If I assume such duty with love, because I see it as a means to accomplish my ideal in life, my freedom is more perfect. It is love for a genuine ideal that bestows greater inner freedom. When this love reaches the peak of enthusiasm, freedom becomes supreme and I carry out my duty enthusiastically. The effort is thereby transfigured; it is lightened and becomes part of the process of elevation to the best in oneself; it is no longer repression but sublimation.

Frequently, one flees from this highest form of freedom for lack of the courage responsibly to take hold of the reins of one's life. Men – wrote Fichte incisively – prefer to be considered as a piece of lunar lava, rather than to be responsible and free subjects. To be responsible means being attentive to everything valuable that asks me to adopt it and accomplish it in my life. Things are of value to me when they offer possibilities for meaningful action. If I respond positively I act responsibly and make myself responsible for the result of my actions.

Only responsible persons are free, for only they are free from selfish and comfortable reclusion in one's own solitude and find themselves ready to engage their creativity and personal development. When one knows how actively to respond to the highest value – the unity with others of one prepared to give his life for friends and enemies – one obtains perfect freedom.

### **Surrender to Absolute Love Is Perfect Freedom**

In the hell of a concentration camp, the father of a family is about to be put in a dungeon to die of hunger. Another prisoner steps in front of him and, gently touching his shoulder, says: "You stay, you have a family; I am alone!" and takes his place. One is not born with such unselfish heroic freedom. It is the fruit of a long struggle, a sign that life has scaled a high peak and gained supreme elevation of spirit. To go into a dungeon to die of starvation contradicts the instinct for survival by whatever means. At this limit point, one spared from that punishment steps forward to replace another he will never see again. It is difficult to imagine the kind of inner freedom necessary to make such a decision. This freedom is not merely a lack of ties, nor pure freedom of movement to choose at one's discretion between two possibilities. Rather, this highest freedom means perfect self control and occurs only when one identifies with the ideal of supreme unity with others to such an extent that any other value is insignificant in comparison.

A young Jew is dragged like a leper outside the walls of Jerusalem. They shoved him about and then dragged him a short way off and begin to stone him. There is spiritual helplessness in dying surrounded by hate; even dying animals usually seek refuge so they feel less unprotected. Yet Stephen is alone before his executioners. It would be normal to try to run, shout, defend himself in desperation, to die killing. However, he remained calm with gaze fixed on high as if seeing a

superior reality. From this extreme height he spoke a word of pardon for those who, seconds later, would leave him speechless for ever.

We need a superhuman capacity for unselfishness, for isolation from the particular situation and adverse fate in order to rise above the present and take the viewpoint of pure love. This love expects nothing, reproaches nothing, and demands nothing. Rather, even in the most stressful moments in life, it consecrates its last energies to restoring the unity the enemies are tearing away in the cruelest manner. This identification with absolute, unconditional love, marks the peak in human freedom.

In the painting by El Greco, *El expolio*, hanging in the sacristy of the Cathedral in Toledo, Jesus is surrounded by a world of hate. The enemies crowd around him, forming a suffocating space. The Roman centurion looks on impassively, whilst Mary and the holy women look fearfully at the cross being prepared. Jesus, however, seems unaffected by the hostile climate. He does not respond with hate. He looks upwards, ecstatically, in an attitude of prayer and introspection. In the painting his figure stands out as a consequence of the radiating power of the scarlet of his tunic. We might well think that the Savior, in his own world, is praying for those who do not understand that hate destroys the personal life of those professing it. This impressive majesty of spirit represents the most relevant form of freedom.

### **Real Freedom and Encounter**

Let us synthesize all we have said. If you do not accomplish what you know you should, then you are not free. If you feel duty as a coercive obligation and carry it out under force, you exercise freedom but you do not yet have inner freedom, that is, a joyful spontaneity in carrying out your duty. But one day you realize that acting in accord with duty perfects you and you accept duty as a friendly voice; you begin to love it when you discover its value. Then you act with flexibility, promptness and pleasure for you have gained true inner freedom.

But one day you discover the highest goodness in your life, your ideal and your greatest duty: establishing the highest bonds of unity with others – with another. Follow this ideal with all your soul, with the drive of the enthusiasm you feel when you take as a goal the perfection towards which you are called and compelled. Then you will easily merge duty with wish and reach the highest level of freedom. You will feel compelled but not forced, inwardly linked but not coerced, for an inner voice reveals that what is obliging is different from you but not distant. This is the very beginning of one's self-realization as a person. That is why you embrace it with the enthusiasm given by the encounter with duty seen as an ideal. As the North Pole which points towards the fulfillment of one's vocation and mission, this is the achievement of true freedom.

Try really to find yourself in all aspects of life: love, beauty, ethics, professional duty and religion, and freedom will flourish within you. "It is day when we are together; it is night when we are apart," said the blind man to his guide, Marianela, in the book by Pérez Galdós (of the same name). What a beautiful sentence! It is day, there are floods of light when we live in the unity of the encounter; when we break the unity night falls and we are plunged into darkness. The encounter is a source of light in which we see clearly the infinite poverty of the forms of freedom spiraling down to the nausea of vertigo.

## The Lure of Immediate Gain Deprives One of Freedom

One who takes one's wishes as the supreme criteria of action loses inner freedom to be creative which requires opening up to valuable realities; the person subject to his fancies remains enclosed in his selfish interior. If desires plague you and you are incapable of seeing as a whole the different values asking to be carried out and of giving priority to those that are higher, then you are not free within.

Castel, the main character in the work by Ernesto Sábato, *The Tunnel*, assumes he loves María, which is an ecstatic experience; in fact he does not, but he wants to dominate her, which is an experience of vertigo. He does not behave as a free man, but calculates everything; he is incapable of putting off the vertigo of ambition in order to be generous to María and respect her for what she is and is called to be. To dominate her he subjects her to interrogation, and maintains sexual relations with her. But, since the dissolution of vertigo is merely an exchange of interests and does not create true unity, the more he has this type of relation with her, the deeper the abyss between them. This withdrawal produces frustration and sadness, which changes into anguish when it becomes repetitive and then turns into desperation. As if possessed by a demon, he surrenders to other vertigos – for different vertigos overlap each other – and he ends by succumbing to destruction, the most negative form of possession. Castel kills María while sobbing to her; "I have to kill you because you have left me alone." Once more he is mistaken. It was not María who left him alone; he surrendered to absolute solitude when he entered onto the path of vertigo. Vertigo does not establish unity, but cuts it off at the root.<sup>3</sup>

Macbeth in Shakespeare's tragedy is surrounded in his castle by the "walking wood" and perishes to show that on surrendering to the vertigo of unmeasured ambition to become king, he totally loses the genuine freedom to open himself creatively to what is valuable, and so he suffocates.

When human freedom is seen in depth with the horizons of wealth and happiness it opens, one must feel infinite pity on seeing that tremendous effort is now put into persuading youth that they are free when they surrender to the excitement produced by fascination. If young people confuse the excitement of vertigo with the exultation of ecstasy they will never enjoy true freedom, but will be exposed to all kinds of intellectual, moral and political slavery.

One is free not when one remains fixed in the immediate present, but when one is steeped in the ideal and acts at every moment on its impulses. The human ideal is the encounter; however, the mere practice of sexuality does not make an encounter, but only a juxtaposition of two solitudes. The encounter is arrived at when two people engage each other, not when two egos are linked. The various elements integrated in the life of a person's sexuality have a personal character only when actively joined with love.

One can well understand that such present day psychologists as V. Frankl and R. Affemann emphasize the lack of meaning in separating the practice of sexuality from personal love. This separation depletes the life of the person and even the satisfactions sexuality produce. "It would strengthen sexual pleasure – writes Frankl – if sexuality were not isolated and disintegrated by separating it from love and dehumanizing it."<sup>4</sup>

It is not possible to continue to defend eroticism today except as a manipulative manner of attaining easy power over peoples converted into masses. But, then these are not people, but a degenerative product or what is left of the people when its most prized possessions: creativity, personal dignity and freedom, are taken away.

We see clearly then that one who is capable of assuming different values and integrating them correctly is wholly free. This integration is achieved by giving priority to the highest value and assembling all values in a harmonious, meaningful complex under this ideal of unity.

Three conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing:

1. Being free is being capable of giving full meaning to one's life.
2. Education for freedom is gaining a sensitivity to questions of meaning.
3. Giving meaning to life implies the art of integrating various, complementary elements.

How this difficult and prolific art may be acquired will be the subject of the following chapter.

## **Texts**

According to Marcello Peretti, the education of freedom is not secondary to training for love:

It has been noted that out of respect for their freedom neither teachers nor educational institutions have the right to enter into another's intimacy. But, what sort of freedom will come from the mere spontaneity or leaving children and youth at their own mercy? And to what will education be reduced if conscience and ethical formation are excluded? . . . Freedom is learned by long practice of personal control and by stimulating the right attitudes of discernment and willpower. Certainly the problem will remain open as to how to favor this. This should not be despotic, but youth cannot do without competent guidance. . . . Precisely in the field of sex education we frequently see the indifference of teachers who consider it legitimate to give way to spontaneous preferences for using sexuality and following amorous choices. But are these, after all, reasonable preferences and real choices, or are they suggestions and passive acceptance of other's behavior patterns. . . . Without doubt love as an act of freedom is the result of personal preferences and choices. But these must be responsible and based upon legitimate criteria of esteem. Based on the value of the person, these exclude any infringement of their dignity. They impose respect, which is not achieved spontaneously or by mere environmental influence, but as a result of suitable teaching. . . . Training to respect people is a prerequisite for educating to love and protecting it from the error of certain sentimental or cultural confusion.<sup>5</sup>

In a letter to Eckermann, Goethe, as excellent a thinker as he was a writer, expressed in concise and lucid form his idea of true freedom:

We are not made free by not accepting anything superior to ourselves, but by obeying something that is above us.

This type of collaborative obedience gives, total scope to our existence, it endows it with full meaning and makes it deeply happy. The task of showing this in detail and correctly falls to ethics as a discipline.

Unfortunately it has been forgotten that ethics only attempts to assure our life its full scope and meaning, and make it truly happy. One can have very intense experiences, but if they have no meaning in one's life as a whole, it will be empty, absurd and one will feel embittered. This is the opposite of being happy, and serious spiritual depression follows from this bitterness.

Viktor Frankl based all his psychotherapeutic work on the search for meaning since, "the modern patient suffers above all a terrible feeling of lack of meaning, coupled with the feeling of emptiness."<sup>6</sup> Let us reflect on several excerpts taken from his work, *Man and the Question of Meaning*:

The human is a being in search of meaning, of logos, and it is a task of the psychotherapist and the task of the logotherapist to help one find meaning.<sup>7</sup>

With regard to the adult generation, I will just note the results of the research Rolf von Eckartsberg carried out with Harvard University graduates: Twenty years after graduating, a very high percentage of these people – who, in the meantime had got on in life, and led extremely ordered and happy lives, viewed from outside – complained of the feeling of an abysmal lack of meaning.

. . . Signs of the feeling of lack of meaning are ever increasing. This is presently confirmed by Marxists and colleagues of purely psychoanalytical tendencies.<sup>8</sup>

Can we give modern, existentially frustrated man, a meaning? We should be content if it is not taken away from man today by reductionist indoctrination.<sup>9</sup>

Nowadays it is often thought that concern with giving meaning to life and guiding it towards a high ideal means evading the demands of daily life and, therefore, constitutes an unrealistic attitude. Viktor Frankl, forestalls this misunderstanding in his work, *Psychoanalysis and Existentialism*:

The fact of putting on the table the problem of the meaning of life should never be interpreted as a symptom or expression of something that is sick, pathological or abnormal in man; far from it, it is the true expression of the human being himself, and of what is most human within man. . . . Anguish in one's fight for the meaning of life should not be considered pathological. This suffering, caused by the problems of life, is the real object of psychotherapy based on the spiritual.<sup>10</sup>

Albert Camus emphasizes the importance of the meaning of life in his own forceful manner:

There is one single really serious philosophical problem: judging whether life is worth living or not. The rest, for example, if the world is three-dimensional, if the spirit has nine or twelve categories, are secondary questions. . . . I think the meaning of life is the most pressing question.<sup>11</sup>

Dostoyevsky, with his profound wisdom, considered the question of meaning essential:

The secret of human existence consists not only in living, but also in knowing what one is living for.

Present day writers teach us that man's life is established as genuinely human and thus full of meaning when each one treats his or her neighbor as a "thou", a possible companion; not as "it", a possible object of control and manipulation.

To Viktor Frankl:

. . . A man is righteous in virtue of the fact that he is not just one among others, but different from all the others and so becomes unique and singular before all the rest. Only when the person who loves considers the loved one as unique and singular does the loved one become "thou" for the lover.<sup>12</sup>

## Notes

1. "Les chemins de la liberté". "Le sursis" (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 418. Spanish version: *Los caminos de la libertad. La prórroga* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial), pp. 362-365. The text is reproduced in my work "Vértigo y éxtasis", pp. 377-378. It is instructive to analyze this in the light of the method found in my *Estética de la creatividad* (Barcelona: Promociones Publicaciones Universitarias, 19872).

2. Cf. *Terre des hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1939), pp. 216-217.

3. Cf. *El Túnel* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1982). A full explanation of this work can be seen in my *Análisis literario y formación humanística* (Madrid: Escuela Española, 1986), pp. 146-167.

4. "Der Mensch vor der Frage nach dem Sinn", p. 93.

5. Cf. "La formación sexual como formación para el amor" in the collective work *La educación sexual* (Barcelona: Herder, 1975), pp. 199-200.

6. Cf. "Der Mensch vor der Frage nach dem Sinn", p. 141. Spanish version (Barcelona: Editorial Herder) entitled: *El hombre en busca de sentido*. The texts given were translated directly from the German.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

10. *Ibid.* (Mexico: F.C.E., 1967), pp. 40-43.

11. Cf. *El mito de Sísifo* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1981), p. 89.

12. Cf. *Der Mensch vor der Frage nach dem Sinn*, p. 93.



## Chapter V

# Ethics and the Structure of Human Life

To discover what type of relationship is of ethical value, we must understand ethics: its nature and task, its goal and characteristics. This, in turn, requires reflection on our personal life in order appropriately to shape our behavior.

### **A Person Must Shape His or Her Life**

From very early on it is vitally important to become aware of how our life develops as a personal reality; how it is woven and in some cases unravelled. We suggested this when speaking of interpersonal encounters, but it should be made clear in the light of the theory of ambits or spheres of influence and of creative interpersonal development.<sup>1</sup>

One proceeds from an encounter and is called to establish a whole series of encounters; these are not just personal, but of every kind. Literary works and biographies help us to discover the different personal spheres we may develop during life. Each reflects a special form of existence, for at some time each person asks "what is going to become of me". Animals do not ask this question. The cat – however sharp – never stops to wonder what will happen to it in the future. It simply lives, reeling off each moment of its existence as a child unwinds the string of a kite. We can foretell at every moment that the cat will constantly obeys the dictates of its species exactly as written in its biological code. It holds no surprises for us.

The human being, when born, is not programmed with everything he will accomplish. His faculties are programmed: his intelligence, vision and his whole organic condition up to the color of his eyes. But his possibilities, are not programmed; but will be evoked by his choice.

What one becomes is determined by one's faculties, the possibilities one receives, and the choice one makes at each moment. Youths today have faculties similar to, or in some cases lesser than those Leonardo da Vinci, but they have possibilities that de Vinci could not have foreseen, such as the theoretical and technical knowledge for the construction of an airplane. If the youth enrolls in a school of aviation, modern society affords him the possibility of flying.

### **What Direction to Give One's Life**

If with one's faculties and possibilities one shapes one's life, what direction should one give it? It may be directed towards love or hate, and within love towards personal or erotic love, towards generosity or egoism, towards construction or destruction.

Does it matter which direction one gives one's life; can one choose at whim? Some believe that one has total freedom to make whatever decisions one wishes. This assumes that the mere fact of desiring something makes it good for human life. But does desire really have this power? I can have many wishes, but are they all justified, that is, adapted to what I am called to accomplish in life and want to become?

It is simplest to believe that I need not worry about becoming something particular, that it is sufficient to live each moment of life as intensely as possible so as to obtain maximum advantages and satisfactions. I do not need to take care of the past which no longer exists, nor of the future which has not yet become a reality. This day to day living sometimes is suggested as a model for

realistic behavior. What is real is the bird I have in my hand at this moment; abandoning present rewards in favor of an ideal which may appear in the future does not seem realistic or sensible.

But modern research on the philosophy of history teaches that while the ideal is future inasmuch as we have not yet fully achieved it, we do try because its value is already attracting us. This power of attraction is similar to the influence of a musical piece on the performer: he tries to recreate it, but does so in virtue of its formative energy. The ideal then is not a mere idea, but one which motivates and gives meaning to every action.

Is it necessary to guide life towards a determined goal taken as an ideal? One is not fully formed, but has to guide oneself towards that form. To a certain extent, this guidance is prefixed by the fact that the human being comes from a personal encounter and needs to establish a web of affection with his environment, which becomes the proto-ambit of his life.

This is decisive. Animals have instincts which lead them to what is necessary to keep alive. Their instincts guide them along the course of their species, to leave which would mean destruction.

The human is not completely channeled by his species. It gives him powers to adopt a certain range of possibilities, but does not dictate what possibilities he should select or what type of behavior he must adopt. The person is free to establish one type of life or another. But this freedom in no way means arbitrariness for it is a universal law of life that all who enjoy a certain initiative must choose that which increases their reality and enables them to develop, not that which impoverishes and destroys. We know from scientific and other sources of knowledge that one develops and perfects himself as a person through creating encounters. This is possible only when two beings intermingle their personal sphere in love. This dialogical encounter must be the goal in human life for it is its last source for meaningful action.

Here we discover another decisive law in the life of man. If dialogue, encounter and mutual love are the ideal of human life, this must be directed in such a way that at every moment and in all aspects it unfolds in a relational manner in the personal sphere.

### *The Inter-Relational or Dialogical Character of Human Life*

One's thinking, feeling, wanting, acting must have a dialogical nature for one must search for truth in community, that is, in collaboration with other people and groups. Looking together in the same direction is possible only when that reality is loved along with the companions in the search. The thoughts and ideas gathered in this dialogical form must be expressed with love or a desire to create true communication. This happens when we share sincerely with others the knowledge by which we adjust to reality and, thus, to our development as people.

This generous communication does good for all and hence creates a strong union: nothing so unites person as doing good together. You share with me your greatest richness: the knowledge you need to become a full person. I receive this and, together with my own experience, pass it both back to you and on to others. This dialogical intellectual life is the sure path towards the ideal of encounter and creative unity.

The life of love must also be dialogical and relational in order to meet the goal which must guide human life. Marital love implies various feelings and desires which must be guided dialogically. Their goal must not consist in self gratification alone, but in establishing spheres of full co-existence. What is rejected is not satisfactions, but obtaining it in a selfish and solitary manner.

## To Live Dialogically Is to Cultivate Virtue

To direct our wishes, feelings, ideas and actions dialogically, is to cultivate all the virtues as they shape our will to the ideal of unity. Their value is not in themselves, but in their relation to the goal sought. We practice virtues by wanting, feeling, thinking, acting and loving, not in response to dictates or precepts imposed from outside, but as fulfilling the deepest demands of our being.

Strength, tenacity, magnanimity, honesty, truth, humility, patience, etc. – every virtue contributes to building the person; they are called *virtutes* in Latin or constructive forces. These virtues or forces of human action are possible when one follows the ideal in some independence from the immediate moment and with sufficient inner freedom to adapt to the demands of the goal. Here the same biological action can be ethically negative in one case and positive in another: it is positive when it contributes to achieving the ideal; it is negative when for immediate gain it draws one away from the ideal. Numbness in achieving the ideal is typical of vice.

Everything in man's life must be pointed towards the ideal of unity and gravitate towards establishing high forms of unity if it is to be genuine. From this three very important conclusions are derived:

1. In every person's being there must be a unity, balance or adjustment of each aspect of life to the others. Sensitivity and intelligence, body and spirit, desires and ideals, freedom and norms must harmonize and be complementary.
2. Active collaboration must occur between the integrated man and the realities of the environment; such collaboration stands out in reversible experiences.
3. This collaboration is viable only when we discover in the surrounding realities certain values or possibilities for attaining our ideal.

### *Values Must be Seen and Lived Dialogically*

Values are relevant to our developing life; they are possibilities which we must actively assume for our full personal realization. Values not only exist, but assert themselves in order for the person assuming and carrying them out to reach fulfillment.

Fidelity, pity, respect, modesty, honesty, etc. are values. They are important in themselves; their relevance does not depend on our caprice. It is not man who decides whether they are valuable or not; the value they have in themselves is revealed in their effectiveness when one responds to their call. Values must be learned dynamically, creatively, distinctly in a relational and committed manner, not coldly and ascetically.

When assumed, values inspire the hope of realizing oneself. When we do not heed the call of values, which requires generosity, but grasp the individualistic satisfactions of the moment, we turn into dreamers. We look for the poor fulfillment had from immediate and solitary satisfaction, but this is a vain and false illusion. For enclosure within egoism closes us to the wealth of relationships and therefore draws us apart from the most genuine human vocation.

An art critic and poet verbally attacked a young journalist for not having underlined in his article the poet's participation. He destroyed a personal relationship out of interest solely in his individual gain. This example enables us to clearly define two points of major interest:

- a) which attitudes must be considered as infraethical or amoral, and

b) at what moment does ethical life begins and under which conditions does the human being attains ethical fulfillment.

