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## Some Approaches to Communication with and Among Adolescents as Seen Through High School Retreats

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SOME APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATION  
WITH AND AMONG ADOLESCENTS  
AS SEEN THROUGH  
HIGH SCHOOL RETREATS

by

Francis X. Muscat, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

February

1968

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## CHAPTER ONE

### I N T R O D U C T I O N

This is an existential account and critique of some approaches to communication with and among adolescents as seen through high school retreats. It purports to be experiential but not empirical, qualitative rather than quantitative, intersubjective rather than subjectivist.

Retreat-giving to high-school students has been one of my major assignments these past eighteen months. This type of ministry has given me the opportunity to visit so many beautiful towns and cities, schools and retreat-houses, in various states, and wherever it was possible, to meet the parents of some of the retreatants. The greatest experience was, of course, the meeting of over a thousand American young men and women, a part of that subculture group that for the last ten years has undergone a devastating barrage of social criticism: they are the "beat", "hip", tormented, tense, conformist, delinquent, apathetic and dissenting youth described in various American books and magazine articles. The faith and honesty, the hospitality and generosity, the optimism and social mindedness, of the students I encountered, confirmed my life-

long conviction that adolescents are really nice people. As James C. Coleman puts it:

"From a more positive viewpoint, it may be emphasized that eighty percent of our young people lead constructive lives and do not become involved in delinquent activities". (1)

The nature and duration of the retreats conducted varied with the type of school or group. Table A gives us an idea of the nature and place of the retreat and the number of students who actually attended these retreats. At one time, the audience consisted of over two-hundred and eighty freshmen, sophomores, and juniors, all girls from St. Joseph's Hill Academy in Staten Island, New York. I gave three talks daily and heard hosts of girls' confessions and spent hours after school interviewing students during this three-day open retreat. The number of the students who asked to have an interview was so great that I had to prolong my stay at this school for one extra day. On other occasions, the group of retreatants was fairly small: thirty-two senior high-school boys from a Christian Broghers high-school in Long Island, New York, came over to Gonzaga House of Retreats in Monroe, New York, to spend a three day encounter with Christ. Homogeneous and small groups such as this one always make things easier for the retreat-

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(1) James C. Coleman, Abnormal Psychology and Modern Times, (Chicago, Scott, Foresman and Company, 1964), p.375.

master and more personal for the retreatants themselves. Besides, certain disciplinary rules can be more easily relaxed.

Various techniques were used to get across the theme of the retreat. Where for instance, "Christian commitment" was the objective to be striven for, a full liturgical participation was encouraged, short and relevant talks were given, the World Council of Church's movie "The Parable" was shown, discussion groups were organized (sometimes with young people of other faiths), Simon and Garfunkel's "Sounds of Silence", "I am a Rock", and "A Most Peculiar Man" were played, and confessions and interviews were made available to all. Most of the talks or discussions were followed by moments of reflection or personal private prayer to God either in the chapel or in the quiet of their room.

Spending so much time with so many young people has taught me what adolescents are really like, the causes they fight for, the problems they go through. What struck me most of all is their honest desire and their innate ability to communicate with their peers, with adults, and with God. They are open and yet receptive, informative and yet modest, doubtful and yet searching.

Retreat-giving is not the only source of experience that I have to write about our "Communicating Young Generation." My three years of teaching Religion to High School boys and girls in Massachusetts (See Table B), the discussion groups I held with adult friends about America's adolescents, the Education courses I have taken at Fordham, Boston College, and Loyola University, and

the reading of articles in American magazines and periodicals on Adolescent Psychology, are all secondary sources which have been helpful.

I am fully aware that certain facets of this problem will remain untouched or incompletely covered for I want to treat only of those dimensions which, as it were, first and foremost caught my eye, and which I found common in almost every place I visited. Besides, my experiences in communicating with and among young people, though sufficiently broad and varied to give an objective picture of the problem at stake, could have been richer if I had the time, the money, and the energy to meet other young people of somewhat different cultural, social, economic, and religious background.

Undoubtedly, some young people face problems of a more acute nature than the ones I have dealt with here - for, besides the core conflicts of contemporary life which all of us have to face some time or other (2), who can overlook the tremendous agony our young people have to go through to find the college of their own liking and ability, to decide whether God is calling them to the religious life, or married or single state? Who can minimize the dread of some of our young men at the prospect of having to go to South Vietnam immediately after their graduation from high-school, or the inferiority complex of some of the girls who have never gone out on a date?

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(2) James C. Coleman op.cit., in assessing common sources of trouble, states that the core conflicts which place a burden upon our adjustive abilities center around avoiding vs facing reality, dependence vs self-direction, integrity vs self-advantage, fear vs positive action, love vs hate, sexual desires vs. restraints, and conflicts concerning values.

**TABLE A: LIST OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S RETREATS GIVEN WITHIN THE LAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS**

<u>PLACE</u>	<u>TYPE OF RETREAT</u>	<u>RETREATANTS</u>
Ipswich, Mass.	Closed Week-End	Marycliff Academy S & J Girls (30)
East Boston, Mass.	Open 3-Day	Julie Billiard H.S. S Girls (50)
Caldwell, N.J.	Open 2-Day	St. Dominic's Hill Academy F & So. Girls (240)
Messina, N.Y.	Open 2-Day	Holy Family H.S. J & S Girls (120)
Staten Island, N.Y.	Open 3-Day	St. Joseph's Hill Academy F, So. & J Girls (280)
Schenectady, N.Y.	Closed Week-End	Vincentian Institute S Girls (35)
Gloversville, N.Y.	Day of Recollection	Gloversville Public High School S Girls (35)
Monroe, N.Y.	Closed 3-Day	Christian Brothers H.S. S Boys (32)
Madison, N.J.	Open 2-Day	Bayley-Ellard H.S. So Boys (66)
	Open 2-Day	Same school So. Girls (72)
Morristown, N.J.	Closed 3-Day *	Cardinal Stepinac H.S. S Boys (38)
Morristown, N.J.	Closed 3-Day *	Christian Brothers H.S. S Boys (60)
Amityville, N.Y.	Closed Week-End	Sacred Heart Academy S Girls (88)



**TABLE A: LIST OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S RETREATS GIVEN WITHIN THE  
LAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS (contd.)**

<u>PLACE</u>	<u>TYPE OF RETREAT</u>	<u>RETREATANTS</u>
Schenectady, N.Y.	Day of Recollection	Notre Dame H.S. F Girls (30)

N.B. F...Freshmen; So...Sophomores; J...Juniors; S...Seniors.  
Number within brackets indicate number of retreatants.

\* Team-retreat.

