

**Emidio Tribulato**

**MEN AND WOMEN AT THE  
CROSSROADS**

What roads love?

# INDEX

<b>Foreword: The roads</b>	
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>1.0 Relations</b>	
1.1 The pleasure and necessity of the encounter with the other	
1.2 The consequences of a disturbed inner reality	
1.3 The modalities of the relationship	
1.3.1 Occasional relationships	
1.3.2 Labour relations	
1.3.3 Friendship relations	
<i>1.3.3.1 Same-sex friendships</i>	
<i>1.3.3.2 Friendship between different sexes</i>	
1.3.4 Spurious relationships	
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>2.0 Love relationships</b>	
2.1 What is love?	
2.2 How and when is love born?	
2.3 What is love for?	
2.4 Which people are capable love?	
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>3.0 The elements of love</b>	
3.1 Intimacy	
3.1.1 Intimacy and complementarity	
3.1.1.1 Specific contributions	
3.1.1.2 Intimacy and dialogue	
<i>3.1.1.2.1 The purposes of dialogue</i>	
<i>3.1.1.2.2 Listening</i>	
<i>3.1.1.2.3 Valuing the gifts of the other</i>	
<i>3.1.1.2.4 Inner silence</i>	
3.1.1.3.5 Readiness to give	
3.1.1.3.6 Competition between the two genders	

3.1.3.7. <i>The instruments of dialogue</i>	
3.1.2.8. <i>Effective and ineffective dialogue.</i>	
3.1.2.9. <i>The fear of dialogue.</i>	
3.1.2.10. <i>The interrupting dialogue</i>	
3.2 The passion component	
3.2.1 Sexuality in men and women.	
3.2.2 The causes of the decrease in the frequency of sexual intercourse.	
3.2.3 The norms and rules of sexual life.	
3.2.4 Jealousy	
3.3 Commitment Decision Component	
3.3.1 Small Joint Projects	
3.3.2 Large Joint Projects	
3.3.2.1 Contributions for Large Joint Projects	
3.4 Component trends over time	
3.4.1 The intimacy component	
3.4.2 The passion component	
3.4.3 The decision-commitment component	
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>4.0 The roads of love</b>	
4.1 falling in love or budding love phase	
4.1.1 The characteristics of the falling in love phase	
4.1.2 The lover's behaviour	
4.1.3 Psychological signals	
4.1.4 Mixed feelings	
4.1.5 Biological signals	
4.1.6 Fantasies	
4.1.7 Social signals	
4.1.8 The evolution of falling in love	
4.1.9 Who strikes?	
4.1.10 Where does falling in love come from?	
4.1.11 Positive effects of falling in love	
4.1.12 The duration falling in love	
4.1.13 The social value of falling in love	
4.1.14 The correct management of falling in love	
4.2 Love sympathy	
4.3 Playful love	

4.4 Empty love	
4.5 Erotic love	
4.6 Love friendship	
4.7 Fatuous love	
4.8 Pragmatic love	
4.9 Romantic love	
4.9.1 Characteristics	
4.9.2 Duration	
4.9.3 Limits	
4.10 Lived love - Marital love	
4.10.1. The link with reality	
4.10.2. Graduality	
4.10.3. The link with the will	
4.10.4 Planning	
4.10.5 Solidarity mutual aid	
4.10.6 Duration	
4.10.7 Its needs	
4.10.8 His gifts	
4.10.9 The team	
4.10.10 Its birth	
4.11 One-sided loves - unbalanced loves - non-loves	
<b>Chapter5</b>	
<b>5.0 Love and planning</b>	
5.1 Evolution love	
5.2 The engagement	
5.3 Marriage	
5.3.1 The purposes of marriage	
5.3.2 Marriage pacts	
5.3.3 The purposes of marriage pacts	
5.3.3.1 <i>Types of ties between men and women</i>	
5.3.3.2 <i>Explicit and Implicit Covenants</i>	
5.3.3.3 <i>Covenants in the economic sphere</i>	
5.3.3.4 <i>Affective-relational pacts</i>	
5.3.4 Strategies to escape marriage	
<b>Chapter 6</b>	
<b>6.0 Conflict in the couple</b>	

6.1 The increased frequency of adultery.	
6.1.1 The prevention of adultery	
6.2 The desire for dominance of one sex over the other	
6.3 Excessive differences	
6.4 The proper management of gender differences	
6.4.1 Female mood variability	
6.4.2 Communication in the two genders	
6.4.3 Love demonstrations in the two sexes	
6.4.4 Diversity in dealing with problems	
6.4.5 Fickleness in decision-making	
6.4.6 The different way of feeling and experiencing sexuality	
6.4.7 The different historical perspective	
6.4.8 The different approach in educational activities	
6.4.9 Personal Care	
6.4.10 The use of time	
6.4.11 Diversity in tastes and choices	
6.5 The increased presence of psychological problems.	
6.5 The excessive presence of illusions and expectations.	
6.7 The new cultural and social climate	
6.7.1 The reversibility of choices	
6.7.2 Parental example and family climate	
6.7.3 The differentiation between the public and private sphere	
6.7.4 The privatisation of choices	
6.7.5 The quantity and quality of work	
6.7.6 The judgement and social value of marriage	
6.7.7 The current modest influence of religion	
6.7.8 Mistrust and disaffection between the sexes	
6.7.8.1 <i>Female imagery</i>	
6.7.8.2 <i>The male imaginary</i>	
6.7.8.3 <i>Consequences</i>	
<b>Chapter 7</b>	
<b>7.0 Understanding within the couple</b>	
7.1 Choosing a partner	
7.1.1 How to choose a partner	
7.2 The correct balance of the three components love.	

7.3 Contributions	
7.3.1 The contributions of the couple	
7.3.2 Women's contributions	
7.3.3 Human contributions	
7.3.4 The contributions of the family, affective and friendship network	
7.3.4.1 <i>Contributions of an economic nature</i>	
7.3.4.2 <i>Contributions of an affective nature</i>	
7.3.4.3 <i>Educational contributions</i>	
7.3.4.4 <i>The contributions of the civil community and institutions</i>	
7.2.5 The contributions of religion	
7.2.6 Implementing appropriate strategies.	
<b>Chapter 8</b>	
<b>8.0 Singles</b>	
8.1 Singles by choice	
8.2 Singles by necessity	
8.3 Singles for convenience	
8.4 Childhood singles	
8.5 Frightened singles	
8.5.1 Male fears	
8.5.2 Women's fears	
8.6 Singles due to economic problems	
8.7 Returning singles	
8.8 Traumatised singles	
8.9 What single status entails	
<b>Conclusion</b>	
<b><i>Bibliography</i></b>	

## PREMISE: ROADS

All roads are not the same. There are the motorways: wide, fast, endless, straight, but boring to drive on. Alongside these are the provincial roads: often winding and full of potholes, but which connect and accompany you from one village to another. These roads do not, like motorways, attack the mountains and valleys you feel in the landscape but almost caress, accompany and enhance it. These provincial roads pass along the squares of charming villages, as if to make you admire the beauty of the place, inviting you to stop and meet the people who live and work among those houses.

Then there are the mountain trails: steep, strenuous, difficult and pe- riculturous, which, however, open up, almost at every turn, to breath-taking views.

There are the dirt roads of the forests: damp and gloomy but lush and full of scents and life.

There are roads you can take with fast roaring cars and others that need a sturdy off-road vehicle. Some paths, forcing you to walk on foot, help you to get to know and discover every rock in your path, every animal or insect you meet, every bush willing to offer you colours and scents.

There are roads that lead to beautiful cities; others lead to lush fields or flourishing orchards; still others seem to vanish into thin air: suddenly, as you walk fast, a grey wall or a thicket of brambles obstructs your path. And you feel lost, discouraged and alone. Some paths even seem to end in black ravines.

Whether you follow one or the other path depends on many factors: on the goal or goals you have yourself; on your abilities and possibilities; on the people meet along the way. Some people may help and keep you company, while others may disturb and aggravate your difficulties. Going one way or the other also depends on their characteristics. Some may be easy and inviting, while others may have peculiarities that discourage and confuse you.

Man and woman also travel roads and these are not all the same. Some, like motorways, are large, well-maintained, straight, perfectly neat, clean and easy to navigate. These large arteries get you to your destination quickly and are therefore also the most crowded, but it is hard not to judge them as boring, lifeless, repetitive, and above all, it is hard not to notice that they are unfriendly to the needs of human nature and the surrounding environment.

Others, such as the provincial roads, are longer, more winding and bumpy, but if you have courage and strength to venture along them, they allow you to discover treasures and human relationships that you would never have revealed, never have experienced or known. Some paths help you to live better with yourself, stimulate you to exploit your talents, educate you to tenderness and respect for others, invite you to better relations with the divinity and with the spiritual component of your being; others are dead-end, seem to take you to nowhere or, worse, lead you to dry or muddy ground; or push you into unpredictable precipices into which you can fall and get lost.

There are roads where, in an emergency, you can get all the help you need and others where you have to fend for yourself.

Men and women walk these roads, sometimes alone, most often accompanying each other.

In this book we will try to follow men and women along the paths and roads of human love. In particular, we will seek to examine the paths that lead to encounter and those that lead to confrontation; the paths that lead to dialogue and those that lead to closure; those that are rich in warmth and those that are rich in love; those that invite communion with others and those that cause you to isolate yourself from others; those that are rich love and those that are filled with hatred. We will try to identify the roads that lead to life and those that lead to death; those that help in growth and on the spiritual path and those that persuade you to engage only in the frantic search for material goods; those that allow you to build something for yourself and your neighbour and those that invite you to close yourself off in your selfishness.



# **Chapter 1**

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

# 1.1 THE PLEASURE AND THE NECESSITY OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER

Man becomes a sociable animal when he increases in his life, as a primary value, the relationship with others. He discovers, first as an individual and then as a species, that it is very important and functional to his physical survival and to his psychological and social well-being to have other living beings beside him. Man discovers that for him, as for many animals and plants, the benefits he obtains from this relationship are numerous and important and that, more often than not, these encounters are full of joy, fill his days with pleasure, give interest and purpose activities and commitments. They discover, with pleasure, that these relationships, if they are well structured, are precious in that they allow one to compare and enrich one's life. ideas, discoveries and achievements.

Man discovers that in meeting, comparing and cooperating with other human beings, it is easier to find suitable solutions to the problems that trouble him; it is easier in dialogue with others to increase his knowledge; it is easier in dialogue with others to find stimuli for his intellectual and cultural growth.

Man understands that when dialogue and communication are respectful and attentive to the wellbeing of the other, joy and serenity blossom or grow in the soul as, after the water of the rain, leaves and flowers sprout. He understands, through experience, that venting and welcoming, intimately experienced with another's heart, bring comfort, banish loneliness, banish sadness and sorrow, fill the soul with hope. Because with the other can joke, comment, play, reason together. One can confide in the other one's thoughts, emotions and feelings. The other can console our sorrows, can dry our tears, can be a valuable help and a solid shoulder in times of fragility and need.

But also in their daily work, and in general in moving and operating in the world, men notice that together with others it is easier get a job done; easier to find the most appropriate solutions;

easier to find the best solutions; easier to find the best solutions;  
easier to find the best solutions.

suiting to the problems. With the help of others, it is less tiring to work the land and reap its fruits; it is less difficult to defend oneself from the enemies or to build a shelter; and it is easier to heal illnesses and stave off death if there is someone to doctor, cure, support and assist you,

In this sense, humans, as well as many animals, discover in the other their vital need.

Every relationship, however, whether with a human being or with plant or animal, involves commitment, sacrifice and renunciation that are directly proportional to the complexity of the living being, as well as to the depth and intensity of the relationship. Moreover, every relational bond entails the assumption of specific roles and tasks to which inevitable responsibilities are linked.

Human beings have discovered some universal rules, together in relationships.

1. *The more complex the living being with whom one relates, the deeper and more involved this relationship is, the richer and more rewarding the exchange will be, while, at the same time, the commitments, renunciations and sacrifices will also be greater and heavier.*
2. *The simpler a living being is, or the more superficial the relationship one establishes with it, the less knowledge, commitment and renunciation will be necessary, but the less gratifying and richer in positive contributions the relationship will be.*
3. *The more complex the being with whom we want to relate, the deeper and more important the relationship we want to establish and experience, the more genetic and/or acquired qualities we will have to possess.*

4. *The more complex the being with whom we relate is, the greater and more intense the preparation for this encounter and relationship must be.*

Caring for a plant requires far less effort and sacrifice than caring for a kitten or a puppy, but in turn, the amount of gratification and exchange possible is equally limited. At the apex of gratification—pleasure and joy, in the sphere of human relationships, lies a stable and exclusive love relationship with a person of the opposite sex. But as great as the possible gratification is, as potentially great as the joy and mutual support, so great will be the difficulties and commitments required; so great will be the limits that this relationship will impose on our individual needs and freedom; so demanding will be the path to this goal.

We have no possibility of escaping these fundamental rules, nor do we have the power to use shortcuts, as they are rules inherent in the very nature of all relationships.

If, then, as is only right, we also include in the sphere of our relationships the spiritual relationship with the supreme being, God, we can well understand how the relationship with this infinitely good, righteous, powerful, generous being would involve so many infinite qualities. Qualities that none of us possesses, and we are therefore forced to accept that it is only his goodness, only his knowledge of our liabilities, only his love, that prompts this supreme being to come to us, accepting a dialogue, a relationship and a loving encounter.

Inherent in the concept of relationship is choice. Or rather, conscious choice. We generally choose the people or other living beings with whom we want to relate but, as in all choices, to a large extent, we are conditioned by our inner reality. Our genes already condition us. There are some people who are genetically more open, sociable and open to dialogue, while others are genetically more closed and reluctant.

In the choice, however, environmental influences are more important and numerous than genetic ones. An affectionate, serene, friendly environment that recognises and responds adequately to the

our deepest needs, stimulates and invites openness, just as a frustrating, dangerous or risky environment leads to closure and defence. And since most important environmental humus is our family, the quality and quantity of positive or negative experiences in relations with parents and the family network can leave indelible furrows in our minds and hearts, shaping, for better or worse, the personality of each one of us, which will be adequate or inadequate, responsible or irresponsible, fruitful or sterile in relations with others. The choice can also be facilitated by the social, political and religious environment in which we live, or it can be altered, hindered, made difficult or prevented by this environment.

However, there always remains a margin, sometimes very narrow, sometimes quite wide, in which we can exercise our free will.

## **1.2 THE CONSEQUENCES OF A DISTURBED INNER REALITY**

As far as the inner reality is concerned, we know that a considerably severe disorder prevents and almost completely precludes the possibility of relating to the outside world. An example of this can be found in the severe forms of autism, depression and schizophrenia. In schizophrenic dissociation, the closure is determined by a pathological and altered view reality, which is often perceived as very aggressive and dangerous. In depression, it is severe sadness, apathy and asthenia that drive us to shut ourselves in our cocoon. In autism, it is an ego that has not been able to structure itself that prevents us from building a valid relationship with external reality.

If we were to outline in a general rule the possibility that men and women have of following one or more relational paths, we would have to say that

*"The stronger, more mature, serene, responsible, well-educated and trained, capable and intelligent a man is, the more paths he is able to take and thus the wider the range of possible choices.*

These positive qualities give men who possess them an edge over others, as they can choose either

easy paths than difficult ones. Unfortunately, for the fragile, weak, immature and disturbed, the range of choices is narrowed down, since these people are forced into only poor, simple and limited relationships. Relationships that, because they are not very rich, will bring less pleasure, joy and gratification to the individual, while at the same time bearing little fruit for the community and society.

Unfortunately, today, due to serious educational and training shortcomings, despite the misuse of words such as socialisation, integration, friendship, love, we have considerable difficulties in forming human beings who know how to live rich and complex relationships with pleasure, joy, but also with coherence, helpfulness and commitment. There are several reasons for this.

*1. The first reason concerns, as we have just said, the personality characteristics of the subject.*

If the product of a deficient or erroneous upbringing is a person who lives badly with himself and/or with others because of his fearfulness, aggressiveness, desire for destructiveness, touchiness, closedness, low self-esteem, anxiety, mistrust or suspiciousness, this person will have serious difficulties in living well in relationships with others, especially when he wants to experience them at the deepest level.

*2. The second reason concerns his internship.*

It is difficult, if not impossible, to experience the encounter with another human being well when no adequate apprenticeship has been implemented. It is not an adequate apprenticeship to relate for years more to objects or animals than to people. I use objects when and how I want. If electric or electronic, such as TV and computer, I turn them on if I want something from them; if bored, I just turn them off with a finger resting on the remote control.

Objects do not protest, they do not take offence if I replace them with another, more modern and functional tool. Objects do not cry with pain when I put them aside or wrench them. Nor do they complain when I angrily or with cold determination decide and implement their demise by breaking them and then throwing them in the waste bin.

As far as animals are concerned: I buy them, care for them, hug them, communicate with them, talk to them, exchange love and attention with them if I want to. If I don't want to, if I have other interests, if they bore me, if I no longer have time for them, I can

always neglect them.



them, I can always take them to a shelter, I can always get rid of them or entrust them to others.

Similarly, dialogue and interaction carried out especially with people who have a professional or institutional role rather than with human beings with whom it is possible and natural to establish an intimate, deep, continuous and stable affective bond are not an adequate apprenticeship.

3. *The third reason relates to the lack of free, spontaneous and constructive interaction with peers in childhood.*

It is difficult to experience a profound, long-lasting and stable encounter with another human being when, from a very early age, one finds oneself, outside the protective walls of one's own home and the reassuring presence of one's parents, in a non-spontaneous and free way, with peers of one's own age, as is the case in all institutional environments: crèches, schools, baby parks, school buses, etc., not to mention all the celebrations, such as birthdays and name days, experienced today in closed and restricted spaces; regimented like soldiers by entertainers or left in the wild. Not to mention all the festivities, such as birthdays and name days, experienced today in closed and restricted spaces; regimented like toy soldiers by entertainers or left in the wild like wild foals in the chaos of the vociferous and prancing peer group.

On these occasions, since it is difficult to choose friendships and subjects with whom to establish a serene, calm, deep dialogue, while it is almost impossible to organise games and activities to one's liking, in small groups and in a constructive manner, the objectives of socialisation are hardly pursued.

But even in adolescence, when sexual promiscuity is considerably risky and the teenager would need more control and better attention to the amount and use of leisure time, the 'socialisation' proposed by today's parents is not adequate to his needs.

An excessive amount of leisure time is not appropriate for this age. Excessive promiscuity in environments that are totally unsuitable for normal, healthy psychological and personality development is not appropriate. We are talking about the many late-night hours spent in small squares or on walls. Let us talk about the parties, which often take place without any control by parents or

other responsible adults. Let's talk about afternoon or night discos for young people.

On all these occasions and in all these places, adolescents, but also pre-adolescents, deafened and stimulated by music at full throttle, are often the first to be in the middle of the night.

lume, they are progressively introduced to the use of alcohol and drugs,<sup>1</sup> while, at the same time, personalities still in formation are led by imitation and play, to the use of an immature, banal, irresponsible, risky sexuality, totally unsuitable for that age, which risks conditioning the healthy development of feelings and their future affective and sexual relationships.

There is also a lack of healthy relationships with mature and responsible adults in the adolescence of young people in our current social reality. Relationships that are fundamental if the child is to abandon the childish role and open his or her heart and commitment to the fullness of adulthood.

## **1.3 THE MODALITIES OF THE RELATIONSHIP**

As we have said, the paths that human beings can take alongside or together with others, especially alongside or together with the opposite sex, are varied and numerous.

They range from *casual and playful acquaintances and relationships, to encounters in the work environment, friendships, and even love relationships*. Rich, the latter, in a thousand facets.

### **1.3.1 CASUAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Casual relationships are the most frequent and numerous. These relationships should also be the easiest to manage.

Until a few decades ago, an encounter with a stranger or near-stranger in the staircase, on the street or on a journey, allowed-

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<sup>1</sup> A group of psychologists from the University of South Brittany discovered that if the music volume is loud in night clubs, customers drink more alcohol, consuming it faster and faster, while dialogue becomes impossible.

FRONT, M., (2008), Is the music loud? Let's drink to it, *in IO*, 9 August, p.137.

there was an exchange of elements of personal life that enriched those who participated.

I remember meetings in railway carriages. Already as the train was moving, the first jokes would begin, the questions to get to know the other, to establish a limited but rich intimacy and dialogue with the other. Already when a passenger entered the compartment, the first questions arose spontaneously: "Where does he come from?" "Where are you going?" "Why are you going?" They were not requests designed to satisfy morbid curiosity, it was a simple and spontaneous way to begin a journey between human beings, certainly brief and limited in time but, at times, very rich. A way of getting to know and being known. A way to exchange and communicate. A way to make the hours of the journey useful and productive through the exchange of different realities and human experiences. A way of experiencing the journey with pleasure and joy.

One also travelled in the lives of others, one was enriched by the experiences of others.

In some cases, this was an excellent way to learn what love is and what one can do for love.

One of the most curious encounters occurred one day when I was travelling by train to the university in Rome after a short period at home.

*We had just been sitting in the compartment, myself and another young man, when we saw a small, petite, elderly man trudging down the aisle, carrying, or rather dragging, a large brown suitcase. After noticing that there were only two of us in our compartment, he decided to spend his journey with us, which we discovered was going to be a long one. As he entered and looked around, he noticed that the luggage racks were not at all within the reach of his arms, so he asked us to help him his luggage up. We didn't ask it twice. With the air of two brave young men ready to do the good deed of daily living, we set about putting on the huge package. In spite of the considerable size of the luggage, this did not seem at all difficult or discouraging. As soon as we put our hands on the handle of the suitcase, however, we realised that the task was much more difficult than we had anticipated.*

*That old man must have put lead bars in that valise, so heavy was it!*

*We had already grown to admire his arms, which, despite their age, must have been much stronger than we could ever have imagined.*

*With considerable effort, pushing on... on that enormous luggage, both of us at the limit of our strength, we had almost managed to place it in the luggage rack when, suddenly, a green waterfall from above swept over us and confused us, causing us to let go, so that the enormous container also went to the ground to keep company with its contents.*

*At first, dumbfounded, we could not understand what it was that had run over and overwhelmed us. When we looked closely, we realised that the waterfall was made up of large olives, still green and fragrant, with which the old man had filled his travelling case more than three quarters full.*

*While we were still picking the oily fruits with our hands and putting them back in their place, and while we were already in the midst of throwing him a few 'blessings' for the strangeness of their contents, he told us that he was making the long, arduous journey in order to reach a son who was working as an immigrant in northern Germany. This was a son whom he had not seen for a long time, so he had decided to go to him with something from his homeland that he would certainly appreciate; something that would remind him of his home and family: green olives to pickle, a large salami, a cheese and four home-made bread doughnuts. He brought nothing for himself, no toothbrush or toothpaste, no pyjamas, no spare underwear or clothes. He explained that, in order to avoid bringing 'useless things', he was planning to keep, for the few days he would be in Germany, the same clothes he had on and that, along the journey, he would eat some, but only a little, of the food he had brought for his son.*

*In the hours we spent together, as the shaky train cradled us, together with his tales of a father of nine children who had started working at a very early age (when he was still wearing short trousers and therefore certainly before the age of fourteen), we learned what the love of a small but strong, courageous and generous father can be made of.*

Nowadays, although young people 'socialise' every day for many hours with their peers, it is difficult for them to even say good morning to the neighbour they meet on the stairs. It is difficult them to say thank you and to greet the shopkeeper or the newsagent they go to every week to buy the newspaper. Even more difficult is to exchange a few jokes in the lift. When they stand in this cramped cabin, many of them look at their flatmates upstairs or who live next door on the same landing, silent, closed and extremely embarrassed and with a sad face, as if they were going to the gallows.

### **1.3.2 LABOUR RELATIONS**

More intimate, but also more complex and difficult to manage, are the relationships in the workplace with colleagues. Exchanges in offices, as well as in factories, workshops or shops, can be very scarce: a 'hello', a handshake, a cup of coffee together, a few biting jokes about the boss or colleagues perceived as adversaries or competitors; a few salacious comments and a bit of gossip about newcomers, just to break the monotony.

It is not uncommon, however, for relationships to be more intense and involving. In some cases, truly intense friendships and strong emotional relationships can be established that can be reflected and continue outside working hours with meetings, dinners, games and dialogue on important occasions for individuals, couples or families.

On the contrary, if not well managed at the individual and team level, these working relationships can be steeped in jealousy, rivalries and even bitter clashes that will inevitably affect the well-being of the persons directly concerned, their families, but also the productivity of the office, as well as of the company.

The wars between colleagues, which sometimes last for years, and the resulting stress and easy bullying are such that some workers sometimes hate and fear the workplace. This environment is perceived as a source of tension, animosity, aggression and confrontation, so much so that many workers, when the discomfort becomes unbearable, are forced to ask for resignation or transfer.

The causes of these clashes are manifold. Often these are individual problems, due to the presence of disturbed personalities that negatively and destructively dialogue and mutual understanding. Other times, shortcomings are found at the management level. Many coordinators fail, due to immaturity or inability, to properly manage the dynamics that arise in the working group or team. In all these situations, the workplace, while it may suffer the consequences of pathologies of the psyche, may in turn be a source of discomfort for the people who frequent it.

These problems have become more pronounced today because, unlike in the past, when the workplace was close to the family environment and therefore one lived in an environment one had known for years and was very close to one's own values, nowadays, next to us in the workplace, we often find strangers with the most varied characteristics, with whom we are not always able to relate in a positive way.

Living elbow to elbow, for so many hours a day, or being part of a team with the same goals and objectives, if at times it can lead to closure, defence or aggression towards colleagues felt as a threat or competitors, can also give rise, between the two sexes, to much sweeter and more tender feelings, more or less lasting, legitimate and involving, which take on special characteristics.

Meanwhile, these feelings are rightly discouraged by employers, who see them as smoke in the eyes. Love, but more often than not passion, which overwhelms employees, can disrupt normal working activities or the already established and stable equilibrium within the group. It is normal for the 'two little pigeons', as they are called by their colleagues, to try to be together as much as possible, eyes to eyes, hands to hands, sharing dreams and emotions, but neglecting their usual occupations. Caught up in the whirlwind of passion, it is not difficult for commas and dots to be distributed here and there in the reports submitted to their directors or office managers with more aesthetic than grammatical criteria. But even the subjunctives, on these occasions, seem to have gone on holiday with their owners to enjoy the gentle moonlight. Under these conditions, inevitably, the workload will weigh more heavily on the other employees who will tend to

react with attitudes of bitterness or revolt, also because it is human to feel some envy and jealousy. For these reasons, the higher passion fever rises, the lower the productivity curve the enterprise, company or office. And this cannot but make the bosses, managers or bosses exhausted.

On the other hand, it is also normal that a special bond is formed between the two, which is perceived by others as exclusive and jealous. This special bond and understanding is often capable of breaking the pre-existing balances within the working group, so there will be a tendency to create new and different alliances with inevitable fights, jealousies and clashes.

If, in the opinion of the colleagues, the love affairs are absolutely illegitimate, because he or she already has another love affair, such as another boyfriend or girlfriend, or worse, already has another family, often all or almost all of the colleagues unite against cheaters, who are banned from the group for their immoral and licentious behaviour. Since this heavy negative judgement and exclusion is poorly digested by those concerned, they will, in turn, retaliate, so that an endless war or feud of insults, clashes, denunciations and reprisals can begin, which can last for years, until the inevitable transfer or dismissal of one or both of the parties concerned. Even worse is the situation when a husband and wife work in the same office.

*This topic makes me think of Anna<sup>2</sup>, a town clerk, who worked in the same office as her husband. Almost every day, she felt jealous whenever the other colleagues approached her man, laughing, joking, or worse, when they coquettishly touched his arm, shoulder or touched his face and hair with their fingers, calling him by various nicknames. She hated her colleagues, whom she called sluts, with the same intensity and in the same way that she resented and resented her husband, whom she found too condescending, until one fine day she decided to confront her most unruly colleagues and shout what she thought of them. Naturally, she had to suffer the obvious consequence of being moved to another office, accompanied by a demerit note, without being able to take the job.*

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<sup>2</sup> Out of respect for privacy, all names and data that could lead to the cases mentioned have been changed.



*have the possibility to control their spouses and cheeky colleagues.*

### **1.3.3 FRIENDSHIP RELATIONS**

*Of all the things that wisdom provides for a happy existence, the greatest is friendship<sup>(3)</sup>*

*Epicurus*

#### ***1.3.3.1 Friendships within the same sex.***

While love relationships between a man and a woman involve numerous and often stringent social, economic, religious, sentimental and sexual implications, in friendship, which is an affective bond between two or more people linked by age, interests or common problems of various kinds: cultural, psychological, work, spiritual, there are no institutional rules, nor are there any financial or legal obligations. The only commitments are inherent in the relationship between the two or more people experiencing this relationship and concern the willingness to offer assistance, help, listening and moral and psychological support within the framework of an affective bond, which is generally not exclusive.

Friendship within the same sex is considerably more frequent than that between different sexes. There are basically three reasons for this:

1. Within the same sex, there are more common elements that can be shared.
2. There needs, inherent in each of us, for the essential elements of a good sexual identity. These needs can best be met by establishing, and then living in, same-sex friendship relationships.
3. Since the friendship between different sexes may cross over into a more involving and complex relationship such as love, relationships that avoid these risks are usually preferred.

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<sup>3</sup> EPICURUS, (1993), *Maxims and Aphorisms*, Newton, Rome, p. 27.

### ***1.3.3.2 Friendship between different sexes***

Friendship with the opposite sex has always been debated. That is, whether a true, healthy and stable friendship between a man and a woman is possible and what the specific characteristics are. The first question can easily be answered in the affirmative, as history records numerous experiences of deep and lasting friendship ties between the two sexes in every era and in all peoples. In recent decades, these bonds have been on the increase, and it is therefore impossible to deny the evidence. It is equally difficult, however, to underestimate or deny the specific features of these friendship ties: their greater variability, different purposes and different management.

#### *Greater variability.*

Friendship between a man and a woman is often remarkably unstable, as it is not uncommon for it to be the prelude to a more intense and involving relationship such as love, in- marriage or just sexual exchange. In fact, it often happens that both persons, or only one of them, have emotions or feelings towards the other that are different from those characteristic of pure friendship. These feelings are sometimes denied even to oneself or concealed for years from the other, but they can express themselves at any time, when certain situations change, bring it about or facilitate it. But even when the friendship is experienced by both parties without any unspoken love implications, it can suddenly turn into a more complex and complete feeling. The case of Marisa and Francesco that we report is quite typical.

*While a light breeze made his friend Marisa's golden hair sway and the conversation, always so rich and heated, strangely languished that evening, Francis noticed for the first time a tremor in her gaze. As if, for a moment, a golden twinkle had lit up in his childhood friend's eyes, between the pupils, similar to the reflection her hair. For several years and on a thousand occasions, he had been beside her. For many years, bound together by a rich and full friendship, they had sat together in books, studying the tedious, endless schooling; as they had sat together in animated conversation about the many problems and dreams and hopes of life, without ever glimpsing either in their gestures,*

*Neither in the tone of voice, nor in the typical embarrassment of innamored people, was there the slightest sign that their relationship was anything more or different than a simple, normal friendship.*

*But that day, as they sat next to each other on a bench in the village house, while the sun slowly descended through the trees and the light played with the autumn colours of the leaves of the platanos, that twinkle in their eyes, that tender embarrassment, had revealed something. Both could not understand whether it was something born at that moment or, on the contrary, it was something ancient, carefully concealed, which had suddenly awakened that day, accomplice perhaps, the tender glow of the sunset, accomplice perhaps, the breeze of that autumn evening.*

*The different purpose.*

While in the friendship between equal sexes the exchange is equal and therefore ideas, emotions, experiences and dreams with similar values are shared, in the friendship between a man and a woman, different experiences are shared, which can be useful to peek, without excessive involvement, into the most intimate part a world complementary to our own and unknown to us.

*The different management.*

Whereas friendships within the same sex, especially between women, are experienced in pairs, friendships between different sexes are often experienced within a more or less numerous group.

The reason why friendships between the two sexes are on the rise is linked on the one hand to increased sexual promiscuity at all ages, and on the other hand to the difficulties of establishing more challenging and involving bonds in a society that makes them difficult and discourages them.

### **1.3.4.1 SPURIOUS RELATIONSHIPS**

More and more often today, relationships, even lasting ones, are evident, which possess neither the characteristics of true friendship nor

the normal components of love, passion or other similar feelings. In these relationships with 'spurious' characteristics, the words, effusions and gestures between friends of different sexes go as far as a high degree of intimacy, sometimes even full sexual intercourse, without any other kind of ties or conscious obligations such as fidelity or planning.

They are called 'special friendships' in that they have the independence, complete freedom and a modest dose of affection and involvement of friendship, but there is no mutual commitment in them, as there is in love, except to give each other dialogue or sexual pleasure when both feel like it. In these cases, it is not clear whether it is friendship that has taken over the gestures and behaviour typical of love, or whether the fear of involvement in a real love drives some young people to live this feeling with the rules and values of friendship.



## **Chapter 2**

# **LOVE RELATIONSHIPS**

### **2.1 What is love?**

It is not easy to answer this question, because while it is true that love is an emotion and a state mind, each of us has a subjective and personal idea of it in relation to the environment in which we grew up, to our personal psychic characteristics, but also in relation to our lived experiences.

Each person therefore experiences this feeling in his or her own way, just as each couple constructs and experiences love in a personal and individual way. Therefore, the ways experiencing and feeling love, both individually and as a couple, are numerous, not least because the same people can experience this feeling differently throughout their lives, but also in relation to the people they meet.

Even if love is a subjective experience, full of personal projections, influenced by time and encounters, we know, however, that this feeling is an indispensable necessity for the individual's e-balance and is fundamental for the good harmony of the human being as a psycho-physical unity<sup>(4)</sup>.

For Branden, the emotions, of which love is made, are in fact automatic psychological responses of greater or lesser appreciation of what is presented to our eyes and hearts. The individual, when faced with certain realities, asks itself whether they are 'for it or against it' and reacts accordingly. Love is considered the most intense expression of the evaluation 'in its favour', because in the beloved we see those traits that we most desire for our own well-being and happiness.

As a consequence of this evaluation with passion, we desire and then seek interaction and contact with the beloved, precisely because we see them as a primary source of well-being, joy and happiness:

On the contrary, since an extremely negative judgement corresponds to negative emotions such as fear or, worse still, terror, as a consequence of this judgement we have, with regard to this type of emotion, a flight behaviour.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>DACQUINO, G.,(1996), *Che cos è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p. 151.

<sup>5</sup>BRANDEN, N., (2002), 'A View of Romantic Love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.245.

<sup>6</sup>BRANDEN, N., (2002), "A View of Romantic Love", in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.245

Love is therefore our emotional response to something to which we attach great value. Therefore, this response is accompanied by an intense desire for physical and spiritual union.

If love is reciprocated, this feeling is accompanied by a profound sense of fulfilment, ecstasy and joy at the existence and presence of the love object next to us. If, the other hand, it is not reciprocated, there is a painful and lacerating sense of emptiness and yearning.

## 2.2 How and when is love born?

Unlike falling in love, the capacity to love arises very early. It is born when the human being is still in infancy. It becomes apparent when the child, who has hitherto received everything: food, attention, caresses, warmth, comfort, without giving anything in return, feels and matures in his or her inner self the desire and need to exchange, with the mother who holds him or her in her arms and then with the father and relatives and finally with the world that has him or her, the only thing he or she possesses that can make others happy: his or her smile.

Already in the first smiles there are all the components of love.

- *There is a desire contact and union.*

The child is as if saying to his mother: 'Please don't go away: we are good together. When you talk to me and I can tell from the tone of your voice that you love me, while anxiety and fears flee from my soul, chased away by your serene, smiling face, we are good together. When you hug me and caress me, when you kiss me and hold my breast, when you wash me and play with my body and I touch and hold and kiss your face, we are well together. When safe and quiet I fall asleep in your arms and then I wake up and find you close and intoxicate myself with your perfume, we are good together".

- *There is a need to say 'thank you'.*

With this primitive but effective communication, the man cub, satisfied and sated with love, can finally say: "Thank you. "Thank you for all the caresses you have given me. Thank you for all the kisses you have given me. Thank you for the warmth with which you have surrounded me. Thank you for the food and care you gave me. Thank you for the sweet words with which you have accompanied me every moment of my still brief existence. Thank



you for the fears you banished from my soul.

- *There is an exchange of gifts.*

In those first smiles, attention and attitudes of care towards objects of love are already present: 'I give you something that I know will make you feel good. I give it you to say thank you, but also to make you feel happy. Because your well-being is my well-being, your joy is my joy, your serenity is my serenity'.

- *There is a desire to make the link between the inner and outer worlds stronger and firmer; between one's own self and that of parents and others.*

There is, therefore, a desire for a mutually beneficial alliance and understanding to be established. An understanding that is lasting and stable. "We are good together, why should we break up? I have I need from you. I can give you everything you need. I see it in your bright, happy eyes when I offer you my smile. We are good together, why should we break up?"

- *In those first smiles are commitments and promises.*

There is the promise to reciprocate what has been given, by all means available. There is the promise of a lifelong union of hearts. There is the desire for a lifelong covenant of growth and evolution for the people involved in that bond. Yes, because very soon the child, if satiated with his mother's love, will extend and involve other family members in his love and thus also in this understanding and alliance: first the father and then the grandparents, brothers, sisters and uncles. And after the family members, the friends, and after the friends, the strangers, and after the strangers, even people whom he has never met and may never know directly, will enjoy the reflections of this love.

*This extension of love makes me think of a steep, sloping valley, covered by the harmonious, curving branches of Uncle Turi's rich, green hazel grove, under which I, along with the others in my family, loved to play, eat and sleep on hot summer days. To do all this, the chosen place was always the one closest to a small spring of pure water, which gushed, as if by a miracle, from a rock in the ground. We drank this very fresh water, lying on our stomachs on the ground, while it wet our faces and hair and the dragonflies, more disturbed than frightened by us intruders, flew around us. This water then, escaping from the small puddle where it was born and collected, flowed into the dark ground and joined the*

*other spring waters.*

*gushing into the valley. All of them ran together, faster and faster, in large rivulets, eager to join the great river flowing at the bottom, on whose stony banks, the women of the village, with their yellow kerchiefs on their heads to cover and hold in place their long dark hair, chatted, sang and laughed noisily, washing their clothes, knocking them hard on the smooth black stones.*

As in all love relationships, certain conditions are necessary for this bond to be solid, stable and fruitful.

1. The first is that the care of the child's emotional-relational world was full, attentive and respectful of the various stages of human growth.
2. The second, equally important, is that this bond, this mutual understanding, this love, is not betrayed.

Adults who love each other accept, albeit reluctantly, a physiological distance. In the morning, after a night together, it is as if one says to the other: 'Hugged and close, we are fine. It is painful to detach yourself from the person you love. But understand that we both have duties and tasks to fulfil. We will meet again later, to continue loving each other, to continue being close'.

The child also accepts physical detachment and estrangement from its mother and parents if this detachment and estrangement is not disproportionate to its needs and requirements.

These needs and demands vary greatly age: they are greatest at birth, then gradually and slowly decrease with the months and years. Therefore, just as adults perceive excessive or sudden estrangement as a betrayal and abandonment, so too do children perceive too frequent, long-term or sudden estrangement as a painful breach of a pact, especially if they are entrusted to persons with whom they have not established an affinity, an important and stable bond of love, which for them is their only source of security and trust.

As for adults, also for children, when a covenant of love is broken or betrayed, the consequences personally and in the relationship

are important and serious. They develop resentment, aggression towards their parents who have failed them, but they also develop resentment, aggression towards the world at large, which is incapable of accommodating their feelings and needs.

And with resentment grows disenchantment with parents and the world, but also with oneself, deemed incapable of establishing valid loving relationship. And along with resentment comes restlessness, anxieties and fears.

Consequently, in the years to come, those children who have been betrayed, those children who have not been given the necessary love in the right way, those children who have been disappointed and no longer believe in other human beings, will be young people and adults disturbed in their growth and psychic maturation. They will also be young and then adults with serious difficulties in dealing with emotional-relational situations, especially the deepest and most challenging ones.

It is the family, therefore, the source and place of primary education in love in all its aspects: love for oneself, love for others, love for another, love for life and all forms of life, love for humanity, love and respect for nature.

And it is always in the family that the child will be able to introject the most important elements of his or her identity and sexual role, which are indispensable for the love relationships to be experienced, as an adult, with the opposite sex.

If a male acquires a full and complete sexual identity and role, so that he can offer the woman he loves, and then his children, the important and rich gifts of masculinity such as strength and courage, determination and understanding, coherence and straightforwardness, it is mainly thanks to the family in he has lived and been formed as a man.

Similarly, if a woman acquires a full and complete sexual identity and role, so that she can offer her feminine qualities such as gentleness and the ability to listen, understanding and tenderness, caring skills and acceptance to the beloved man, her children and society, it will be mainly thanks to the family in which she lived and was formed as a woman.

On the contrary, if a man is weak, insecure, with low self-esteem; if he is immature, fragile, not very determined, not very

coherent or aggressive; and if a woman is irritable, nervous, harsh, incapable of listening and accepting, the demerit will be above all.

all to families of origin who proved to be stingy or incapable of giving the affection and care necessary for their development.

We have emphasised the word 'above all' because while the contributions of the family of origin are important and fundamental, it should not be forgotten that today, much more than in the past, the contributions of the environment where this child and this family have lived, have a considerable capacity to affect their personality.

Our information civilisation, which is run for the use and consumption of the economic and business world, tends to enshroud every child, every pupil, but also every man, whatever his age or sex, with its messages like a spider's web. However, not only do these signals often not have educational characteristics, so as to be of help and support to families, but, being considerably ambiguous, vulgar and uneducational, they also succeed in confusing, debasing and depleting the heritage that parents or teachers try, with a thousand difficulties and limitations, to instil in the minds of children and young people.

## **2.3 What is love for?**

To this simple question, the obvious answer is: 'To make the men and women who are lucky enough to experience this feeling happy'. In reality, things are much more complex than they appear. The purposes of love are manifold:

- *Love is a source of pleasure and joy.*

Meanwhile, the obvious answer is true. If all goes well, if love is reciprocated, if the events of life allow love to grow and develop, if betrayal does not shake it, if frost does not crystallise it, if conflicts do not deteriorate it, then love is certainly a source of intense joy; joy that is felt as the fullness of feelings, as security in one's future, as stability in having arrived in a safe harbour.

There is no doubt that love makes us feel better, makes us feel wanted and accepted even when the storms of life hit our hearts. The endorphins that are released in our bodies while he/she caresses us and whispers words of love or while we laugh about everything and nothing together make us more sociable and relaxed.

They alleviate loneliness, make us feel the world and its inhabitants closer and friendlier.<sup>7</sup>

- *Love makes one discover the pleasure of free gift.*

Another purpose of love is to make man, and thus also his children, discover the pleasure and joy of free gift. This feeling is the only one capable of bringing pleasure and joy even at times when sacrifices and renunciations are necessary. This discovery allows every human being an important leap in quality and maturity. In fact, it is the immature child who always needs to ask for and receive from others for pleasure and enjoyment, while only the mature man or woman is willing to give, unreservedly, experiencing gratification and joy.

- *Love enables the gift of human life.*

Since love is not merely an emotional or sentimental state, it has the capacity to act and operate. Acts that fall under the category of love perform many functions and fulfil tasks and fulfil purposes that are connected with the success of reproduction.<sup>8</sup> Love is, in fact, indispensable for creating new families; it is therefore necessary to perpetuate the human species.<sup>9</sup>

It is love that encourages one to accept complex and difficult roles such as those of father and mother, husband and wife, giving these roles and tasks the gratification, pleasure and fulfilment necessary to perform them fully.