### *Infra-Ethical or Amoral Attitudes*

To measure the height at which we stand in the creation of the human sphere, and therefore of ethics or morality, we must determine the attitudes which would place one below the ethical level. The ethical level is the plane on which creative activities are carried out, creating spheres of every type, particularly genuine personal relationships. All that creates co-existence is ethically valuable; all that destroys interpersonal links constitutes an ethical antivalue.

Those who do not worry about the creative or destructive nature of their actions, because they strive only to accumulate pleasant sensations, move on an infraethical level. They do not even enter the sphere of ethical or creative life. This attitude of indifference is a serious negative since it leaves one at the margin of the possibilities of personal development and everything one does in life will be affected by this negative sign. Each act, by pursuing only self satisfaction and being confined within one's selfishness, lacks ethical value or simply is not "good". What is radically "bad" and constitutes the source of evil in various acts is the basic attitude totally separated from creativity.

Some say that, a person who is unconcerned with the goodness or badness of his actions, seeing them only from his own individual outlook, lives an "innocent" life, far removed from good and evil; that one's acts are "indifferent" when they spring from a basic indifference to all ethical duty. Because they are indifferent and morally neutral, they conclude, such acts may be the object of free and arbitrary choice: one can do or not do this as one prefers.

This is a comfortable position; in principle it appears liberal, generous and peaceful. But it is false at the very root. No one is justified in adopting an attitude of indifference to the elementary duty of growing or bringing their being to its full development; this obligation is inherent in every person alive. Plants and animals automatically develop all they have written in their inner program. Man, on the other hand, must program his life in a rational and voluntary way. If not, he confounds the deepest demands of his own being, upsets the balance, and is out of the game. As unbalanced, no actions will be right, real, or fruitful in shaping the "second nature" (the "êthos") which one must acquire through molding one's personality.

One television series about sex devoted a good part of the time to describing various forms of sexual activity and stressing their satisfying aspects. The speaker never questioned whether merely gaining gratifying and exciting sensations morally justified an action. A good number of programs never touched on the ethical problem, as if sexual relationships had no other meaning than to satisfy instincts and quench erotic desires. But at a certain point, when a young person asked if he should agree to carry out certain perverse sexual practices, she firmly replied: "If the person suggesting it wants to destroy you, then you should not accept. Otherwise, you can do what you like. Those practices are one of many options. Simply choose them freely."

This person ignored the fact that certain sexual acts can morally destroy the person carrying them out, although the partner may not expressly intend this. It is not sufficient to avoid bad will in order to avoid the damage such actions can produce and to make them legitimate. Nor does free choice guarantee that one is on the right path, for it is not an ethical but infraethical criterion: choosing freely is not inner freedom; it is not a guide for life. Freely choosing nothing but pleasure does not direct one towards a good outcome; it does not set one on the path to encounter, but

hinders one, for it leaves one on the childish plane of simply searching for oneself,<sup>2</sup> excluded from a genuine relation with the surrounding realities.

This exclusion is ethically negative for it impedes the creative activity which constitutes the nucleus and marks the beginning of a valuable ethical life. Søren Kierkegaard considered mere surrender to immediate pleasures to be infraethical and infracreative. Such an attitude sometimes is presented as a liberation from ethics, which is interpreted as repressing instincts and as an enemy of the great feast of life. It does not liberate from oppression, however, but oppresses because it withdraws from the links which make man free. This withdrawal puts man below the level at which he forges his maturity as a person, which is the level of ethical life.

Understanding the rupture of ties to be access to freedom is mere illusion. To understand this from within, we must analyze the characteristics of a person whose ideal is the accumulation of pleasurable sensations. Note how one characteristic provokes the following one and all form a process of vertigo, which does not develop, but stagnates and stifles the human being.

### **Characteristics of the A-Moral, Infra-Ethical Person**

One who wishes only to be filled with pleasant impressions lives in search of sensations, which are idolized and in which one wishes to drown oneself. But resting here is impossible because sensations fade and joyous moments dissolve in time. In such ephemeral moments, one who is focused upon sensations strives repeatedly to experience gratifying sensations so that opportunities for pleasure do not escape. He thus becomes a person devoted to enjoyment clinging to the happiness of the day (Horatio), enjoying the beauty of the instant (A. Gide) and trying to stop time in its flight (A. de Lamartine). But all this is in vain, for bodily sensations do not last. They have a very poor form of temporality, whereas experiences which last through time are above the level of sensitivity and enjoy a higher type of temporality.

The person devoted to enjoyment feels hounded by the passage of time and wishes to imprison it by incessantly repeating sensations. To do so he tries to control the realities which are the source of sense pleasures. For this he reduces all around him to a means for his own ends. He does not wish to collaborate with others in achieving something in common or to convince, but to vanquish them at any price, to impose himself and rule, to possess them, to have them under his control and to manipulate them.

The selfish person develops his capacity for calculating to the maximum, while leaving his creative power in suspense. He does not create a co-existence with others, but feels lonely, irritated with himself, and empty of all that is not an illusion of power.

Fascinated by the ambition to control everything from his own loneliness, this dreamer confuses emptiness with independence; he believes that by confronting everyone he endows himself with great personality. So he becomes a weak being, for man in his solitary state loses his personal identity. Under the illusion that he has a personality, he does his utmost to fulfil his desire for satisfactions, but in this he lives only by the dictates of his species, without taking charge of his personal existence.

When he realizes his lack of real freedom from having broken the link with all around him, the dreamer feels deceived and insecure and out of balance due to separating from everything that confirms his reality. He imagines that by increasing his control over things and persons he may feel secure, and thus becomes obsessed with having and possessing. This, in turn, induces him to abandon himself to external realities and to be alienated in them.

He feels lost because he is incapable of relating to their creativity and actively responding to his real possibilities. This stifling solitude, in the end, generates desperation, the bitter consciousness of having closed off access to fulfillment as a person.

Reviewing the foregoing, we see that one who is fascinated by sensation suffers from triple illusion:

- a) He believes himself closely united to reality, when in fact he is linked only tangentially.
- b) He thinks he is highly free because he has broken ties that signify connections, norms and direction, and does not realize the connection between values and life. They limit choices, but enable the only real human freedom, namely, to be creative.
- c) He considers liberation to be giving free rein to throbbing instincts, without realizing that this is submitting to the rule of the species.

The consequences of this triple illusion are very serious. Authors well versed in clinical psychology warn that persons who rescind from norms and precepts which orient and give meaning to one's sexuality first believe that they are freeing themselves from the iron dictatorship of the "super ego", the guiding judge of human life. For such freedom, they deliver themselves to the forces of instinct, as the key to human happiness and the source of all gratification. Soon, however, being given over to immediate gain with no sense of anything surpassing pleasure, they find themselves trapped in a selfish atmosphere which encases them in what Lacan calls the "libidinal omelette", an attitude toward life driven by the sole goal of selfishly accumulating pleasure.

This retreat into the closed circuit of the ego takes one back to infantile individualist stages, which, due to their lack of creativity, have matured little or not at all. Whereas creative activity is open and collaborative, narcissistic submersion in one's own interests prevents one from opening to the invitation of true values. Being devoted to enjoyment as the sole goal, one is imprisoned by gratifying stimulæ and does not listen to the invitation to establish creative ambits of co-existence and relationships. In Freudian terms one follows the "principle of pleasure", not that of reality.

By attending only to pleasures of the senses, the person who has fallen into vertigo is incapable of integrating his internal sources of energy: the instinctive and voluntary, the bodily and spiritual, the spontaneous and reflexive. This inability prevents him from taking charge of his tendencies, guiding them towards an ideal, giving them meaning and accumulating them with inner freedom. Not being assumed into the magnetic field of an ideal value which centers and dynamizes one's whole personal life, the tendencies remain de-centered and isolated. Left to themselves, such urges are insatiable, always asking for more because sensation becomes dull and needs ever more intense stimulæ in order to maintain the same threshold of excitement.

For the person, these ever increasing demands of tendencies separated from the ideal mean not inner freedom, but servitude. One who has surrendered to vertigo feels overrun. One is free to surrender to vertigo, but by so doing renounces one's inner freedom and is dragged along by a higher force that carries one where one does not want to go. To free basic urges from all ideals, values, norms and precepts is a one-sided decision; at first it produces euphoria, but deception and spiritual asphyxiation soon follow.

The person in vertigo wants only the bird in hand or immediate satisfaction. Kierkegaard described this attitude very well in *The Mortal Illness*:

The immediate man . . . immediately links to wanting, yearning, enjoying, etc., but really is always passive. Even in yearning this "I" is no more than a dative, as happens with the child. This man knows no other dialect than that of the agreeable and disagreeable.<sup>3</sup>

This unjust unilateralness renders us biased in making choices, manic and obsessive; it fixes our attention on one part of our personal reality and blocks us from all else. If a perfect machine lacks a vital part it becomes scrap. Similarly, personal life, if it does not correctly integrate all its parts disintegrates and loses dynamism and value.

### **When an Ethical Attitude Appears**

Ethical life begins when one realizes that it is not enough to let oneself be carried along by pleasurable sensations; that human life develops only by drawing up a plan for life, following an ideal, and choosing those factors which render it possible. From childhood we find by experience that man is not a static, but a dynamic being who must constantly grow. To do this one is obliged to choose at every moment those elements which enable one to achieve what he requires in order to be true to his vocation and mission. The radical vocation of every person is to establish the highest mode of unity in each order. This is possible only when we do deal not simply with the immediately pleasurable, but are attentive to what is of value.

Such attention requires detachment from one's own interests and a corresponding inner freedom that opens to a wider horizon. If when absorbed in some favorite activity I hear a call for help what should I do? Carry on with my activity or give up my momentary interest in order to help the person who calls? I make a hierarchy or order of values: first piety and then pleasure and choose the former. This grading supposes relinquishing a value, that is, choosing between two values and giving preference to the higher, even at a sacrifice. This sacrifice does not mean repression, however, but preferring a higher value to a lower one and thereby raising oneself to a higher level of personal achievement.

Moreover, preference does not mean leaving a value aside, but joining it to another higher one, assuming it within that field of meaning, pointing it in the right direction into a more relevant field of action. Physical intimacy in marriage has precise meaning and value for the pleasure it holds in satisfying an impulse, etc. But, in married life, every act of corporal intimacy is a living expression of personal love, of giving oneself generously to one's spouse, of the strong will to participate in a common plan and to join two lives in the pursuit of the same ideal. Living the particular as a means by which all these aims are reached does not lessen its meaning, but rather emphasizes it by conferring upon it its full significance. All its value in the first horizon is maintained and strengthened when it is assumed into a wider field of action.

The ethical attitude depends on our capacity to integrate several values in our life and to coordinate different attitudes and acts. Such coordination and integration enable one to create high bonds of unity with the realities in his environment. Such forms of creativity imply a high level of personal perfection and, therefore, of ethical maturity.

### *Ethics as a "Second" or Acquired Nature*

A synoptic review of the foregoing gives a precise idea of what is understood by Ethics. The life of a human being is not fully programmed; it must be planned and accomplished consciously

and freely. One does this by playing in the sense of establishing spheres of life and engaging in them. This web of spheres forms a "second nature" in man, a special way of acting, choosing and seeing reality, called in Greek *êthos*.

Ethics is not only a matter of customs ("mores" in Latin, from which the term "moral" is derived). It is the analysis of the "second nature" that man must work out by establishing spheres of activity of every kind: co-existence, professional and artistic life, religious elevation, etc.

One develops as a person by establishing spheres of engagement because one is a being of relationship and encounter; one lives as a person, unfolds and perfects oneself by interpersonal encounters. Encounters take place only between realities that are spheres of engagement, whereas an object is treated as a reality that can be controlled, but not encountered. To avoid reducing something to a mere object, requires an attitude of respect. Respecting a person means letting them be as they are. But as a person is a developing being respecting him or her means helping them become what they are destined to be. Respect, therefore, implies collaboration; it supposes an intermingling or mutual enrichment of two ambits which generates encounter and enkindles love.

Loving someone means founding with them high levels of unity. That ethics stresses love not as mere sentimental exuberance, but as a creative force of encounter or interrelation makes sense for this is the goal of personal life, its driving idea or ideal. Today great writers show that all human life is oriented by generous love. From such love comes all ethical life, which in turn culminates therein (Gilleman). Hence, giving love its full scope rather than diminishing it is a matter of decisive importance for once diminished it can no longer be a genuine ideal of human life.

Love, along with encounter, is destroyed by vertigo, but strengthened by ecstasy. Human origins are in a sphere of love; its destiny is to establish other such spheres. One who actively immerses oneself in this field of love – the process which comes from and leads to love – lives creatively and ecstatically. He or she acquires a dialogical and relational mentality with exalted feelings as second nature.

On the other hand, one who withdraws from this circuit of love becomes disoriented and off balance, trapped within one's egoism, and surrenders to the elements of vertigo which obstruct any rise to the true ideal of establishing high levels of unity. This obstruction is similar to the defects in a door which prevent it from moving smoothly. The vertiginous person, acting in a shortsighted manner inspired by egoism, acquires forms of conduct or habits which weave a "vicious" second nature that bars his or her path towards the ideal of unity.

This schematic view of life enables us to see the fruitfulness of personal love, which joins and integrates all the forces in the human being in contrast to the disintegrating power of a love reduced to mere eroticism, which breaks apart and isolates such energies.

The tendency to integrate or disintegrate the sources of human dynamism determines the ethical meaning of one's life. The dynamism involved in achieving an "integrative ethical life" will be the subject of the next chapter.

## **Texts**

From his vantage point as a doctor wishing to orient human life to its true being, Viktor Frankl warns that the goal of education is not to impose precepts on man, but to direct him towards full realization:

Sooner or later we will stop moralizing and will ontologize morals, that is: good and bad will not be defined as something we should or should not do, but good will appear as the realization of

the meaning required and imposed on a being and we will consider bad that which prevents realizing the meaning.

Meaning cannot be given, it must be sought. Meaning must be sought, but not created.<sup>4</sup>

The human person needs to endow oneself with meaning and is restless until this is achieved. That such restlessness has the form of desire indicates that one's goal is outside oneself. This goal is not easy to determine, because it is not simply given with the desire, but must be suggested to desire by the intellect. In order for this to exercise its guiding function correctly, it must be clarified most carefully.

The present attempt at such clarification has led to the conclusion that such a goal is given by love, correctly understood, rather than by satisfying impulsive instincts. The French philosopher-playwright, Gabriel Marcel, underlines this in the following text.

An effort must be made to replace "desire" with love. . . . Desiring is "having" which not yet having, which disjunction explains the lacerating nature of the desire. Like possession, "desire" attacks the very roots of love. One who "possesses", unless he or she purifies the tie to his possessions, risks being ever on guard as against an attacker; he sees in everyone a plaintiff: What is he going to ask of me now? One who "desires" runs the risk of seeing others as no more than "obstacles" or "means" for attaining his desires. In neither case is he ready to love.

Love is radically different from desire, in that it gravitates around "communion", which considers having as something subordinate, excludes the "objectivization" of I and the other, and has nothing to do with dividing all into an inside and an outside. Real love tries to unify things and persons in a higher reality which is more ourselves than are we. This really transcends multiplicity and opens us to the plenitude of being.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

1. A detailed explanation of these spheres of interaction can be found in my *Estética de la creatividad. Juego, arte, literatura* (Barcelona: Promociones Universitarias, 1987).

2. Cf. R. Affemann, *La sexualidad en la vida de los jóvenes* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1979). L. Cencillo, *Líbido, terapia y ética* (Estella: Verbo Divino, 1974).

3. Cf. *op. cit.* (Madrid: Guadarrama, 1969), p. 110.

4. Cf. *Der Mensch vor der Frage nach dem Sinn*, p. 155.

5. G. Marcel, *Etre et avoir* (Paris: Aubier, 1953), pp. 196, 216, 219, 222, 236, 243-245, as summarized by R. Troisfontaines in *De l'existence à l'être* (Paris: Vrin, 1953), I, pp. 234-235.



## **Chapter VI**

### **The Integrating Character of an Ethical Life**

In the previous chapter we saw how the person as a living being must grow and develop: 'not to develop' means 'to die'. The way for a living person to grow is to embrace more territory with intelligence, willpower and sentiment, and to establish new spheres of life. The child opens to the life of reason, shapes his or her willpower and develops in sensitivity, while at the same time learning to create spheres of interrelations of every kind.

This creative activity mobilizes the whole human being: one's tendencies and preferences, one's instincts and ideals, one's vital needs and desires, in order to realize the values discovered throughout life. Disintegrating instinctive greed and the throbbing of physical desire block this personal dynamism and provoke a whole series of conflicts. This blockage is profoundly anti-ethical for the basic and decisive reason that it impedes the normal development of the human being.

#### **The Ethical Life and Prioritizing Values**

The ethical attitude is achieved when one wishes to live to the full and appreciates the stimulation of the sensitive aspect. But at the same time he or she avoids attachment to such satisfactions in order to see life as a whole and integrate the value of pleasure with other values which are considered even more relevant. A pregnant woman who is unable to play a sport is obliged to choose between two values: the pleasure produced by the sport and the satisfaction of giving life to a new being. The pleasure and the satisfaction are both feelings, but they differ in level:

- the first feeling is enclosed within the woman, whereas the second opens generously to the other being;
- the first is joined by a certain euphoria, while the second is linked to sacrifice;
- the first can be part of a process of vertigo which destroys; the second is part of an experience of ecstasy which constructs.

A summary confrontation of both types of feeling enables one to see that the second is light years higher than the first; the woman who decides on the highest value promotes her life which she lifts it to a higher level. No matter that she has to relinquish one value, her capacity for development will be increased, because the human person realizes oneself far more quickly the higher the category and power of the appeal of values to which one is inclined.

This capacity to choose at each moment the highest value enables us to integrate the three basic planes of human activity: sensitive-corporal, creative-ethical and spiritual-religious. If the mother-to-be opts for the child, creates with it a personal relationship, and commits herself to what such a relationship implies, she adopts a totally ethical attitude. If the woman is a believer and makes this choice in virtue of life coming from God and being His gift, the ethical meaning of her decision then becomes religious, because the high value she has chosen is linked to the supreme value. But this ethical and religious scope of her attitude does not contradict the sentimental, affectionate and sensitive aspect of the relation between the mother and her future child. She may well feel an affection inspired by blood ties, appreciate it as of her own, and experience the

gratification of caressing it. These feelings and pleasures, typical of the "aesthetic" state as understood by Kierkegaard, integrate perfectly with the ethical decision to give life to a new being, to love and educate it as a person, and, with a religious attitude to respect it as in God's image endowed with a sublime vocation.

A similar form of integration can be seen in the sexual relationship of the married couple. In an integral view of the life of love, the married couple links (a) the pleasant tactile union, or the aesthetic state, (b) to the wish to establish together an ambit of unselfish, generous friendship, or the ethical state, and (c) to the undertaking to live in conjugal friendship so as to accomplish together the task which God, who is defined as Love, commends, that is the religious state.

Conflict arises when the three attitudes are not correctly coordinated. The true meaning of the first or aesthetic is kindled in the second or ethical, which culminates in the third or religious state. One shapes his existence and gains inner equilibrium when he does whatever fully achieves this state and fills it with delight. Conflicts always come from dissatisfaction, rooted in lack of fulfillment. Imagine a Gothic vault with ribs pointing upwards, reaching toward form integration. Leave it half finished, and soon the whole will crumble. Integration produces unity, which supposes structure. In all beings, structure is the source of solidity and dynamism, of fulfillment and eternity.

Hence nothing is more important in one's life than to examine in depth how to develop one's personal life – in what way and through what phases its structure and manner of being can be shaped. Let us complete then what was said in the previous chapter regarding the basic characteristics of the human being and its development.

### **Three Basic Characteristics of the Human Being**

1. By being sensitive one can grasp stimulæ, feel a special attraction towards what is satisfying and therefore constitutes a value. But being spiritual, possessing intelligence, and having to direct one's development as a person, one cannot consider the enjoyment of pleasing stimulæ to be one's goal. Rather, one feels the need to guide all one's energies towards attaining the links which allow one to grow and to reach one's due stature in all respects.

One such link is that to other persons. From childhood, we realize that personal relationships establish us as human beings. Separation from our families tears us from the roots which enable us to exist. Conviction that we are destined to involve ourselves with others and create fruitful ties suggests that the person in greeting another is beginning a friendly relationship with a personal being.

2. It is decisive in a person's formation to discover that sensation and various other human functions are often pleasing to man, but that this is not all that such experience gives. Such pleasure is produced only when the sensorial experience is carried out with ease and efficiency. To look and see clearly without the least effort, to walk gracefully and agilely gives special satisfaction. To breathe deeply, drink thirstily, or hear a faint sound at a distance, etc. – any organic function properly carried out is pleasing. This pleasure is already a value in itself, but bears a higher value when it awakens a person. When we feel pleasure, we know we are normal; if we feel displeasure, we infer something is wrong, and take appropriate steps. The good smell of food is pleasing to our sense of smell, but this pleasure involves more than simple pleasure for it tells us that such food is good for our health. A bad smell is nasty, but beyond this it warns us of a danger in such food to our organism.

The senses play the role of watchman through the pleasure or displeasure they produce. It is an unfair devaluation of their scope and meaning to take them simply as instruments of pleasure. We must never forget this law: each type of reality reaches fulfillment when entering a relationship with a reality of a higher order. There is a sort of rising curve in creation which dynamically draws beings upwards.<sup>1</sup>

Following this line, every sexual experience presents a first value for the pleasure it holds. But this delight does not happen within itself, but refers to a higher function which constitutes its meaning and fulfillment, namely, expressing the enjoyment of personal unity.

