Ecco la traduzione in inglese del testo estratto dal documento:

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WALKING TOGETHER (CAMMINARE IN DUE)

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WHEN LOVE KNOCKS

What is love? It is estimated that three-quarters of literature addresses it in all its aspects, and it seems that all this interest is not enough for man's thirst for love—a man who is continually searching for it, always and vainly hoping to be satisfied by it.

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Only we Christians know what love is and where it is to be found: love is our substance, and to love is to live. Indeed, God, who is love, made us in His image and likeness, which is to say, love: we are love. We are nothing else. Muscles, senses, intelligence, will, and feeling are the means through which love is manifested: they are used rightly and happily if they are used for love. As soon as one strays from love, one enters into disorder and anguish; one leaves God and life, and enters into death.

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Man, however, cannot stop himself from loving, because if he did not love, he could not live, not even physically. Having departed from the love of God—that is, from the object of his happiness—he desperately turns to love someone or something, and falling lower, unable in the end to love others, he takes refuge in self-love: a sterile and most unhappy love, but love nonetheless.

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Chosen creatures love God directly and find the most certain and tranquil happiness, having no fear of losing the object of their love; but God has permitted, and indeed commanded, man to love Him also through His creatures, which are His handiwork and His glory. Man finds his happiness in loving creatures as well, provided it is an ordered love—that is, always a love of God within the possession and enjoyment of His creatures.

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The love a man has for a woman, and a woman for a man, is first in order of time and right, the most legitimate, the most comforting, and the most fruitful: it is a sublime love, the most sublime after the love of God.

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There is no human endeavor worthier than this love or that should take precedence over it. No social status or professional commitment justifies giving up marriage. All fears that marriage limits a person's freedom and works stem from a falsification of its concept and value.

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The family is the greatest work man can build for himself and for society: in nothing else does he glorify God as in fatherhood—spiritual in the priesthood, natural in marriage. In nothing else does he find such honor and such richness. With no other work does he build society as with the family, which is a source of life and energy.

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How is love born? The origin of love is mysterious and any explanation is insufficient: its origin is God Himself, and therefore unfathomable to us, though recognizable through the means God gives us.

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At first, a young man feels a mysterious and sweet attraction toward a woman—an attraction that grows day by day until it invades and gently dominates him.

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The thought of the woman gives him an indefinable emotion, exalts him, and invites him: he sees in the woman the creature of his happiness. Everything about her gives him sweetness: the memory, the presence, the voice, the color and softness of her hair, the smile, the grace of her figure and movements. For her, he would give anything; he would be ready to perform any act of heroism.

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It is the first impulse, the first attitude toward love: the first calling to marriage. But it is not yet time to choose, because he likes the woman simply as a woman, and he feels the same charm toward one girl or another, indifferently.

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Every time he finds himself in the presence of a pleasant young woman, his heart beats faster and he feels as though he has met his love; but a little reflection convinces him that he was mistaken: something is wrong, some symptom warns him of the error.

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Meanwhile, the need for love becomes stronger and takes on clearer contours: not all women please him anymore, but only a few who possess specific physical and moral qualities. Attention polarizes; internally, we shape our ideal woman, the one we think suits our taste, temperament, and upbringing.

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Then, finally, the meeting happens. How, when, and why it happens at that moment is a mystery. Indeed, cases favored by romantic literature—of a sudden encounter and an instant flame—are rather rare.

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Generally, the meeting happens at a given moment with a woman already known previously, perhaps a friend from long ago, toward whom love has suddenly or gradually been born.

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From that moment on, there is only her. The others fade in his imagination, and she reigns supreme. From that moment, the young man relates everything he thinks, says, and does to her: he is no longer alone, he is with her, even if he has not yet declared his love.

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Something of his has already departed from him; something more than Adam's rib has settled in her: he is no longer complete—and therefore unhappy—without her. He needs to talk to her, or at least see her, or at the very least evoke her in his imagination.

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This love is good and does no harm to the young man. It does not harm his studies, his work, or his family and social relationships: it does not harm him, but benefits him, making him happier and better.

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However, he must ensure that it is truly good and willed by God, and not a deception of either the senses or the imagination.

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Deception of the senses is a gross deception that is easily discovered. It is enough to consider whether the thought of her inspires impure thoughts or rather a livelier desire for goodness, purity, and perfection.

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If it awakens impure thoughts, we are warned that we are being deceived, and we must force ourselves to forget before passion grabs us by the throat. A marriage entered into under the impulse of the senses would end up an unhappy marriage, destined for failure and misadventure.

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Many young men, on the other hand, redeem themselves from vice to become worthy of the woman they love. Whoever has lost their purity must resolve not to become engaged until they have managed to regain it.

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The sublimity of love requires this victory. It is a commitment to be made before God, her, and oneself, also to prove one's ability to face family responsibilities; for he who has been unable to conquer himself cannot guarantee his ability to overcome challenges in maintaining and guiding a family.

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Engagement must be entered into out of love, never out of calculation of any kind. Woe if love is missing. It is said that marriage is the tomb of love, and it is hard to say anything foolish than that. It is the tomb of love when love was never there in the first place; but if it is truly a contract of love, in marriage it grows day by day: it grows, consolidates, and becomes sweeter and dearer with each passing day.

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There are marriages that succeed well enough even with simple natural love, but they are merely peaceful marriages, not happy ones, because happiness belongs to God, and therefore to supernatural love.

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The certainty of happiness in marriage comes from preparing and contracting it under the bond of grace, of the "mutual charity" spoken of in the Nuptial Mass.

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THE TIME OF ENGAGEMENT

Is it better to get engaged early or wait until one is more mature? It is one of those questions that cannot have a categorical answer, because engagement is not a mechanical operation that can be done at our leisure—like buying a car for those who can afford it, or changing a hairstyle for those who care about it.

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It is good to get engaged when love is born and after recognizing that it is a true, upright, wise love, willed by God. If it is born early, one gets engaged early; if it is born late, one waits for it to be born: there is nothing else to do. Or rather, something can be done: desiring it and praying for it to be born, praying that we meet our future wife, but doing so without mooning about.

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However, if love is born early, it is better that way, and it is not right to let it languish without very serious reasons. Spiritual directors generally advise young people not to have overly long engagements, and they are right, because engagement is a time for mutual knowledge and cannot be prolonged beyond what is necessary due to the dangers it entails. Indeed, if love is good, as it should be, the two young people aspire to perfect union (an aspiration in which there is nothing blameworthy), and a long wait creates a sense of discontent and discomfort.

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But when it is said that the engagement period should not be long, it does not mean that in certain cases it cannot span a few years—even four or five if necessary—without losing its freshness, provided the souls of the two young people remain fresh; and above all, it does not mean that young people should not get engaged early: if anything, they will marry early, and that will be all to the good.

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We have grown accustomed to making too many calculations and have ended up thinking too much with the spirit of materialists, who cannot do anything without translating it into numbers and studying its economic convenience: people who, for fear of dying of hunger, have let their hearts die of sadness.

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From the little experience we have gained, we can testify that the marriages most fruitful in every kind of good are those made between those youngest in age. When young, the heart is purer, and marriage has a special fragrance that it maintains even with the passing of years. On the other hand, someone who marries at a later age necessarily carries a bit of weariness, even if they have remained pure in their senses—or at least it requires greater effort on their part to rediscover the fragrance of youthful love.

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Of course, one cannot marry without a minimal economic foundation, but its importance should not be exaggerated. The author knows someone very well who, when he married, earned just enough to put something in his stomach in the morning without the certainty of being able to repeat the experiment in the evening, and bought his first home furnishings on debt. In fact, during the first month, to eat, he sold the only thing he had left: his bicycle. But without regret: that certain sense of adventure appealed to the young newlyweds, who felt richer than a nabob, and within a few years, they managed to pay off their debts, complete the home furnishings, and achieve a certain level of comfort.

