IV. Liberty, ideals, commitment

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29. The ideals of the youth

"Here he is indeed, near the forty-two years... What would think of you the boy that you were at the age of sixteen, if he could judge you? What he would say of what you have become? Would he simply have consented to live to be seen transformed thus? Perhaps was it worth while for him? Which secret hopes have you not disappointed, of the ones that even you don't remember?

"It would be extraordinarily interesting, although sad, to be able to face in front of each two beings. The one that promised so much and the other one that accomplished so little. I imagine a young addressing to the older without indulgence: "You have deceived me, you have stolen me. Where are the dreams that I had trusted you? What have you done with all the wealth that I so crazily have put in your hands? I responded of you, I had promised for you. And you have done bankruptcy. It would have seen worthy to go with everything that I still possessed, and that you also have squandered"

"And what would say the older to defend himself? He would speak about acquired experience, of useless ideas thrown overboard, he would show some books, he would speak of his reputation, and he would seek feverishly in his pockets, in the drawers of his table, to be justified. But he would defend himself badly, and I believe that he would be shamed."

These paragraphs of the Newspaper of Julien Green are an interesting thinking, so much for the past as for the future of any life. Because -as it has been written by Martin Descalzo- every life would have to be the crop of the great sowing during one's youth. To live is to bear fruit. And it is not simply to advance and to age. The life is to bet determinedly at the young age, and to maintain and to improve that bet during the adult life.

And it fits then to be asked: if already it is difficult to maintain that bet of youth when in those years large ideals were sown, what will be when only disillusionments or insubstantiality were sown? When a young person does not have ideals, or they are small and vulgar, it is very probable that a little encouraging future expects to him. Therefore, perhaps one of the greater infamies is to push the youths in front of the mediocrity or in front of the desperation.

It is true that it doesn't suffice with dreaming during the youth, because those dreams can result in ingenuous or false projects. But who does not dream never, who is limited only to verify the difficulty, who always boasts to be very realistic and considers ingenuous to whom aspire to improve himself, and to improve the world in which he lives, who think that way so jinx, do not realize that the main enemy are not all those that were indicated with so much emphasis, but the worst enemy they have is their interior.

When the adults tend to abandon the large ideals of the youth, justifying it by saying that the circumstances are contrary to our projects, we are then deceiving us miserably. It is certain that the projects of those years have the need to be adapted and modified along the life, because the life is long and there are very little things foreseeable, but we know well that many times what we have done with those ideals is, simply, to reduce them, by laziness, by abandonment or by stinginess. And what we achieve with that is to go deflating our life as a globe, almost without being conscious of it.

The despair -indicates Josef Pieper- is in the same mental structure of who orients badly his life. It supposes always a large pain of who refuses to walk along the way toward the fullness that his nature calls him. But we do not arrive to the despair in a sudden way. Its principle and its root use to be the laziness, mother of all the vices. The laziness is synonym of neglect, of disinterest, and that always conducts to a sadness that paralyzes, that disheartens. And the worse thing is that it carries to a vicious circle of reluctance that reinforces the neglect. The lazy man is subtracted of the own obligations of the greatness of his mission. It is like a corrupted humility, own of who does not want to accept his true condition and his talents, because they imply a demand. As a sick that does not want to be cured so that he is not required the same as a healthy person is required.

There is a type of hope that arises of the youthful energy but is exhausted with the years, when the life declines. Nevertheless, the true hope is an unworried and confident courage, that characterizes and distinguishes to the man of young spirit and that makes of him an attractive model to follow. The hope gives a youth that is inaccessible to the old age and to the disillusionment. Thus, although day by day we lose a little the natural youth, we are able day by day to renew our youth of spirit. Instead of giving cult to the youngness of the body, in a forced and external way, and that besides produces despair by seeing how we lose it, we should seek those higher summits, which can improve, rejuvenating day by day his spirit.