3. The mere study of the different aspects of the development of the human personality shows us that each value refers to another, so that as a person evolves normally he or she shapes a supporting structure of values. To determine which of these values is the higher and deserves priority, one can note the way in which some values make claims on others and serve as a means of expression.

For example, a young man and woman live singly and intensely; they enjoy the freedom of movement their state allows, take full advantage of their incomes to travel, develop their studies, and enjoy a multitude of enriching experiences. One day they fall in love and decide to marry because they foresee in marriage a value which is new and doubtless higher in many aspects than the state they must forsake. The new obligations will limit considerably their capacity to take initiatives. More than once when they feel tempted to think they have lost their "freedom" they must meditate upon the following: the freedom they enjoyed in their single state signified a value, but this referred to higher specific form of freedom achieved in married life. As a more valuable form of freedom it is, therefore, more difficult to acquire. It is not simple freedom from ties, but capacity to establish fruitful ties. This is another type of freedom, much closer to the fulfillment of the human being. It does not leave the way clear to do whatever we fancy at any time and greatly reduces the sphere of our possibilities. But it lifts us to a far more mature level of activity; it teaches us to choose not in virtue of our fancy, but of our highest duty, namely, that of establishing a high level of union with another.

If we discover the richness of such union, it does not matter what experiences we have to relinquish in order to carry it out! Our fulfillment as persons is not achieved by simply accumulating experiences, but by our dedication to essential tasks. And the most essential task in life is to establish the highest unions, which include marital union.

### *Asceticism and Human Contentment*

Nowadays it is often said that we want to "realize ourselves". Nothing is more correct, on condition that we know how to achieve this along the proper path for realizing ourselves as persons. Human beings realize themselves properly when they engage all their faculties in realizing the most valuable possibilities. If I exercise my faculties – corporal and spiritual – simply in order to obtain the satisfactions of a game, and do not heed the call of values actively to assume them in my life, I do not realize myself or advance along the road towards my fulfillment; I remain stuck in the phases of infancy centered upon myself.

Listening to the call of the values and responding renders one responsible: one who responds to values becomes responsible for what happens in virtue of such a response. This double form of responsibility is the essence of creativity. One responds to the call of the value implied by marital love, and is responsible for the fruit of such a response, which is one's home. Such creative

responsibility lifts one to a high degree of human maturity, and places one on the path to fulfillment and contentment.

Obtaining this contentment is the goal of ethics. When this demands a certain ascetic element in one's behavior and channels one's life towards accomplishing ever higher values, it does not attempt to restrain vitality or demolish yearnings for happiness and enthusiasm, but simply makes it possible for them to accumulate to the maximum.

One cannot be happy when one only half realizes oneself, when one begins the journey towards maturity but stops half way, captured by passing attractions. True contentment is a feeling which comes from knowing that one is fulfilling one's true vocation and mission and developing one's being. This is exactly what ethics proposes and demands: to develop fully and obtain contentment that is not illusory, but realistic.

### *Prioritizing Values and the Fulfillment of a Human Being*

The tension between instinct and reason has been a theme since ancient times; it reflects the spontaneous, multicolored, fruitful life which questions and constrains everything. All human problems seem to consist in ridding oneself of the ties placed by the spirit upon life, by reason on instinct, and by norms on liberty. Let us do away – we are told – with norms, precepts, spiritual ideals and any reflection upon the meaning of our actions, and we will have absolute freedom to live life to the full!

This interpretation is too simplistic because it tries to choose the forces nourished from within the human being, when what is decisive is to integrate them, and therefore to enrich them all. Instinct is a magnificent reality, as are the body and sensitivity, because, along with being a source of satisfaction, they are destined to be a means for expressing and realizing the whole human person. What is dangerous and to be avoided is taking sensitivity, body and instincts alone. By themselves they produce only a fleeting flame which burns suddenly but disappoints man and plunges him into anguish and non-sense.

It is extremely important not to seize upon the first value we discover as the summit of all value. This misunderstanding leaves millions of people embedded in a primitive state. Let us suppose a young man and woman begin to associate with each other and immediately surrender to erotic satisfaction. The discovery of this field of gratification enflames and dazzles them. They believe there is nothing more colorful, fascinating and attractive; they are intoxicated with pleasurable feelings, joining one another in exaltation, and thereby feeling moved and transported. This deep sentimental upheaval leads them to believe that everything they experience is the quintessence of love and that their amorous enthusiasm entails real personal transformation.

They hold to this conviction with all the weight of experience which, by being so intense, appears to them to be perfect and definitive. However, a person with some experience can see in this a double error. Mere sexual practice exalts because it constitutes a form of fascination that produces vertigo; it arouses spiritual emotion because it enters the sphere of love, but it does not yet constitute a genuine experience of personal love.

What is serious is that the two do not notice that the great value they have discovered is not a definitive value, but only a first indication of a higher value. By not observing this, at mid point along the path to constructing a sphere of love they will plunge down the path to vertigo instead of ascending the path of ecstasy. Vertigo erases the personal encounter and reduces human creativity to a minimum. It does not allow high and lasting forms of unity to be created, but lives in terms of impressions which need ever greater stimuli.

The demands becoming ever higher, one who surrenders to vertigo finds oneself drawn closer to all types of extremes which destroy psychic balance. In this obsessive search for individual satisfactions, no true happiness and enthusiasm can be found.

There can be no enthusiasm and happiness because these sexual experiences are not yet experiences of love. In order for there to be love there must be creativity. But creativity or ecstasy is experienced only through fulfilling such demands as the generous opening of the spirit, availability, the wish to create together a valuable ambit or sphere of co-existence, readiness to intermingle the two ambits of life, etc. These demands are not fulfilled by the mere fact of surrendering oneself to the sentimental effusion implied in sexual relations. However moving, that statement of affection does not arouse a real wish to create. This wish moves on a different level from feelings.

A form of very intense union, unsurpassable in quality, would appear to be achieved in sexual activity, but when this responds to mere erotic greed it does not create a genuine unity of wills, interests, ideals and motives. Such an eminent unity is possible only between persons who put their whole being, energies, and desires, including their appetites, into the task of establishing a high personal union. This coordination of all one's energies into establishing personal unity implies overcoming the selfish attempt to possess and obsession with satisfying one's instincts. Such purification is in no way achieved through erotic surrender.

So balanced and deep a thinker as Gustave Thibon insists on the need to avoid confusions in so decisive a matter: "Does the excitement of a great passion transform in any way such motives as egoism or ambition? We can consider ourselves fortunate . . . if they do not sweep us away!"<sup>2</sup>

### *Need to Integrate Sexuality in One's Personal Plan for Love*

The sexual relationship has an inherent tendency towards a fascinating vertigo due to its "passionate" nature. It brings into play bodily forces which drag one along because they follow their course irresistibly as soon as they are put into play. Conscious of this risk, those who wish to confer a creative meaning on all their personal relationships strive calmly to integrate these instinctive energies into an over-all personal plan. Some married people before the marriage act have some purely personal communion, like a reading or a prayer. It has been said that such practice is counterproductive because it reflects a negative sense of the meaning of sexual experience. Western culture certainly entails manipulative prejudices concerning the meaning of what is bodily and it is time to develop a realistic idea of the value of each aspect of being human. The marital act has positive ethical value, but does not eliminate the danger of drawing the married couple into attitudes which are more fusional than strictly personal. Hence the appropriateness of highlighting their ethical meaning with acts that signify forms of union at a distance, of presence of calm and reflected collaboration, in order to compensate for the strong propensity towards fusion involved in corporal joining.

So-called "marital chastity" consists in never surrendering to the dream of absolute intoxication, but in striving that every action, however impulsive and binding it may be, contribute in a specific way to establishing between the married couple a genuinely personal community which is not something given, but always an open task.

In order to have full meaning, the human sexual relationship must be inspired by, and give birth to, new and more valued personal relationships. It is, therefore, foolish to neglect the personal bond with a spouse throughout the day, and then hope, at a certain moment, to have sexual

relations. Such incoherence leads them to feel that they are being reduced to a means and that they are not considered a real companion.

To confer a fully human character to the sex relationship, it is important to cultivate a personal union at all times, so that this is what is expressed in physical sexual form. This elevates to a creative level all the energies generated by the appetite.

Sometimes erotic relations are maintained under the pretext of working under the impulse of real love, though aware of not having established a true personal relationship with the other person. Such love is reduced to mere passion or erotic frenzy. True love implies recognition and esteem of the values within the other person as a person, beyond the pleasure which certain of their qualities might produce. The process of falling in love begins with the feeling of pleasure produced by some quality in a person, but the process does not become true love until the person is loved unconditionally, in happiness and sadness, in health and in sickness, that is, in every circumstance. The person who satisfies an erotic desire promises eternal love, but this is conditioned to obtaining benefit from the enjoyment of that moment. But love with conditions is not true love; rather it is a quenching of instincts which are essentially selfish or wrapped up in themselves.

To really love someone as G. Marcel noted, means telling them: "You will never die". Life calls for perpetuity, eternity. Is there any sense in telling someone: "I'll love you this summer?" This is ridiculous because of the sharp drop from one level to another. Real love is on a personal, creative level where some are startled by the absolute value of others which they respect and encourage. Such absolute value surpasses the limits of space and time.

In view of this elevated condition of human love, we can understand that in order to love truly the spell of the sexual union must be overcome, and all that is passionate, fascinating and thoughtless must be assumed in order to be transformed into a means of expressing personal union. When the sexual union is carried out under the impulse of a sincere wish to stimulate personal, sacrificing love, its power for moving the human being is transfigured. It loses much of its power of seduction in order to become a calm expression of a personal response, an eloquent statement of a deeply moving renewal and growth of the most intimate union of two beings.

This is transfigured and assumes a new direction. It is not extinguished, nor is its attraction lessened. On the contrary, it takes on a new and higher scope more suited to the whole human being than is the frenzy of passion.

### **The Need to Perfect First Love**

The transformation of the first or so-called impulsive "romantic love" takes place when one stops searching for oneself in the interpersonal union in order to give oneself up to the creation of something new: this is a dual relationship, a *nosotros*. Such relationship is created when the other person is not reduced to a means for one's own ends. First they are taken as an absolute unchanging and irreplaceable center of initiative.

Love includes a certain propensity to idolize the loved one. One is absorbed, enthralled, dominated by the other. That is why Ortega, in his book *Sobre el amor*, identifies falling in love with stupefaction. The person in love attends to only one transfixing reality in the world, and disregards the other realities.<sup>3</sup> This unbounded rapture of admiration and wonder seems, at first, to respond to an attitude of generosity or altruism because it is coming out of oneself. But analyzed in depth, it often denotes a selfish condition when what inspires exaltation is not the person but an object of desire, a source of satisfactions. When the pleasure produced by the qualities of a person is loved, it is not that person who is loved, but one's own self. Such love closes in on itself.

Though it may be intense, this class of love does not free one from seclusion in oneself, but intensifies one's egocentrism. This is a narcissistic love which sees in the surroundings only a reflection of its own figure, with which it is in love in a self-interested way and therefore wishes to possess.

A series of attitudes derives from this narcissistic attitude which shrinks true love into bitterness: suspicion, lack of confidence, mistrust, capriciousness, irritability, resentment, haughtiness, and the like.

With perfect logic, the "Narcissus myth" depicts this person as obsessed with admiring his own figure and catching it in the rippling water. The obsession prevents him from taking into account other beings with their special conditions, so that he drowns in the water. Doubtless Narcissus experienced an acute emotion on throwing himself into the waters, fascinated by the prospect of catching his own shape and enjoying its attractiveness. But this exuberance does not save him from destruction. Note well: the emotional intensity which accompanies a desire or a project is not the measure of its perfection.

One achieves perfection when one creates something of value, not by surrendering to a series of pleasant feelings. We must not forget that creativity depends on the will, which is a capability for deciding in the light of understanding. Sentiment has an important role in human life, but it is neither the only, nor the primary one.

### **The Need for Knowledge of True Selves**

If we wish to live our human lives with a minimum of dignity, we need to know its basic components. At the dawn of intellectual life in the West, with good reason Plato exhorted us to study the essences so as to distinguish between just and unjust, noble and plebeian, great and mean. This power of discernment is more necessary today than ever, owing to the avalanche of sophism. The Sophist is one who searches not for truth, but for the opinion of the majority in order to navigate with the current and gain easy popularity.

By searching not for truth, but for popularity one is in danger of not taking the right path to authentic personal development. If we do not know the meaning of each element constituting human love, we undoubtedly will tend to give preference to what is most exciting and impulsive and to leave aside what offers a higher value. With this we remain half way along the road towards maturity. And since one acquires right balance only when one tends towards what is most valuable, interrupting one's ascent exposes one to every kind of extremism.

It is a law of life that young people begin relationships, form friendships, and live the first experiences of love under the emotion of discovery, and quite rightly so, because such experiences do hold important value and lead to much greater values. But they should not be content with the first values presented and the accumulation of sensations of novelty, surprise, pleasure, etc., but be sure that these first values lead to higher ones without which our growth is cut short.

One could say: "The pleasure, excitement and adventure in love is enough for me. I do not want anything that deprives me in any way of the freshness, which embellishes my life with a special charm." But though one may choose from many possibilities, one does not have the authority to impoverish one's life. At the start of love life, one is immersed in a field of reality with its laws, requirements and goals. There is no sense in evoking the forces and energies of love only to lower them unjustly. All injustice against reality is paid for dearly because it always seeks its revenge by reducing man to levels lower than animals. An animal's life is regulated and cannot

make any detours, whereas the human person must regulate one's life. If one does not, one risks inverting the correct order and putting one's life style out of orbit.

In order properly to regulate life requires training suited to the complexity of the being itself. This means full preparation for love. To surrender to eroticism it is sufficient to surrender to the force of instinct. But eroticism, though having the value of pleasure, is not sufficient to found a life of human relationships. The columns which serve as the base of a building also have a value, but if their capacity for resistance is not sufficient the building tumbles down.

The dynamism of personal love is the only sufficient energy for maintaining human life at a proper level. A heavy airplane requires corresponding power in order to stay in the air. Remove the energy and it falls; without the energy beforehand it does not take off.

To attain the high energy involved in true love, one must shape one's capacity to choose not what is most appealing at the moment, but what is most suited to one's personal development. Such choosing implies breaking away from the interests nearest to hand, that is, it implies inner freedom.

This high form of freedom is reached only through training and exercise. How such a process should be conceived and carried out will be the subject of the next chapter.

## **Texts**

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, internationally famous for his analyses of human life, emphasized that genuine sexual love does not close in upon itself, reducing itself to instinctive force.

It is not just the notion of love which eludes any definition of instinct, but the very manner of loving."<sup>4</sup>

To give our life its full meaning and scope, we must put into play all the energies within us, and not give priority to spontaneous impulses. The following texts are an example, by Luis Cencillo, who directed his psychotherapeutic practice towards the proper development of personality:

Sex must always be informed by the person; pure sexuality has only the form of a degradation of the person. Genitality is not merely an objective, interchangeable thing; it is always the genitality of this concrete person with all his or her personal depth and complexity. Hence the alienation, almost aberration, of prostitution.

Repression, in the strictly scientific Freudian sense is . . . the unconscious marginalization of impulses, so that the subject progressively comes completely to ignore them and deprives them of proper channels for their activation. . . . An amorphous repression without ethics may lead to the same results: the unconscious is freed but does not proceed along the proper channels of conscience; thus it expresses itself in behavior which is anomalous and unsuited to real objective demands. This too is not freedom.<sup>5</sup>

Gustav Thibon proposes a balanced concept of love, equidistant from angelicism and materialism, pointing out the way the human person is diminished by sexual obsession:

In every soul there are spiritual nuances and depths conditioned by the difference in sexes. They are oppressed and withered by an overly carnal polarization of sexuality. The apostles of the primacy of pleasure may say what they will, but one cannot be fully sexual if one is not first fully personal, fully human. The sexuality which aims to isolate itself from the person ruins oneself. 6

To proceed in love with inner freedom, we must raise our instincts and appetites. Energies assumed in a creative task moderate their anarchic impulsiveness and propensity to extremes, but do not by this lose energy and quality. Rather, they gain in meaning and become a source of deep contentment. Kierkegaard shows this with subtle wit:

The Serbs have a legend which describes an enormous giant with an equally enormous appetite. He goes to the house of a poor laborer and states his intention of sharing in his meal. The laborer places on the table, within his limited resources, all the house has to offer. The voracious eyes of the giant have already gulped it down in one glance, and yet calculate that he would not have been more satisfied had he really devoured it. So he sits at the table waiting for more. Not for one moment had it passed through the laborer's mind that there would not be sufficient for the two of them. When the giant prepares to grab the plate, the laborer stops him with these words: in my house it is the custom to begin with a prayer. So the giant sits waiting to eat and this is how there was sufficient for both.<sup>7</sup>

Kierkegaard commented:

Receive well-disposed what is offered well-tested. If you find it too little to satisfy, then see whether you could not be better prepared, or check whether you have forgotten some measure of precaution.<sup>8</sup>

A good way of prevent greed from being our downfall is to stop and do something creative. This may be greater or lesser, but in any case it will put one on the road to ecstasy, give one freedom and majesty of spirit and save one from the spiral path downward into vertigo, which sucks one in and drags one along.

## Notes

1. Cf. J. Guitton, *La existencia temporal* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1956).
2. Cf. *Sobre el amor humano* (Madrid: Rialp, 1981), p. 172.
3. Cf. *Obras completas* (Madrid: Rev. de Occidente, 1961), vol. V, p. 573.
4. Cf. "El hombre y la adversidad," in *Hombre y culture en el siglo XX* (Madrid: Guadarrama, 1957), p. 119.
5. Cf. *Líbido, terapia y ética* (Estella: Verbo Divino, 1974), p. 277.
6. Cf. *Sobre el amor humano* (Madrid: Rialp, 1961), pp. 196-197.
7. Cf. *Diálogos sobre el primer amor y el matrimonio* (Madrid: Guadarrama, 1961), pp. 247-248.
8. *Ibid.*



## Chapter VII

# Preparation for Marital Love, I: The Need to Integrate Its Four Aspects

Presently there is a discussion of whether people need sex education or formation for love. The first is generally understood as clarifying the various forms in which the marital act can be performed and explaining the ways to avoid malfunctions and problems. Formation for love means placing sexual experiences within the frame of interpersonal relations, with their wealth of implications.

### **Preparation for Love Is Unavoidable**

Some of those in favor of mere sex information state gratuitously that those who defend a preparation for love act under a religious prejudice. The word "prejudice" is tendentious, indicating an attitude that is irrational and unfounded – "religious criteria" would be more appropriate. Secondly, those making this statement assume that preparation for love is not included in the study of human life and its correct development. But a brief analysis of modern research reveals that every feature or aspect of human life must be seen, analyzed and guided in function of the whole. R. Affemann warns that sex information separated from preparation for integral love is counterproductive for purely pedagogical reasons. Viktor Frankl, founder of the school of psychiatry called *Logotherapy* states in his best seller, *Man in Search of Meaning*, that sexuality can be separated from personal love only on pain of mutilation. "It would be desirable to optimize sexual pleasure if it did not isolate and disintegrate sexuality, separating it from love and thereby dehumanizing it. We must not forget that a sexuality so dehumanized is not in itself human, but has to be humanized."<sup>1</sup>

The human person is a dynamic being whose destiny is to grow continuously in order to attain more perfect states of realization. The study of any aspect of human life, as noted in previous chapters, should be open to the fact that one aspect refers to and is extended in others, where it achieves its true meaning. In greeting another, giving one's hand has some, though not full meaning. It intermingles my personality with yours, a process of initial communication and weaving a web of interrelation. But to stop at the mere handshake, with all that supposes of physical-sensitivity, physiology and psychology, would mean stopping half way, and constitute an abnormality in human behavior.

Something analogous happens when one is fascinated by the practice of sex and disregards everything this aspect does or should imply.

### **The Four Elements or Aspects of Marital Love**

Modern research emphasizes that the inner dynamism of the interpersonal love relationship brings into play four aspects already mentioned in another chapter which should now be analyzed in detail: sexuality, friendship, development of love in the home, and relevance.

If we analyze these in depth down to their final implications, we realize that in marital love these aspects strengthen and complement each other.

## Sexuality

Phenomenological research has taught us throughout the XXth century to see the body as the place where a person expresses oneself, as a bearer of presence and encounter. Eminent contemporary thinkers – Merleau-Ponty, Marcel, Levinas and others – stress that one does not simply have a body, but is corporeal, that one lives personally in the expressive medium of one's body. The whole person vibrates within the body, as all of a symphony vibrates with one accord, though not the whole symphony.

The sexual relationship is physical: two bodies are immediately joined and feelings are exchanged. If I see my body as an object that I have or own, logically I may believe that I am allowed to do what I like with it to gain satisfaction. Seen thus as a means to attain certain advantages, the body expresses the person not as a creative being, but as an egoistical I who, like a child, wants everything for oneself. Thus diminished the relation between two bodies is not an encounter: it does not lead to a creative, ecstatic experience, which is a source of happiness, enthusiasm, festive joy, support, peace, contentment and fulfillment.