- *Love serves to give solidity and stability to new families.*

Soundness and stability are indispensable conditions for the development of offspring, because children, all children, need to find a stable human environment around and beside them,

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<sup>7</sup>LEGATO, M. J., (2006), *Why men do not remember anything and women never forget*, Sperling and Kupper publishers, Milan, p. 78.

<sup>8</sup>BUSS D. M., (2002), 'A View Romantic Love', in Stern- berg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed., *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.120.

<sup>9</sup>For Buss, love is part of natural acts. Acts love exist in the context of the reproduction of the species. The tasks of love acts are in essence: 'to seduce a mate; 2) to secure the mate's fidelity; 3) to procreate together with the mate; and 4) to activate the parental functions towards the offspring'. BUSS D. M., (2002), 'The Acts of Love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed., *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.121.



that has characteristics of intimacy, serenity, maturity, availability and mutual acceptance. The environment where love is frequently experienced is indispensable for the growth of children and their harmonic development and maturation.

- *Love allows one to understand and approach divinity.*

For all believers, human love serves to bring one even closer to and better understand the very source of love: God. And as one understands God and shares in his love, it is easy and easy to grow in holiness, richness and inner beauty.

This multiplicity of purposes cannot and should not be limited or disrupted by selfish and personalistic demands, on pain of losing the deep and true meaning of this feeling.

## **2.4 Which people are capable of love?**

We can all love, we all have the right to love, because love arises from the human condition of emotional interdependence. We are programmed that way from birth and the neurotic needs love as much as the normal person; perhaps more.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, this feeling is to be found both among people who are able to live it to the full, and among those with pathologies, who will have more or less limitations in living and participating in it.<sup>11</sup> We know, however, that *people who accept themselves, who have good self-esteem and who do not display defensive attitudes are more capable than others of loving and experiencing satisfying and fulfilling heterosexual relationships, because before being capable of loving another person, one must first be capable of loving oneself.*

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<sup>10</sup> MURSTEIN B. I., (2002), 'A taxonomy of love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M., ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.35.

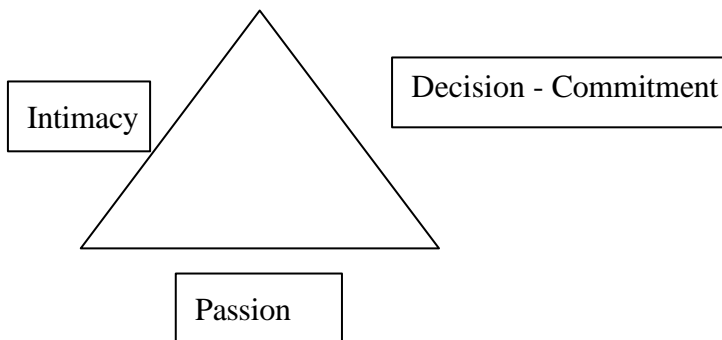
<sup>11</sup> MURSTEIN B.I., (2002), 'A taxonomy of love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M., ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.29.



## Chapter 3

### 3.0 THE ELEMENTS OF LOVE

Numerous elements in love have been highlighted. These elements have been tried to be schematised in various ways. For ease of exposition, we will follow the scheme proposed by Sternberg. This cartoon symbolises love as a triangle in which each side represents a fundamental component of love.



These components he calls: **INTIMACY - PASSION - DECISION - COMMITMENT.**

Instead, we like to think of love as a house resting on three or more pillars. These pillars, like those of a house, should all be solid and of the same height. Otherwise, the construction on top of them risks being unbalanced and therefore not very usable, or worse, it may fall down and ruin.

If this house is not supported by any pillars, it is more a hovel than a real house. A hovel in ba-

lia of the fury of the external elements, periodically invaded by rats, by water, as well as by mud, if not knocked down by wind and in-temperatures.

### 3.1 INTIMACY

Intimacy, from the Latin word *intimus*, internal, hidden, concealed, describes the most personal and deepest, intimate feelings and emotions. There are various types of *intimacy*: *intellectual, visual, tactile, affective, spiritual, and then there bodily, sexual and finally genital intimacy*.

Every couple and every person uses mainly some channels of intimacy and not others. The intimacy of which Sternberg speaks <sup>12</sup> refers above all to intellectual, emotional and spiritual intimacy. This type intimacy includes: feelings and confidences; willingness and a sense of togetherness; relationship affinities and attachment; dialogue and communication.

If there is good intimacy in the couple, we will often ask ourselves: 'Do we take an interest in the lives of those around us? Do we respect and admire each other? Are we willing to share a good deal of each other's emotions? Do we do everything to make each other feel good?'

Intimacy, therefore, consists of dialogue with other, trust in the other, esteem for the other, desire for the good of the other, material, emotional and affective care for the other, joy to be experienced with the other, understanding with the other.

Among the many positive effects intimacy is that it decreases both male and female aggression. Male aggression, which is linked to testosterone, which is present in large quantities in males, has the characteristic of being direct and involving motor skills. Female aggression, on the other hand, is more defensive and verbal, and therefore motor skills are much less involved in its expressions.<sup>13</sup>

When the man is in a stable and gratifying situation within the couple, there is a drop in testosterone levels.

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<sup>12</sup> STERNBERG R. J., (2002), "The Triangulation of Love", in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.142.

<sup>13</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma, p 44.

and this decrease greatly diminishes his aggressive and destructive behaviour. As for the woman, when she feels cuddled and listened to by her man, even by means of small attentions, she becomes more serene and available. On the contrary, when she finds herself in a situation that leads her to face life's difficulties on her own, without male tenderness and support, her anxiety, insecurity and depression are accentuated, while her 'acid', neurotic and aggressive behaviour increases, precisely because of the lack of a male side that helps and supports her by giving her comfort, security and support.

Society therefore has every interest in an intense, warm, profound and stable intimacy between two people, a man and a woman, as this condition allows a considerable decrease both mental disorders and antisocial behaviour.

### *The signs of intimacy.*

For Sternberg<sup>14</sup> when there is good intimacy the individual:

- *can count on their loved one in case of need;*
- *has the desire to contribute to the material well-being of the loved one;*
- *feels happy with a loved one;*
- *holds the beloved person in high esteem;*
- *is capable of giving and receiving understanding;*
- *shares their inner world and material resources with their loved one;*
- *receives emotional support from a loved one;*
- *gives emotional support to the loved one;*
- *communicates one's inner thoughts to the loved one;*
- *considers the relationship with a loved one as something of great value in one's life;*
- *is able to rely on his partner in times of need.*

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<sup>14</sup> STERNBERG, R. j., (2002), "The Triangulation of Love", in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.142

Characteristic of intimacy is thus being able to count on the loved one in case of need.

There are various types of needs: material, spiritual, affective, sexual.

We are with the *material needs*: a home that offers care and shelter; the food and water with which we can feed and dissipate; the clothes with which we can cover ourselves; the objects and tools useful for our daily activities; the help of a doctor and medicines when we are physically ill.

*Spiritual needs* concern our relationship with the divine. They are spiritual needs: knowledge of and closeness to God, meditation, silence, prayer, contemplation.

*Affective-relational needs*, on the other hand, include the desire for hugs, tenderness, listening and closeness. Affective needs also include the need for care and attention at many times of the day.

Finally, *sexual needs* concern the mutual exchange of pleasure.

To satisfy all these needs, we need be certain that the other person is active, committed, wants and seeks our inner good, our serenity, our deep joy.

These needs are satisfied when the other demonstrates day by day, moment by moment, his or her esteem and trust in us; when the other communicates to us above all his or her mature and positive feelings: affection, esteem, optimism, joy, trust, courage, as well as a desire for our presence.

Finally, these needs are satisfied when the other cares for us and is active at all to make us feel good inwardly.

### ***Obstacles to intimacy.***

According to Frizzarin <sup>15</sup>, there are numerous obstacles to intimacy: difficulties and problems in the social and professional spheres, personal immaturity, the inability to love authentically, self-centredness, the fear of not being good enough, constant anxiety, suppressed anger, and poorly developed communication skills. Other obstacles to intimacy we find in couples in the

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<sup>15</sup> FRIZZARIN, P., (2001), *1+1= 3, ovvero tu+ io= noi*, Archdiocese of

Rossano Cariatì, Rossano, p.143.

which there are numerous or considerable differences in intellectual, cultural and religious views, as well as differences traditions, opinions and background.

### ***3.1.1 INTIMACY IS COMPLEMENTARITY***

In order for the love relationship between a man and a woman to be rich and intense, it is important and necessary to recognise that there is another complementary being beside us. Another human being with different characteristics and specific potential that can be valuable for us.

Another to accompany us through life's difficulties. Another who can make us see the same problem in a different light. Another who will add strength to our arms, light to our minds, tenderness and capacity for love to our hearts. Another who, fortunately, has a different sex and therefore, precisely because of his or her diversity, is capable of bringing valuable specific elements into our affective, sexual and social lives. Another capable of making many valuable contributions in building a family, as in the education of new human beings. Another to rediscover important elements not fully present in our body and soul.

Another, a man, to face life and the difficulties of existence with more strength, security, stability, determination and linearity.

Another one, a woman, to find and experience the richness of a richer, more varied and lively dialogue; to discover the details and the subtlest nuances of feelings and emotions; to experience with intensity and fullness the taste of tenderness, the pleasure of care and welcome.

Another one, therefore, that we could not and would not do without.

The communion of love is, in fact, all the more life-giving when it merges two vitalities that show themselves to be rich in their own specific differences. It is important, then, to discover in the differences not the cause of conflicts but one of the possible resources for individual life, for the couple, for the children, for family and home management. Sexual complementarity is all the more valuable the more it is produced, the more it is rich in suggestions, the more it is sought after, accepted and accepted.



If, on the other hand, attempts are made to deny, obfuscate and blur as much as possible, through the use of incongruous educational attitudes or inappropriate laws, the differences between the sexes in the pursuit of maximum equality in behaviour and attitudes, if people are mistrustful or, worse still, averse to all behaviour linked to diversity, intimacy, which is one of the fundamental components of love and life as a couple, becomes extremely tiring, painful and often impossible.

This is unfortunately what has happened in recent decades in the western world, where the watchword has been that 'we must be equal and autonomous. Never depend on another both economically and psychologically'. The male must be able to do everything the woman does and vice versa. "Dependence = slavery".

In the quest autonomy and independence at all costs, many elements are underestimated.

- It is underestimated, for example, that if the other person has something that I do not have, it is pleasurable to be with him to discover that something, to experience it, to savour it, to take it in. If the other is the same as me, not only is there a lack of diversity of opinion and choice, but also a lack of pleasure in the encounter of different realities.
- If the other person can do or does better something that I cannot do as well, he will be dear to my heart, I will regard him as a precious person and respect him even at the cost of limiting my ego and my aggressive and destructive instincts.
- If, on the other hand, I think or believe that I know how to do everything the other does and am therefore capable of doing the same things, what is the point of seeking his help? What is the use of his company and presence?

The most obvious and foregone conclusion will be that 'every man for himself makes three' and that 'it is better to be alone than badly accompanied'.

When the relationship is lived and seen in this detrimental light, the difficulties of living together are amplified, as are the faults of the other, while at the same time there is a tendency to give free rein to the most immature and childish part of one's ego. To

that capricious, impulsive and destructive childish self that lies within each of us.

An immature self that tends to ask more than give; tends to talk more than listen; tends to pout more than smile; tends to criticise more than value. "I would do better". "I bring more money home than he does". "I can cook better than she can. The consequence is obvious: "If I can do everything the other person can do, then I can save time and patience and live on my own".

We forget that at the basis of any social relationship is exchange and that the more important, deeper and richer this exchange is, the more the relationship will be perceived as valuable and vital. This applies to peoples and nations, as well as to individuals or families. Self-ownership, whether in material or spiritual goods, has never enriched anyone, exchange has.

It is also forgotten that the contributions made by the other are essential for the maintenance of any relationship.

We consider important and are unwilling to give up people who give us something that is essential for our physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual wellbeing or for our very existence.

How much gratitude was to be seen in the eyes of men and women who daily could see for themselves the hard work, the sacrifice, the commitment and the willingness to give their spouses everything they needed for their lives and well-being!

Getting food by hunting meant risking one's life day after day. To be able to put a piece of bread on the table meant ploughing and hoeing dry, stony ground with one's own hands and strength arms, then sowing, watering, weeding, harvesting, threshing, riddling, grinding; and then again: kneading, lighting the fire and finally cooking. Putting water on the table meant digging a well with pickaxe and arms, or going to a more or less distant spring, collecting the water with a jug and carrying it home. Not to mention the risks that each day, due to wars, theft and aggression, each of them, and especially the males, were prepared to take in order to defend the other spouse, children and family.

Today, so many sacrifices, labours and risks are no longer necessary to give one's loved ones the essentials.

But 'if the other works to provide me with something useful or individual to my everyday life; if the other gives me assistance,

protection, care and defence; if the other is open to dialogue, knows how to accept me and listen to me, knows how to understand my sorrows and lift my spirits; if the other generously pampers me and pleases my body; if the other brightens my life with his smile, warms my heart with his warmth; if the other is helpful and supportive in my upbringing, raises my children, looks after my home, protects and defends my family, assists me in times of need or necessity: when I am sick, weak, fragile; if the other, finally, manages to be fundamentally faithful to our love relationship, then he or she becomes precious in my eyes, dear to my heart, indispensable to my life. So it is natural and spontaneous to desire him and defend him before everything and everyone; it is natural and spontaneous to long for him, to seek him out and hold him close to me.

If, on the other hand, the other greets me absent-mindedly in the morning only to return in the evening, tired, exhausted by fatigue and stress, indifferent to my needs and problems; if the contribution he makes to the family is only money that he hardly needs for himself; if he converses more with others than with me; if he is more capable of smiling and making others laugh than of bringing some joy into our home; if sex is just a way to release the tension of a moment; if he cheats on me as easily as he takes his coffee in the morning, then, if I am engaged or married, my indifference towards him will grow more and more until I will want to get rid of him as soon as possible and definitively, in the hope of looking for something or someone who gives me more or something different. If, fortunately, I am still not married and I think I should start a family, I will think about it more than once before embarking on such a situation.

### **3.1.1.1 The specific contributions.**

Just as there are similar contributions for both sexes, there are equally important specific contributions.

Women might reason along the following lines: 'If it is he who provides for all the material needs of my family, so that without him we would lack even the most essential things for our life and well-being; if it is he who takes on the greatest responsibility for the integration of our children into the social environment; if it is he who takes on the unpleasant task of saying

no to children and being authoritative with them, so that I can be gentle and kind to them; if it is he who takes on the task of being

strong and rational so that I can be sensitively emotional; if he can console me and protect me and make me feel safe; if he can adapt to doing a thousand little jobs around the house to make it always efficient and functional; if he can put a limit on work outside the family so that he can have a dialogue with me and follow and listen lovingly to his children... then he will be precious to me and I will not let him slip through my fingers. I will defend our union tooth and nail. I will know how to adapt to him, I will know how to integrate with him.

"If, on the other hand, he works all day and in the evening, being too tired, he does not want to talk to me or to our children, but prefers to spend the few hours he is at home in front of the TV, with a bottle of beer in his hand; if he does not know how to paint a wall, is not able to repair anything in the house and therefore I have to call in a technician or a workman for every small fault; if he systematically lays me off to spend his free time with his friends drinking and playing in a bar or at the sports ground running after a ball; if he appreciates the beauty of other women more than my own; if he leaves the responsibility of bringing up children to me; if he does not know how to be authoritative with his children and therefore forces me to be authoritative so that I have to juggle the two roles father and mother... then why have a man around the house? Better not to have him, better to provide only for myself, better to be and act alone.

The male reasoning could be along the same lines. "If she loves children and is capable of taking them in and looking after them lovingly as I would never know how; if she is able to give all the tenderness, listening, helpfulness and gentleness they need; if she knows how to welcome me and embrace me; if she knows how to be tender, passionate and sensual with me; if she never makes me doubt her fidelity; if she knows how to take care of my home and make it clean, warm and cosy; if she knows how to prepare delicious dishes with own hands; if she knows how to relate with respect and love to my parents and relatives and how to manage and expand relations with the families of origin by choosing the right words to weave the threads of a living, warm and welcoming emotional network... then she is precious to me. Then, if married, I cannot help but consider her indispensable and dear. I cannot but

continue to desire her and seek her out, striving to keep her with me. And if I am not a married man, what be more beautiful?

than think about a woman, seek a woman, desire a woman, marry a woman, grow old with a woman?"

"If, on the other hand, she is away from home all day between work, choosing clothes and knick-knacks, going to the gym for body care and chatting with friends; if she talks and converses more with her work colleagues than with me; if she does not know or is bored and tries to avoid cooking, washing and ironing as much as possible; if she makes me wash the dishes and the floors with the excuse that we have to cooperate; if she can't even sew on a button; if little or nothing can be asked of her because she tells me that she also works outside the home and that she is neither my slave nor my cook, housekeeper or maid; if she forces me to do the daily shopping, while she goes out to the shops to spend her and my wages; if she does not want to have many children because she has neither the ability, nor the time, nor the will to look after them; if she tries to turn only child we have against me; if he wants to have the last word in everything; if he makes me bicker with my parents because he wants to be independent and does not want any kind of influence from my relatives; if there is a risk that meeting someone else will leave me with no house, no furniture, no children, then... why stay married and what is the point of getting married when what little she can give me I can have with much less effort and much less risk?"

"I too am able to put some pasta in the boiling water and open a ready-made sauce. I too am able to take a pre-cooked food from the fridge and put it in the microwave to reheat. I too can put dirty laundry in the washing machine. On the other hand, it's even better for my sex life: I can change women whenever and however I want, each time choosing them even younger and more beautiful than a wife I will see growing old beside me. No, marriage is absolutely not convenient'.

As can be clearly seen, if the other does not take on specific tasks and roles that are useful, indeed indispensable, for us, interest, esteem, trust and need drop precipitously, while suspicion and mistrust increase.

The consequences between men and women of the irrational cultural stereotypes and laws in the western world are increasingly serious and recurring conflicts and mutual aggression; envy and jealousy; separations and divorces; and even life choices that



categorically exclude any plans.

long-term and often also short-term with a person of the opposite sex.

The single people are born, grow and spread. Spurious relationships, cohabitation, special friendships and homosexual partnerships increase. The latter hope, very often in vain, that living and feeling similarly about dialogue, situations and problems will avoid conflicts or help resolve them. In reality, however, the lack of the main binding agent of diversity and complementarity takes away the flavour and pleasure of the encounter and makes stable cohabitation much more difficult.

### ***3.1.2 INTIMACY AND DIALOGUE***

All books aimed at suggesting, advising, helping the birth and development of a good love relationship have a chapter devoted to dialogue. And so, even among those less interested in these problems, it is common to say that if something does not work in a couple, 'there is no dialogue or no good dialogue'.

We know that if communication is a fundamental element for the development and relational life of many animals, it is even more so for humans.

We can safely say that our genetic humanity will have its natural development and acquire completeness only and insofar as someone communicates with us effectively. It is communication, first with the mother, then with the father and then, progressively, with the other significant human figures with whom the child enters into relationship that allows both the birth and the progressive development of the child's ego. Even if, as is the case with deaf children, verbal communication should be deficient, the presence of other sources of communication, especially gestures and expressions, manages to make up for the sensory deficit.

It is precisely through dialogue that the child overcomes the initial trauma of birth, the fear of the world and of others, and the temptation to withdraw into itself. It is, in fact, the people who welcome the child into the world, especially its parents and other family members, who, with their facial expressions, tone of voice, attention, caresses and kisses, make the child feel welcome. It is they who will make the child feel that the world loves it, that the world is a good thing and that it is willing to accept it into the community of humans with warmth and readiness.

When parents fail to do this. When they fail to communicate to the child, through their gestures and words, the warm sense of welcome, affection and helpfulness, or fail to listen to their child's messages, sadness, anxiety and fear prevail, which will inevitably force the child into closure and depression.

Afterwards, it will always be dialogue that will enable the man cub to grow and mature language, intellectual and cognitive skills. It will also be through a continuous exchange of experiences and values that the ethical and moral sense will develop in him.

For these reasons, opening up to life and its full human growth and maturity will only come about if it has parents at its side, or at least human beings who place themselves in a serene, affectionate, stable and continuous dialogue of motherhood and fatherhood.

Just as for the development of the human being, dialogue is fundamental for the formation, knowledge and development of the partner and thus of the family.

### **3.1.2.1 THE PURPOSES OF DIALOGUE**

#### ***Dialogue leads to knowledge.***

There is no doubt that communication and understanding of each other is fundamental in life together.

It is only through dialogue that two young people, despite the fact that they come from different families, have different types education and habits, have different languages, religions or social backgrounds, and come from different cities and cultures, can achieve the ambitious goal of forming the unity in two that we call a couple.

This can only take place if there is a continuous exchange of thoughts, ideas, reflections between the two young people, tending towards the discovery and co-knowledge of the other, with the aim of later arriving at his or her acceptance.

This knowledge cannot be limited in time, as the human being is in a continuous state of becoming and therefore, knowledge must also be continuous. One cannot think of knowing one's boyfriend or girlfriend, but also one's husband or mother.

at a certain time and that is all. Positive or negative experiences; experiences of pleasure or adversity; joys as well as crises and sadness; illnesses or the merciless passing of the years continually change us, forcing us to continually adapt. For these reasons, it is necessary that this knowledge is applied to each present moment and projected into the future.

***Dialogue allows us to choose the right person.***

Getting to know each other is essential in order to choose well the person with whom we want to set out together and plan a common life project. This is all the more important today, since the choice of the person to marry and with whom to form a family in the western world is no longer, I do not say imposed, but neither is it steered or suggested by parents, relatives and friends.

Young people today are forced to rely solely on personal knowledge of the other person if they want to choose their life partner properly. Only direct knowledge today enables them to get to know the character of the other person: his or her desires and needs; the universe in which he or she moves; the meaning of his or her attitudes and reactions; the real nature of his or her expectations;<sup>16</sup> the reasons that make him or her sad or irritated and those that make him or her smile, be serene and joyful.

***Dialogue allows us to choose the right words.***

But even later, when one has decided to build a life together, it is always dialogue that allows one to know the words that hurt or that are good for the other and for the couple.

Hurtful words are those that touch the exposed nerves of the other person's soul and thus provoke aggression, resentment, disappointment, bitterness, loneliness and dis-esteem. For Frizzarin, the words that should not be said to the person one loves are those that question one's abilities and dignity, such as: 'you are like your mother or father; you are raving; it is your fault; the only thing you know how to do is complain; you are irresponsible; you are an impossible person, etc.'<sup>(17)</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup>MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psychology of Marital Life*, Città Nuova Editrice, Rome, p 129

<sup>17</sup>FRIZZARIN, P., (2001), *1+1= 3, ovvero tu+ io= noi*, Archdiocese of Rossano - Cariati, Rossano, p.71.

and the qualities of the other: 'you are a fool, a dummy, a bimbo, a cre- tin', 'you don't give a damn about the house, about your children, you only think of yourself/about yourself', 'you don't care about anything'.

Even more offensive and heavy are the words concerning the sexual sphere: 'You look like an impotent man', 'you are such a frigid woman'.

Equally offensive and damaging, as they can provoke serious resentment in the partner's soul, are phrases involving the parents or relatives of one or the other: 'Your mother is a witch, all she needs is a broomstick. "Your father also wants to rule in our family, he thinks he is a general or a little Duce'. Then there are a series of words or references that, in some people, do not induce any offence or resentment, while in others they can lead to lacerating wounds that are difficult to forget as they are capable of provoking a state of animosity that can last over time, sometimes for decades.

Through dialogue and communication, one should be able to identify these gestures and words, which are in themselves neutral, but which experience, or rather knowledge of the other person, has shown to be very offensive to that person. Some of these words or phrases relate to gender: male or female and are therefore much more offensive to one sex than the other. For example, saying to a man 'impotent' is much more offensive than saying to a woman 'frigid'. Telling a woman that she dresses badly is much more offensive than telling a man.

Just as there are words to avoid, there are words to please and therefore to be said often to a loved one. It is these 'magic' words that open the other's heart to benevolence, joy, a smile, a gift: 'Good job; the lunch you prepared was tasty; you are fantastic; you are great! It was beautiful; I feel good next to you; I am happy I married you, etc.'.

These words, or phrases like them, help the other to open up, stimulate him to love even more, encourage him to engage joyfully in building both the love relationship and family life.

Here too, knowledge is crucial because, while some positive words or gestures have a universal value, other words or gestures are linked to specific qualities of the person who

we want to love, with we want to or have already embarked on a journey as a couple.

***Dialogue allows us to choose the right gestures.***

Just as important as words are gestures. There are behaviours that are universally accepted and others that are rejected by all. In books on marriage and marriage, men are never failed to advise men to listen to their women's outpourings at length, with understanding and emotional involvement, but also not to fail to give them gifts and flowers on various anniversaries; to make men happy, women are advised to satisfy their sexual and nutritional needs, but also to have attitudes of listening and loving care for them when they return home tired and frazzled.

What we have said about words also applies to gestures: there are gestures that are neutral in themselves, but which, depending on individual characteristics, may be agreeable or may provoke resentment, anger and offence.

In our relationships with others, we often forget that each us has our own personal history: in terms of family, experiences, social environment or background. Each of us, therefore, is a bearer of diversity. Diversity is not the exception but the rule. If the goal is to form a united and supportive couple from a man and a woman, one should then learn to live together and manage diversity well, not uniformity. This goal is much more difficult to achieve when mass society tends to impose equality and uniformity: in words, in the way of dressing and thinking, but also in the way of being men and women, boys and girls, fathers and mothers, as well as in the way of running the family and work. This search for egalitarianism in gestures, words or behaviour at all costs makes what is natural appear strange, makes what is normal appear abnormal, makes even positive, yet different, contributions appear negative.

***Dialogue is a means of exchange with the other.***

With each other shares feelings, emotions, fears. One communicates the events of the day that made us joyful or sad, that made us smile or angry. One makes one's al-

the facts of life and past events that made us happy or made us sad or worse traumatised.

With each other they exchange information and experiences about their childhood and previous family life; joyful or sad emotions; dreams and aspirations; ideals and disappointments.

There is always something one can give to one's partner, just as there is always something one can and must receive.

Exchange can be about knowledge, ideas, ways of being, experiences, but it can and must also be about the world of affection and feelings. It is only right and natural to share the fears and anxieties from which we suffer. One lays one's heart bare, not only to get help but also to improve and deepen intimacy. Suggestions and advice are given to the other person on how best to deal with illnesses, limitations as well as life's difficulties. And if we sometimes express our disappointment and annoyance at words and behaviour that have saddened us, our positive and appreciative comments should not be lacking whenever the other person offers us his or her helpfulness and skills.

There is, in fact, an exchange that reassures and makes the other person feel good, and there is, unfortunately, an exchange that hurts and weighs on his or her soul and sensitivity, sometimes to the point of making him or her feel bad, to the point of undermining the image he or she has of himself or herself, of life, or of us.

Positive exchanges are made up of mature and pleasant feelings such as: love and esteem; tenderness and acceptance; serenity and *joie de vivre*; optimism and enthusiasm. Negative exchanges are made up of immature and unpleasant feelings such as bitterness and dislike; envy and jealousy; boredom and disinterest; anger and aggression; sadness and resentment; feelings of worthlessness and insecurity; disappointment and bitterness.

The exchange of positive feelings and emotions is a source of dynamism and brings gratification and fulfilment, so much so that it is much sought after by both parties, but especially by women, who, by communicating their worries and problems, get rid of the tensions and negative emotions that weigh on and shake their souls. When communication is lacking or is not aimed at making the other person feel better, but also at family and relationship life, it is not only a matter of making the other person feel better, but also of making them feel better.

we impoverish ourselves more and more each day. Every moment more we die as individuals and as a couple.

It is right that this mutual giving is ultimately equal, but one cannot use the shopkeeper's scales to weigh how much each person has given or is willing to give, because the ability to commune with the other the intimate elements of one's own soul is not only linked to our will, but is closely connected to the possibilities and capacities of each of us at that moment, in that situation and is related to our own inner reality. That is why it is correct to say that the effort to exchange should be equal, not its content.

It is right, therefore, that each one tries to give, in the , as much as he or she can, just as it is important to welcome with joy and gratitude what the other can give at that moment, even if it seems insufficient and limited relation to our needs.

Among other things, this exchange, as we shall see later, cannot be technically equal, both because it takes place between people with a different human history and because it takes place between a man and a woman who have not-teously different and sometimes conflicting contents, modalities, interests and needs.

The biggest problems arise today mainly in the manner and content of the exchange. Our young people, unfortunately, have been educated to give free rein to words, but also to feelings, emotions and behaviour, without filtering them through the sieve of love, rationality and sensitivity. The lack of these filters is due to a so-called 'free and spontaneous' upbringing, which has reigned for over thirty years now. In this period of history, in the search for maximum naturalness and freedomchildren and then young people have been allowed to live, dress, behave and express themselves with very few rules and standards, or even without them, and thus without the necessary and indispensable control exercised by reason, common sense and good taste, if not the indispensable respect for their neighbour.

The most striking example can be found in the streets but also, unfortunately, in the schools and churches of our cities. In these places, there are often young girls, but also not-so-young women, who wear very short blouses and trousers both during the summer and winter months. Thus, leaving



legs, bellies, hips, breasts and more. "because fashion wants it that way!"

The males, for their part, again in keeping with the fashion of the moment, have no problem wearing jeans that are so worn, dirty and frayed that no rag-and-bone man would give them a second glance.

Both of them do not worry about the possible impact of their clothes on the eyes, senses and judgement of their partners, serious and responsible peers, or on the eyes and sensitivities of more mature and wise people. Other things, it is not even evaluated whether, from the point of view of one's own health, this keeping of legs, abdomen and hips uncovered is healthy or not.

Ultimately, relational, moral, aesthetic, common sense, good taste or medical issues are not only overlooked, but often not even considered and evaluated. It is fashion that thinks and decides. It is current fashion that totally replaces good taste and common sense, prudence and reason, modesty and rules, medical and religious indications.

If parents, older brothers or sisters have the audacity to point out the unsuitable effects of such clothing, the conclusion of any talk and observation is inevitably of this tenor: 'I like them, they are used and I wear them, it is my business not yours'.

Just as in dressing people say 'I like them, I wear them, they are my business and not yours', similar phrases are used in speaking such as: 'I felt like saying it and I said it. I am a real and spontaneous person'.

But the things left unsaid, both in the case of clothes and words, are other. It is not explicitly said that obeying the fashion of the moment is more important than cherishing the relationship with the person who loves us and whom we should love. It is not said that obeying the fashion of the moment is more important than the relationship with parents and other people who live with us, who should love each other while respecting their sensitivity, common sense and judgement.

It is not explicitly stated that behaving as one wants and saying what one wants, when one wants, how one wants, presupposes that others, in this case the man or woman who is watching us, will be able to do so.

and with whom we should communicate and thus exchange in a constructive and positive way: "If they love us, they should accept from us everything they have to say, all our behaviour, our choices. If not, they do not love us. Otherwise they are bratty, ugly and bad and do not deserve our love!"

This is an extremely childish way of establishing and experiencing relationships. Such behaviour and attitudes should physiologically be expected only from children who are not yet able to control and understand the effects of communication on others, as this so-called 'real' behaviour is a totally unsuitable way to initiate or advance a relationship or to establish and mature parental and family commitment and responsibility.

People forget that clothes, gestures, behaviour or words are means of communication. This means, willingly or unwillingly, they are tools that relate us to others. We cannot therefore neglect or disregard the messages that reach others.

The filter of rationality would then require us to analyse, before we open our mouths, the objective(s) we aim to achieve.

Finally, the filter of sensitivity should make one choose the most delicate and appropriate words at a given moment and not those that come out of one's mouth freely.

When these filters are not used or are devalued because 'you have to be sincere and say everything you have inside in a spontaneous and free way, as it comes', the risk is to invest the other with an avalanche of uncontrolled emotions and feelings that not only do not improve understanding in the couple, but also limit and sometimes block for months if not years, the future possibilities of a constructive and productive dialogue.

The risk is that from 'spontaneous, sincere and truthful' words and phrases, a skirmish of increasingly colourful phrases, full of insults, epithets and aggression, but poor in listening, helpfulness and acceptance, will arise. The risk is that the other party, in an attempt to defend itself, will erect an insurmountable wall not only against that kind of language, but also against the person using it. The most predictable consequence is that the person who is 'free to say what is

feels' is left alone to swear at those who do not understand and accept 'the utmost sincerity and spontaneity'.

Then there is the problem concerning the ability to absorb negative emotions. The other is not a psychiatrist, a psychologist, nor even a psychotherapist who has a duty, being paid for it, to listen and metabolise the suffering and pain of clients and patients. The partner, although he has a duty to help and support his loved one, has limits that we cannot and must not exceed in any way because, not being a person prepared for this, he has difficulty in dealing with excessively intense or long-lasting suffering. In the final analysis and in simple terms, he married to be better off than he was before, not to be worse off.

*In all relationships, the commitment we make, even if not explicitly stated, is to ensure that the load of joy and pleasure we give the other person far outweighs the sadness and sorrow we bring them.*

According to Frizzarin, one should then be educated from an early age: 'to practise containing one's emotions and their relative expressions. Unfortunately, today there is no adequate education in families on emotional life, so that many young people believe that it is their right not only to express their emotions, but also to express them when they want, where and how they want'.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Dialogue is a means of cohesion in the couple.***

Cohesion indicates the degree of sharing and closeness seen in the relationship and in the decisions the couple makes.

Laughing together, talking together, committing and working together for common goals, lead to a special state mind: the other is important to us; we feel the other close; we could not do without the other. The other makes us feel secure,

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<sup>18</sup>FRIZZARIN, P., (2001), *1+1= 3, ovvero tu+ io= noi*. Archdiocese of Rossano - Cariati, Rossano, p.96.

the other is a solid shoulder to lean on in times of crisis or need.

When the degree of cohesion of the couple is considerable, educational problems are better dealt with, with more security and linearity, as are relations with the outside world: family of origin, friendships, work. Cohesion therefore plays an important role in the functioning of the family and the couple.

Greater cohesion is achieved when couples or spouses talk to each other, standing by each other. In other words, greater cohesion is achieved when people continue to respect, love and understand each other while arguing. In contrast, fractures are inevitable when couples or spouses confront each other with the aim of humiliating the other, subjugating the other or, worse, excluding the other.

### ***Dialogue is a means of finding common lines.***

Effective communication makes it possible to find common lines so that educational and work activities, the management of the home and the family network, happy moments as well as sad ones, occasions full of enthusiasm but also episodes of crisis and discouragement can be tackled with solidarity and unity of purpose.

Diversity of opinion can be frequent in engaged and married couples, as it is often necessary to find solutions or useful lines for the couple, the children and the family. In these situations, which are all the more frequent the greater the family commitments, dialogue is valuable. But under what conditions?

Authors have indulged in this theme, which aims to help bring about and develop a climate of serene harmony, if not happiness, within the couple.

One tries, of course, to imbue these councils with egalitarian, if not democratic, principles, then linking them to a lot of and the great cohesive force of love. As if to say that with a lot of democracy, a lot of love and a lot of good will, this age-old problem should be solved. However, this is not the case. Democracy is not enough, good will is not enough, love is not enough.

To tackle the problem of how to decide and who should decide, a whole series of methods have been devised, but these have numerous serious drawbacks. For the sake of fairness, we list them:

1. Every decision, from the smallest to the biggest, is made in common.
2. It is good to allow decisions to be taken in turn: one spouse makes one decision, while the other spouse makes the next decision.
3. As long as possible, it is good to use the system of intermediate choices between the wishes of one and the other spouse.
4. It is better to divide all decisions into two large groups by entrusting them to both spouses. Therefore, all decisions concerning certain family areas are taken by one spouse, while all others are taken by the other spouse.
5. It is good to let decisions be made every other day or every other week or every other month. As in: 'One day or one week or one month I decide, the next day, the next week or the next month you decide'.
6. It was also suggested to write on a card the proposals on which the couple had a difference of opinion and then leave the choice to Lady Luck.

The observations that could be made to these proposed systems of choice are numerous.

In the meantime, deciding together, finding a common line on every problem that arises in family life, exploiting the feeling of love and goodwill, is difficult to achieve because the number of possible discussions, if one takes into account both fundamental and trivial, minute choices, is practically infinite.

One can have different and often conflicting ideas about everything: from the colour of the curtains to put in the bedroom or the type of sofa to buy, what to eat for dinner or lunch, where to put the tiled dog given by Aunt Josephine for the wedding, how many children, or how much salt to put in the mine. Let us not even talk about the best educational attitudes to use in every circumstance, at every age and for every child. This always together requires infinite time and patience. While the patience, good will, attention, energy and also the loving feeling of both spouses are considerably more limited.

As far as the use of a democratic system is concerned, this is unfeasible within normal families. Since the couple consists of two people, also of different sexes, who come from different families, with different characters, tastes and principles, many votes in the 'family parliament' would result in a fifty-fifty percent 'yes' and another fifty percent 'no'.

Taking decisions in turn: one spouse takes one decision, while the other spouse takes the next decision, is unrealistic because the decisions do not all have the same value. Furthermore, there are many choices in which it is not possible to use a middle solution, as the middle choices could be the worst ones. With regard to dividing the decisions into two large groups, with one spouse managing each group exclusively, it seems to us that this method limits the contribution of the excluded spouse too much. Allowing decisions to be made every other day or every other week or every other month could lead to a very irregular and contradictory family trend. Finally, the use of drawing lots does not seem very serious to us. It would be like leaving the conduct of the family to chance.

While realistically admitting that there are no ideal solutions, we believe that the systems devised and used for thousands of years by the majority of our ancestors are, with all their limitations, probably the best possible, precisely because they are so well tested. In order to use them, however, one must have the courage to accept the diversity of sexual roles and thus accept, as a consequence, a specialisation, albeit partial, within the couple, and one must be able to forget so-called 'family democracy'.

If one accepts these two principles, it is possible, as has been done for millennia in billions of families in the past and as is currently done in the vast majority of the world's population, to ensure that number and intensity of family conflicts is significantly reduced.

To do so, it is indispensable that a good number of choices are the exclusive or predominant prerogative of one or other spouse. It is therefore necessary, in advance, to divide the choices into five broad groups.

Two of these groups will be the sole responsibility of the individual spouses. In practice, one group of decisions and choices will be made only by the spouse who is predominantly, though not exclusively, concerned with one area, such as the emotional world and household management, while the other group will be made by the other spouse who is predominantly, though not exclusively, concerned with the economic world and services. These choices, made without asking for prior authorisation and without any discussion, will then be shared with the other spouse in such a way that each of them is always informed about the partner's work and the family's progress.

Mothers who go to the market for their daily shopping, household detergents, children's T-shirts, the magazine or book they find interesting, should certainly not need to be authorised by their husbands for these choices. The same is true for husbands, who should be totally free to make the small expenses related their personal well-being, work activities or hobbies.

The other two groups, which are always connected to the sphere of influence of sex roles, will instead include choices requiring a certain educational, economic or family commitment. These decisions include all expenses of a certain economic importance, but which concern specific areas of competence. I am thinking, for example, of the cot, the cradle and the pushchair for the small child, the expenditure on the trousseau for the older daughters or the purchase of a new car, a new computer or the decision on who to invite to the various parties and occasions. It is these expenses and decisions of a certain importance which, however, fall respectively within the female or male sphere of responsibility. These decisions should certainly need to be discussed in depth with each other, as the commitment, both financial and familial, can be considerable, but the final decision should definitely be entrusted to the spouse who is more competent or responsible in that area.

This leaves a third group of choices, which can and should be few in number. These choices include decisions concerning the basic lines, direction and course on which the family as a whole should travel and move. These basic decisions cannot be entrusted to fate, nor can they be made

alternately between the two spouses. The only realistic solution we see is to entrust them, after thorough discussion and prior confrontation, to only one of the spouses: to the head of the family. Only he or she, who represents and is responsible for the general conduct of the family and its unity, has the right and duty to exercise the best choice. Therefore the other spouse has the task accepting it calmly, without contesting it, without continually questioning it and without excessive grumbling. These decisions include: the place of residence in the marital home; the hours and times when it is right for the family to be reunited; the amount of time and energy to be used for the harmonious development of the emotional-relational world and that to be used for the economic world and services; the fundamental educational guidelines; and the best way to manage the most onerous and burdensome economic commitments.

We can help those around us in a thousand ways. First of all by listening.

### **3.1.2.2 LISTENING.**

For Frizzarin, dialogue, but above all listening, is the best instrument for perceiving the movements of the soul and harmonising with those around us. When one listens with great inner silence, in order to put oneself as much as possible in one's partner's shoes, the other person easily feels the love one has for them:

This means that dialogue should not consist of a struggle of words and arguments to overpower other people's thoughts and ideas, but a means of understanding and giving the other person what he asks for, what he needs, what can improve or satisfy him. For the same author, it is necessary to give one's partner an emotional presence, which is 'the ability to feel at ease in one's relationship with one's partner and at the same time the desire to enter one's partner's personal world as if it were one's own'.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> FRIZZARIN, P., (2001), *1+1= 3, ovvero tu+ io= noi*. Archdiocese of Rossano - Cariati, Rossano, p.97.

<sup>20</sup> FRIZZARIN, P., (2001), *1+1= 3, ovvero tu+ io= noi*, Archdiocese of



Rossano - Cariati, Rossano, p.128.

That is why one should reflect more on the needs that the other person expresses, not only with words, but also with silences, than on the response to be given to counteract or overwhelm them.

Listening to the other person means being on the same wavelength as them, it means putting your own heart alongside theirs. Listening to the other person means putting oneself in a situation in which our helpfulness, attention, openness, sensitivity and closeness are present to the highest degree. Only then does listening become a gift, as thoughts and ideas are shared; joys and sufferings; humiliations and exaltations; moments of anguish and moments of happiness.

These moments of listening are precious because they allow the person we love to let go and confide <sup>21</sup>, expressing their feelings and opinions. Ultimately, listening allows the other person to be themselves, and then sharing leads to intimacy. When we manage to create this state of mind within ourselves, words are not necessary, our eyes speak, our hands clasped in theirs speak, our embraced bodies speak.

And when words flow out to encourage, stimulate and share, they are not words of convenience, they are not words of chance, they are true words, because they come from the depths of our being and have the capacity to give joy and zest for life.

It is only then that help is born. Help to understand oneself and others. Help in accepting the sadnesses and disappointments of which life is, unfortunately, prodigal; help in savouring the happy moments and those, rarer ones, of happiness.

### **3.1.2.3 Valuing each other's gifts**

Since each of us needs someone to enhance the qualities and abilities we possess, highlighting what the other person offers us is crucial.

If we have the power to diminish even the greatest and most beautiful gift(s) with our words and behaviour, we also have the power to shine a good light on and enhance even the smallest offerings, the smallest manifestations of love. Every gift from the other that we value, gratifies and stimulates our partner to give more and better. Being important to someone makes one feel

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<sup>21</sup> ALBISETTI, V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Mila-

no, p.189.

well, it gives security, strength and courage; it makes you face life better and with more determination; it stimulates generous, correct, responsible and attentive behaviour.