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They worked tirelessly, always full of faith, and if someone had gone to offer them wealth, they wouldn't have known what to do with it, because a hard-earned earthenware cup has more brilliance than a gifted crystal goblet.

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Still enslaved by social conventions, many young people postpone marriage until they are sure they won't "disappear" behind a lack of rich clothes and home furnishings. These are young people who delay the greatest of joys (and who can recover lost time?) for the most fleeting of pleasures: we have nothing to say to them, except that we hope the Lord opens their intelligence and heart.

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Furthermore, there are too many disconsolate and distrustful young men around regarding women. They are betrayed by their poor upbringing, and if they share any fault, it is that they allowed themselves to be deceived. Naturally, by force of watching shows where women inevitably betray, reading books that exalt the freedom of senses and moral bonds, and keeping company where the same is said and perhaps done, one cannot help but form an unflattering concept of women (and why not of men?).

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But is it like that in our families? In the many families we know, is it really like that? A young man once told me he wouldn't marry a woman from a certain city for all the gold in the world. "In that city, women are all corrupt!" And he swore up and down that high and low, north and south, in that city, there was no escaping corruption.

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That young man knew all the brothels in the city and all the places of questionable rendezvous, and he knew what dismal things were committed in those environments; he knew that even ladies who wouldn't answer a greeting on the street so as not to appear condescending frequented them.

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He knew virtually only those environments, and he refused to believe in honesty and virtue. One day I placed a sheet of paper in front of him and asked him to write down a few figures and attempt a statistic of the women who, according to him, populated those places of corruption. He set to work earnestly, and to tell the truth (whether he was accurate or not, I couldn't say), he passed the number of two thousand.

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"You know," I told him, "that the city has nearly half a million inhabitants. Removing the male population leaves roughly two hundred fifty thousand women; subtract the young girls and elderly women, and you have at least one hundred thousand active women. You see clearly that your corrupt women represent barely two percent, and most of them do not belong to the city's stable population".

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He was struck by the comparison, although he tried not to give up. Then, little by little, he changed his habits and environments, as well as his entertainment, company, and reading, and I watched him blossom again.

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One day he announced to me that he had cut ties completely with that life, which he defined as degrading. I didn't bring it up again because I knew he was ashamed of it. A year later he became engaged and then married a girl from that city—a flower of purity.

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"I am not worthy of her," he told me. "The Lord has overwhelmed me with His mercy".

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"You wouldn't have been worthy two years ago, but now you are. But are you convinced," I remarked with a smile, "that human judgment, when not illuminated by grace, is narrow and stops at its own experiences?"

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He was deeply convinced of it.

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Despite the corrupt man doing everything to ruin women, most of our young women are still healthy in body and soul. Rather than fearing them, young men should worry about themselves and make themselves worthy of meeting the girl of their dreams—whom God certainly holds in reserve and will be happy to reward to those who have deserved her.

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THE DECLARATION OF LOVE

In declaring love to a girl, one must not be too hasty. The habit of "stopping her" and writing to her without first getting to know her a bit is not the most suitable for success. The young man expects that poor girl to suddenly feel ablaze with love for a stranger or almost throw herself into his arms, emotional and happy. Unfortunately, there are such thoughtless girls, but they are not the most advisable: those who ignite quickly, extinguish quickly as well.

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Haste, which is never capable of accomplishing anything good, ruins many good intentions and grants many tearful failures. The path of love opens with affection and charm, and charm naturally cannot arise without some mutual acquaintance.

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One must find a way to make oneself known and appreciated, and since love sharpens the mind, good opportunities to be known and appreciated will not be lacking, if one deserves to be appreciated.

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We have spoken of good opportunities to discourage the young man from seeking encounters at dance parties or in places of poor taste, because an engagement born while dancing will lead—barring special grace—to a dancing, restless marriage.

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Good opportunities, moreover, are numerous: the happiest are those met within common works of apostolate and in the common paths of the Lord, but good ones also include school, work, gatherings with friendly families, outings, etc.

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It is good to keep in mind right away that charm cannot be forced, and nothing is less charming than a young man striving to be charming. The attitude should be as natural and simple as possible. When a young man transforms and changes his posture in the presence of a girl (how many do!) to get noticed, he arouses anything but attraction—he arouses pity.

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With a bit of common sense, the young man should notice after a while whether his company is welcome or not to the object of his love: there are certain nuances that escape even the most polite and gentle girl who tries out of courtesy to hide her aversion, and these nuances do not deceive unless love has blinded him.

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How does one make a declaration of love? Whoever can do it verbally should go ahead: it is the most direct method and has its advantages. But a letter has been and remains the classic means of declaring love, and it also has undeniable advantages—mainly that of allowing the

woman more freedom for reflection and therefore offering a more considered and definitive response.

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The letter should be as simple as a conversation: the simpler it is, the better it turns out, as it better reveals the maturity and composure of the suitor.

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The response is not always absolutely positive (a woman is not always able to overcome the reservation of modesty), just as it may not be absolutely negative.

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When the response is negative, it is up to the young man's perspicacity to read between the lines to see if it is worth trying again or rather desisting. A partially negative answer reveals hesitation, and therefore an uncertain temperament that the man will later need to help shape during the engagement; or it reveals a proud character that likes to be pursued, and to this one must pay close attention, for if one fails to bend a woman's pride during engagement, one will never succeed later.

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A decisively negative answer calls for no further replies. He who pleads and begs does wrong, because even if he succeeds in bending her will, he will start from a position of inferiority that will be difficult to overcome later: love can neither be bought nor begged for. One must have the strength to command oneself and say no to the heart even if it costs tears: better to suffer right away than to suffer forever.

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In certain cases, reasons for refusal can be very noble and cost the person refusing a sublime sacrifice, imposed by family conditions or other duties; in such cases, no general rules can be given because each situation has its own precise character and must be resolved individually. But if two people love each other with supernatural love, they will know how to resolve them according to God's will.

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A positive answer opens the relationship of engagement. There may be further correspondence to arrange the initial details, or agreements may become verbal right away.

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Many complicated customs have fallen away, and even regarding love, things have become much simpler; yet it is certainly a sign of propriety and a guarantee of harmony that the young man's parents officially introduce the fiancée to her parents.

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The official engagement will then take place according to local customs, which vary greatly, or it may not take place at all, provided everything is done according to the sound rules of Christian morality and chivalry, without heavy remnants of paganism or different beliefs.

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A habit that should be overcome is fixing certain set hours on specific days of the week for the couple to meet in the fiancée's home—hours and days to which people in some places are too formally attached.

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The fiancé should be welcomed into the fiancée's home like a son, without time restrictions other than those dictated by proper balance in respect of mutual needs.

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"Making love" (fare all'amore) is a overly materialistic expression that does not suit us. Visiting each other, talking, walking together, and thinking of each other *is* loving each other—something far more beautiful and sublime than "making love," which denotes a material action. Therefore, it should not be said that the two are "making love," but simply that they are engaged.

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Gifts between engaged couples are virtually inevitable, and as an expression of affection, it is good that they exist. However, they must be given wisely and without forgetting that no gift can cover an un overcome vice, or cause an increase in esteem—at least from a woman who has a bit of intelligence and does not let herself be caught by the sparkle of trinkets.

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Gifts should not even serve as the frame, but only as the final touch to the frame of the engagement picture; they must come last in importance and value compared to other values, moral and social.

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The finest gift is to be worthy of one another and to cooperate in the mutual pursuit of perfection. Accessory gifts should respect the condition of each fiancé, so that a wealthy fiancé does not give lavish gifts to a poor fiancée, causing her the embarrassment of being unable to reciprocate, or vice versa. They should also be wisely measured in quantity so that they are appreciated: the habit of constant gift-giving diminishes interest and, consequently, affection.