It is rather an intense, disturbing, inebriating, exalting, euphoric experience, carrying its own special charm. But these conditions, however attractive in principle, do no more than rapidly disenchant because they mean not encounter, but vertigo. Merely sensual union joins two bodies left to their uncontrolled instinctual energy. Their union does not lead to a field of genuine interchange which is free and fertile. Proximity does not, in this case, establish presence and, therefore an ambit of light and personal development. Rather, it arouses feelings of suffocation because the human being must develop by creating relationships of encounter, fields of exchange and free play, which imply not only immediacy, but distance.<sup>2</sup>

The sex relationship lived by itself, as a mere source of gratification, fuses with one's partner, thus destroying the play of creativity. It reduces the loved one to a bundle of stimulations to which one's response is automatic, not free or creative. Hence the feeling of drowning produced by surrendering to tactile immediacy, which is inebriating and, as such, alienating.

One who is drunk with sensations is degraded by being deprived of any creative function. Purely lascivious attraction has a special power to drag one along, to rob one of inner freedom, to hypnotize and deliver one up to the pleasure of letting oneself fall. But it lacks any capacity to produce the genuine personal pleasure of being on the path to personal fulfillment.

The link between this incapacity and that power explains why erotic love, selfishly separating sexuality from its natural context, offers a paradise of pleasurable sensations while, at the same time, engendering sharp forms of violence. Pleasure seems to signify a peak experience, whereas violence ends in destruction. This enigmatic link between eroticism and destruction, *eros* and *thanatos* can be explained given the fact that eroticism means a process of vertigo which by successive phases leads to a destruction of personality and, at times, of biological life itself.

In the film by Truffaut: *Jim et Jules*, two young men share a young woman intimately, even after she marries one of them. This life given over to instinctual impulses appears to run quite smoothly alongside the river and its old mill. But one day one of the young men exclaims: "We have played with the sources of life and we have lost". This severe warning is an admonition of the tragedy to come. The young woman, with no previous violence, invites the friend for a drive in her car and urges her husband to keep his eyes wide open. She takes the wheel, starts up and, on crossing the bridge, to the mill takes a sharp turn which throws the car into the river. The film ends with the pathetic picture of the husband following the worker at the crematorium who is carrying two small urns of ashes.

Eroticism and destruction go together. Centuries ago the author of *Celestine* captured this in some unforgettable images. In recent times several writers, including Herbert Marcuse, proclaimed the need to give young people absolute freedom to practice sex in order to avoid repression and achieve the necessary equilibrium to their lives. Experiments in some schools, after a preliminary period of peace and calm, encountered insurmountable difficulties. The basic reason was that the practice of sex by itself makes humans violent while leaving them only half-developed.

There is a similarity to a plane which misses takeoff. It goes along the runway at a very high speed and normally would lift off, avoiding ground obstacles. To suddenly brake such powerful dynamism instead is to expose oneself to a violent headlong crash at the end of the runway. Similarly, to start the love process is to enter an area which releases great energy, mobilizes many personal resources and puts them under tension. There is no danger here when there is no blocking its natural tendency to develop freely. But it is extremely dangerous to reduce all the illusion of the one surrendering to love to a mere search for sensations for this turns into destructive violence. Where fertile illusion opens to broad horizons which nourish human life, enclosed within itself illusion becomes mere destructive frenzy.

But can the charm and value of first love be reduced to a source of satisfaction? Imagine hearing the wonderful *Passion according to Saint Matthew* by Bach. It moves one from the first chord struck by the orchestra and leaves one immersed in a sea of admiration when one hears the final chorus. How far that feeling stretches; it is immensely satisfying and cannot be reduced to producing pleasure. Emotions are very varied; the highest forms carry us to the highest realities. When Bach created his work he did not try to give us a moment of pleasure; his aim was much more, namely, to open us to the very deepest mystery. He does this with incomparable beauty, which does not remain enclosed in itself and in the pleasure it produces.

With one who is loved one feels transported and does not stop at the pleasure this feeling brings. Everything in human life is a sign of something superior. The reality to which one's emotions relate is the personal friendship lived in marriage. Here we come to the second element of marital love.

### *Friendship*

The sexual relationship responds to an instinctual impulse according to a rule dictated by Nature, it is inflamed suddenly and quenched almost immediately. It lasts but a very short time. The flame is as intense as it is fleeting, and leaves barely any trace. It creates nothing because it does not ask that the creative faculty be put into play; it is sufficient to go along with the instinct.

Friendship is a generous relationship which one must create energetically. No instinct, left to itself, establishes the type of union implied by friendship. One is not born with this union, but must establish it oneself. Such establishment is both possible and difficult. It is possible because man is open to other realities and develops by creating spheres of interchange with them. It is difficult because it implies an express wish to open up to another, of mutual giving, comprehension, personal comradeship, presence and encounter. This wish inspires an act of confidence, availability, admiration and respect, recognition and commitment, creative consent and fidelity. In contrast stand the tendency towards selfishness, occlusion within ourselves, arrogance and self-sufficiency.

In order to open up to the other person sincerely and mingle one's own personal ambit with theirs, we must rid ourselves of our masks, just as to graft two plants the bark must first be removed. This sincere opening up means offering oneself as one is, with no protective shields. It,

therefore, supposes trust in the other, i.e. hope that the other will be true and faithful to us. The person who surrenders becomes vulnerable because exposed to betrayal by the person in whom one has confided, since anyone may accept our confidence in order to gain control.

The only way to trusting in someone is to look at the possibility of friendly encounter rather than at the risk of betrayal, and to decide to be available. I am available to you if I am always ready to listen and respond to you, to receive the possibilities you offer and offer you the possibilities I have. To be available I must consider myself as a being who is not being drained by giving myself, who realizes myself by running the risk of surrendering. One becomes available when one lives in the conviction that one's greatest possession is to be able to give oneself to the difficult task of co-existence, with all the dangers involved.

The available person prefers fulfillment to security, and trusts in the power of fulfillment and maturity entailed by sincere friendship. He or she does not calculate the risks, but gives a full vote of confidence to the inner impulse which leads to unselfish surrender. There is something inside one which inspires to give oneself confidently; one believes in the fruitfulness of that voice, that special angel which speaks to him as to Socrates. Socrates said that an inner voice sometimes spoke to him, advised him, reprehended him, asked him whether death was not preferable to life lived without searching for the truth? That voice within us warns that we should not stop at mere sensations, but should search for the truth in genuine values which are not those closest to hand, but the highest.

One is unavailable when filled with anxiety, fearful of losing all one possesses. This provokes a closing of the spirit within oneself and withdrawal in search of security. Such a search is illusive, because solitary retreat separates man from that which makes him live in a truly personal manner. The one who is unavailable loses; one wins when one develops, through the creation of every type of ambit, particularly ambits of co-existence. Creative activity always demands a bond with valuable realities.

This bonding is possible only when there is sufficient humility to admire and recognize what is valuable. Admiration frees one from submission to the interests of the ego and its risks. The person who admires and recognizes something of value concentrates his or her energies in giving a positive answer. This answer constitutes, in turn, an appeal requiring a response. This interplay of appeal and response creates a field of encounter in which reasons emerge which lead to changing the initial reception of a valuable reality into full acceptance.

Such free, committed, active and collaborative acceptance establishes a creative field of play. In laymen's language this is called a "friendly relationship". In this field "inside-outside" and "mine-yours" schemas are overcome, and replaced by a wonderful exchange between beings. You are still different from me, but no longer distant, exterior or strange. You can physically separate yourself from me to astronomical distances; but no matter: I call you, explain my problem, and immediately you immerse yourself in my life which you understand and respond to.

By encountering each other, we perfect our respective beings because the human person is precisely, as seen above, a being of encounter. By being friendly we strengthen our personality and mark more strongly our personal profiles; yet while these profiles stand out our communication becomes more fluid and effective, because our personal frontiers cease to be dividing barriers and become places of living interrelationship.

On this plane of creativity everything happens differently from the plane of possession. If I own a property adjacent to yours and wish to extend it this must be at your cost; any attempt to do so will come up against your opposition, for my extension means your contraction. The personal creative plane is quite the opposite. We are side by side and intermingle our spheres of life. This

enriches us both so that I can be grateful that someone of value is by my side and approaches me, not to reduce, but to extend the horizons of my life. This gratitude severs the roots of the arrogant propensity to resent anything of value. When one is grateful for the existence of others, one inserts one's love into the community. This brings us to the third aspect or element of love: the plan for a home life.

### *The Communitarian Thrust of Love*

If personal, love is already communitary because the person comes from encounter and is destined thereto. Love is sparked within the intimacy of each person in the intimate half-light of a private relationship, and ends by wanting to communicate and collaborate in forming webs of co-existence. Since the days of Eden trees have been silent witnesses to thousands of lovers. Love is an asset which he who possesses wishes to spread. When this is an impossible love, the lovers feel that having to hide it is a punishment. This innate desire to communicate something secret responds to the communitary tension contained by all.

The love relationship houses a germ of fertility: it tends to create a bond between lovers, between these and the community, and between the community and all surrounding valuable realities. When we discover the love relationship we are in the presence of unsuspected fertile energy. This explains why so many people when making a serious commitment to love become responsible, learn to respond to the call of value, and take charge of the fruit of such response.

When we embark upon a love relationship we enter the dynamics of the creation of spheres of interchange, which tend to overlap. Therefore, when we love someone deeply we create relationships not only with them, but with their family, environment, ethical beliefs, religious ideals, culture, symbols and rites, and celebrations – all the latticework of spheres which constitute their life. Loving a person is loving them as a whole sphere of life, with everything that it involves.

But the fruitfulness of love is not limited to establishing relationships with already existing realities. It gives birth to new personal realities, unrepeatable and unchangeable. We are able to look upon this incredible power without astonishment only because we have seen it since childhood.

### *The Relevance of Love*

Marital love is creative in two ways: it increases personal friendship and brings forth new lives. Whenever there is creativeness one touches bottom in the mystery of being for we seem to approach the enigma of origins, that surprising point at which something that did not exist begins to exist. The creation of new human lives has amazing attributes: a life appears before us endowed with its own vocation and mission, a being with a capacity to think, feel and love, to make plans, to travel throughout the whole universe, discover its origin and raise itself up to God and love Him. To begin to glimpse the wealth encompassed within human life reveals the importance of marital love; it gives the impression of perceiving a mystery, an abyss of magnificence which evokes immense respect. Whatever be our moral or religious attitude, the mere consideration of what marital love implies makes us treat it with profound reverence.

This respect, filled with admiration, appears in a decision as simple as it is decisive: to take human marital love in all its scope and to give due importance to all its aspects - sexual and friendship, sensitive and spiritual, satisfying and sacrificing, instinctive and creative. To link these aspects a certain maturity is required, namely, the capacity to extend freedom to each content in

order to relate them with others, enrich and complement them. This need to relate concepts with each other is found in the relational condition of being human. Nothing in the human person can be taken singly; each component takes on real meaning when it enters into play with the rest.

### **Eroticism as Isolated Sexuality**

We have just described four elements in marital love: sexuality, friendship, tendency to create a home life, and relevance. These four elements should not simply be juxtaposed as objects usually are. They must be assembled to form a structure as a constellation of complementary elements. If one is broken off from the others the whole collapses. This enables us to understand eroticism, namely, a breaking away of sexuality, the first of the four elements in marital love, in order to obtain passing satisfactions. This break off is wrong and as such violent and a source of violence. It creates violence because the human person is born to associate with other beings and must put all his faculties in the service of the ideal of personal union.

### **The Human Tendency to Establish Fruitful Relationships**

The human being is born already sexed as masculine or feminine and therefore is predisposed to create bonds with someone who is complementary in many aspects and willing to establish a fruitful sphere of interchange. Each person carries relationship with others in his or her own being. Attraction to the other sex is not a fancy or a whim. It is a movement born in one in contact with another. To a certain point, it is subject to my control and decision, but it does not depend on my will, but is already determined by my configuration. By existing I am immersed in an extremely powerful dynamism which leads me to break my family ties and to join with another being. The purpose of this biological, psychological and spiritual energy is not merely to satisfy a basic individual need like eating and sleeping.

If it were, that would lower the meaning of such primary strength. Nourishment and rest are necessary to conserve biological life, but play no part in developing the human personality because they hold no creativity. On the other hand, sexual activity relates two personal beings and subjects them to special emotions. What meaning does this emotive bond have? Without doubt, it is the creation of a sphere of relationship, "together", a field of encounter.

Seen in depth, the sexual force is generous, it attempts to overwhelm the individual and to form the person as a communitary being. The person who marries to be happy alone reveals serious immaturity, for maturity comes from links with others.

If it is to be an authentic human act every sexual expression should indicate a desire for personal union. This is not reduced to linking two individuals, but establishes a sphere of community. Sexual potency has a communitary function. A man and a woman may love each other intensely, but if they are not going to form a home life, they should not put their sex drive at stake.

The home life, like every form of life, carries the need to perdure, and therefore must be renewed. The personal condition of sexual relations demands that these relations be fruitful, not just as regards motivating personal love, but also with respect to the procreation of new lives.

This opening to fecundity means guiding sexual forces towards value, goodness and fulfillment of meaning, which orientation generates unimaginable power, capable of integrating the various levels of the process of love. When this integration is absent, sexual energy is only ruled by certain automatic procedures which leave impersonal the experience of love, making it mechanical, utilitarian, and in the same measure degrading.

There is nothing that disillusion a sensitive person so much as the suspicion that an act of intimacy is not a response to wholly personal motivations. If the sex act, as committing and giving oneself, is reduced to a type of passionate vertigo, it loses its quality and becomes grotesque. Reducing the phenomenon of love to automatic bodily functions is purely debasing.

This debasement is found at the root of every kind of prostitution. To prostitute is to reduce to a means to attain certain interests an act which should be a means by which a personality unfolds. Sexual acts are the means by which personal love should be actively declared. Such declaration is gratifying, but its goal is neither first nor foremost to produce gratification, but to give an ardent testimony of love, which means surrendering to the loved one and rising above the state of mere passion. Mere pleasure is not a value sufficient to give full meaning to an intimate act which touches the most sensitive strings of a person. In the scale of values it is a very elementary value. If the wish for personal surrender and creativity in the heart of home life is lacking, the amorous sex act, however pleasurable it may be, is always false, for it is blocked and has no full meaning.

This explains how uncontrolled desire can sweep along genuine love as in a flood. Desiring and wanting must be distinguished, for often we desire something we do not really want, which reflects a lack of true inner freedom. We become free as we grow in the power to integrate wishes in a task endowed with meaning. By the same token this integration overcomes the repression of desires and their anarchical satisfaction.

Nowadays we tend to give full rein to desires, as if they were the model for value. Any compromise in the satisfaction of desires is understood tendentiously to be a form of repression which provokes neurosis and hardness of character. It is dangerous for one's psychic balance to wish to quash with violence and repression the voice of desire which, Spinoza warned, is found at the root of the human being as a dynamic being with impulses and inclinations. But it also would be reckless suicide to ignore the destructive capacity of desires when they are not assembled in a meaningful structure.

To develop properly one must know at first hand what desires imply: their propensity to be led by various forms of vertigo, their vulnerability to advertising, and yet their ability to be wholly meaningful and effective when subjected to the guidance of ideals. The throbbing tension nurtured by desire is not in conflict with calm reflection, understood as the capacity to channel vital energy towards goals with full value and meaning.

Ethical life should try not to repress desires but to direct them, to integrate them in spheres of action which respond to the true being and deepest vocation of the person. Such integration does not eliminate desires but assimilates them in a project of value; it integrates them in a process of creativity illumined by an ideal.

This integration gives desires, tendencies and instincts a new value. They are not enclosed within themselves, but open to a task which surpasses the mere search for gratification. In this opening to the highest values they achieve their full meaning.

### **The Path of Values Provides Strength and Equilibrium**

When directed towards the heights, the various human energies reach their highest power and, at the same time, gain equilibrium. But it is not enough stoically to control instinctive tendencies. The highest values, all the realities which are the source of meaning for our existence must be fervently desired. More than controlling desires and appetites, we should speak of their strict ordering and integration into effective fields of action for human development.

Our basic ethical task does not consist, as is often stated, in fighting against instincts, reducing their strength or strangling their demands. Here the work of strangling, lowering and fighting is attributed to the spirit cast as imposing norms and giving rules. If we look upon life as a conflict, we put into conflict the instinctive and the spiritual life, thereby destructively tearing the person apart. But instinct and spirit should not oppose each other, but be integrated. The way to do this is to devote oneself to a valuable common task. Gustavo Thibon warns: "The solution to the conflict is not in choosing between spirit and life, which are only parts of man, but in choosing love, which is the whole of man. . . . Love and its unity take possession of everything in man, even conflict." 3

Tendencies or instinctive drives are not bad. What is bad is to separate them from the spirit and detach them from the values which give them their full scope and meaning.

One who has begun a love relationship feels its emotion and enchantment. There is the impression of having discovered a marvelous land, hitherto unknown and unsuspected. But this should not be rushed. To create genuine friendship and a shared existence full of the highest value one must look towards the greatness of the goal which will guide one's powers, both instinctive and spiritual, in a convergent direction. This convergence will give life its full personal identity. There will be peace within oneself, because all the attitudes and actions will be adapted to one's most intimate vocation. It is this adaptation which signifies genuineness and dignity.

The foregoing clarifies a decisive idea: we should not repress tendencies, but direct them. Only by putting them into play in order to achieve something valuable will tendencies cease to convert themselves into passions as inclinations which pull one down. One who wishes to keep his personal dignity, must never let oneself be pulled down or seduced; it must be he or she who guides all his faculties and energies towards high goals. It is these goals which give inclinations their full meaning and force, which they do not repress but channel. The orchestra conductor does not suppress any instrumentalist, but indicates the path he must follow to carry out his function perfectly. Sometimes he must be silent, at others he must join with other instruments; occasionally he must take the lead, but always he must affirm his personality whilst performing in a cooperative manner.

Being cooperative is equivalent in every creative process to being productive. Encouraging individualistic isolation lessens one's creative capacity. Teaching that each one may do what he likes with his body and inner processes is to encase one in oneself and render impossible any creative work. It might appear generous if you are provoked into behaving in a manner totally alien to the norm, course and rule.

Look for satisfaction, behave with absolute freedom, do not be muffled by foolish ancient taboos. Take on, for once, the privilege of being free. The sexuality of an animal is programmed for the fastidious task of procreation. You have the capacity to break away from that. Do not be burried under by a tangle of obligations. Be free.

This statement in favor of liberty is as easy as it is dangerous. To follow these instructions is to become subject to the worst of servitudes: the total lack of creativity. This is to see all exits blocked towards developing properly as a person and to experience anguish and desperation. To avoid this state of spiritual asphyxiation one has to know well what makes us humans and leads to real happiness. This knowledge is acquired during a process of training for love which gives us sufficient inner freedom to know how to grade values and give priority to the highest. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

## Texts

Some decades ago the opinion was spread that only free love, unconditioned by personal commitment, allows one to live in peace and harmony. Slowly it was discovered that this return to the theory of the good savage, according to which if one gives in to one's basic tendencies they develop naturally with no problems, does not correspond to reality. Close investigation of the thoughts of such writers as Herbert Marcuse shows that they do not defend the cult of uprooted love in so simplistic a way as had been supposed and as pictured above. His real intention, it is now believed, was not to call for freer and more frequent sexual activity, reduced to its erotic dimension, but, on the contrary, to show that eroticism is a tawdry and superficial lowering of the real development of fully human sexuality. This latter should be understood as the ability for the whole person to relate to others in an open, serene, joyful and constructive way.

J.M. Pohier is conclusive in this respect:

Only a superficial glance at Marcuse leads us to summarize his thought as purely a call for greater sexual freedom and greater satisfaction of pleasures in general. What some denounce as hyper-eroticism in our society, and others acclaim as sexual freedom, seems to be in direct contradiction to what a genuine development of sexuality demands.<sup>4</sup>

Ambrosio Valsechi confirms this opinion of Pohier:

It is not in the line of a greater quantitative freedom that Marcuse sees the solution; a similar line leads fatally to an ulterior genital instrumentalization of sexuality and, therefore, to a repressive reduction of the same. It is a qualitative transformation which gives a new assignment to sexuality. . . . It is the intuition that man's most powerful force, sexuality, can and must be beneficial in the whole field of human activity if it frees itself from the encumbrance of a hypertrophied genitalization which later gives way to the detriment of other factors. Paradoxically, Catholicism has perhaps sensed this viewpoint when it suggests virginity as the genuine ideal, without thinking that acceptance of it meant being less manly or womanly. . . . This appreciation of virginity has effectively contributed to an affirmation of the dignity, autonomy, presence and effectiveness of woman; it has noticeably favored the friendly relations between the two sexes, by valuing, in the lack of the most typically sexual elements, their other many tendernesses; it has enriched history with the incalculable surrender of thousands and thousands of male and female existences who have tried to be humanly and affectionately mature "without deadening the heart", despite their voluntary relinquishment of genital sexuality; it has constantly indicated, as sign and fruit of this maturity, an immense range of social productiveness which now, finally, is also offered to married couples as the ideal goal to renew their affections. . . . All these are other aspects, undoubtedly "prophetic", in favor of a sexuality undergoing transformation and development.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

1. Cf. *Der Mensch vor der Frage nach dem Sinn* (Munich, Piper, 1985), p. 93.
2. The true relation of presence is the result of coordinating a form of immediacy with another of distance. Different forms of immediacy and distance give place to different forms of presence. The study of the relationship between immediacy, distance and presence throws a beam of

understanding upon a good number of human events. A full study of this evocative subject can be found in my book, *El triángulo hermenéutico* (Madrid: PPC, 1975).