30. To feel appealed to

Sometime ago I read that the most important decision in the life of a person, the one that more conditions the global result of his existence, the decision that all we finally take, many times, without noticing it so much account, is this: if we center our life in ourselves or we center our life in the others.

Our entire environment continuously calls us spear to awake our sensibility toward the needs of the others. There are people that are accustomed to turn a deaf ear to those calls. Others, on the other hand, know how to grasp them and they reflect on them, and there are people that have eyes to discover the sufferings and the needs of the others. They think little in their own satisfaction and, curiously, are the ones that then reach greater benchmarks of satisfaction and of happiness. They know to be attentive and they try to solve, with the goodness of his heart, the lacks of who surround them. And perhaps it seems that in them that attitude is innate, but the reality is that it is a consequence of the education received and, above all, it is fruit of the effort and the personal availability during the life.

This idea recalls me the history of a boy having fifteen years of age in a small Spanish city. It took place during the Christmas holidays of the year 1917. Since some days ago it was snowing without interruption and the New Year entered with glacial temperatures. The thermometer had descended to sixteen degrees below zero.

One of those mornings the boy went out into the street and he founded something that will vary the course of his existence: the tracks in the snow of some barefoot feet. He stopped to examine them with curiosity and observed that the trace corresponded to the naked footstep of a Carmelite friar. He was immediately submerged into a deep interior removal. In his soul entered an anxiety that would never abandon him. There was in the world people, like that man that did large sacrifices by God and by the others. And he? Was he incapable of doing nothing?

It is probable that quite a lot of persons passed for that same place that morning. Some of them didn't pay attention to those tracks, intermingled perhaps with the traces of other people, cars or bicycles marked also on the snow. Others had seen them, and they thought perhaps that was admirable that there were so extraordinary people, but in their interior no thought arose that appealed to them for the rest of their lives.

Those tracks in the snow caused to see to Josemaría Escrivá -thus that adolescent was named- that God asked him to complicate his life, that he would be compromised in a great task in the service of the others. During the rest of his life he would recall with emotion that moment.

All the reality that surrounds us is a constant appeal toward the reflection and toward the commitment. The world that surrounds us is full of questions that are waiting our personal answers. But those questions only are as whispers that only are heard when there is a certain degree of personal maturity and of rectitude of life. The one that lives hoarded and seduced by his own egotistical interests doesn't perceive those questions neither those calls or, at the maximum, he responds saying "and to me what?" And if he does not perceive the questions, it is difficult that we find the answers that give a clear sense to his life.

Perhaps in the world there is a lack of more people with an attitude of listening and with sensibility, but, above all, there is a need of generous personal answers. If one asks not to himself why he is in the world, what is truly worthy in the life, he will never come to perceive neither to formulate a clarifying answer. If one doesn't ask himself those questions, he will never find any answers. It is precise to tune up the ear and to ask oneself why we are in this world, what can give true value to our life, what can fill really our heart and to offer us a lasting happiness. These are questions that, if are responded with success and then one perseveres in the commitment that they suppose, they are the condition to come to be one same, to live the own life and to live it with the liberty.

31. Question of habits

José Antonio Marina explains the history of a girl that needed to do exercise and she was proposed to run a while a couple of days during the week. She didn't like to compete with others, so she began to run alone. A day, a coach that she knew told to her: "You should run marathon". She believed that it was a matter of joke. Besides, she had always thought that the marathon was exhausting and boring. But that man insisted to her more and convinced her, and he

prepared for her a plan of training with some precise and well calculated objectives, that required an effort each time a little greater, but always accessible.

"Without realizing it -explained she-, I began to get excited with the idea of bearing a kilometer more. It is a curious process. First it makes you restless, then it irks you while you are trying it and, at the end, you feel a star if you obtain it"

The way to dose the goals converted a tedious task in a stimulating activity. "The exercise fits me well. To compromise me in a long task pleases me. I like to compete a little with myself. Also I was influenced when I knew that what I was going to obtain was important to someone: to my coach."