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**TABLE B: LIST OF SCHOOLS AT WHICH RELIGION COURSES WERE  
GIVEN**

<u>PLACE</u>	<u>YEAR</u>
Hanscome Field, Bedford, Mass.	1962-1963 1963-1964
St. Julia's Parish, Weston, Mass.	1964-1965

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## CHAPTER TWO

### PEER AND ADULT DIALOGUE

#### A) Peer-Receptivity:

It would be most unfair to say that youth today, and especially American youth who are living in such a highly complex and affluent society, cannot communicate with anyone - period! They certainly can and they do. Of course, one always comes across adolescents who have alienated themselves from others - in the main, these young people are the product of pathogenic family patterns where the father and/or mother are rejecting, or overprotective, or overindulgent, or on the brink of a broken home due to marital discord.

The majority of our adolescents can relate to others. They do pour out their hearts to their peers and, very often, they get solid and intelligent advice from their friends. Our young generation has by no means lost its significance and importance in the mystery of salvation to their peers, and, for that matter, to all the People of God. In the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity young people are encouraged to witness to Christ in the social

environment in which they live:

"They themselves ought to become the prime and direct apostles of youth, exercising the apostolate among themselves and through themselves and reckoning with the social environment in which they live." (3)

Young people are ready to listen to what other young people have to say: how many would question the sincerity of this young man who himself was struck by the words of wisdom written in a retreat note-book:

"When I got here yesterday, I was prepared to make a lousy retreat. Now I am at least making a good one. And you know what persuaded me? It was the writing in the book. I quote: 'While you're here don't try to make it one big game. They aren't kidding when they say it can change your life.' And 'You guys who come here thinking it's going to be one big party are crazy! Pray to God for grace to see your weakness and make a damn good retreat. You may think some of these sayings are funny, but take it from one who found out different.' Most of them said the same thing. I figured that if the guys themselves said it, it must be true.

I don't know what really influenced me to change my former views. Maybe it's the whole atmosphere in general. Anyhow, I have reconciled myself to my old beliefs, and now I'm back with God." (4)

There is no unorthodox doctrine in the note this young retreatant found in his room. This writing does not seem to come from an overly pious young man - the language itself is evident here. All I know is that this written memoir the 'anonymous retreatant' had left behind seemed to reach this young person more than the introductory talk I had given the retreatants in the chapel that night.

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(3) Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. Guild Press, N.Y.

(4) Taken from an evaluation-sheet which was given to all the boys during the retreat in Monroe, New York.

One channel of communication is certainly the group-discussion technique. The group interaction is a fascinating process to watch. There is always a give and take of hostility, warmth, fear, support, rejection, and the myriad other social aspects of group behavior. It is here that young people spill out what has been bothering them for years, and, in return, they find support and understanding, and sometimes great light too. A student from the Vincentian Institute in Albany making a week-end closed retreat at the Dominican Retreat House in Schenectady, New York, put it this way:

"The idea of girls discussing the topic was really helpful because, I for one, found other girls with the same problems that had been troubling me. We could discuss the trouble and then try to find an answer." (5)

In similar fashion, a friend of hers said:

"This retreat has made me feel closer to God by being closer to my class-mates. The discussions were excellent and they really helped me with a lot of problems." (6)

Looking at these group discussions, we cannot overlook the fact that Christ is present through His Spirit.

"When two or three are gathered together for my sake, there am I in the midst of them." (7)

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- (5) Taken from an evaluation-sheet which was given to all the girls during the retreat in Schenectady, New York.
  - (6) Taken from an evaluation-sheet which was given to all the girls during the retreat in Schenectady, New York.
  - (7) Matth. 18:20.

Another means of communication which should be used during a retreat is freedom to talk to anyone at any time if this is judged both necessary and helpful by and to a given individual. Community living should be stressed during a retreat for, after all, this period of time is supposed to help one devise ways and means for better Christian living. Consequently, silence, during a closed retreat, just like in any other moment of our daily life, has its own mixed blessings. No one can deny the value of it - it can be creative and, at times, it does bring one closer to those whom one loves. As Erich Fromm so nicely remarks:

"Concentration is by far more difficult to practise in our culture, in which everything seems to act against the ability to concentrate. The most important step in learning concentration is to LEARN TO BE ALONE WITH ONESELF without reading, listening to the radio, smoking or drinking. Indeed, to be able to concentrate means to BE ABLE TO BE ALONE WITH ONESELF - and this ability is precisely a condition for the ability to love. If I am attached to another person because I cannot stand on my own feet, he or she may be a lifesaver, but the relationship is not one of love. PARADOXICALLY, THE ABILITY TO BE ALONE IS THE CONDITION FOR THE ABILITY TO LOVE." (8)

If silence is golden, conversation with other people can be no less fruitful. We certainly need time to be with ourselves, to know where we are heading in the pursuits of our daily living. We have to find time for an "I-Thou" intimacy with the Risen Christ Who in turn gives us His Spirit of Love and Understanding. The retreat is the ideal time for all this. However, Christ does manifest Himself in various ways to different individuals. It seems to me that we are restricting Christ's grace to a person whenever we deprive him of an encounter with one of his peers in the peace and 'silence' of the

retreat. To talk for talk's sake, especially during a closed retreat, is both silly and out of place and so is the idea of seeking companionship because one is scared to be with oneself or of having to face reality maybe for the first time in one's life. To talk to clarify one's doubts and problems and to seek Christ is both enrichening and laudable. Our adolescents should be given the freedom and responsibility to communicate intelligently and opportunely with one another, and, at the same time, should be reminded of the rights of others who prefer to spend a more quiet and peaceful time.

It may rightly be objected here that in the past our young people who made closed retreats were never denied the opportunity to discuss their problems with the retreat master or with any of the 'supervising' sisters, brothers, or lay-people. This is perfectly true. But in the past, we have to admit, we never gave much chance to our young people to feel free to visit any of their friends in the privacy of their rooms - there was always a sneaky suspicion that this would spoil the end of the retreat. It is important to realize that the priest who is conducting the retreat or the sister or brother or layman who are supervising by no means exhaust the channels of grace that the Holy Spirit would want to pour on His young people - through the instrumentality of their peers.

A group of Dominican Sisters and I tried this experiment once. It just worked beautifully. This student's remarks reflects the majority's opinion:

"First, I would like to thank you so much for the retreat. The freedom that you and the nuns gave us helped me to make a much better retreat. The responsibility

entrusted to us and the mature way we were treated made me feel like an adult. With this much responsibility I felt an obligation to be on my best behavior most of the time. Since the nuns were so liberal with us we owed them obedience and didn't mind giving it to them. The retreat has brought me much closer to my Christ." (9)

B) Openness to the Adult World:

Young people do communicate with those adults who give them of their time, talent, energy, and love. They are usually receptive to what adults have to say when these use teen-language to get across their message, are honest and straightforward, have a sense of humor, and admit their fallibility in areas of knowledge and behavior.