On the contrary, if the gifts that the other person gives us, even if they are small, are not well received, he will feel frustrated and powerless and will therefore close himself off and defend himself even more, while at the same time resentment and bitterness will increase in him. It is known, in fact, that dislike and lack of trust on the part of those nearest and dearest leads to closure, sadness, abandonment, discouragement, rejection, but also to increased reactivity and aggression.

#### **3.1.2.4 Inner silence**

Listening not easy. To listen, one must be able to create inner silence. But in order to create inner silence, it is necessary not only to stop talking for a few moments, but above all, it is necessary to limit the whirlwind of thoughts that often swirl around in our minds, disturbing and preventing concentration. They are thoughts and worries related to the things to be done and the busy life to which the consumer society forces us. Above all, they are deep anxieties, fears and anxieties resulting from the non-physiological way in which we have spent our childhood.

When our childhood has not been well-lived, whether due to an upbringing that did not meet human needs, a cold and unharmonious family environment, or poor, sporadic and unsatisfactory parental presence, numerous unresolved and invasive inner conflicts can arise. These scars of the heart will disturb our souls for years, more or less intensely, filling them with sadness, anxiety and restlessness. We often find it difficult to understand the true causes of these negative emotions, while at the same time we have difficulty in finding appropriate remedies.

Therefore, not only do we find it difficult to shut off our mobile phones and the various instruments we like to surround ourselves with, which disturb our inner silence, but it is also difficult to banish the anxieties and sadnesses that assail us and do not leave us free to open up to others.

#### **3.1.3.5 Readiness to give.**

But the willingness to give is not easy to possess either. To be

able to have it, it is necessary that someone, the people closest to us, should be able to give it.

cine, and thus especially our parents and family members, have given us a lot at the right time and in the right way, and consequently have generously, in their family life, emphasised giving as the primary value of their behaviour.

If our parents and other family members, with whom we grew up, sowed our existence only with material gifts: clothes, toys, mobile phones, loud motorbikes and luxury cars, the fruits of these seeds can only be poor and meagre. So poor and meagre that we will hardly feel like sharing what little we have with others. If, on the other hand, those closest to us have sown in our souls abundant and rich spiritual and emotional-relational gifts, the trees produced by these seeds will be many, but above all, these trees will be so large and rich in fruit that it will not be at all difficult to offer them to others.

### **31.3.6 Competition between the two genders**

We said above how important it is to value the other, but, in order to want to value the other, we must not perceive him as a competitor, we must not perceive him as an obstacle to our realisation. This is particularly difficult today because the false concept of equality to which the last generations have been educated, would like us both, men and women, to devote ourselves in the same way, with the same commitment and with the same responsibility and dedication both to the *economic and service world* and to the *affective-relational world*.

These are two very different worlds: they live from different inputs; they have different purposes; different structural characteristics; different times and modes of growth; different rewards, values and places.

There are several *places* where these two worlds carry out their activities.

The places of the affective-relational world are the arms of the mother, the father and those of other family members, and then the cradle, the bed, the home. The places of the affective-relational world are the grass-smelling parks, the hills or the seashore from which to watch the sun set and the first stars rise

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<sup>22</sup> TRIBULATO, E., (2008), *Mondo affettivo e Mondo economico* Centro Studi Logos, Messina, p. 16.

On the contrary, the places of the economic world are busy streets and smoky factories; offices and ports; mines and farmland.

In the two worlds, the affective-relational world and the economic and service world, the way *time* is experienced and managed is different. If time in the affective world is not sold but offered, and is valued above all for its slowness and abandonment, on the other hand, time in the economic world is bargained for, sold or given away, and there is the distinct feeling that it runs fast and frenetic.

*Space* has a different value. In the economic world, space is an enemy to be knocked down or a commodity to be sold; in the affective world, it is a place to be experienced, enjoyed and savoured.

There are different *gratifications*. In the economic world, gratifications are nourished by power and money. In the emotional world, gratifications are made up of glances, handshakes, hugs and barely whispered words that communicate the emotions and breaths of the soul.

Above all, *values* are different. In the economic world, they value drive and determination, dynamism and speed, resourcefulness and strength, power and glory production and wealth. In the affective-relational world they value gestures and caresses, closeness and gifts, feelings and care, continuity and loyalty, availability and sacrifice.

In the economic world, change and innovation are just as important as stability and continuity in the emotional world.

And finally, '*production*' is totally different. In the economic world, objects and artefacts, consumer goods and food, machines and tools, services and organisations are produced. Whereas in the affective-relational world, feelings and emotions, love and friendship, welcome and gift, intimacy and listening are produced.

Therefore, if on the one hand it is impossible to live them both with full capacity and willingness, on the other hand there is the risk of a ruthless competition emerging, first within one's own soul and later also within the couple, with the result that the two are not able to compete.

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<sup>23</sup> TRIBULATO, E., (2008), *Mondo affettivo e Mondo economico*, Centro Studi Logos, Messina, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> TRIBULATO, E., (2008), *Mondo affettivo e Mondo economico*, Centro

Studi Logos, Messina, p. 33.

<sup>25</sup> TRIBULATO, E., (2008), *Mondo affettivo e Mondo economico*, Centro Studi Logos, Messina, p. 41.



envy, jealousy, aggression and destructiveness towards the other: the opposite of the aims and needs of the person, the couple and the family.

If I, as a woman, need help in carrying out my task and ask my husband to take care of the baby while I prepare the baby's papina for him, there is no competition, because the caring and emotional-relational responsibility for raising the child remains mine. And just as the effort and commitment are mine, so are the expressions of gratitude, love and the special, deep bond that I will form with my child; but if both parents feel fifty-fifty involved, as the current egalitarian thesis would have it, it is easy for competition and envy, jealousy and bitterness to arise. For if it is he who is best able to prepare and feed the child, if it is he who has succeeded in forging a deeper and more joyful bond with our child, it is above all to him that the credit will go if the child grows up well, just as it is to him alone that the kisses and other expressions of affection go.

There is no doubt then that one's man or husband is a competitor in this fundamental role. And if there is competition, it is easy for there to arise, instinctively, the need me, as a woman and wife, to equip myself and use all the weapons and feminine wiles to hinder him and fight him in every way, even diminishing his image in the eyes of his son, in order to limit his power.

The same happens when it is the wife who engages in work outside the family.

If she, when and if her prevailing role in the affective-relational world allows her to do so, cooperates and is active in some small job, leaving me as a man with the substantial responsibility for the maintenance of the family, then I will say thank you and be grateful to her, but if her working career is superior or brighter than mine, if she earns as much as me or more than me, if she is well liked by her colleagues and is held in high esteem by her boss, then as envy, jealousy and competition, she becomes a villain and an enemy to be fought and destroyed by all means by devaluing or denigrating her.

To think that in these situations dialogue, even help of a great love, becomes a gift and pushes one to value the other, is to live and let current and future generations live in the world of illusions and dreams.

*Natural laws, be they physical, psychological or biological, can be forced for some time but never subverted.*

### **3.1.3.6 Dialogue tools.**

When one person communicates with another, they do not use a single communication channel.

Language is certainly an important tool of communication, but not the only one. Non-verbal communication, made up of gestures and behaviour, is just as important. A gift, a tenderness, a caress, a gesture of solidarity, the exchange of a gentle sexuality, capable of communicating our love, availability, loyalty, attention and respect for the other person, are as precious as a thousand words.

It is therefore clear, from this perspective, that all behaviour and not only speech is communication and that communication influences behaviour.

### **3.1.3.8 EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE DIALOGUE.**

#### **Effective dialogue:**

- 1. It is rich in sincerity and loyalty.**
- 2. It is delicate towards each other.**
- 3. He does not judge the other.**
- 4. It is based on acceptance of the other.**
- 5. It has as its perspective the encounter with other.**
- 6. It seeks the satisfaction of the other's needs.**
- 7. It is based equality with other.**
- 8. It contains an intense and valuable emotional charge and participation.**

#### ***1. It is rich in sincerity and loyalty.***

The effectiveness of communication is measured by its clarity, by its ability to be interpreted, by the responses it elicits and ultimately, by the greater or lesser possibility of satisfying the needs and expectations of the individual and the couple.

For dialogue to be effective, therefore, the language should be as clear, simple, sincere and transparent as possible.

We live in a social environment where, very often, one communication hides another, one need disguises another, one opinion is expressed to hide another. We live in a world where there is a tendency to cover up unorthodox, less than noble or credible intentions with words that are anything but true and sincere. This inevitably leads each of us to have a notorious, almost total distrust of everything and everyone. If many people lie or do not really say what they think, there is a risk of believing that everyone is lying and that therefore the truth does not exist.

For this reason, it is necessary that communication is not only clear and sincere, but that there is also consistency between what we say and do, that there is also consistency between the content of what is said, the tone of voice, mimicry and other connotations of the message<sup>(26)</sup>.

Be careful, however, not to turn sincerity into cruelty. Sincerity is at the very basis of dialogue, but there are thoughts and feelings that could hurt or harm and therefore, before they are expressed, need to be carefully screened, to find the most appropriate ways and times to communicate them.

Dialogue is not about saying everything that is on one's mind at a given moment, but about building, through love and respect for the other's sensitivity, a sincere and loyal relationship. The pain that can be caused by misusing words and gestures is considerable, so communication should always be attentive to the maturity and sensitivity of the other person.

## ***2. It is delicate towards each other.***

While one cannot force a person to open up and confide feelings, emotions and thoughts when one does not put them in a position to feel free to say everything they feel, on the other hand, brusque manners, words that humiliate, that make one feel bad, excessive impulsiveness, lack of patience, aggressiveness are words and gestures that push away, frighten or put the person on the defensive.

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<sup>26</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città Nuova Editrice, Rome, pp. 130-131.

is beside. For this reason, even when our partner is wrong, it is right to use as much gentleness as possible to help him or her understand the mistake and rectify it.

### ***3. He does not judge other.***

It is difficult not to judge. It is human nature to think and see faults and limitations in others, from which, of course, only we are exempt!

Unfortunately, in the context of love relationships, after the falling in love phase, judgements on those close to us are frequent, the aim of making the other person feel guilty. Judgments are used when saying phrases such as: 'You are a fool, an incompetent, an idiot, an evil person, etc.'

To avoid making judgements, it would instead be appropriate to use phrases such as: "This attitude yours could lead these consequences. "This attitude I do not share, it makes me suffer, it does not serve the purpose". "I would like to understand your way of doing, your way of being".

Judging undermines and mutual trust; it prevents the deeper content of one's thoughts from being expressed; it pushes one towards closure, defensiveness and aggression.

### ***4. It is based on acceptance of the other.***

Accepting the other means accepting the different personality, the different social reality, the different sexual identity and the different role that each of us has and brings to our life as a couple.

It is from this acceptance that positive confrontation arises and develops. When acceptance is lacking, so that we would like the other person to be as we have dreamed and desired or always have the same characteristics, it is easy to realise that dialogue becomes difficult or ceases. This does not detract, however, from the fact that the efforts of every individual experiencing the difficult but wonderful reality of love as a couple should aim to harmonise and integrate their own inner reality and behaviour with the experiences, needs and desires of those around them.

### ***5. It has as its perspective the encounter with other.***

Encounter, understanding, should be the ultimate goals of dialogue. This is not always possible, it is not always possible to

find

that longed-for agreement. But this inner tension towards the encounter should be there at all times and in every situation.

If during the argument the other not accepted he/she is but is seen as a source of frustration, he/she will be practically rejected as a partner and communication will tend to decrease <sup>(27)</sup>.

### ***6. It seeks the satisfaction of the other's needs.***

When the partner asks for something, it is because he or she needs it. If these needs are legitimate and healthy, meeting them means loving and cherishing one's partner. Trying to meet the needs of the other sometimes involves a certain commitment and sacrifice. But this commitment and sacrifice will be amply rewarded when the other person notices and values our attention to him or her. Conversely, if the relationship with the partner has only been full of rejection, aggression and violence, we must necessarily expect a return of negative and destructive attitudes and behaviour.

This commitment to meeting each other's needs must take gender and individual differences into account. The needs of a man are different from those of a woman. The needs of each of us, as individuals, can be or translate differently. No two people are the same: with the same tastes, the same inner reality, the same desires. Moreover, basic needs are often not clearly expressed, but this does not exempt us from trying to understand and meet them, going beyond clearly expressed thoughts and words.

### ***7. It is based equality with other.***

Equality as human beings even if with different sexual identities and roles. The behaviour and role of the husband or father cannot be the same as that of the wife and mother and vice versa. Diversity of roles is crucial both for the upbringing of children and in the male-female relationship. Children need a woman-mother, who brings her immense wealth of humanity and communication skills to the upbringing and care of the children;

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<sup>27</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città Nuova Editrice, Rome, p 130-131.

warm affectivity and intense sensitivity; tenderness and affection. These and other strictly maternal qualities are fundamental in the upbringing of the child.

A father also brings and gives irreplaceable elements of character, intelligence and affectivity. Strength and straightforwardness, courage and security, consistency and firmness - characteristics of a good father - are equally important in the child's development.

***8. It contains an intense and valuable emotional charge and participation.***

If dialogue is not made out of love or is not based on love and affection, it is of minimal effectiveness. Participating in the feelings, visions and values of those close to us should be the task of each of us. This participation should lead to emotional involvement the couple, so that the wishes of the other person become our wishes, their needs become our needs, their suffering becomes our suffering. In this way, there is a participation and a sharing of thoughts, feelings and emotions that strengthen the union. Involvement, however, must necessarily have limits because, if excessive, it risks compromising our lucidity and inner well-being, which are indispensable to better help those around us.

### **3.1.2.8 EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE DIALOGUE**

From what we have said, it is easy to point out the characteristics that make dialogue ineffective or ineffective.

Dialogue is ineffective:

- 1. When it becomes just communication.**
- 2. When it is only a means to alleviate our anxieties and conflicts.**
- 3. When it becomes egocentric communication.**
- 4. When he ignores the other person.**
- 5. When it is used to accuse, demand, deride and dominate the other.**
- 6. When it becomes pedantic and repetitive.**
- 7. When it is made up of constant complaining and victimisation.**
- 8. When it is used as a means of overpowering, dominating and exploiting the other.**

**9. When it becomes a monologue.**



- 10. When it is false and unfair.**
- 11. When it is obscure or difficult to interpret.**
- 12. When each problem of the couple solicits and brings into play other problems and thus digressions are numerous.**
- 13. When it contains clandestine communications or meta-communications.**

***1. When it becomes just communication.***

Our society is rightly called the communication society since, at least on a technical level, the tools possessed by the richest countries are capable of wrapping the world in a telematic network. These tools allow each person who enters the network to communicate words, thoughts and images to another, even if that person is on the opposite side of the globe, almost instantaneously. Mobile phones and the Internet are symbols and tools of this possibility. Yet, never before has the human being suffered from dialogue problems.

Communication disorders are becoming a social disease. According to Dacquino, we are immersed in an unhealthy bath of interpersonal relationships that do not work, as we increasingly talk to others for functional reasons and less and less for the purpose of conveying content. We are reduced to formal relationships and incommunicability that has loneliness as a corollary.<sup>28</sup>

We have said, in fact, that communication becomes dialogue when empathic listening to the other person is a key element, but this is achieved if we can devote the necessary time, willingness and indispensable serenity to dialogue.

The first of these elements, time, seems to decrease every day, swallowed up by a thousand other commitments: work, social, play. Being together is often a race to do and do-ing rather than to live with serenity, tranquillity and fullness of mind, thoughts, gestures, feelings and emotions.

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<sup>28</sup> DACQUINO, G., (1996), *Che cos'è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p. 280.

For several years now, the notion of time has been linked to the notion of money earned or spent: 'time is money'; 'those who have time do not wait for time'; 'time rates'.

Time makes us earn, but it also makes us spend. If, when we talk on the phone, every second used for dialogue has a cost, if we know that every word, every feeling we express is counted by someone and translated into money, we are estimated to convey not emotions or feelings, but only quick and concise information, which may only serve to inform and reassure the other person or to conclude business deals, but is certainly not effective in establishing a true and deep dialogue.

Radio, television, the telephone, especially the mobile phone, more than help, disrupt real communication. This, at times, cannot even be initiated, while in other cases it cannot be deepened properly. It will have happened to many of you to talk to someone and be interrupted by the start of a television programme, a song on the radio or the ringing of a mobile phone. These instruments often intrude in an invasive and overbearing manner into the dialogue that has just begun, preventing it from going deeper or breaking, sometimes in an unrecoverable way, the magical atmosphere, emotion and feelings that were being experienced.

Moreover, unfortunately, many technological tools risk transforming into virtual any more intimate reality such as friendship, a- more, brotherhood. These realities become only images and voices, losing, with physical reality, their emotional characteristics, so that we feel and find ourselves increasingly alone, in a babel of words and a kaleidoscope of images. We therefore owe it to ourselves and those around us to counteract and greatly limit all the instruments that do not allow us to benefit from effective communication.

## ***2. When it is only a means to alleviate our anxieties and conflicts***

Dialogue is ineffective when it only becomes a means to relieve us of anxieties, fears or inner conflicts, burdening the other person with them.

In this connection, it should first be pointed out that every major psychological disorder influences both dialogue and our relationship with others, especially with those closest to us. In anxious people, example, fear arises without an objective reason or cause, or is triggered and experienced abnormally as a result of situations and events that should not normally provoke such emotions. While fear of an examination, of a serious illness or of death appears to be justified, anxiety or fear that strikes the individual for no reason or for the most varied and diverse reasons, even trivial ones, is a sign of psychological problems that can alter the normal relationship, the educational task and family life.

Depressive symptoms are also not to be underestimated. In people who suffer from mood disorders, reality is almost constantly tinged with grey, if not black, colours, and they therefore view life, others, themselves, and the world with pessimism, closure and sadness. Since they tend to see the worst and destructive side of every human and social reality, they will also have serious difficulties in establishing a serene and productive dialogue, as they will tend to devalue every initiative and every sign of openness to life and the world on the part of both spouse and children.

In some cases, inner conflicts become evident through incongruous or aggressive behaviour that negatively influences the individual's words and actions, without the individual being aware of his or her altered inner reality.

In all of these situations, as with many other psychological disorders that bring suffering to the affected person and those close to him or her, a careful psychological examination prior to marriage would be indispensable in order to assess the seriousness of such problems and to indicate the most effective therapies to resolve them.

**3. *When it becomes egocentric communication.*** In egocentric communication, we tend to put ourselves first, so that every word from the person next to us is measured according to the gratification or frustration given to the pro-me first.

**4. *When ignoring the other person***

by not listening or being indifferent to his or her needs or suffering. In these cases, the other's demand is not adequately answered. For example, the other asks for tenderness, understanding or pleasure and I deny him this tenderness, this understanding, this pleasure.

**5. *When used to accuse, demand, mock, dominate the other;***

*It has, therefore, an offensive and defensive function;*

**6. *when it becomes pedantic and repetitive;***

**7. *when it is made up of continuous complaints and victimisation;***

**8. *When it is used as a means of overpowering, dominating and exploiting the other.***

Therefore a tool to change the other for our own ends;

**9. *when it becomes a monologue;***

**10. *when it is false and unfair,*<sup>29</sup>**

and therefore each tries to convince, dodge and manipulate the other;

**11. *When it is obscure or difficult to interpret.*** People often say: 'If he loves me he must understand me, if he doesn't understand me it means he doesn't love me', yet they do not analyse whether their way of communicating is sufficiently clear or not;

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<sup>29</sup> ALBISETTI, V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Milano, p.73.

**12. When each problem of the couple prompts and causes other problems to be brought into play, there are numerous digressions.**

**13. when it contains clandestine communications or meta-communications,**

In such cases, one says one thing but means another, and thus the content of the language is not consistently connected to the way it is said. Today, following the dictates of psychologists, affectionate words such as 'darling', 'love', 'dear', 'my sweetheart', are often used with the partner, but these delicate and tender words, if accompanied by a harsh and aggressive tone of voice that expresses exactly the opposite, have a counterproductive effect in relationships.

### **3.1.2.9 FEAR OF DIALOGUE**

There are many personal or couple situations in which the fear of dialogue is remarkably intense.

One is afraid of dialogue when:

- *one does not want to discover or manifest oneself.* In many psychic pathologies, the predominant symptom is precisely the difficulty in communication. When the ego suffers or has suffered numerous and repeated painful experiences from childhood, it defends itself by closing itself off;
- *when one is afraid of being judged.* The negative judgement of others inevitably leads to closure and defensiveness;
- *when one is afraid of 'losing oneself in the other'.* This fear is often linked to a fragile and immature self that fears losing its individuality or suffering by lending itself too much to the other, loving and allowing itself to be loved;
- *when one is afraid of one's aggressive and destructive impulses.* If the person is aware that they often deal with others by behaving excessively or frequently aggressively, they close themselves in their shells and avoid communication in order to avoid counter-reaction from others. The same fear occurs, however,

when, because of

overly punitive or fussy parents, some not excessively negative behaviour is overrated and condemned by people who are too severe towards themselves and others;

- Opposite to the latter is the *fear of giving oneself without an immediate counterpart* and thus, ultimately, the *fear of being a victim of the other*.

### **3.1.2.10 THE DIALOGUE IS INTERRUPTED**

Dialogue, like any other reality, undergoes ups and downs. It can be born, grow, develop and manifest itself at a certain point in a couple's life at a fully satisfactory level, just as it can become ill, decline or even cease.

What can lead the dialogue to its reduction, crisis or even its end?

The reasons may be the most varied.

1. The first concerns the very commitment that the couple every day to this instrument of mutual creation and communion. When this commitment is poor, inconstant or clumsy, it is easy for dialogue to suffer a continuous setback rather than growth.
2. The second relates to the very basis of dialogue in the couple and concerns its cohesion. The amorous understanding that is established between a man and a woman and that becomes concrete in an important planning bond such as that of an engagement or, even more so, marriage, is essentially based on a privileged, even if not exclusive, relationship of solidarity, complicity, mutual support and backing. When this privileged relationship is lacking because one or both of them establish with others: parents, children, friends, lovers, work, that special bond that should be the foundation of every couple, then, lacking the same base on which to rest, grow and nourish, the dialogue will surely wane and then die.
3. The third reason has to do with the very purpose of the dialogue, which should lead to better mutual understanding, understanding and self-giving, in order to a greater

wellbeing of the couple. When this does not happen, but rather the words seem to push them more and more towards non-communicability, confrontation and suffering, increasing mutual destructiveness, one is inclined to run away from communication that is deemed useless, counterproductive and harmful. In reality, a vicious circle has been established, from the couple is often unable escape, forcing the two to always speak and behave in the same, destructive manner, while preventing different, positive and creative words and actions. In such cases, the help of a family counsellor or couples therapist is indispensable.

### **3.2 THE PASSION COMPONENT**

The passion component relates to the impulses that lead to a love affair, such as: physical attraction, tense arousal, strong sexual attraction and carnal sympathy within a love affair

Intense passion is indicated by phrases such as: 'That man, that woman, I like her, she takes me, she makes me blood' 'I go crazy for her'. When intense passion is present, there is a desire for belonging, domination and healthy jealousy, underlined by possessive adjectives 'my woman' 'my man'. "Woe to him who looks at my woman". "Woe to him who touches my man".

If the main and ultimate purpose of love is the reproduction of the species, an essential component of love must necessarily be sexuality lived out within the couple.

The human being, like all sexed living beings, needs a subject of the opposite sex to reproduce itself. It is evident, therefore, that the instinct to involve oneself and a person of the opposite sex in a relationship is inscribed in the DNA of each one of us. The relationship may be very brief and therefore last for the time of copulation, or it may last for a long time: the time to overcome the difficulties of pregnancy and childbirth; the time for the offspring to become autonomous and mature; or even, why not, as long as God has granted us to live.

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<sup>30</sup> Sternberg R., J.,(2002), The Triangulation of Love, in *The Psychology of Love*, edited by Sternberg R. J. - Barnes L. M., Bompiani, Bologna, p.143.



Since the main and ultimate purpose of a love bond is reproduction, attractiveness and physical appearance are important in the choice of a partner. The more handsome, fitter, healthier partner, all being equal, will be preferred to the less handsome, less robust or sickly partner.

In this choice, the instinct dictated by natural selection, common to all animals, operates. It stimulates the search for a mate or companion with good, indeed excellent physical, psychological and social adaptation characteristics, so that the offspring have the best and healthiest chromosome endowment possible.

This instinct is present both men and women, but is felt more by the former who look for important reproductive characteristics in the physical appearance of the woman they love, such as youth, beauty and physical health.

All religions have never underestimated the importance of sexuality in the life of the couple (*conjugal duty*) because in addition to ensuring greater reproductive possibilities, frequent use of it greatly increases the oxytocin level and thus the degree of intimacy, stability and harmony in the couple.<sup>31</sup>

Although love is not only passion and desire, sexuality is a vital bond between a man and a woman, since it has the capacity to unite two people, involving them in a bond that can become not only a union of bodies but also a union of hearts.

This can happen because sexual acts, by which men and women give themselves to each other, are by no means something purely physical or biological, but concern the intimate core of the person as such. The pleasure that the couple exchanges is the most intense and intimate communication between human beings and therefore creates belonging; solidity in the couple; it drives away and resolves disagreements; it gladdens and eases the sacrifices that married and family life inevitably brings.

Sexuality is also an exercise in giving to the other, because normally, the pursuit of pleasure is not only for oneself, but also involves the partner. This exchangeable gift is an important bonding agent as it arouses gratitude and belonging. How can we fail to view positively the person who takes part in the pleasure together with us?

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<sup>31</sup> LEGATO, M. J., (2006), *Why men do not remember anything and*

*women never forget*, Sperling and Kupper publishers, Milan, p. 80.

cere given by sexuality? How can we not see positively those who make us feel good, those who satisfy our instincts and our need?

In the two sexes, sexuality is experienced and interpreted differently.

### **3.2.1 Sexuality in men and women**

#### ***The debut.***

Sexuality in males awakens at puberty in an impetuous way, as a sexual need.<sup>32</sup> In women it awakens as an indefinable feeling that pervades the whole personality and results in a general need for tenderness.<sup>(33)</sup>

#### ***Sexual stimuli***

Female sexuality is more sensitive to the sentimental components of intercourse, whereas male sexuality is more responsive to the visual or imaginative arousals that precede sexual activity.<sup>34</sup>

#### ***Expressions of sexuality***

Male sexuality is much more intense and more linked to genitality. Particularly when young, it is like a river in flood that, in its rush towards the sea, knows no obstacles and overwhelms and rushes everything. Therefore, unfortunately, its use sometimes oversteps the bounds of common sense and rationality. Since male sexuality is freer, more immediate, easier and more instinctive, with less emotional and sentimental involvement than female sexuality, men pay much less attention and caution to the consequences of sexual acts than women do. In women, although sexuality is certainly a pleasurable and desirable reality, it is expressed with less intensity and greater self-control, because the woman's ancestral instincts know how to

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<sup>32</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psychology of Marital Life*, Città Nuova Editrice, Rome, p 37-38.

<sup>33</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993) *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città Nuova Editrice, Rome, p 37-38.

<sup>34</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R. (1993), *Psychology of Marital Life*, Città Nuova

Editrice, Rome, p 37-38.

that it only takes a few sexual relations to get pregnant; as it also knows that motherhood means a physical, psychological, educational commitment that can last several decades.

### ***Sexual acts.***

The phases of sexual acts are very similar in men, whereas in women they take on personal characteristics and are therefore different.

For the man, sexual intercourse is equivalent to all the other relationships he can have with his fellow men, whereas for the woman, isolated sexual acts are of little value and sexuality remains closely linked to affectivity.

### ***The orgasm.***

While men almost always achieve orgasm, there are some women who rarely experience it and others who never experience it despite the good will, willingness and ability of their partners.

### ***The relationship sexuality with motherhood and fatherhood.***

As far as motherhood and paternity are concerned, for Mucchielli, motherhood has first and foremost a biological resonance for women, so that the curve of physical, psychic and hormonal balance its apogee with motherhood<sup>(36)</sup> therefore the harmonisation between maternal and sexual feelings is more difficult. Paternity, on the other hand, has a social and emotional resonance for the man, while it has no resonance at all on his organism<sup>(37)</sup> and therefore there is normally no conflict between paternal and sexual feelings.

In women, moreover, motherhood is radically distinct from sexuality so that even the richest sexual experience cannot compensate for the lack of motherhood<sup>(38)</sup>

<sup>35</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993) *Psychology of Marital Life*, Città Nuova Editrice, Rome, p 37-38.

<sup>36</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psychology of Marital Life*, Città nuova editrice, Rome, p 40.

<sup>37</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993) *Psychology of Marital Life*, Città Nuova Editrice, Rome, p 37-38.

<sup>38</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città nuova editrice, Rome, p 37-38.

### ***Variations over time.***

A woman's sexual activity is less varied and more discontinuous than that of a man, and there is a cyclical diversity.<sup>39</sup> It increases immediately after menstruation until around the middle of the month (*ovulatory phase*), and then decreases sharply (*post-ovulatory phase*). In men, as there is no sexual cycle, their desire is influenced more by psychological variations than by hormonal factors: greater when they feel gratified by their partner, less when they are attacked, irritated or frustrated by her; greater if their personality characteristics make them serene and relaxed, less if anxious or psycho-logically disturbed; greater if well rested and satisfied, less if tired or stressed.

While for both sexed genders desire declines with age, for women this decline is earlier and more rapid and can begin as early as the premenopause.

Much of the diversity in the way sexuality is experienced that we have listed has not been caused or activated by customs or traditions, but is genetically transmitted. This means that men and women who experience sexuality according to their nature - male or female - are not subject to censure or even judgement.

### ***3.2.3 The causes of decreased frequency of sexual intercourse.***

In recent decades, as a result of the 'women's liberation' movements, whose ideas have been widely taken up by the mass media, various messages have been sent out concerning the way in which men and women currently experience sexuality. One of these, starting from the objective reality there is a clear, constant decrease in the number of sexual relationships, despite the fact that the prevailing 'sexual liberation' should have led to a considerable increase, comes to the conclusion that this is only due to the greater female resourcefulness in the field of sexuality, which leads men to shy away from their amorous assaults.

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<sup>39</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psychology of Marital Life*, Città Nuova Editrice, Rome, p 37-38.

In truth, things are more complex than what is briefly described and proposed by the mass media. While it is true that the number of sexual intercourse in couples has decreased considerably, the causes of this decrease are different and involve other elements besides that of women's greater initiative in this field.

These include:

1. *Sexuality is not and cannot be detached from relationship.*

If the relationship between men and women is experienced with serenity, if it is rich in dialogue, listening and mutual understanding, it is easy for this loving relationship to be complemented and enriched by sexuality. On the contrary, if the relationship is characterised suspicion, confrontation, quarrelling and accusations, it is difficult for men and women to experience this conflictual relationship with sexual intimacy, which, let us remember, is the deepest and most intimate moment of every relationship and every loving communication.

2. *Sexuality is also a gift towards the other.*

If one or both partners are not polite and do not enjoy the pleasure of giving generously, sexuality will only be limited to moments in which personal and individual pleasure is sought, which often does not coincide with the other's desire.

3. *The use of sexuality requires an inner state of serenity and relaxation for both.*

Enemies of sexuality are therefore anxieties, stresses, worries and excessive commitments. All these factors have the power and capacity to inhibit it even for long periods.

4. *Sexuality, like all pleasures, is very sensitive to situations of tiredness and satiety.*

Premature, easy and incongruous use, as is the case today in our western civilisation, leads to an early decline in desire in both men and women due to onset of a state of saturation and boredom.

5. *Sexuality is a moment of deep intimacy that arises within a couple.*

If one or both have had other, or worse many other sexual experiences, it is easy for this relationship, made up of



deep and personal intimacy, is disturbed by memories, comparisons, guilt and accusations, even if not clearly expressed and manifested.

6. *The rise of infidelity.*

It is also easy for sexual life to deteriorate when one or both of them give in to adultery. Not only for physiological reasons, but also and above all for psychological reasons. It is difficult, as it is a contradiction in terms, to give oneself completely to two or more people.

7. *Sexuality is by definition the relationship between two different sexes.*

If differences diminish and blur language, behaviour, clothing and roles, it is easy for desire to blur as well. Today, women's magazines, like fashion houses and magazines, often offer women extremely seductive lingerie, which is supposed to stimulate or rekindle the dormant desire in their men. The results, however, are transient and disappointing, because while the clothes, perfumes and artfully created atmospheres stimulate the male pleasure centres, at the same time, the same centres are inhibited by the way women themselves present themselves in everyday life: a rampant, swaggering, sometimes aggressive and harsh attitude, to which clothes are linked that are equally lacking in grace and femininity.

8. *Sexuality needs freedom in its expressions.*

If birth control becomes pervasive and obsessive, so that one or more means are used to limit seriousness, these same means become a limitation and a hindrance to a spontaneous and free use of sexuality.

### **3.2.3 The norms and rules of sexual life.**

Few things, like the sexual life of young people, have been regulated by rules and regulations in all peoples and in all ages.

In relations between the sexes, the etiquette clearly, meticulously and scrupulously described how one should behave between men and women bound only by a feeling of friendship and how one should regulate relations between men and women as acquaintances, fiancés or spouses.

Similarly in the religious field, in the old religious texts for adolescents, it was described what was and what was not allowed for young people in love or engaged, in the sentimental and sexual field. Which caresses were venial sins and which were considered mortal sins. Which kisses were innocent and which were lewd and sinful. What distinguished a good and pure girl from a bad one.

Failure to comply with these rules and regulations meant not only being stigmatised in front of the social and family group, but also suffering forms of severe marginalisation and heavy punishment at the hands of families, the community, religion, but also the state itself.

This commitment to giving norms and rules of conduct on the use of feelings and sexuality in young people may lead one to think of a cruel persecution of youthful exuberance by old wigs incapable of fully experiencing the intensity of feelings and the great tensions and passions of love.

It is also for this reason that these indications, rules and standards of conduct, as well as the resulting punishments, have been branded in recent decades, as is well known, as rules and standards that did not take proper account of the natural instinctive needs of young and not-so-young lovers and their demands for freedom and spontaneity in sentimental and sexual relationships. At the same time, religions that still proposed them and had them implemented by their faithful were accused of sexophobia.

Since then, in the Western world, gradually but inexorably, the rules concerning the sexual life of young people have almost all been cancelled, both at the legislative level and at the family and social level.

These rules and norms remain, albeit in a much sweetened way, only at the religious level.

Therefore, for Campanini, 'Between love and desire on the one hand and its fulfilment on the other, all distances are lost.

that societies of the past had built, to make room for a- more'.<sup>40</sup>

However, the effects of a total, full and complete freedom in the mental and sexual field did not bring all the benefits that were expected.

In the field of love relationships, more spontaneity, more dialogue, more knowledge was expected. In the area of couples, more understanding, more respect, more love and sexual pleasure to be experienced by two. On the contrary, on the other hand, the failures associated with this type of behaviour were more pronounced. Breakdowns at a personal level: insecurity, anxiety, disappointment, depression, feelings of emptiness and worthlessness, spread of risk behaviour for sexually transmitted diseases. Family breakdowns: increasingly small and fragile families. Families increasingly unable to fulfil their educational and training tasks with regard to their offspring. Families increasingly in the grip of dissolution and fragmentation.

Evidence of these failures is the considerable increase in separations, divorces and aggressive and destructive behaviour within couples and families, but also an increase in the precariousness and instability of emotional and care ties.

At the social level, too, as a consequence of the unrestrained use of emotional and sexual freedom, there has been a considerable increase in sexually transmitted diseases and an accentuation of discomfort in childhood, adolescence and also in adulthood. This accentuation of discomfort and the increase in sexually transmitted diseases have led to a considerable increase in social expenditure in an attempt to stem and contain the psychological consequences for individuals, couples and families.

Today, we are forced to rediscover in those apparently excessive and limiting rules and regulations an ancient wisdom that is much deeper and more valid than we could have imagined. In this field too, as in so many others, mankind continually and systematically demonstrates its difficulties in correctly reading history and learning from past experience.

On closer inspection, the purposes of all those rules and regulations, which were fretfully and erroneously trashed, were much more numerous and

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<sup>40</sup> CAMPANINI, G., (1998), "Sessualità e società", in *La famiglia*, 191,

September-October, p.41.

important for the future of young people themselves and of society than one could have imagined.

1. Responsibility for life, couple and family.
2. Sexual impulse control.
3. Value, esteem and pleasure towards the opposite sex.
4. The search for concrete commitment.
5. The prolongation of affective and sexual tension.
6. Stimulating the growth of values and ideals.
7. Reduction of the split between sexual and emotional life.
8. Stimulating the development of mature feelings.
9. Avoid births outside of marriage.
10. Avoiding voluntary abortion.
11. Avoid shotgun marriages.
12. Stimulation of psycho-affective and social maturation and growth.

*1. Responsibility for life, couple and family.*

The first aim was to give the young and the not-so-young clear signals: life, the couple, the family, are elements of great importance, indeed they are the most important things in human societies, so they should be treated as responsibly as possible. Societies, all societies of the present and the past, cannot afford 'free love' because freedom and responsibility must go hand in hand.

*2. Sexual impulse control.*

Examination of reality confirms again and again that the adult, but also the young person, especially a male, has enormous difficulties in curbing his sexuality if the social environment, the opposite sex, parents, and secular or religious moral norms do not provide particular indications, prohibitions, limits, and standards. If these are missing, sexuality is experienced with characteristics of considerable immaturity and lack of responsibility in both sexes, but above all, we repeat, this is more likely to happen in young males.

In the absence of rules and norms, an instinctual and genital sexuality prevails in adolescents, young people, but also in adults, which encourages sexual venting without there often being any sexuality at all.

neither a rational indication, nor a life project, nor even the slightest sentimental attachment.

3. *Value, esteem and pleasure towards the opposite sex.*

Another aim was to increase and maintain the value, esteem and pleasure towards the opposite sex. This value, esteem and pleasure are all the more intense the more limited and longed for. To offer them easily and without any exchange is to diminish their importance, to castrate and limit their function. In so doing, the risk is that the relationship with the other person becomes merely a means of experiencing emotions and pleasures: the thrill of the first meeting, the thrill of falling in love, the pleasure of giving and receiving only on an epidermal and genital level.

4. *The search for a concrete commitment.*

It has also seemed important to many peoples and for many human generations to use sexual pleasure and a more involving affection, in order to obtain in return, a conscious commitment to others, society, the family and human life itself.

5. *The prolongation of affective and sexual tension.*

Allowing a deeper and more intimate sexuality only after marriage also means ensuring that the affective tension, the desire for the other, is prolonged over time and does not wane quickly and easily. Today, in fact, we find in many 'freely' educated young people a tired sexuality and a modest pleasure in being together long before marriage, at a remarkably early age. Currently, the period of adult life with the highest number of sexual relationships, around 40 per year, is precisely the period between the ages of 18 and 25. 32.8 per cent of men between the ages of 18 and 55 suffer from reduced sexual desire. 18.4 per cent do not have sexual intercourse and 14.8 per cent have no attraction to the opposite sex. According to a survey on female sexuality by the Italian Society of General Medicine for 62% of Italian women sex is a sporadic event, 17% do not have sex, although 87% of abstinent women are in the age group considered sexually active.

In a survey conducted by the University of Georgia among stable, close and accomplished couples, 16% have less than one relationship per month.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> DACQUINO, G., *Che cos è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, 1996, p. 110.

6. *Stimulating the growth of values and ideals.*

Another aim was to give rise to, develop and increase, instead of impulses and stimuli of a purely instinctive and genital nature, the ideals and values associated with the gift of affectivity and feelings.

7. *Reduction of the split between sexual and emotional life.*

The intention was also to reduce and if possible eliminate the split, especially in adolescent males, between sexual and emotional life. This is only possible if, in the love phase, the young person is forced to limit and regulate his sexual instincts to a great extent.

8. *Stimulating the development of mature feelings.*

Moreover, only if the immense energies of amorous passion are channelled and limited is the development of deeper, more mature, broader and richer feelings of self-giving achieved. If they are not banalised, the great sexual energies set in motion and turn a river of positive, creative energy that pours out on others, on children, on society, in the form of commitment, discovery, creativity and availability.

9. *Avoid births outside of marriage.*

The norms and rules of sexual life were also intended to prevent the child that came into the world from being the fruit of a momentary mating instinct rather than the product of deep love within a stable couple and a normally structured family.

10. *voluntary abortion.*

Another aim was to prevent the fruit of a casual relationship from being killed by voluntary abortion, with harmful consequences not only for the small, defenceless and blameless human being in the making, but also for its parents and family members.

11. *Avoid shotgun marriages.*

To avoid a couple being forced into a reparative marriage due to an unwanted pregnancy without the necessary psychological and social maturity, the indispensable responsibility, but also the will to go through a complex and gra-

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<sup>42</sup> In England, 42 out of every 1,000 underage girls become pregnant every year and out of ten young or very young women who have conceived, six turn to health facilities in order not to carry a pregnancy to term.

commitments such as marriage and family. "The alarm over underage pregnancy rates has assumed global proportions. In 1990 alone, approximately one million girls between the ages of 13 and 19 became pregnant in the United States, of whom as many as half carried the pregnancy to term."<sup>43</sup>

*12. Stimulation of psycho-affective and social maturation and growth.*

If the young person, in order to be able to have an emotional and sexual relationship, must demonstrate notable characteristics of maturity, responsibility, work and social skills, he or she will, in order to attain the desired goal, strive with all his or her might and use all his or her best energies to attain those elements of ability and maturity required by the partner's parents. By using these measures, if on the one hand the best young people are selected for marriage and procreation, on the other hand, they are more likely to improve and develop their potential, capacities and abilities in view of the desired goal. Their families are also more likely to be committed to this important goal.

Picking up on the analogy we made at the beginning of our book, those who make it too easy for travellers by providing comfortable highways prevent or limit the discovery of the thousands of realities to be found in the more difficult, more impervious, but also more rewarding and enriching paths. Leaving sexual and sentimental relationships solely to the instincts of youth impoverishes young people because it does not let them discover the beauty of true love. It also creates a series of problems that compromise not only the very future of families but also the happiness of young people. These, often, after years of playing with emotions and easy sexuality, find themselves without ideals, without a partner or companion, without a family and without the ability to give love, life, education and care.

But society, too, after having let its most valuable product for the future - adolescents and young people - play with feelings and easy pleasure, finds itself with a fistful of flies in its hand.

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<sup>43</sup> PASINI, W., (1995), *A che cosa serve la coppia*, Mondadori, Milan, p.118.



hand. It ends up with more elderly people, with fewer children, with more divorced and more single people, with more psychological malaise in all ages. And this represents a considerably higher social cost than the state has to provide for when the social fabric can count on healthy, stable family units.

### **324 Jealousy.**

Included in the passion component is jealousy. This feeling could be defined as the fear of losing the other or something of the other: their presence, their love and the material, emotional or spiritual contributions they bestow on us.

This is one of the most debated feelings. It is debated whether, in , jealousy should be accepted and welcomed or not: 'Jealousy is the poison of love'. "If one is jealous it means one does not trust the other and therefore does not respect the other". "Jealousy destroys love because it triggers conflicts that can even lead to tragedy'. In the 1970s, in the name of sexual revolution, jealousy was also burnt in the town squares together with women's bras, and the jealous was branded as a man who was a king or a sick man out of the Palaeolithic era.

The opposite thesis, on the contrary, states: 'If there is no jealousy, is no love. "A little jealousy is good for the couple, because it flatters the partner by making him or her feel important, and therefore jealousy is gratifying for the other person because it shows that one is not indifferent to his or her concerns'

Let us say at the outset that when a feeling is present in the vast majority of people and, above all, when it is pre-existing in all ages and in all relationships, it is difficult to define it as a pathological or negative feeling. Because of natural selection, pathologies, all genetically transmitted diseases and negative behaviour for the species, are gradually reduced over time, so that their number is always small in the end.

