

Fr. Perozich comments —

This commentary is not new in its content. It, however, is powerful in its clarity, its order, its guidance for me and for all people who wish holiness and eternal life, as well as a warning for those who seldom think of God.

“... cause we’re living in a material world, and I am a material girl”, sings Madonna. She is correct in the first line, and incomplete in the second one.

The human person needs grace and the spiritual world to be lifted up to God from being bound by the material world which can pervert the soul of a man.

- ***The sense-impressions naturally are the more powerful ones of the two because the material world from which they emanate surrounds us.***
- ***The workings of grace, on the other hand, reaching us from the invisible spiritual world, are, generally speaking, vague and faint.***
- ***The full recognition of an evil is the first step toward effectually correcting it.***
- ***The human mind, in its subconscious activities, is a very delicate and impressionable thing. Every intelligible sound that reaches it from the sense-world is permanently recorded. It is there transformed into ideas and conceptions of the most complex character. After a while, these penetrate into the conscious working mind and take their revenge upon the life and character of those who have allowed them entrance. But, worse than this, the evil spirits avail themselves of the material that they thus find ready for their use.***
- ***Thus it comes to pass that many a passionate craving, many an unlawful desire, terminating in a misdirected life, strong aversion to prayer and spiritual exercises, and actual and willful neglect of spiritual obligations may often be traced back to some light and frivolous remark listened to in a conversation, to some flippant suggestion, quite innocent***

perhaps and permissible in itself but charged with disastrous consequences to the soul's life.

- *I have come in contact with men, earnest and sensible and well-meaning men, who have vainly striven for years to shake off one such haunting impression or image that was formed, perhaps, under circumstances that they could scarcely control and that, in the course of time, was distorted by the demon out of all proportion and into a never-ceasing torture and temptation.*

- *The safeguard is simple and suggests itself. The difficulty is to keep it in mind and to employ it rigorously and on all occasions. We must strictly guard our senses, and, so far as unwholesome impressions are concerned, we must tightly close those doors against them that lead to the citadel of the soul. We must take care not to furnish the devil with fuel for the fire that he is striving to kindle.*

- *We must make up our minds to cut and avoid places and persons through whom injury is thus likely to be inflicted upon our souls.*

^a *What matters it, after all, if flippant and indifferent men and women who recognize no higher duty or aim in life think us strange and eccentric? St. Bernard says, "One cannot be perfect without being singular." And St. Alphonsus adds, "If we would imitate the common run of men, we should always remain imperfect, as for the most part they are." We are—alas!—living in times when the man who allows his mind to become a kind of cesspool, a receptacle of all sorts of impurity, is regarded as the sensible, practical man of the world, while he who seeks to sanctify himself is looked upon as abnormal and peculiar. But we may be sure that matters look very different from God's point of view. Christ declares that "the clean of heart . . . shall see God," and the Apostle spoke of "holiness: without which no man shall see God."*

Christ And The Powers Of Darkness

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Guard Your Senses

We are beings of a composite nature, made up of body and soul. And although these are, in a certain sense, quite distinct from each other, they are nevertheless intimately joined together, one acting upon the other, one strongly affecting and influencing the other. **The sense-impressions naturally are the more powerful ones of the two because the material world from which they emanate surrounds us,** and we cannot, under any circumstances,

escape from it even if we would. We cannot get out of our bodies. It is in our bodies and by means of our bodies that our spiritual education is carried on.

The workings of grace, on the other hand, reaching us from the invisible spiritual world, are, generally speaking, vague and faint. They come and go, sometimes when we least expect them, and unless we make strenuous efforts to retain them by cultivating a certain condition of receptivity and “by curbing all our senses under discipline,” they but lightly touch our soul’s life. In any case, under ordinary circumstances, the sense-impressions are far more vivid and imperative, and the probability is that their effect and influence can never be entirely wiped out. Here, too, our human nature exhibits the wound and flaw that it has received by reason of the Fall. There is a disorder, a want of harmony in it, the origin of which nothing else in the world can explain.

Theologians teach (and experience confirms) that while the evil spirits cannot *directly* influence the inner citadel of the soul, they can and do effect this by means of the senses. They can act upon the senses and vivify the impressions that these convey. The consequence is that if we want to safeguard our souls, we must watch over our sense-life. Theoretically, we know this; practically, we ignore and deny it. We carelessly allow the soul to be flooded with a very world of unwholesome pictures and ideas, and then we wonder why we make so little progress in the spiritual life—why our intercourse with God is so cold and halting.

Take, for instance, the sense of hearing. What damage does it not inflict upon the soul if it be not carefully guarded and watched over? What poisonous and unwholesome stuff is not reaching the soul’s centers by this one channel in the course of a single day? We know the evil thing from its effects. “As often as I have been among men,” writes Thomas à

Kempis, "I have returned less a man." We know what the writer means. We have experienced this sense of nausea and self-contempt if we have ever taken ourselves seriously. It is the protest of the immortal soul against injury that has been inflicted upon it by indulging in or listening to debasing and unprofitable conversation. We have come away from such conversation with our spiritual perceptions blurred and injured, annoyed with ourselves and with those who have exposed us to the injury. We have found ourselves unable to pray and to entertain a single elevating thought. We have resolved, in a vague and undefined sort of way, not to expose ourselves unnecessarily to such perils. We are anxious not to be suspected of fanaticism and of narrow-mindedness. We do not care to appear eccentric and peculiar. And besides this, there is a side of our nature for which the light and frivolous talk of superficial and frivolous men and women has a peculiar fascination. Criticism of the character and doings of our fellows, of their possible motives, condemnation of them, if possible, is gratifying to our vanity. It puts our own imaginary virtues into a clearer light and makes us hug ourselves in our self-righteousness.