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The engagement must not begin with any ambiguity or implicit understanding, for it would be a foolish illusion to believe that certain things will remain hidden; and even if they do, the

secret to be kept will be an icy blade that permanently cools the relationship between the engaged couple and, later, the spouses.

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Instinct leads us to hide certain faults and flaws so as not to diminish in our partner's esteem—or simply to avoid causing her pain—but it is a stance that must be faced courageously and resolved before the solution becomes increasingly difficult and painful.

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It is best to present ourselves as we are. It is a necessary act of honesty: everything must be told, including habits, religious and political ideas, and whatever else serves genuine knowledge; equal sincerity must be required of the fiancée. For example, those young men do great harm who attempt to partially conceal their fruitful work in the apostolate so as not to "overwhelm" a fiancée who does not fully share their views, thinking they will do so later when she is more mature. Experience shows that in most cases, these are illusory hopes; the truth is that those young men love their fiancée more than the apostolate and are too afraid of losing her.

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They start with a compromise—that is, in a position of inferiority—and will recover poorly. If one does not start with clarity, one can expect anything except the right to a successful engagement. Clarity never hurts, least of all in a matter of such great importance.

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Ecco la traduzione in inglese del testo fornito:

READING WITHIN

The fiancée must be pleasing, and therefore a more or less happy choice depends on the taste of the one who chooses. In painting, those who do not understand it allow themselves to be influenced by bright colors and the immediacy of the drawing; the more refined, on the other hand, by wanting to over-subtlize, end up confusing technique with art, and thus only those with good taste and a sense of balance are capable of giving a confident judgment. The same thing happens with women. Whoever has habits and tastes that we do not want to define as vulgar, but at least carnal, is struck by blatant and provocative beauty and remains entangled by it. Then he will have to deal with it himself, because usually such overly highlighted beautiful skin does not correspond to an adequate inner beauty, but rather an impressive emptiness that will later bring its cheerful consequences. The refined allow themselves to be struck by culture and spirit, but even these are qualities that alone are not enough to make a good companion for a man. Indeed, they are more often a cause of sorrow than of consolation, because they solicit self-esteem, and the ambitious woman will adapt unwillingly to marital subjection, whereby peace will be compromised. To be sure of having good taste and therefore hope to make a good choice, it is necessary to possess a good inner

preparation, which acts on sentiment, but also on intelligence and will. Anyone who, as a sensual young man or at least one with common tastes, has managed to become a young man of spiritual tastes, will have noticed how this evolution has also been accomplished in an intellective and aesthetic sense. For example, if before he liked a banal play or a silly novel, now he realizes that that play is banal and that novel is silly: he no longer likes them, and he laughs at himself and at the time when he liked them. Now he relishes what he did not relish before because he did not understand. He has acquired, in the spirit of Christ, the sense of charity and universal love: he sees everything with a wise and moved eye, discerns the beautiful from the ugly, the good from the bad, the true from the false; he penetrates deeply and judges wisely. With this spirit, he cannot fail to like the woman who will neither betray nor disappoint him. More than seeing beauty, he will feel it and discover it in her soul. It will not merely be an external beauty, but a beauty that shines from within in the gentleness of her face and smile, and which will be deeper and more secure than any other physical quality, of the heart and intelligence: it will be a sense of humility, goodness, and charity, which angelicizes the woman. Other qualities will be subordinate to this one, which will order them and guide them to the rightful end. "I would like my fiancée," said Frédéric Ozanam, "to be better than me, but to be humble enough not to make me realize it". Since the man must be the head of the woman and the family, and this not out of his ambition, but by God's command, it is natural that when he possesses superior qualities to hers, especially spiritual ones, command becomes easier and safer. It is right, indeed a duty, that he who must be a guide and teacher be worthy of being one, and must strive with all his soul and all his will to be worthy of it. But when the fiancée has something more than him—such as more beauty, better health, more culture, more money, a better social status, etc.—she must be, as Ozanam said, humble enough not only not to make it noticeable, but to be intimately convinced that she is worth less than her fiancé. One can see how necessary, even indispensable, it is for a young man who wants to get engaged to prepare for the choice through a "school of taste," under the teachings of the sole Master, who knew how to "read within" (intelligence derives from Latin and means precisely to read within) and chose without making mistakes. The first conquest must be that of purity, without which clarity of intelligence is not possible. And what if the young man began this process of renewal after the engagement and now realizes he made a bad choice? He is bound to her by a promise that he cannot break without serious reasons, and the most serious and legitimate reason of all for repudiating a fiancée is the lack of love: the realization that she pledged herself without true love. Then one resorts to the test of love, inducing her to follow on the path of spiritual perfection—naturally without demanding more than she can give, because the measure of God's gifts is different for everyone, and each of us must answer for what he possesses and no more. But it will be seen whether or not she puts all her will into it, and whether she does so willingly or not. If this test succeeds, it will be sufficient. If it fails, we can begin to have strong doubts that she loves us, but we are not yet sure. Further tests are then needed. A Novena to the Virgin could be agreed upon together so that she may enlighten both on their love, and see if she submits to it willingly, and how she then decides. Still other tests, and these tests should be tests of docility. Whether she is obedient to certain small demands, such as wearing a certain dress that she does not

particularly like, taking a walk itinerary chosen by the fiancé, giving up going to the cinema, and other small things that serve sufficiently, by her behavior, to reveal if she loves us, respects us, and recognizes her dependence on us. If these tests go well, it seems to us that it is not permissible to abandon the fiancée simply because her tastes have remained inferior to ours, provided, of course, that one continues to love her; because if one no longer loves her, then it would certainly be a case for parting ways. In any case, the inferiority of tastes must not crack the virtue and honesty of the future family, but should merely be a cross to bear, as atonement for errors committed. Usually, however, if the woman is not too proud or too stubborn, the man makes her as he wants her. Not for nothing is she "flesh of his flesh" and therefore subject to his will and receptive to his guidance. A popular proverb says that birds of a feather flock together. That is, it says what we have tried to explain in this chapter. If the similarity is not very pronounced at the time of engagement or departs from it later, it is up to the man to shape it or reshape it so that the union turns out pleasing and comfortable. It has been said that the woman must be pleasing, and therefore the choice must be absolutely free. If she is not pleasing and one gets engaged for other reasons, in the hope that love will come later, a great foolishness is committed, as well as an injustice toward her, because no one has promised us that love will be born; and if it should not be born, as almost always happens, a great betrayal has been committed, for which not only will the consequences be paid, but an account will be rendered to God for false witness in a matter grave enough to strip a creature of His of her freedom forever. As for the age of the contracting parties, it also has its importance. Marriages in which the woman's age is equal to or a few years younger than the man's commonly turn out to be less secure for marital peace. In a freely chosen fiancée, a man can look at himself and recognize his own flaws and virtues. Having chosen her similar to himself, he is similar to her, and therefore, rather than scolding or—worse yet—despising her (whoever despises her does not love her), it is better to scold or despise oneself, and then act, in a second step and gently, upon her. What has a girl who was previously engaged to someone else lost? She has certainly lost something, at least the freshness of her heart, but if she wants to, she can find it again, and there is no creature that cannot be reborn with the help of God. Therefore, the principle of not wanting to get engaged to young women who have already been engaged is a prudent principle, but one that cannot be adopted absolutely. The past matters and must weigh on the judgment, which must be accurate and enlightened, but it must not matter so much as to suffocate the present: it is the present that matters most, with all the guarantees it can give and the tests to which it can be subjected. Purity of the body can also be acquired. What matters is that the woman feels the mortification and sorrow for the wrong committed and asks the fiancé for help to become pure again for him. The young man has the duty to inform himself as accurately as possible about his fiancée's past if she is not well known to him, but then he must not remain with the doubt of being deceived. One cannot get engaged without mutual trust, which rests on reliable information and present behavior.