This did not happen because of jealousy.

Is the child jealous when the baby brother is born or when the father kisses the mother. The mother is jealous when the son dares to give more kisses to the grandmother or the nanny than to her. Is the friend jealous when

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<sup>44</sup> DACQUINO, G., (1996), *Che cos'è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p..

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school the schoolmate of the heart wrongs her by sitting with another girl. The employee is also jealous when the office manager puts another employee next to him in his room.

Therefore, if this feeling is so widespread, it is difficult to define it as pathological, or at least it is difficult to define any feeling of jealousy as pathological and non-functional.

Since the feeling of belonging is always present in all relationships, the fear of losing something that we feel is ours is physiological but also indispensable, because it sets in motion the instinct of defence that tends to protect us and safeguard us from the loss something important or fundamental to our life or well-being: psychological, physical or spiritual.

In spite of this, the crusade against this feeling and the behaviour consequential to this emotion has been massive in recent decades. The efforts to eradicate this 'cancer of the heart' have been remarkable and worthy of a better cause. Thus, at school, some teachers make their pupils change places every week in order to prevent excessive bonding between classmates; a husband or wife who looks into their partner's mobile phone or has their partner checked and photographed in order to exclude or confirm a betrayal is punished by law for violating privacy; a husband or wife, boyfriend or girlfriend who dares to express suspicions of their partner's fidelity is mocked.

It is the effect of individualism pushed to the highest level, but it is also a means by which the business and service world tries to protect itself from intrusions by wives, husbands and boyfriends who, because of this feeling, could cause problems for employees and other workers in companies or offices. This attitude is also the result of the confusion between physiological and pathological jealousy.

The latter is easy to recognise, as its manifestations are not only unrelated to reality, but are result disturbed or altered inner psychological pathways, which can easily be detected by means of a thorough psychiatric interview.

*Francesca, the wife of a toll-taker, when there were still these railway employees near the level crossings who tried to lower and raise the barriers when trains arrived on the railway line they controlled, saw many people pass by every day.*

*locomotives and thus also many locomotive drivers. One of these struck her with his handsome face, his bright smile and, above all, the friendly greeting he gave her through the cab window every time he passed by with his train. A very different greeting from the one given by her rather sulky and introverted husband.*

*One fine day she realised from her heart beating fast as the train approached, and from the fact that she could no longer look up at the engine, let alone respond to the greeting, that she had fallen in love with this handsome young driver. She felt ashamed of having experienced this sinful feeling, but after a few days, little by little, the shame disappeared and was replaced by aggression and jealousy towards her husband, whom she accused of having betrayed her. The accusations were absolutely flimsy but the delirium of jealousy from which she suffered made living together impossible.*

In this case, as in many others, it was the impulse to betrayal that had triggered the pathological jealousy with which the young cashier defended herself, transferring her upsets onto her husband.

Since emotions and feelings cannot be suppressed, but only repressed, as a consequence of this crusade against jealousy, the more physiological manifestations of this feeling have diminished, while the more serious and pathological ones have increased considerably in number. Thus, if a spouse cannot check the other spouse's mobile phone or e-mail in order to prevent and avoid an initial relationship that could lead to adultery, when it has taken place and has shaken the couple and the family concerned, the law itself is forced to intervene in its consequences: inter-marital disputes, separation, divorce, child custody, psychological problems for minors and the persons concerned, all of which adds considerably to the citizens' discomfort and social costs.

Unfortunately, society, which is so careful to defend the privacy of the individual, is later forced to intervene in so-called 'madness dramas' in which exasperated and humiliated husbands hurt, assault or kill their children or wives.

Equally extreme is the behaviour of women wounded by jealousy. These out of desperation or as a sign of extreme

aggression and revenge, if more rarely they organise the death of the husband, most often they take revenge against their partner by depriving him of the relationship with their children, while in extreme cases they turn their anger and resentment towards the latter by attacking or abandoning them.

### **3.3 DECISION COMPONENT COMMITMENT**

Having a large, rich and important project in common is for the couple the best cement of union. Having a common project means dreaming that project, working together for that project, fighting together for something you believe in. Having a project in common means sacrificing together, enjoying together, enriching together. It means assisting, leaning on and supporting each other in our daily struggles and labours.

In the decision-commitment component there is, therefore, the will and determination to take on short-term and long-term burdens first towards each other and then towards the family and society.

Projects, decisions and commitments in common are not all the same. Some are major, while others are small, drab and limited in time.

#### **3.3.1 *Small joint projects.***

Small, elementary and time-limited joint projects are very familiar to us: chatting and studying together; going out with friends for an evening at the bar, disco or pizzeria; having sex; going on a trip together.

Small joint projects are easy to realise but give little to the couple, they can only serve as a pastime to dispel the boredom of an evening or weekend. They certainly give, at least for a time, fun and pleasure to those who live them, but they remain small and keep the couple small, and above all they bring nothing or almost nothing to society.

A couple remains small when it remains anchored to elementary and simple pleasures. A couple remains small when it does not know, does not want to or is unable to fly high projecting itself into the future. A couple remains small when it is unable to expand the love it possesses and lives, beyond "I" and "you", or when it fails to take responsibility for the great needs of humanity.

If we were to define this historical period, we could describe it as the period of small couples.

The reasons why couples remain small do not only relate to the personalities and wills of the individuals concerned but, co-responsible for this state of affairs, are certainly families, societies, states and religions.

### ***3.3.2 Major joint projects.***

The great common projects are quite different. They require from the couple a considerable expenditure of energy, great commitments and sacrifices lasting many years, the need to overcome arduous difficulties. In return, like all great things, this type of project can fill the heart and mind with considerable gratification and satisfaction, but above all it can give much to human society.

One of the first great common commitments should be about the stability of feelings, outside and above the emotion or infatuation of the moment. "I commit myself to love you now, but I also commit myself to keep this love alive and bright, not only today but throughout life. I commit myself so that this love will become stronger and stronger, so that it will overcome the pitfalls of time and events that could undermine and corrode it. And when this happens, I will do everything I can to repair the damage and remove the encrustations that the years have deposited on it, until it shines as before. Furthermore, if for any reason our relationship should become seriously ill, I undertake to treat it patiently until it is completely healed.

The commitment is made not to an ideal person but to a real person: with his or her merits, abilities, but also flaws and limitations.

One accepts and gives one's readiness and willingness to love that particular person even if, due to various events in life, that person should change for the worse. One thus commits oneself to loving and accepting that person even if his or her merits should diminish over time, and if his or her faults should increase because of the wounds inflicted by years, illness or adversity.

Si promette di accettare il corpo dell'amato o dell'amata oggi, quando la giovinezza lo fa risplendere di bellezza, armonia e vigore e la sua mente è lucida, attiva e brillante, ma si promette di accettar-

and love him also tomorrow, when, as is natural, his beautiful body should fade or become ill, and his mind, with advancing age, should no longer be as lucid and active as before.

One commits oneself to love that person and therefore disposes one's heart to welcome, nurture and grow this feeling using all appropriate means: words, gestures, behaviour, but also forgiveness and compassion.

One is committed to sharing joy and tenderness with the other; care and attention even through daily renunciations, sacrifices and suffering.

There is a commitment to control and limit individual needs in favour of the needs and requirements of the couple and family.

It is planned to open the couple's bond of love also to the children that may come. Children to be cared for, looked after, educated and then accompanied on the paths of the world.

In the great common projects one wants to share, therefore, hopes, dreams, realities, joys, sufferings, struggles.

Symbol of a great common project is also the house.

A home in which every object, every wall, every piece of furniture, speaks of him, speaks of her, speaks of choices made as a couple. A home that reflects the moments of joy, as well as the difficult moments. A home that is both nest and temple. A nest for the little human beings who will be born there and who will be raised and educated there until they are able to walk the streets of the world on their own. A home that will be a nest the maturity they have reached will allow them create, in turn, other great life projects. A home that is a temple of love and tenderness, of welcome and forgiveness.

### **3.3.2.1 Contributions for major joint projects**

In order for a relationship to be mature and empowering and to create great common projects, numerous and complex educational and training contributions are needed from parents, the family network, the state and religion.

#### ***Parents' contributions.***

These inputs are crucial and must be able to provide:

- two parents with specific roles so that the education and training received is rich in paternal and maternal characteristics. An upbringing that acquires straightforwardness and security from the father; autonomy and courage; control of anxiety and emotionality; tighter and more direct dialogue; more straightforward and responsible behaviour; drive and dynamism; initiative and determination; a sense of duty to family and society; realism and the joy of achievement; control of pain and emotions; strength and determination; respect for rules and authority. An upbringing that acquires warmth and tenderness from the mother; grace and softness; helpfulness and caring; acceptance and communion; empathic and relational skills;
- two parents who have reached a good level of maturity and with psychological characteristics that allow them to live their interpersonal relationships in a serene and harmonious manner, with little and rare conflict;
- two parents with different and complementary roles, so that one of them is significantly and predominantly engaged in the development of the emotional world, while the other is predominantly engaged in the development of the economic and service world;
- two parents who are both willing to commit a large part of their energy and time to education, dialogue and relationship with their children;
- two parents who know how to empower their children by giving and enforcing rules and regulations useful to themselves, the family and society;
- two parents who, in turn, have worked on and implemented rich and wide-ranging projects and know how to transfer their experience and skills to their children with enthusiasm and full readiness.

### ***The contributions of the family network.***

As far as the family network is concerned, it is indispensable for it to advise, help, support, correct, esteem and protect the couple and family being formed with di-



sponibility, but also with gentleness and shrewdness, without ever neglecting the specific responsibilities and the indispensable need for autonomy of young spouses.

### ***The contributions of the state.***

No less important and substantial are the contributions of society and the state. In order to stimulate and help young people to commit themselves to a solid and rich project, the attitudes and messages to be conveyed through laws and regulations should be much more incisive and often the opposite of the current ones. Politics and civil society should therefore

- commit at least half of their best energies and resources to the development of the affective-relational world;
- prioritise issues concerning the training, functionality and stability of couples and families;
- consider the education and training of children and young people as fundamental, considering the family as the natural seat for the formation of future generations;
- systematically monitor the state of well-being or malaise of families, couples, as well as individual citizens, at least with the same commitment with which the economic and financial situation of the nation is monitored.

### ***The contributions of religion.***

As far as religion is concerned, it must be acknowledged that its contribution to a healthy couple and family life and to a love that forms and makes couples grow not only in faith towards God, but also in faith and mutual availability, towards children and the family, has always been considerable, decisive and much more important than that shown by the various civil institutions.

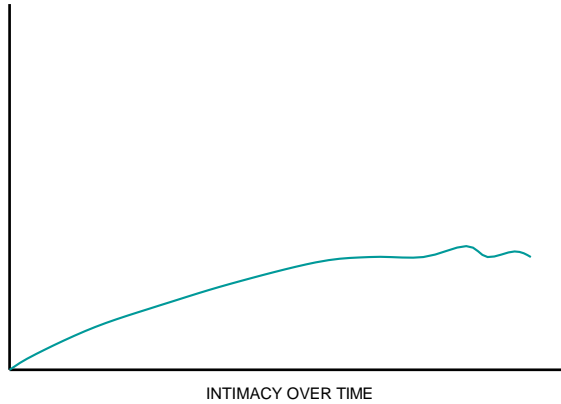
Unfortunately, in a secularised society, pervaded and constrained by the sirens of individualism, materialism and consumerism, in a largely de-Christianised society, it is necessary for its voice to become even louder and its commitment even more decisive, firm and straightforward, so as not to chase or justify the current pre-Christian mores.

valent with which some societies tend to debase and self-destruct.

### 3.4 COMPONENT TRENDS OVER TIME

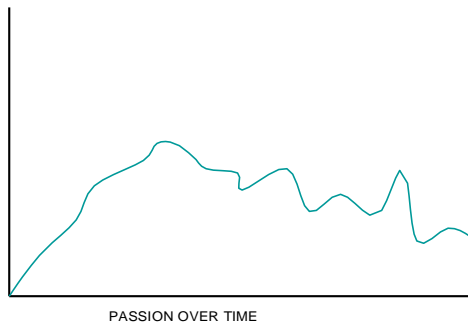
These three components love do not all have the same evolution over time.

#### 3.4 1 *The intimacy component.*



Intimacy tends to increase quickly at first, then more slowly until it reaches a level of stability. Subsequently, either it consolidates and thus the bond strengthens, or it falls apart and is then replaced by boredom and disinterest. These two successive developments depend above all on history and personality of the persons involved, but also on their commitment to finding new moments and spaces for dialogue and sharing.

### ***3.4.2 The passion component.***



This component follows the laws that regulate all pleasures and therefore, while its initial development and growth is often impetuous and rapid, its decline may be equally rapid, due to saturation and addiction. However, considerable fluctuations remain over time, so that the fire of passion can easily rekindle at any age, even after many adverse vicissitudes.

However, at the moment of falling desire, if there is not the necessary commitment, good personal maturity and warm intimacy, there is a risk of looking for other people with whom to experience the same intense initial emotions again.

### ***3.4.3 The decision - commitment component.***

The development of this component depends on the maturity and personality of the individuals concerned, but also, as we have already mentioned, on the social environment in which the young people live.

The more mature people are, the more willing they are to commit their lives to building something important, such as a family, through a lasting and stable relationship, the more this component will increase. If, on the other hand, people are immature or have only been brought up to selfishly take from life without giving,

more likely to have difficulty making commitments and keeping them.

However, this development is also closely linked to the laws in force in society at a given time and, above all, to the customs, habits and rules for which religions and families of origin are responsible. If institutions, families of origin and the social environment do not demand any commitment, or demand a very modest commitment from young people, it is easy for this component to be very low or even absent. The same happens if family and society as a whole are prepared to accept that commitment is easily broken either during engagement or after marriage. Even in this case, the quantity and quality of the commitment will be very modest and will be influenced by the other components of love. "I no longer have a great passion, an intense sexual desire for him/her: it is better to separate". "We have little dialo- go: it is better to divorce". "Some of his attitudes and habits bother me: why not break up?".

Often the commitment lapses due to inner discomfort wrongly attributed to the relationship. "At the moment, I feel sad and depressed. Perhaps I should separate so that I can find more effective stimuli with other women that make me feel better. " don't feel well: it is probably married life that depresses me, so it is better to separate'.

## Chapter 4

### THE ROADS LOVE

The paths of love are many and varied. Perhaps they are as many as there are couples. Perhaps they are as many as there are people who live and experience this feeling.

In this book, we will only describe the most important theologies of love:

***4.1 The stage falling in love or nascent love.***

***4.2 Love sympathy.***

***4.3 Playful love.***

***4.4 Empty love.***

***4.5 Erotic love.***

***4.6 Love friendship.***

***4.7 Fatuous love.***

#### ***4.8 Pragmatic love.***

#### ***4.9 Romantic love.***

#### ***4.10 Marital love or lived love.***

### **4.1 FALLING IN LOVE OR BUDDING LOVE PHASE**

One of the most frequent, but also strangest and most unsettling forms of love is the first phase of love, also called: *falling in love phase, nascent love, first moments of love, love infatuation.*

This road is made up of roller coasters, love tunnels, little red hearts, castles in the air and dreams in which it is so easy to soar and walk on pink clouds.

This is a mostly involuntary, uncontrolled, very strong, irresistible and exhilarating feeling. This is an emotion that confuses and upsets, that burns and overwhelms reason and that, like a torrent in flood, floods through the body as well as the mind and heart, so much so that it is sometimes feared even by the people who experience it.

It is an emotion that blinds. A disease from which few would wish to recover. A madness exalted by poets, capable of upsetting the seemingly most rational and controlled people.

There is in this kind love a pleasure never satisfied with kisses and the presence of the beloved. There is an immense joy that makes fatigue feel light, sacrifice sweet, renunciation easy. The purpose, in the falling in love phase, is not only sexual. The purpose is fusion and union with the beloved in order to enjoy the ecstatic bliss that one imagines one will experience in his or her arms.

In the stage of falling in love we feel bigger and stronger, ready to change the world or turn it inside out.

There is joy, as there is suffering; there is security, but also the fear of losing a loved one; there is the happiness of holding a loved one close to one's heart, but also the heartbreak when they move away or when they do not correspond to our feelings or abandon us.

In this phasetime changes and is shaped in a peculiar way. The time of waiting runs cruelly slow, while the time of the

of the meeting runs mockingly fast until the unspeakable goodbyes.

This emotion is like a fire that can shake even the calmest and most serene souls. Like a fire, burning in the soul, it is capable of pulling people of different ages, social levels, characters and races into each other's arms. Researchers seem to have discovered a chemical mix as the cause of the exhilarating pleasure of falling in love, very similar to that which is present in the phase of manic excitement.

#### ***4.1.1 The characteristics of falling in love phase.***

Specific characteristics are present in this phase, and it is therefore difficult to confuse it with other emotions or feelings.

Meanwhile, falling in love is described as *an irrepressible attraction* because, when it is very intense, it is capable of involving and coercing even people with a tenacious will. "I do not want to, it is not the case, I foresee that this feeling will overwhelm me, will bring me many problems, will do me and hurt me, but I cannot help but feel it and follow it.

At other times, however, it is felt as a *compulsion*: 'I live happily with my daily routine and, without wanting it, without looking for it, I am caught up in this feeling that compels me, disrupts my life and makes me dependent.

This is not always the case. Often the person puts themselves in an *open frame of mind for this emotion*. In such cases, it is as if men and women of all ages leave their hearts uncovered so that Cupid can more easily hit them with his arrows of love.

We find this kind emotion in Romeo and Juliet, in Paolo and Francesca, in Paris and Helen, in Samson and Delilah, in Caesar and Cleopatra. Characters, these, who are unable to think about the difficulties and problems that their love will bring both to them directly and to their families and nation, but allow themselves to be carried away, helpless but happy.

Another characteristic of the falling in love phase is that it can *take the person by surprise*: 'I walk down the street I always do to go to the office, thinking about my daily little problems, and at the newsagent's I meet eyes, a face, a body, which makes me vibrate like never before.

I follow him and try to get to know the owner of those eyes, of that body. I feel an overwhelming need to talk to this person to get to know her and to be close to her. I barely resist the impulse to embrace and kiss her. I already dream, unbelievably, of never being away from him/her again.

In this sense, falling in love can be *fortuitous*. This does not mean that I cannot fall in love with a person I know, with whom I have studied and worked, without any mental problems, before that particular fateful moment, but it is more surprising and strange the first way.

By the person concerned, but especially by those close to him, this emotion is often judged as an *illness*. The 'love sickness', which everyone can diagnose but no doctor can cure, let alone heal.

It is a disease that is sometimes creative, sometimes destructive. This malaise, in the opinion of others, *makes one blind*, as the person involved can no longer see reality in objective terms. For example, he can no longer objectively see the person behind the two beautiful eyes that overwhelmed and upset him. The innamorated person sincerely and firmly believes that he/she has discovered the most beautiful, the best, the most generous, the 'greatest' person in the world, not realising at all the often much more modest reality that others see and that he/she alone does not see.

Blind in that, for example, the lover cannot understand that he or she is being exploited by that person for his or her own ends. Blind because he/she fails to realise that the minimum conditions do not exist for this love to be realised and made concrete. Blind because the plans he or she had made based on this feeling often have the appearance of dreams and castles in the air.

Even the lover himself witnesses, sometimes helplessly, this inner upheaval.

*I still remember, in this regard, the dismayed and unmoved face of an elderly father whom I faced while I was working in the psychiatric emergency room at the University of Rome. This father asked, with the utmost urgency, for our service to intervene for his 'good, good, generous son, a pearl of a boy, who, however, had suddenly gone mad',*



*so much to say and do, to his parents but also to other relatives and friends who tried to reason with him and to bring him back to normalcy, words and behaviour that he would never have said or done.*

*Since, in our medical mentality, the first aim when we are faced with a problem is to establish a nosological framework, I tried in every way to get him to tell me about the particular symptoms of this serious mental disorder that had affected his son, that I could make a precise diagnosis and thus prepare the most suitable and opportune interventions. Unfortunately, the man's answers, which were too general and evasive, did not help me: 'He does not listen when spoken to. He is like a madman. He says and does things, doctor, that only a madman says and does'.*

*My doubts about the diagnosis remained unsolved until I asked how long his son had been suffering from these severe disorders. "But ever since he met that girl who made him lose his mind," his reply, a tone that implied his astonishment at the limits he perceived in my ability to understand the problem. Limits that were certainly confirmed, together with the deepest disappointment, when, when asked for a specific cure, I had to reply that an adequate and effective drug for these pathologies had not yet been discovered!*

The need for the fusion of body and soul with that 'special' person we love is well known, while, at the same time, distance, time passing quickly, various impediments, exasperate to the extreme the heart in love that yearns to be always close to the beloved.

In the mind of the lover, reality is bent his own desires, needs and emotions. Therefore, while the positive judgements of others: family, acquaintances and friends, exalt and accentuate his feelings, the negative ones not only do not affect his convictions in the slightest, but every word contradicts his own way of seeing and judging offends him and makes him hate and distance himself from all those who dare contradict him.

### ***4.1.2. The behaviour of the lover.***

While there is a notable detachment from everything that does not concern the beloved<sup>45</sup> so that study, work or normal occupations are neglected, the lover is capable of doing crazy things in order to be near or to be able to see even for a few minutes the man or woman towards whom he or she feels this great attraction. In order to obtain this immense joy, he or she is capable of facing immense hardships and considerable dangers, managing to overcome difficulties normally considered insurmountable. , in order to be near his or her loved one for only a few hours or minutes, he or she is capable of waiting for hours in the rain for him or her to leave the school or office where he or she works. In order not to lose the person he/she has fallen in love with, he/she is willing to compromise his/her job, break off with parents and close friends, live in poverty.

### ***4.1.3 Psychological signals.***

The psychological symptoms are also contrasting. If, on the one hand, when the beloved is far away, the sense of emptiness and annulment is painful, equally intense and full of fulfilment is the soul of the lover when the other is near. If the mere thought of the loved one fills him or her with immense joy, the fear of not being reciprocated sufficiently, of not being reciprocated with the same love, makes him or her anxious.

If smiles, flirting glances kisses fill the lover's heart with an intense warm glow, a distracted attitude on the part of the other person, behaviour that is not perfectly suited to his or her needs, makes his or her heart overflow with anguish and mute sadness.

Anxiety is then evident. The anxiety to understand and read in the other's looks, behaviour and words whether he/she also feels the same emotions: "Does he/she love me?" "Does he/she not love me?" "How much does he/she love me?" "Does he/she love me as much as I love him/her or less?" "Will he/she accept me?" "Can we always be together?" These are just some of the thousands of questions that the lover continually asks himself and also asks the patient but unfortunate friends he tries to involve in his torments of love.

<sup>45</sup> BREHM, S.S., (2002), *The Psychology of Love*, edited by Sternberg R..  
J. - Barnes L. M., Bompiani, Bologna, p 259.

Then there is the anxiety and expectation of a nod, a yes, a kiss, a caress, a promise from the loved one. Alongside these manifestations, there are also the anxieties and fears of losing them; of not seeing them again; of not being able to stay with them for ever; of not making them sufficiently happy; of having made them suffer unnecessarily and foolishly; of not meeting with their parents' approval, etc.

#### ***4.1.4 Mixed feelings.***

Characteristic of the stage of falling in love are the conflicting contrasts that alternate in the soul of the person involved in this emotion: happiness is mixed with suffering; joy follows or precedes sorrow; excitement and exaltation are mixed with pressure. And again, maximum trust in the other is mixed with the fiercest jealousy towards all possible competitors, no matter whether from the past, the present or an improbable future.

One can be jealous of every kiss given to others in the past, just as one can be furious at every look placed on the beloved in the present.

Therefore, the needs for exclusivity and possession are very much intense.

#### ***4.1.5 Biological signals.***

The biological signs of this unstable and explosive mixture, recorded by those involved, are numerous. First of all, the heartbeat when he/she calls, when he/she sends a text message, a letter, when we can finally meet him/her. And then the trembling, the palpitation, the sweating when we are happy to stay close to the loved one; but also the dry mouth, the difficulty in breathing and speaking freely, as well as the inability to study, to work calmly and to manage one's life in an orderly way, when the emotion is more intense and involving.

#### ***4.1.6 The fantasies.***

Another characteristic of this kind of love is the fantasies made with and about the person one is in love with. Fantasies and dreams, it goes without saying, full of warmth, tenderness, sexuality, availability and attention, far above and beyond any

reality.

#### **4.1.7 Social signals.**

As far as social signals are concerned, the lovers, living in a world of their own, absorbed by each other, find it difficult to integrate well into the social sphere, have hardly any resources to devote and invest in others, who are used and involved only as listeners to their verbal outbursts. Friends who are willing to listen are told in great detail about every act or behaviour of the beloved, together with a request for advice, which is, however, unlikely to be accepted or put into practice.

Woe, however, to those who carelessly point out something that conflicts with their wishes and needs. Any negative notation or criticism is judged as being dictated by lack of knowledge, sending or misunderstanding.

#### **4.1.8 The evolution falling in love**

The evolution of falling in love varies greatly. After a relatively short period, a few weeks or a few months, one needs something less involving, more staid, calmer, as one cannot live for long in that state of intense emotional investment.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, this emotion may disappear from one moment to the next without leaving any trace other than a vague memory, or it may result in considerable regret, which may last for a long time, even for many years. Regret for what could have been and was not. Regret for what was experienced together or only in the depths of one's heart and which was lost or never materialised.

In some cases, a falling in love gone wrong can mark the whole life of a person who, 'burnt', will not accept and resist other similar feelings, remaining bound and conditioned by the first passion.

*Forty-five-year-old Maria had only experienced the fire of love at a very young age, during her first year of university, when she fell madly in love with a colleague. For a few months, she thought she was reciprocated, but later discovered that her colleague only felt a modest sexual attraction for her. Feeling very stupid and foolish*

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<sup>46</sup> DACQUINO, G., (1996), *Che cos è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p.185

*Because of the upheaval that had pervaded her, she had forced herself to despise the lover who had not reciprocated her intense passion, while at the same time she had vowed to herself that she would never, in the future, fall into the trap of this feeling again.*

*He had kept to his purpose for many years, but now, at the age of forty-five, he wondered whether, when meeting the right person, he should allow himself to be seduced by the sirens of passion or continue to control his impulses by using his brain and reason rather than his heart with each new encounter.*

One ended emotion can be replaced by another similar one, it can remain in the soul as a painful after-effect, just as it can turn into a different love feeling, less intense and upsetting but deeper, more lasting and stable.

One hardly accepts the exchange for friendship. This proposal is considered almost offensive. As if someone were to propose that we exchange a chest full of gold and precious stones for lead or sea pebbles.

#### **4.1.9 Who does he hit?**

Falling in love can affect men and women of all ages and social status but it is clearly more frequent during the teenage period, although, intense flare-ups may be present in adulthood. At that age it can be more upsetting than when young, so much so that in literature and film there are frequent characters who fall head over heels for a young girl in later life.

More cerebral people are sometimes able to handle this emotion better, more carefully and wisely. Other people, more sensitive to its charm, are overwhelmed by it without the possibility of control.

Some seem to be immune to it, so much so that they are surprised by the accounts of those who have tried it. Some, on the other hand, use the in-maturation phase as if it were a drug. These are neurotic personalities who need strong stimulation and intense gratification in order to establish relationships with the opposite sex. These people seem to be unable to live and love except in this intense and unsettling way and like abstinent drug addicts, when they feel emotions towards a person diminish,

frantically trying to project their feeling onto another and then onto yet another, ad infinitum.

*Francis, a teacher in his early forties, still living with his parents, could not keep count of all the women, of various ages, with whom he had fallen in love, often without the other person knowing, because, being very shy, he could not even communicate his ardent passions. He was fifteen years old when, for the first time, this kind of amorous feeling exploded in his heart in the form of the image of a girl from the class next to his.*

*He had fallen in love with Maria, whom he had just glimpsed on his way in and out of class and school, the day he noticed her crouching in a corner of the courtyard, holding a book in one hand and a pencil in the other hand, which was to be used to underline the salient parts of various topics. She played with this pencil, running it over her face, hair and arms, as if caressing herself. This gesture of stroking herself with the pencil had triggered the spring of love. For Francis that girl could only be a wonderful girl, sensitive, affectionate, sweet, charming, intelligent.*

*He was certain that being next to her, even without touching her, even without talking to her, would be the most beautiful experience of his life. No pleasure, no joy, no event could be more exciting than the realisation of that dream.*

*That day, while his heart was beating wildly and a sweet languor invaded his body and almost paralysed him from head to toe, he remained far away from her, contemplating her for a long time, until the end of recreation. And so the next few days, for almost a month, he was content to watch her from afar. But then, one fine day, despite his fear of fainting before her from emotion, despite his fear of forgetting the sentence he had decided to say to her to start the conversation, a sentence he had repeated to himself a thousand times over, he decided to approach her while she was alone.*

*He still remembers the intense, sweet pain of crossing the courtyard to reach it. Walking on those few metres of beaten earth was like walking through a desert. She felt her throat dry and parched, while with difficulty she swallowed the saliva that had become slimy and hot in her mouth.*



*He complained of a strange exhaustion in his body and a pounding pulse in his temples as the image of her with the book in her hand grew dimmer and dimmer and was covered in a grey haze. When he had almost reached her height (not being able to go straight towards her, he had thought of the tactic of a slow evasion), he was almost happy to see her, suddenly getting up to go and talk, laughing, with her companions. She could not recall, after so many years, the feelings that were stirring in her mind and heart when another boy, uglier than him, less intelligent and better than him, spontaneously wrapped his arms around her waist while she rested her head for a moment on his shoulder, continuing to talk and laugh with her companions!*

*He remembered this gesture with pain, but strangely enough he also felt it as a liberation. Like when we dive into the sea and enjoy the sight of that wonderful liquid world and the contact with sea and plant creatures that are so different and so in- cant but then, the need for oxygen forces us to resurface and we feel free when, looking around, we can breathe freely again.*

*Since then, his life had passed in a continuous seesaw of intense emotions and desires. He went from one falling in love to the next almost without a break. If on the one hand he felt and suffered severe frustration and depression when this emotion ended or diminished, on the other hand he was unable to establish a relationship that did not have characteristics as involving and intense as those he felt in the phase of budding love.*

*He had never known or been interested in less intense relationships. He said that only when in love did he feel alive and satisfied. When he sensed 'lukewarm' feelings in himself or in the women he met, he would break off the relationship by looking, like the addict looking for his daily fix, for another woman on whom he could project and with whom he could experience the fire of falling in love.*

*He did not rule out marriage, but he had little faith that he would meet a woman with whom he could experience feelings and emotions as intense as those he sought for life. This fact had made him sad and discouraged. Therefore, as in the drug addict, moments of true joy had become increasingly scarce and rare, so that life seemed pointless, empty and dull.*

#### ***4.1.10 Where does falling in love come from?***

It can arise from any physical detail: the eyes, the nose, a part of the body, the lips, the hair. It can arise from the smell of the other, from his or her listening and speaking skills. It can arise from his way of handling, speaking or listening, from his way of smiling and looking. All these details produce an intimate resonance by connecting or bringing to the surface, even unconsciously, infantile or primitive emotions, but also memories of early relationships with parents, brothers or sisters.

Some of the elements that trigger this feeling can be linked to the daydreams born in reading and fantasy stories. Other times, the person we fall in love with is also the person who makes us feel better, who best satisfies the deepest needs of our soul, who best completes the dreams of that part, male or female, that is missing.

In some people, this emotion satisfies the desire to give: affection, protection, joy, and that is why one can also fall in love with people who are unfortunate or tragically shattered by life events, such as disability or drug addiction.

Other times, on the contrary, the other is someone we imagine can give us something: affection, protection, warmth and joy, of which we have been deprived too much or too long; someone who can us solve our inner problems.

According to Dacquino, 'Precisely because attraction to a partner corresponds to the projection onto a new person of emotions experienced during childhood, the lover tends to relive unresolved conflicts through the love relationship in an attempt to resolve them.

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#### ***4.1.11 Positive effects of falling in love.***

Falling in love is certainly an excellent, albeit primitive, instrument used by nature to lead even the most recalcitrant individuals to reproduce and form a new family. It can then be considered a positive event if it has the function of initiating a path of dialogue, knowledge and mutual giving. On the other hand, it appears to be of little use, indeed clearly detrimental to growth and

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<sup>47</sup> DACQUINO, G.,(1996) *Che cos è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p.153.

personal and social fulfilment, when it is only a source of intense emotion but causes estrangement and escape from everyday reality, transporting and causing person experiencing this emotion to live permanently in a golden but unreal world, made up only of dreams and illusions. In these cases, the risk is that this emotion makes it difficult to have a real path, a real bond, a real stable and lasting relationship with a man or woman.

#### ***4.1.12 The duration falling in love.***

The duration of this particular emotion is extremely varied: a few days, a few months or, more rarely, a few years.

#### ***4.1.13 The social value of falling in love.***

The value placed on falling in love is not the same in all societies and has not been the same in all historical periods. It was only at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe, but also in America, that people began to think with increasing insistence that falling in love was a desirable, even obligatory event in a relationship. Therefore, while in the West, for about half a century, falling in love has been considered almost a reason for living and has become fundamental to embarking on and pursuing a love journey, in other societies, such as India, China, Japan, Haiti and the Arab world, it is viewed with great suspicion, as this emotion stimulates love relationships with many unrealistic elements, so there is a real risk that many unions will be based only on illusions and dreams and will therefore be doomed to failure.

For this reason, in these peoples, unlike in ours, it is absolutely not recommended to marry a person with whom one is in love, because after falling in love, one may be disappointed and this disappointment may lead to the break-up of the family unit. They also find it incomprehensible but also regrettable that one can lose one's head for another person.

Even among the ancient Greeks, the most important feeling was not falling in love and passion ('*eros*') but friendship ('*philia*'), which prompted gratification of the other by feelings of admiration, support and attribution of positive qualities. For them, another important sentiment was '*agape*' in which interest and love for the other was manifested through favourable behaviour. But also in almost all societies of a few centuries ago the basis

of a lasting relationship between the sexes was not falling in love but mutual esteem, friendship and respect. It was marriage at the centre of the social fabric and not love or worse, falling in love.

Of this emotion, one did not fail to emphasise the lack of adherence to reality, its short existence, the desire to possess the beloved, the excessive exclusiveness. As excessive was the idealisation that, with its end, could lead to tragic disappointments for those concerned. For these reasons, this feeling was held back, if not excluded, from the life of the couple.

That the emphasis with which we in our current Western society give credit to falling in love is excessive and misplaced is proven by much of the characteristics of this emotion. This feeling can drive us to bind ourselves for life and to embark on a complex, articulated and difficult project such as marriage and family, fraught multiple commitments and legal, relational, economic and social involvement, with a person, just because something in their eyes, skin or face has triggered an archaic biological and hormonal mechanism that had, in primitive man, only the function of stimulating mating.

We have asked ourselves why, in our western society, so much emphasis is placed on falling in love and why it is not played down correctly, as was the case in many epochs and is still the case today in many civilisations. The answer, apart from historical and literary considerations, lies in the tendency to try to simplify, trivialise and consider even the most complex and profound things as a pleasant game, such as the relationship between two people who want to build a lasting relationship.

Along with trivialisation, there is also the need, on the part of societies in which the mass media are widespread, to spectacularise every event and every reality so as to create strong emotions. On the other hand, what could be more exciting and spectacular than two people in love caught in the fire of passion? Spectacularisation is essential in order to sell a product; and since love has been made into a product to be sold first with books, then with films and photostories, and now with dozens of TV programmes, the situation of two people in love, living and suffering the hot events love in an alternating way, is certainly more interesting and stimulating in order to acquire a large audience.

than that of two people who love each other with a quieter but constructive and richer feeling.

To understand this, one only has to observe how falling in love and sex cooked in all sauces occupy, together with violence, a large part of television programmes and are increasingly found in magazines and films.

Falling in love becomes a product with considerable economic returns. The turnover sex, emotions and feelings is measured in millions of euros, also because everything is done to link these feelings to objects. We do not only fall love with people, but the consumer society wants us to love objects by means of a link or words that are normally used with people.

Sentimental and sexual winks are the most frequent messages when the aim is to sell. To increase the sale of cars, motorbikes, electronic objects, mobile phones, or even very banal household appliances such as a washing machine or an iron, advertising is not afraid to use phrases typical of the world of affection and relationships: "My love for you is infinite..." says a woman voluptuously caressing a washing machine. "If you want I can be yours, take me..." says a voiceover, while a beautiful woman is lying on a car.

#### ***4.1.14 The correct management falling in love.***

The observations we have made do not detract from the function of falling in love if one sees it not as the basic element of a , but as a strong impulse for a journey to begin.

A path union ('couple' comes from 'copula', which implies an intimate and elective interpersonal relational bond between a man and a woman), a path and a bond made of knowledge, mutual understanding and commitment, destined, at least in intention, to last.

For this to happen, however, certain conditions are necessary for falling in love to develop into a more solid, valid and lasting love feeling:

1. the maturity of people experiencing this emotion must be adequate and remarkably high;

2. The affective - sentimental and sexual education of young people must be carefully prepared, so as to develop the capacity for reasoning to be used also and above all in love choices. Education must also succeed in strengthening all the qualities that are indispensable for a valid and solid relationship and for a rich and full maternal and paternal role. Nothing can be taken for granted, least of all such difficult and important tasks as those of husband and wife, father and mother;
3. There must be present from both young people involved a great and deep willingness, a need and a desire to engage in a project that is splendid and rich in gifts but also arduous;
4. The commitment and constant support of the affective and family network of the two young people is essential, and they must put in place all the necessary strategies to ensure that, alongside the pleasure of the relationship, a duty to each other and to society is born. Alongside passion reason develops; alongside play, sacrifice and commitment are born; alongside the search for something for oneself, for one's own satisfaction and joy, the pleasure of giving freely to others, to society and to life is born;
5. The family network, which stands next to the two young people who want to embark on a journey as a couple, must therefore have numerous qualities:
  - must be present and active. It is not enough to have parents if they are not intelligently active in advising, suggesting and guiding their children, first in their choices and then in the conduct of their affective and emotional relationship;
  - must be a rich network. Rich in terms of the number of people bound by a warm mutual affection, but also rich in values to be passed on to the young people who live and train within it;
  - must be a healthy network. Healthy in its moral principles. Healthy in psychological terms. Healthy in that it is capable of aggregation, acceptance and valorisation. Healthy in that it is

capable of support,

reinforcement and collaboration. Free, therefore, of those conflictual, aggressive, destructive or marginalising tendencies that make an affective network scarcely valid, if not pathological;

- must be an affectively warm network. Warm in the capacity to love. Warm in acceptance. Warm in giving.

## **4.2 LOVE SIMPATHY**

When there is no sexual attraction towards a person of the opposite sex, nor do they make life plans together, but in the relationship between the two there is only *friendship, without union, warmth and intense passion*, we are in the presence of sympathetic love. In this kind of love, only the intimacy component is pre-eminent. We like to talk to that person, we like to listen to them; we feel good in their arms or next to them; we enjoy the exchange of cuddles and little superficial caresses, but sexuality is rare and so is jealousy.

Travelling along the roads of sympathetic love, every now and then we enter into pleasant discussions and communicate the pleasure of mutual closeness by holding hands, but without great, intense sexual passion. The pleasure of each other's ideas, the warmth conveyed by their hands and arms, are sufficient to satisfy and fill our souls, even if, after this interval of tense intimacy, we go our separate ways.

## **4.3 LUDICO LOVE**

The streets of playful love are littered with victims left by their sides like dolls or broken toys, abandoned by wayward children who have grown tired of playing with them. Fortuna, while these children continue to run about, oblivious of what they have abandoned along the way, someone sometimes lovingly collects the toys they have used and then neglected, repairs them, consoles them and gives them a new lease of life.

People who prefer playful love do not have in mind or seek an ideal type of love. *They play with love*, and in this game they collect a thousand adventures with a thousand different people, without deepening any relationship, without ever becoming involved, without ever fully experiencing anything.



Occasionally there is some hint of passion, more imitated than deeply felt, but there is neither the time nor the desire build deep intimacy or real commitment.

These people often pretend to be in love because that is how the other person wants it and because that is how the culture imposed by the mass media wants it. On the other hand, pretending to feel intense passion is not at all difficult. Books, newspapers, cinema and TV describe every day and in every detail what those who experience this emotion must say, do, manifest. And so many, both men and women, mimic their favourite actor or actress in a stereotypical pantomime of amorous behaviour and seductive attitudes.

They use the most seductive clothes, the most bewitching perfumes and make-up to seduce and make it clear that they love. And, to achieve their goal, they do not skimp on the means: they circle each other with large bouquets of red roses, invitations to bars or restaurants, gifts and passionate phrases of proven and proven effect.

*Luisa, married with two children, well educated, good-looking and pleasant to talk to, had also discovered love as a game. Knowing exactly what men liked to hear, she hurled her love arrows at every 'interesting' man she came across, no matter whether free, engaged or married. She loved to feel invested and partly, but only partly, involved in the falling in love of her victims. She only vibrated with pleasure when she felt that she was, for a few months, at the centre of their hearts and inflamed desires. When after a short time, in order to pursue other amorous adventures, she thought of leaving them, she did so gently and gradually, in such a way as to make them desire her with increasing intensity without ever making herself hated. In this way she managed to be like a spider in the centre of a web where, one by one, a large number of men fell and were trapped. Some still with vibrant hearts and bodies, others anaesthetised but still alive, while others were hanging from the threads of the web, long dead and already emptied.*

*As Luisa was in fact a fundamentally frigid woman, only by collecting and living the desire of others could she satisfy her cravings.*

*She did not understand, however, why women, even those who knew nothing about her games, hated her so much, expressing openness.*

*rejection and hostility. She did not understand that the feminine sixth sense had identified a real danger in her and defended and punished her by marginalising her and refusing her friendship.*

#### **4.4 EMPTY LOVE**

When *only the decision/commitment component is present or prevails*, we are in the presence of empty love.

We find this situation on numerous occasions: in stagnant or sclerotic relationships; at the end of a love affair but also in the initial phase of an arranged marriage, when one decides to love another person without there being any passion and intimacy yet.

This does not exclude that with time a more balanced, complete and satisfying relationship can be reconstructed or built, so that empty love is filled with intense feelings such as passion, warmth, intimacy and dialogue.

In many peoples such as the Chinese, Indian and Muslim nations, even today, as was the case for thousands of years in the Western world, one does not marry in that one loves a person but one marries committing oneself to love a person for life. Therefore, at least in the initial phase, one is certainly in the presence of an empty love.

This difference is not insignificant. While today in Western civilisation, marriage may be the culmination of a great or small love, or simply the natural outburst of a great or momentary passion, for those peoples, and in the past also for us, marriage represents the starting point for building together a love as great and deep as possible, as beautiful and satisfying as possible for both of them and for the whole family.

Empty love may be asymmetrical, in the sense that it may be present in only one of two members of the couple. In this case, the other may feel guilty for not being able to fully reciprocate a different, richer love.

#### **4.5 EROTIC LOVE**

When *only the passion component prevails or is present*, we are in the presence of erotic love. In this type of love, the main protagonists are not the two people: with their past, their

history, their culture, their tastes, their memories, just as the heart and feelings are not protagonists. In this kind of love, the real protagonists are the bodies. It is from his or her bodies that the love spark starts. It is his or her buxom breasts, her hips or muscles and his or her mighty torso that drive the meeting and the understanding. The passionate physical attraction sometimes ends gradually, often raptly, almost violently in convulsive and repetitive sexual intercourse.