There are many hidden forces in each one that only reach their efficacy when they arise, as to clarify them and to set them, an objective that can summarize and can combine those confused impulses of the desire, until causing them to take the form and the attraction of a goal. That process, by which a series of dispersed and vague motives configure a new source of energy, is fundamental in order to improve the own talent. And it is a process that almost always depends on our capacity to reach habits that help us to negotiate well our aspirations, desires and feelings, which many times are confused and even are in conflict. Because it is frequent that we want to do something but we do not want to do the necessary thing to obtain that something. It is possible to be thirsty but not to have desire to walk to the fountain. One can want to give a happiness visiting to a sick friend but one must conquer the laziness to be raised and to go. If someone doesn't have will, he only manages to do what he wants to do in that moment, but he can not obtain anything out of that narrow enclosure of the short time. Therefore, the will consists in a good part in acquiring the habit of wanting to do the things, so that appears the paradox that to want is a question of habits.

When running, that agility, that resolved, rhythmic, long stride, is like a representation of the liberty, above all when one has experienced before the slavery of the breathlessness, distress and exhaustion. Therefore, the training is a great achievement of the intelligence and of the will. When one has achieved certain skills thanks to the habits that one has acquired, the spontaneity produces large creations; but if one does not have the skill that is born of the effort by acquiring habits, the spontaneity uses to be disastrous.

The influence and the subtlety of the mass consumers' publicity promote an accepted and comfortable submission of the spontaneity. We are requested for the passive fascination to be elements of what we desire, and then we roll meekly by that slope, bewitched by the amphetamine like power of its hot rhetoric. But we know that, at the end, always we find us again down, again disappointed and frustrated by not having the habits that we really desire. We bump into, as always, the stubborn reality of the effort, with the need to cultivate intelligent habits and with the evidence that what we want does not always coincide with what we desire.

32. The impatience of the men

An old legend from Norway counts the history of an elderly monk named Haakon. He took care of a hermitage in which there was an image of a Christ very venerated and to which use to come many people to pray. A day, that good monk, prompted by a generous feeling, went down on his knees in front of the cross and said: "Lord, I want to suffer for you. Leave me to occupy your position. I want to replace you in the cross". And he remained fixed with the stare in front of the image, as expecting an answer. The Lord opened his lips and spoke. His words fell of the high with a whispering and reprimanding tone: "My brother, I agree to your desire, but it should be with a condition". "¿Which one, my Lord? I am willing to comply it with your aid." "Listen: whatever happens and whatever you see, you should keep silent". Haakon answered: "¡I promise it to you, my Lord!" And the change was performed.

Nobody notified the change. Nobody recognized to the hermit, hanging with the nails in the cross. The Lord occupied the position of Haakon. And the monk complied with the commitment during a long time. To nobody he said nothing. But one morning arrived at the hermitage a rich man that, after having been a while very thoughtful, he left there -forgotten- his wallet. Haakon saw it and kept silence. Nothing said he when a poor man entered into the hermit one hour later and took for himself the accounts receivable of the rich man. And neither nothing said him when, a little time after, another boy was prostrated in front of him to ask his protection before undertaking a long trip to the another side of the ocean.

But suddenly it entered again the rich one in search of his wallet and, as he didn't find it, he thought immediately in the boy and told to him: "¡You give me right now the wallet that you have stolen me!" The young, surprised, retorted to him: "¡I have not stolen anything!" The rich man rushed furious against him saying: "Do not say lies, return it to me immediately!" Then a strong voice was heard: "¡No. Stop!" The rich looked up and saw that the image spoke to him. Haakon, from the cross, defended at the young and rebuked to the rich by the false accusation. The man was frightened and he left the hermitage. The young also went because he was in a hurry to take his trip.