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FIANCÉES AND COUNTRIES

Moglie e buoi dei paesi tuoi (Choose a wife and oxen from your own village). This proverb is also a bit too practical and rather disrespectful toward women with that comparison to the monumental solemnity of a pair of oxen, but it has its importance as an indication. It means that the more similar we are, the easier it is for the union to remain good, because neither one nor the other has to endure the effort of overcoming disparity to become similar. Therefore, it is recommended that the fiancée be from the same place and thus have the same cadence of speech, the same habits, and possibly the same tastes. It is good that she also has the same level of education and culture and belongs to the same social standing: poor with poor, and rich with rich. Different arrangements, which aim toward a fairer distribution of wealth, are beautiful only in the imagination of romantics. In practice, they are almost always the cause of disagreements and mortifications. Likewise, the same education and culture contribute greatly to marital peace, because they facilitate the union, which must also manifest in the possibility of understanding and being understood in one's inclinations; there is no doctor who is not satisfied to be able to talk about medicine to his wife, just as there is no mechanic who does not enjoy hearing her ask for explanations about the lathe and the milling machine. But all this is not essential. If love arises between two young people from different places or social standings, that difference is not sufficient to advise against the engagement, provided that what unites them is love and no other interests interfere. Supernatural love will make them similar, helping them to carry out the effort of overcoming discords, including those of temperament and taste. A fiancé who loves sports cannot reproach his fiancée for loving music, and a fiancée who knows she displeases her fiancé by being seen swimming in public needs only to give it up to please him. A fiancée without culture, provided she has a bit of intelligence and heart, can comfort an educated fiancé just as much as an educated woman could, by inviting him to speak, listening to him, and willingly taking an interest in the things he prefers. "All day long," a fiancée told me, "he talks to me about things foreign to my world, and at first I found it hard to listen, but he was so comforted by it that my effort was more than rewarded, and now I have ended up loving what he loves". Supernatural love smooths everything and bridges everything. A fiancé had lost an eye in an accident and was left facially disfigured. Being an honest young man and not wanting to force his fiancée into taking a step that she might now take out of pity rather than love (pity is not love), he said to her: "You were engaged to a young man who had two eyes and no scars on his face; now this young man is no longer as he was then, and he releases you from your promise". The fiancée wept with emotion and replied: "What do I care about your eye? I love you, not your eye; even if you had lost both of them, you would not have lost my love". Man is less generous than woman, and who knows if he would have given her the same answer had she been the one to lose an eye; but we like to hope so. In certain cases, the Lord allows the trial by fire in love, and blessed are those who know how to overcome it, for they will have nothing left to fear. We have touching cases of young people who marry all the same, knowing that following an illness of one of them, they will no longer be able to have children, or will have to endure the company of a partner who is permanently disabled. It is a grave step that should not be taken without long and serious meditation, and if possible in agreement with one's spiritual director; but such an act of sublime love cannot fail to be pleasing to the Lord. Where, however, the health of

children comes into play, the case no longer concerns only the two contracting parties, but future third parties who have not voluntarily consented, and therefore it must be carried out with the sense of responsibility it requires. Jealousy is and is not a disease of love. All engaged people are more or less jealous, and if this were a disease, it would mean there is no escape. Whoever loves is jealous of the object of his love, and there is nothing to reproach him for as long as he does so with discretion and does not cross certain limits. Jealousy must consist in the desire to defend and preserve the exclusivity of love; but once this is obtained, that is enough, otherwise it truly becomes a disease—and a bad disease—that can have the most painful consequences. Jealousy as a disease is a lack of trust and therefore of respect; when we reach this point, it would be much better to break off the engagement and return to one's own freedom. A jealous fiancé sees everything as if through a distorting mirror that warps any act, and he neither has nor gives peace anymore. If he has doubts about the fidelity of his betrothed, he must not consume himself in torment, but simply and calmly put her to the test. Let him do so, however, with all the respect that an accused person not yet proven guilty deserves. For example, he has some suspicion regarding a certain person or environment that his fiancée frequents. He should not scold her, but say to her with all composure: "I do not like you going around with so-and-so or in such-and-such a place, because in your familiarity with that person, and through no fault of yours, I see this and that danger; and I am not pleased with you frequenting that environment because I do not consider it safe for this and that reason". Just like that, simply. If she loves her fiancé, she will obey; and if she does not obey him, the fiancé will be able to say to her, hiding or not hiding his pain: "I am so sorry, but we are not made for each other, seeing that we have such different tastes. Let us separate in holy peace, for the good of both of us". It is true that there are cases where things are not so simple, for example, when the fiancée works and the fiancé is jealous of someone who works with her. He is not permitted, out of a simple suspicion or an even simpler fear, to ask her to leave or change her work environment, especially if she needs to work and cannot change environments without harm. Without agonizing over her behavior or taking fireflies for lanterns—such as believing she loves her boss just because she willingly speaks of him, he being the person she is most in contact with—there are many means to obtain proof of whether she loves her fiancé, and these means mainly concern her docility and her spirit of sacrifice, provided, of course, that she is asked reasonable and not impossible things. Even here, the subtle nuances of feeling may suffice, which do not betray a serene observer—if a jealous person can manage to be serene. Can a fiancée be allowed to wear makeup with beauty products? In general, she cannot be forbidden, provided it is kept within decent limits; but she should be the one to understand that the game is not very advantageous for her, because it is much better to present ourselves as we are and be loved as such, rather than to have someone love a figure in us that is not our usual one, and which at the moment of union—when all pretense is no longer possible—might cause some disappointment and cool down love. It is always a matter of sincerity, which is the safest and most pleasing thing. A woman with makeup is a woman who is in some way lying; and speaking of lies, a woman who lacks spiritual formation is known to be a master of them. But since women's lies also do not have long legs and do not go very far, it is easy to discover the trick and remedy it. Simplicity,

moreover, benefits beauty: the simpler a woman is, the more pleasant she is. If anything, what should be appreciated is a certain composed elegance in dress, which is a sign of good taste and gentleness of soul, whereas luxury in itself almost always reveals an inner poverty. Elegance attracts, while luxury dazes. Elegance is the healthy state of beauty; luxury is its violent exasperation, and therefore a lack of confidence and balance.

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THE ART OF MAKING ONESELF LOVED

The girl is pleasing, and possesses all the virtues suitable to make her liked by an honest young man; however, the same could not be said of her family: she is like a flower pinned in a swamp and stony ground. In her home there is no virtue, or no balance, nor peace. What should the young man in love do? Many advise in this case to abandon the cause and turn one's eyes and heart elsewhere, raising the danger that the family's temperament will sooner or later reveal itself in the girl, resulting in some nasty surprise. We do not like to be so categorical, given that saints have been known to be born from families that were anything but holy. That caution should be exercised regarding the family, we agree; and that the mentioned danger exists, we do not doubt. But it seems to us that the young man's attention should be directed primarily to the girl, and if conditions for supernatural love exist between the two, other reasons do not seem to us sufficient arguments against this love. It will mean that the union of the two young people will take place on the margins of a stormy area, which may even sweep over them, but only to make them suffer and not to submerge them, unless they so wish. Their sorrow, if it bears the Christian mark, will be neither harsh nor useless. We have already spoken of illnesses, and of the duty each contracting party has to declare their defects, both moral and physical. If one looks at what social medicine advises, many marriages would be inadvisable, especially in view of eventual consequences on children; but perhaps in this field too, there is exaggeration. Naturally, if a young man is evidently and incurably ill, he would commit a crime if he married; but when someone is that sick, perhaps he does not even have the desire to, just as it is best that anyone with violent forms of schizophrenia, incurable venereal diseases, and other grave reasons does not get engaged. In other cases, when the consequences of marriage are doubtful, it seems we can advise it, also because recently medicine has affirmed that disease—including tuberculosis—is rarely transmitted directly, but rather only the predisposition to it is transmitted, which is quite a different thing. And ultimately, we Christians, who care more about eternal life than this poor mortal life, should not grow sad in remorse if, after having done everything possible to avoid it, we were to see a child of ours fall into our same illness. A child who dies at two or ten years old is a soul destined to glorify and enjoy God for eternity, and therefore it is much better than if he had never been born. Prolonged illness is dangerous only because it predisposes the soul to sadness, and a sad soul is more easily a victim of rebellion and error. But we must hope that the Lord will not abandon those whom we have entrusted to Him. A woman feels protected only when she feels that her man is stronger than she is. Literature is full of "tamed shrews" and "you know well the art of making yourself loved," addressed to the strong man. If