The road travelled by those who choose erotic love makes me think of the routes organised for lovers of good food and fine wine. For these travellers, the natural or artistic beauty of the places visited is of no importance. They do not care about archaeology, beautiful monuments, historical events or the customs of the people they meet on their way. The only places they look for and are enthusiastic about are restaurants and inns. When they return from their journeys, they will only tell friends and relatives who are willing to listen about how delicious the barbecued meat was in 'that out-of-the-way inn' they encountered on the way, or how 'the wine discovered in the shady valleys was drunk with pleasure!

The difference from other types of love is evident. In the meantime, dialogue often consists only of muffled phrases and appreciations that only serve to increase the excitement and make the encounter more pleasurable. Furthermore, while the romantic lover seeks for his or her effusions, a breathtaking view, a golden sunset, a rosy sunrise or a silvery moon reflected in the sea, the erotic lover is absolutely indifferent to everything around him or her except the body of the beloved. Even a semi-dark, shabby little room in a fourth-rate hotel is fine. As is the side of a road, a lift, a public toilet, a lido cabin or any place where there is a minimum of privacy. On the contrary, for some of them, the stranger, more different and riskier the place, the more they appreciate it and seek it out.

If physical intimacy is at the highest level in this type of love, the same is not true for other forms of intimacy. It may happen this type of lover that they spend the whole night together having sex, without yet knowing the name of their partner, whether he/she is free or married or what his/her intentions are for the future of the relationship. This is also a characteristic heroic love.

co: the commitment component is minimal, often only concerning the date, place and time of the next appointment.

These encounters can end as suddenly and quickly as they began, with a simple 'hello', if the mutual attraction, for whatever reason, falls below a certain level that these lovers consider unacceptable. By the way, if both seek this kind of relationship, the end does not bring, I do not say trauma, but neither does it displease the couple, who are willing to open up immediately to other encounters of the same kind.

The end of erotic love affairs is swift and frequent because physical pleasure, like all pleasures, saturates and degrades easily and quickly. It is rare, therefore, that passion remains for a long time at the same high level in which it was in its initial phase.

It may happen, however, if certain character premises are in place, that the initial, overwhelming erotic passion turns into a quieter, more constructive love, a kind of amalgamation of *eros* and *stor-ge*.<sup>48</sup> And then it may happen that this type of relationship turns into another type of love, even into classic conjugal love.

The merits of this amorous path, which can be taken by the couple, relate above all to the intense, mutually offered and mutually enjoyed pleasure. In this pleasure, in which the bodies are the protagonists, it is the bodies that are most fulfilled and gratified, while the affective-relational and social levels are extremely lacking.

Needless to say, this form love has a considerably reduced future and confidences. It gives no respite to the deepest part of the soul; it gives neither hope nor certainty for the future; it makes no contribution to the emotional network; it does not open up to life, except in an incidental way and therefore with serious risks for the product of conception.

Any child mistakenly conceived by these lovers risks being abandoned or entrusted to other hands and other hearts, but may also risk being killed by voluntary abortion. Fortunately, there is the possibility that an unforeseen pregnancy will awaken and arouse the maternal or paternal instinct, which can change the

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<sup>48</sup> LEE, J. A., (2002), "Forms Love", in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M., ed., *La psicologia dell'amore*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.57.

positive sense the fate of the new human being coming into life. Unfortunately, however, even in this case, if both are not mature and willing for this unexpected event, the reception of the new born may be perceived, by one or both of them, as an undue intrusion. It is easy, then, for the child to be born to suffer the burden of more or less unconscious aggression and rejection on the part of one or both parents.

## **4.6 LOVE FRIENDSHIP**

When, on the other hand, *the intimacy component plus the decision/commitment* component are present, but the passion component is missing, we are in the presence of friendship love.

Hatfield describes this kind love as 'the affection we feel for those who are deeply part of our lives'.<sup>49</sup> We are, therefore, in the presence of two people who share an intimate relationship, whereby one cares for the other. Even if the passion component is minimal or non-existent, the two are good together because there is complicity, dialogue, understanding, communion, but also fidelity.

This type of love is much more common than one would think. Many romantic loves end up turning into friendship love.

Whereas in passion love, intimacy is desired, in friendship love is possessed<sup>(50)</sup> and while passion love privileges the ecstasy-unhappiness dimension friendship love flourishes in an atmosphere of contentment, punctuated from time to time by the frustrations of reality

Friendship love can satisfy both members of the couple and therefore the couple will endure over time, or this situa-

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<sup>49</sup> HATFIELD, E., (2002), 'Love passion and love friendship', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p. 233.

<sup>50</sup> HATFIELD, E., (2002), 'Love passion and love friendship', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p. 233

<sup>51</sup> HATFIELD, E., (2002), "Love passion and love friendship", in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.236

will dissatisfy one of the two. In such a case, the dissatisfied person will look for a love that is also rich in passionate elements, in this case putting the stability of the union in crisis.

Like all types of love, friendship love is nourished by positive experiences, while it is suffocated by negative experiences.

## **4.7 FACTUAL LOVE**

When *passion and commitment present but intimacy missing*, we are in the presence of fatuous love.

When one goes down the road of this kind of love, there is a rapid and violent courtship in which falling in love begins; a few weeks later, the engagement is announced and the following month, the marriage is celebrated. But sometimes, too, the following month one goes to the lawyers to ask for a divorce.

This kind of love is not uncommon to see in old Hollywood movies and makes us think of those organised trips that propose visiting seven world capitals in seven days. On the first day you visit London, dine in Paris, have lunch in Prague, visit the Colosseum in Rome, climb the Acropolis in Athens, buy souvenirs in Cairo, and on the way back you pass through Madrid.

The limits of fatuous love are obvious.

The lack of intimacy often shortens these relationships and the two, when the flare-up of passion is over, feel as if they have been cheated. They look at each other in amazement as two strangers and suffer in tension.

Dialogue, knowledge of the other, understanding, exchange, sexuality, ultimately love, need time for their evolution and growth. To think that a few weeks are enough for this is purely illusory. A Hollywood film from the 1960s.

## **4.8 PRAGMATIC LOVE**

The pragmatic love that Lee<sup>52</sup> speaks of makes me think of those good travellers who, months before departure, before even

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<sup>52</sup> LEE J. A., (2002), "Forms Love", in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed., *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.68.

take the first step, they prepare long and thoroughly for the venture or the road they intend to travel. They train both physically and psychologically and plan and organise the journey in every detail to avoid unpleasant surprises.

In order to make the journey safe and pleasant, look for a suitable companion who has certain requirements they consider indispensable. Above all, they look for a travelling companion who loves what they love and has an aversion to everything they hate. These foresighted people mark on the map the paths and roads they will have to take, the hikes they intend to make, the necessary stops, while at the same time filling their rucksacks with everything they may need along the way: sleeping bag, map, compass, food, tent, change of clothes, medicines, etc., so as to reduce and, if possible, avoid any inconvenience and unpleasant surprises along the way. This type of traveller is mocked by lovers of adventure and unforeseen situations, but is easily consoled by observing along the way the inconveniences encountered by all those who love improvisation and risk.

In pragmatic love, both he and she look for a person suits them and satisfies their needs. Or it is other people who, for free or for a fee, help them to find someone who possesses congenial characteristics in terms of age, profession, religion, social status, economic situation, physical appearance, etc.

Often the requests also contain canons referring to particular life habits or psychological characteristics. One only has to read a few marriage advertisements to realise this type of love. "Wanted: 'Woman medium height, non-smoker, practising Catholic, unmarried, not over 30 years of age, free, of mild and sweet disposition, who loves dancing, family life and travelling'.

In the past, pragmatic love affairs were mainly handled by the parents of young people and their relatives and friends. The latter, knowing the characteristics and needs of the individual suitors well, searched in their own country or in neighbouring countries for someone who could suit son, relative or friend. Matchmakers were also dedicated to these matches on behalf of the respective families.



Nowadays, those who prefer to search for their soul mate without relying on chance or chance encounters have numerous tools at their disposal. First of all, they can choose from the thousands of advertisements in many newspapers and magazines. If he is not satisfied, he can click on one of the many Internet sites made available to those looking for a soul mate. He can also, for a fee, use the services of the many flourishing matrimonial agencies in every large city. These agencies, also with the help of the computer, promise to carry out an accurate examination of characteristics and abilities of their members, in order to find one or more persons of the opposite sex who are eligible or at least compatible.

In many large cities, specific bars, restaurants and dance venues come to the aid of singles in search of a soul mate. For quick encounters in bars, one can rely on *speed dating* or Italian spendthrifts. For less hurried, more reasoned and romantic, you can dine by candlelight in restaurants that organise *speed dinners*. If one then has more time to choose the person one loves and/or marries or lives with, one can take part in special trips, weekends or cruises for lonely hearts. If all this is not enough, one can rely on the introduction of a *wing woman* who, for a fee, will introduce the young single person to a possible partner.

The strangest thing is that at present, in the Western world, free introductions by one's parents and relatives are usually rejected and considered offensive, while introductions by the various, among whom can be hidden plenty of swindlers and fraudsters, are accepted and demanded, often for a fee.

This type of love, which has always been present in the history of mankind, is the most ridiculed by those who choose romantic love or passionate love, as it greatly limits the spontaneity and magical atmosphere present in the casual encounter. It also lacks the pleasure of the courtship phase and the overwhelming emotion of falling in love is absent, at least in the initial phase.

There are, however, many proven merits:

- in the meantime, there is a clear request and a clear availability regarding the purpose of the meeting: cohabitation, marriage, friendship, companionship, etc:

- all the factual, professional, social, religious and political characteristics desired or rejected are immediately clarified and highlighted;
- In addition, certain skills or character elements considered important for starting a love affair are also immediately highlighted. 'I am looking for a romantic, strong, decisive man who makes me feel secure'. Or 'I am looking for a sweet, sensitive, affectionate, serene woman who does not create unnecessary anxiety for me';
- In addition, lacking the deceptive emotions and projections of the falling in love phase, many elements of the other person's character are more easily revealed and, therefore, the acquaintance phase has a better chance of success.

This type of love is preferred by people who love or who want to keep their feet firmly on the ground and who do not want any unpleasant surprises, but it is also chosen by men and women who, coming out of difficult or disastrous situations and experiences such as divorces, failed romances or love deceptions, no longer want to take unnecessary and painful risks.

## **4.9 ROMANTIC LOVE**

The most sought-after love in Western societies is romantic love. The roads travelled by men and women who believe in and experience this kind of love are full of meadows and colourful flowers; breath-taking plains and lonely beaches; fiery sunsets and moonlit nights; shining stars in the night and roundabouts by the sea on which to dance or dine by candlelight, while violins or guitars play sweet tunes laced with poignant words.

It is the union of *intimacy and passion* that gives birth to so-called romantic love.

In this type of love, the decision-commitment component is particular. On the one hand, promises of eternal love are numerous and frequent: 'I want, I am certain, I assure you that this love is so great and intense that it will last a lifetime'. On the other hand, however, there can be a tragic implication: 'This will happen if you love me with the same intensity and passion as today. This will happen if you continue to represent for me, as you do today, a splendid, wonderful gift from heaven'. *The decision component*

*commitment is, therefore, closely linked to the intensity of mutual love feelings.*

Branden defines romantic love as 'a passionate spiritual - emotional - sexual attachment that reflects a high regard on the part of both for the other's worth as a person'.<sup>53</sup> This feeling is frequently found in summer love and between lovers.

#### **4.9.1 THE CHARACTERISTICS**

Romantic love is characterised, in the meantime, by a choice free from all external influences. He/she has not been introduced by friends and acquaintances, let alone by parents or other relatives. He/she had no approval from the Church or the State or any other institution. One day, who knows why, who knows how, on the dance floor, but also at the bus stop or between the supermarket counters, their eyes met and the love spark flew between them. Already after a few hours, this spark may have ignited a hot, crackling fire in the hearts of the protagonists.

In other cases, however, romantic love opens gently and slowly in both hearts, without a sound, like flowers blooming in a mountain meadow in spring.

Ultimately, therefore, in this type of love, the two people share their lives, choosing each other voluntarily on the basis of what they feel in their hearts, regardless of social, family or financial considerations:

One accepts the other without reservation. One respects their sovereignty, as one protects and cares for their evolution towards self-realisation, taking their thoughts, feelings and needs to heart:

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<sup>53</sup> BRANDEN, N., (2002), 'A view of romantic love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, M. L., ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.244.

<sup>54</sup> BRANDEN, N., (2002), "A view of romantic love", in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, M. L., ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna , p.243

<sup>55</sup> BRANDEN, N., (2002), 'A view of romantic love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, M. L., ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.252.

Another characteristic of romantic love is gifts. Often they are non-expensive gifts: a flower, a small object or a cute animal that she/he had laid eyes on with interest. Gifts are the equivalent of words to say: 'I love you'. "I thought of you'. "I remembered our anniversary, the first kiss, the first promise of love".

Romantic lovers exchange not only gifts but also attention. Therefore, one tries to understand the other's wishes or requests and takes action to fulfil them immediately, without even discussing them.

In romantic love, the others: children, family, friends, work colleagues, are like extras, never taking on the role of main act. Romantic lovers try to be alone and therefore do everything to exclude others from their world. When they are together with friends, their eyes seek other and light up when he/she meets their gaze, when he/she touches or caresses the other's hand. Even when the two lovers are together with others it is as if a bubble encloses and isolates them, so that friends and relatives perceive them not as individuals but as an inseparable unit.

Unlike other quarrelsome couples, he never speaks ill of her in public and vice versa; nor are their respective limitations and shortcomings pointed out. They do not like noisy disco dancing. They both prefer to twirl on the softly lit dance floor, accompanied by the notes of Strauss waltzes, or they like to exchange tender words of love, using the cheek-to-cheek dances of the sixties.

Their favourite dream and wish is also to be able to spend an evening at home without telephone, without television, without children, for a candlelit dinner. This dream and wish they try to fulfil whenever possible, even neglecting social activities, as the relationship is experienced as a top priority.

Romantic love requires a good level of self-esteem. Each of the two must feel that they can love the other, but also that they are worthy and deserving of the other's love. When opinions differ and there is a risk of a clash, each of the two faces this feeling with courage and always with openness towards the partner. Says

Branden:<sup>(56)</sup> 'Even when we are in conflict with him, even when we are frustrated, hurt, angry, we have the courage to remain in touch with our loving feelings instead of closing in and withdrawing. "Attachment in romantic love is spiritual, sensual and emotional at the same time, combined with a great mutual admiration. To achieve this, a deep reciprocity of values and meaning in life is indispensable, giving the two the feeling of being 'soul mates'.<sup>57</sup>

In romantic love, the mental rather than the sexual connotations of the partner are more evident. One loves the other not because he or she is a connoisseur of all love techniques, but because he or she knows and satisfies our heart. Romantic love is therefore rooted in genuine appreciation and admiration for the other.

In summary, in romantic love one seeks:

- a companion with whom to share values, feelings, interests and goals;
- someone with whom to share the joys and burdens of existence;
- a person to love and admire;
- a person by whom we are excited, stimulated and towards whom we like to direct our energies;
- a person who loves, cares for and appreciates us;
- a person who, along with sexual needs, makes us dream and gives us the necessary emotional support;
- someone of the opposite sex who cares about our well-being and who will assure us of their trustworthy presence in face of life's trials;
- someone with whom to share emotions and care;
- someone in whom we can discover and live the potential we lack as men and women.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> BRANDEN, N., (2002), 'A View of Romantic Love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, M. L., ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.256.

<sup>57</sup> BRANDEN, N., (2002), 'A View of Romantic Love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, M. L., ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna , p.244.

<sup>58</sup> BRANDEN, N., (2002), 'A view of romantic love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, M. L., ., *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani,

Satisfying these needs should lead to greater self-awareness and self-discovery, a more extensive and deeper contact with our selves and the world; a better appreciation of ourselves and our capacity to love; a better utilisation of our masculine and feminine potential; a better sexual identity

For a good vitality of romantic love, the following are necessary: many declarations of love; many physical manifestations of love, such as caresses and sexual acts; solicitude and care for each other; considerable mutual admiration and appreciation and much intense dialogue. Dialogue that is indispensable to let the other know we like, what makes us happy, what we admire. Dialogue that enables us to share with our partner our intimate life, thoughts, memories, feelings, dreams, aspirations, but also wounds, anger and painful experiences.

For romantic love to live long, intense, mutual emotional support is also necessary.<sup>60</sup>

In this kind of love, the two partners are active and present in illness, difficulties, adversity, crises, as well as in moments of joy and gratification. The two partners are each other's best friend, help each other, are devoted to each other's interests and well-being.<sup>61</sup>

#### **4.9.2 Duration.**

The duration of romantic love varies widely. It can last a few months, a few years, it can end the moment one is forced to come down from the pink clouds by marriage to face the many practical and inconvenient problems of everyday life, but

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Bologna, p.249.

<sup>59</sup> BRANDEN, N., (2002), 'A View of Romantic Love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, M. L., ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.249.

<sup>60</sup> BRANDEN, N., (2002), 'A View of Romantic Love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, M. L., ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna , p.251.

<sup>61</sup> BRANDEN, N., (2002), 'A view of romantic love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, M. L., ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bombiani, Bologna, p.251.

there is no doubt that there are cases where romantic love lasts for decades, indeed for a lifetime.

### **4.9.3 Limits.**

Even in romantic love there are limits:

1. The first limitation concerns the closure or poor and modest openness to the social, family and friendship network. It has been seen that the couple's relationship is more likely to break down when it does not fit properly and well into these networks that should support and sustain it. Since there is always a certain physiological and natural dependence on one's family or friends, attempting to break or, worse still, cancel these ties creates in the individual considerable feelings of guilt and unworthiness that cannot but influence the relationship.
2. As is the case in nascent love, it is easy to fall into error about the qualities and possibilities offered by the other, as we tend to idealise and hugely expand on his or her qualities and possibilities. This is also because in this kind of love, the other tends to present himself or herself as we would like them to be.
3. The third limitation concerns the high level of investment in intimacy and emotional dependence on the other. If it is only the other who satisfies all or almost all of our affective-relational needs, the disappointment, if these needs are not fully, continuously and completely satisfied, is remarkably serious and burdensome. Just as the passionate attachment between the two can give rise to the deepest ecstasy, so, too, if even a small frustration or disappointment arises, the same attachment can give rise to serious, indescribable suffering; so much so that many people who are disappointed in this kind of love utter the classic phrase: 'Never spoil yourself for love, never again love someone with all your soul'. Often, it is precisely those disappointed romantic love who are the best followers of pragmatic love. Therefore, in order to be well-lived and protected, romantic love

must



mantic requires a lot of commitment, a lot of energy and considerable wisdom and consistency.

4. The fourth limitation concerns the openness of love towards children. If the couple tends to be too functional, the emotional relationship with the children may be lukewarm and thus insufficient to meet their needs. Then, when, with birth of children, a good deal of attention, affection and care will naturally be shifted to the offspring, there is the risk that this affection and care will be judged by the partner as a betrayal of the promise to give everything to each other totally and exclusively.
5. Finally, since romantic love has developed considerably in more individualistic societies, such as the American one, it is easy to make the accusation that it is in fact a less mature love than others and that it takes much more from the social and family environment than it is meant to give.

#### **4.10 LIVED LOVE - CONJUGAL LOVE**

The most serious love, the most stable over time, the most useful to society, but also the most difficult to build and maintain, is the love in which all three components are present in a balanced way: *timelessness, passion and commitment*. This type of love is called lived or complete love by Sternberg.

Similar to experienced love is the conjugal love of which Mucchielli speaks<sup>(63)</sup>

In the streets of conjugal love we find everything: there are brats to nurse and rock, just as there are romantic candlelit dinners stolen, almost miraculously, from family necessities. There are taxes to pay, washing machines to fill and laundry to iron, but also exotic trips and sunsets by the sea to enjoy. If moments of tension and stress are not uncommon, cheerful get-togethers are frequent. Often the smell of red roses given as a Valentine's Day gift is

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<sup>62</sup> STERNBERG, R. J., (2002), 'The Triangulation of Love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M., ., *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p. 151

<sup>63</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città nuova editrice, Rome.

combines with the smell of sauce boiling in the pot. Often a kiss given in passing to the partner is also contested by the loud and impertinent children.

This type of love can arise after marriage or when the two partners have come to know each other well, which can also happen before marriage if the courtship has been long.

Once the initial love passion of the falling in love phase has been reduced or scaled down, it is replaced by the esteem, sympathy and reality of married love.

This type of love is significantly different and much more complex than falling in love. Despite this, very often among the young, but also the not so young, one and the other are spoken of indifferently as if they were synonymous.

In married love, the three components: intimacy, passion and commitment, are well balanced.

If, as we have said, the commitment component is considerable, for love to last, the intimacy made up of verbal dialogue, of listening but also of gestures will necessarily have to be very deep and rich. The same applies to the passion component. Giving pleasure to each other with enthusiasm, with joy and with generosity gratifies, enriches and helps to cope with the myriad difficulties of everyday life.

#### ***4.10.1 The link with realities.***

Conjugal love is a feeling closely linked to reality. It does not, therefore, arise as an alienation or distortion of real experience.

#### ***4.10.2 Graduality.***

Another characteristic of this type of love is gradualness. This feeling does not burst out suddenly like falling in love or romantic love, but increases gradually along with the intimacy between the two people, as the things that are shared increase: dreams, memories, thoughts, achievements but also losses. Every reality and every event experienced together, hand in hand, supporting each other, increases intimacy and thus also love.

### ***4.10.3 The link with the will.***

Another significant difference lies in its origin and growth. The birth, growth or decline and end in- mation do not depend on us. They are not subject to our will, as falling in love is 'free'. It takes us as suddenly as it can disappear. Marital love, on the other hand, is closely linked to our commitment, will, ability and availability.

We therefore want to love that person, and so we dispose our hearts to this feeling. We want this love to grow, and therefore with our words, our gestures, with our behaviour, with the thousands of cares we put in place, we do everything to achieve this.

We want this love to last a lifetime, and so we strive to make it ever stronger and more robust, so that it can withstand the pitfalls of time and events that could attack and corrode it. And if, for whatever reason, the relationship should fall ill, we cure it, sometimes directly and personally, sometimes if we cannot do it alone, we have the co- ray and determination enough to get others to help us.

### ***4.10.4 Planning.***

Characteristic of this type of love is also planning. There is not only today, but also commitment and planning for a long time to come: they want to plan a life in common, supporting each other; they plan to buy a house using their work, savings and common sacrifices; they plan to have children and then grandchildren to care for, look after, educate and then accompany on the roads of the world; they want to share hopes, dreams and realities, whether sad or happy.

### ***4.10.5 Solidarity and mutual aid.***

Solidarity and mutual help are basic characteristics of married love. In this kind of love, there is an active concern for other family members whom we seek to protect and for whom we feel responsible.

If we analyse conjugal love we find in it an intense need for closeness and dependence, so much so that one considers the other

very important person, indeed essential for one's own life but also for one's own happiness: 'If I did not have her, I would be unhappy: she is everything to me'

When one experiences this feeling, one considers the couple and the family at the centre of one's life, while the family origin, friends, work, but also the 'I' and the 'you' take second place, although they remain present. We are responsible for this new and original human reality. We are primarily responsible for the upbringing of our children. We who are jointly responsible for defending, protecting and strengthening, sometimes tooth and nail, the independence, autonomy, stability and vigour of this union

Alongside the couple, conjugal love includes openness to life and thus seeks in children another reason for enrichment, both personal and as a couple. In conjugal love, children are wanted, sought after, desired, because with them the love of a couple produces its best fruits, which it offers to life and humanity, and from them it draws nourishment, purpose, vigour and support.

#### ***4.10.6 Duration.***

Another characteristic of conjugal love is that it is a very strong, long-lasting and stable feeling. Whereas inna- mation or passion may last only a few hours or a few days, at most a few years, conjugal love can last a lifetime.

#### ***4.10.7 His needs.***

Although in living this sweet, enchanting feeling, there is much joy and much desire to please and be pleased, it is formed and matures through daily gestures, renunciations, sacrifices, sometimes suffering.

Couples who choose to experience conjugal love increasingly tend evaluate their individual acts, attitudes and

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<sup>64</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma, p 77.

<sup>65</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma, p 77.

their intentions, as a function of conjugal wholeness and of the resoluteness of the effects this love will have on children. This is because people, in conjugal love, are committed to and responsibly work for the health of the couple and the family.<sup>66</sup>

#### **4.10.8 His gifts.**

Marital love is a feeling that enriches the two, but also society, in a profound and stable way.

It then emerges forcefully that conjugal love is the centre and driving force of the emotional world. It can be understood that only by living this kind of love to the full will it be possible for the new generations to live both individual and social and relational realities a fully human sense. In fact, without conjugal love and hence without the family that is born from it, there is no possibility of allowing a mature, serene, balanced human life to develop, free from discomfort, psychological disorders, as well as from egocentrism.<sup>67</sup>

We have said that conjugal love is born, grows and develops in the perspective of human procreation. This does not mean that procreation is indispensable, but that in embarking on this path together, one wants to share one's love for the other also with children. One generously wants to open one's heart so that others too can drink from the love one feels and lives.

#### **4.10.9 The team**

As in a team, in conjugal love, one tries to help the other, one supports the other and is supported by the other: in their difficulties, in facing everyday problems, seeking solutions. When this feeling is rich and strong, one has the distinct feeling of winning in two and losing in two.

The wellbeing of the other becomes one's own wellbeing and thus each is interested in the other's joy and serenity as if they were their own joy and serenity. When this

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<sup>66</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città Nuova Editrice, Rome, p. 78-82.

<sup>67</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città Nuova Editrice, Rome, p. 78-82.

feeling is rich and strong the other is important not because he can give me something but because he is an important part of me. Not respecting the other is not respecting myself. To love and pay attention to the other is to love and pay attention to myself. To be a champion of the other, to care for the other, to protect the other, to devote one's life to the other, to seek the other's physical, spiritual and psychological wellbeing are fundamental to having me and our family care, to having me and our family wellbeing, to having me and our family protection.

Esteem and mutual respect are fundamental components in this kind of love. The higher the esteem and respect, the longer the relationship lasts, the more the couple cements this love.

#### ***4.10.10 His birth.***

Conjugal love can be born in various ways: it can be added to friendship; it can replace friendships; it can arise from casual acquaintance; it can replace the fire of falling in love; it can, as in India, China and many Oriental peoples, begin at the very moment when the marriage project begins, which, if it is planned and organised by others, is pursued and lived by us.

A love that is born after marriage seems scarcely credible, if not impossible, in today's Western culture. Yet millions of couples from the present and the past are there to prove that this kind of love exists and is just as valid.

### **4.11 ONE-SIDED LOVES - UNBALANCED LOVES - NOT LOVES**

Some of the loves we have described are monkish loves, unbalanced loves or non-loves. In fact, any love in which one or more fundamental characteristics are missing is a monkish love, is a limited love, or even a non-love, is a false love. *Non-loves* are those in which there is only the presence of passion or commitment or intimacy. *One-sided* loves are those in which only two of the three components of love are present. *Unbalanced* loves are those in which the three components are not experienced with the same intensity.

Sometimes limits are present from the beginning of the relationship, sometimes they arise later. Fortunately, the opposite can happen: some one-sided, limited or unbalanced loves are completed, enriched and balanced with time and the good will of both partners.

Unfortunately, our society tends more and more to produce 'unbalanced loves' 'one-sided loves' or 'non-loves'.

There are several reasons for this.

1. In the meantime, the business world, for a calculation that is not only very petty, but above all very short-sighted, fears deep, lasting and stable ties, which could alleviate the needs of people who are free of family and relationship constraints. For this reason, the business and economic world entices, with considerable privileges of power, money, fame and career, men and women who renounce not only family ties, but also long-lasting, rich and involving relationships.
2. Added to this is the considerable influence of the expansion of the false concept of freedom into all strata of society. Therefore, each person is encouraged to choose, as in the supermarket, the type of love he or she prefers, without any indication of the quality of these feelings. It does not matter then whether this love enriches or impoverishes individuals or couples. It does not matter whether this love makes people grow or leaves them immature and infantile. It does not matter whether it causes physical, moral or psychological harm. Nor does it matter whether this kind of love is useful to society or not; whether it is a love that offers society healthy children or sick families, balanced and serene or disturbed people. Anything goes and 'anything goes'. There is no doubt that this is a very myopic position, as the damage resulting from this type of attitude will necessarily have to be dealt with by the same society that was initially concerned with the problem. It is the community as a whole that, like it or not, will be forced to deal with the damage caused by wrong

choices. Damage to couples, sin-



institutions, damage to administrations and services, but also damage to the political leadership itself.

3. In addition, so-called *ethical and cultural relativism* has spread throughout all social strata. For *ethical relativism*, each person or social group decides for itself what is good and what is bad, what is useful and what is useless or harmful. With the rise of ethical relativism, there is no one truth or 'the truth', but as many truths as there are people. With *cultural relativism*, in our society, the concept of truth based on science and knowledge has long since been replaced by the concept of opinion. As a result, all norms, values and rules are on the same level of plausibility. Without clear and secure points of reference, all choices can be good and useful, if the person decides that they are good and useful for him or her at the time.
4. The last reason is consequential to the others. If families produce people who are disturbed, immature, poorly motivated, apathetic, and incapable of a serious and responsible commitment, if families are not able to communicate certain values that are fundamental to humanity, the choice of the type of love to be lived out will be a consequence their own lack of ability, but also of the dis-values they have chosen.



## **Chapter 5**

### **5.0 LOVE AND PLANNING**

#### **5.1 EVOLUTION LOVE**

The evolution love can be the most varied.

It is possible for the same individual to go from one type of love to another, either with the same partner or with different partners, just as it is possible for the couple to go from one type love to another mon-

course of one's existence. We can then find all possible combinations in every couple and in every individual. However, as we have said, the type of love experienced depends on many individual and family factors, but is also closely linked to the encounters made in one's life, as well as the social environment where one lives.

It is possible, then, that the love experienced as a couple will result in an important project such as engagement and then marriage, but it is also possible that the final project will be very different: friendship, cohabitation, Dico, temporary marriage, free relationship, etc.

## **5.2 THE ENGAGEMENT**

Until a few decades ago, the reasons for the meeting and dating of two young people were quite clear and defined. They met and frequented each other with a view to an official engagement and to prepare to build a new family with marriage. This was a period, of varying length, during which the social environment close to the young people was engaged in preparing the formation of a new family. This preparation took place on several levels:

- *on an interpersonal level,*
- *family and friendship,*
- *on a religious level,*
- *on a social level,*
- *economic level.*

*On an interpersonal level,* the couple, as a prelude and preparation for the next stage of marriage, began with the engagement, acquaintance, understanding and integration through dialogue and the exchange of small affections.

*At the family level,* together with or immediately after economic agreements, a dialogue and understanding began, if families did not know each other, with the aim of creating around the couple, through integration and union of the families concerned, an economic, relational and environmental basis that was as stable and serene as possible.

The civil and religious community also participated and provided for this fundamental and important appointment, each with their own instruments and respective roles. And so if the *religious*

*community*

*The civil community*, for its part, took care to guarantee this new reality all the provisions and services necessary for its well-being. For Prandini: 'What was really important once for the stabilisation of intimacy was, in fact, the relationship with external relations: a strong bond was needed with the closest social circles, for example with extended families, and a common lifestyle'.<sup>68</sup>

In the meeting and then engagement phase, the influence of the two families' parents, relatives and friends in both the choice and the conduct of this phase was the most varied. In extremely coercive situations, the choice of the best fiancé or fiancée was imposed by the two families, as well as the best way to conduct the engagement period and then the marriage. "I have found a wife for you, she is the daughter of the cloth merchant, whom you will marry as soon as you turn eighteen. I know her father and his family well. They have always distinguished themselves by their honesty and industriousness. Everyone speaks well of the young girl, too. Tomorrow, I will ask her father for your hand and we will draw up the prenuptial agreement.

In these cases, which were very common in the past but are also common nowadays in many Oriental countries, not only were the feelings of the two young people disregarded: "I like him", "I don't like him", "He is the man for me", "He is the woman of my life", etc., but also no consideration was given to whether or not the person in question was willing to marry, and when and under what conditions. In these extreme situations, the new bond, and thus also the new family, became a problem between two family networks in which the two young people were only minimally involved, almost always only by formal assent.

In the more widespread and current cases, however, much less coercive customs prevailed, and thus the two young people were wholly or partly involved both in the choice of the person to marry and in the conduct of the premarital relationship. In any case, however, for

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<sup>68</sup> PRANDINI, R., (1998), "La cultura dell'amore giovanile", in *La fami-*

maintained the constant and decisive support of parents and the parental network.

This contribution was enshrined in the very communication which the two families attended or invited relatives and friends to the pre-wedding, wedding and reception services. In short, behind and alongside the young people, their families and the social environment from which they came were always there to support and guide them.

Currently, however, in the Western world, the management of the encounter, most often of the many love encounters, engagement, marriage, as well as the end of one or the other, is totally governed by the two young people. In practice, the direct involvement of families and communities is minimal, if not non-existent, and they prefer to see the choices of young people as individual and private choices.

At present, not only is the person to be met in view of marriage not imposed, nor is it indicated when and whether to marry them, but advice is given, no judgement is given on the validity of this choice or on the quality and, therefore, on the possible outcome, positive or negative, of the relationship to be undertaken.

Even the commitment to help the formation of a new family with the provision of a marriage dowry has fallen into disuse. Being together is often not accompanied by social and moral commitments of any kind. Only bland interpersonal commitments remain, when present. Thus, while the love life of young people is completely detached and free from religion, morality, family and community, it is also isolated from any social control or support.

This solution, which is just as extreme as the extremely coercive one, seems to us to be an answer that produces more problems than it solves because it 'deprives young people of those criteria of choice that they seem to increasingly need'

Whereas before the advent of mobile telephones, sometimes for years, only the ringing of the intercom let parents know that there was a 'he' or 'she' waiting for their son or daughter at the door, nowadays parents realise that someone, often not quite sure, is waiting for them.

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<sup>69</sup> PRANDINI, R., (1998), "La cultura dell'amore giovanile", in *La fami-*

*glia*, 187, January - February, p.15



who she/he is, is waiting for her/his daughter or son somewhere in the city, only by the preparations: she/he takes a shower, puts on a special dress, combs her/his hair more carefully, says a hasty goodbye or leaves the house at a halt.

Even when on certain anniversaries both young people stay at home to have lunch with one of the families of origin, relations are kept as aseptic and formal as possible.

Se da una parte i genitori evitano accuratamente domande che potrebbero essere giudicate inopportune o inquisitorie del tipo: "Cosa fanno tuo padre e tua madre?" "Che progetti hai per il tuo futuro?" "Quali sono le tue intenzioni nei riguardi di mia figlia?" "Quando pensate di sposarvi?", dall'altra il contributo al dialogo da parte del giovane si mantiene su temi altrettanto asettici e formali: "Buon giorno" "Buona sera". "Very good this baked pasta". "Not bad this focaccia, where did you buy it? "Congratulations your home, I see it is well furnished".

In these situations, if a girl brings a young man home, she does not introduce him except by his first name: 'This is Pao- lo'. No one should be interested in who Paul is. No one should care what the relationship is between the girl and this Paul. No one should be interested in, nor should anyone allow themselves to comment on Paul's characteristics: his character, his qualities, let alone his faults. The abstention from comments also concerns the future of the relationship that the two young people intend to establish between them: acquaintance, engagement, special friendship, prelude to cohabitation, lovers' relationship, marriage and so on.

For these reasons, the romantic relationship has taken on a variety and, consequently, a greatly varying quality of conditions. We move from the 'half-situation' in which there are initial approaches, glances, winks and sometimes giving out one's telephone number, to the 'situation' in which one is dating and there is a deeper acquaintance. To the 'togetherness' or 'story' in which the acquaintance becomes more intimate and realistic.

At present, the reasons for the 'situation', 'togetherness' or 'history' (the term 'acquaintance' or 'trust' is hardly used) are not only much more numerous and disparate, but above all, they are unclear to both of them and their families.

One can 'stay together' to feel loved, with the prospect of marriage and thus to prepare to form a family, but one can 'stay together' only to experience the emotions and pleasure of in-namation; to enjoy the pleasures of free sex; to have someone to talk to; to spend a few hours at the disco at weekends. One can 'get together' to not go on holiday alone or with girlfriends. One can 'stay together' in order to have, when going to a pizzeria, a person of the opposite sex beside one and not make a bad impression.

Even between the two parties involved, as in a game of hide-and-seek, the motives are not only not made explicit but, with a thousand stratagems, are carefully concealed or postponed, to prevent the other party, upon discovering them, from walking away, running away or breaking off the relationship.

If any of the family members dares to ask about the intentions of the two young men, they are silenced with a sentence such as: 'When we have graduated, when we have both found a job, when we have a house, when we can support a family, we will discuss it, now it is too early.'

This saying and not saying, this not discovering one's own desires and expectations, as well as one's own motivations for 'being together', can last for many years. On the part of the two young people, it is like agreeing to both get on a ship and live for months and years on a voyage, having planned no destination or worse, each having planned a different destination from the other.

On the side of the two families, the situation is neither clearer nor more straightforward. For the parents and relatives, it is like seeing their daughter or son or grandson boarding a ship together with a stranger, without knowing in which port the ship will arrive and where each of them wishes to go. What remains, however, is the secret hope that that ship, by some providential event, will take the right course as intended by each of the two families.

But it is by no means certain that both families want the same thing!

We found ourselves, in our professional work faced with parents of young people who had been 'together' for several years, who wanted and were working towards exactly the opposite goals.

*In one such case, Laura's family would have liked the two young people, after eight years of an ill-defined emotional bond, to marry. While the other family, Francesco's, wished and hoped that the marriage would never happen and therefore worked every day to achieve this goal. Both families then pretended not to know each other, and even when they met by chance, they never exchanged their respective wishes or expectations. This, like so many similar love stories, ended in nothingness, or rather ended in pain and sadness for Laura and her family, while his parents gloated that they had achieved what they wanted with the break-up of the relationship!*

The reasons why this type of leadership, or rather non-leadership, prevails more and more in Western societies are several:

*1. The first reason concerns the concept of freedom.*

This type of choice confirms and exalts to its extreme consequences the concept of freedom and individualism: 'Everyone must be free to do what they like, especially in situations of the heart. It is only the two young people who must love and choose each other. What is the point of interfering in their feelings and decisions?

As a result of this way of thinking, it is left to the two young people to make a choice, the purpose or purposes of the meeting, the person or persons with whom to embark on a couple's journey or, more simply, a trivial sentimental or sexual relationship, the conduct of the various relationships and their eventual end. Subsequently, it is always left to the young people to decide whether or not to resume broken relationships, whether or not to form a family, whether or not to live together, and so on.

The watchword is: maximum freedom, no interference. One must let everyone listen and follow their own heart, their own will or simply their own instinct.

*2. The second ground concerns liability.*

"Why do we as parents have to be the ones to take some or many responsibilities that may be held against us later? "You didn't let me marry the girl I loved. "You advised me to stay with a girl who is not a good girl at all. She is incapable, unfaithful, can't cook, etc.". These are just some of the

of the many accusations that could be levelled at parents, relatives or friends who have advised or advised against an amorous relationship; it is therefore better for young people to make their own choices, taking upon themselves and only them all the burdens.

3. *The third reason concerns possible conditioning.*

In order not to influence the young people positively or negatively in their choices, it is considered more appropriate for parents, relatives and friends to refrain from judgments, advice and suggestions, since any kind of relationship that may arise from this meeting concerns the two young people and only them. Therefore, it is the two young people who must freely make their own choices. Relatives and friends only have to accept and experience them without making any comments or criticism.

In this field too, as in so many other educational and training tasks, people prefer to do nothing in order to avoid the fatigue, the effort, the difficulty and the responsibility of intervening with the risk of making some errors of assessment.

4. *The fourth reason concerns the difficulty in reconciling school commitments, work and romantic ties.*

There is an awareness that it is difficult to manage school commitments, preparation for a future profession, possible work and romantic ties at the same time.

This is due to the fact that biological and social reality at present diverge strikingly. Biological reality would like to experience in rapid succession after the age of eighteen to twenty the stages of falling in love, love, marriage and then procreation. The social reality of the Western world works and strives to prevent this, as all these events are deemed premature.

It is premature to get married or only think about marriage if both have not completed their studies.

It is premature to start a family if both have not found a job, preferably a stable one with sufficient income to live at least as the two lived with their parents, if not better.

It is not possible to think of a marriage without having a house, without having a stable place of work for both, and without having the furniture to furnish this house. Parents, friends, relatives, teachers, the media, like churchmen do

bearers and interpreters of this social reality, and since it is difficult to guide and limit the amorous outpourings of the two young sweethearts for many years, they prefer to close both their eyes and wash their hands of it, leaving all responsibility to them, protecting themselves with the omnipresence of individual and personal freedom and responsibility.

5. *The fear of hurting.*

Other times it is the fear of antagonizing the son or future daughter-in-law. If I intervene, I might say or do something that might touch the sensitivities of the two young people, who might look at me unfavourably for many years to come, so it is better to refrain.

6. *The fear going against the tide.*

In many cases it is the fear of going against the tide. If everyone is doing that today, even if I don't agree, I can't behave differently.

After decades in which love, dreams, and the pink clouds of sentiment have been lavished in poems, novels, films, photostories and soap operas, of the two extremes we have described, almost everyone today agrees in condemning without appeal an engagement, and then a marriage, totally managed by the family, as lacking those elements of affection and choice that are indispensable in a life project in which the two young people are the leading actors. Few, however, see, but above all face with courage and determination, the problems that may arise, and in fact do arise, in the other condition: the extremely liberal one.

What does this refraining from judgement, guidance, direction entail? What does it entail not giving young people norms and rules of behaviour in this very delicate phase of their lives?

***What problems can arise?***

The problems that arise or may arise are numerous.

The experience of these decades, of full and complete freedom in sentimental and sexual relationships, has taught us that a love affair, left in complete freedom in the hands of the two young people, does not always, indeed rarely, go in the right direction. And even if this happens, just as easily as a union is established, in the same way, easily, the same union breaks down.

One of the reasons for this is the different way in which the two sexes experience marriage. If for women the goal of motherhood and marriage, even if it is concealed or denied, always remains in their hearts and desires, for men the marriage project and the desire for fatherhood only arise if there is a specific request and if, at the same time, they are directly involved. In simple terms, for the male, the decision to marry also stems from the fulfilment of the commitment made to someone who represents authority him: the girl's father, for example, or even better, his family represented by the father. If the commitment is only to the girl's mother, or even worse, if there is only a bland promise to the girl, this bond will be broken.

considered much less pressing and empowering.

If, as is often the case, no specific commitment is asked for, it is a grave mistake to think that this promise is implied in the soul. It is far more likely that the commitment is not there at all and, on the contrary, the girl, the family and the father, who did not have the strength, courage and ability to demand it, will be judged negatively.

On the part of the young male, there is therefore the risk that the enjoyable game, experienced through the fire of falling in love, will remain merely a game that will never turn into a bond with the girl, her family and society. There is a risk that falling in love will fade away like mist in the first rays of the morning sun, without having turned into solid and lasting love. Love made not only of pleasure and fun, but also of sacrifice and duty, both of which are necessary to grow and mature as men and women and no longer as immature adolescents. But also for the woman, being involved from an early age in the prospect of only school and then work obligations, while on the one hand this has diminished the pleasure and joy of a future marriage and future commitments to the family and thus to the world of affection, on the other hand it has accentuated an ambivalent state of mind in which desire is combined with fear and perplexity, hope is crushed by pessimism, the fire of enthusiasm is extinguished in the water of reason.