When the hermitage remained empty, Christ directed his words to the monk and told to him: "Go down of the cross. You haven't served to occupy that position. You have not known to keep silence". Haakon replied: "Lord, how was I going to permit that injustice?" Jesus occupied the cross again and the hermit remained prostrated in front of Him. In the afternoon, the Lord spoke him again: "You didn't know that it was convenient for the rich man to lose the wallet, because

he carried in it the price of the betrayal to his woman. The poor man, on the other hand, had need of that money. In relation to the boy that was going to be struck, his injuries would have him impeded to carry out a trip that for him would turn out to be fatal: some minutes ago his ship has just wrecked and he has lost the life. You didn't know anything. I do know. That's why I keep silent so many times."

In many occasions we ask us why reason God does not answer to us, why He remains silent, why He does not carry out immediately what for us turns out to be perhaps evident. Many times we would desire that God could appear stronger, that He acted with more firmness that He defeated immediately to the evil and that He created a better world. Nevertheless, when we intend to organize the world adopting or judging in the place of God, the result is that we do then an even worse world. We are able and we should influence in the world in order to improve it, but without forgetting never who the Lord of the history is. As it has been indicated by Benedict XVI, we perhaps suffer in front of the patience of God. But all we need of His patience. The world is saved by the Crucified and not by the ones that crucified Him. The world is redeemed by the patience of God and destroyed by the impatience of the men.

33. The moral solitude

"That boy -related the professor Robert Coles- was fifteen years old. The study went very badly to him, and he used to pass hours and hours in his room listening music with the door closed."

"A day I asked him for his life and his problems, and he refused to speak of them, with a gesture of disdain. "Why you reply with that gesture?" I asked him. "Because nothing", he answered. "And it will not be perhaps due to you?" I ventured. By hearing that, he turned, he looked at me with attention, and he waited some seconds before murmuring: "Why do you say that?"

"I felt then that I had approached to an important problem of him, and that perhaps that boy was quite near of opening his heart and to allow me to help him, but that also he was able suddenly to block the access to him. I preferred not to respond directly to his question and, with certain inconvenience, after having suffered his boast, but with affection, I told him: "It seems to me that I understand what you feel, and I know that in those moments it seems that one can count nothing to nobody, because one does not know well what passes to him, neither what to do with oneself neither what to say". The young remained looking at me, he didn't say anything, but, when he removed their handkerchief, I realized that his eyes had begun to become watery.

"We spoke several times, and that boy was leaving little by little the abyss of desperation, of his apparent impenetrable solitude. It turned out to be extraordinarily costly to him to analyze that mixture of feelings, doubts, yearnings and interior injuries and, above all, to express them in words to another person. Little by little he was beginning to show as a young full of grudges, very reserved, disdainful of any moral guideline and hypercritical. He was a brilliant observer that detected with great intuition the errors and the falsehoods of the entire world, but he could not remain there and later he directed his attention to himself and he judged himself also with extreme severity.

"Only after some time, and I needed quite a lot of it, I began to realize that, in the bottom, he was looking for aid to evaluate his life with moral criteria."

That boy adopted an attitude of vital skepticism, with which he tried to hide that he habitually felt alone, rare, sad and quite irritated. He lied, despised the others, he lived in the middle of a premature sexuality and of an abuse of the alcohol that had carried him to a persistent solitude. A solitude that was not only emotional, but also moral. His life had broken with the moral values learned in his childhood, and he was paying for it a very high price.

The moral abandonment has very painful consequences, and that is such so much for the ones that go to an elite school as for the ones that live in the alleys of a suburb. The anxiety that accompanies to the lack of sense, and to which is frequently added the abuse of the alcohol, or the abuse of the sex or of other things that try to hide that anxiety, produce with facility situations as the one that we have described. And what can be done? One must understand them, in the first place. And then one must offer them something in which they can believe, something that help them to control the impulse, the bitterness, the dejection and the sensation of grievous uselessness that hounds to all those that don't include an ethic compass that guide them in the bottom of themselves.