It is up to adults to be brave enough to take the first step and to engage in a friendly conversation with young people. Many adults are frightened and fearful when they look at what we call "Teen-agers". As Edgar Z. Friedenberg vividly put it in his article "A minority in need of new rights":

"When adults look at what we call 'teen-agers' many see odd and disturbing visions. Some see monsters: violent, destructive and dangerous unless fenced in and controlled. Others see something less vicious but still slightly subhuman: happy-go-lucky, irresponsible, impulse-ridden young animals - amiable enough by nature, perhaps, but disorderly and amoral.

Many adults dislike and fear adolescents; more simply feel vaguely uneasy and defensive in their presence. They can't talk to youngsters, much less listen to them, and waste every encounter in which they might get to know them in fussiness or hearty, hollow kidding..." (10)

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(9) Taken from an evaluation-sheet which was given to all the girls during the retreat in Schenectady, New York.

(10) "The Young Americans: Understanding The Upbeat Generation" Time, 1966.

It is not unusual to hear parochial school students criticising their priest or sister teacher for not identifying themselves with youth. They want to see a priest who, besides his learned classes or parish assignments, finds time to visit the Gym. while young people are playing basketball, to discuss certain topics or to kid with them, to be able to listen to the hundred and one things they have to say; they want to see a sister who, besides her carefully prepared lessons and the faithful observance of the Rule, can talk to the kids after school hours, occasionally take lunch with them in the cafeteria, and simply act human. Young people's response to this type of a priest's or sister's identification is usually one of respect for, trust in, and total openness to Father or Sister.

Young people today have the desire and the ability to communicate with their parents - only, if father or mother are ready to give them of their time, love and attention, and not just of their money and permissiveness. I had a long and very interesting interview one night with a young man from Long Island, New York: His parents lavish him with money to prove their 'love' for him. His reaction was:

"Who wants all that pocket-money they give me? For Easter I usually go to Bermuda and for the summer I go to Europe. I have had lots of fun with girls. Yet, many times I have thought of committing suicide. I have nobody I can talk to - my parents are socializing all the time." (11)

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(11) An interview with a High-school senior boy from a Christian Brothers School in Long Island, New York.



Young people still need positive regard - liking, acceptance, warmth, empathy, and respect - from other people who are significant to them.

"The need to love and to be loved is crucial for healthy personality development and functioning. In an interview study of 158 well-adjusted children, Langdon and Stout (1951) concluded that the most important single factor - in fact the only factor common to all the cases studied - was satisfaction of the child's need for love and acceptance. Human beings appear to be so constructed that they need and strive to achieve warm, loving relationships with others. The longing for intimacy with others remains with us throughout our lives, and separation from or loss of loved ones usually presents a difficult adjustment problem." (12)

Finally, mutual cooperation among adults, and more specifically cooperation between parents and teachers does inspire our adolescents in their search for a frame of reference to find their own identity and reach a certain degree of maturity and self-integration. Parent and teacher should work hand in hand to educate adolescents, to prepare them for life, so that they in turn may continue to transmit the knowledge, love and concern they possess to other people (see appendix five p.43)

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(12) James C. Coleman, Abnormal Psychology and Modern Times, (Chicago, Scott, Foresman and Company, 1964) p. 73.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE BOY-GIRL RELATIONSHIP

For a great number of high-school students, mainly juniors and seniors, a boy-girl relationship can create lots of serious difficulties. Some of the factors that accentuate this problem are: the prevalent philosophy of free-love advocated, for example, by Playboy magazine, the puritanical or over-permissive attitude of some parents towards teen-age companionship, and the sometimes conflicting moral doctrines they get from their religion classes.

The Playboy philosophy of free-love is fairly situational: decisions ought to be made contextually, situationally, and responsibly. No one will tell me how to behave in a given situation - I will have to decide that 'on the spot.' Besides, absolutes do not exist! If there is going to be any norm at all, this will have to be the criterion of love. This statement sounds good and very Christian but it is extremely vague. This criterion of 'love' applies to both pre-marital and extra-marital relations. Obviously, this kind of teaching conflicts with the Catholic Church teaching on the sacredness and beauty of sex. As we see, the Playboy type of free-love is nothing

but an off-shoot of Existentialist philosophy that denies absolute standards or principles of human behavior:

"Existentialists teach that values do not exist apart from the freely chosen acts of man. Action must not be predicated on abstractions from empirical evidence or intellectual speculation; they cannot be accepted as authentic criteria for human behavior. The highest morality is a recognition of freedom; the lowest morality, as Jaspers clearly states, is the subjection of individual consciousness to standards or principles which have been preordained." (13)

The puritanical attitude of some parents, and for that matter of some of our teaching priests and sisters, is still to be found. The general and personal sex attraction and the physical and psychological differences between the sexes have been so emphasized that, at the back of his mind, a boy is constantly fearing a sex-explosion in his first dates with girls, and a girl 'who reacts less quickly in a physiological way than a boy does' is always on the alert for she knows that her partner 'reacts swiftly to stimulation'. The over-permissive parent has been for some time now making news in our education, psychology, and sociology magazines and periodicals. We are aware that overly indulged children are characteristically spoiled, selfish, and demanding. The indulged young person enters readily into warm, human relationships but exploits them for his own purposes in the same way that one has learned to exploit one's parents. It is not difficult to see then how a young man who has been spoiled all his life by his parents now wants to exploit love in his relationship with a girl. An interesting study of this faulty parent-child relationship by James C. Coleman is to be found in Appendix A. pp 32ff

(13) Joe Park, Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Education, (New York, the Macmillan Company, 1964), pp. 556-557.

Finally, some Church members, including priests and sisters of the 'avant-garde' school of theological thinking are mixing up students either by the terminology they use which is very often well above the students' heads or by their unorthodox teaching regarding sex and morals. One hears of a 'crack-pot' priest, here and there, who tells young people that he sees nothing wrong with masturbation or with petting as long as a young man and a young woman do not go all the way. This kind of 'new morality' has never had and will never have the blessing of the Church - and the Church has definitely not changed its teaching in this area even in this post-conciliar era.

There are still intelligent and morally good Catholic parents who give a certain amount of controlled freedom to their son and/or daughter to go out on a date - and, there are many mature young men and women who profit from such a companionship. It is healthy for a young man and a young woman to go out together from time to time and to be able to behave intelligently and maturely, be sensitive to one another's needs, respect one another's moral and religious convictions, have fun, and discuss problems of an academic, social, political, and religious nature. Besides, this type of companionship can be spiritually uplifting and can draw one closer to God. To deny that a platonic relationship can exist between a young man and a young woman is as false as to maintain that any boy-girl relationship necessarily ends up in sexual indulgence of some form or other.

