

HIGH SCHOOL

3. Adolescence in One's Plan in Life

98. In terms of personal development, adolescence represents the period of self-production and therefore the discovery of one's vocation. Both for physiological, social and cultural reasons, this period tends to be longer today than in the past. Christian parents should 'educate the children for life in such away that each one may fully perform his or her role according to the vocation received from God'. This is an extremely important task which basically constitutes the culmination of the parents' mission. Although this task is always important, it becomes especially so in this period of their children's life: therefore, in the life of each member of the lay faithful there are particularly significant and decisive moments for discerning God's call. Among these are the periods of adolescence and young adulthood.

99. It is very important for young people not to find themselves alone discerning their personal vocation. Parental advice is relevant, at times decisive, as well as the support of the priest or other properly formed persons (in parishes, associations or in the new fruitful ecclesial movements, etc.) who are capable of helping them discover the vocational meaning of life and the various forms of the universal call of holiness. 'Christ's *Follow me* makes itself hard on the different paths taken by the disciples and confessors of the divine redeemer.

100. For centuries, the concept of vocation was reserved exclusively for the priesthood and religious life, in recalling the Lord's teaching, 'You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48), the second Vatican council renewed the universal call to holiness. As Pope Paul VI wrote shortly after the council: this strong invitation to holiness could be regarded as the most characteristic element in the whole Magisterium of the council, and so to say, its ultimate purpose'. This as reiterated by Pope John Paul II: 'The second Vatican council has significantly spoken on the universal call to holiness. It is possible to say that this call to holiness is precisely the basic charge to all the sons and daughters of the church by a council which intended to bring a renewal of Christian life based on the gospel. This charge is not a simple moral exhortation, but an undeniable requirement arising from the mystery of the church'.

101. Therefore, in catechesis and the formation given both within and outside of the family, the church's teaching on the sublime teaching of virginity and celibacy must be never be lacking, but also the vocational meaning of marriage, which a Christian can never regard as only a human venture. As St. Paul says 'This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church.'(Ephesians 5:32). Giving young people this firm conviction is of supreme importance for the good both of the church and humanity which depend in great part on parents and on the family life that they build in their homes.

102. Parents should always strive to give example and witness their own lives to fidelity to God and one another in the marriage covenant. Their example is especially decisive in adolescence, the phase when young people are looking for lived and attractive behavior models. Since sexual problems become more evident at this time, parents should also help them to love the beauty and strength of chastity through prudent advice, highlighting the inestimable value of prayer and frequent fruitful recourse to the sacraments for a chaste life, especially personal confession. Furthermore, parents should be capable of giving their children, when necessary, a positive and serene explanation of the solid points of Christian morality such as, for example, the indissolubility of marriage and the relationship between love and procreation, as well as the immorality of premarital relations, abortion, contraception and masturbation. With regard to these immoral situations that contradict the meaning of giving marriage, it is also good to recall that: ‘the two dimensions of conjugal union, the unitive and the procreative, cannot be artificially separated without damaging the deepest truth of the conjugal act itself’. In this regard, an in-depth and reflective knowledge of the documents of the church dealing with these problems will be of valuable assistance to parents.

103. Masturbation particularly constitutes a very serious disorder that is illicit in itself and cannot be morally justified, although, ‘the immaturity of adolescence (which can sometimes persist at that age), psychological imbalance or habit can influence behavior, diminishing the deliberate character of the act and bringing about a situation whereby subjectively there may not always be serious fault’. Therefore, adolescents should be helped to overcome manifestations of this disorder, which often express the inner conflicts of their age and, in many cases, a selfish vision of sexuality.

104. A particular problem that can appear during the process of sexual maturation is homosexuality, which is also spreading more and more in urbanized societies. This phenomenon must be presented with balanced judgment, in the light of the document of the church. Young people need to be helped to distinguish between the concepts of what is normal and abnormal, between subjective guilt and objective disorder, avoiding what would arouse hostility. On the other hand, the structural and complementary orientation of sexuality must be well clarified in relation to marriage, procreation and Christian chastity. ‘Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its physiological genesis remains largely unexplained’. A distinction must be made between a tendency that can be innate and acts of homosexuality that ‘are intrinsically disordered’ and contrary to natural law.

Especially when the practice of homosexual acts has not become a habit, many cases can benefit from appropriate therapy. In any case, persons in this situation must be accepted with respect, dignity and delicacy, and all forms of unjust discrimination must be avoided. If parents notice the appearance of this tendency or of related behavior in their children, during childhood or adolescence, they should seek help from expert qualified persons in order to obtain all possible assistance.

For most homosexual persons, this condition constitutes a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition'. Homosexual persons are called to chastity.

105. Awareness of the positive significance of sexuality for personal harmony and development, as well as the person's vocation in the family, society and the church, always represents the educational horizon to be presented during the stages of adolescent growth. It must never be forgotten that the disordered use of sex tends progressively to destroy the person's capacity to love by making pleasure, instead of sincere self-giving, the end of sexuality and by reducing other persons to objects of one's own gratification. In this way the meaning of true love between a man and a woman (love always open to life) is weakened as well as the family itself. Moreover, this subsequently leads to disdain for the human life which could be conceived, which, in some situations, is then regarded as an evil that threatens personal pleasure. 'The trivialization of sexuality is among the principal factors which have led to contempt for new life. Only a true love is able to protect life'.

106. We must also remember how adolescents in industrialized societies preoccupied and at times disturbed not only by the problems of self-identity, discovering their plan in life and difficulties in successfully integrating sexuality in a mature and well oriented personality. They also have problems in accepting themselves and their bodies. In this regard, out-patient and specialized centers for adolescents have now sprung up, often characterized by purely hedonistic purposes. On the other hand, a healthy culture of body leads to accepting oneself as a gift and as an incarnated spirit, called to be open to God and society. A healthy culture of the body should accompany formation in this very constructive period, which is also not without its risks.

In the face of what hedonistic groups propose especially in affluent societies, it is very important to present young people with the ideas of human and Christian solidarity and concrete ways of being committed in church associations, movements and voluntary Catholic and missionary activities.

107. Friendships are very important in this period. According to local social conditions and customs, adolescence is a time when young people enjoy more autonomy in their relations with others and in the hours they keep in family life. Without taking away their rightful autonomy, when necessary, parents should know how to say 'no' to their children and, at the same time, they should know how to cultivate a taste in their children for what is beautiful, noble and true. Parents should be also be sensitive to adolescent's self-esteem, which may pass through a confused phase when they are not clear about what personal dignity means and requires.

108. Through the loving and patient advice, parents will help young people to avoid an excessive closing in on themselves. When necessary, they will also teach them to

go against social trends that tend to strife true love and an appreciation for spiritual realities: “Be sober. Be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm on your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you’ (1 Peter 5:8-10).