The moral education is more important than many believe. It is something of what the young people is hungry and thirsty and that they try bravely to find. The most persuasive moral education is the one that is transmitted with the testimony of our life, with our form to be with the others, to speak with them and to relate to them. When? When we give thanks to the person that serves us in the Coffee House and we try not to treat him with indifference. Or when we try to utilize more the words "thanks" and "please", and not in a self-sufficient, superficial, and mechanical way, but by an authentic desire to learn to break that affection to our individualism, to direct us more to the others and to treat them with consideration, to be important the ones for the others, to be interested for their things with tact and sensibility and to express them our gratitude by anything, although it could be a small thing. Or when we lose the fear to recognize that what we do is wrong, and even when it seems that it doesn't cause harm to nobody - at least it causes damages to ourselves-. Or when we

endeavor that doing more space in our interior for the others, and to offer thus a small accommodation for the others, is better than living absorbed by our own importance. All this creates a way of life; an attitude that facilitates the discovery of the moral truth and that penetrates slowly but effectively in us and in who surround us.

34. Simple solutions

It is said that, in an occasion, Christopher Columbus was invited to a banquet where he had been assigned, as it is easy to suppose, a seat of honor.

One of the guests was a courtier that felt jealousy towards the great discoverer. As soon as he had the occasion, he directed toward him and asked him in a quite arrogant form: -if you hadn't discovered America, perhaps are there other men in Spain that would have been able to do it?

Columbus preferred not to respond directly to that man. He proposed to him a game of wit. He raised, took a fresh egg of hen and invited to all the presents to try to place it so that it could stay standing on one of its ends.

The occurrence had quite a lot of acceptance. Almost all the presents entered to the challenge of that game and they tried to do it one after another, with greater or smaller conviction, in front of the attentive sight of the others.

But the time elapsed and none could manage to find the way by which that damned egg could keep the equilibrium. Finally, Columbus raised himself again, with solemn air, he approached, he took the egg and he struck him slightly against the surface of the table until the shell was a little sunk by one of the extremes. Thanks to that small flattering, he was able to maintain perfectly the egg in vertical position.

-¡Of course, in that way, everybody can do it! - objected, quite annoyed, the courtier - yes, everybody. But "everybody" that could have been able to do it. And he added: - once I showed the route to the New World, "any" can continue it. But "someone" before had to have the idea. And "someone" had later to decide to carry it to the practice.

This old and famous anecdote has ran through the centuries and has carried to the set-phrase of "the egg of Columbus", to refer to those solutions which are very simple in appearance, yes, but that previously "someone" had to have thought them, and "someone" later had to decide to put in practice them.

Many important transformations both in the people as well as in the institutions, the scientific knowledge, and the world of the thought or in the society in general, have their origin in simple discoveries to which "someone" has known how to get a profit. Someone that knew how to get profit of the obvious things, of those truths that all we have access to.

Something like this happened -we jump forward some centuries- the day in which millions of persons saw Fosbury to jump. He surprised to all them with a technique of amazing novelty. The high jumps had always been done by turning the jumper looking to the bar. Nevertheless, on that occasion, Fosbury jumped from behind. That was something so extraordinarily efficient that, a little time after, the previous technique disappeared completely. That revolutionary change was produced thanks to a new discovery, thanks to the development of something that, in spite of seeming so simple and so efficient, it hadn't been done by anybody before.

In the life of any person, or of any institution, or of any society, it turns out to be decisive to be open to those important discoveries. To be sensitive in front of the force of the obvious things, in front of the things that perhaps are so simple that they seem to us not important enough to deserve our attention. Learning how to get more profit from the common sense, to this simple reasoning -not simple neither trivial-, but that cause to glimpse important ideas in a clear and forceful way.

For example, any purpose of personal improvement should seek to free the tremendous potential that encloses the simple fact to face brave and serenely the truth. To that liberating and simple truth, so present and clear when we don't resist seeing it. Because, as it has been written by Lloyd Alexander, "once you have the value to look at the evil face to face, to see it as it really is and to give it its true name, it lacks the power to act on you and you can destroy it". The largest truths can seem topics or generalities sometimes. But that uses to happen only when one is limited to only speak of them, not when, additionally he chooses them as basis for his life.