Abuse of freedom and exploitation of love in a boy-girl relationship is to be expected so long as we are dealing with human nature. All men have their little moments of weakness. It is of the utmost importance, however, that both parents and educators of youth make no compromise in the Church's teaching on love and sex. This does not mean that, in the case of a priest, for instance, he should not be both approachable and understanding when failures in this area of one's life are brought up to his judgement and absolution in the Sacrament of Penance. Many young people stay away from confession for a long period of time either for fear that they would be shouted at by the priest or because of extreme embarrassment due to the nature of the sin. (See appendix three pp4D ff) It is encouraging to see during a retreat a growing minority of young people who are anxious to make the Sacrament of Penance more human and personalized - some of them take the initiative in asking the priest whether it is all right with him if they confessed face to face to be able to ask and discuss things with him.

Young people, in general, want to know "how far they can go" whenever they are out on a date. It seems to me that such a problem cannot be discussed simply in terms of what is right and what is wrong. If one answers them one way, they will say: "Aha, that's what we'd expect of a clergyman," and if one answers them another way, they will say, "Well, then, you're giving us the OK to do anything we want to." The way such a question should be handled is by asking two other questions: "What is the ultimate

purpose of human sexuality?" and "What is the meaning of this experience?"

They know somehow that the concept of love is more extensive and deeper than the theme-song "Everybody loves somebody sometime" which Dean Martin occasionally sings on his Thursday night show. They are also aware that a man who does not love and who is not loved in return psychologically decomposes and is socially ostracized. The young generation have their own prophets, like Simon and Garfunkel, who are constantly emphasizing in their pop-songs the need to go out of one's own shell and to extend oneself to other people: such is the message in "I am a Rock" and in "A Most Peculiar Man." Finally, they keep hearing in some of their religion classes that sex-love is good and sacred and actually blessed by God as long as it is practiced by the right people, at the right time, and in the right place.

Faith enlightens reason. This is especially true in the way Sacred Scripture speaks of God - the True and Absolute Love. Love is best manifested in God's giving His only-begotten Son to the World, and in the Son's giving of His life and spirit for us all. Love is, in other words, a gift - a total gift of oneself, of what one has, of what is dear to oneself. Love knows no other objective than the enrichment of the 'other'; put negatively, love knows of no exploitation of persons nor does it try to dominate over them in any conceivable form. Humanly speaking, love is a gift of oneself, of one's talents, of one's time, of one's energy, of one's comforts,

of one's affections to people. No friendship is worthy of its name if it does not fall under this category of love.

Young people are capable of this richness and depth of love - some of them are eager to be graduated from high-school to be able to join the Peace Corps or VISTA; others prefer to show their dedication to people by joining some Religious community or organization; still others show this love in the friendship they establish with people of the same or opposite sex.

Friendship is one dimension of love; it, too is founded on mutual respect. A friend is sensitively responsive to the dreams and aims of others and shows sincere appreciation for the contributions others make to the enrichment of life. A friend is himself; he is done with hypocrisy, artificiality, and pretense; he meets and mingles with people in quiet simplicity and humility and he strives to lift people up and not to destroy them. It is impossible to have a sincere respect for one when one has the influence of poison on one's soul. Erich Fromm is not far from this point when he says:

"Love is possible only if two persons communicate from the centre of their existence, hence if each one of them experiences himself from the centre of his existence. only in this 'central experience' is human reality, only here is aliveness, only here is the basis for love. Love, experienced thus, is a constant challenge; it is not a resting place, but a moving, growing, working together; even when there is harmony or conflict, joy or sadness, is secondary to the fundamental fact that two people experience themselves from the essence of their existence, that they are one with each other by being one with themselves. There is only one proof for the presence of love: the depth of the relationship, and the aliveness and strength in each person concerned; this is the fruit by which love is recognized." (14)

When a young man says to his girl-friend: "If you love me come to my house tonight - my parents will be away and we will be all alone" he is being utterly selfish and most immature and damaging to the girl. It would be utter folly on the part of the girl to accept his invitation - she very well knows what his designs are. There is still the possibility, no matter how great or slight, of the girl getting pregnant or of contracting venereal disease or of losing her virginity. Besides, engaging in premarital relations, is often against the girl's moral principles (and deep down, isn't this true of most of our Catholic high-school boys as well?), is spiritually suicidal, and makes her experience the most shattering of guilt feelings.

That one does not have to indulge in sex to be able to love and enjoy oneself is very hard to sell to some of our young people. "After all", some of them remark, "Isn't kissing (and very often they are referring to 'french-kissing') a manifestation of love? and what is wrong with petting so long as this is done by mutual consent?" This type of rationalization is very often the result of sheer ignorance of the beauty and sacredness of love and sex, and at times, of a malicious and hedonistic frame of mind. It is possible, too, that these young people are reacting to some of our sanctimonious married couples who prohibit pre-marital relations to the young ones while they are being unfaithful to their marriage vows in their daily life. Finally, one cannot rule out the fact that there has been a lack of adequate instruction about the dignity,



duty, and expression of married love, both in the school and in their home, and that this drawback is being confirmed by an intellectual and emotional assent to the leading liberals of the clergy, most of them Protestant, who hold that premarital sex would not only be permissible in certain cases but advisable. (See Appendix Two, pp. 34ff.)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE ADOLESCENT AND GOD

#### A) Honesty about Religion:

The denial of God or indifference to religion has directly or indirectly infected our young generation as it has already the adult world everywhere. This seems to be the result of many currents at work, some of them vividly delineated by the Second Vatican Council in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. Our young people are constantly breathing the air of our modern civilization which is "excessively engrossed in earthly affairs" (15); besides, adolescents are fully aware of the irresponsibility of some believers who

"...to the extent that they neglect their own training in faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral, or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion." (16)

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(15) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,  
Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. Guild Press.  
N.Y. P.216

(16) Ibid., p.217

This sin of omission on the part of baptized Christians is more lethal than the doctrine of the "Death of God" of some American theologians or of some of the continental Existentialist philosophers who either deny the existence of God or simply have no time to discuss such a mythological concept.

A fairly large cross-section of the world of Catholic adults who receive the Eucharist every Sunday and still bear a grudge against people of other color, creed, or race, cannot in all justice radiate Christ to their adolescent son or daughter at home for whom this kind of "Christian behavior" is sheer hypocrisy. These 'practising' Catholics seem to be unaware of the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians:

"Every time then that you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes. unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A MAN SHOULD FIRST EXAMINE HIMSELF. ONLY THEN SHOULD HE EAT OF THE BREAD AND DRINK OF THE CUP. FOR HE WHO EATS AND DRINKS WITHOUT RECOGNIZING THE BODY, EATS AND DRINKS A JUDGEMENT AGAINST HIMSELF." (17)

A good number of our adolescents are being exposed by gifted priests and sisters to the teachings of Vatican II - and yet, these same young people go to their parish church to fulfill their Sunday obligation where some pastor makes it explicitly or implicitly clear that he is not so sure whether the Ecumenical Council was the work of the Holy Spirit or a trapping of the devil. It takes very little time and intelligence for a young man or a young woman to discern a priest or a sister who are not that sure of the relevance

of their own vocation or of their commitment to Christ in the Church. Neither the defections from the priesthood or the sisterhood are helping our adolescents to follow Christ more closely by joining the seminary or embracing the evangelical counsels nor is the rigidity or unhappiness of those who remain 'faithful' to their vocation helping to do this.