This evading or downplaying of responsibility is not only not courageous, it is also not wise, because, like it or not, the two families will inevitably be affected, for better or worse, by the problems of cop-

family members not on one but on a thousand occasions. Family members will not be able to escape involvement, whether in the acquaintance phase, during engagement, marriage, cohabitation, partnership crisis(es), separation(s), divorce(s), etc. The influence of families is therefore inevitable. The influence of families is, therefore, inevitable. We might as well make this clear in a calm and cohesive manner.

When the families concerned engage in pilatesque behaviour, a wrong and deleterious message is given to young people: 'everything concerning love, sentimental, sexual problems concerns the couple and not the families of origin and society'.

We have said that this is a wrong message because it is not so, never has been so, never can, not even theoretically, be so. Unless the amorous encounter takes place on a desert island, love, passion, falling in love, sexuality, marriage and marriage, involve duties, tasks and commitments that are not only the responsibility of the two young people, but which, like it or not, deeply and heavily involve people and social contexts that are much broader and more numerous than one can imagine.

If the choice is marriage, the spouses, whether they want it or not, will have to submit to a whole series of laws, decrees and civil and religious norms that affect the spouses and the family.

If one chooses not to marry but to bring a child into the world, one has not only changed one's own life (obligation to maintain, educate and care for the child for decades), but one has also profoundly changed the life of the respective family members who, sooner or later, will be involved in care, assistance and often also maintenance.

A child that is born changes society to a small or large extent. This new human being coming into life may be a saint and a benefactor or an evil murderer. He may be a bringer of peace and prosperity or he may be an architect of destruction and death for mankind. He may solve the problem of world hunger or he may force entire populations to starve.

Moreover, at the moment when this child is forming in the womb, society with all its social and welfare services is also inevitably involved. Who will have to pay for the visits, examinations and care of this mother and her child before and after

birth if not civil society? Who should provide for its education, health care, if not the community?

The whole of society may find itself in even more impec- tive situations. If this union through marriage, cohabitation or pre-marital relations leads to the birth of a child with psychological or organic problems, due to hereditary defects or an insufficient capacity for care and attention, who, apart from the parents and relatives, should bear the burden of this handicap?

What we have outlined is not a theoretical hypothesis but what is happening every day before our eyes. More and more children are born to parents with more or less serious problems.

vi. These psychological problems, under the influence of passion or falling in love, are not always taken into account, so that young people in love are carried along by events rather than managing them. One meets a girl, invites her out, proposes sexual relations; she accepts, gets pregnant, one feels obliged to marry her. But after marriage, couple problems and educational and care problems arise.

One realises too late, for instance, that the girl is psychologically unable to educate, bring up and care for a small child. Just as one may realise too late that the young man is not fit to fulfil his normal duties and needs towards his wife and new family, because he is not able to have a serene, balanced, stable and rich affectionate relationship.

The disappearance of prenuptial agreements, in which both parents of the future spouses undertook to give a dowry to their children, also has considerable consequences. "Why do I have to work and save all my life to give my children a dowry that will enable them to have an economic basis on which to build a family, when the other party has seen fit to squander all their earnings having fun? "And why do so, especially when I am the father of a son, with the risk that the house or furniture I will give him as a dowry, the fruit of hard-earned savings, will be enjoyed, in the event of separation, by his wife?"

There is then a real risk of harmful consequences on the very way marriage is viewed. This will no longer be expected as a condition that can improve the reality of one's children, but will be feared as the cause of their psychological and financial ruin.



On the other hand, if the families of origin do not provide at least part of the future generations with financial support, there is a risk that the young people will not even have the chance to start building that new cell of society, that indispensable building block for the future of mankind, which is a new family.

If, on the other hand, families get involved and commit themselves together with the young people in this pre-marital and then marriage and family journey, these young people will continue to have guides who, due to their age and experience, could and should be bearers maturity and wisdom. Otherwise, the young people will be alone, at the mercy of events; alone in facing the storms of life; alone in resolving daily adversities.

The experience of recent years has therefore taught us that the joint commitment of families, so that young people first enter and then remain on a path of seriousness, responsibility and duty, is necessary, indeed indispensable. The formation of a new, basic cell of society cannot be entrusted to a game, albeit a pleasant but futile and fleeting one, but to a serious, attentive and scrupulous confrontation and relationship.

A wise conduct of love relationships should, therefore, include a clear communication by the young people both within the couple and towards their families, friends and society in general: "The two of us, Chiara and I, are not friends, we are not acquaintances, we are not lovers; our relationship is something more and different; we have important and solid projects in common. We want to share everything: our lives, our aspirations, our affections as well as our bodies. We want to live together in the same house. We want to have children of our own to bring up to maturity and responsibility. We want, therefore, to build a healthy, stable, reliable family together, one that is determined to achieve its goals. In order to achieve these goals, we need to walk, with your help and support, hand in hand, on a path of education and mutual acquaintance that will lead us, barring unforeseen obstacles, to marriage as soon as possible.

The people closest to the couple should contribute to this premarital pact with their suggestions and advice. Each of these people, as soon as they become aware of it,

not only has the right but also the duty to give young people those signals of acceptance and acceptance or, on the contrary, of disapproval and criticism, which it considers in conscience useful for the good of the individual, the couple and the future family.

Therefore it is right, as well as proper, that parents, relatives and close friends can say: 'I congratulate you, I am happy that you have embarked on this path', 'I like this boy/girl, I see in him/her a serious, serene, committed, beautiful, intelligent, responsible, caring person. It is evident the love he/she has for you. It is undeniable that you are good together. I think you will be able to be a good wife and mother, or, I think you will be able to be a very good husband and father. But it is also right and proper for these same people to make clear, albeit with the necessary delicacy, prudence and caution, their disapproval or negative judgments: 'I don't think she is the right person for you; I sense that she is emotionally immature; I have the impression that she has neurotic problems that could adversely affect your couple and family life; she is too different from you, I don't see you well together'.

### **5.3 THE WEDDING**

The fundamental goal and project love and relationship between a mature man and a mature woman should be marriage and family.

For ethologists, the origin of marriage lies in the need to extend the mother-child relationship to the sexual partner, to ensure the mother's parental care and the father's sustenance for the offspring. For Buss, 'marriage is a means to oblige the couple to an exclusive relationship (including fidelity), to ensure the pooling of resources, and to create the proper context for bringing children into the world and rearing them. It constitutes an official commitment...' <sup>70</sup>

Inherent in marriage is the concept of *union*: *union of* a man with a woman; *union of* a family with another family; *union an* affective and friendship network with another affective and

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<sup>70</sup> BUSS, D. M., (2002), "The Acts Love", in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M., ed., *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.126

amicable; union of an economic patrimony, whether small or large, with another patrimony.

Along with the concept of union, the concept of the *formation of a new and original family reality* is inherent in marriage: "the two shall leave father and mother..."

Society, through laws and through religion, confers authority and stability in *legal terms* on this union. Marriage is, however, *not a formal but a substantial contract*, in that it is made up of rights and duties of an emotional nature, but also an economic nature, of mutual aid and support, which are made explicit and assumed.

This institute is also a *project*, full of generosity, for the benefit of life and society. Through this project, a man and a woman intend to embark together on an intimate, involved, profound and important journey, in order to build and enrich the network of the human family with a new node.

For Christians, marriage is a *sacrament*. "In human love, through the sacrament, God makes himself present, sanctifies the couple who are transformed into an epiphany of God."<sup>71</sup>

Marriage, therefore, is the most suitable instrument for bringing two people closer together, making their love stable and lasting, and channelling and committing acts of love to a reproductive function. A function that we know is essential for the continuity of the species. Since new human beings must be nurtured, protected, taught, loved, educated and guided for a very long time, mankind has found no better system for realising and implementing these goals than the marriage institution, in which personal, couple, family, social and religious elements are combined.

If, from a developmental point of view, the children born of the couple are not able to mature sufficiently to be able, in turn, to manage a healthy, lasting and stable relationship, so as to be able to bring up and educate future offspring well, the purpose of the acts of love would be null and void or in any case incomplete.

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<sup>71</sup> RAVASI G., (1989), *La vite e l'olivo*, Edizioni Piemme, Casale Monferato, p. 7.

### 5.3.1 The purposes of marriage

We can then distinguish the purposes of marriage into:

1. *personal and couple purposes;*
2. *family purposes;*
3. *social purposes.*

#### 1. *Personal and couple goals.*

Just as the farmer who has discovered a source of fresh, pure water, indispensable for his family and his fields, endeavours by all means to acquire this precious spring and the land where it gushes forth, and endeavours to care for and protect this spring so that it does not dry up or become contaminated, so too does every psychologically balanced person wish and endeavour to ensure that the loved one, who is also the primary source of love, pleasure, joy, support, comfort and dialogue, remains close to him or her forever.

The loved one is also instrumental in making many important projects possible and feasible.

- Project such as the construction of a new, different and original family reality that makes possible the reproduction, education and maturation of new human beings.
- Project such as that of acquiring a different and desired role: first as a mother or father and then as a non-no and grandmother.
- Project as being the primary educator of other human beings who, carrying the same genetic heritage, will be able to prolong and project their own offspring into the future.
- Project such as living the feeling of love more fully, richly and completely.
- Project such as caring for one's partner. In caring, there is an active and concrete desire to help the other person improve his or her personal life on a bodily, social, cultural and spiritual level,<sup>72</sup> by placing the emphasis on the need to help the other person to improve his or her personal life.

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<sup>72</sup>FRIZZARIN, P., "*Uno più uno= tre, ovvero tu plus io uguale noi*".  
Archdiocese of Rossano Cariati; Rossano 2001, p.129.

attention to his or her psycho-physical well-being, safety and growth as a person.

Only marriage can make all these projects possible, which also have a high degree of gratification. It is gratifying, as a father or mother, to give birth to and then nurture, care for, educate and train new human beings who, capable and mature, will in turn be able to make a great contribution to society. It is gratifying, as husband or wife, to be important to another person, can find in us, more than in any other human being, help and support, joy and pleasure, consolation and warmth, tenderness and listening, solidarity and care.

## ***2. Family purposes.***

The aims of the relatives of the two young men are quite different:

- In the meantime, they take care that, next to their children, when, because of their age or their passing away, they will no longer be able to look after them, there will be someone, a loved one who loves them, willing to assist and help them in the adversities and difficulties of life. In Sicily, the term 'settling a son or daughter' is used to indicate that this fundamental parental task is also fulfilled by marriage;
- They then wish for their children to have the joy and exciting experience of completing their life cycle with the reproduction, care and education of new human beings;
- They hope that their children will find in love lived together with another person, that fullness and autonomy that they cherish;
- family members also seek, with the marriage of their children, to have the joy of relating in the role of grandparents. Such a different but important and enriching role in the autumn of life;
- Finally, they aspire to pass on to their children and grandchildren those material goods and spiritual and moral experiences and values that have enriched their existence and that of their ancestors.

### 3. *Social aims.*

Equally important, but once again different, are the social aims.

Society, like a large living organism, has every interest in replacing ageing and fading family cells with new, vital and prosperous realities that will contribute work, exchange, enterprise, invention and strength to the environmental and social fabric.

When one family grows old or dies and is not replaced by another that has at least the same or similar qualitative characteristics as the first, the entire social organism grows old and deteriorates. When, on the other hand, the new generations are just as good and capable of positive developments, the whole social organism benefits and is enriched.

#### 5.3.1 MARRIAGE PACTS

#### 5.3.3 THE PURPOSES OF MARRIAGE PACTS

The covenants, rules and commitments that form the basis of marriage must, in some , try to reconcile different and often conflicting realities and needs.

- *The instinctive desire for dominance of one sex over the other.*
- *The instinctive desire and need for amalgamation of one sex over the other.*
- *Personal desires and needs.*
- *The desires and needs of the community.*
- *The desires and needs of the family.*
- *The desires and needs of the welfare state.*
- *The desires and needs of the business and service world.*
- *The desires and needs of the affective-relational world*

The cause of the incessant changes and the different ways of experiencing sexuality, roles, the family, the relationship with children, lies precisely in the multiplicity of stakeholders and the diversity and multiplicity of their needs and requirements.

It is well known that the need of the individual does not always match that of the couple. The needs of the couple do not always coincide with those of the family. The needs of families do not always match the needs of business and services.

Just as it has never been easy to reconcile the demands of the freedom of individuals and couples with the demands of responsibility, it has been just as difficult to reconcile sentimental and love needs with educational and care needs; economic needs with affective needs, and the latter with religious and ethical needs.

By the various peoples, civilisations and nations, in an effort to balance these various needs, marriage pacts and commitments have been structured, adapted, invented and, at times, re-invented, using experiences and traditions not only of their own culture, but also of other peoples and races with which each population came into contact.

For example, as far as relations between the sexes are concerned, we have never had uniform modes of relations throughout the earth. We can then safely say that the diversity and variety of these relationships are not the exception but the rule.

The women and men of ancient Greece did not have the same rights and duties as Roman men and women. In turn, Roman men and women did not have the same rights and duties as the men and women of the peoples surrounding the empire or whom the Roman world subjugated.

Even today, relations between the two sexes are considerably different from those that existed even only fifty years ago, but they are also considerably different in different parts of the globe.

Nor can it be said, as is often erroneously asserted, that there is an archaic way of understanding these ties and a modern way. It would be strange to understand as archaic what takes place in the non-western world or took place only fifty years ago in our society, and to define as modern only what has taken place in the last fifty years in Europe or North America, while denying that there are many peoples with customs that are opposite to ours, and they are the clear majority.

These covenants and the rules concerning relations between the sexes in premarital and married life are affected by, other things, economic and environmental situations, but they also intervene

also the influences of emerging needs from individuals and communities.

Just think of the different environmental conditions in which the bushmen of Africa found themselves compared to the Eskimos of the North Pole. Just think of the peasant civilisations of a few centuries ago compared to the industrial civilisations of the early 19th century and the post-industrial civilisations of today.

Variety is present:

- *in the rules given to engaged couples,*
- *in the choice of spouse(s),*
- *in the number of spouses,*
- *authority within the family,*
- *in the stability and strength of the marriage bond,*
- *in the choice of family residence,*
- *in the relationship between the couple and the families of origin.*

### **5.3.3.1 TYPES OF BONDS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN**

On the best way to regulate the relationship between a man and a woman, between a man and a woman and their family, friends and social environment, lay people and priests, great saints and great sins, have written and argued. Since understanding, dialogue and harmony are the basis of the family, and since the family is essential to society, the harmony of this relationship cannot be neglected, it cannot be left to improvisation.

Prominent physicians, psychologists, educationalists, philosophers, poets, writers and artists have tirelessly endeavoured to describe the joys and sorrows of love and the relationship between sexes. Many of them also tried to offer the advice they considered most appropriate to make this relationship rich, full and satisfying.

The art of teasing and arousing interest in the opposite sex, of seducing and bewitching, the art of convincing and persuading, of loving and falling in love, the art of giving and receiving pleasure, of getting married and conducting a peaceful if not happy marriage, or simply the art of living peacefully in the same house with a man or a woman, has always been the most topical, debated and controversial subject.



Being an elusive subject, humanity has not been able to give it a configuration, not to say definitive in time, but not even simply stable.

Although the nuclear family is a universal social phenomenon, whereby in every situation the husband, wife and non-adult children form a unit separate from the rest of the community, a considerable number of possible forms of relationship have been tried out and used over the centuries and in different peoples: man-woman; couple-family; couple-civil society.

For instance, conjugal ties may be between a man and a woman (*monogamy*). The presence of couples buried in the same grave in ancient cemeteries seems to attest to the fact that monogamy was generally practised as early as the Palaeolithic era. "Between one man and several women (*polygyny*). Between one woman and several men (*polyandry*). Between two women or between two men (*homosexual marriage*). Or between several men and several women (*love within a commune; free love*).

As far as the responsibility for running the family is concerned, this relationship can be envisaged: as equals; female-dominated; male-dominated; with different but complementary roles; with similar roles. Therefore, responsibility within the family can be entrusted to the woman (*matriarchy*), to the man (*patriarchy*), to both (*shared responsibility*), or the ultimate responsibility can be delegated to state judges, as is the case in Italy today.

Links and relationships with families of origin may be very close and numerous or very limited and scarce.

All possible interventions of the state on the family have also been tested: no interference, little interference or, as in our current society, massive interference.

Even the relationship between the sexes before marriage was and is handled in various ways by both the families concerned and the community. If in some periods or in some peoples, no sexual freedom is provided for before marriage, in other peoples and at other times, modest communication within the couple was accepted in order to get to know each other well, and thus partial and limited intimacy was accepted, right up to our own historical period in the Western world, where complete sexual communion and freedom is often permitted, with all the rights of married people but no obligations.

Covenants may only involve the individual members of the new family, the two family groups, the social environment of origin, the city or state where the individual families live.

Agreements can thus be at an extremely simple level: Mary marries John and goes to live in the house her mother left her. Or they can involve nations and economic potentials, such as pacts between rulers that could even be the harbinger of a lasting peace or of long and bloody wars, or such as pacts between tycoons of industry.

Marriage contracts may contain only secular elements, as in Muslim populations and civil marriages, or they may involve religion to the extent that marriage is considered a sacrament, as in the Christian religion.

It is from these covenants that the duties of one fiancé vis-à-vis the other, of one spouse vis-à-vis the other, derive. Duties on the part of parents towards children and vice versa. The duties of the family towards the state and vice versa. The duties of the parents of origin towards the spouses and the duties of the State towards the family.

### **5.3.3.2 EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT COVENANTS**

Covenants may be *explicit or implicit*. *Explicit* covenants are those set out in laws, marriage contracts or prenuptial agreements. *Implicit covenants* are those that are not directly expressed during the marriage ceremony, nor are they found in the laws of the State or in public or private writings. These covenants are, however, to be found in local customs and in the social environment, which often require them, demand them and enforce them, perhaps with more commitment and consistency than state officials. For both explicit and implicit covenants, there can be sanctions for those who do not comply.

Covenants may concern the period of acquaintance of the children, the pre-marital phase and the matrimonial phase. Some of these covenants may cover, in the event of divorce or annulment, the period after the dissolution of the marriage bond.

In general, alongside covenants that tend to establish duties and obligations of an affective-relational nature (*affective-relational covenants*), there are others that seek to make the economic conditions of the marriage clear and well-defined (*economic*

*covenants).*

*Affective-relational pacts* concern feelings, emotions and roles.

On the other hand, *economic covenants* include dowry assets, the conditions for their use, the outcome of these assets at the time of dissolution or annulment of the marriage or the removal of the spouse, and so on. In various societies, certain aspects prevail over others, and therefore, economic covenants sometimes prevail over emotional-relational ones, and vice versa.

### **5.3.3.3 COVENANTS IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE**

Covenants related to the world of economics and politics may contain many elements concerning the individual elements of the couple, man and woman, but also the commitments of the respective families or, in noble-type contracts, even the commitments between two large communities or between two states.

If we consider the marriage contract alone, we immediately realise that it has undergone considerable changes in the various historical epochs, nor has it ever been the same among all peoples of the earth, even considering the same historical period.

Until the standardisation of customs and traditions, marriage contracts differed even between towns and villages very close to each other. While in some countries, the tradition was that the woman brought the house and the man the furniture, in others, the woman brought the jewellery and the groom the house. In still others, the woman brought nothing at all and everything had to be provided by the groom or his family.

Nor can it be said that there has been an evolution, if by evolution we mean a better way of defining these relations, since there have often been returns to the past and the introduction of customs considered outdated in the same peoples. We need only think of divorce, already present in biblical times and then abandoned for centuries by some peoples because it was considered detrimental to marriage and the family, only to be reintroduced in many countries.

In wealthy families, contracts could be like this: 'My son will bring a house and an estate to his wedding celebration, the bride will bring a castle and her servants as dowry'. Or, more simply, in poorer families: 'The woman

will bring as dowry two pairs of hand-embroidered sheets; the young man, his work a farm labourer and his small farm left by his father'. These contracts in many societies are drawn up before a notary by the parents of the bride and groom of the families concerned. Many pre-nuptial contracts indicate the gifts or dowry that the groom's daughter agrees to give or vice versa.

These contracts have been studied in the sociological field to try to understand their meanings.

The economic meanings are quite clear:

- is offered to newlyweds the possibility of starting their union with a more or less solid economic basis, depending on the possibilities of their families;
- These covenants also serve as an incentive to increase, through work and good financial management, the family's wealth;
- serve to protect both spouses in the event dissolution of the marriage.

The use of gifts, offered by relatives and friends, also has an important significance. When friends and relatives provide the bride and groom with money, objects, household appliances or, in some places, even their time and work to build the matrimonial home, it is as if the community close to the bride and groom want to recognise the new family reality and participate in its construction with their own small or important gifts.

In the Western world, economic contracts or pacts, like so many others, had been gradually and for a short period cancelled as exchange and affectionate contribution between people was put in the foreground rather than vile money or riches. Despite this, after a few decades in which only sentimental aspects were considered important, this type of pact also came back into the limelight, especially in America and England, in the form of pre-nuptial contracts that stipulate, with the typical fastidiousness of high-profile lawyers, what one must give to the other in the event of betrayal, estrangement, separation, divorce, violence, alcoholism, etc.

This 'putting one's hands forward' is not, as is often the case in our Italy pervaded more by sentimental dreams than by the realities of life, vulgar way of dealing with love relationships, but a response

to

to a requirement linked to the nature of the marriage contract, which, precisely because it is a contract, is experienced much better, with less bitterness and, above all, with fewer criminal consequences, the clearer and more defined the clauses governing it are.

It is much better to know in advance what awaits us in various eventualities, rather than to live with the nightmare of haphazard decisions of lawyers, judges and courts that can say everything and the opposite of everything, doing substantial injustice to one party or the other, just because the hotshot lawyer of one of the two has managed to find a more effective codicil in the judge's soul than the opposing lawyer.

#### **5.33.4 AFFECTIVE-RELATIONAL PACTS**

With regard to this type of pacts, some arise from sexual gender needs as a man or woman; others refer to one's role as husband and wife or as father and mother; still others refer to relationships with one's family of origin or friendship network.

##### ***Communion.***

Fundamental to the marital pact is mutual communion, which also implies mutual cooperation, sharing, physical, moral, legal and social union.

If one gets married, one loses a part of oneself and one's personal freedom. "I commit myself to be for you a companion/companion in life".

Being a companion implies closeness and physical and emotional intimacy. Being a companion implies reciprocity of help, defence, support and collaboration. Consequential to this covenant is cohabitation in the same house. This coexistence has almost always been considered an indispensable element of the conjugal pact, since it is not possible to assist, educate, help, support, and welcome the other person or the children if they do not live under the same roof, share the same room and, if possible, the same bed. When spouses do not complement and support each other, tensions in the family environment, role conflicts and the break-up of the family into different entities are inevitable.



### ***Autonomy.***

Spousal union does not imply the fusion of the two persons, which is not only impossible, but also not convenient, since a certain personal autonomy always remains. Besides, communion and autonomy are the right and wrong sides of the same coin. There is no true autonomy without communion. On the other hand, if communion is distorted, autonomy is also disturbed.

The success of many marriages lies in achieving the right balance between communion and autonomy. If the other feels rejected, abandoned, neglected, when the partner tries to be alone in his own space, individual discomfort and clashes within the couple become frequent. This feeling of being rejected or abandoned may be caused by a lack of capacity for personal autonomy, excessive expectations, a distorted view of communion within the couple, or fear of betrayal <sup>73</sup>.

On the other hand, excessive autonomy renders many marital pacts fragile, aleatory and insubstantial and often puts the marriage itself in crisis.

### ***Loving and loving.***

"I commit myself to work and seek your good. Physical and material good, moral, psychological and spiritual good". Affective fulfilment and the exchangeable gift of love make it possible to overcome and overcome loneliness, sadness and the difficulties of life. Inherent in loving and loving the other is a commitment to mutual care and assistance, but also trusting and esteeming the other.

### ***Honouring the other.***

"I recognise that you are the most important person in my life, the other part of me, and therefore it is my duty to respect, honour and praise you, always considering you a special person". When the marriage is successful, the spouses, by supporting each other, enhance the trust and effectiveness with which each can fulfil his or her role.

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<sup>73</sup> ALBISETTI, V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Milano, p.79.

### ***The creation a new family.***

"I commit myself to forming, together with you, a new and different reality from the family origin. This commitment entails an economic and management detachment, but also a partial emotional and affective detachment from the previous situation. "We will no longer be children bound to our parents by a considerable bond of emotional dependence, but we will have to behave as parents, each with specific responsibilities towards the other spouse and children.

The creation of a new unit has the value of giving one's life a decisive turning point fraught with changes: more responsibility, more independence from the family of origin, more commitment, more sacrifice, more dedication to the other spouse, to the children and to both family networks. This shift ultimately indicates the passage from those who ask to those who give, from those who demand and seek to those who offer.

### ***Procreation.***

Linked to the concept of the new family is the covenant to give birth to new human beings. Hence the covenant to fruitfulness. "We want our love to be realised in readiness and openness to new human lives".

### ***The education of offspring.***

Next to and consequential to the procreative pact is the educational commitment. "Together we shall strive for the newborn to develop all human potential: language, intelligence, will, spirituality, sociality, culture, feelings and emotions. Together we will strive for our children to be healthy, strong, serene, courageous, capable of autonomy and autonomous decisions. Together we will ensure that the newborns are rich in human and spiritual values.

### ***Stability.***

When one affirms that one is willing to love and honour the other for one's whole life, one establishes a covenant of stability which, among other things, is indispensable for peaceful coexistence. "How can I commit my heart, my labours, my possessions if the other can leave me if and when he wants to?"

### ***The exchange of physical and sexual pleasure.***

The exchange of physical and sexual pleasure is also part of the marriage covenants, so one should not underestimate it under the pretext that each person must be free to make or not to make love. Even if individual freedom is not to be coerced, there remains a clear commitment: to give and receive pleasure from the other spouse, including sexual pleasure.

### ***Loyalty and exclusivity.***

Cementing these covenants are promises of fidelity and exclusivity. Both of these promises are indispensable for the stability of the couple and therefore important for the project to be realised. Fidelity and exclusivity of the relationship are elements that give the guarantee of affective continuity: 'I will be loved, or rather I will be loved, not only today but also in the future, or at least, the other will seek and strive to do so'. This continuity of love will inevitably be reflected as affective continuity also on the offspring and thus there will be a guarantee that the offspring will also enjoy this benefit.

On the other hand, daily commitment also needs fidelity. Work, sacrifice, fight, for whom? For what? "I will strive, I will sacrifice, I will commit myself if this bond between us stable and not betrayed, if the children that will be born are our children and not those of an occasional lover". "I will leave my future goods to someone who is related to me by blood and not to the child of another. Many couples fall into crisis and break up precisely because of sentimental and sexual infidelity.

Commitment to sentimental and sexual fidelity between spouses, but also between fiancés and cohabitantes, is one of the pillars of a relationship for two when it is rich, stable, deep and lasting.

It is difficult to imagine a relationship with these characteristics without fidelity. Proof of this is that for many centuries and in almost all civilisations, betrayal was and is severely punished, even with the death of the adulterous woman and man.

The reasons for such severity are to be found in the value placed in almost all eras and peoples on the family, which is considered the basis and fundamental pillar of human society. And since betrayal is a behaviour that has numerous detrimental

consequences for the family and society, as well as for the individual spouses, it is understandable that it is not only the family that is betrayed, but also the family itself.

well the great concern but also the considerable seriousness and seriousness with which this issue was and is being addressed.

As far as the couple is concerned, one can be as open, modern or insensitive and indifferent as one likes, but it is instinctively and vitally difficult to accept that the beloved person has a sentimental and/or sexual bond with someone else. Even in relationships that are not as deep and intensely involving as friendship ties might be, emotional continuity is important; if, instead of friendship, a very intense, intimate and involving emotional tie such as that of love is undertaken, fidelity becomes essential.

### **The reasons for loyalty and exclusivity**

*The reasons require fidelity and exclusivity are biological and psychological.*

*Biological reasons.*

- If your loved one has other partners, he or she is more likely to contract one of the many sexually transmitted diseases with which he or she can infect his or her spouse, but also their children.
- If the other is a woman, it is easy for her to be pregnant with a child who does not carry the same genetic heritage and so the man, who is not the biological father, will foolishly, unwillingly and unknowingly raise and know that he is the lover's child.
- If the other is a man, there is a risk that he will tie himself to a woman or women who could be the bearers of his offspring, but there is also the risk that he will not tie himself to any woman because, satisfied with having given vent to his sexual instincts, he will not need to channel his commitment and energy into a demanding project such as marriage or marriage. This entails considerable risks for the care, growth and upbringing of the human offspring, who need a permanently united parental couple for their healthy development.
- The last biological element concerns the risk of sexual promiscuity. If man is free to fertilise

many women, there is a high risk that two half-siblings with a similar genetic make-up will meet and bond in a loving and sexual relationship, a consequent increase in genetically transmissible diseases.

*Psychological reasons.*

- From a psychological point of view, it is the stable and perennial affective bonds that give greater security and continuity in the relationship, but also comfort and emotional serenity. Just as the child needs stable affective bonds, the adult also works, is active and is fully open to relationships if the affective bond does not have fragile and fickle characteristics.
- The willingness and openness to plan a future life as a couple will be more concrete, just as the daily commitment to the rebirth of a tired love will have more vigour and concreteness, the more strong and stable bonds are built and maintained.
- Work, too, has more meaning, just as sacrifice and commitment have more purpose, if during one's life or at the end of it, the fruit of our activity goes to who have been close to us and with whom we have been deeply and continuously connected.
- Adultery also simultaneously undermines trust in others and trust in ourselves. Meanwhile, one is afraid of not knowing the other. After the infidelity, one sees the partner as different from what one had always thought of him or her, and this new perspective leaves not only an unpleasant feeling of bitterness in the mouth, but also much loneliness and uncertainty about one's own future. How can we accept acceptance, and how can we trust one who has produced love and commitment? Distrust can spread and involve many other people. How to trust women or men if as soon as you turn your back they are ready to betray you? How to trust other human beings if your word is wasted paper? Adultery, when it is discovered, also undermines one's positive self-image, as there is always the fear of having deserved the

betrayal by a spouse. Extra-marital relationships create, therefore, upset, anxiety, stress and guilt and, because they feed illusions, distance one from reality.

- Without fidelity there is no marriage, but neither is there an exclusive covenant of love. Unfaithfulness is always a failing of the WE. It is always a failing in the intimacy and fusion of the couple, in the hope of 'love forever'.
- The breaking of the emotional pact, like all pact breaks, leads to particularly intense, violent and long-lasting aggressive reactions, which almost always trigger a series of very negativistic emotional counter-reactions, which are difficult to control, made up of hostility, rejection and disesteem towards the person who betrayed.
- In some cases, the betrayed takes revenge by betraying in turn, thus triggering a perverse circuit of accusations and reprisals that leave on the battlefield, the stormy results of the destruction of dreams, hopes and processes.
- The violent reactivity that erupts when adultery is discovered makes the domestic environment saturated with tension. This tension can provoke numerous serious psychological problems in both the persons concerned and their children. The latter are at risk of suffering psychological traumas, which manifest themselves in a series of more or less serious symptoms such as: anxious somatisations, socialisation disorders, restlessness, poor ability to cope with frustrations, fears, phobias, poor school performance, and nightmares. Explaining to one's children the reasons for the tragic reality one is experiencing, as often done nowadays by parents in the throes of marital crises and in search of justifications or allies, does not erase the drama of inner experiences. If I find myself in a house that is being bombed, the fact that I know perfectly well who and why is dropping the bombs that hurt and kill and cause the

collapse of the walls of the house, very little affects my terror or my injuries.

*The attitude of the institutions.*

The attitude of institutions, but also of society as a whole, is today, in this regard, remarkably deficient, not to say complicit or absent. One accepts and understands adultery out of love; one forgives betrayal on a whim; one tolerates betrayal out of revenge; one turns a blind eye, indeed two blind eyes to betrayal for fun.

Whereas until 1968, Italian penal code provided for women to be imprisoned for the crime of adultery, while men were only punishable in the case of concubinage, since that year adultery has no longer been considered a crime.

Whereas until a few years ago marital infidelity was considered fault in separation proceedings, today it is only considered fault if it is proven that the infidelity was the cause of the marriage breakdown. Cases in which infidelity is considered self-defence are not uncommon. She/he 'had to cheat' because of psychological suffering caused by emotional and sexual deficiencies.

One does not tire of making available to everyone, in every home, but also in schools and offices, the best and most suitable tools for contacting, initiating and carrying on extramarital love affairs. There are thousands of sites on the Internet available for men and women seeking extramarital encounters or adventures. With these tools, but also with other means such as newspapers or the mobile phone, it is easy to seek each other out, to get to know each other, to fall in love, to desire each other and then, finally, to meet.

### **5.3.4 STRATEGIES FOR ESCAPING MARRIAGE**

Marriage and family building are certainly the most important and burdensome commitments in a love relationship.

Such burdensome commitments that many couples today try to escape using a thousand tricks.

- The first of these subterfuges is not to make the romantic relationship official. Terms such as 'my boyfriend, my girlfriend', 'my love', 'John, the guy I'm having an affair with', replace 'my boyfriend or girlfriend' or worse 'my betrothed, my betrothed



spouse', as it used to be. The new terms are used to avoid in any way formalising or giving importance to a relationship. Our 'being together' does not mean that we have made a stable and everlasting commitment. Our 'being together' does not mean that there has been a promise of marriage between us.

- The second ploy, when the promise of marriage is there, is to prolong the period of engagement for years, using all possible means: 'We have not yet both graduated'. "We do not yet have a job". "We do not have a stable job yet. "Yes, it is true, we have a stable job but we do not yet have the means to buy a house and furnish it.
- The third expedient used is that of alternating unions: 'Yes, let's get together, let's go out and have holidays together, let's have sex, but everyone remains tied to his or her family of origin who provides everything'. Or: 'Yes, we are together, we live together in the house that the families or one of the two families have made available to us, but our parents continue to pay for everything we need: food, care, housing, telephone card, electricity, water and various bills'. Or: 'Yes, we live together, we pay all the necessary expenses ourselves, but we do not want to get married for the time being'. And finally: 'Yes, we are married, we stay in the same house, but everyone should have maximum freedom. We meet for moments of sexual intimacy and to do something in common, but without having children, which would cause serious problems'.

The escape from a real family and authentic marriage has led to the birth or proposal of the most disparate types of ties, such as temporary marriage, de facto couples, special friendships, various types of cohabitation and free love. All these partial or momentary ties, if they make it possible to escape some or all of the marriage pacts, considerably limit the gifts of a stable union. The limitations affect individuals, families of origin and society as a whole. The latter will be confronted daily not only with a massive drop in births but, above all, will be forced to confront and manage a new population.

young people psychologically disturbed, violent, poor in values, immature, highly dependent and with serious difficulties and limitations in the world of work and the production of goods and services.



## Chapter 6

### 6.0 CONFLICT IN THE COUPLE

Just as there are centripetal forces that tend to unite and make the couple more cohesive, there are centrifugal forces that tend to separate man and woman from the love path they had embarked upon.

The increased conflict in today's Western world couples, both before and after marriage, is easily experienced on many occasions.

One only has to open the newspaper or switch on the TV to hear with horror what can happen when love turns into hatred, when tender words turn into insults, when affectionate kindnesses turn into punches, slaps or worse. The pages of the daily newspapers are dripping with gruesome and macabre stories of violence in the family environment.<sup>74</sup> These tragic events have become the daily bread on which numerous popular TV programmes and blockbuster films are based. The media use the tension in these events to fuel or enhance the incas- sions.

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<sup>74</sup> In 2003, there were 165 family murders. One every two days.

Verbal and/or physical aggression, sexual violence, killings between men and women, between husbands and wives, or between ex-husbands, wives, lovers or cohabitantes are increasingly frequent.

It will be said that today's mass media, in order to seek maximum audience, are making a noise for all the most vile and violent news that has always been present in every age and time. Unfortunately, statistics prove the opposite: assaults are not only more exposed to the public's lubricating pleasure, but are actually on a continuous, constant increase.

On the other hand, it is sometimes enough to be among friends with the intention of spending a pleasant evening to be forced to live through, suffer and often even participate, willingly or unwillingly, in a whole series of tirades between husbands and wives, between partners or between boyfriends. In other words, tirades between people who should be in a loving relationship, but who instead openly and reciprocally display aggression and resentment.

On these occasions, the purpose that is perceived is clear and obvious: to hurt the other person more, one pokes him/her in front of everyone. In some cases, the hope of having the other person's strength against the partner is evident: 'Have you seen how he treats me? Have you seen the way my husband thinks?'

In these cases it is difficult if not impossible to intervene, both because 'between husband and wife it is better not to put your finger on it' and because intervention, even if explicitly requested, often does not help to bring any serenity to the couple. does not really know what to say and how to say it, without offending one or the other, or without antagonising one or the other. One prefers to keep quiet or make some witty remarks to avoid committing oneself or compromising oneself with one's own views and judgements.

The increase in gender aggression is documented by many other sources: separations, divorces and lawsuits between men and women are on the rise. Trials for violence, abuse and injuries clog courtrooms and the computers of associations that protect women.

Another indicator is the increased distrust of the opposite sex, expressed both verbally and in behaviour: 'Men are all the same. "If you have met one you have met them all". "All women are...". All men are...' and a series of often unrepeatable comments.

At the same time, courteous and cavalier behaviour decreases. Who stands up any more to give way to a woman on the car bus? Which boy is ready and happy to carry his friend or schoolmate's book bag in addition to his own? Which girl is prepared not to go out on a Saturday night with friends to keep company with her hospitalised or sick boyfriend? Who is that guy in the trattoria who is also willing to pay the bill for his girlfriend?

The willingness to sacrifice in order to be close to and care for one's partner is considered a legacy of distant historical periods when men and women were slaves to such altruistic and chivalrous behaviour and attitudes. Explicit and clear-cut declarations of love have also decreased. No longer the demanding phrases such as 'I love you'. "I would like to marry you". "I would like to be with you all my life". Such expressions have been replaced by others of a very different tenor, such as: 'I like you'. "I feel good with you". "You turn me on". "I like you". "You're not bad!".

Proposals made to the other are, moreover, extremely limited in time, space and content. "If you want we can go out to dinner and then to my house or your house". "If you want, we can spend a weekend at my beach house with our friends". It is already a lot if the proposal goes as far as proposing to spend a week's holiday together.

The increased conflict in couples in the western world today has several causes:

1. *The increased frequency adultery.*
2. *The greater desire for dominance of one sex over the other.*
3. *Excessive differences in .*
4. *The different approach to situations and problems due to gender differences.*
5. *The increased presence of psychological problems.*
6. *The presence of more illusions and higher expectations.*
7. *The new cultural and social climate.*

## **6.1 increased frequency of adulthood.**

We are with the *traditional causes* infidelity.

- *The difficulty in dialogue and understanding reciprocity.* Hence, a dialogue that breaks down, that does not grow, that does not bring the hoped-for contributions of understanding mutual knowledge, intimacy, inner well-being.
- *impoverishment or weariness of life in two.* A couple's life that becomes impoverished not only no longer bears positive fruit for both but also becomes a constant cause of suffering and sadness.
- *The inclusion of malevolent and destructive attitudes in the life of the couple.* Attitudes of morbid jealousy, aggression and mutual spite make the home a place of confrontation rather than a meeting place; life together is not a way of helping each other but of hurting each other with constant assaults on the other, with no holds barred, while even children become a tool to take something away from the other, to humiliate and attack the other.
- *The excessive restriction of one's personal freedom and self-determination.*
- *The neurotic need to prove to oneself, before others, one's capacity for charm, seduction or virility.*
- *The ongoing search for a perfect person who can fully satisfy all our needs: social, economic, sexual, sentimental.* In this search, as we associate with many different people every day, we would often like to combine the body of one, intelligence of another, and the friendliness and sexual interest of yet another.
- *The need to live, even as adults, in a state of perpetual adolescent love.* This neurotic need results in a constant search for new sexual and amorous stimuli.

To these traditional causes, many others have been added in modern Western societies.

- In the meantime, human education and training that is poorly attuned to a child's deepest needs and requirements leads to an increase in the number of young people entering adult life with disturbed personalities that make them immature and prey to the easy and immediate needs of childhood or adolescence, but also with little or no educational background in terms of fundamental values such as honour, loyalty, responsibility, fairness and commitment to others and society.
- The messages sent out every day by rampant consumerism that stimulate us to replace and change everything that does not meet our desires at the moment. Therefore, 'if that woman or man does not give me what I expect from her/him, it is right to look for another woman or man who will give me what I want at this moment'.
- The presence of a petty psychologism widespread in glossy newspapers, which links individual malaise to the people with whom we currently relate. These superficial and fundamentally flawed psychological theories indicate as a cure for stress, anxiety, depression, psychosomatic disorders, not a careful physical or psychological examination and treatment of the person, but the need for a change in one's lifestyle and especially of those closest to one, so as to take outside the couple or family what is needed to feel better. "If at a certain age I am afraid of old age and death, a love affair with a young person will be a blessing in disguise. "If I suffer from digestive disorders, it is because I somatise my sexual or marital dissatisfaction in my abdomen". "If I am sad, all I have to do is choose a new partner or a new relationship that will bring cheerfulness, good humour and joy into my life". For Salonia, 'It seems that cheating in couples has gone from being a possibility to a necessity'.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> SALONIA, G., (2006), 'The couple faced with the dramas jealousy, betrayal and separation', in Trentacoste N., ed., *Tearing an ab-*



- A society founded feelings and emotions then throws away every tired, disappointing relationship, lacking the passion and bite it possessed during the period of falling in love.
- More and more often today, men, but also women of a certain age, leave their wives or husbands to remarry or live with a young girl. The intention behind this is to test one's seductive abilities, but also the need to awaken dormant sexuality in the encounter with a young body. Often, however, these people go from excitement to depression, when the enthusiasm once again deflates and the novelty loses its bite.
- Since, in Western societies, moral standards have lost their ability to direct private behaviour, the goodness of an action is judged by what I expect to gain from that action in the short or medium term and not by whether that action is right for me or for others or conforms to the dictates of conscience.
- The easy betrayal is also due to the fracture of the role-playing associated with sexual roles. It is no longer men 'hit on' women, who, on the other hand, with the right criteria and healthy discernment, select and judge, and for the most part refuse to allow themselves to be drawn into inconclusive or negative adventures, but men and women 'all together passionately', seeking 'stories' that bring excitement and pleasure, even if only for a few days or hours. All this without even thinking about whether one hurts, who one hurts, and what the personal, family and social consequences of all these 'hit-and-run' relationships will be.

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*difficult arm*, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi, p. 158.

<sup>76</sup> DACQUINO, G.,(1996), *Che cos'è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p. 221.

- Then there is the management of the couple and the family which is considerably more open than in the past. Often the two partners, for work or study reasons, find themselves alone for long periods, in different environments and in different cities, dealing with different people. And this can only favour the comforting or occasional betrayal, which, however, can turn into an irremediable break-up of the couple over time.
- Furthermore, our society lacks careful control of verbal and non-verbal communication with the opposite sex. Often, in an atmosphere of complete freedom and friendship, smiles, attitudes and winks are wasted in relations between men and women, which send out ambiguous signals that can be interpreted by the other as signs of emotional, amorous or sexual availability. Similarly, it is accepted, because that is the way everyone does it, to wear clothes which, rather than covering, reveal, rather than conceal, parts of the body that are capable of intense sexual stimulation, without the slightest concern for the protection of modesty, but also without concern for the messages that this type of clothing conveys to the opposite sex.
- If we then add to this the considerable increase in the frequency of cheating between the two sexes in all spheres and in all places, it is not difficult to discover the reasons that have led to a dramatic increase in cheating between spouses as well as boyfriends.