3. Cf. *Sobre el amor humano* (Madrid: Rialp, 1961), pp. 75-76.

4. Cf. ¿Es unidimensional el cristianismo?, *Concilium*, 65 (1971), 187-199.

5. Cf. *Nuevos caminos de sexualidad* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974), pp. 58-61.

## Chapter VIII

# Preparing for Marital Love II: Integrating Desires and Ideals

In the previous chapter we saw that Ethics puts forward norms and precepts not to lessen the strength of tendencies and instincts, but to guide them towards reaching high goals. These goals can and must be assumed as one's own. By so doing they are no longer exterior and strange, but become intimate, like an inner voice. I realize that in order to accomplish the ideal in my life I must adopt certain attitudes. It is a duty which I cherish because it means the path to my full development.

### **Ethical Maturity Requires Interiorizing Duty**

My criteria for checking and controlling behavior must be internal and creative, rather than external and passive. Truly moral behavior is not what I do of necessity because it is forced from outside, but what I do in virtue of the ideals, aspirations and motivations I have adopted with such enthusiasm that I turn them into the interior impulse of my own activity. In education it is decisive to realize that nothing is external to one's person when it constitutes the meaning of one's action, the North Pole, as it were, guiding the authentic development of one's personality. It is extremely important to know exactly how we are made, what forces integrate our being, and how they must be assembled in order to achieve a fully human manner of behaving and being.

The presence of sexual energy can provoke serious psychological and moral problems in a person. A mass of awkward questions is raised by premarital, marital and extramarital relations, by homosexual ties, masturbation, compulsory or voluntary celibacy, etc. For keys to resolving such problems we must know exactly which aspirations must control our personal dynamism and the criteria of moral behavior arising from the human condition, seen as a whole.

Until a few years ago the ethical criteria in questions of sex was doubly orientated: one biologically and another juridically. Sex acts within matrimony which complied with the normal conditions of human nature were considered licit. Modern ethical research complements these criteria with another, totally personal one: the intrinsic dynamism of love as understood in its fullest and most demanding sense.

Of what does this dynamism of love consist and how does it merge with instinctive tendencies? To answer this important question, there is need for a correct training for love. It is in no way sufficient to have biological, medical and psychological sex information; thorough investigation of the analyses of the human person by modern philosophical anthropology is required.

### *The Person Must Choose and Must Know How To Do So*

Anthropology teaches that man, being spiritual and therefore intelligent, does not merely respond to stimulæ. That is the case of the animal which responds automatically to the stimulæ it receives. It is hungry; it sees food and eats it. When in rut, it sees a partner and mates. By so doing it follows the lines marked out by its species in order to perpetuate itself. The human person, however, is not a captive of stimulæ for one sees the realities which stimulate him. When hungry, one sees food, and in it discovers nourishment. As it belongs to someone, one cannot merely take hold of it, but must buy it. One may then eat it, but is capable of denying oneself and giving it to

another, or keeping it for another moment. Between undergoing stimulae and responding to them, there must be a mediating reflection and option. One must think about the meaning of eating such food. The significance: to satisfy hunger is patent, and needs little reflection. The meaning, however, is not something immediate; to discover it one must rise above one's situation for it is in virtue of the meaning that I must decide with regard to action. To behave as a person, one cannot submit to the stimulae received at every moment, but must open up to the meaning of the action to be taken in response to such stimulae. One does not feel compelled to respond in a certain manner, but is called to give an answer that is free, conscious, creative and meaningful in accord with the ideal one pursues in life.

### *To Choose Well One Must Leave Stimulae Behind*

This is possible only if I step back from the stimulae and the immediate interests they arouse. I feel hungry and see something appetizing. My immediate interest is in eating it and satisfying myself. But I can step back and relinquish it. When I overcome the automatic link between stimulus and response, I begin to be free. Our whole life is a process of the conquest of liberty, which is effected when we stop fusing ourselves with the surroundings and begin to encounter them. Fusing oneself with something is not being free. By stepping back, not to withdraw from, but to create a relation of encounter, we rise to freedom.

The fetus is quite at home in the womb, feeling protected in the warm surroundings in which it is merged. It is a different being from the mother, but lives in dependance upon her to whom it is totally attached. It has no independence whatsoever. Birth is traumatic because the foetus loses its shelter and is separated from the mother. This separation means, on the one hand, the loss of the immediacy of fusion and, on the other, the possibility of establishing a higher form of union: that of encounter. Biology stresses the inescapable need for the new born infant and the mother to form a web of affection, that is, a form of encounter.

The web of affection, established with the mother first and then with the father and siblings, constitutes a place of refuge for the baby; it is similar to the mother's womb insofar as the union is, to a certain extent, a form of fusion. The baby does not yet step back from the beings around it to whom it is closely bound. But it is the law of life that this close bond must diminish. The centripetal force holding the family together will be counteracted by the centrifugal force pushing it towards school, childhood friendships and, later, towards the new world of love.

The power of sexuality will be sufficiently strong to overcome family ties, with which we are born and which, in a certain way, are automatic and merging. At the right moment, the young person will meet someone from outside the trusted family world, who does not have the same roots, and who may be unknown to them for many years, with whom to establish a new world full of uncertainties.

The adventure of love constitutes the second great trauma in human life, we might almost say a second birth in which the human being goes against the fusion tendency to open up to a relationship of encounter. One relinquishes a lower value in order to gain a higher one. This is a trauma of growth. The human being voluntarily undergoes the difficult experience involved in a step towards a higher form of relationship and a rise to a higher degree of maturity. Giving in to the sexual impulse merely to obtain individual pleasures and satisfy erotic greed does no more than change one form of fusion for another; it does not mature but blocks personal dynamism. Sexual union plays a beneficial role in the process of human development only when it is not reduced to

the automatic response to a pleasurable stimulus, but implies the wish to create a new and higher form of personal union.

### **Such Union Is Found only in Encounter**

Eroticism, with its superficial and selfish attitude, does not capture the value of non-fusional relationships; it blocks love in the infant phase. According to Sartre, the erotic caress puts the body of the person caressed in the foreground; one is fused with the body while the person is relegated to second rank. The erotic caress goes from solitude to solitude, from body seen alone to body seen alone. The person who caresses in this manner is fused with the pleasure this gesture produces, but does not establish a genuine relationship with the person whose body he caresses. On the other hand, the truly loving caress affects the person more than the body. I see an old friend and embrace him. What I am really embracing is his person more than his body. In married life, the body plays a decisive role, but it does so insofar as it is the living expression of the person. Viewed in this way the body does not lose any of its powers and faculties; on the contrary, it gives it full force and leads it to fulfil all kinds of energies and possibilities.

For the caress to be personal, one must stand back from the stimulæ without withdrawing from them, and must establish an ambit of encounter with the stimulative reality, in this case with the person. Being both perceptive and intelligent, one is destined not to fuse oneself with stimulæ, but to establish relationships with the realities which stimulate one. These relationships may hold different qualities. While those of higher quality are being established, one's union with the realities around becomes more mature, more in accord with one's real vocation and mission in life.

In contrast, when we form a relationship in order to share our selfish desire to reap pleasurable sensations, we establish a very poor form of union; this creates nothing, but means simply enjoying moments which satisfy some fancy. The relationship between a human and other beings is of high value only when productive in establishing an ambit of interaction which intensifies personal love and creates a home, with all that it involves in creating a new life and being a starting point for establishing unselfish relationships with other social groups.

It is, therefore, not sufficient to practice sexuality between two persons alone in order to give it a relational character. The relation one is destined to realize is the encounter, and many forms of sexual relations which are matters of mere sensorial saturation are not encounters.

### *True Love Relinquishes all Desire to Possess*

Training for love is not reduced to learning an art of loving or techniques for refinement of the senses and passionate enthusiasm. The voluptuous dimension of the senses and of erotic frenzy only accentuate human isolation when they are not held and inspired by a strong desire for genuine friendship. If we wish only to possess what dazzles our instincts, we allow ourselves to be drawn by fascination, which starts a process of vertigo which does not unite but isolates.

When we love truly, above all we want the good of the loved one; we are more concerned with giving than receiving. Above all we want to give possibilities of full personal development, which are achieved not by surrendering to mere passing pleasures, but by dedication to high ideals.

Persons who love and do not just wish to possess, never turn the loved one into a means for their own ends, nor do they turn themselves into means for the other. They know that such lowering impoverishes both; it does not respond to their true vocation. They wish to share the presence of the other, live with them and enjoy their physical and spiritual proximity. However, they do not

forget that such proximity must not be lived possessively, but according to the discipline imposed by personal values which invite to an encounter and place various demands. We are not born with this discipline, but must strive to learn it and practice it through sacrifice. This sacrifice means relinquishment, but not repression, because it is a form of ordering values which leads us to fulfillment.

### *One Who Loves Wishes to Participate with Everything of Value*

Learning a disciplined form of behavior means acquiring the art of living freely and responding to the call of values. Values not only exist, but assert their value and need to be accomplished. One's vocation as a person and, therefore, one's duty is to adopt these values in life, which values constitute one's dignity as a person. We are very noble beings because we are immersed in an order which extends beyond us and spurs us to carry out a range of values. This is the order of love (*ordo amoris*) or the love relationship with all surrounding realities. To reduce love to merely filling ourselves with enjoyment is to challenge this order; we go against the only way of perfecting ourselves.

Mutual perfection is our highest asset, our ideal. When one loves a person as a person and expresses one's love corporally with sexual energy, one feels one is exercising power, calming an appetite and satiating greed, but at the same time one knows that at a higher level one is participating in a higher project. This has determined that human beings be born sexed, and hence pointed towards each other in order to establish ambits of love that motivate personal life, and giving rise to new personal lives. Living our love as though it depended totally on our initiative and fancies, we discover that, nevertheless, by this we are carrying out a project which is higher than either of us and thus elevates our various acts of love. Filling them to overflowing, we situate them in the history of the universe. In realizing this dual condition of love, we overcome the risk of reducing the loved one to a means for our own satisfaction.

### **To Love Freely Is to Love Unconditionally**

By ridding ourselves of the tendency to debase the loved one, we gain confidence in love. Without such confidence we would always be on the alert, afraid of being used, manipulated, degraded or of doing the same to another. However, in feeling confident we gain the inner freedom to surrender ourselves. If I know you act in virtue of purely personal interests, what guarantee have I that you will be true in love when those interests are not as satisfied as they are today? Promises of eternal love made on the impulse of passion are not sufficient. There is need for the guarantee given by generosity which places no conditions on loving. Loving forever means loving unconditionally. True love is not subject to time, but wants the loved one to live forever. This unconditional love is natural to free people who have cast off their subjugation to interests and to what is useful, and thereby are capable of constantly acting for the good of the loved one.

This generous, unselfish, altruistic love is not reduced to a mere feeling of attraction towards another person, but responds to a voluntary act. I met you one day and was attracted by some of your personal qualities. I started to get to know you and to establish ties of affection, of commitment. I made plans for the future and at the end of all this process of intimacy I proclaim: I love you, that is: I affirm your being, link with it, commit myself to it, and create an ambit of co-existence with you. These decisive acts in life respond to an act of will, to a free option enlightened by reason.

This exercise of will is complex. It depends on a thousand conditions: intellectual, affectionate, cultural, social, etc. To make a serious option about another person engages not only the sentiments inspired, but also our ideas of love, freedom, institutions, pleasure and sacrifice.

For this reason the capacity to love is not improvised, but requires a whole formation process by which we must clarify ideas, sharpen sensitivity to values, increase the capacity to give priority to those which are higher over those which are lower, gain the power to make firm choices and promises. It is totally inadequate to consider that sexual information is merely explaining the ways of obtaining pleasurable sensations. As the practice of sexuality acquires balance and meaning only when lived fully, such inadequacy is a mistake which carries serious consequences.

It is not enough to know certain details of biology and psychology; the whole personality must be formed according to an unselfish, generous and fruitfully creative attitude.

The mere explanation of how pleasurable sensations are obtained already constitutes, in fact, an incitement to sheer eroticism. It provides not formation for love but deformation; it launches one on a path opposite to that of real love.

### **Preparing for Love Is Learning to Direct Desires**

Those who confuse preparation for love with sex information usually claim that the concept of unselfish, generous love is an absolutely unattainable utopia. What is realistic, they assert, is to seek satisfaction and give it to those who share this search with us. This is the bird in the hand we all prefer to that ideal love which is presented as the peak of perfection.

It is true that, in principle, the human being prefers immediate gain to uncertain promises. But the formative task consists in opening new horizons to human desire, learning to value what we do not yet have in hand but which calls us to its accomplishment because of its value. Value wants to be adopted and carried out. It is something ideal in the sense that it does not yet exist, but it is not unreal: it is efficient, capable of moving us and directing us towards a very high form of life.

What is appalling is that when we allow ourselves be fascinated by the desire to rule which satiates our instincts, we blind ourselves to understanding the eminent reality of what is valuable and consider it merely dreamlike, if not a prejudice, taboo or evasion which are enemies fo life. Those who promote eroticism do not see beyond instant pleasure; they are immersed in the immediate and have no other horizon than that of satisfying an inclination. They admit no other value than pleasure and a freedom of choice, which in fact is only to choose to enjoy: this is the narrow, stifling circle of eroticism.

Nowadays, our environment seems to be ruled by this myopic way of viewing the relationship of love. But even if in all history there had been but one example of genuine love, it would be sufficient to discover a broader and more liberating horizon than eroticism. Fortunately, examples of generous love are numerous, a form of love which, if not perfect, at least constitutes a constant yearning to free oneself from the tyranny of egoism, exploitation and degrading belittlement. This yearning grows within one due to the asymmetry between the forms of daily relationship and the ideal of love one discovers as an inescapable requirement of one's being.

### *Learning to Love Is Believing in Acts of Generosity*

Nowadays it is often assumed that it is feasible to remain together only as long as love lasts, understanding love as mere passion. This reduction of love to passion mistakenly lessens human possibilities for co-existence. It is true that there is always also a self-concern in love, because we

look also for our own happiness in the surrender to another person. But this search for happiness should not be the primary aim, but a complementary achievement. Something similar occurs also in art. If I play a great musical piece, I put the maximum effort into it in order to bring to life a very valuable reality and live a peak experience. I do not do this only or even primarily for my pleasure. I know that this will follow, but my first intention, which drives my action, is directed to faithfully and generously recreating the work. Immanuel Kant was correct in underlining that an unselfish attitude is basic to all aesthetic experience.

All this shows us that we must recuperate and restore language. At the moment it has been abducted and used to twist the meaning of important human events, rather than to delve into their inmost essence. We must clarify the terms lucidly and forcefully, and repeat them to ourselves in order to imprint them well on our mind: Love does not mean mere passion but involves affection, sentiment and yearning, all of which must be integrated into a voluntary and lucid process of creating an ambit of personal surrender.

"Making love" is a senseless expression, literally without meaning. Furniture is made as are houses and their utensils: gestures of one type or another are made, but love is not made. I do not make love and, by the same reason, I am not master of it. I should not play with it like a fluffy toy that I can calmly put back in its box when I finish. Rather we collaborate in its slow arousal, as the fruit of a progressive encounter and of a wish to create a stable, valuable relationship.

As we mature, we realize that our body is not a tool for us to use. At first it appears that I have a hand, the same as I have a hammer; that I have sexual powers as I have the power to walk and move. But these words are false; they deceive me. *I have* none of these, for the decisive reason that I have no body, rather I am corporal. I live life corporally at the same time as I live personally, because my body is personal and forms part of my person as a whole. But the person is constituted by the encounter, and not everything given by the encounter is the property of those who make the encounter. It is not the mere output of a productive act, but the fruit of a relationship and hence deserves immense respect. My sexual power is not an instrument at my service, but a potency destined to establish relationships. Hence I cannot put them at stake at will, but only as required by the destiny they must serve. This submission to their goal means dignifying them, whereas reducing them to mere instruments means degrading them.

### *How to Harmonize Passionate with Serene Love*

How is it possible to direct towards establishing unselfish love sexual forces which of themselves are passionate, fairly irrational, and quick to break loose in search of individual satisfactions – more inclined to frenzy than to peaceful surrender? This difficulty must be overcome through preparation for love.

When one becomes accustomed to living unselfishly, seeking the good of others and not being encased in one's own problems and fancies, one acquires the habit of transcending whatever one is doing at each moment and tending to the good of the other. One is not imprisoned by pleasures, but strives to love the other person for themselves, for their virtues and their defects, their attractive qualities and those which may be slightly annoying. In virtue of such constant contact, this person evolves into something unique. The ambit of life created with them is also unique, as is the child which is the fruit of this encounter. To give origin to something unique requires great creativity; it is very serious precisely because it is a truly originating act.

## **The Richness of the Encounter Makes Possible Loyalty in Love**

Maintaining an intimate relationship with realities which are unique, irreplaceable and unchangeable, constitutes a source of energy for living in a loving manner. Every day the premonition that lasting love is impossible is spread further. Love is seen as a brief flame, and many shudder at the mere idea of remaining faithful for life to a matrimonial promise. Why this present difficulty in attaining stable commitments? It is because of attachment to the impressions of the moment, and to the conviction that in life one counts only upon what one has immediately available. If I start from the basis that I have some faculties and some people who allow me to exercise them, as soon as these two possessions exhaust their possibilities I will conclude that love is exhausted and has nothing more to give. By thinking and acting in this way I regrettably forget that the great wealth of those who love is their mutual encounter and its fruit – their home and possible children. A reversible relationship is established between married couples and the home, which in turn effects them; they enrich it, and it enriches them. From this mutual enrichment emerge a thousand new reasons for loving, which replace and surpass the reasons which first kindled the flame of attraction and affection.

I feel attracted to you, and want to find myself with you – as do you. By attempting to find ourselves, we already immerse ourselves in the magnetic field of the encounter and receive the energy and light which encounter gives to those who truly join together. This enables us to know ourselves better, which knowledge increasingly inflames our desire to join together in the most perfect union. By according greater quality to our union, gradually we discover the fruits of the encounter: happiness, enthusiasm, peace, contentment, shelter, celebration. These are an eloquent indication that our life is triumphing; they inspire us to perfect even more our mutual engagement.

## **One Does Not Have Love at One's Command, but Must Participate in It**

As our form of union ripens, it becomes obvious to us that we are not the masters of our love life, that our most personal and intense activity is a form of participation in a source of life which nurtures us. This is similar to the poet who composes a poem, but knows that he is not its master because it is the fruit of his immersion in the sphere of meaning and life.

Discovering experiences of mutual interchange and their decisive function in our life is indispensable to understanding that married love life integrates different planes or elements: reasons for liking, physical and psychic attraction, common interests. But all should be prompted and joined by a deep desire to achieve a true encounter, which is a source of a high quality of life. If I am not imprisoned by fleeting and selfish satisfactions, but surrender my person to the loved one, it is because I trust in the existence of the phenomenon of personal encounter. This envelops us both, it feeds and builds us internally by placing us in a field of play that surpasses the division between the here and the there, the within and without, mine and yours.

This surrender is daring but not foolhardy, precisely because I know the encounter exists as a sphere of life in which we both feel protected. Do we not see daily the strength given to the married couple by thinking about the home, the children, and the responsibilities they have assumed? A good number of concentration camp survivors stated that their basic source of spiritual energy, which enabled them to overcome superhuman trials, was the memory of their home. They participated in forming it; later it sustained them. One who says disparagingly that this idea of the home is purely "platonic" in the pejorative sense of "unreal" shows a profound ignorance of the valuable reality of personal interrelationships.<sup>1</sup>

## *Love Implies Commitment of Will*

Preparation for love is preparation for encounter or mutual engagement, which means an intermingling of all the spheres comprising the two people. Such intermingling means a total capacity for surrender for the establishment of a relationship of encounter is a voluntary and lucid act, not mere momentary and sentimental exuberance. This act of free will which is genuine love must be carefully prepared. First and foremost this means accepting life and valuing positively all that gives security and protection. This first protective act leads us to accepting other people, trusting them, liking them, and creating with them a web of relationships. This web implies a social order, with its own hierarchy. By immersing ourselves in this network of relationships we learn to make contact, to oblige ourselves, to live experiences of interchange which make us see that we are neither autonomous nor gregarious, but cooperative. This cooperation inspires an attitude of loyalty to the realities which oblige, and, by obliging, uphold and incite.

On discovering this relational nature of the personal being and the laws expressing it – the need to relinquish a lower value in order to attain another that is higher, overcoming selfish solitude in order to establish unselfish relationships, etc. – we begin to discover that the attraction inspired by another person is an element of life which has its own value, but refers to higher values. Similarly, exercising the senses involves a special pleasure which we have experienced since childhood in the oral and anal phases. But, while we experience the richness of relationships, we discover that we should not stop at pleasurable sensations. There remains a wonderful path to tread: the discovery of values, which surpass the individual and becomes the basis of an interchange of experiences which establish an ambit of genuine love and of solid, stable and fruitful co-existence. To tread this path and make this discovery there must be a will to love the other person with total surrender.

Nowadays many young people lack the basic confidence that such an act of will is possible. Rather, they believe that it does not make sense, that it is nonsense. This conviction prevents them from immersing themselves in the sphere of love which is mutual engagement. They remain enclosed within themselves as in a fortress and defend their isolation for fear of losing their independence and security. They must be encouraged to believe that trust dispels doubt, while, on the contrary, mistrust stimulates fear. Fear makes impossible surrender and loyalty, which is the constant creation of what at a certain moment was promised.