Our young people cannot stand the 'phoney behavior' of some of the Catholic adults around them whose love of God EXCEEDS the love of their neighbour and whose Christian commitment is sometimes a cloak for their inner conflicts and neuroses. Our young generation yearns to be good - and they try their level best to live up to their Christian ideals for a while; but, they lack models of good Christian living. Religion is still too dear to them to discard it - they know more about it than their parents. The vast majority of our young people are neither 'atheists' nor 'agnostics' despite the fact that sometimes they show signs of 'religious indigestion'. There were many like this young man who said:

"I came up to this retreat with an inclination to do good. Up to this time, and I hope for the rest of the retreat and my life, I have come closer to God and God has come closer to me. I can feel his boundless mercy and goodness, and I can now understand that you can have greater love for God. This retreat did not save my soul because I thought my soul was not lost.

This retreat made me think out my problems, which are just between God and me. God has shown His mercy, and I came up here with the thought of thanking Him. I always ask but I never say thank you. But I got much more out of the retreat. I now know how to love, worship, and serve God in more respects than I

could imagine. I now know that God is forgiveness, God is mercy. And most important of all, God is love in every shape and form." (18)

It is most encouraging to see a group of young people all assembled together around the altar, fully participating at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, full of fervor and collaboration. A retreatant remarked:

"The Mass was the most beautiful one I have seen in my life. For once I felt a part of it and not just someone looking on from outside." (19)

There was nothing really spectacular or dramatic about the liturgy - nothing, at least, that could bring down a ban from any local chancery. We had the altar facing the people, religious folk-singing, reading of the Proper by the students, offertory procession and petitions, and a few other innovations all in accord with the Liturgical Commission. The liturgy itself could have been made more meaningful if all the Mass, including the Canon, was in English, and had permission been granted us to have Communion under both species.

Some retreat-houses have chapels that are most conducive to prayer and meditation; such are, for instance, the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Grace at the Dominican Retreat House in Schenectady, New York, and the chapel dedicated to St. Ignatius Loyola in Monroe, New York. Referring to the former, a young

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(18) Taken from an evaluation-sheet which was given to all the boys during the retreat in Monroe, New York.

(19) Taken from an evaluation-sheet which was given to all the girls during the retreat in Schenectady, N.Y.

woman put it this way:

"The chapel speaks for itself through its simplicity. I could relax and talk to God which I found difficult in big decorated churches." (20)

And as for the latter, a senior boy remarked:

"The chapel is what a chapel should be: small yet roomy, not cute yet nice, comfortable yet not plush and most of all in the "Alone with God" room you can accomplish much in the way of thought." (21)

Others found the open air more helpful to prayer than the formal atmosphere of the chapel:

"The most beneficial thing of this retreat was that I learned to talk to God. Set prayers never meant much to me and they never made me feel close to God either!. I just went outside and stood there watching the clouds drift by; then I told God just what I felt....about everything. I asked Him to help me and I really believe that He listened too. I could almost feel him there, standing patiently to listen to me. I am so glad I can finally get something out of the prayer I offer to God." (22)

There are hundreds of other young retreatants who expressed themselves in similar fashion.

#### B) Commitment to People:

All Catholic doctrine is social doctrine as we shall fully realize this at our encounter with Christ on the 'day of reckoning':

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(20) Ibid.

(21) Taken from an evaluation-sheet which was given to all the boys during the retreat in Monroe, N.Y.

(22) Taken from an evaluation-sheet which was given to all the girls during the retreat in Schenectady, N.Y.

"Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see the stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these brethren, you did it to me.'" (23)

At no time in her temporal existence has the Church been more vocal in trying to help mankind avoid the misery especially of the lowly, poor, and weak. Like Christ, the Church would have pity on the multitude weighed down with hunger, misery, and lack of knowledge. Christ's love is impelling the Church for

"He who sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (24)

In trying to achieve this goal, Vatican II made it very clear that the Church is ready to work hand in hand not only with the 'separated brethren' but also with unbelievers:

"While rejecting atheism, root and branch, the Church sincerely professes that all men, believers and unbelievers alike, ought to work for the rightful betterment of this world in which we all alike live. Such an ideal cannot be realized, however, apart from sincere and prudent dialogue." (25)

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(23) St. Matth. 25: 34-40

(24) L Jn. 3:17

(25) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. Guild Press, N.Y. p. 219.

Youth likes this face of the Church. It should come as no surprise that young people view the world with a clarity and moral dedication all their own. The Fathers at Vatican II, mindful of this, expressed themselves this way in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity:

"Their (young people) heightened influence in society demands of them a proportionately active apostolate. Happily, their natural qualities fit them for this activity. As they become more conscious of their personality, they are impelled by a zest for life and abounding energies to assume their own responsibility, and they yearn to play their part in social and cultural life."(26)

We find ourselves saying: "Yes, but how?" to their call for Christian commitment. We realize that young people, no less than adults, have a right and a duty to the apostolate which derives from their union with Christ and their incorporation in the Church through their baptism and confirmation. They are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself. But, how are they actually to witness to Christ in the milieu in which they live? It is the here and now type of Christian involvement that they are interested in - and rightly so! This is the hour for Christian action, and youth wants to be where the action is.

In almost every retreat I have given, I had the retreatants themselves in group discussions suggesting ways and means of how they could actually be effective instruments in God's hands for the extension of God's kingdom on earth. The following

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(26) Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. Guild Press, N.Y.



observations are the fruit of their long discussions and reflections:

a) One has to take a personal interest in people, regardless of whoever, whatever, or wherever they are. One's Christian outlook should go beyond incidentals to the great fundamental truth that every human being is made in the image of God, no matter how well or badly he may reflect it. No matter whom one is dealing with - parents, friends, non-Catholics, unbelievers, negroes, or old people, one has to witness to Christ. In order for communication among men to be possible, men must freely love each other, not as objects, but as persons - even more, as children of God. (See Marcel's idea on Divine Filiation in Appendix four pp43ff)

b) As a Christian one has no choice, if one wants to be true to one's vocation, but to be 'the light of the world' and 'the salt of the earth', in the midst of so much darkness of mind and coldness of heart. To achieve this goal one has to carry one's personal, family, religious, and civic duties faithfully and cheerfully especially in the face of strong social pressure and condemnation.