### **6.1.1 PREVENTION OF ADULTERY**

From what we have said, it is not difficult to point out the elements and attitudes that can prevent adultery.

1. In the meantime, it is fundamental to assure the other of fidelity to all the commitments undertaken in marriage. Commitments that can be summarised as follows
  - Commitment to help and protect.
  - Commitment to an intimate and profound dialogue.

- Commitment to a rich and intense emotional and sexual exchange.

- Commitment to respect the other. Respect for their needs, their individuality, their role.
  - Commitment to care. Care directed towards comfort, security, physical and psychological support, but also commitment to family care as father and mother, as daughter-in-law and son-in-law towards each other's parents and relatives.
  - Commitment procreation and child-rearing.
2. Prudence, duty and responsibility should also drive states, societies and religions to place a high value on fidelity, discouraging adultery to the utmost through appropriate regulations. When this is not the case, because pity, understanding, acceptance and indifference are pushed to the utmost degree, or when is almost no attention paid to the person betrays or induces betrayal, then it is difficult to expect men and women to behave in a way that is irrepressible and consistent with the promises they have made, but also with feelings of love.
  3. It is necessary to avoid any excessive mistrust in the other's ability to resist temptation and therefore it is important to avoid excessive and unmotivated jealousy. However, it is also necessary to avoid overconfidence to the effect that 'the other, if he loves me, will always be capable of resisting all allurements that may come from the outside world'. While some peoples, such as those of the Muslim religion, characterised by excessive mistrust, and therefore act with excessive caution in relations between the sexes, other societies, such as our own, are characterised by excessive trust in the other's abilities, with consequent attitudes of considerable recklessness. We often accept situations and behaviour that are in themselves lawful, but objectively have little chance of being managed correctly over long periods. We behave in love and romance in the same way as we do in education. We put our adolescents and young people in

High-risk situations regard to alcohol or drug abuse or incongruous and antisocial behaviour and, to justify ourselves, we have no better reason than to state with extreme confidence that 'if you want to, you can resist any negative influence from outside'. While it is true that not all men and women placed in a risky situation will betray their partner, it is also true that certain conditions are linked to a real risk that must be prevented in order to avoid serious and major personal, family and social traumas.

## ***6.2 THE DESIRE FOR DOMINANCE OF ONE SEX OVER THE OTHER***

In the human species, as in many animals, the instinct and desire for dominance of one over the other, the need to excel or the joy of the revenge of one over the other, is very much present.

Man, however, unlike animals that use only a part of the external environment for protection or food, has not created for himself a niche of supremacy and security in a more or less vast territory, but has sought, when and if possible, to conquer new spaces and new lands in any way and by any means, subduing, exploiting or killing other men and peoples.

The desire for conquest and supremacy is an inherent characteristic of the human species. This desire is linked to his remarkable intellectual abilities that enable him to see beyond. Beyond hedges and hills; beyond rivers and mountains; beyond immense plains and forests. Just as his lust for space is infinite, so is his lust for power. Many great leaders, from Julius Caesar to Charlemagne, from Napoleon to Hitler, could not be satisfied with what they had managed to conquer. Despite having carried their victorious weapons over boundless lands, despite having subjugated multitudes of people and conquered enormous riches, they were still dissatisfied with their lust for power.

As if driven by an insatiable thirst, these and many other leaders engaged in wars of conquest farther and farther away from home territories, seeking something more, something better.

to add to what they had conquered. They failed to be aware of the fact that the inordinate lust for power leads to the ruin of individuals, just as it leads to the ruin of entire peoples and splendid civilisations.

Why be surprised then if men and women throughout history have sought to subjugate each other? Why be surprised if men and women have sought and are always seeking something more for their own sex, to the detriment of the other?

However, this instinct is much greater, more evident and destructive, when men and women are activated on the same level.

If the two sexes engage on different planes, as has been the case in many civilisations for millennia: women in the 'relational affective world' and men in the 'economic and service world',<sup>77</sup> mutual aggression, the need for possession and the desire to crush and subjugate the other, is considerably reduced, while interest and care for the partner's well-being is accentuated.

If, on the other hand, men and women become active, as is the case today in the western world, on the same level, both hidden and manifest conflict increases.

In this, as in all competitive situations, the one tries to trivialise, blame and thus slow down or prevent the success of the other in a competition that is all the more insidious as it is more subterranean, irrational and instinctive.

If it is the woman who is successful in the economic and service world, if she earns more than he does, if she is the one who is more valued and respected in the social and institutional environment, it is very easy for the man to feel this success as a threat and thus to become more aggressive, demanding and elusive towards the opposite sex.

There is an even worse reality than what we have described, which is that of feeling so humiliated in one's masculine pride that one renounces and refuses any commitment, any help and any availability to the opposite sex, as well as to family and society.

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<sup>77</sup> TRIBULATO, E., (2008), *Mondo affettivo e Mondo economico*, Centro Studi Logos, Messina.

This is what happens in peoples in which women, according to the media, have achieved such admirable professional achievements that they surpass men.

*On my recent trip to Russia, I had noticed, almost absolute protagonists in the field of work, women: women driving train convoys, women carpenters, women cleaning the streets, women in museums, women guarding supermarkets, and of course women in secretarial jobs and hotels. Women everywhere there was work and effort to be done. Also having as my guide a woman, young, beautiful but sad, it came to me spontaneously to ask: "Katia, excuse me, we saw on our tour always women working everywhere, but where are the men?" I was very impressed by her answer, given with a melancholic and defiant facial expression and tone: "The men are home sleeping because they have to sober up from the evening, while their women are also working.*

I don't think it was quite like that, I refuse to believe that there are no hard-working men in Russia, but Katia had pointed out a truth that is unrecognised by many but that sociologists have noticed in other societies as well: when women engage in purely masculine fields in a substantial and therefore full-time manner, earning as much and more in money and social esteem than men, the latter, humiliated and depressed at having lost the pleasure and pride of providing for their wives and families, not only lose the taste for work, as they consider it superfluous, but also shut themselves up in a cocoon of apathy, self- - and hetero- aggression and destructiveness, using very poor and shoddy rewards.

This self and hetero-destructive depressive reaction is also a way of sending a message that is hardly understood and accepted: 'If my capacities and possibilities are not adequately valorised, not only do I not use them to their fullest, but I voluntarily limit and destroy them in order to take revenge for the castration that has been performed on me'.

In women, on the other hand, the conquest of more power entails something different but equally serious. They are currently preparing, preparing, dreaming and aspiring to enter the world of work and service in the same way as the Jews prepared, dreamed and aspired to enter the world of work and service.

to reach the land promised by the Lord. For this coveted, desired and expected role, they sacrifice their best and most biologically and emotionally fruitful years on school benches and in books. They attend schools, universities, further education courses and master's degrees with good results, but more and more often they are forced to give up deep love, marriage and marriage. And even when this does not happen, so that many women manage, albeit late, to marry and have children, they are often forced to take a back seat or abdicate their domestic role, delegating the specific tasks of care, education and assistance to others, because they have acquired the qualities and values characteristic of the economic and service world, but have lost the skills necessary to manage the emotional-relational world correctly and well. Medical, pedagogical and social workers aware of this loss, and often find themselves dealing with women and mothers who are not very aware of what is going on in their children's souls, but are also unwilling to commit their time and best energies to the care and nurture of their offspring.

*Some time ago, a child of about three years of age came to our attention with clear autistic traits. The mother, a kindergarten teacher, had not noticed the child's severe pathology, as in the evening, when she returned home after a day of study and work, she saw the child calm and quiet when putting him to bed. Nothing abnormal had she noticed until, in order to have him closer, she had him enrolled in the same class where she taught. Only then, comparing her son's attitudes and behaviour with those of the other children, did she realise the serious pathology present. Invited and urged to be more involved, committed and present with her son, she found nothing better than to have him followed by other paid therapists!*

### **6.3 Excessive differences**

Excessive differences in personality characteristics but also differences due to differences in educational styles, values, religion or culture have always been judged as enemies of relationship stability. It is not for nothing that the old saying: 'Wife and



buoi dei paesi tuoi', invited a choice within one's own environment, so as to avoid excessive or too many differences in the couple. Today, this invitation often falls on deaf ears, for various reasons.

1. In the meantime, the means of communication allow written, verbal and visual contact between people who are very distant from each other, be it in terms of physical appearance, religion, lifestyle, values, language, etc.
2. The globalisation of markets and people, the low cost of air transport and the increased economic prosperity that favours tourismemigration, cultural and professional exchanges, allow frequent and continuous contact, even physical contact, between people in places far away from each other.
3. The formation of couples with little in common is also caused by the increased readiness for friendly, sentimental but also sexual relationships among young people, which are little or not at all restricted and guided by parents and adults.
4. Finally, the family influence in sentimental and sexual choices is missing or has significantly diminished.

From what we have said, it is clear that the number of couples embarking on a common path, despite their excessive differences, has become very numerous and is increasing every year.

## ***6.4 The correct management of gender differences.***

Gender differences are numerous. If they are understood, accepted and well managed, they are of considerable help both couple relationships and in bringing up children and family life. If, on the other hand, as is often the case today, attempts are made to deny these differences by unsuccessfully and mistakenly seeking uniformity in behaviour and , the problems associated with these differences not only do not disappear by a miracle, but are accentuated considerably.

In fact, Albisetti says: 'I remain of the opinion that female psychology and male psychology are very different from each other and that this profound difference in experiencing themselves, each other and the world around them is the real reason for the vast majority of

<sup>78</sup> And again the same author writes: "If one were to start from the idea of never wanting to change the other, realising that the spouse belongs to another sex, very different from one's own, with a psychology very different from one's own, and were to take all this as an axiom, perhaps many crises, many marital conflicts would not exist".<sup>79</sup> If, on the other hand, as has been the case in recent decades, one wants equality in styles, in behaviour, in the way of feeling and living, one inevitably wrongs both men and women, in that one risks raping or mortifying both the male nature and the female essence in the vain and useless, as well as harmful, attempt to modify and level out their personal characteristics.

If the two different realities cannot be accepted, valued and amalgamated, the conflicts and problems that can arise in understanding and communion between the two sexes are manifold and risk becoming more numerous.

Let us list, in brief, just a few of the many gender differences that we find in male and female educated men and women respectively.

- Men have more courage, linearity and firmness; they are more agile; they are more fond of violent and bodily games; they have a greater interest in cars, motorbikes, construction games, weapons and inventions; they are more faithful in their friendships but are less emotionally involved in them; their aggression is expressed much more physically than in women; they are less capable of caring for a small child but are more capable of educating and looking after their children in adolescence and youth.
- Women take better care of themselves; they are more sophisticated in their clothing; they express more gentleness, patience and communication skills; they are more capable in bringing up and caring for young children; they are calmer in terms of movement but have more pronounced emotionality and are therefore more to anxiety and depression; their

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<sup>78</sup> ALBISETTI, V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Milano, p.71.

<sup>79</sup> ALBISETTI, V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Milano, p.138.

aggression is expressed more subtly and diplomatically using mainly language and behaviour; their mood is much more variable and they are less firm in their decisions.

- Self-fulfilment in women is linked to the establishment of positive emotional relationships with others, whereas in men, self-fulfilment implies greater independence, egocentricity and social recognition.<sup>(80)</sup>
- Female intelligence seems to be more connected to life and is living; women are therefore more interested in people and feelings. Male intelligence is more closely linked to inanimate matter<sup>81</sup> and therefore men are more interested in objects, especially technological objects.
- In women, emotionality, affectivity and sensitivity are bound together, in men, they are not.<sup>82</sup>
- Female affectivity makes women more sensitive than men to the quality of interpersonal relationships.<sup>83</sup>
- The image that men and women have of marriage is different. For the woman, this institution is a vital and essential situation from which she hopes for self-realisation; it is the aim and means of her realisation. For men, marriage is another source of fulfilment, beyond the social or group role.<sup>84</sup>
- Man's psyche is oriented towards action, towards conceiving, ordering, inventing the tools he needs, towards dominating society and matter: co

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<sup>80</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma, p 42.

<sup>81</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psychology of Marital Life*. Città Nuova Editrice, Rome, p42.

<sup>82</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psychology of Marital Life*, Città Nuova Editrice, Rome, p 43

<sup>83</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma, p 42.

<sup>84</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R.,(1993), *Psychology of Marital Life*, Città Nuova

struction, warfare, defence, destruction, edification, and so man is essentially deed, woman is nature.<sup>85</sup>

- Men are more interested in outdoor activities, women in indoor activities.
- Men want to achieve goals that demonstrate their capabilities, women want to experience situations and emotions that satisfy them.
- Men are more rational, women more intuitive.
- Men reward themselves for their abilities, women for the interest others have in them.
- Men, when they have a problem, tend to focus on it and thus close themselves off. Women manifest all emotions more openly and explicitly, especially negative ones. They are not afraid, like men, to communicate them openly, and in doing so they do not always seek a solution, but rather a moment of venting, as they know that by talking about them, the virulence of certain negative emotions is sometimes lessened and even disappears. Men, on the other hand, are less inclined than their partners to talk about their problems if they feel that others cannot provide an immediate and satisfactory solution. They therefore seek less help from psychologists and doctors.

Let us now examine just a few of the gender differences which, if not well managed and valued, can cause considerable conflict.

#### **6.4.1 Female mood variability.**

The female mood, unlike the male mood, is very variable during the day, during the monthly cycle, in the premenopausal and menopausal periods. This variability puts a strain on one's partner, who finds himself relating on certain days, at certain times of the day or during certain periods, with a person who is affectionate, sexually available, patient, tolerant, extremely open; while on other days, at other times of the day or during other periods, he is forced to live with a person who is edgy, aggressive, irritable, sexually unavailable, a

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<sup>85</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R., (1993), *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma, p 46.

sometimes depressed, impatient or dysphoric. This variability is due to the constant hormonal changes to which the female body and psyche are subjected, but is also caused by a greater sensitivity of the female emotional brain to metabolic variations.

Mood variability is basically the flip side of the coin of women's greater ability to get in touch with the souls of others: husbands, children, family members, suffering people, the needy or destitute. Therefore, if one considers these feminine qualities to be useful, indeed valuable, one must willingly accept the other side of the coin, namely the problems that mood variability brings to one's spouse and family life.

The problem is highlighted or magnified when men are imbued with a culture that wants women with characteristics equal to their own. For decades now, in magazines, in films, as well as in television programmes, the inclusion of women in all jobs and activities, even in the most risky ones, has been constantly extolled and emphasised.

Almost every day, what was once seen as the deluded, fair sex is represented by actresses who, without batting an eyelid, fistfight, attack, shoot and kill, with the utmost determination and confidence. Men, given these premises, are hardly willing to accept that women, all women, may have, along with numerous and remarkable positive characteristics, also limitations. Limits due not to a particular pathology, but to a physiological female reality.

But also many women, influenced by the mass media, are now convinced that they are like men, equal to men in every way. For this reason, they are hardly willing to accept the limitations imposed by the genetic constitution. Therefore, while they do not shy away from risky, tiring and stressful situations and jobs that are unsuitable for their feminine nature, that put a strain on them or upset their psychological balance, they try to hide or shift the greater irritability, depression and aggression that is present especially on critical days and at critical times, blaming their discomfort on those closest to them, and thus especially on their children and the men at their side: 'He does not understand my needs, he does not cooperate. "He first makes a mess, he makes a mess, and then he doesn't help me as he should". "He never satisfies me". "He is a loafer who does not

I can't get out of the armchair when he's at home'. "I can't stand him any more, all he does is piss me off".

As far as greater male stability is concerned, women, exalted by the concept of liberation and autonomy vis-à-vis men, rather than relying on it, rather than being helped by it, embracing positive aspects and opportunities, are afraid of it, see its limits and therefore tend to debase it in order not to use it.

For this reason, the women's irritation becomes fury when they feel that 'he' does not remain fully and emotionally involved in the problems and needs of children, sick people and others. "He does not understand the children's problems". "Men act like they have ice in their pockets". "His mother might be sick, I might die, and he won't bat an eyelid. What should be a possibility becomes a limitation and can cause conflict and accusations.

#### ***6.4.2 Communication in the two genders***

Differences in the way we communicate can also be a cause of conflict. Men communicate with facts rather than words. And when he uses words, he tends more to communicate events synthetically and in a linear manner, whereas the woman, on the other hand, inserts her feelings and thus fills the facts with a torrent of emotions.

It may happen that a woman complains in order to vent or to seek understanding and affectionate support from her man, while the man worries and takes action in search of a solution to the problem, thinking that the woman's complaints mean a peremptory and immediate request for intervention.

Furthermore, the more linear, dry, stringent male language often contrasts with the cascade of words, adjectives, reflections, comments, extrapolations, digressions, adjectives and subordinate phrases, which are present in female language.

This is why women are often disappointed and offended by men's laconic comments when they are asked to give their opinion on a person or situation or are asked to recount an event. Equally annoyed do men feel when they are hit by a flood of emotions, words, and emotions.

and comments by women that do not give room for concrete reasoning.

Caught up in the maelstrom of this torrent of words, many men fail to identify either the starting point of the problem or the logic behind the words, and therefore avoid talking.

*I remember in this connection a couple who had gone to the family counselling centre for pre-marital counselling. After sitting down, the girl immediately told me the reason for their conflict: the couple had very little communication. The boyfriend, according to the woman, was too closed and did not open up to her. After a little prompting, the young woman began to talk to me about herself, her relationship with her parents, her family and social life, her relationship with her friends and the family network, the birth of their love affair and the difficulties they were currently experiencing as a couple due to the young man's poor communication skills. After almost half an hour I managed to stop her so that I could get the boy to talk and thus get the full picture of the situation. When I asked the man what his family history was, before he could open his mouth, she interrupted him with: 'I'll tell you, doctor...' and went on to describe the boy's character, his family situation, his home, his relatives; and then his strengths, vices, faults and aspirations.*

*After managing, with much difficulty, to stop this torrent of words, I asked the boy a second question concerning his relationship with his girlfriend. This attempt was also unsuccessful as, even before the boy managed to open his mouth, she had already informed me with an: 'I'll tell him, doctor...' how he saw her and their relationship; what he wanted and what he was looking for. It is evident that the diagnosis made by the girl was correct but that the defect in communication was not the young man's!*

Not all girls, fortunately, are so talkative, but this gap exists and is often a cause of conflict.

Apart from the quantity of dialogue, the structure of communication is also different. The structure of the male language is reduced to the essentials, has few adjectives, links, shorter, concise and precise sentences with few superfluous details.

Being more linear, it goes straight to the crux of the problem and immediately seeks its solution. In the woman, on the other hand, communication is enriched with a thousand comments, periphrases, endless details and impressions that make her story much richer, but also, for the man's sensitivity, too dispersive. Moreover, while male dialogue is poor emotion, female dialogue is bursting with emotion. Therefore, ideas in women are only one element of the dialogue, whereas for men they are the dialogue. This, too, is a source of contention, as the man, overwhelmed by a thousand emotion-rich details, does not understand exactly what his partner's need, desire or, simply, his problem is and whether there is a problem. When a wife asks her husband: 'What did you do today?' he is likely to answer with 'Yes, as usual... at the office... everything's fine'. These kinds of answers leave the woman unsatisfied, as she would have liked a rich commentary that made her relive her man's working day, so that she could enjoy and participate in his experiences. The same question posed to the wife would have had a much broader and articulate answer in which the woman, with a wealth of details and comments, would have reconstructed not only the essential contents of the day but also her impressions, feelings and evaluations. A rich account not only of what was said and done by her and her co-workers, but also of comments: on the ridiculous tie in the office, on the too-short skirt of her colleague, on the intrusive attitude of the employee at the next desk. Everything or almost everything would have been reported, relived and revisited without taking into account that, for a male listener, many of these details would not only have been absolutely useless and irrelevant to what was being asked, but could, if not overly available at the time, have made him feel confused and lost.

This diversity can lead to some striking surprises.

*A young man, recounting his love story, was astonished at the remarkable verbosity of the female gender with the consequence that he had assumed role of 'listener' while the woman he 'was' with until a few days before, had the role of 'talker'. It happened then that after seven months of being together, she invited him to spend the weekend in a pleasant tourist resort. What was the woman's surprise to realise that for*



*he was not allowed to go out at weekends, for the simple reason that he was married and that those canonical days seemed right to devote them to his wife and children! The man, accused by the unwilling mistress of being a false man and an out-and-out cheat, justified himself candidly by saying that she had never, during the seven months they had been together, in her flood of words, asked the simple but essential question: "Are you free or are you married?"*

This forgetfulness of her is also part of the diversity of gender. The woman assumes much more the man does. The woman imagines that a man she likes, with whom she is madly in love, who is with her and has sex and an intimate life with her, must necessarily be as free as air. Whereas this is not always the case for the man. If the question is a direct one, it may be easy for him to admit his family status in order to save his image as a 'man of honour and speech', but if there is no direct question, men have, since time immemorial, preferred to gloss over the thornier topics of emotional or, worse, marital ties.

*Something similar happened to Elena, a girl who had been engaged to a young man for eight years. For him, she left her hometown and moved to the opposite side of Italy. For him she cooked delicious meals and fragrant apple tarts. To please him, when she visited, she was happy to diligently clean and tidy her room as a student away from home, which looked as messy and smelly as a barn.*

*Everything had been going well until the moment when, as they had both finished their studies and found a job and could therefore marry, when asked directly when they could get married, he replied that he could not marry her because his parents did not approve of her. In fact, the young man, who had been well informed by his parents on how marriages for males proceed today, had no intention of getting married at all. He defended himself by saying that never in the eight years they had been together had he ever uttered the word "marriage" and never had she asked him a specific question about it.*

Here too there is a false presumption on the part of the woman. If I do all these things for him, if I give him besides apple tarts, my body and my whole heart, it is implied that we are together with intention of getting married as soon as we have the minimum conditions to do so.

As we have seen, however, the male way of reasoning not exactly the same as the female way. Therefore, there can be serious and unpleasant surprises at the end of a path that can also be pleasant, but which often does not lead to anything of what was imagined, desired, dreamed and expected.

### ***6.4.3 DEMONSTRATIONS LOVE IN THE TWO SEXES***

The way of expressing interest and love is also different for men and women.

Women love gestures and words related to customs, local usage or the fashion of the moment. Flowers are certainly one of the oldest and still effective means of showing love. But also invitations to dinner, especially if he cooks or the invitation is to an elegant and exclusive venue, are effective means of seduction. Similarly, gifts, especially if they are the colour of gold or contain those shiny little stones called diamonds, are able to reach the heart of the hardest woman and help her understand the love felt by the man.

Unfortunately, however, even in this case there is the risk of seeing fireflies for lanterns. The sparkle of a solitaire is not always, on closer inspection, as intense and pure as that of an imaginary and de- sidered diamond!

For her, anniversaries are crucial. In these fateful dates, she sees milestones in her life and in her relationship her loved one. "He loves me. He remembered our first date, our first kiss, Valentine's Day, my birthday, our wedding anniversary.

For the man for whom anniversaries, and to some extent also anniversaries, are of modest importance, things are totally different. For him, too, there is the memory and there is the event, but this memory and this event are not necessarily placed in a context of anniversaries. The man's judgement regarding his woman's love is based on other elements: 'I know that she loves me because she has been nice to me during this time; she has made a

good lunch, we have often love; she has looked me sweetly in the eye; she has not been rude; she has not made me jealous or been annoying or irritating; she accepts my hobbies and needs; she takes care of me, our children and our home; she does not overwhelm me with demands or complaints.

On the contrary: 'Since she was rude, nervous, irritable, aggressive, surly, not attentive to my needs, always ready to ask or complain, it means that she does not love me'. As can be seen, the views and perspectives on being loved or not are substantially different. For the woman, manifestations of love are tied to dates and precise ritual behaviour; for the man, it is important and decisive, in feeling loved, the woman's overall behaviour with regard to his physical and psychological well-being.

*A man, who had come in for consultation because of a serious relationship crisis, complained about his wife, calling her "an hysterical lunatic". As an illustration of his wife's madness, he brought the case of the last quarrel that had led to the break-up. "After a day's work, I come home from the office and, as usual, I give Franca, my wife, a welcome kiss. I sit down in my favourite chair and simply ask her what she had prepared to eat for the evening. She, enraged, first looks at me with rancour, straight into my eyes, as if she wanted to incinerate me, then shouts while at the same time wringing her hands and throwing the plates in the air, repeating like an obsessive: You ask me what we are eating tonight! You dare to ask me what one eats this evening, sprawled on the sofa! You are not a man... you are a filthy worm'. Overwhelmed by that torrent of contumelies, I just couldn't understand what terrible sin I had committed. Finally, when there were no more dishes in the sink to break, weeping and wailing as if her beloved mother had died, she revealed the tragic truth: I had forgotten that it was our wedding anniversary and that she, like every year, was expecting a 'special evening', with an invitation to dine in a small restaurant on the estate. By the way, she had gone to the hairdresser's to celebrate this anniversary and had already prepared and dressed up, which I had not noticed at all. She also expected me, as usual, to bring her a bouquet of red roses. But I, doctor, with all*

*the things I had on my mind that day could I ever remember this anniversary thing, the dinner and the red roses?"*

#### **6.4.4 DIVERSITY IN DEALING WITH PROBLEMS**

Misunderstandings between men and women often arise from the different assessment of the same events. If a child is injured because his or her car has been involved in an accident while driving recklessly, the mother focuses attention on the damage her child has suffered and, above all, on the pain this child has felt or is feeling. And, therefore, torn by grief, she embraces her son, weeps, despairs and seeks immediate help, whatever it may be. She lives with all the anguish of her mother's heart what she imagines to be the dramatic reality of the young scion.

Instead, the man, the father, in such a circumstance, pauses to assess the extent of the damage to the young man and the car; he reflects on the best way to deal with the problem; he tries to figure out which emergency means might be right for him and, above all, he thinks about what his or his wife's erroneous upbringing attitude might have caused such dramatic consequences.

This behaviour, which is considered too rational and 'unsupportive', often annoys the wife, who would like the husband to get more involved in the suffering of the child and not in the practical problems to be dealt with. On the other hand, the man cannot understand how the wife stops at cuddling the wounded son, rather than trying to solve his problems and prevent them for the future.

Even in the case of a drug-addicted child, on the one hand, the mother, who feels sorry for the young man who has gone down this bad road, suffers, scolds her son, threatens him, tries to make him understand the mistake he has made and the suffering that this type of behaviour causes her and the entire family, but then fails to prove in practice that she is tough enough, linear enough, and decisive enough tackle and remove the causes of the problem. The father, on the other hand, if sufficiently mature and correctly educated, tries to implement the necessary measures, even if they are painful. Measures that the mother often does not agree with because they are experienced as too drastic, painful and limiting for the child.

As we have seen, the same event is experienced, approached and considered in sometimes totally different ways by men and women.

Man looks at the problem rationally: what happened? Why did it happen? What to do to solve the problem now? What can be done to prevent the problem in the future? What are the present and past causes and educational responsibilities?

The woman feels it in an affective - relational sense: who suffers? How much does she suffer? How can this suffering be alleviated at this time?

There is a significant divergence in the evaluation of the same event, in the prevention and solution of the problem(s).

This different attitude and this different evaluation, are often the cause of even violent altercations between one sex and the other, if it is not accepted that different and complementary perspectives and ways of feeling between men and women, between fathers and mothers, can and indeed must coexist.

Conflicts that arise from a different way of seeing and dealing with problems are greatly accentuated in the presence of laws, such as the current laws on the new family law, which, with shared responsibility force men and women into endless, exhausting and ultimately unsuccessful and sterile discussions and negotiations. Many of these discussions and negotiations often result in the worst of decisions: to decide nothing in order not to give in to the other party.

#### ***6.4.5 FICKLENESS IN DECISIONS***

Both men and women are good at making decisions that are useful to themselves, the couple, the family and society, but whereas men, when faced with a problem, quickly examine all the variables and then quickly and decisively take the decision that seems most appropriate to them and act accordingly, women, when faced with the same problems, have a different approach. She tends to examine a much larger number of variables, not only that, but also includes in these variables many elements of an affective-relational nature.

This entails a longer reflection time than is necessary for males, but above all, it results in a

engorgement in finding and implementing the most appropriate decisions. The woman often goes back on her decisions, changing them several times so that her yeses easily become noes, only to return to being yeses again, but with many 'maybe', 'we'll see', 'maybe', 'I don't know'!

This different way of examining and solving problems puts man in the situation of a castaway who is looking for a foothold but realises that all the boards and objects floating on the sea do not offer any stable grip.

In these situations, while the man tends to accuse the woman of not deciding as quickly as he would like, leaving him and the family in a stalemate, the woman, on the other hand, tends to accuse the man of making hasty decisions that are not always the best ones. Therefore, the man's most frequent accusation against the woman is of fickleness and immobility, while the woman's most frequent accusation against the man is of easy-going.

The solution certainly does not lie in greater male surrender. Women often feel the need for a determined, straightforward and strong male side that allows them to confront more opinions, so that they can make choices with more confidence.

The case we report can best illustrate this concetto.

*Dario complained about his wife Teresa, accusing her of never knowing what he wanted, while she complained about him, blaming him for not being understood and helped in decisions, which she was always forced to make alone.*

*It often happened that she would, while he dozed on the sofa, involve her husband in decisions. For example, how to spend the weekend. "I thought we could go to my parents' villa in Taormina, so the children can run around freely on the lawn, you can help my father with some work in the garden, while I get my mother to explain to me how to make parmigiana, what do you think? To this direct question from his wife, he often answered with: 'Yes dear, I agree'.*

*However, she, strangely dissatisfied, continued: 'Or, if it pleases you, we could visit our friends Francesco and Agata, who have had a baby, and in that way we can get rid of this in-combination. It seems only fair to reciprocate after they have*

*always made gifts for the birth of our children. What do you think?" Even to this sensible proposal he replied: "Well, if you want, let's go to Francesco and Agata.*

*But it didn't end there. At this point she brought up another hypothesis on how to spend the weekend: 'Do you know, though, that we haven't spent a weekend on our own for a long time? Would you like to be free to get up late and go where we like?*

*To this proposal too, Dario invariably replied that he agreed, to avoid possible clashes.*

*Strangely enough, however, despite this remarkable condescension, his wife did not seem to be at all satisfied with his answers, so much so that she often burst out with aggressive words and weeping, accusing him of not understanding her and not helping her in her choices. For the poor man, this female behaviour was, and risked remaining, an unfathomable mystery!*

*He often repeated to himself what he was doing wrong if, unlike so many men accused by their wives of never satisfying them in their desires, he was willing to do exactly as proposed.*

Poor Dario had not yet realised that women do not experience situations of choice in the same way as men do, and that his wife's need was not to have her husband's assent to her proposals, but that she wanted a serious and committed contradiction that would allow her to clarify to herself which was the strongest desire or the right thing to do, so that she could make a final decision with more confidence. Which, on her own, she could not do. She therefore expected her husband to be strongly in favour of one solution, to the exclusion of all others, in order to push her out of the mental block in when she was uncertain about the best choice.

#### **6.4.6 THE DIFFERENT WAY OF FEELING AND EXPERIENCING SEXUALITY**

A woman, when dressing to follow fashion, uses only feminine parameters, revealing aesthetically pleasing areas of her body, such as her legs, hips or breasts, which, for the male sensibility, are a source of sexual arousal, while she feels only slight embarrassment, compensated by the fact that she feels

beautiful, desirable and appropriate to the fashion of the moment. Since sexual arousal in men arises above all from sight, the woman who uncovers her body can hardly perceive and understand the many emotions, desires and drives that arise in the male mind and body in the presence of even a partially naked woman. Moreover, since men have great difficulty in properly reining in and channeling these desires and emotions, it is easy for them and sensibilities see this as an explicit sexual message, an immoral provocation, a shameless or unconscious exhibition, and so on.

As a consequence of this, while the more instinctive and carnal part of the male will enjoy the arousal due to the sight of the female nude, other male component, the one bound by norms and rules, will tend to frame this behaviour using judgments that are almost always unflattering to women. The male's subsequent behaviour will inevitably be a consequence of these emotions and considerations: on the one hand, he will have a strong slow sexual attraction to the exposed body, and on the other, the im- mediated negative judgement will lead him to have only an epidermic relationship with the woman who impudently exposes her body to his gaze and desires.

If the man's behaviour is then foul-mouthed or excessive, it is unlikely that the man will not be judged negatively by the woman, as she would have wished for a different interest: more serious, stable, concrete, more open to feelings, more respectful of the totality of her person. If the man's behaviour then becomes offensive or, worse still, sexually aggressive, the media, as well as the law and the institutions, will judge this man to a scoundrel, a profiteer, if not a rapist. As a consequence of all this, the image of the 'male', in general, will worsen and deteriorate not only in the eyes of the importunate or victim woman but also, what is worse, in the eyes of women in general. They will tend to judge not only the man who has behaved in this way, but all men as dirty, if not aggressive rapists. Women's associations, which were set up to protect women, will in such cases try even harder to nurture a detrimental male image, warning and emphasising the worst aspects of such behaviour.

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On the part of men, things will be no better. Although they understand the instinctive behaviour of the male interested in the event, they will tend either to judge themselves negatively as belonging to the male gender or women who, on the one hand, provoke the males, but are then ready accuse them of violence and violence. The male-female relationship risks deteriorating in such cases, as it is undermined by prejudices and abnormal fantasies, which have nothing do love, dialogue, giving and mutual respect and admiration.

There is another, even more deleterious path that the male psyche may follow and that is to sterilise, as far as possible, the impact of these images his sensitivity and desire. This second path will lead the male to raise his arousal threshold to the maximum, with the consequent decrease in sexual desire that, in the most serious cases, could lead to impotence or premature ejaculation.

The non-acceptance of differences in the way men and women experience sexuality can cause further conflicts. Many authors of books dedicated to couples, in order not to admit that different realities exist, have for many years continued to describe women's desire as not inferior or different from men's; therefore, if there are problems, they are caused by men who are too hasty, selfish, immature, who do not take the woman's needs into account, so that according to the theories of these authors, 'there are no sexually lukewarm, frigid or anorgasmic women, but unprepared men'. Once again, blaming the man, the male, is the favourite sport of scholars of both sexes.

In reality, there is a clear difference between men and women in the quantity of desire, which is, on the whole, much more intense in men than in women. The signs of this greater intensity of male sexuality are numerous: masturbation is much more frequent in men than in women; men think about sexual intercourse more frequently than women; they take more initiatives in this field; in their dreams, unlike in women, sexuality is much more present.

On the other hand, this diversity, within the framework of natural selection, has its own logic: in order to best care for the product of conception, which then represents the future of mankind, the woman must not be excessively interested in sexual activity, as she is not interested sexual activity.

This may lead to a lack of attention to the offspring already born, but also to an excessive number of pregnancies compared their care and upbringing possibilities.

Wanting to cover up the truth at any cost, in a spasmodic quest for equality, has only complicated women's relationship with themselves and their men. "If I am not an ardent woman it means there is something wrong with me or my husband or the love we feel for each other.

In any case, blaming oneself, the other person or the feeling experienced, does not solve the problems but complicates them. Greater aggression towards the husband who is judged to be incapable or selfish, certainly does not improve the relationship. Betraying the husband in search of the man capable of arousing 'scin- tille' only worsens the marital bond and puts it in crisis. Even worse is to devalue oneself.

We believe it is wiser to help couples accept reality, so that they live it together with love and mutual understanding, helping and supporting each other. other things, it is a foolish illusion that the frequency of full sexual intercourse represents the degree love, passion or intimacy of the couple.<sup>86</sup> As far as men are concerned, they too physiologically experience a decline in desire with advancing age, even if this decline is slower and more gradual than that of women. Considering the man sick in this case, in order to sell him expensive blue pills, certainly earns the pharmaceutical companies a lot of money, but this certainly does not improve the relationship with oneself and above all does not the life of the couple. This should live the autumn of life with the same serenity and joy with which it has lived the other seasons, without looking for non-physiological behaviour and performance.

#### **6.4.7 THE DIFFERENT HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Other reasons for contrasts between men and women often arise from the different historical perspective.

Women are more connected to the present reality, to the fashion of the moment, to current values, to the way others see, experience and deal with events at a given historical moment. In this she is more in tune than man with the current consumer society.

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<sup>86</sup> ALBISETTI, V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Mila-

no, p.42.

me, all projected on the 'here and now'. "Buy, spend, take, serve, now, in this moment".

Men's view of reality covers a broader time span than women's, as they tend to cover, more than women, issues and realities not only of the present but also of the past and future. Themes to which the female gender pays little attention. Ultimately, men, if sufficiently mature and responsible, are much more traditionalist than women and, in dealing with problems, take more account of traditions, past culture and future needs. In the search for solutions, he tends to build with passion and commitment the preconditions for something that can project positive effects in years and periods far and distant. So much so that, at times, it even links its behaviour to a future that bypasses generations.

This genetic predisposition is probably the result of the different roles that men and women have had in society and in the family. The woman-mother was forced to solve the pressing needs of the moment. "What can I now feed my children and my husband? "How can I solve the water problem today? "Where can I find shelter for the night?

The more politically and socially committed man, in tackling and solving longer-term problems, needed to look far into the future and at the same time take into account the valuable experiences of the past. "I build a road so that I can more easily transport my goods, those of my children and grandchildren, but also those of others, if they pay me a fair toll.

This different time perspective is often a reason for confusion, both when it comes to economic decisions and educational choices. Is it better to modernise the house and wardrobe or to invest in saving a little money for the future? Is it better to punish the child's disobedient behaviour today or to wait until this behaviour becomes much more serious tomorrow? Is it better for the daughter who is getting married to plan a fairytale wedding or to use the same money to make a down payment for the mortgage of the house where she and her husband are to live?

Again, there are no right and wrong ways, but different perspectives. If both manage to take into account and value the two perspectives, the masculine and

female, from which reality with its associated problems is observed, not only do these differences not stand in the way of couple and family life, but they can also be of great help in running the family, as they complement each other. Here too, however, there must be mutual acceptance so that each member of the couple can make his or her contribution and play the role for which nature has prepared them fully and freely.

#### ***6.4.8 THE DIFFERENT WAY OF MANAGING WORK ACTIVITIES***

Then there is the different way of approaching work commitments and activities. Whereas women are able to manage their energies by concentrating them, even for a very long time, on repetitive work without becoming excessively tired, men carry out their work tasks 'in a hurry'. He puts great deal of effort, physical and mental energy into what he does, so that he is able to do a great deal of work in a short time, but immediately afterwards he needs a few minutes of full relaxation to recover from the abundant energy spent.

This alternating commitment is often frowned upon by the woman, who reproaches him for lounging around while she is busy at home. It is not a matter of invincible laziness of the male gender, but of a different way of dealing with commitment and fatigue.

On the other hand, the sense of home is different for men and women. For the man, since time immemorial, the home has represented refuge, serenity, the place where he can recover the energy he has ably spent outside. For the woman, on the other hand, the home represents the place of work. Work as housewife and relational and dialogic work as mother and wife. For this reason, the woman, unlike the man, sees leaving the house as a moment of relaxation.

Also in the field of work, man needs deep motivation to commit himself. When these motivations are not present, his commitment falls far short.

Furthermore, he has the instinct to build, to invent, to create, something new and different but also something worthwhile by his ingenuity, his imagination, his manual skills, his strength. Therefore, he does not like repetitive or too simple work.

This, too, contrasts with the wishes of many wives who, while sometimes reluctantly accepting that their husband should indulge in a delicious dish or menu, resent the fact that, once the 'creative' activity is over, their man does not want to clean the kitchen and wash the dishes. In fact, housework, unless it is repairing an electrical system, repainting walls or renovating a room, often does not excite men at all.

#### ***6.4.8 THE DIFFERENT APPROACH IN EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES***

As far as educational activities are concerned, the greatest contrasts arise from the different ways of educating and the different objectives. For mother, education is about relationships and dialogue, understanding and listening, acceptance and participation. The overriding goal is to give the children, at that time and in that situation, the greatest and best physical and psychological well-being; the best protection from danger; the greatest acceptance and acceptance.

For the father, since his objectives are to stimulate in his child: strength, linearity, courage, security, consistency, firmness and respect for social norms, so that in the future he will be able to responsibly, correctly and well fit into the roles he has chosen or assigned by society, educational activity is indeed made up of dialogue, understanding, listening and participation, but above all it is made up of rules and norms that must be observed and enforced. The educational and training activity is made up of incentives to improve oneself, facing the future and obstacles with courage and determination, without hesitation and without second thoughts, with the determination and confidence necessary to face people, events and situations, even very difficult ones.

As a consequence of this, the mother seldom sets absolute limits and prohibitions because the child's suffering, which often becomes her own suffering, prevents her from taking too drastic and linear a course of action. For the father, who is less and less likely to involve himself in his children's emotional situation, it is easier to set well-defined limits within which, depending on their age, they can move freely. For the same reason, he is generally firmer and more resolute in enforcing rules and regulations.

The mother also puts up stakes, especially when the children

are young, but these are much more elastic as they are more related to the anxieties and fears of the moment than to very broad goals and

or the needs of children projected into their future as future citizens, future men and women, future parents. Therefore, especially when the children are approaching adolescence and are no longer sensitive to emotional blackmail, the mother's educational difficulties become more evident.

Again, if the couple acts as a team with different roles and functions, not only is it easier to achieve the goal or goals that both had set for themselves, but painful disagreements are avoided. On the contrary, if each element of the couple or family acts without a specific role, not only are the goals compromised but, above all, the contrasts between the spouses are greatly accentuated.

#### **6.4.9 PERSONAL CARE**

We know that women use much more time, energy and money than men when it comes to personal care, both in terms of cleanliness and appearance. This can lead to small but repeated quarrels when, for , the man is forced to stand, for what seems to him an interminable time, in front of the bathroom door in which his better half has locked himself. Or when, in front of the staircase door, he waits impatiently for her to do all her 'co- seven' before deciding to leave the house.

The man, on the other hand, is often accused of not paying the right attention his body care and clothing. "That tie clashes with the colour of the jacket". It is the classic female notation. "The hazelnut of the shirt clashing with the black of the shoes makes me despair". Says the wife despondently to her husband.

Now that aesthetic treatment has a considerable cost, the conflict has shifted to the economic level. "We cannot afford to have your breasts redone. "We can't afford a subscription to the beauty parlour," says the man to the woman as she retorts: "You're cheap, Maria's husband gave her a beautiful nose for her birthday!

The egalitarian upbringing of recent decades has increased the number of men who have a very similar view of time and body care to that women, but this has not diminished the conflicts as the mutual accusations are always present and topical.



#### **6.4.10 THE USE OF TIME**

Time management is also a reason for frequent crises. Time or appointment time has a very relative importance for many women. If a woman says: 'Let's go out at four o'clock in the afternoon', it does not mean that at six o'clock the woman will be at the front, ready to go out. It only means that around that time she 'might' be ready to go out. The more methodical and rule-conscious man feels this behaviour as a lack of punctuality and respect, so, like an animal in a cage, he paces back and forth between his wife's room, the front door and the lift in a state of annoyance at the appointed time. He knows that he cannot hurry the woman too much, because she would be angry, on the other hand, he cannot understand why he cannot be punctual at the time she indicates.