### **To Trust in Love Requires Ethical Maturity**

The only way to drive away such paralyzing fear is to regain trust. But to regain trust in the possibility of the encounter and genuine love, it is necessary to discover the existence of the different values which call us, to recognize the need to respond to their call, and to give priority to the highest values.

This requires a whole process of formation, which teachers should encourage. It is not enough to express fine ideas on love, we have to train for maturity by means of an action program which enables the child and teenager to grow in terms of true freedom, in the knowledge and grading of values, and in the discovery of the types of reality which inspire people actively to immerse themselves in them in order to realize personal interchange.

Nowadays there is great confusion in evaluating emotions, sentiments and affections and a greater need for clarity and decision in selecting those which are most valuable. A lucid choice is

possible only with a clear idea of the magnificence of what we have taken as an ideal. One's ideal should be to establish the highest forms of unity, which are those which deserve the name of love.

Full capacity for love means esteeming the personality of the loved one and their values, surrendering to them and personal adoption of the attachment felt for their being. I have reasons to choose such and such a person as the goal for my love, but rise above reasons and end by choosing them as a person, far beyond all motivation.

This inner freedom cannot be improvised, but an effort has to be made to achieve it. Small children are very attached to the affectionate web created with the mother and father in the home. They situate themselves in this because it provides protection and security. Throughout life they will discover that there are different ways of inserting themselves, of feeling protected, of actively immersing themselves in realities which offer possibilities of action, that is, values. The art of living as people consists in knowing how to put oneself actively, not passively, into such realities because in this we continue to be a child in the sense of needing and of being dependent upon a type of protection from outside. We must look for shelter more and more in the encounter as an event we collaborate in establishing but which surpasses us.

In the encounter we learn to be autonomous, that is, to be free to give ourselves in love, and to be heteronomous, that is, to be capable of responding actively to values. We give this warm response to what is valuable in itself. The experience is no longer egocentric, even though we know that through it our own personality develops. By opening to this form of value, we leave childhood behind to enter the maturity of grown-ups. This maturity is fully realized when we choose not what satisfies our fancies of the moment, but what enables us to reach the ideal we have assumed as the goal in our life.

To choose in virtue of the ideal of genuine love is no easy task because this ideal is tremendously demanding. Fulfilling all its demands is equivalent to practicing the different virtues: truth, sincerity, generosity, patience, humility, fidelity, delicacy, tenderness and tenacity. Virtues are not habits man has to acquire in order to cultivate his spirit in a special way, as with people who aspire to religious perfection. They are, simply and basically, the conditions of creativity and, therefore, of encounter and mutual engagement. One who wishes to make the encounter and create a love relationship must cultivate virtues with care and effort. Abraham Maslow expresses this clearly, though not very precisely: "The human being is built in such a way that he struggles to be ever more full, that is, he struggles for what the majority of people would call good values, serenity, kindness, value, knowledge, honor and sincerity, love, altruism and goodness."<sup>2</sup>

The practice of these virtues and others connected with them places one on the road to maturity, forms one, brings one close to perfection, and bestows on him unsuspected inner wealth. In view of this, one gains the necessary perspective to clarify such delicate and subtle matters as the proper understanding of the values of interchange, modesty and married life, and the antivalues of erotic exhibition and pornography. These topics we will broach in the following two chapters.

There we will see clearly that preparation for love and ethical preparation are connected. Preparation for love means preparation for freedom, for entering into a valuable life, for choosing in virtue of an ideal, for carrying out all sorts of reversible experiences, and for transcending each separate act and directing all according to the requirements of our vocation. Hence these lessons on human love will constitute in the end a brief treatise of ethics.

## Texts

The basic task of ethical life consists in making one more sensitive each day to the call of values, above all to the value which plays the role of the ideal in life itself. Therefore, to achieve human maturity, the pressing need is to value each act in the light of the goal to which we feel called.

A contemporary moralist, Marcello Peretti, condenses the collective work "Problems of Juvenile Sex Education" in these words:

Sex education as a deeply human problem cannot conveniently be resolved . . . without constant reference to a view of man and his destiny as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

When the different acts are viewed in this way as a whole and with the meaning they should have, sufficient inner freedom is gained to interiorize the duty to love. This is underlined by Søren Kierkegaard in his wonderful book, *Two Dialogues on First Love and Marriage*:

You consider . . . duty as the enemy of love; I consider it as its friend. . . . You believe that when duty appears love is finished.

There is only one duty, that of loving truly and deeply in one's heart. Duty is as protean as love itself, and proclaims all that springs from love to be sacred and good. It rails against all that is not born from love, however beautiful and beguiling it may be. Duty commands, it can do no more; the "more", which is within my hands, is to do as it bids. At the exact moment I do this, in a certain way I do more; I pass from exterior to interior duty and thereby surpass duty. You may gather from this the infinite harmony, knowledge and logic that reigns in the spiritual world! . . .

Duty rightly loves genuine love and loathes to death falseness, yes, it kills it. When individuals are in possession of truth, they see in duty only the eternal expression whose path has been traced for all eternity, and that the path they would so happily tread is not merely permitted, but commanded them.<sup>4</sup>

This path to genuine love is the attitude of fidelity, which is possible only when one has a correct idea of what loving someone is and implies. Kierkegaard himself explains this forcefully:

You finish by reducing love to a certain age, and love for one single person to a very short period of time . . . , but this is precisely the deepest profanation of the eternal power of love.<sup>5</sup>

When love is not profaned, but is given its full meaning and scope, the risk of reducing it to the mere practice of sexuality is avoided. Walter Trobisch explained this to a group of young Africans in the following manner:

If a couple wishes to make use of the sex act in order to know whether they love each other, we would say: how little do you love one another! Needing this proof of love means love is already lacking. On the other hand, it cannot be surmised from the success or failure of the experiment whether they love each other or not.

This is also the situation of many young engaged couples in America and Europe. They think they love each other, and accordingly go too far too soon. A gap is created in their relationship so that they feel less and less sure of their love. Because of this they intensify their intimacies in the hope of intensifying their love as well. But the more they do so the less sure they are of their love. On the other hand, they do not dare to break their engagement because they have already gone too far. So they get married, but they carry that emptiness into their marriage, and little by little it becomes the cause of the many problems and disagreements that irremediably ensue.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes

1. At the end of this book I transcribe the blood curdling tale by ex-Auschwitz prisoner, Viktor Frankl, who was able to assess the liberating role played by the memory of a wife at an unbearable moment in life.

2. B. Haering, *Etica de la manipulación* (Barcelona: Herder, 1978), p. 71.

3. *La educación sexual* (Barcelona: Herder, 1975), p. 152.

4. *Op. cit.*, pp. 238-242.

5. *Op. cit.*, pp. 320-321.

6. *Yo me casé contigo* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1973), pp. 108, 113.



## Chapter IX

# The Value of Courtship

In the previous chapter it became evident that personal love is not improvised. It is too great not to require a strenuous process of preparation and formation. Training in the art of love should be initiated in childhood, developed during courtship and culminate in marital life.

### Courtship

#### *The Role of Time*

Courtship is not a kind of premaritomy in which sexual relations are begun, but a period for shaping all the conditions required to establish a love that is genuine, solid, fertile and happy. The period of courtship should not be wasted on trifles or small consolations, to a greater or lesser degree surreptitious. Effort must be dedicated to clarifying the understanding of everything related to love, to strengthening willpower so as to order values and select the highest, to sharpening sensitivity, to cultivating the noblest sentiments and to practicing fidelity.

Intelligence must serve for something more valuable than pleasure-gaining techniques. It must help one discover that genuine love means a high level of unity, which is mutual engagement, and which admits of various degrees of perfection.

Will power must be strengthened to the point where it is capable of always choosing the value which serves as the ideal in our life, and of creating serious commitments and remaining true to them.

Human sensitivity must be cultivated until it can vibrate in a special way with the highest sentiments, namely, those aroused by the valued relationship. Satisfying an instinct produces a feeling of pleasure in me, which affects me in proportion to its intensity. Apart from pleasure, sharing an aesthetic experience with a friend produces joy. This form of joy or happiness surpasses that engendered by pleasant sounds or delicate colors. It means the spiritual excitement of opening up together to a reality that perfects us. Learning to value kindness, tenderness and simplicity requires time and dedication. The present environment leads us rather to consider as values: aggressiveness, violence, arrogance and a spirit of domination. In the face of apathy towards values it is necessary to stimulate a feeling of enthusiasm and a creative attitude.

Cultivating sensitivity, willpower and intelligence is a decisive task which engaged couples must inevitably carry out. The development of a creative capacity depends on this cultivation, and without creativity no married life is possible. That is why the decline in creativity marks a break in married life. Nowadays we lament the fact that many young people, on principle, reject marriage as a way of life. We can recommend that they keep to the established norms, be loyal to the customs of the family, and not contravene religious rules. But this will be to no avail if young people live on the plane of experiences which are satisfying but barely, if at all, a matter of personal growth or creativity.

Similarly in premarital relations, if young people consider that the essence of married life consists in achieving satisfaction, particularly sexual, they will tend to anticipate these during their courtship. They do not consider this to be a preparatory period in which they have great and important tasks to carry out, precisely with a view to enabling the full scope on the amorous-sexual activity when married.

### *Corporal Intimacy, an Expression of Personal Intimacy*

During a talk on premarital relations a young person asked how far he should go in amorous relations. What is fundamental is not how far one can go, but where one must start from. If you take a dominating attitude with the other person as a means to satisfying your erotic greed and giving you selfish pleasure, you are wrong from the start; your contact with that person is spoiled from the beginning. If your goal is to love the other person and not just to gain satisfaction, you should remember that there are two different rhythms in the process of intimacy with someone. Corporeal intimacy is achieved through a rhythm that can be accelerated; but personal intimacy is achieved according the slower rhythm of a processes of maturing that cannot be accelerated at will. A clock can be made in an afternoon or in an hour. It depends on the rhythm set in the production process. A grain of wheat cannot ripen in an afternoon, neither in a day, or even weeks; its ripening process cannot be forced with impunity from outside. Much less can the rhythm of spiritual intimacy be accelerated at whim. If the rhythm of physical intimacy is accelerated to gain a passing satisfaction without having yet achieved personal intimacy, one's life is turned upside down, whatever be the moral attitude of those involved. Many relationships between young people fail prematurely due to this upturning.

Naturally, those who form premature "intimate" relationships usually state emphatically that they have personal "intimacy" with the loved one. But they should not fall victim to a mirage, and consider erotic greed as a genuine form of personal love. It is very easy to confuse the interest we feel in satisfying an instinct with the surrender of love to a person. The person who wishes to satisfy an instinctive impulse takes the other person as a means to his end. But a means is valued in the measure in which it serves one's intentions. In contrast while one who loves a person as such values their qualities positively, that love is above these qualities; one remains faithful under every circumstance: in sickness and in health, in joy and in sadness, in the joyful moments when he admires attractive points, and in the painful instances when he notices faults and defects.

### *Qualities of True Love*

When love is directed to the person, one is on the path where virtues flourish. The person who loves in this way shows very fertile qualities, among which the following stand out:

1. Treating the loved one as a unique reality in the world, irreplaceable and unchangeable.
2. Valuing the loved one in this manner is acting in a trusting manner. When love is self-interested there is fear that giving oneself may mean losing oneself. Generosity frees us from this fear and enables us to give ourselves wholeheartedly, trusting more in the possibility of the encounter than in the risk that the person loved may betray our trust.
3. This liberated being opens tranquilly to the other as "thou", without any trouble whatsoever.
4. Thanks to this the being who opens is sincere and genuine.
5. Genuineness makes one a realist, able to recognize one's deficiencies and the urgency of perfecting oneself and achieving higher forms of realization.
6. This clarity enables one to see that love develops according to the slow rhythm of ripening, and that this rhythm is different in each being.
7. Recognizing this different manner of being leads to respecting the loved one, allowing them to be what they are and are destined to be.

8. This respect translates into patience, tact, prudence and good judgment. Being patient is not reduced to having stamina. Stamina belongs to walls and columns. One is not built to have stamina, but to be creative and to grow. Patience means adjusting to the rhythm of each being, with a view to establishing a fruitful sphere of co-existence.

9. The fruitfulness of love is proved in its extension into the home, in the increase in the quality of the union between the married couple, and between these and their surroundings, as in giving life to new beings.

10. The high quality of their union avoids regrets and encourages gratitude. The person deeply united to another being feels no regret about the high values the other realizes; on the contrary, they are grateful because they feel enriched thereby.

11. The grateful person is absorbed not in competition, but in healthy emulation.

12. These conditions lead to an attitude of calm tranquillity with the loved one. Those who truly love each other do not feel pressed to be on guard; they know they have created a living space or field of play where everything moves around spontaneously, because the barriers between "mine" and "yours" have been surmounted.

13. This intense communication stimulates the lovers, since it constitutes a source of energy and light.

14. Such uninhibited communication means a deep personal commitment, an intermingling of the two spheres or ambits of life.

15. Such intermingling cannot be fleeting; it is beyond temporal and spatial determination. Marcel noted correctly that true love is unconditional and surpasses the course of time. This is not a mere matter of lasting or perduring, it means constantly creating what once was promised, namely, a very high level of union. This creative capacity is fidelity, which obviously has an infinitely higher meaning than pure stamina.

16. The high quality of love turns it into a great asset, which spreads like light: love spreads, expands and communicates. It takes others to its bosom and enables them to rise to the life that is within them.

17. This spreading and shelter often means sacrifice, but the person who loves truly is able generously to accept all that contributes to increasing love.

These and other qualities are given by true love. The task of the engaged couple must be to endow their incipient love with such conditions and accord them their due worth. How can they tell whether they are on the right path to attain these? There is a very simple test: do they direct their first affection towards the other's person and not towards the benefit they may get from their friendship with them.

### *When Personal Love Begins*

But who can say whether one directs one's deepest intention towards personal love and not towards one's own undeniable interests? Persons themselves must have the inner light for this, take distance from their desires to define with honesty whether they are starting to love the person they are courting or are more interested in the pleasure to be derived from one of their qualities.

To carry out this examination, one can analyze the type of caress used to express affection for the person one professes to love. Are they erotic or personal; can one say that they are a declaration of your love, and not just to satisfy one's erotic greed. Imagine that, at a certain moment, the person being caressed shows displeasure at some gesture which to them seems excessive. How does one

react? Is it to try to force their will, to convince them misleadingly that the attitude is justified because it is meaningful? Does one insist on beginning intimate physical relations before having true spiritual intimacy?

These questions suggest that things may be richer and more complex than suspected thusfar. Only when one is seriously prepared to make a commitment for life with someone and mould one's existence with a common plan can the intimacy be personal.

This is why the person's question about how far to go was badly phrased. It asked only for a dividing line between the permissible and the non-permissible, without worrying about having a creative attitude towards the loved one. But training for love is not reduced to knowing a few norms and holding to them. It means putting into shape the capacity to love fully. Only when one loves in this way can corporeal intimacy serve as an element to express personal intimacy – not to disturb, but to promote, human relations.

### *The Negative Effect of Premarital Relations*

Premarital relations are disturbing and inadvisable because they are premature and lack real meaning. In human life actions which do not express what they signify are destructive. Sex relations touch the soul precisely because they refer to an event of the greatest importance: the committed intermingling of two persons. If such commitment and intermingling do not exist, the sexual act is reduced to mere sexual intercourse, which, seen alone, lacks meaning and therefore becomes literally "non-sense" or absurd.

This initiation of dishonest, deceitful, hypocritical, insincere relations is a bad start for life together and for many reasons:

1. The engaged couple becomes accustomed to taking as definitive the first idea they have of love. Since it is a very precarious idea, their whole relationship is affected by this initial mistake. When they realize that erotic love does not go far, this discovery will provoke in both of them their first disappointment and apathy, then boredom and finally perhaps a break. They will say – as is frequently heard nowadays – that love has finished, and new horizons must be looked for. They do not see that love never existed, but was supplanted by mere eroticism.

2. When eroticism is considered the only form of love, the couple runs the risk of thinking that, by permitting sexual relations, they have already got everything out of each other. They complacently give themselves up to such practices and neglect the immense task they should carry out during courtship to prepare for a real life of love, with all its creativeness and fruitfulness. Pure eroticism is a form of vertigo, surrender to which wipes out one's creative capacity, reduces sensitivity to the highest values, and prevents one from establishing valuable forms of unity. The fall into erotic vertigo promises everything at first but ends by taking all: it makes preparation for a genuine life of married commitment absolutely impossible.

This preparation involves such important tasks as the following:

- helping oneself to feel enthusiastic about great values;
- learning to be creative together by participating in values and bringing about relevant realities;
- sharing solid ethical criteria;
- building together on high ideals;

- growing accustomed to living dually, to matching one's rhythm to the vital tempo of the other;
- increasing the capacity to overcome different moments of life and to choose in virtue of the ideal rather than of the whims of each moment;
- opening up to the deep happiness given by loving fully, not just partially;
- confirming day by day that nothing joins people so much as doing good together.

Imagine two engaged couples. One gives themselves up to sexual pleasures. Undoubtedly, they have moments of euphoria, but these pass like a burning flame: they not construct, but leave behind only a few ashes. The other couple also feels the desire to express their love by sexual union; this is a spontaneous movement responding to instinctive impulses. But they know that love is not like hunger which is satiated by eating to restore a vital balance. Food satisfies a basic, elementary, primitive, biological need, whereas the sex relation does not satisfy the need to create a genuine love relationship: it is not sufficient. Hence this couple is patient and strives to lay the foundations for full love, for a deeply united life. In this sexuality will play a role much more relevant than for the first couple because it will be a living expression of a personal relationship that ripens daily. This sexual life, integrated in a personal life of love, will be totally free and therefore happy. The first couple feels free because they put into play a mere freedom of manoeuvre, and move at their fancy. But this is moved by mere appetite, rather than by a clear will to establish a high and difficult form of unity. They lack the freedom to create and develop, and for lack of creative power their sex life cannot lead to personal fulfillment and genuine happiness.

The inner freedom of the second couple enables them, on the one hand, to overcome the desire to take themselves as a means to obtain easy gratifications, and, on the other hand, to devote the time they spend together to discovering worlds of mutual interest, to open up to each other's fields of attraction, to let themselves be drawn by the values to which the partner is most sensitive. In this way they help each other to perfect themselves as persons, and to have trust, support and security in themselves, because humans feel most support when the loved one opens to our world of values. They learn to look together in the same valuable and valued direction.

People are very united when they discover the powers of initiative in others, collaborate with them, and even open up new possibilities to them. Those who form this sort of relationship strongly intermingle their different spheres of life, not only the affectionate ambit. All too often it is thought that one person is joined to another when they feel attracted and share a certain sphere of affection. This form of union often is no more than the beginning of a life together. Unity is not established suddenly and unexpectedly as in the well known phrase "love at first sight", but requires time and effort. Ultimately this is what guarantees the endurance of the relationship, whereas when this is reduced to sentimental effusion it can sink like a bonfire of dead leaves.

### *Fixation with Passing Satisfaction Is a Hinderance*

Surrendering to sense indulgence accentuates egoism, centers people upon themselves obsessed with their own interests, does not allow them to turn the different-distant into different-intimate, and ends by launching them into the various processes of vertigo, which dissolve communities and reduce them to mere masses.

One must avoid surrendering to any kind of vertigo, because any one of them may lead you where you do not wish to go. Vertigo experiences should be avoided, not only because they are forbidden and may have been considered taboo in the past, but above all because of their

consequences. What is important is that such practices do not enable one to develop properly whereas one must grow in order to reach maturity and fulfillment as the total unfolding of one's possibilities. A Jumbo jet has enormous power and reaches very high speeds on the runway. Soon it either gains the freedom of flight or crashes into the first obstacle on the ground. The human being is endowed with energy which surpasses the mere biological needs of subsistence and is destined to an extremely high form of free action. One does well to let himself be carried by such drives, but would be foolish to remain on the runway and refuse to rise above to a higher level, for then the energy acquired will not open into free movement, but turn to destruction.

Human tendencies are not mere instinctive forces that start and finish within themselves. They are auxiliary forces of willpower and of capacity to create projects of fulfillment. There are several sources of energy within man: instincts, filial and conjugal love, companionship and friendship, and participation in creative activities, professional work, and every kind of task. Being mature consists in knowing how to integrate these forces in order to attain the great goals toward which the human person is called. To make such forces automatous and give them free play, as though they were a toy with which one can amuse oneself and then quietly leave aside is frivolous; that belongs to a childish stage of development.

All energy that is destined to merge within a meaningful whole becomes a destructive force when taken separately, because then it is distorted and subjected to laws which do not correspond to its nature. Sexual power aligned with a life of love is a source of constructive energy. It is a living expression of an unselfish relationship which, with generosity, can maintain impulses on their proper course. The same sexual force, left at the mercy of an ambition, does not have the resources to regulate itself. It expands freely until attaining the threshold of satisfaction. As sensitivity is deadened by the repetition of stimulæ, this threshold has continuously to be elevated in order to keep the same level of excitement. Thus sexual forces turn into sources of extremism and degeneration which are highly destructive.

Taking sexual forces apart from their function in the process of personal love means a change in the natural order, which literally is a "per-version". A perverse activity is not only one carried out with the express object of destroying another person, but is every activity which, by not fulfilling the demands of reality, becomes destructive, even without intending to destroy.