35. Human models

The character, like the art to well thinking, is not related so much with rules as with models: close to the rule or to the criterion should go the example; and near to the example, the idea and the way to carry it into the practice.

Every man experiences, with greater or smaller frequency, a feeling of emulation in front of some human testimony that is presented to him. Always there are moments in which he remains dazzled by a concrete aspect of a concrete person

and, then -in greater or smaller measure-, he desires to be, in that aspect, like that person.

The man -today perhaps more than in other times- believes more in the live human testimonies that in the teachings. He believes more in the life and in the facts that in the theories. He is recognized in the human models and he feels attracted by them.

All we need models. All we seek them. There are behaviors that attract us with a fascinating force. In front of any human model an empathy is produced, a species of contagion that drags. Only real men decipher what the man is and what he can come to be.

The problem is that this effect is produced so much for the good as for the evil. Therefore it has been always said that the great educational challenge is not in the eloquence of the word - being it very important-, but in the eloquence of the speech of the works, in the greatness of soul of whom has to educate. The things seem less difficult and more attractive, when we see them made life in others.

Therefore it is also decisive that who is in an early phase of the formation of his character has in front of his eyes some attractive humans models, that facilitate him to acquire quickly the criteria of estimation that after don't result to be a varnish, but they respond to well settled principles. And this refers so much to the real models that he sees in human beings living near him as to those other, real or fictions, that are presented to him in the literature, in the movies or in the television.

If a family, an educator, or even a society, presents the evil as something that succeeds, or presents models that many times are models of negative values, would be damaging to all, but, above all, to the youngest, that are the most permeable to those stimuli.

If we offer negative models as tempting goals, then we wouldn't be able to complain if the young seem to be lost, without beliefs neither moral guidelines. It is precise to instill these feelings and those values, because, if not, then we complain without reason. As said C. S. Lewis, sometimes "we eradicate the organ and we require the function. We grow men without heart and we expect of them virtue and initiative. We laugh about the honor and we are surprised of seeing traitors among us. We castrate and we require to the castrated that they have to be fertile".

36. The shadows and the fears

It is very interesting the history of Bucéfalo that horse that only Alexander the Great was capable of riding. All the ones that tried to do it were incapable to be maintained on its rump beyond a few seconds. The animal pranced, reared and immediately gave on the ground with all its riders. Alexander knew it. He observed to the horse with attention and immediately he discovered the secret of that untamed steed. Then he approached to him, got the reins and put him in front of the sun. He caressed him, freed his cloak and of a leap mounted on him and spurred him with energy. He controlled the curvets, without leaving him to be set apart of the direction of the sun, until the animal calmed itself and continued his march in a slowly and tranquil pace. The applauses sounded, and the historians say that, having seeing it Filipo, his father, he predicted that the kingdom of Macedonia that he possessed would remain small for the glory to which was called his son.

Which was that secret that only Alexander was able to discover? It was something very simple. He realized that the horse was frightened of his own shadow. It sufficed with leave him not to see it, with lining up his eyes toward the sun so that the tormented animal could forgot his fears.

The world is full of people to which passes perhaps something similar. They are people apparently normal and confident, but that hide in their interior all a series of fears and complexes that tie them down to the failures and to the bad experiences that they have suffered. Many of their energies are paralyzed by that negative appraisal that they have of themselves. They are hostages of their own past, men or women which fears impede them to face their future with determination and they are impeded to come to be what they are called to be.