there could be anything absolute in the world, we would say that in one hundred percent of cases, when the marital train derails, the fault lies with the engineer—that is, the man. Since the absolute does not exist, we will stick to ninety-nine percent, confident of being in the right. In this regard, the famous Gospel episode of the adulteress comes to mind (whoever wishes to consult it will find it in chapter VIII of the Gospel of Saint John). Jesus asks those dear men who want to stone her, as jealous guardians of morality and justice, that whoever recognizes himself as being without sin be the first to cast a stone. Those men remain perplexed for a moment, their hands loosen, and the stones fall at their feet. Then, one by one and in silence, they turn on their heels and walk away from that inappropriate place, leaving the adulteress alone with the only man who could condemn her and does not condemn her. This episode shows us with dazzling clarity that when a woman strays, the primary fault is not hers. The primary culprit is always the man, whether the one who relinquished his authority as head, or the other who enticed her or allowed himself to be enticed. We are interested in the former—that is, the future husband and present fiancé. A fiancé can be gentle with his fiancée, but this gentleness must never be weakness. The weak man has the duty not to get engaged until, with the help of God, he has become strong—that is, a master of himself. Only he who knows how to rule himself will know how to rule others. To the weak man, it may seem that the woman appreciates his submission, but it is not true. A woman is happy only if she is compelled to obey, because that is in her nature, and because that is how God willed it for the order and peace of family society. If the woman recognizes him as weak, she will despise him, and all the whims she displays will be meant as a warning to him, almost a lament and a prayer for him to be strong. All modern theories that preach equality between man and woman and independence from one another are disruptive, utopian, inhumane theories that erode the peace and happiness of spouses and the cohesion of the family. Saint Paul's "Let the man be the head of the woman, as Christ is the head of the Church" is part of that divine law of which "not even a syllable" shall perish, because human nature will never change. As Christ is head of the Church, so too with the same spirit, and this is the secret of success. There are, however, certain engaged couples who do not know how to love each other except by bickering. Let them do so if they like, but he truly makes a poor showing, and who knows what will happen to him when they become "one in two": it will be a unity at war with itself, which therefore cannot reign. Quarrels, pouting, and all other similar "caresses" that certain engaged couples willingly bestow upon each other must be overcome within a reasonable timeframe, by virtue of the man's strength of decision. Bickering indicates the existence of two weaknesses trying to overpower each other without success: it is the exasperated outlet of the weak who wish to delude themselves into thinking they are strong. Don Abbondio would say that no one can give himself courage if he does not possess it; but we know Don Abbondio was wrong, because what is impossible for men is possible for God, and God does not deny the inner virtue of fortitude to the young man who asks for it in humility and faith, and applies his good will to achieve it. The strong man does not accept a quarrel. He states his opinion firmly and awaits the consequences. If the woman does not understand, he does not insist. He tells her: "This is my will; when you are ready to fulfill it, let me know". Then he does not let himself be overcome by tenderness or regret, at any cost, because if he fails to resist, it is

over. It is better to cut off the engagement than to continue it in those unfortunate conditions. If the woman does not step down from her pride and show a grain of intelligence, it is better for both to let her go: the time of engagement is the "novitiate" in preparation for married life, and if it were inevitably to end in failure, there would be no point in it existing. The decision not to leave the fiancée, after recognizing her deficiencies, just to avoid "looking bad" or for other sentimental reasons, is a decision of the weak; let whoever wishes accommodate himself. Afterwards, let him not complain, but weep in silence over his fate.

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THE PRELIMINARY BALANCE SHEET

The young man in love, or at least a candidate for love, must one day decide to sum things up and make a balance sheet of his aptitudes for marriage, to judge whether he is fit to get engaged. First column of the balance sheet: the state of the senses. If he has nothing to reproach himself for, let him go forward; if not, let him stop; one does not get engaged if the problem has not been solved. The old story that a man is not a man unless he commits sensual acts plays havoc among simple-minded young men and manages to convince even some who ought to have enough intelligence not to let themselves be convinced. These young men boast of their animality as something that brings great honor; and it may be that in the animal world this is true, although animals never act against nature, as it is always against nature when the act does not have procreation as its immediate end. Man, on the other hand, does not become a man until he has the strength to break away from animal companions and rise back to his dignity of being ordered to perform every act according to justice and reason. And then a reflection—this one purely natural, without invoking greater responsibilities. The young man who gets engaged continues to commit impure acts: with whom does he commit them? By himself? But when a young man commits vulgar acts alone, is he truly alone in his imagination? If he is alone, he betrays his fiancée in a repulsive manner. If he is with other women, he betrays her just as if he were actually in that company. If he has her in his imagination... let him be ashamed the next day to go and greet her. If he commits these acts not alone, but with other women, he trades in the flesh of his fiancée, repudiating her and deserving that she repay him in the same coin. It may be that, if he has not conquered his senses, he is led to test his fiancée's honesty; and it may also be that the fiancée gives in, not because—mind you—she willingly consents, at least in most cases, but because she fears that by not consenting, he will neglect her or abandon her for others; she yields so as not to lose him, committing, poor girl, a big mistake for which the man is primarily responsible. Indeed, after having possessed her, he will have nothing left to ask of her; the engagement will lose its appeal, and having recognized her as weak, he will begin to despise her, reaching what she unconsciously set herself up for: abandoning her, or marrying her without good will, which is much sadder than abandonment. Therefore, victory over the senses before the engagement, under pain of disorder and discord. Second column: the slag. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, and therefore the heart needs to be cleansed of every bad affection and every vulgarity, so that the word comes out clean from the mouth, as

fits someone who must serve as a guide to the most delicate of creatures. Third column. Whoever gets engaged is no longer alone and is not free to do as he pleases. Everything that conflicts with the good rules of engagement must be eliminated: it is no longer permissible to go on certain escapades, spend the night under the moonlight, get drunk, smoke like chimneys, lose at gambling, spend indiscriminately, and run into debt—all things that are highly honorable among romantic, spineless youth, but not at all suitable for bringing a family together and founding it on rock—that is, on balance, honesty, and order. The young man who wishes to get engaged must prove his willpower by imposing upon himself the habit of thrift and a life regulated according to certain rules that, when desired, are found written in the conscience rather than in law books. Fourth column: temperament. The fiancée must not feel uneasy in the fiancé's company, for any reason. Instead, certain "boiling" fiancé's and suffocating fiancé's oppress the poor girl beside them in a pitiful manner. The "boilers" are those who grumble about everything and everyone, and cannot speak of anything without coming to a boil. The grumbler is a poor spirit not very suited to making a good husband: the cure is found in the habit of recollection and meditation, which helps us know ourselves and others, grounds us in humility, and develops charity. After that, there is no reason in the world to grumble, knowing that we should only grumble about ourselves, and we do not do so out of charity toward our person. On the rest, we can at most state our opinion, but with simplicity and without arguing back—without wanting to have the last word, as certain silly women do. The "suffocating" ones are conceited people who, the less they know, the more they claim to know, and the less they know how to speak, the more they want to be listened to. He who truly knows doubts himself and willingly keeps silent; but I once had a colleague who knew four phrases in French, pronounced them horribly, and repeated them at least sixteen times a day to his fiancée, suffocating her. Then there are the hot-tempered, the discontented, the distrustful, the fanatics, etc., who, if they do not master themselves beforehand, will treat their fiancée as a free emotional outlet and torment her without mercy. Gluttons can speak of nothing but sweets, the vain of clothes, the proud of… imaginary conquests, the slothful of cars and comforts, and so on. All things to be conquered, if the Lord grants the grace (as He gives to whoever asks humbly) to know one's own flaws. Here ends the examination of the most common columns. Let everyone add his own particular ones and solve his personal problems, so as to become a "decent" fiancé, even if it is not possible, for lack of time, to become perfect. Let him try to realize the gravity of his step, which binds another life to his own—a life that, at the moment it entrusts itself, acquires the right, by divine arrangement, to be protected and defended. One may be entitled to ruin one's own existence, if one pleases, but not that of others. It would be a fine thing if the defender himself were the one to commit the devastation, or at least to strip away the peace of the one who came to him to place her peace under his protection. In the company of the fiancée, one must be joyful, and one is not joyful until the soul has been cleansed of all obstructions and toxic fermentations. An operation best done beforehand, just as the home is prepared beforehand while waiting for the most desired guest.