### *Shared Interests Are not Total Friendship*

Some hold that the erotic relationship establishes friendship and, by so doing, appears truly constructive and noble. But on going more deeply the concept of a genuine friendship is not reduced to a mere exchange of interests. Erotic caresses may create a very attractive and inviting sphere of pleasure. But should this be called friendship? When at a given moment the other person is unable to give such satisfaction, would they still be loved?

The hero of the famous work by Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, met María. He loved going to the beach with her to swim and indulged with her in erotic relations. He considered this relationship perfect, and showed his pleasure by declaring he was the young girl's friend. But, once in prison, he claims he is no longer interested in her nor concerned whether or not she has other lovers. Obviously this young man's love for María did not withstand the test of absence, and thereby showed itself to be the false love of mere eroticism which clings to the pleasure produced by certain qualities. If Meursault had loved María as a person, the forced separation would have purified and even inflamed the love, not erased it. But he was absorbed and bound by the fascination of immediate sensations. He never worried about giving them full meaning, as is seen when María

suggested getting married, and he asked where was the sense in that. Getting married is a creative act, whereas Meursault lived always on the plane of sense impressions and never took the distance demanded by creativeness. In order to create a genuine love relationship we must free ourselves from our bond to immediate gain. Genuine love also means gratifying sensations, but these are offered in full to the person who does not look for them directly and exclusively.<sup>1</sup>

### **Giving Love Its Full Meaning and Fruitfulness**

To have erotic relations with no intention of marriage, that is, of committing oneself to a serious and lasting life project, is to play with the sources of life and in the most banal sense. That is, it puts at stake energies destined in the last instance to the creation of a high form of unity and even of new life, without being the least interested in either goal. This game is very dangerous because it represents an attack on reality.

Nowadays the need for ecological respect is stressed, and quite rightly, for the reality around us is our living environment; it is there for us to collaborate with, not to attack. Similarly, on the higher level that is personal life, the laws of human reality cannot be infringed upon with impunity. Sexual potencies are relational, dialogical, destined to be the living expression of, and to foster, relationships of love. To consider them as a mere source of gratification – sense and psychic – is to belittle them. No one has the right to belittle their own reality or that of others.

One intends to marry the one with whom one is on intimate terms. Are you ready at this time to give sex relations their full meaning? If you have the slightest doubt, it is because you would degrade them and prematurely wither a beautiful plant that is barely sprouting. Studies on the meaning of sex life point out that every amorous expression has two distinct and interlinked forms of fecundity: increasing personal love and giving life to new beings. A view of life as a whole shows that the attraction and pleasure of the sexes is one of nature's resources for achieving the survival of the species and the grouping of human beings in communities of personal love. To reduce this to pleasure and disregard the fruitfulness entailed goes against the flow of the dynamism of reality.

Though one can separate the two aspects, is it sensible to do so? Is human intelligence and freedom to be and to tear apart what nature so obviously has joined together? Often it is claimed that for centuries the married relationship was directed towards procreation rather than towards the encouragement of personal love, and that it is now time to reverse these terms. But the first is not quite true because, by separating love from eroticism, it was put into close contact with personal love. As regards the need to link sex and the fostering of personal love, it is only fair to warn that at present those who would liberate love do not cultivate and defend anything but mere eroticism. Certainly, it is necessary to underline that married love has, as one of its primary aims, the increase of mutual love. But such increase is not achieved by encouraging erotic vertigo.

To discover how all amorous gestures incline towards the two goals indicated, it is sufficient to analyze two facts:

1. All the aspects of erotic play tend to stimulate and bring turbulence to the generative powers. Once this is achieved, their attractiveness declines or even comes to a halt. It is incoherent to separate love and "procreation" and then put all efforts into imagining ways to avoid pregnancy, for obviously this separation violates the natural order. The measures to be taken in virtue of responsible parenthood to avoid conception must be adapted to the normal process of human nature, understanding the nature of man as in itself creative, not just biological.

It cannot seriously be claimed that sex relations constitute a biological activity similar to others such as eating and drinking. Those activities have the goal of satisfying an individual, an untransferable need, whereas sex relations put at stake two people: they surpass the individual sphere and enter the communitary, which is not reducible to satisfying individual instinctive greed. Performing a sexual act without being fully conscious and expressly willing is a violation, a reversal of the correct order.

Sex relations surpass many other human actions in that they are destined to be a living expression of a highly important personal relationship; that is their meaning, it is what they themselves demand. Hence when the sexual relationship is separated from its full meaning, the foundations are laid for all kinds of violence and extremism.

2. Another fact shows clearly the link between sexuality and personal love, namely, the difficulty in not establishing personal ties of affection and commitment with those with whom we have sex relations. The main characters in the film "Last Tango in Paris" have been living together in an apartment for several months. One day the young girl asks her partner, a mature man, "Hey, what's your name? What's your real name? We've been together a long time and I don't know your name, nor you mine. . . ." The partner replies brusquely: "Look, young girl. We haven't come here to ask anything. We came to forget. My name's none of your concern, nor your's mine." Of course! Calling someone by their name means engaging their whole person down to its very core. The person who wants to keep relations on an infra-personal level, un-committed and infra-creative, makes an effort not to call the other by their name. But having "intimate" relations and not knowing someone's name is a contradiction; it is ridiculous, absurd. Hence it brings a shudder to anyone who is the slightest bit sensitive.

We have the same painful sensation when the young girl in Ingmar Bergman's film: "The Silence" remarks to her sister: "Isn't it marvelous, I'm having relations with a foreigner and as neither speaks the other's language, we can't talk to each other." Aesthetics teach us that language is the vehicle of creativity. If personal bonds are not created, sexuality loses its humane character and becomes debased. Practicing it in this way means abusive manipulation.<sup>2</sup>

### **Ethics Outlines the Formative Role of Courtship**

In the face of all manipulative misuse, modern ethical research outlines the need to recognize in courtship its true character. López Azpitarte writes.

What is really important is that courtship is lived as a true school for, and verification of, love. This is always a difficult and dangerous apprenticeship, especially when premature sex awakens false hopes and illusions without foundation. If this love does not exist, the relationship will always be deceptive and when two people have come to truly love each other, they will have discovered with immense joy that they have other multiple forms of maintaining and increasing their loving harmony.<sup>3</sup>

This noble and fertile form of understanding courtship is not fostered by modern society, but rather is hindered thereby. Various groups, including some which, for institutional reasons, should guide people, mobilize all the means within their reach to incite the practice of pure eroticism, thereby abandoning their function of subjects of history. We know that the subject of history, the one who decides the path of historical events, is not the private individual, but the society. Each

society gathers the possibilities transmitted by previous generations and hands them to the persons capable of assuming them so that in their post they can make projects for the future and carry them out. A society which mobilizes its capabilities, for example, for communication and entertainment, books, films transparencies, etc., in order to beguile people with an erotic decoy deprives them of the creativeness it needs, while in the same measure being untrue to its historical function.

Modern society submits children and teenagers to an incessant bombardment of erotic impressions; it spreads among people the vague idea that there is no other love than eroticism. This insinuation is usually well accepted despite its falsehood because it works in favor of the tendency to take the easiest as genuine, even though it may be adulterated. But psychology sees the propensity to satisfy impulses straight away as regressive, a return to the oral phase of infancy. The child experiences the pleasure of sucking early on, and when it cries adults put something tasty into its mouth to quiet it. Any kind of anxiety is calmed with oral pleasure. To gain maturity the child must learn to put up with wants and unsatisfied pulses if necessary in order to attain higher values.

Such relinquishment of immediate satisfaction of instinctive impulses has a beneficial effect when it is an accumulation of vital energy and an application to the determination to create a deep friendship that may generate a union of high quality in marriage. This patient wait frees young people from the risk of having sex relations before reaching the hetero-erotic phase, that is, before being open to the other person. The young person doing this during the auto-erotic phase, directed solely to satisfying their own interests, tends to reduce the partner to a means for one's ends.

Professor Rudolf Affemann, in the light of his clinical work as a psychiatrist, writes against premature sex relations:

Frequent sex relations during the period prior to heterosexuality provokes tension that constantly is transformed into pleasure. By this procedure the psychic organism is deprived of very important energy (and sexuality constitutes the most potent psychic energy). During this stage, it must be accumulated within the inner space of the spirit in the greatest quantity possible (without producing repressions) so that the decisive and difficult maturing processes of puberty can be produced. These processes must collide with strong inner opposition, and do not take place without the use of energy. One of the most important tasks of this period of maturing is constituted by the integration of sexuality with other non-sexual sectors of the personality. When this integration is not produced, sexuality remains apart from the rest of the personality; it then becomes autonomous and, due to its own laws, follows courses which very frequently are barely controlled by conscience.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Power of Human Instincts Should Be Integrated with That of Love*

Nowadays there is a tendency to believe that to be true to oneself one must act in accord with the demands of one's instincts; nothing is considered true except on the condition that one analyze in depth what these are and their scope. But human instincts do not close in; they rise above themselves and serve purposes which go far beyond themselves. True satisfaction of an instinct is not simply giving it full rein at every moment, but guiding it towards reaching the goal it should serve according to its own manner of being. Affemann places singular emphasis on clarifying that, if instincts are to be achieve their objective "it is necessary that many instinctive impulses are not fulfilled."<sup>5</sup>

One point at least should have remained clear, man is not lord and master of himself. He cannot make himself as he pleases. Within the limitations of his parameters adapted through teaching and learning, he has to be what he must be according to his natural aptitudes, which, after all, are directed towards goals. Therefore, the human being is not allowed to use whatever modes of behavior are possible, as and when he likes. Rather, he must understand himself as a mediator through whom his own being is revealed. Also, the human being is not allowed to manage his instincts at his fancy, but must submit them to norms. . . . The object of the sex instinct consists in maturing from love of oneself into love of yourself. . . . Sexual activity is, therefore, an expression and form of realization of heterosexual love having reached maturity. Because it is expressive in nature, the form of sexual realization cannot be separated from the love which fills it with a uniting and reuniting content.<sup>6</sup>

Maturity in love is had by love for the "thou". It is also perfectly true that one who truly loves also searches fulfillment in a certain measure when making intimate contact. In the sex relationship, as in every human activity there is a mixture of motivations. But "if the sex act is not to be alienated from its own objective, its specific weight must be placed on the love for "you" and not rest upon the love for "me". This is the conclusion Affemann draws from his clinical experience and his view of human love from his broad psychological and sociological knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

He is not unaware that the wait – at times long – by so many young people for the hour when they join in matrimony is made particularly painful as love grows. It is certainly not easy to enter fully the ambit of love without expressing it fully. We are facing love a real problem. But we should recognize also that often we interpret a less nature attraction as true love when it is no more than mere erotic greed which leads to expressing immediately in sexual form the slightest burst of attraction or affection.

This haste reaches such a point today in the communications and entertainment media that an affectionate relationship that is not rapidly expressed with acts of intimacy is barely understood. The excessive exaltation of sex relations prompts them to be mistakenly considered as the realization par excellence of creative human life. With sights and attention fixed on this narrow horizon, many people wind up being obsessed with sex and lose sight of other fine and fruitful fields of activity.

Exactly the opposite is what should be recommended. To live sexuality in a balanced and full way, it is advisable to broaden the field of vision and guide the mind, will and sentiment towards various forms of creativity which give rise to affection and to the wish to establish intimate forms of unity.

### **Exercising Creativity Requires Imagination**

To carry out this decisive task we must put into play creative imagination as an indispensable virtue for full human development. If one loves another and wants to express that love one may think immediately of doing this through sexual activity. One may believe this to be the only possible normal and appropriate way. But though at the moment, this is what most pleases and satiates one's appetite, it may well not mean love of the other, but rather the gratification such action gives one. Try showing your love by listening carefully when the other tells you a problem,

or reproaches you for not working hard enough. Experience helping the other or some member of his or her family in difficulty. Go with them to visit a sick friend, or share a good deed. It will soon appear that taking part in doing good creates very deep forms of unity; not psychologically exciting perhaps, but personally uplifting, and immensely pleasing. Remember Bergson's statement: happiness is a sign that life has triumphed.<sup>8</sup> The greatest triumph in life is creating the highest forms of union.

One who surrenders to forms of union which establish a creative, development activity will create with the person loved a field of play or of encounter which is incredibly fertile. This fertility will finally give sexual activity in matrimony a moving strength of expression and an unsuspected capacity for increasing personal love. The sacrifice of the wait will have given you the capacity to accord each aspect of marital life its due value, which is the guarantee of fulfillment and deep contentment. Nothing has been repressed or left aside; on the contrary, everything is exceedingly enriched when integrated in the great task of building together a happy and fertile life of love.

If a person wishes to live intensely, one's love relationship must be taken seriously. Its value must not be lowered but given expressions in full scope. Love must not be confused with eroticism; love is far richer and, therefore, is possible only when one is sufficiently mature and capable of unconditionally choosing and surrendering. One's life must not be so directed that sex relations are given their true meaning and contribute to increasing, not subduing, one's inner freedom. Continence requires sacrifice, but this means not repression, but the ordering of values; it relinquishes a lower value to rise to a higher one. One's life should be a real adventure lived with the illusion given by love; but it must not be illusive as results from surrender to eroticism.

## **Texts**

Max Horkheimer, in the collective work, *In Search of Meaning*, wrote: "If the sex taboo is removed, the barrier fostering yearning collapses and love loses its foundations."<sup>9</sup>

Training for love is not to impose adult ideas on young people or vice versa, but to give due quality to personal relationships. This is clearly stated by André Séve in a book which is a strong statement of the need to love one another unconditionally:

I have not been able to talk much to the young people I deal with because it is really difficult. We will be the last adults who are sure of ourselves. Without too much effort, I believe, young parents learn to live and interchange in a continued search to come closer together. . . . Those who prepare young people for marriage must keep in mind the fairly new concept of the couple: not to possess each other, not to control or be controlled, but to live something very "closely". The present taste for friendship reflects on all this; to live an original friendship, naturally tinged with what is sexual, but ruled above all by love. In the beauty and fragility of these couples (who may say: why continue together if we are not in love?), the sex relationship is much more a search for love and a language of love than I had thought before having dealt with these young people. My mother – Cristina tells me – asked me if I was sleeping with Lucas, without asking whether I loved him. She was only concerned about that: about going to bed! Perhaps we shall have to progress together towards the firm idea that "going to bed" should not exist without love. Though illogical in their own ideas, young people seem to see quite clear that only love can humanize the brutality or selfishness of the sexual act, and turn it into something beautiful and responsible. . . .

After having done what I wanted – Soledad tells me – I came one day to hate myself. The new adults, more lucid about themselves and more liberated, can help the new young people clearly to define good and bad: not everything can be done.<sup>10</sup>

Marcello Peretti stresses again and again that the art of loving well cannot be improvised, but requires long and conscientious preparation. Hence his interest in underlining the need for solid "training for love".

It is evident, from all that has been said, that the attitude of love is not a spontaneous facet of the personality, but is acquired through a well determined training or apprenticeship in which the center of interest is the will. By its intrinsically ethical aspects, love is above all an act of will: someone is loved, when and how one wishes. As an act conditioned and maintained by the confluence of the attitudes which explain the complex dynamics of the will (intellectual, affectionate and cultural in general), it requires training suited to the complexity of these dynamics. From this viewpoint it can be understood that no improvised capacity to carry genuine acts of love can be hoped for.

Passion alone, simple falling in love or individual benefit, are devoid of love. Each one of these aspects of our experience – even more so when they occur at the same time – can explain perfectly the attachment of one individual to another, but not the love which lives the attachment as a surrender, that is, as a motive which transfers its own satisfaction to the good of the loved one.

Evaluation and surrender: these are the real centers of interest in sex education, which tends principally toward the pupil becoming increasingly the lord of his own personality, realistically accepting all his functions and attitudes, and with the capacity of using them for his own good and that of others. This capacity is an indispensable premise for the attitude of loving.

Explaining sex means explaining the person, the order and the duties of life, the value of freedom and the essence of love. On the basis of these premises it will not be difficult to integrate what characterizes the practice of sex, which is always instrumental with respect to the objectives constituting the primary reason in education for love.

The supremacy of love over sexuality is proved also by the fact that marital intimacy does not close the path to other facets of love, as if it had to exhaust itself in the reality of the bond on which it depends. For this reason, the married couple may love each other intensely, but their life together constitutes a fountain of renewed resources to face other commitments which join them to other people in personal encounters and activities of a community nature. Wanting another person's good is wanting it for everyone: good is ruled by universal laws.

One who is not capable of faithfulness and surrender with a spirit of friendship and fraternity is not ripe for marital love; one who has not become a sincere friend or brother of someone is deprived of the use of the attitudes which prepare for commitments of courtship and marriage.

The full capacity to love is a characteristic trait of the adult era; self-control, independence of choice, valuing another's personality, the right evaluation of the ideals in life, the capacity to fulfill

commitments resulting from an unselfish attitude and personal surrender, all are attributes which can attain sufficient consistency during the advanced phase of youth.<sup>11</sup>

Paolo Liggeri, in his work, *Guide to Marriage*, underlines the need to achieve the maturity of a personal being in order to live love fully:

The authenticity of love has basic characteristics that can never change, as long as the human being does not change in his physical and spiritual components. . . . It is necessary, then, to have the courage to repeat that being dazzled by a passing aspect or by a partial quality is not love; that sexual attraction alone is not love; that the tendency to turn others into instruments and subjugate them cannot co-exist with love, for love is not receiving without giving, alleging rights without recognizing that these exist only together with duties, loving while everything is pleasant, while there are only advantages, while we feel like it.<sup>12</sup>

## Notes

1. Cf. *L'étranger* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942); *El extranjero* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1971). A detailed interpretation of this work is found in my *Estética de la creatividad*, pp. 411-441.

2. This link between language and creativity opens a surprisingly illuminating horizon to ethical research. In this field of illumination it will be possible to carry out one of the most pressing tasks of the present moment: drawing up an *Ethics of Language*. I offer a grain of support in my *Estética de la creatividad*. pp. 291-357.

3. Cf. *Praxis cristiana*, II. (Madrid, 1981).

4. Cf. *La sexualidad en la vida de los jóvenes* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1979), p. 206.

5. *Op. cit.*, p. 212.

6. *Op. cit.*, pp. 213-214.

7. *Op.cit.*, p. 215.

8. Cf. *L'énergie spirituelle* (Paris: PUF, 1944), p. 4.

9. *Op. cit.* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1976), p. 114.

10. Cf. *El hombre vive de amor* (Madrid: Ediciones Paulinas, 1987), pp. 59-60.

11. "La educación sexual como educación para el amor", in M. Peretti (ed), *La educación sexual* (Barcelona: Herder, 1975), pp. 189, 190, 193, 194, 195, 197, 201.

12. *Op. cit.*, in M. Peretti (ed.), *La educación sexual*, p. 247.



## **Chapter X**

### **Modesty and the Riches of Marital Love**

In the previous chapter we explained the value of courtship and sexual continence, seen not as repression, but as the ordering of values. Such ordering cannot be carried out by anyone concerned with only immediate gains, the bird in hand of pleasurable sensations. This hedonistic attitude, obsessed with the easy attainment of satisfying impressions, leads to the glorification of premarital relations to such a point that the pressure by certain communications media along this line leads many young persons to think of virginity as frustration – as recounted by Dr. Affemann.

#### **The Criteria of Behavior Come from Within**

At this moment of affective and spiritual confusion it is well to underline strongly that the important thing in life, that which gives dignity, is not being narrow or broad minded, but knowing where to go. I do not determine my path by my way of thinking; it is, to a great extent, indicated by my personal reality which has to develop; my duty is to lead it to its goal.

Conscious of this, let us ask: does the sexually stimulative climate of today's society and the consequent dismissal of the highest values favor correct development? This is the decisive question, for even if all public opinion, or at least all that passes as such, leans towards a massive cult of eroticism this does not constitute a solid criterium of action. Obsession with erotica neither builds one nor makes one happy; rather it unbalances one and makes one neurotic.

Years ago, Doctor Gregorio Marañón made this forecast:

Blind is he who cannot see that the ideal in the future stage of our civilization will be a simple return to eternal values, which being eternal are both old and modern: supremacy of duty over right; revaluation of pain as a creative energy; disdain for the excessively sensorial; cult of the soul over the body; in sum, in one way or another, the return to God.<sup>1</sup>

Marañón was a liberal-minded humanist who opened paths to medical research, developed historical studies, and was constantly on the lookout in society for the progress of events. From this privileged position he pointed out that the future of modern man lies in the return to eternal values, that is, the values which, by their high quality, have the power to last and be valid for all times.

Amongst these values, here we shall point out three that concern human love: inner freedom, modesty and marital unity.

#### *The Value of Interior Freedom*

Training for love is training for freedom, for the capacity to be genuinely free in the practice of sexuality. Learning this art is the great task of courtship and marriage. No public law can decree this form of freedom; we must strive to conquer it, which striving requires accustoming ourselves to choosing in virtue not of the whims of the moment, but of the ideal we have set ourselves.

Discovering the authentic ideal of all truly human life is another and none too easy task, to be tackled in every process of training for love. Without an ideal suited to one's real vocation, no freedom is possible. Nowadays so much is said about breaking free from norms and taboos, that

more than ever absolute clarity is needed about the ideal which must drive and guide our life. To free oneself from every kind of moral tie in order to immerse oneself in the well of obsession for immediate gains is grotesque. The word "freedom" is used as a "talisman" to take advantage of its present prestige and to impress the unwary. If the guiding task to be carried out is more than pure manipulation, it is essential to clarify what freedom consists in, its forms, and which of these is the highest and most exemplary.