I have never liked the candor and the vehemence with which some persons speak about the self-esteem. But I do agree that this matter is a growing problem in our days. To educate to oneself is something like to educate to another. To educate to another one must demand him (if not, we will convert him in an intolerable spoiled person), but also we must treat him with affection, one must look at him with good eyes. In the same way, to educate oneself also one must require, but at the same time one must self treat with affection, to look at oneself with good eyes. Nevertheless, there are too much people that mistreat themselves that reproach rough and repeatedly their own errors, that judged to themselves with too much hardness and that consider themselves incapable to surpass their defects.

It is true that the ones that do not recall their failures of the past are designed to repeat them. But one must do it with equilibrium and with sensibleness. Because the failure can have a fruitful value, the same as there can be sterile successes. A fruitful failure is the one that conducts to new perceptions and ideas that enlarge the experience and the

know-how. It is very famous that anecdote of Thomas Watson, the legendary founder of IBM, that called to his office to an executive of the company that had just lost ten million dollars in a risked operation. The executive was very frightened and he thought that he was going to be fired in an explosive way. Nevertheless, Watson told him: "We have just spent ten million dollars in your formation, I expect that you know now how to take advantage of it".

One can not live obsessed by the shadows and being frightened by them. We all have failures, every day. The evil thing is when one considers that the colt of his life is impossible to dominate, when he throws the towel instead of investigating which are the true causes of his exhaustions and of his inhibitions. If we examine the things with care, perhaps we conclude that, like Alexander, we should take the reins with decision and to maintain the sight looking toward the ideal that gives lights to our life.

37. Religion and moral education

Many parents and educators are worried about the moral education of their children, students, etc. They see that quite a lot of their present problems have the root in a deficient or insufficient basic formation in the moral convictions, criteria of conduct, ideals of life, values, etc. But what more calls the attention to me is that many of those parents and educators, even being considered good believers, barely include the faith at the moment of the education, and that seems to me to be an error of serious consequences.

It is true that one can have a very demanding morale without believing in God. And it is also true that there are persons of great moral rectitude that are not believers. And it is true that one can find respectable ethics that exclude the faith. But I do not see that none of those reasons do advisable that a believing person educate his children as if he didn't have faith, or that he ignore the importance that the religion has in the moral education of any person.

At first sight, I don't see how can exist an ethics that omit totally God and can be considered rationally well founded, because the ethics is remitted to the nature, and this to its author, that cannot be another that God. Besides, an ethics without God, without a superior being, based only in the social consensus or in some cultural traditions, offers few guarantees in front of the clear weakness of the man or in front of his capacity to be manipulated. A reference to God serves -and the history seems impelled in showing it- not only to justify the existence of norms of conduct one must observe, but also for moving the people to observe them. The believer directs himself to God, not only as legislator, but also as judge. Because to know the moral law and to observe it are well different things, and therefore, if God is present -and present without intending to accommodate Him to the own whim, is understood-, it will be easier that those moral laws are observed.

On the other hand, when a man ignores voluntarily to God, it is easy that the man deviate until becoming the unique instance that decides what is good or bad, in function of his own interests. Why to help to a person that with difficulty will be able to correspond to me? Why forgive? Why to be faithful to my husband or to my woman when it is so easy not to be? Why not accept that small easy profit? Why take a risk to speak the truth and not to leave that be another who pay the consequences of my error?

Who doesn't have conscience of sin and doesn't admit that someone is over him that judge his actions, founds a lot more defenseless in front of the temptation to be erected as the judge and as the supreme decissor of the good things and of the bad things. That doesn't signify that the believer does always right, either that he is not deceived ever; but at least he is not alone. He is less exposed to deceive himself by saying that it is good what he likes and that it is bad what he doesn't like. He knows that he has inside a moral voice that, in determined moment, will notify him: stop, you must not continue over there.

Without religion it is easier to doubt if it is worthy to be faithful to the ethics. Without religion it is easier not to see clearly why conducts that suppose sacrifices should be maintained. This happens even more when that laical morale is transmitted from a generation to another without barely any reflection. As it has been indicated by Julián Marías, the ones that at the beginning maintained those secular principles as elements of an ideological debate, they had at least the enthusiasm and the idealism of a cause that they defended with passion. But, if that morale is transmitted to the youngest, to the children, and later to the children of these, without any linkage to religious beliefs, it is easy that this idealism remain in some simple ideas without a clear base and, therefore, they lose vigor.