THE MOST REMARKABLE ACT

Certain discontented husbands, who have stumbled upon a bad wife, claim to be victims of an injustice, because when they got engaged they were young, in youth there is no discernment, and it is not fair to discover errors when it is too late to fix them. These husbands reproach God for having mismanaged the rules in establishing the responsibilities of marriage; and since it is foolish to state such enormous things, let us try to see clearly. We know that the age of the soul does not agree with that registered at the civil registry: with God we are mature at eighteen and at the same time, in other respects, young at eighty, whereas without God's light one can be a babbling infant at sixty. In youth, foolish things are committed when we are thoughtless youths; but being thoughtless is not God's fault, who has made available to the young man sufficient means to make him a master of himself, conscious of his acts, wise, and therefore fully responsible. Mistakes are made when little account is taken of God's gifts. One gets engaged more according to instinct than reason; one loves and does not love with supernatural love; things are done or not done according to God's law, which—it must never be forgotten—is a law of love and therefore gentle and highly effective for our true happiness. People want to be happy without enduring effort; they do not seek joy by facing pain when necessary, but rather by avoiding this unwelcome acquaintance, even knowing that joy is stable only after victory over pain. To be clearer, one chooses the woman who delights us without bothering to consider if she is made for us, so as not to know how to face the pain of giving her up, in case a well-performed examination of conscience should warn us of the danger. In short, grave things are done with incredible levity. There are those who put more effort into choosing a tie than a fiancée, and naturally the fiancée will later cause him more trouble than the tie. It will be said that not all young people have had the opportunity to receive adequate spiritual formation, and here collective responsibilities may come into play, whereby some pay for the omissions of others—for example, of parents or environment; but in this case each will pay according to his own responsibility, and whoever pays for others' faults will receive according to justice. In general, however, it is more likely the young man who fails to take advantage of the means at his disposal, and then the responsibility is his. While becoming wise and rich according to the world does not always depend on us, wisdom and wealth of the soul—which are the assets that count—are available to whoever wants them: one has only to request them and receive them. When, however, the married man realizes the mistake made, he should neither give way to despair nor take it out on his wife, who probably has not broken her promise if the husband expected things from her that she, by education and intelligence, could not give. She gave him the beauty that dazzled him, she kept for him the money that enticed him, and in short, everything that pleased him then; if he now seeks different things that he did not seek then, so much the worse for him: it is useless to blame her. There is nothing to do but endure, in good resignation, the consequences of the act committed, as atonement for one's own sins and those of others. A young man liked beauty and looked no deeper. Now he finds himself with a wife with a tiny brain, who blames him for the children he gives her according to good Christian rules, and who interest her no more than a movie show. Another married a woman with a few thousand lire—and with a brain and heart

equally tiny. The conclusion was that she continues to hold onto that little bit of money tightly and would let her husband and children starve to death rather than part with it, with the aggravating factor that she acts this way because that money is her pride, and she uses it to despise her husband, who conversely is a good-natured soul. It serves our peace to recognize ourselves as guilty of our acts and to have the decency to keep quiet about our misfortune. Many times parents are directly responsible for their children's misadventures, not only for failing to educate them properly, but for having driven them themselves into making a marriage of convenience, as it is so poorly called. Parents should never meddle in their children's matters of the heart, at least no more than is allowed to try to straighten out twisted things in time, or things that seem twisted to them; because it is not systematically established that parents always see clearly, especially if the parents do not possess the spiritual wealth of their children. When man was a slave and where he is still a slave, parents chose and choose by authority the bride for their children; but Jesus broke these chains and brought freedom into the world, including the freedom to marry whomever one wishes. There is no well-bred child who does not appreciate the advice of parents, but when this advice seeks to become an imposition, the child has the right to rebel. We must admit that there are not a few young people who should be grateful to their parents for having enlightened them in time; but here we want to speak of those less wise parents who start from materialistic assumptions and, seeing marriage as a business deal, would like to bend their children into concluding it, and if they are not listened to, do not forgive them for having disobeyed. They care more about their selfish desires than about their children's happiness. The children will suffer for it, but they must not, on account of this, permit the disturbing interference of parents in the marriage. They will not cease to respect and love them, they will succor them in time of need, they will forget everything they suffered through their fault, but they must make themselves independent of their influence. This is to prevent, for instance, that by dint of turning the son against his wife—who, whatever she may be, is now his wife and therefore his flesh, and must matter to him more than anyone else, parents included—they succeed in wretchedly digging a chasm between the spouses and encouraging coldness and betrayals. God, who loves us more than parents do, created us free, and wants all our acts to be performed in perfect freedom, among which marriage is certainly the most remarkable. Therefore, when his or her parents do not give their consent to the engagement, the young man must calmly weigh the causes, refer them—if he wants to be more at ease—to his spiritual director, and decide under a right conscience. If he believes that the engagement does not serve the interests of his soul, let him do violence to his heart and listen to the wise advice of his elders: let him do nothing. If, on the other hand, it is clear that the reasons for refusal are not moral or spiritual at all, but merely prejudices of class, environment, etc., the two young people, agreeing together, will resolve with quiet courage to overcome them. The same applies regarding the refusal of her parents, noting that if the refusal concerns his moral conduct, he has only to act accordingly, recognizing himself worthy of receiving it; if, instead, it concerns his different social standing or other unjust considerations, he can try to convince his fiancée not to yield to it, and if she loves him, she will not yield to it. And speaking of the interests of the soul, the young man must beware of the mistake of getting engaged to a

spoiled girl, allowing himself to be carried away by the generous idea of helping her redeem herself from evil. Our nature is too weak to allow us this luxury, and there is the danger of taking a tumble along with her. Let him leave her to the care of other souls of the same sex, or to priestly souls, and try to forget her. If he wishes to save souls, he will meet so many along his path, and since all have the same value, he can do so with greater tranquility, striving to save souls of his own sex, without exposing his own—which, even in the order of charity, must take first place.

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Ecco la traduzione in inglese del testo fornito:

THE SWEET SILENCE

Love does not need many words. Talkative engaged couples are generally not the most capable of loving, because talkativeness is an indication of levity, and whoever is lighthearted is lighthearted in everything, even in love.

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Nor are repeated "I love yous" obligatory. There are engaged couples who never say it to each other, and they love each other no less than others because of it. Love consists more of contemplation than of words, and whoever truly loves enjoys the presence of the beloved being, even without needing the comfort of words. Indeed, knowing how to be together in silence for a certain time without feeling weariness can be a proof of love.

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Love is demonstrated through demeanor and actions, not through words, which, when abundant, cannot help but slip into the artificial.

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Besides, without needing to say "I love you," engaged couples—whatever topic they speak about—are dealing with love, insofar as love is the primary cause of their conversation.