### **The Value of Modesty**

Modesty today is too often ridiculed as "straight-laced" and considered typical of people who are against everything physical or bodily. "The body is not bad, it is said; all its parts have the same value and it is fine to exhibit them and enjoy their beauty." In this regard it is necessary to determine clearly on what plane of reality we move when we say that the body is not evil: biological or that of personal interaction. Otherwise, we explain nothing and confuse everything, as says the Little Prince: "Grown-ups mix everything, confuse everything.". The first rule of thought is to distinguish what is different, separate what is contradictory, join what is combinable.

In the biological plane obviously all the parts of the body carry out their function and have no need to be ashamed of doing so. There is no sense in hiding any of them as if it were out of place and had no reason for being. In the hospital where the body is analyzed and treated in its biological aspect, one spontaneously shows each of its parts making no distinctions and with no need to blush. Nakedness in this case is ethically neutral; it is neither good nor bad but simply useful for therapeutic effects.

But to step up a level, the body plays an expressive role in the web of human life where it does indeed hold ethical value, that is, acquires positive or negative meaning as regards the full realization of the person. For modern philosophical anthropology the body is the word of the spirit, the place where one develops himself or herself as a person. It is not simply a tool that man owns and can use at will. Far from being reduced to an object, the body constitutes a facet of the person, the privileged place where one expresses oneself and takes shape. When one person embraces another not only do two bodies intertwine, but two people establish a field of mutual affection. Two people joining sexually do not merely carry out sexual intercourse, but create a very intense interpersonal relationship.

In sexual relations, the body plays an extraordinarily expressive role. It is not a simple trampoline for progressing to something else, as when a news item reported. Here the body intervenes, but as a plain messenger who disappears before the importance of what has just been said. Though I talk to you for two hours at the end you may be incapable of saying what color my eyes are; you have not noticed, because my body was only a means of communication. In the amorous relationship, however, the body passes to the foreground, taking the honors as the main character; it becomes valuable and therefore is seriously affected by the sense or nonsense of what is being done.

What is being carried out is an intimate action. Being your intimate friend does not mean I have to go outside of myself and merge with you, as Manuel Machado wished when in a poem he confessed to his loved one: "I should like to be liquid, pour myself into your veins and lose myself in you." But if one merges with a loved one, one stops loving him or her, because one has lost one's personal identity. Nor is it intimacy to go outside oneself and lose oneself in the other.

Intimacy means simply and deeply that you and I establish a common field of play, in which the division between the here and the there, the within and the without, the mine and the yours is

surpassed. If we are intimate, you are not outside me, nor opposite me. We are both in a field of interplay in which we act spontaneously, sincerely, with an open spirit, confidence and fidelity. This fluid, generous, fruitful, sincere exchange is intimacy.

Intimacy is a field of encounter then, of an intermingling of two life ambits or spheres. As all encounter is a source of light, by finding each other we learn who we are, what ideals motivate our life, what is the sense of our existence. Everything that happens in private is clear to those who establish an ambit of encounter, but not to those who remain outside it. In consequence, exhibiting what happens within that private area lacks all sense.

Every human action always has a meaning and, in certain cases, may also make sense. A sex relationship holds meaning for those who experience it, giving them, for example, a certain satisfaction. But if either has created an ambit of love with someone else and has promised to be faithful to that commitment, the sex act has no sense because it means giving preference to a lower value over another that is far higher. It has no sense; yet it has meaning.

For those who are quite outside and contemplate it only to satisfy their curiosity or take sheer erotic excitement, it has neither meaning nor sense. It would be taken as a means to an end that is alien to their human relationships. But humans in their acts – above all, those which touch the most sensitive areas – can never be taken as a means for an end; they are an end in themselves. This was made quite plain by Kant in his *Critique of Practical Reason*. Lowering what is an end in itself to the condition of means to extraneous ends means literally "prostitution" and is the essence of degradation.

To observe others in an intimate act is unbecoming of an adult simply because it makes no sense. It may not be forbidden, but it makes no sense because the act has meaning only for the people performing it, not for those viewing it from outside. To observe this makes no sense, and this nonsense is not lessened by the fact that such act gives pleasure or what is being contemplated holds a certain beauty. Beauty and pleasure certainly constitute two forms of value, but all assumption of values must be made within a meaningful context. A young mother on a train breastfeeding her child performs an intimate action inspired from start to finish by a spirit of shelter and protection. This is a living picture of motherhood, the figure preferred by artists who capture the noblest and most significant of human spheres or ambits. This is shaped by the spirit which as the origin of the creative force transfigures all gestures, glorifies the female form, and embellishes it with an aura of respect. Everything is brimming with sense in the gesture of the humble mother.

In contrast, despite the attraction which an erotic exhibition may have in certain cases and for certain people, in the end it does not incite true admiration and pleasure, but commiseration and sadness. Only when an uprooted action really constitutes the plastic expression necessary to a dramatic event can it achieve sense and a certain nobleness.

To protest meaning is the goal of modesty. An action endowed with full, not just partial, sense is a modest action, because sense gathers up actions, assembles them in a structure and thereby shelters them. The logic of degradation runs parallel to the logic of the annulment of structures and the loss of sense. Sense is lost when privacy is exhibited and withers.

We consider as intimate parts of the body those that play an expressive role in acts of sexual intimacy. In themselves such parts are neither good nor bad, but simply perform the function assigned them by nature. This function is intimate, integrated in acts which make no sense in the public sphere, but only in the private sphere of the dual relationship to which biological creativeness and a good part of amorous creativeness is entrusted. This private nature of the sex relationship is in contradiction not to the tendency to create a home life that human sexuality should have, but to public exhibition which is quite different.

## *The Sense of Modesty*

This makes it possible to understand positively what modesty means. It does not mean priggishness or irrational attachment to prudish customs; rather it means respect for a very significant facet of humanity which loses its deepest sense when exposed to a look from outside, objectifying, degrading. In one's life there are relationships and acts which are eminently creative, and whose strict meaning cannot really be understood other than from within – and, in consequence, by those carrying them out. To proffer them to the eager stare of those who cannot understand their intimacy is to dishonor them.

Being modest is equivalent to defending one's dignity from all attempts at sadistic belittlement. We know well that a stare is very possessive and constitutes a kind of touch from a distance. "Let me see," we say, in order to take charge of something, or "Seeing is believing". Seeing is like feeling the reality of something, and to a certain extent taking possession.

As a condition for keeping his recently rescued loved one, Eurydice, Orpheus could not look at her face for one whole night. In literature and mythology, night means a trial period; look means putting at stake the desire to possess; the face is the place where a person's whole being vibrates. Hence, not looking at the face means relinquishing the desire to possess a person, who should never be the object of possession.

Showing the most particular, most private and personal parts of a body implies letting oneself be possessed. Protecting oneself from stares does not mean priggishness or subjection to irrational religious precepts, as sometimes is commonly affirmed. It responds to the conviction that sex relations and the related aspects of the body hold a special meaning, not given in the plane of pure anatomy.

Modesty tries not to ignore sex, to leave it aside or repress it, but to value it properly and give it its right order. Modesty does not take as its goal hiding a certain percentage of the corporeal surface, but safeguarding one from indiscriminate, disrespectful, manipulative and possessive use of one's creative strength.

Now it can be seen better how the practice of exhibitionism, under the pretext of "liberating" one from norms and taboos, is a flagrant contradiction, because it means submitting to a process of debasement of human life which can lead only to enslavement.

Sex occupies an important part in the whole structure that is human life and within this structure acquires its personal meaning. Broken away, it loses sense and is prostituted. All exhibition suggests an act of surrender and, since personal surrender cannot be done collectively, public exhibition constitutes a mere game with gratifying stimulæ. This trite game is light years away from any creative personal relationship, indeed, in the same measure it manifests degradation.

Collectively to watch pornographic scenes on cinema or television screens is to expose oneself to this degradation. Some say that it is not degrading because it does not intrude unfairly on privacy, since the actor consented to being filmed in acts of intimacy, but they consent for money for the purchase of their services so that formal prostitution is coupled with the degradation of all exhibitionism. Because it is prostituted, pornography produces only tremendous sadness. It is as difficult to imagine a smiling pornographic picture as it is a happy rock singer. There is nothing but harshness, gloominess, ill humor and, at heart, bitterness.

## **Eroticism and Pornography**

It is time to define eroticism and pornography more precisely. Sometimes it is said that whereas pornography is crude, gross and vulgar, eroticism has a beautiful countenance, and is sweet and harmonic, charming and attractive. If, by eroticism the sexual aspect of human love is understood then, of course, it has these qualities. But the eroticism in the media is something quite different. It is a breaking away of sexuality from its natural context of human love. As we have seen, every breaking away is violent in itself, apart from any morals or religion. This form of eroticism may appear in a refined manner, resorting to the aesthetics of the ellipsis, or brutally showing every minor detail of the most intimate sex acts. Such unashamed exhibition is usually called pornography. It should, however, be emphasized that pornography is but a form of eroticism. Indeed it is not the most dangerous kind, because it bares its vulgar primitivism and banality which repulses the normally sensitive person.

What is really dangerous in eroticism does not lie so much in the exhibition of intimate acts as in its point of departure: the decision to take sexuality as a means to attain satisfactions and leave aside the connection with friendship, the projection of love into the home and the fruitfulness thereof.

A literary or cinematographic work that shows intimate scenes, but also the danger of erotic breakaway from sexuality, is not destructive. It is, in fact, a lesson for those with sufficient education not to allow themselves to be fascinated by crudeness, and with the capacity to rise above the work and capture its overall message. But works that exalt the break between sex and love are destructive in the maximum, even if they do not exhibit indecencies.

In general, it can be said that literature of quality is educationally constructive. It shows human weaknesses in all their crudity, but delves into their meaning and reveals the path to solution. This is done not with abstract ideas, but with images, which should be interpreted with corresponding dexterity and perception if they are to be eloquent. This is why it is necessary to teach children to read literature and watch films properly from early on.<sup>2</sup>

What is serious is that at present important communications media have replaced quality literature with cultural by-products which attempt to substitute the lack of talent with stimulants. This low level culture exercises an extremely harmful influence on people, especially those less cultured. There is need here first of all for quality, a high level of culture, and humanistic authenticity, because if human themes are treated at the right level then the ethical plane is gained by that very fact.

The ethical plane begins when creativeness, correctly understood, is put into play, namely, when relations of productive encounter are created, as happens in the process of ecstasy. In contrast, the vertigo process wipes out the possibility of the encounter and reduces to the minimum the human capacity to create high forms of unity. With this it destroys real culture, which is to say, everything one does to establish fruitful forms of unity with what is real.

Strictly understood, eroticism and pornography do not constitute a form of encounter, but make it impossible. They are, therefore, below the minimum as regards culture. They do not create unity, but simply titillate the appetite. Viktor Frankl points to the mockery in the efforts of the industry of sexual pleasure to glorify pornography by qualifying it as "progressive", when it is no more than a "symptom of psychosexual regression". This industry tries to justify exhibiting pornographic products by declaring that it is only defending freedom from censorship. But what they are in reality defending, according to Frankl, is the "freedom to do business and earn money".<sup>3</sup>

## The Value of Matrimonial Unity

Everything said about human love has a very positive objective, namely, to guide one towards fulfillment and happiness, towards accomplishing vocation and mission, towards personal authenticity. Such authenticity and fulfillment are achieved only when one has sufficient inner freedom to choose always that which leads to the realization of the ideal of unity. Man may establish very different and widely ranging forms of unity with the realities around him. The art of living consists in discerning which forms of unity are the highest and carrying them out in life.

Married life, properly understood, is a school of unity, a place suitable for founding relevant forms of unity. This is where its value lies.

It is a pity that so much is spoken about the problems that arise in married life, of the conflicts that tear it apart, of the ways out offered for spiritual ruptures of the married couple. Hardly any time or skill is dedicated to pointing out the magnificence of the forms of unity that married people are called to realize between themselves and the surrounding society.

This noble task corresponds to both civil and religious marriages. In both, the promise to devote life to establishing together outstanding forms of union is made; they differ only in quality.

In a Christian religious marriage, for example, this quality is set by a pattern to be copied. Those young people who take each other as spouse before God's minister and the assembly of believers who receive their love and their words, promise to create between them a form of unity so high that each day it becomes more like the unity that Jesus held with the Father and with men. In virtue of this unity, the Saviour gave his life for friends and enemies. "A church wedding" is not, therefore, just a ceremony, but places the requirement to live in unity very high on the list of creating high forms of union in life.

We know from the Gospel that Jesus summarized his entire life on the one value of unity. "In this you will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another". "When two or more are joined in my name, I shall be in their midst." "May they be one, Father, as you and I are." Unity is the hidden pearl we must buy at the cost of everything we own. It is the ideal to which we must adhere. When we reach it, we achieve our fulfillment as men and women and become the spokesmen for the whole universe. God created the world from love which means making men free willingly to return to their origins and give glory to the Creator. The wheat glorifies God when it ripens and gives nourishment, the star in following its orbit, the flower when exuding perfume. All give glory to the Creator, but they do not know this. The one who knows this is the human person. We know that we give glory to God by being true to our destiny, which is to establish valuable forms of unity. By truly joining one to the other and to God, we actively enter into the grand circuit of creative love. Thus, we return to our origins, become true, attain maximum dignity and achieve full development and authenticity; and with us is joined the entire universe to which we give voice.

When two young people at the altar promise everlasting faithfulness and proclaim before the community of believers their wish to establish a union similar to that which Jesus had with the Father and with men, something very great takes place in the universe: the circle of love which brought it into existence is closed and everything takes on its final and definitive meaning. The flowers the bride carries in her arms and which adorn the church, the wax candles that light and give warmth and light, the metals which give the liturgical act an expression of strength, the very architectural structure with its space and capacity to shelter, all are assembled in a flow of return to the Creator, and so take on full meaning and beauty.

If each person, in the status he or she has embraced, follows this path of unity with perseverance, then their lives will overflow with joy, because joy, as we saw, "always announces the triumph of life" (Bergson). There is no greater triumph than dedication to doing good. Goethe used to recommend: "Do not delay in putting into play the forces of good." The Apostle Paul exhorted the first Christians: "Tire not of doing good." Supreme good comes with the establishment of the most valuable forms of unity. This task gives full meaning to our existence, carrying it out must be our ideal. How to do this day by day is a lengthy subject for discussion elsewhere. For now I will make one final consideration.

From all we have considered it can be deduced that the life of love is not easy: it requires training and effort, but is worthwhile. It fills us with joy and light so that life becomes a feast, albeit difficult. On the other hand, if there is no true love, existence becomes harsh and gloomy. "He who is untouched by love walks in darkness", wrote Plato. This darkness invades us when marital unity is broken and divorce is sought – a desperate solution that may or may not appear to be necessary in certain cases, but which always constitutes an immense loss.

Now, finally, at the summit of our study of the magnificence of genuine love, the present day exaltation of eroticism can be seen to be so paltry and wretched that it is painful. There is no need to subject it to lengthy criticism; the best criticism is to confront it with the correct view of love. This brings into relief its incompleteness, its incapacity to establish a human life of co-existence, its falseness, its fantasy.

In the deluge of erotic publicity, the best solution for retaining inner freedom is to experience the creation of valuable forms of union, thereby entering into the magnetic field of real love and glimpsing its magnificence. Once this value is seen close up, any offer of false substitutes will lose its power of persuasion.

"Love has such power," observed Saint Teresa, "that we forget our contentment to content Whom we love." This forgetting of oneself in order to serve others is the essence of generosity. From generosity springs all that is great, noble and beautiful embellishing human life. Directing life unselfishly is the optimum path towards becoming a full person and being truly happy. For "Real magnificence," said Jacques Leclerc, "that of God himself, does not consist in ruling, nor in possessing, nor in bedazzling, but in loving, in saving, in uplifting and making live."

## **Texts**

There is now great difficulty in achieving a profound idea of human life and its amorous aspect because of the tendency to degrade sex to the base condition of a mere consumer item. It is advisable to analyze in depth this type of debasement, since it explains in good measure the high index of matrimonial failures now taking place. The following texts by Rudolf Affemann may help:

Sexuality takes on the character of a consumer item. Freed from its spiritual aspects and separated from the person, the consumer uses it in the same way as when he licks an ice cream. The sexual partner is used as a consumer item, tasted like a sweet. There is a high turnover of partners; a new friendship is made like buying a new fur coat. Girl friends are changed like cars; the consumer associates successive persons with commodities of mere sexual consumption. The deepest relationships become undesirable; feelings are bothersome. It is easier to proceed to consumption without either, and easier to separate so as to give oneself to a new sexual consumer product. 4

After a certain time, the sexual consumer no longer finds the life-giving, refreshing and rejuvenating effects of sexual contact in the same object. One is not capable of believing that a relationship does not deteriorate after a certain time. In turn, this level of expectation accelerates the weakening process of sexual consumption between two people. The sex consumer permanently needs something new.<sup>5</sup>

Due to this permanent deviation of psychic tensions towards constant consumption, it is impossible for them to form slightly more intense states of tension. So the energy capable of driving towards growth and transformation disappears. The consumer remains in the oral phase of the infant, unable to bear the displeasure occasioned by unsatisfied tensions, nor does one positively face them. Here one follows the commodity value of love that is suggested from propaganda. He sees no reason why he should not grant himself everything. . . . As a result there is produced in the consumer a regression to the oral plane or one stays fixed at this level like a baby. Even when one carries out functions of a genital type, it is more a using of the other as an object of satisfaction and relaxation from tension, which is sought for its own sake.<sup>6</sup>

This anxious search for nothing more than pleasure is a left over from the auto-eroticism of early infancy.<sup>7</sup>

The reduction of sexuality to a pure method of attaining pleasure alienates man and makes impossible his maturing or love.<sup>8</sup>

A mature sexuality searches for the thou in love.<sup>9</sup>

Gustav Thibon stressed the need to link marital love with friendship, beyond mere passion:

A strong and pure union cannot be founded on passion, nor even (since purely animal passions do not exist in man) on the superficial tenderness born from sexual emotion, the sentimentality of romance and cabarets. Life together demands a much deeper, much more total communion. For the married couple's life to be true love and not a whim of instinct, it must also be friendship. . . . Friendship based on personal attraction and choice returns the person to his place in love and replaces the inevitably ephemeral bond of two egoisms, with the stable union of two beings chosen by each other and irreplaceable one for the other.<sup>10</sup>

This marital love linked to friendship is inspired and upheld by the common tendency towards an ideal of high level of life which frees those who love each other from seclusion within an egoism. Marcello Peretti underlines this clearly:

The communion of love may be interpreted in terms of the contemplation by lovers – one of the other – in terms of the reciprocal perfecting measured to the ideal or the higher good of existence. It is principally to this good that the purpose and yearning of love refers, the motives for giving one's person, the reasons for the pact of common intimacy. . . . Aiming at the ideal based on the values of the human reality the point of reference is found both with how to repudiate all that is arbitrary and the condition for affirming the freedom of every human state, that is to say, the freedom of the lightest affirmation of the person.<sup>11</sup>

In Auschwitz, Viktor Frankl experienced what a true love relationship can mean in order to overcome an extremely painful situation. His account bears the title: "When there is nothing more left".

In spite of all the enforced physical and mental primitiveness of life in a concentration camp, it was possible for spiritual life to deepen. Let me tell what happened on those early mornings when we had to march to our work site. That brought thoughts of my own wife to mind. And as we stumbled on for miles, slipping on icy spots, supporting each other time and again, dragging one another up and onward, nothing was said, but we knew that each one of us was thinking of his wife. Occasionally I looked at the sky, where the stars were fading and the pink light of the morning was beginning to spread behind a dark bank of clouds. But my mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise. A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, and proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which human persons can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how one who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of one's beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when one cannot express oneself in positive action, when one's only achievement may consist in enduring one's sufferings in the right way - an honorable way - in such a position one can, through loving contemplation of the image one carries of one's beloved, achieve fulfillment. For the first time in my life I was able to understand the meaning of the words, 'The angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory.'

I did not know whether my wife was alive, and I had no means of finding out (during all my prison life there was no outgoing or incoming mail); but at that moment it ceased to matter. There was no need for me to know; nothing could touch the strength of my love, my thoughts, and the image of my beloved. Had I known then that my wife was dead, I think that I would still have given myself, undisturbed by that knowledge, to the contemplation of her image, and that my mental conversation with her would have been just as vivid and just as satisfying. 'Set me like a seal upon thy heart, for love is as strong as death.'<sup>12</sup>

## Notes

1. Cf. *Obras completas I* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 19753), p. 128. The parenthesis is mine.
2. One method for carrying out this type of training was explained in my works: *Análisis estético de obras literarias* (Madrid: Narcea, 1982); *Análisis literario y formación humanística* (Madrid: Escuela Española, 1986); *Obras literarias de hoy* (with cassettes and leaflet) (Madrid: Edit. CS, 1982).
3. Cf. *Der Mensch vor der Frage nach dem Sinn*, p. 94.
4. Cf. *La sexualidad en la vida de los jóvenes*, p. 87.
5. *Op. cit.*, p. 88.
6. *Ibid.*, 89-90.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
10. Cf. *Sobre el amor humano* (Madrid: Rialp, 1961), pp. 149, 153.
11. Cf. "Sex Education as Education for Love", in *La educación sexual* (Madrid: Herder, 1975), pp. 188-189.
12. Cf. *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (New York: Pocket Book, e.d.), pp. 56-61.

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