When it is denied that there is a judgment and a life after the death, it is quite easy that the perspectives of a person become reduced to what can happen in this life. If the man counts on nothing more because he doesn't believe in the beyond, the sense of last responsibility tends to be diluted, and the moral rectitude deteriorates more easily.

There are occasions in which the motives of natural convenience to act well prompt us with great force. But there are other occasions -and they are not few- in which those motives of natural convenience lose weight in our mind, by any reason, and then are the supernatural motives the ones that take a greater prominence and they help us to act as we owe. To ignore any of them is a moral error and an educational error of great reach. Therefore, the believing parents that give little importance to the religious formation of their children use to finish realizing their error, but almost always late

and with bitterness.

And what to say to whom, in spite of seeking to God, doesn't have faith? I would say to him that to seek to God is an important step and that, almost always, supposes to have already something of faith. If the search is sincere, sooner or later he will find Him. I would recommend to that person that would thought about his own conduct and in the truth, that he reflected on what is good and what is bad, and that he tried to act according to it, because it is perhaps God exactly who is asking to him, and by acting well he is arranging to discover to Whom is the source of the Goodness.

38. Respect to the sacred thing

In the present society -I write glossing ideas of Joseph Ratzinger-, thanks given to God, the one that dishonors the faith of Israel, its image of God, its large figures is fined or punished. It is fined also who despises the Koran and the profound convictions of the Islam. Nevertheless, when it is a matter of what is sacred for the Christians, the liberty of opinion appears like a supreme right whose limitation would result in a threat against the tolerance and the liberty.

The surprising fact that, in the western world, the insults to any religion except to the Christian are punished with severity, contrasts in a notorious way with the evident Christian roots of our society, that have favored along its history an enormous social and moral advance as well as of economic and of scientific development. The West suffers a strange lack of self-esteem towards its history, towards the roots that have given it its present force. It is noted in this a species of complex, that only can be qualified as pathological, of a society that tries -and this is worthy of compliment- to be opened full of comprehension towards the external values, but that seems not to value itself; that tends to put its attention always in the sadder and in the darker of its past, but that fails to perceive the profound values that support it.

Our society needs a new acceptance of itself, a humble and certain critical acceptance, but without falling in the abandonment or in the negation of what is of itself. The multiculturalism cannot subsist without points of reference. And it cannot subsist, for example, without respect toward the sacred thing. It is a matter of a fundamental point for any culture: the respect toward what is sacred for the others and the respect to the sacred thing in general, to God. And this is perfectly demandable also to who doesn't believe in God. If that respect is broken, somewhat essential sinks in the society, because the liberty of opinion cannot destroy the honor and the dignity of the others.

For the other cultures of the world, the absolute profanity that has been forming in the West is something deeply strange. They are convinced that a world without God doesn't have a future. Therefore it is still more necessary than the multiculturalism respect and protects also our Christian values, at least with the same force with which it opens to others. Because the respect to the sacred elements of the other only is possible if the sacred thing -God- is respected. And the ones that are Christians, certainly we should be able and we should learn of what is sacred for the others, but it is also our job to show in us the face of God, of that God that has compassion of the poor and of the weak, of the widows and of the orphans, of the foreigner; of the God that to such an extent is human being that He has become Himself a man, a man suffering next to us, He gives dignity and hope to the pain.

The destiny of a society depends always of active minorities that have convictions. The consequent Christians should see themselves as such creative minorities and to contribute that our society recovers again the best of its inheritance and know how to put it to the service of all the humanity. Otherwise, the heritage of values of the West, its culture and its faith, that on what is based its identity, will enter in a serious slope, just in this hour in which so necessary is its spiritual vigor to improve the world in which we live.