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Decisions must be made by mutual agreement, following a serene discussion in which the engaged couple must not try to make their own opinion prevail out of self-love, but strive to be as objective as possible. The fiancé should show that he greatly appreciates the fiancée's opinion, even if he does not share it. In case of a lack of convergence between the two opinions, the fiancé's should prevail, and he will know how to make it prevail by means of resolute and authoritative, yet gentle, persuasion.

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When he finds it his duty (the exercise of command is a serious duty) to offer a serious and reasoned reproach to his fiancée, he should do so with sorrow, not with rancor.

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Sorrow is serene; it is never angry. Take as an example the reproach made by Our Lady to Jesus after three days of agonizing search. She said these simple words to Him, in which there is so much sorrow and so much sweetness: "Why have you done this? Your father and I were looking for you".

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A reproach is both a request for clarification and an invitation to self-defense: "Why have you done this?". If the fiancée answers with docility, the match is won; if instead she persists in her error, then the fiancé should act without weakness—and without thereby harshening the reproach—but simply by taking the measures he deems appropriate in the common interest.

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As for more intimate relations, the young man must remember that engagement is a marriage of the soul, not yet made complete by that of the whole being.

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The communion of the soul must be full, abundant, comforting, and joyful, and therefore confidence must have no limits; not even a corner of the soul should remain secret: the one must mirror themselves in the other in joyful freedom.

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Sensible contacts, on the other hand, must be more circumspect, in view of the weakness of the flesh. Since even spiritual love needs some sensible sign within us, handshakes, caresses, gentle embraces, and pure kisses cannot be avoided, but all this must happen with discretion and with a religious respect for purity.

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The limit of these intimacies is marked by the first hint of the awakening of the senses. As soon as the young man notices this disturbance, or notices it in his fiancée, he must consider it an alarm signal. He has reached the limit of what is permissible and honest: if he persists, he will enter the zone of sin.

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However supervised the engaged couple may be, it is impossible for them not to remain alone for some time, and it is good that they do so because they need it for their confidences; but they must know how to be alone with the respect that their love requires. It is enough for them to remember that man is never alone, because God who "searches hearts" is always present.

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In marriage there is no wealth worth that of the consolation of arriving both without anything to reproach yourselves for, nor any cloud having come to obscure the clear sky of purity. On

this depends the happy outcome of all married life, which will retain the tone that the engaged couple knew how to imprint upon it through their conduct: marital relations themselves will be marked by this intonation.

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When supernatural love and mutual goodwill are present, clashes of temperament are conquerable. By saying they are conquerable, we mean to assert that they must be conquered before marriage. The engaged couple can agree on the conduct to maintain and on the meeting point of their two temperaments, each sacrificing a little. The fiancé must gladly guide "the conversion," giving it the appeal of a game and the satisfaction of victory whenever he falls into this defect, and not only when it occurs against her, but also when it happens with others.

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Love, with God's help, suggests ingenious and sure solutions. It is enough that this love and this mutual goodwill exist. An irascible fiancé who feels mortified by his weakness in the presence of his gentle and submissive fiancée can authorize her to give him a punishment whenever he falls into this flaw. He will willingly submit to her punishments; she will not despise him for this, but rather appreciate and love him more because she knows he does it for her. He will hand her a little notebook with the task of writing down his outbursts "on record," a notebook that they will consult together from time to time to rejoice in the progress that cannot fail to come.

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A fiancée may be vain or proud. If she has goodwill, she will let herself be corrected and submit to progressive acts contrary to her defects—dressing ever more humbly in the first case, and enduring some humiliation in the second—under the joyful and secure guidance of the fiancé, who will keep the log of "infractions" and assign an appropriate reparation, which the fiancée will gladly fulfill.

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More often, both have something to smooth out, and then they will be mutually accusers and accused, making the game more complete and engaging.

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Mutual admiration for the victories achieved must be reached: the fiancée should have no other will than that of the fiancé, not out of passive and inert submission, but out of a conviction of his superiority, since he—acting according to supernatural love—cannot act except in the interest of both; and she owes him this active docility even in small things, of which daily life is mainly woven.

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The fiancé must have no other aim than her good; by doing good to his fiancée, in accordance with God, he will also do his own; it is a transfer of person and interests into her.

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The purpose of engagement, as a preparation for marriage, is essentially this: to take each other by the hand and walk together toward perfection.

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And God, who gave this commandment, is generous with help to engaged couples, for whom the path to perfection is much easier than if they were to undertake it in isolation. This tangible predilection of God, which any engaged person who desires it can experience, is easily explained in view of the importance of marriage as a cooperation in building His kingdom.

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Therefore, engagement cannot begin in a more promising way than with Jesus in the Eucharist, nor can it continue better than with Him. He is not an intruder, but the substance of love and the assurance of happiness.

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Love without Him would lose its vigor and sweet appeal. "Without me you can do nothing," and therefore you cannot even build the four walls of a house without fear.

DOCX+ 1

OBSTACLES

The main obstacles to marriage are of two kinds: economic and familial. Professional ones are rarer and now almost gone, where it was once believed (and sometimes imposed by law) that certain professions were incompatible with the married state.

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It is not necessary to wait to get engaged until one has a secure economic foundation, but neither is it permissible to bind a woman to such a demanding promise when there are insufficient grounds to justify the hope of economic security in the not-too-distant future.

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For example, we believe that a university student can get engaged, provided he is not a slacker, when he has the right to hope for an early source of income soon after or not long after graduation. On the other hand, a middle school or high school student should not get engaged, having too many years of study still ahead. Likewise, a trade apprentice can get engaged, but not someone who, not yet being an apprentice, cannot establish any probable timeline for his economic stability.

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It seems to us that anyone who cannot foresee getting married within four or five years at most should not get engaged.

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And if two young people love each other and are not in this condition? They have a wise solution they can turn to: they express their love for each other, but they do not get engaged—that is, they do not commit. They can say to each other something like this: "We love each other, but we cannot get engaged because we are too young, and I, as a man, cannot give you, as a woman, any guarantees; therefore, let us remain free. If at the right time we are still free and still love each other, we will get engaged, but not now".

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Familial obstacles, on the other hand, are almost always conquerable; if many fail to overcome them, it is because they lack goodwill, or allow themselves to be guided more by sentiment than by reason, making an error in judgment.

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There are young women who sacrifice themselves and give up marriage because their family needs their help, and young men who do the same.

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If family members were more generous, in many cases they could very well forgo such help and not hinder the birth of a new family.

DOCX

Let us take the case that seems most severe to us, in which both the young man and the young woman are the sole support of their respective families.

DOCX

We affirm that even this case is not without a remedy: let us observe that if individually each of them is sufficient to support their own family, is it possible that when their strengths unite in marriage, this ability ceases in them?

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These scruples exist because the spirit lacks the breadth of supernatural love. A good young lady told me some time ago that she was distressed because the young man she loved wanted to marry her, but she could not abandon her family, which was in desperate need of her income and her guidance.

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"And why," I asked her, "do you not lay out your situation clearly to him? If he truly loves you, not only will he not forbid you from caring for your family, but by marrying you, he will help you do so".

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She replied that she could not ask such a sacrifice of him.

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"But don't you understand," I replied, "that because he loves you, it is a greater sacrifice to give you up than to cooperate with you?"

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"And if children come? They will be new commitments".

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"Which should not frighten you: God will certainly provide".

DOCX

I could not convince her, and the matter dragged on like that for a long time, until the war arrived to give a violent solution. She was killed by a shell, and now I see that her family neither scattered nor starved, but God provided differently, as He certainly would have provided had that marriage taken place.

DOCX+ 1

Many relatives not only fail to hide obstacles, but aggravate them in order to delay what they wrongly consider the loss of their relative: it is a form of selfishness that is understandable when souls are not illuminated by the light and goodness of God, nor by trust in God.