c) It is important to recall Pope John's belief of accepting the other person while disapproving of what he does: in "Pacem in Terris" (158-159) we read: "One must never confuse error and the person who errs, not even when there is question of error, or inadequate knowledge of truth, in the moral or religious field." In a group discussion, for instance, a young man should be articulate in defending the Church's right to legislate certain

laws. After the discussion is over, this young man should not go around with this "holier-than-thou" attitude, staying away from the 'bad guys' lest he be contaminated by them.

d) Trying to "influence" or "manipulate" others in order to meet one's own needs at their expense is definitely un-Christian-like. This is certainly true of the young man who says to his girl-friend: "If you love me come to me tonight...."

e) To fail to use well the talents God has shared with us is to lack appreciation of His generosity, as well as to cheat yourself and others. To close your eyes to the gifts of others and to the way God does manifest Himself to us through others is a rejection of His incarnate beauty and infinite wisdom. It takes no small effort to see the splendor of God's glory in our colored brethren or in our separated brethren or in the world of adults or in the conscientious Communist who is truly fighting for social justice.

f) Dedicating a part of one's spare time to some regular activity is imperative to keep one's motivations constant and one's morale high. One can always do some volunteer work in one's parish, or in school, or in hospitals, or in some old people's home.

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## EPILOGUE

If we were to limit our appraisal of the present characteristics of the American adolescent to the newspapers, popular magazines, and radio & television newscasts, we would essentially see the following "Teen-age Gang Steals Car", "Youth Dope Ring Smashed", "Premarital Pregnancies", "Illegitimacy, and Abortions Among Teenagers Become A National Scandal", The blot on the American Scene is ugly and symptomatic, but, remember it is only a blot.

It has been my objective throughout this paper to partially overlook the dark side of the picture so as to stress some of the fine points radiating in our youth today. It is my conviction that our adolescents are responsible individuals who are proud to offer service when given the opportunity for they have both the innate and actual ability to relate with others and with God. I believe that our present young generation will come up with a modern interpretation and definition of values and standards which for years have been an inherent part of the American culture and society, so that they will have something finer and more functional than what currently exists.

My intention was not to minimize the serious problems and challenges which face us as adults, parents, and teachers,

living today with adolescents in the 1960's but actually this generation may be one of the most trustworthy and capable America has had for a long time.

## APPENDIX ONE

### SUMMARY CHART OF FAULTY

#### PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

<u>Undesirable Condition</u>	<u>Typical Personality Development of Child</u>
Rejection	Feelings of insecurity and isolation. Attention-seeking, negativistic, hostile behavior. Unable to give and receive affection.
Overprotection- Domination	Submission, inadequate, lack of initiative, tendency to passive dependence in relations with others.
Overindulgence	Selfish, demanding, with inability to tolerate frustration. Rebellious to authority, excessive need of attention, lack of responsibility.
Perfectionism - Unrealistic ambitions for child	Child internalizes parents' unrealistic standards. Inevitable failure leads to continual frustration, guilt and self-devaluation.
Rigid, unrealistic moral standards	Extreme conscience development. Tendency to rigidity, severe conflicts, guilt, self-condemnation, and self-devaluation.
Faulty discipline	Overpermissiveness associated with insecurity, antisocial aggressiveness. Severe discipline typically leads to excessive condemnation of self for socially disapproved behavior. Inconsistent discipline commonly

SUMMARY CHART OF FAULTY PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS (contd.)

Undesirable Condition

Typical Personality  
Development of Child

	results in lack of stable values for guiding behavior with tendency to inconsistency and vacillation in meeting problems.
Sibling rivalry	Direct or indirect hostility, insecurity, lack of self-confidence, regression.
Marital discord and broken homes	Anxiety, tension, insecurity, lack of secure home base, tendency to evaluate world as a dangerous and insecure place. Conflicting loyalties, lack of adequate models for proper ego development.
Faulty parental models	Internalization of unethical and socially undesirable value attitudes which frequently lead to difficulties with the law.
Contradictory demands	Lack of integrated frame of reference: confusion and self-devaluation.

(Taken from "Abnormal Psychology & Modern Times" by James C. Coleman.

## APPENDIX TWO

### RELIGION AND THE NEW MORALITY

Leading liberals of the clergy debate the church's role in today's sexual revolution

#### THEOLOGIAN

Dr. James Luther Adams, Professor of Christian Ethics at the Harvard Divinity School, is the most prominent Unitarian theologian in the World. An official Protestant observer at the 1962 Vatican Council

#### VIEWS

A premature commitment issuing from premarital intercourse can be motivated by a sense of responsibility - by a strong subjective sense of conscience - but the objective consequence of the commitment may in the end be destructive. It is often easy to overlook the fact that one is responsible for consequences as well as for authentic motives. A widely held view in our youth culture today places much more emphasis upon inner authenticity, the euphoria of spontaneity, immediate response, than upon continuity and durability. In this sort of ethos, a consideration of future implications tends to be neglected. Physical intimacy can be exhilarating, but it can also be deceptive when it gives an illusion of personal intimacy that doesn't really exist. Physical intimacy shouldn't be identified with depth of personal relationship. It's possible for the person who indulges in premarital or extramarital intercourse to be misled by this deception. MY MAIN POINT IS THAT OPPOSITE VALUES ALWAYS HAVE TO BE

## RELIGION AND THE NEW MORALITY (contd.)

### Theologians

Dr. Harvey Cox is Associated Professor of Church and Society at the Harvard Divinity School. He belongs to the Baptist Church and is the author of the theological best seller  
THE SECULAR CITY

Dr. Robert Wood Lynn, dean of the Auburn Program at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Ordained in the Presbyterian Church. Author of  
PROTESTANT STRATEGIES IN EDUCATION

Dr. Martin E. Marty, an ordained minister in the Lutheran Church teaches in the University of Chicago Divinity School.

### Views

TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION, AS IS TRUE WHEN WE CONSIDER BOTH CONSCIENCE AND CONSEQUENCE, FREEDOM AND ORDER, SPONTANEITY AND REFLECTION.

It is wrong to insist that always, and with every unmarried couple, intercourse is wrong. There are instances in which it would be not only permissible but advisable before marriage.

It is very easy for people to deceive themselves about what constitutes a serious relationship. In this area, we have to be fairly realistic about ourselves and our enormous capacity for self-deception. In our society, many people feel that it's necessary, once they've experienced the full sexual relationship with each other, to make a commitment, so they are driven into making a premature commitment. This is as much of a problem as the absence of a commitment.

Well, this whole question of premarital sex covers more territory than most people realize. I don't think you can define handholding or dancing or necking by the unmarried as something other than premarital sex. I disagree with people who set aside copulation in an absolute way and say, "Here is the line." I've read many interviews with teenagers in which a sort of magic line is drawn. If you stay on one side of it with technical virginity, you're a saint. If you happen to cross it, you go to hell. Such line drawing is a violation of the definition of sexuality in our tradition. True, sexual



## RELIGION AND THE NEW MORALITY (contd.)

### Theologians

### Views

The Reverend Howard Moody,  
United Church of Christ.