There is a similar attraction in questionable plays and songs; we like them even though we inwardly condemn them; we return to them as the moth returns to the light of the candle even though it has badly burnt its wings.

It can serve no purpose to deny all this. **The full recognition of an evil is the first step toward effectually correcting it.** Half-cures, based upon an imperfect diagnosis, are of no use whatever in these matters. All sensible men know that things are as I have stated them. But what very few realize is the fact that by these apparently trivial means, grave and permanent injury is infallibly inflicted upon the soul.

And this is true for more reasons than one. **The human mind, in its subconscious activities, is a very delicate and impressionable thing. Every intelligible sound that reaches it from the sense-world is permanently recorded. It is there transformed into ideas and conceptions of the most complex character. After a while, these penetrate into the conscious working mind and take their revenge upon the life and character of those who have allowed them entrance. But, worse than this, the evil spirits avail themselves of the material that they thus find ready for their use.** Their action becomes that of the photographer who develops the sensitive plate upon which the invisible impression has been formed. And they do more than this. They enlarge the picture. They bring out a variety of shadows and details and astonish the mind by ultimately presenting the picture in a form that the mind quite fails to recognize as its own.

Thus it comes to pass that many a passionate craving, many an unlawful desire, terminating in a misdirected life, strong aversion to prayer and spiritual exercises, and actual and willful neglect of spiritual obligations may often be traced back to some light and frivolous remark listened to in a conversation, to some flippant suggestion, quite innocent perhaps and permissible in itself but charged with disastrous consequences to the soul's life.

The process, of course, is the same with respect to the sense of sight. The eyes have been rightly called the windows of the soul. Few people have any idea how much injury is inflicted upon the soul by the unguarded use of this faculty and to what extent the powers of darkness avail themselves of the door that is thus carelessly opened. It seems such an innocent thing to

stop at a shop window and to gaze at an unclean picture calculated to play upon the sensual part of our nature. It is almost impossible in our days to avoid doing this. The thing may have happened before we have realized it. And our better nature may assert itself, and we may pass on our way after a while, even mentally condemning what we have seen. But if we have lingered at all, the mischief is done. The photograph has been taken. The image has been formed in the mind. It may lie there undeveloped and forgotten. But the day invariably comes when some temptation will assail the sense-life, when the imagination will be set to work. The picture will then be developed, the image will rise from its subconscious storehouse and will form the background upon which the temptation will construct itself. It will take the particular shape that the material, lying latent in the mind, will cause it to take.

This work beyond all doubt is the work of the demon. We cannot, in reason, imagine that any part of a man who in any sense desires to live a godly life can act in such hostile fashion toward another part. Besides this, the pictures formed are often painted in colors that are quite strange and out of keeping with anything the mind, by its natural disposition, is ever likely to form.

A long experience in connection with abnormal psychical phenomena has convinced me that we are here on the demon's track. **I have come in contact with men, earnest and sensible and well-meaning men, who have vainly striven for years to shake off one such haunting impression or image that was formed, perhaps, under circumstances that they could scarcely control and that, in the course of time, was distorted by the demon out of all proportion and into a never-ceasing torture and temptation.**

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rigorously and on all occasions. We must strictly guard our senses, and, so far as unwholesome impressions are concerned, we must tightly close those doors against them that lead to the citadel of the soul. We must take care not to furnish the devil with fuel for the fire that he is striving to kindle.

We must make up our minds to cut and avoid places and persons through whom injury is thus likely to be inflicted upon our souls. This is really a much easier thing to do than one is apt to imagine at first sight. It requires a little courage and determination—a casting aside of the fear of man and contempt of his sneer and ridicule. We must cut out for ourselves a distinctive path through life and, in this respect, ruthlessly push aside every person who threatens to obstruct it. The prize is well worth the effort. **What matters it, after all, if flippant and indifferent men and women who recognize no higher duty or aim in life think us strange and eccentric? St. Bernard says, “One cannot be perfect without being singular.” And St. Alphonsus adds, “If we would imitate the common run of men, we should always remain imperfect, as for the most part they are.” We are—alas!—living in times when the man who allows his mind to become a kind of cesspool, a receptacle of all sorts of impurity, is regarded as the sensible, practical man of the world, while he who seeks to sanctify himself is looked upon as abnormal and peculiar. But we may be sure that matters look very different from God’s point of view. Christ declares that “the clean of heart . . . shall see God,” and the Apostle spoke of “holiness: without which no man shall see God.”**

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This article is adapted from a chapter in *Christ and the Powers of Darkness* by Fr. J. Godfrey Raupert which is available from Sophia Institute Press. found on Spiritualdirection.com