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It is well that "the two shall leave father and mother, and unite and become one flesh," provided that the father, mother, siblings, and anyone else entrusted to their care do not need them; otherwise, love should suggest a coordinated and happy solution to both problems, even if this comes at the expense of the freedom of the two young spouses.

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Recently, a paralyzed man passed away in a working-class family. When the two young workers got engaged, she warned the young man that she could not abandon her sick brother. He told her that he would take him in, and indeed at the moment of marriage they took him into their home. For thirty years, he was the caretaker and nurse of his unfortunate brother-in-law, who from then on refused to be cared for by anyone else. One day, when I advised him to place him in a nursing home, he replied: "If I institutionalize him, they will let him die; as long as I have breath, I will care for him myself". And he cared for him until his very last day.

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It is enough to be clear at the time of engagement: "Look, I am in these circumstances: I cannot abandon my family. Think about it and decide". But it is not right to refuse, and to reject one's own good fortune, out of principle and without inviting the other party to share a responsibility, thereby committing an injustice and showing an arbitrary lack of trust.

DOCX+ 2

Other obstacles of a social nature and beyond individual control may intervene, such as wars, which separate engaged couples for long periods. They cannot consider themselves released from their promise because of this, even if they lack news of each other for years, and their behavior must always remain aligned with their status as an engaged couple. Not even the temporary loss of a job is a sufficient reason to break off an engagement.

DOCX+ 2

Certain obstacles, on the other hand, may arise later during the engagement. They will then be considered by mutual agreement and faced and resolved together, or the engagement will be dissolved.

DOCX+ 1

In the face of certain family impediments, it is good to keep in mind that marriage is not a devourer of energy, but a source of new energy sufficient to maintain old commitments and provide for new ones.

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At this point we should speak of other true impediments, which fall under the judgment of the Church, and are therefore not within our competence. However, we would like to mention only the serious dangers involved in marriage between blood relatives, although it is not absolutely prohibited. In the vast majority of cases, children born to spouses who are related to each other in the second or third degree exhibit severe mental and physical anomalies, and therefore, out of consideration for them, it is highly advisable to avoid them.

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That being said, most obstacles can be overcome if faced with determination. Sentiment is not always a good advisor. Counsel is a gift of the Holy Spirit, which must be asked for without fear of lacking either justice or goodness, since God is neither unjust nor lacking in goodness.

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THE COMMITMENT OF LOVE

Engagement is a bond of belonging: the fiancé belongs to the fiancée, and the fiancée belongs to the fiancé. Their love must surpass any other love: only the love of God, to which it is ordered, precedes it.

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The fiancée is at the pinnacle of every action and affection of the fiancé. Anyone who loves others—even closest friends—more than their fiancée would be disorderly. The fiancée must satisfy all his needs, even those of friendship; the fiancée is the primary friend, understood in the most beautiful sense of a confidante and comforting communion of soul.

DOCX+ 2

Love for one's mother is a noble love, yet love for one's fiancée, which is of a different nature, cannot rank below it. Not even a dominant passion, even if very noble—such as a passion for study, work, science, music, or sports, shows, travel, etc.—can prevail over the love for and interest in the fiancée.

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It is good for the fiancé to detach himself from all close company and confidences with other women, and the fiancée with other men. Friendships and affinities that compartmentalize the heart and represent a latent danger—even if unnoticed—are not permissible.

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By this, we do not mean that the fiancée can replace the love of study and work in a man's heart. It is simply a matter of ordering these actions toward love for her and carrying them out for her sake, and therefore with greater commitment and greater consolation. She must be invited to participate in his inner world, in which she will be enthroned as queen.

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The fiancé can no longer perform any action forgetting her, nor allow her to do so forgetting him. He cannot undertake a job or a journey, choose companions, frequent certain environments, or make plans and resolutions without informing her and listening to her.

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This does not mean that they are not granted a certain freedom of movement that allows each to satisfy particular inclinations and respect certain good habits, but everything must be coordinated toward the interest and development of their love. For example, if the fiancé loves sports and the fiancée loves music, they should not be jealous of these respective passions, which will satisfy the soul and make them happier, thus benefiting their love.

DOCX+ 1

If people did not know that the young man and woman were engaged, they should be able to tell by their demeanor. They must carry a new joy on their faces: the heart has found the object of its love and pours forth its joyful transfiguration. They must become better day by day, and when sorrow comes to test the strength of their love, they will bless the Lord for it. To love means to remain serene in joy, without paroxysms, and strong in sorrow, with an intimate and infinite sweetness that is never lost in love.

DOCX+ 3

If the engagement brought restlessness, fears, and anxieties, it would not be good. If the fiancé did not feel improved by contact with her, and if she did not feel better beside him, they should separate again, because the primary reason for their union would be lacking.

DOCX+ 1

They must hold the gift they give each other in such high esteem as to never feel worthy enough of it. Woman is for man the first revelation of the love of God, who created her in a moment of intense tenderness: "It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him a helper suitable for him".

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And the helper turned out to be worthy of him. He needs sweetness, and she is sweetness; he needs confidence, and no one knows how to listen to him like she does; he needs rest, and she is his rest; he needs counsel, and she is counsel; he wants goodness, and she is goodness; he seeks glory, and she is his glory; he wants to rule, and she is his peaceful dominion; he needs light, and her eyes are full of light.

DOCX+ 1

Woman changes the desert of the earth into a blossoming garden for man. Toil will no longer exasperate him, because he will have support; sorrow will not crush him, because he will have a sweet comforter. His days will no longer be painful, because God Himself will be near him in the supernatural love of his woman.

DOCX+ 2

She will be his strength, his courage, his self-sacrifice. She will be the inspirer of his most daring projects, the silent, humble, and faithful companion in their execution, and the cause of his victory.

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This sweet gift is never earned enough, and it does not ask too much if it demands the splendor of the soul and the integrity of the body.

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The same commitment is required of the woman. A man who extends his hand to choose her as his own has a value that no wealth on earth can equal. None of her qualities, none of her splendor, equals the gift the man makes of himself to her. She, though very rich, is fragile; and he, though poor, is strong. She is alone, and he is the friend. She was created for him, and she is sad until his love fills her heart, transfigures her, and makes her a happy creature. Nothing could fill her heart—no honor and no glory, except the love of God—as the heart of a man fills it.

DOCX+ 4

The beloved woman is an angelic creature; for her, sacrifices, pains, and deprivations no longer matter; love covers her with a gentle mantle that heals all wounds and makes tears fruitful.

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Love gives warmth to her heart, light to her intellect, wings to her imagination, and decisiveness to her will; it gives her the heroism of devotion and sublime action.

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In love, it is God who gives life to His creatures: He gives true life, the kind that time does not wear away, but strengthens and revives. Love is the light of God; other gifts are interwoven with it, just as the colors of the rainbow are within the brightness of the ray. Love is not merely one of God's gifts, but God Himself descending with His essence into the soul; and that is why, without an homage of gratitude to God, love cannot endure; if the soul ceases to draw from God, it languishes. One may have a reflection of love that can endure for a long time—because we remain a reflection of God even if we cease to love Him—but we will never have the comforting and secure fullness of love immersed in God.

DOCX+ 3

Love is a communion of souls, even when total union occurs in marriage, which is ennobled by supernatural love and acquires a value and joy of comforting spirituality.

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Marriage—which will take place only after the two engaged people are sure they know each other properly and love each other as God wants them to love, and not according to the violent laws of the flesh or other deceptive laws—will unite the two spouses in a perfect society, a society born before any other civil association and possessing rights prior to nations and states.

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A society that God did not revoke even after original sin, and to which alone the continuation of life is entrusted without violating His law.

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Christian marriage will fertilize human society with new elements and new, vigorous, and healthy energies, and will enrich divine society with souls.

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