Dr. Allen J. Moore is Dean of Students and Associate Professor of Theology at Claremont, California. He was ordained into the Methodist ministry.

intercourse is, on the relative scale, the deepest, highest, most profound, most engaging and involving relationship. We conceive that relationship as one through which two people share a secret of personality and become "one flesh" - as in marriage. But two people certainly exchange a great deal of that secret of personality through sexual expressions just a little bit short of the "line". We all know very well that many, many, young people in our churches take a wide range of these sexual expressions almost for granted.

Are we able to say with assurance that all extramarital sex is destructive? Most men engaged in counseling know there are situations in which extramarital affairs have saved marriages.

There are many levels of human sexuality, and although premarital intercourse may not be the most appropriate, it offers the possibility of being meaningful. It might be entirely possible for two people who are very much in love, very much committed to each other, very much concerned with the relationship, and who are struggling to find a deeper way of communicating with each other, who out of this level of communication are trying to find some renewal, some hope for the future, to have sexual intercourse premaritally. But, as a social theologian, I think there are three things that must be involved in any sexual act - be it outside or inside of marriage. The first is that the people involved should have some shared history. The second thing is that these two people should have a commitment to each other - a commitment they are willing to make public. By commitment I mean a promise that they should share life together. I don't necessarily mean 'till death

RELIGION AND THE NEW MORALITY (contd.)

Theologians

Views

The Right Reverend James A. Pike, formerly Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of California. An Episcopalian.

Father Herbert Rogers, S.J. has taught English literature, drama and philosophy at St. Peter's College in Jersey City and also theology at N.Y. Fordham University

Rabbi Richard L. Rubenstein is the director of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation and the Charles E. Merrill Lecturer in the Humanities at the Univ. of Pittsburgh.

do us part", but there should be a willingness to make their commitment public.... Finally, I think that the two people should have some hope for the future. They should see that this act is not an end in itself; it is not just self-gratification but points to something beyond them in both space and time....

I can't buy the codifiers who say we've got a set of rules telling us what is right and wrong under every circumstance. Decisions ought to be made contextually, situationally, responsibly.

We should not concern ourselves too much with censorship for adults. Our emphasis should be on educating rather than coercing the public. The only effective censorship is self-censorship.

Although there is more sexual activity on campus than when I was in college, today's relationships are usually more lurid journalistic accounts would suggest.

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### APPENDIX THREE

#### WHAT TEENAGERS LOOK FOR IN A PRIEST

In answer to an open request published in the Indianapolis, Indiana, diocesan newspaper column by Rev. R.F. Borrromeo, S.J., "For Teens Only," Miss Mary Kay Werkowski (or 5884 Forest Lane, Indianapolis, Ind. 46220) wrote the following letter, describing "what a priest should be."

April 20, 1964

Dear Sirs,

For the first time since we moved to Indianapolis (which was about 3 years ago) I read the Criterion. When I read your article and found an invitation to sound off about priests I simply could not resist.

As you probably have gathered this will be rather informal for one of my pet peaves is stuffy letters.

Being a typical teenager in many ways I feel I'm an expert in several fields and "faults of priests" is one of them.

First and foremost - Be interested in Teenagers !!!  
Don't be so busy that you haven't got time to listen. Ask most teenagers if they've ever talked to a priest about religion personally and 95% would tell you that priests are too busy and don't have time or interest in teenagers.

You'll have more opportunities because you're young and it's often easier to talk to a young person than to someone who looks like your father. But for heaven's sake keep their respect. Don't be a stuffed shirt but let them always remember you're a priest.

Learn to read personalities. I, personally, need a person who is a domineering sort and won't let me run over them. Some of my friends would rebel vehemently to such treatment and the same person would get nowhere with them.

Another thing, teenagers hate to go to confession. I've yet to meet one who is even indifferent - we all dislike it with a passion. So when one of us finally goes, make good use of the time. You won't see them there again for at least a month and at most anywhere from 9-12 months. Don't get angry, but be INTERESTED! Don't get a set little sermon that you give to every Tom, Dick, and Harry that comes in. Make it something pertaining to them individually. If the spirit moves you, you might even ask some questions. Even if they just require a "yes" or "no", at least you're making us think a little. Always leave an opening for us to ask questions. Something like "Any questions?" or even better "Is there anything bothering you or anything you'd like to ask?" A kind word is so appreciated.

Cultivate the ability to be easy to talk to. One of the most pitiful things I've ever seen is our assistant pastor. Very few of us can talk to him except when we're kidding around. I would consider myself a flop if I were a

priest and practically no one could talk to me and confide in me.

Well, there you have my favorite gripes. They are some of my friends' also, so it's not just one warped individuals' opinion. I hope I have been of some help. Best of luck in everything you do. If you get a spare moment let me know how things are coming.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Kay Werkowski

## APPENDIX FOUR

### EXISTENTIALISM: RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

Sartre:

"Hell is - other people." No  
Exit

"....the Other is first the being for whom I am an object;  
that is, the being through which I gain my objectness...  
the death of my possibilities causes me to experience  
the Other's freedom.

From BEING AND NOTHINGNESS

"Unity with the Other is in fact unrealizable...(since I  
would have to) act upon the other's freedom."

Ibid.

Marcel:

In order for communication among men to be possible, men must freely love each other. To accomplish this, they must regard each other not as objects, but as persons. Each man must be present to the other as "toi" so that a personal relationship is possible. Marcel insists on this personal relationship in order to overcome "the broken world." God is the absolute Toi.

" It is in treating the other as a child of God that it seems to be within the limits of possibility for me to awaken within him a consciousness of his divine filiation...I... direct the adoration of which God is the unique object on to the divine life as seen in this creature, who from the beginning has been unaware of this true nature and is all the more unaware of it the greater his self-complacent vanity may be." HOMO VIATOR

## APPENDIX FIVE

### ON MUTUAL COOPERATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Remarks by the Rev. James C. O'Brien, S.J. to the parents of the boys of Junior Year, Oct. 3, 1964.

I have asked Father Vigneau to let me speak with you this evening because we have, you and I, a matter of really common concern. Xavier High School (in Mass.) is acutely conscious of the fact that the primary responsibility over a boy's education rests with his parents, and that we have our commission and mandate from the parents. The education we give to your youngsters, then, must be something that we do in a climate of cooperation and openness with you, a climate of mutual respect and trust. To put it plainly, you have a right to know what is going on here. And nothing we do, however justifiable in itself, should ever be allowed to appear as if we were trying to "slip something by" you. Now, because at this precise point in your sons' education a specific matter presents itself which could conceivably take on this unfortunate complexion, I want to speak very openly, not at you, but with you tonight.

The question revolves around the point of teaching your boys realistic literature. In some schools systems, much unfortunate and unlightening heat and friction have been generated on this matter. I don't want that to happen here, and I'm sure you don't either. That's why I'm here tonight to tell you what we're about. And so, from the first, let us establish a few points - most of which I hope you would have granted anyway.

1) We are educators, who want to educate - lead our charges to real maturity; and who have respectable qualifications, both academic and, I hope, personal to do this job.

2) We are a group of priests, students for the priesthood and Catholic laymen, who not only do not want to harm your boys' souls, but even feel a personal responsibility for leading them towards God by every academic path. At the same time, it occurs to us that the world, this world as it really is, is and has to remain the place of every man's path and pilgrimage to God.

3) When I speak of realistic literature, I do not mean filthy literature, pornography in any sense. No book will ever be taught at Xavier High School that is lurid. No books will ever be taught at Xavier that fail to see evil for what it is, evil. And moreover, no book, however fine and unexceptionable its moral perspective, will be taught here if its portrayals of evil are so detailed that they might be upsetting to adolescent readers - some of the writings of



William Faulkner and Graham Greene come to mind in this connection. As a priest, as a teacher who wants to do the reasonable thing and as a chairman of the Department of English at this school, I assure you on each of these points.

Very well then: if this is what I do not mean by realism, what do I mean? By realism I simply mean works of literature that deal with and reflect the problems of real people, sometimes speaking of these problems frankly and in the language that the real people themselves would probably use. Sin, immorality - and by this I do not by any means refer only to sexual immorality, but also to hate dishonesty, prejudice, cowardice, meanness of the spirit, and the rest of the unlovely catalogue - the world of evil and the evil of the world are a part of life that your boys already know about and with which they must live out their lives; and I would submit that a school is not educating if it sends its graduates out into the world able to handle facts and figures, but not able to handle the world, not able to handle other people - or themselves.

Cardinal Newman, a theologian, writer, and educator, once wrote as follows:

If the school is a direct preparation for the world, then let it be what it professes. It is not a convent, it is not a seminary; it is a place to fit young men for the world, with all its principles and maxims, when their time comes. But we can prepare them against what is inevitable; and it is not the way to learn to swim in troubled waters never to have

gone into them... Cut out from your classroom all broad manifestations of the natural man, and those manifestations are waiting for your pupil's benefit at the very doors of your lecture room in living and breathing substance... You have succeeded but in this: in making the world his university.

We at Xavier do not want our boys to have to learn about life the hard way. We feel that the vicarious experience literature can provide indispensable preparation for them; that it can enlarge their minds, their consciences, their sympathies, their souls. But at the same time we realize too that mature literature can be badly misread; that the point of it can be missed by the reader who cannot see the whole book for what it is. Here we think - precisely here - is where we come in. Where we must come in.

And so, during the first two years of your boys' courses at this school, he has been led by the hand through books like Huckleberry Finn, then on to deeper forms like Steinbeck's The Pearl, where perhaps for the first time he sees symbols at work. He has then gone forward to books like Great Expectations and been shown how to see an author's deeper message that underlies all the sections of the book. Perhaps through The Ox-Bow Incident, he has learned that a few "hells" and "damns" can be signs of book's integrity rather than proofs of its immorality. He has been set on his guard against the subtle presence of naturalistic, amoral attitudes in some stories - like most of the stuff on television.

He has been shown how to distinguish the belief of an author from the beliefs of the author's characters - through, for example, the writing of Shirley Jackson. He has been urged, and shown how to cultivate an esthetic distance between himself and the work of literature, letting it educate him, but not involve him. He has been introduced to the principles of moral evaluation of creative literature through such works as Father Harold Gardiner's NORMS FOR THE NOVEL.

I think that if by this time he is not ready for the works of Lewis, Hardy, Golding, and Salinger, he never will be; and the remedy for his plight then would not in any case lie within the proper preserve of educators. In fact, however, I believe that your boys are ready. And, if time permitted, I think I could prove it by reading you some extraordinary clear and mature explanations of the morality/art problem written by your sons this past week in response to a routine examination question. Frankly, I am wonderfully pleased with their progress and their understanding. And I think you can afford to be.

Now, at this point you are probably thinking: why doesn't he just come right out and say it, they're going to teach THE CATCHER IN THE RYE. Well, as a matter of fact, we are - among other things. And much of what has been said already should indicate why. But a few specifics. Let's take this Catcher in the Rye. For one thing, did you know that if it had been left to the judgement of university people and teachers and literary critics, this book would have no fame at all and

would most assuredly not be getting taught here or anywhere else? When it came out, it was one of those "sleepers", getting nowhere near the attention it warranted. The adolescents of the last dozen years are the ones who made it a classic. They refused to let it die in the desert of the critics' early silence. It spoke to them; and it seems still to speak to them. It is a way that only the rarest and best fiction does; and it was they who kept buying it, they who kept reading it whether or not the critics of the universities in those days cared - and later, whether or not the book was intemperately abused by many adults who themselves had never really read it. Well then, if adolescents find much that is meaningful to them in this book, maybe they should be led through it just at that time when it can be most meaningful to them - when they are at Holden Caulfield's own age. Most of them will read it anyway; many friends have. But isn't it much better that they be led through it, as I said, led to see the fundamental moral seriousness of the book, its tragedy, its quests for value; and I would add that I think these aspects of the book are now beyond really serious question. The alternative, it seems to me, is to have many a youngster just running through the novel secretly up in his room, giggling at the swear words, looking for the "good parts", missing the deepest meaning of the total work, and finally perhaps itching in his soul over whether he has read a dirty book.....

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I hope you see what I'm driving at, and what we at Xavier High School want to do about it. Then once again I want to assure you that after Salinger we intend to move on, not to Mickey Spillane, but to Sinclair Lewis and Scott Fitzgerald, who also investigate tragic people - fooled themselves and fooling others in a sham world; to William Golding, searching the inhumanity of man to man; and to other good writers, vicarious experience of those characters we - the religious educators whose mandate is from you - sincerely believe to be an integral part of the training of your boys for life, and indeed the only alternative to having their experience of much of life first come home to them in the school of trial and tragic error.

I am most interested in any reactions you may have to what we are attempting to do. I hope you will talk to me about it around the school this evening, or some other evening, if you would like to make an appointment for a longer discussion. Father Francis Murphy and Mr. John Alan Pratt, the other teachers of Junior year English, will, I am sure, be in agreement with the general lines of what I have said and just as pleased as myself if you would wish to talk with them. And finally, thank you so very much for your time and attention.

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**APPROVAL SHEET**

The thesis submitted by Reverend Francis X. Muscat, S.J. has been read and approved by the director of the thesis. Furthermore, the final copies have been examined by the director and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Sept. 7, 1967  
Date

John W. Wozniak  
Signature of Adviser