#### **6.4.11 DIVERSITY IN TASTES AND CHOICES**

The tastes and choices in the use of economic resources also differ considerably. Women like to use them to improve emotional, individual and family well-being by buying personal or household items: clothes, underwear, furniture, pictures, carpets; whereas men prefer electronic and mechanical items: a new television set, the latest type of DVD, a more powerful and gritty car or motorbike.

Unfortunately increased economic prosperity and advertising stimulates people to buy and use things that divide them rather than unite them.

### **6.5 THE INCREASED PRESENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS**

The personality and family experiences of the bride and groom are crucial for a successful marriage. For Albisetti, 'Personality is a very complex reality. It is the result of thousands of psychic processes, mostly related to childhood experiences and memories, guilt and feelings of inferiority'.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> ALBISETTI, V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Milano, p.38.

When the personality is altered, numerous pathologies manifest themselves, such as antisocial personality disorder, characteropathies, neuroses or worse, psychoses. Addictions to smoking, alcohol, drugs and gambling increase considerably. These pathologies are not only detrimental to the offspring, but often put the relationship in crisis or in serious difficulty.

As far as neuroses are concerned, the old and abandoned definition indicated neurotic persons as those who suffer a lot, but who also make others suffer a lot. This double inner and outer suffering is frequently found in subjects who complain of this type of inner conflict, which leads to a series of symptoms that not only disturb the person affected, but also alter relationships, especially deep inner relationships such as those of couples and families.

The person suffers because he or she is not at ease with him or herself; suffers because a mother's or father's love has never been had or has been had badly; suffers because he or she is troubled by anxiety, acute and intolerable feelings of col- pains or depression; suffers tortured by fears or worse, by obsessions.

There is hunger of the body but also hunger of the heart, i.e. of the affection. This kind of hunger concerns drug addicts, tramps, outcasts but also people leading an apparently 'normal' life.

No one can, in fact, give a son or daughter back the love or respect for his or her needs and requirements that he or she was denied during childhood. No one can give back an absent father or mother. No one give the acceptance and listening that they never had. The dissatisfaction in the couple's relationship is accentuated also because, in neurotic disorders, sexuality is often involved, which can take on pathological elements: impotence, frigidity, premature ejaculation, paraphilias. In addition, not being able to give what one has not had, the capacity for dialogue, care and tenderness are altered or diminished.

In turn, neurosis causes others to suffer because pathological experiences have a negative impact on the people with whom they come into contact. In particular, the relationship with people with whom they would like to establish an intimate, full and deep relationship is altered. These people, willingly or unwillingly, are affected by this suffering and also suffer.

How not to be caught up in the anxiety that, like a raging wind, stirs and upsets the souls of those around us? Anxiety that manifests itself in everyday life with unmotivated fears about a multitude of events and situations that leave healthy people asymmetrically indifferent?

How can one fail to be involved when melancholy, sadness, apathy and asthenia spread like a viscous, black river in an emotional relationship or, worse, in a family that needs light, warmth, joy and vivacity instead?

How can we not be involved when the aggressiveness, dysphoria, irritability and extreme mood variability present in individuals mental lability make dialogue interaction and relationships difficult, if not impossible?

Some neurotics do not feel good about themselves if they do not attack someone. They find their identity in aggression.<sup>(88)</sup> Aggression, wreaking havoc, using a polemical, exasperating, analytical tone about everything the other person says or does, serves to relieve and reduce the inner tension that is affected by past problems or shortcomings but has no relation to current reality, which is ultimately 'used' to achieve the above aim. Overwhelmed by aggression, which is sometimes only motivated by the slightest of motives, if not totally unjustified, it is difficult to be indifferent.

This type of behaviour cannot fail to provoke a negative reaction from the other, consisting of aggression, closure or estrangement. In this way, a conflictual relationship is established in which all means of defence and offence are used, with certainly not very constructive results. In any case, the peaceful relationship and dialogue are disrupted. The latter is often briefly interrupted. There is, however, the risk, should the exasperation become frequent and considerable, that the dialogue will be interrupted forever.

Also important self-esteem. If a person does not like himself, does not esteem himself, does not self-confidence, he cannot love and esteem others.

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<sup>88</sup> ALBISETTI, V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Milano, p.112.

All mental disorders make it difficult to relate and dialogue with others as well as with oneself, not least because they often accentuate needs, which become endless, difficult to understand and thus cannot be met in any way. In such cases, it is a constant complaining about what the other person gives or does not give; does, does not do, or the way in which the other person behaves.

Even if quarrelling does not mean not loving each other and even if, times, quarrelling is liberating, the continuation quarrelsome behaviour is, to be sure, indicative of a pathology in the relationship, but most often it is indicative of the pathology of one or both of the people in the relationship.

All psychological problems are on the increase in today's social environment, to considerable educational deficiencies and the failure to respect the physiology of children as they grow up. These psychological problems are especially on the increase in couples, as the family and social filter that should prevent people with psychological problems from bonding with others in the marital bond is missing when emotional unions formed.

This filter was present and acted when marriages, in whole or in part, were arranged, guided or otherwise controlled by parents or the social environment. The filter was the popular voice which, knowing the personality characteristics of young people, indicated who was capable of running a family and a relationship and who was not. Acting as a filter were the parents and relatives of the two young people, who, being held responsible for the success of the relationship and the characteristics of the children they proposed for marriage, were encouraged to select which of their children were capable of marrying and which were not suitable for taking this important step.

These two filters, the social filter and the family filter, are today totally absent, as it is young people who seek each other out, choose each other, decide whether or not to have sexual relations, but also what kind of union to establish between them: whether cohabitation, marriage or simple affectionate friendship.

It is sometimes hoped that life as a couple will cure immaturity or psychological disorders. This is true, but only partially. A good love relationship may improve a minor psychological problem, but it certainly does not eliminate or solve

it.

## **6.5 THE EXCESSIVE PRESENCE OF ILLUSIONS AND EXPECTATIONS**

Marriage and emotional relationships are the place where most people delude themselves, where most try to realise myths, beliefs and dreams that have nothing to do with reality.<sup>89</sup> Strangely enough, modern man, the man of the year two thousand, lives in reality but has his head in the clouds and lives in dreams and illusions much more than primitive man.

If expectations are realistic, what the partner or the marital relationship can give will seem valuable. If, on the other hand, these expectations are excessive or clearly illusory, it is easy for aggression, resentment and anger to arise, not only towards each other, but also towards the institution of marriage.

Unrealistic or totally illusory expectations can be numerous.

We list just a few of them:

- *Believing that perfect woman or man exists.*

The search for perfection in the partner is one of the first and most difficult illusions. If we are unhappy with the person next to us, we console ourselves with the thought that we have not yet found the right person or that we have only found the wrong person and,<sup>90</sup> therefore, it is right to continue searching for the ideal person. Certainly it would be nice to find, even at the end of the world, a perfect being. Unfortunately, we know that perfection, at least among human beings, does not exist, and that if we really want to look for it, we have to look upwards, to God.

- *Believing that things will remain the same.*

With time, people, all people, change, as a result of changes due age, good or bad experiences in life, changes in one's own role or that of others, illness, relationships relatives, work, etc. It is necessary, however, to expect change in the other person and not static change. It is necessary, however, to expect the other person to change and not to remain static. It is therefore important to prepare oneself for new situations by trying to adapt as far as possible. In this sense, it is most helpful to have access to the

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<sup>89</sup> ALBISETTI, V., *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Milan, 1994, p. 17.

<sup>90</sup> DACQUINO, G.,(1996), *Che cos'è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p.  
153.

I sing a person who knows how to adapt to change, rather than a person who is rigid and unable to mould.

- *Believing that the ideal partner exists.*

If there is no perfect man or woman, there should at least be the other half of the apple. A person with whom we can fully complete ourselves, who knows how to listen to us and understand us fully, so that all or almost all of our needs and the most basic needs of our soul are met.

This too, unfortunately, is a utopia. We have said that it is right to try to find another who has similar values, ideas, feelings, experiences, religion to our own. This makes life as a partner considerably easier than life with another with whom we only share a feeling of love. However, this does not mean that it is possible to meet someone who has the same thoughts and needs as we do; someone who sees reality through the same eyes as we do; who loves what we love and who approaches problems and events in the same way as we do.

Sexual differences already entail different ways of living and feeling reality. Then there is upbringing, which shapes and colours each one's view of life differently; and again, there are the many encounters and experiences that, for better or worse, leave deep marks or furrows in our souls and characterise us. Given these premises, it is easy to be disappointed when reality replaces the idealisation of the spouse figure.

The demand for the ideal partner today has been pushed beyond imagination and reality. People often want everything and the opposite of everything. One wants complete freedom in dressing, courting or being courted; one wants complete autonomy in the choice of place and city in which to work, but one then firmly believes that a self-respecting man and woman will be able to get through all deprivations, all temptations and relationships unscathed without ever betraying, without ever allowing themselves to fall in love or simple sexual encounters.

Many women want a man at their side who has and expresses all the masculine characteristics and, why not, also the feminine ones according to the needs of the moment. It is good for a man to be strong and decisive, confident and determined, straightforward and consistent, and also to assert himself as a true male, but, when appropriate, they want him to be tender and delicate,



sweet and accepting and discover her emotions and her feminine side like a real woman! Similarly, many men are happy to see that their woman is beautiful, takes care of her person and, above all, that she brings home a good salary with her work; the important thing is that she is also faithful, devoted, always present at home when and if necessary, ready to cook, wash, iron, always managing to take great care of the home, the partner and the children!

- *Believing that love is able to make people understand and accept everything.*

Another unrealistic illusion is that.... "since we are a close couple who love each other very much, the other cannot but always think as I do. The other will understand everything at once: every feeling, emotion and desire of mine, even if it is not expressed in a clear and obvious way"<sup>(91)</sup>.

The pink newspapers state, in fact, that 'if he/she loves you, he/she will understand everything you want to say to him/her, joyfully accepting everything you do and say. Because love is capable of overcoming every obstacle and barrier'.

Unfortunately, this is not the case. Even love has its limits. The other person is not always able to understand everything. Sometimes their difficulty in understanding depends on our limits in communication; in other cases they may not understand because their values or points of reference are different from ours or because anxiety, stress and excessive worries prevent them from doing so.

Moreover, the feeling of love, which we imagine to be always the same over time, like all feelings is never experienced with same characteristics and intensity. It physiologically undergoes frequent and considerable fluctuations that do not always depend on the will of the loved one who loves us. There are, therefore, moments of remarkable openness, willingness and acceptance in our souls, but there are also moments in which closedness, suspicion, and suspense prevail.

- *Believing that the other is always ready to fulfil every wish and meet every need.*

This too is an illusion. Every person has limits. The partner, if he is mature and if he loves us, will try to our needs.

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<sup>91</sup> ALBISETTI, V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Milano, p. 34.

fundamental principles, if they do not contrast much with his own, but it is indeed difficult, and perhaps we would not even like it, to meet a person who is always at our beck and call, always willing to please us in everything and on every occasion.

- *Believing that out of love for us the other can distort their character to the point of adapting themselves entirely to us.*<sup>92</sup>

When this kind of illusion is present, we dream and imagine another, who in time, or even better, immediately marriage, will lose his or her defects, or at least correct those behaviours that annoy us or that we do not accept, so that he or she will be as we want him or her to be. There are even many people who believe that they have the power, after marriage or partnership, to change the other person.

Reality shows us that when cohabitation or marriage is established, behaviour and attitudes that already annoy us are likely to worsen and multiply. The reason is simple: by living in an intimate and close relationship (the everyday life of living together), it will be easy many unpleasant behaviours to come to light that were not apparent during the engagement. While it is true that, through willpower, this adaptation, if not a real change, can partly take place, it is pointless to delude oneself about a radical change.

Behaviour is linked to experiences and experiences that date back to childhood or are even, at least in part, implanted in the genes as early as fertilisation, so it is illusory to think that they can change much, even with a lot of good will. The important thing would be to find a person who tries to adapt to us by eliminating or smoothing out just a few small elements of their that are unpleasant or unproductive for us in the relationship.

In short, it would be good to find a person who is elastic and mature enough to be able to do what the master masons did when they built those wonderful dry-stone walls found all over the world and of which Sicily is rich. They would choose, from the many stones available, the one that best matched the one they had already placed on the wall, but then, and this is the most important thing, they would move it, shift it, turn it, and so on.

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<sup>92</sup> ALBISETTI, V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Milano, p. 34.

They would hammer in all directions until they found the best possible fit, while respecting its shape and size. At the most, with a few blows of the hammer, they only smoothed out any protuberances that prevented a good fit.

Therefore, it is much more productive, with mutual respect, to use the other person's personality and ideas for a frank and positive confrontation, without deluding oneself to change him or her profoundly and without using his or her inevitable shortcomings to belittle or attack him or her.

- *Believing that in marriage one must negotiate, negotiate and bargain.*

Some people treat their partner as if he were a trader and the marriage relationship as if it were the delicatessen shop. They are willing to give to the other, only if he can reciprocate with goods of the same or equivalent value. "I'll go out with you if you let me buy the dress I like so much". "I will make love to you if you promise to take me to the theatre". "I'll go on a cruise with you if you come with me to Paris". Bartering, bargaining or worse, blackmail, so present and customary in the economic and service world, are not made for the affective-relational world. They are not made for love which, at its base, should have the pleasure of free gift. The pleasure of pleasing the other.

- *Believing that the other should make us happy.*

We already know that happiness is often an unattainable chimera. But even a simple state of well-being and joy is linked to numerous components that often have nothing to do with the people who are with us and share our lives. The state of wellbeing can depend on many factors: genetic make-up; the state of health or illness; what we received as children; the attention we were given. Furthermore, a state of wellbeing or ill-health is conditioned by the love with which we have been surrounded; the commitment and educational balance of our parents; the wealth or moral misery of the environment in which we have lived. A state of wellbeing depends on the encounters we have had in life and on how we have been able or have been able to deal with these encounters; on the teachers, adults and family members who, through their words, their behaviour and their presence, have built up within us a basis and a psycho- logical support that is serene or disturbed, rich or poor, open or closed. E'

this psychological support, which will be the foundation and pre-supposition of our well-being or malaise.

A state of well-being or discomfort also depends on the type of work we do and also on the greater or lesser stress we have to live with on a daily basis.

The goodness of the relationship with our wife or husband, the gratification that the other person gives us, the care, attention, physical and emotional caresses or, on the contrary, the coldness that the other person shows towards us, their aggressiveness, their irritability, their coldness, are certainly important but they are part of much more numerous and complex contexts present in our psycho- gical reality.

In the final analysis, the excessive and unjustifying blaming of the other for our discomfort is often neither right, fair nor helpful for family and couple life.

Unfortunately, it is often inner malaise that makes us long for a marriage will heal us and make us happy.

- *Believing that the wedding day will be the best day of our lives.*

There is, especially in the female soul, the anticipation of the highlight of one's life: the wedding day.

From childhood, little girls dream of it and wait for it. Around this fateful day are built desires and emotions made of joy, brightness, well-being, happiness, certainly greater than ever before. If, as sometimes happens, these expectations are not fulfilled, the disappointment is bitter. All it takes is an overcast sky, a sagging bodice, a train on which the page gets caught, a tasteless buffet, to bring down the bright castle built around the 'happiest day of one's life'.

- *Believing that sexuality and love are always connected to each other.*

The other expectation created by the romantic literature of the last centuries then states, quite categorically, that if you love him and he loves you, you will experience intense, warm, splendid sexuality, without any problems.

While it is true that attraction and mutual love positively influence sexuality, this does not mean that these two elements alone can make the complex reality full and satisfying.

of sexual life. Genetic components, psychological experiences as a child and, in addition, numerous organic factors as age, diseaseshormone pollution and somatic characteristics also play a role in sexual understanding. These and other components can limit or make sexual interaction problematic even for people who are very much in love.

- *Believing that with the beloved one we will always be two persons in one soul.*

Therefore, everything can be done, everything can be said, everything can be manoeuvred and asked for because it is like saying it, asking for it and manifesting it to oneself. This is true and is possible, but only in part. Both we and the partner have a personal sphere that has to be taken into account and respected. This personal sphere is wide in the relationship friends, it diminishes in the relationship with a couple, it diminishes again with marriage, but it does not disappear, nor does it cancel itself out.

If this personal sphere is too broad, there is the risk that the bonds of love are like thin threads that can snap at any moment; if, on the other hand, this personal sphere is too narrow and the relationship takes on fusional characteristics, the risk is that one will feel imprisoned by heavy bonds or have the feeling of losing oneself in the other.

Respecting a just personal sphere is important so that the partner can better experience the component he shares with us. Fighting it, trying to annul it, is counterproductive precisely to life as a couple.

- *Believing that the couple is sufficient for .*

Then there is the other illusion, also very widespread, which gives importance and value only to the couple. While the others: family members, relatives and friends have little or no value. "I married your son/daughter, not you, not my mother-in-law. I decided to live together with you, not with your friends".

While it is true that the couple forms a unity and that the others: parents, relatives and friends, must respect this unity, it is also true that this new reality is embedded in a family, friendship and affective network, which it cannot and must not disregard. The two families, but also his and her relatives and friends, should not be seen as an obstacle to the couple's life, but as a fundamental help and support to be nurtured and deeply respected.

## **6.7 THE NEW CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CLIMATE**

There are many social factors in today's society that condition couple and family life in a negative way.

**6.7.1 The reversibility of choices.**

**6.7.2 Parental example and family climate.**

**6.7.3 The differentiation between public and private spheres.**

**6.7.4 The privatisation of choices.**

**6.7.5 The quality and quantity of work.**

**6.7.6 The judgement and social value of marriage.**

**6.7.7 The current modest influence of religion.**

**6.7.8 Mistrust and disaffection between sexes.**

### ***67.1 The reversibility of choices.***

In Western societies, the reversibility of choices is valued positively, and thus as a social value, i.e. the freedom to go back on one's decision when it proves too binding for a subject who is wanted and thought of as absolutely free in his social relations. From this it follows that any behaviour, to be desired, must be revocable and therefore it must be possible to return to the starting situation:

Moreover, the social environment itself is absolutely oblivious to the consequences: why should two young people have to bind two families with moral obligations, on account of their love relationship, through engagement? It is far better to remain free in one's choices by presenting the person with whom one has embarked on a path of affection and often also of complete sessionality, as 'my boyfriend or girlfriend' or 'the person I am with' to family members and society. Why get married when there are other more easily reversible choices such as affectionate friendships or at most partnership? Why procreate and thus remain bound for decades to educational, care and nursing obligations? Far better not to have children and to live one's sexual or love life carefree.

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<sup>93</sup> PRANDINI, R., (1998), "La cultura dell'amore giovanile", in *La famiglia*, 187, January - February, p.7

### ***6.7.2 Parental example and family climate.***

The example of the parents and the family atmosphere in the home are important in the success or otherwise of a strong romantic relationship. The importance increases if a marriage relationship is established. And this for various reasons.

A family climate that is tense or disturbed by frequent and heavy conflicts is not the most suitable environment for the healthy growth of a child. Tension and aggression expressed in a more or less clear-cut manner by parents lead to frequent and often serious psychological symptoms of varying severity, which will inevitably affect the children's future emotional relationships, making them more fragile, more distracted and more disturbed.

On the other hand, negative examples are also models to which the child first and the young person and adult later instinctively conform: 'If my parents used to quarrel and attack each other, it is natural and normal that relations between spouses are characterised by mutual quarrels and aggression.

The third reason concerns help and support from parents in married life. This help and support is unlikely to be offered by parents who have conducted their lives in a conflictual manner. The suggestions and advice given to the young couple are much more likely to be destructive than constructive.

### ***6.7.3 The differentiation between public and private spheres.***

Our society tends to differentiate private spheres of action, such as love, friendship, family, and lifestyle choices, from public spheres of action, such as work, study, political participation, and church membership, creating absolutely separate norms and values that find it difficult to integrate with each other

This differentiation should serve to protect the individual's freedom from external interference. In reality, a community that does not give any ethical guidance in the sphere of private actions, but only deals with the consequences, is a poor and stunted community. For Donati, 'The tendency (on the part of society) to make a liberating rather than a sanctioning right prevail obviously has effect of further privatising the couple, which is acknowledged to be a poor and monolithic community.

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<sup>94</sup> PRANDINI R., La cultura dell'amore giovanile, in *La famiglia*, 187,

1998, p.7



scient and also incentivised to follow their own aspirations and desires.<sup>(95)</sup>

#### **6.7.4 The privatisation of choices.**

Privatisation of choices means that for society, all individual, couple and family choices are at the same level. Only limitation is whether or not one complies with laws and regulations. It is like saying: 'Behave as you want, make the choices you want, as long as you do not commit crimes and violations of the law'. Our society, in its various institutions, is directed by a cultural code that refuses to take a moral stance (this is socially good, this is socially bad) on decisions concerning the private life of the individual. It is as if to say: 'In public, make decisions according to the laws imposed by the majority; in private, behave as you like'

They are socially indifferent actions: to have or not to have pre-marital or mercenary relations; to opt for marriage or partnership; for affectionate friendship or free sex; for separation or divorce. As these actions are considered the private choices of consenting, adult individuals, one is fully justified in performing them. Ours is a society that judges it irrelevant and indifferent to take responsibility as a couple, to decide on marriage, to build a publicly legitimised family. Whether one marries or not is a matter of personal tastes and values:

Just as there are no moral dilemmas for everything that concerns the private sphere of the individual, society itself is increasingly intrusive with regard to the consequences of the same decisions.

Therefore, if two young people, even very young ones, have sexual relations with each other, it is of no importance to the state: 'their business', but if they want to get married or if the girl gets pregnant and wants an abortion, it is of no importance.

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<sup>95</sup> DONATI P., (1995), *La dinamica di coppia oggi: un approccio relazionale*, in *La famiglia*, 170, March-April, p.13

<sup>96</sup> DONATI P., (1995), *La dinamica di coppia oggi: un approccio relazionale*, in *La famiglia*, 170, March-April, p.13

<sup>97</sup> PRANDINI R., *La cultura dell'amore giovanile*, in *La famiglia*, 187, 1998, p.13

tire, then it must submit to the laws of the state and the services offered by the state.

It is difficult, however, to imagine an assembly of citizens that is indifferent to the personal damage that this type of behaviour can have on the future of these young people, but above all, it is difficult to accept that a state remains indifferent to the death of a future citizen.

If a young man or woman becomes involved with a married man or woman, it is of no social relevance, but if this behaviour leads to the break-up of a family with the consequent demands separation or divorce, then the state intervenes to regulate both. But are we sure that the damage caused to society by the break-up of a family is of no consequence to a community?

On the one , fathering children is not a socially accepted value, and on the other hand, the problem of birth shortage becomes a topic of public discussion due to the serious social consequences of this behaviour

Once again, some modern states have chosen to behave short-sightedly and schizophrenically with regard to the welfare of individuals, couples, and families.

### **6.7.5 quantity and quality of work.**

Among the many factors that hinder good intimacy and dialogue between a man and a woman today is quantity and quality of work.

Work commitments, like many other commitments, even those of notable social importance, can create an ecstatic emotional involvement: occupying our thoughts, taking up a large part of our energies, committing our will beyond acceptable limits. It is often the employer or society itself that demands and demands from us, not a part, but all or almost all of our commitment, our imagination, our interest.

These demands are not only seen as sacrosanct, but the worker who deals with and cares about

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<sup>98</sup> PRANDINI R., La cultura dell'amore giovanile, in *La famiglia*, 187, 1998, p.14

much of his family and marital duties. These duties or incom-  
bences are judged as 'ancillary' social needs!

We know, however, that there is a real risk of 'producing' only  
material well-being, while poverty and affective, relational,  
educational malaise invade individuals, groups and the community  
as a whole. Ultimately, therefore, the whole society becomes richer  
in material goods but poorer in values, joys and feelings.

The reaction of people heavily and ecstatically involved in  
intra- or extra-family work is quite well known. The individual  
lives, thinks, breathes, according to what he has done or the  
commitments and achievements he has in mind. He/she tends,  
therefore, to distance him/herself from spouse, children, friends or  
the most involving or empowering relationships.

He then tries to overcome this pressure, this psychological  
stress, by means of moments of compensation. These moments,  
however, are not experienced physiologically, but in an excessive  
and neurotic manner. For this reason, on the canonical days:  
Saturday, Sunday or night, the individual tries to make up or regain  
what he has lost and what he has absorbed in work or social  
activities, engaging either in absolute rest or in frenzied, useless or,  
worse still, druggy fun. All this has negative effects on  
relationships, which are experienced in a superficial or anxious  
manner. The person becomes impoverished. He tends to go into  
crisis, accusing not the person or thing that has taken away his  
energy, but others: husband, wife, friends, of not being able to  
understand him and connect with him.

For Albisetti, in fact, careerism, competition, personal  
ambition, the desire for possession and prestige have not advanced  
the understanding between people one iota, let alone help love  
relationships,<sup>99</sup> either because the stress of the enormous amount of  
energy used to reach a high position, or because of the quarrels with  
one's spouse, deprived of the dialogue and attention to which he or  
she is entitled.

A vicious circle is established that increasingly distances the  
individual himself, others and society. Particularly in the , which  
should be a meeting, a source of pleasure,

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<sup>99</sup> ALBISETTI, V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Mila-  
no, p181.

joy, warmth, overworked people will tend to bring, in a destructive and alienating clash, the tiredness, frustrations, debasement, thoughts and anxieties accumulated during the day.

Although men and women have always worked, it is type of work and its quality that make dialogue and deep communication difficult. How to have the right serenity to dialogue when the work is not managed by you but it manages you?

How can you have time for dialogue when your thoughts frequently turn to your employer, who has threatened to fire you if you do not perform well enough and are therefore forced to take your work home and finish it on time?

How can you have a peaceful dialogue with the love of your life when your boss makes it clear that you will not be able to advance your career if you do not accept his dinner invitations, or when you are not happy when he proposes to go with him on a trip to a conference on the other side of the country?

How can you have a peaceful dialogue when your thoughts turn to your colleagues who surround you with smiles and seemingly affectionate phrases, while under the table they are busy finding ways to debase you in the eyes of the boss or doing everything they can to get recommendations from powerful people in order to go over your head or take your hard-won position?

How do you live the relationship well when you are forced to fight against the competition, chased by appointments, meetings that go on into the night and sudden moves in Italy and abroad?

It is difficult to be a smiling husband or wife, a mother and father who is always available and at the same time competing in one's career. Always looking for the most rewarding social positions possible and higher and higher salaries.

It is therefore essential for the individual, but also for the civil community, to have a quality of work that is significantly different from that currently present in our society. We need a quality of work that is much more attentive to personal needs and the well-being of couples and families.

In the choice and conduct of work, we should absolutely avoid leaving the leftovers of our time and our lives for communion, meeting and exchange with the person we love.

our energies. Instead, we should carve out hours and days in our daily or weekly lives to devote to dialogue and emotional, loving and sexual exchange with serenity, availability and to the best of our ability.

#### ***6.7.6 The judgement and social value of marriage.***

The judgement and social value of marriage differ among different peoples, just as they differ over time.

Society can take a positive view of marriage and the family and work for its well-being. If this happens, it will certainly be glad when young people in the prime of their lives meet and embark on a path important future projects. It will be glad and will work tirelessly to help these young people to build a new family unit and will then endeavour to protect it with all the means at its disposal.

On the contrary, for societies conditioned by the world of business and services, the very image of two young people meeting and walking together with the intention of building a solid family may be judged as a misfortune and loss, since this type of society fears that those two people, at first completely dedicated to work, will be busy and distracted by the thousand family occupations. The social environment will then act to suggest that this meeting and walking together should be exploited as a pleasant diversion, whereas if the intention is more serious and responsible, if the two people want to form a stable family union, the risk is that they will be judged to be poor wretches who are incapable of realising how much trouble they are putting themselves and the companies they work for in.

#### ***6.7.7 The current modest influence of religion.***

Religion, in all ages and among all peoples, has always had a considerable influence on behaviour and attitudes concerning the family, marital union, and the use of sexuality. Unfortunately, at present, its influence on people's behaviour has diminished considerably as increasingly secularised states have marginalised it in the area of emotions and feelings. Religion therefore no longer holds together the various aspects and moments of life. Today it is one of many aspects of existence. It is considered

as closer to the emotional and sentimental aspects than as a light and beacon showing the way forward. Thus, in secularised societies, the disconnect between the feeling of love for the divinity and the daily practice of the teachings and norms that God has given to mankind becomes more and more pronounced.

### ***6.7.8 Mistrust and disaffection between the sexes.***

Each element of the couple should live in a cultural climate of trust, esteem, need, desire and lust for the other sex.

#### ***The female imaginary.***

The woman loves and is instinctively attracted to an intelligent, strong, serious, mature, responsible, protective, authoritative, self-confident, cheerful man, who gives her joy and security, trust and protection. It is of this man that she dreams, it is of this man that she is ready to fall in love.

But what happened to this man in your imagination?

Ever since the so-called 'women's liberation' began, ever since the cultural climate began to legislate and fight for 'gender equality', the image of the male has been systematically deteriorated and debased. How can one trust and dream of men if they are continually described as 'immature', 'bamboozled', 'mama's boys', 'unreliable' in caring for their women as well as their children, men who are increasingly frustrated and culturally, intellectually and sexually incapable?

How can one trust men when they are continually accused of the greatest evils? "Men have kept women enslaved for millennia by relegating them to the home, close to the cooker, the brats to care for, and the laundry to wash and iron. "Men, precisely because they tend to be violent, continue to attack and kill women who rebel against their domination: that is why women, rather than seeking them out, must associate and organise themselves to defend themselves against these violent rapists".

Violence, by the way, is seen almost exclusively in male guise. Is not women who need defend themselves against the authoritarian male through the Pink Phone? The same applies to sexual abuse and violence. Who rapes, who out, who makes indecent sexual advances, if not men? On the other hand, the sta-

tistics are there to prove it: almost all cases of violence or stu- pro reported to the judicial authorities come from women and not men.

Not to mention paedophilia. Who is the paedophile ogre if not a man who puts his filthy, adult, sick male hands on a small, innocent being?

As happens when one wants to accuse someone. The number and nefariousness of the enemy is easy to find and prove, and they become more and more vile and numerous with time.

In this game of slaughter, voices are rarely raised in defence of men, as these voices would have to question the whole house of cards created over the last century around this topic by feminists. Moreover, one would have to accept many now almost completely forgotten and erased realities regarding gender diversity.

What man, in fact, would go before a judge to cry and complain that his woman had perpetrated violence on him, both physically and morally? What man would feel like going to a hypothetical hotline to complain about violence perpetrated against him by his woman? He would immediately be disqualified as a male incapable of defending himself against a weak female. Yet we know that verbal and behavioural violence is much more present and frequent in women than in men.

Psychiatrists and psychoanalysts also know very well how verbal violence wounds or kills the soul of the victim as much as, and more than, physical violence. It is therefore not a question of greater male aggression and violence, but of different, albeit equally serious, ways of expressing and manifesting animosity and disrespect for others.

It also neglects to emphasise what we said in a previous chapter, namely men become all the more physically violent the more his relationship with women is conflictual and unrewarding, and the lower the consideration women, but also society as a whole, have for him.

Therefore, a vicious circle is triggered: the more women devalue and accuse men, the more violent they become, the more accusations are levelled at them, and so on.

As far as sexual harassment is concerned, no consideration is given to the fact that for millennia the sexual approach by both women and, above all, men, was and is effected through bodily contacts that ignite, if shared, the play of passion.

Therefore, if the greater male sexual desire leads men to accept approaches any woman without being shocked or protesting at all, the same is not true women. Moreover, even if men were to feel annoyed, irritated or offended by female approaches, none of them would be willing to give up their masculine dignity to go and accuse a woman of sexual harassment in court or to a hypothetical male defence association.

On the problem of paedophilia, we know from the field of psychology that the majority of boys are precisely those who have felt sexually disrespected in their lives by their mothers, sisters, aunts, family friends, who have behaved lewdly or provocatively towards them. We also know, however, that although these children and young people are willing to talk to psychologists and psychoanalysts about such behaviour, they are not at all willing to involve the police or court judges in the case of abuse.

### ***The male imaginary.***

As for men and their imagery, the way they see and relate to women is very varied.

However, even if in order to adhere to common cultural sense, accusations against women are made quietly, the word of mouth among young people has a very different meaning.

This word-of-mouth comes not only from what is directly observed with one's own eyes, but also from what others around them are eager to emphasise and demonstrate.

Examples and phrases are often intended to acquaint the young person entering life with female shortcomings or flaws. These people include fathersmale friends and acquaintances who have been burnt by a disastrous divorce or a turbulent and traumatic life together, but, strange to say, among the people who are ready to accept or point out the shortcomings of today's girls and women, there are also mothers and loving aunts. The latter, although from



young women had espoused the most radical feminism, when their child or grandchild has to make delicate choices such as marriage or a 'serious' commitment, they are the first to denounce the faults of their own sex in our historical period, with the same bitterness as the most hardened male chauvinist.

1. The first comments on a possible girl to marry are about her appearance: very often absolutely unkempt, sometimes too sexy and provocative. Both are not appreciated by men, just as they not appreciated by the mothers and aunts of young males, who would rightly like to see, in a woman to love and marry, a serene, clean, hidden, undiscovered beauty. A beauty enhanced by a dress that highlights the wearer's femininity and grace, without sending out provocative messages. In these comments, it is emphasised that the clothes worn by girls today are either so shapeless, dirty and wrinkled that they look more like dockworkers than graceful maidens, or they are clothes that excessively uncover the body, leaving little to the imagination.
2. Another notation concerns the lack of seriousness in behaviour. The man, but also man's parents and friends, expect the woman, in a game as old as time, to embark on a journey with him, in which sexual intimacy proceeds in small, gradual steps, together with the unfolding of a common life project. When they notice that the girls of today give themselves away too much and too easily, or when they observe with horror that it is even they themselves who make the first approaches, and that the young girls need a good evening to tell their 'stories with other men', they already have a sign ready for such women: **'Woman of easy virtue and perhaps a little stupid'**. Never marry women, it is better to marry them to others and then take advantage of their charms.
3. Also to be banned are women who provocatively display the attitudes of modern feminists, as this type of woman has the characteristic of immediately putting her hands on her role and tasks: 'Don't dream of me being a housewife. I have not studied ven-

years to be a scullery maid, a cook or a nanny". "Do not think of relegating me to this dull town of ours should work and study require you to go elsewhere. Nor would it occur to you that I might follow you, should your work take you far away. After so many sacrifices to graduate and specialise, I care about my work and do not want to be hindered by anyone. The friends, relatives and parents on the strutting torso of these women recommend putting a sign in plain sight saying: '**Rampant woman to stay away from**'. "If you ever marry one of them, besides loneliness in a dirty house, a lot of dishes to wash, floors to sweep, and bums to wipe await you. Better to leave them alone in the company of their work and the office they love so much!

4. Then there is the examination of women's qualities, or rather their skills, in matters that for men are essential for their own well-being and that of their future children. Every man would like to have a woman who is rich in domestic and maternal virtues, and who is willing to act as the emotional and material supporter of the family. Since many women, although willing to marry, need a good caterer or a quick microwave oven to prepare even a simple meal, since for many of them the sewing needle is an instrument of torture used by women of the past, and since they do not know how to start ironing a shirt, the young man is again advised to put a sign on these women saying "**Incapable woman**". "Your future will be made up of pre-cooked, dirty house, worn-out trousers and shirts without buttons. Better look elsewhere.
5. Then there is the '**Lament Woman**'. This type of woman, whatever her condition: no matter whether rich or poor, healthy or sick, beautiful or ugly, educated or uneducated, uses much of the time spent in her husband's company to complain about everything and everyone, especially those closest to her. She complains about her children, who are always ready to make a mess; about her employer's bullying or her friends and colleagues. But above all, the complaints are about boyfriends, husbands and men in general: 'You neglect me. You never take me dancing'. "You never remember my com-

ple year'. "You are a panto." "You don't make me feel the love you say you feel for me". "You talk to my friends and not to me, etc.". It is lovingly advised to avoid these types of women more than the plague, because with their victimisation, they are able to ruin even the brightest of days, just as they are able to make even the most appetising lunch indigestible.

6. Young males are also affectionately advised not to even consider '**the woman manager**'... who earns as much or more than you, who has two degrees and a few masters while you only have a diploma'. It is these women who, even before they put their feet on the ground in the morning, run you over by listing the thousand things they have to do during the day. Their paper notebooks, or even worse their electronic ones, are full of appointments and must-do commitments. Rushing from one engagement to the next, if you insist, they are willing to find 'space' for you between a business breakfast and a mee- ting. Their clothes and hair styled in a very professional and practical manner betray their status as 'career women'. These are clothes, by the way, that they are only willing to take off, but not to please, late in the evening, when they return from their latest endeavour. The child of these women (they often have only one child) is either willing to speed up as they do, cooperating fully in making every minute of the day productive, in which case they are also willing to take him or her to and from school, gym, friends, singing, guitar lessons, etc., or, if the child is lazy, they feel an urgent obligation to entrust him or her to someone who can look after him or her all day long: the husband, grandparents, babysitters or day care.
7. Then there is the '**muddy angel woman**'. This type of woman could and should have been pure and immaculate, but has lost those characteristics of brightness, purity and whiteness very early on. Given this current reality, the best attitude is to take advantage of what she is still able to offer to male lusts, such as a well-groomed and available body, but never to marry them.
8. Finally, there are '**women friends and confidants**'. Many of these are unwilling or unable to involve themselves ec-

in amorous and/or sexual relationships. The reasons are numerous. They often have very traumatic family experiences, are the children of divorced parents or of very conflict-ridden families. Some of them are stressed because of too many work commitments. Others are frightened or cold towards the male gender because of neurotic problems or because of their hormonal set-up. With all these women, it is better for the man to adapt to engaging in a relationship made up only of friendly, tender and chaste companionship without asking and without giving anything more.

### ***The consequences.***

The consequences of this type of information on male and female behaviour are considerable.

If, fortunately, there are still a good number of men and women who manage to escape old and new cultural stereotypes and thus manage to build, through marriage, solid and stable relationships based on trust, gift, fidelity and mutual understanding, the list of young people who find or find it hard to walk the high road, who get lost in dark alleys and become confused, grows longer.

#### **Female behaviour.**

Some women, for example, seek and hope that at least the men they choose are different from those whom their mothers, sisters and friends have married and whom feminists have described. They then begin love affairs with these men, with the hope that this initial bond will lead to marriage or at least to stable cohabitation, but, fearing negative responses to their needs and expectations from their men, they prefer not to talk about taboo subjects such as marriage or stable cohabitation. When these women, pressed by biological times, decide to do so, they realise that there is no intention to build a family on the other side.

Other girls, who are very numerous today, see career, work achievements friendships and social relationships as their primary gratifications. These women, although they do not rule out marriage or a stable union in the more or less distant future, should they meet, at the right time and in the right place, a very special man who accepts all their rules and needs,

However, they are willing to sacrifice little or nothing: neither a job, nor a career advancement, nor a promotion, nor a well-established routine of work, study, lectures, travel, balls, dance evenings, wellness centres, etc.

A minority of women, which is also growing in number, establish from the outset uncommitted relationships ranging from pure sexual release, to open partnerships, special friendships and temporary cohabitation, in order to emphasise that they do not seek and do not want to be involved in a serious, stable relationship with a clear and well-defined plan. These women are content with very fleeting and brief relationships. Relationships that may begin after a night out at the disco or after a dinner with friends and then end as early as the following evening or morning.

### **Male behaviour.**

As far as men are concerned, the range of attitudes and behaviour is also very diverse.

Meanwhile, there are young men in whom the image of the female martyr to male abuse predominates. These men, also in order to make amends for the 'slave' behaviour of their parents, try hard to have a relationship that is as close as possible to female demands. They are willing to cook, sweep, clean the house, look after children, in order to please their women. They are as cheerful and witty as women want men to be today. They give them maximum freedom. They never ask for anything. They never fight them, for fear of being accused of over- faction and violence. But this behaviour and attitude is not always adequately rewarded. Many of these men suffer from the multiple accusations that, despite their great di- sponibility, are levelled at them. Some, even worse, find themselves crying after being betrayed by their wives with men very different from them: rough, aggressive, insensitive, violent and unfaithful. And they wonder where they went wrong.

There are also a good number of men who try to adapt to the inevitability of change, even though they do not believe in it, driven by the media, churchmen, feminists and sociologists. These, in order to find a viable and practical solution, like good tightrope walkers, juggle a thousand demands and endless difficulties. Sometimes they succeed, with enormous efforts and immense effort, in carrying out a discrete family project, at other times,

despite all efforts, they too are forced to succumb to insurmountable difficulties, lengthening the already long list of couples and families that fall apart and break up.

Unfortunately, the number of men in whom the image of a woman as a being to be feared, as a source of trouble - legal, moral, economic, relational - is on the increase. These men try to have the least impeachable relationship possible with the female gender. Out of their mouths will never come, I do not say a promise of eternal love, but not even a request for cohabitation or a weekend together. A coffee, a movie, a pizza with friends is the most they are willing to give up. These same men, in order to avoid their partners waking up one day and asking them to marry them, prefer to only have relationships with women who are already married, but faithful to the institution of marriage and children, so as to be safe from inappropriate demands.

Not to mention those men who, convinced that there are few women worth marrying, devote their days and nights to the healthy and exciting sport of hunting while waiting to find one meets the minimum requirements for marriage. These men, mostly young, but now also quite elderly, take all the precautions they can to hunt and shoot female game, using the advice of trusted friends already involved in the sport. Since they want to have the same relationship with women as between a hunter and his prey, they soon learn to recognise the places where they are most numerous and easy to catch: squares, pubs, friends' parties, discos, cruise ships. These men of all ages know all about the most effective hunting tools: a very powerful motorbike with the latest accessories, a sports car combined with a special outfit, a few joints and a lot of alcohol to break down the last defences and, finally, a well-stocked wallet that allows them to give many gifts.

Unfortunately, these hunters soon realise that hunting is no longer as exciting as it was. Often the victim is not only compliant and goes along with the hunter, but is also a lover of the same sport! In spite of this, the indoctrinated youngsters, because hunting is always open, seem to have the sole purpose of life to bag as much prey as possible. They are capable of loving relationships.

They have sex with half a dozen women at the same time, and only when time and strength do not permit it, they 'dump' or 'dump' one of them to be replaced by another. They move from one woman to another, like butterflies on the flowers of a meadow in spring, without ever going beyond a superficial relationship of play, sex, fun and pleasure. They therefore feel no guilt whatsoever if, next to the girl with they 'are' at that moment, there is also their best friend. Nor do they have any qualms about going out with Giovanna one day and with her sister Luisa the next, while the next day is devoted to the mother of the girl they have just left. Some manage to do even better!

*Still ringing in my ears and in my heart is the dramatic tale of an 18-year-old girl who had been 'with' a young man for three years. The young man, while before, as young people do nowadays, insisted on staying with her until the morning at weekends, one fine day he asked her to come home early because he had to study every now and then.*

*A few days later he renewed his request to return home early ... 'because tomorrow I have to help my father with his work', and then finally systematically refused to return at dawn, as his parents no longer wanted him to return at such a late hour and had therefore given him an unbreakable time: at 10.30 p.m. he had to be back home.*

*While she initially viewed these serious and responsible behaviour with pleasure, she later began to doubt the young man's sudden willingness to study and work, just as she began to doubt his honesty and integrity. The change had been too rapid, too many days in which he 'sacrificed' his nights to study or to rest, obeying his parents' instructions.*

*The doubt that there was another girl or girls became nagging. Observing the group of friends with whom they were usually hanging out, he found nothing suspicious except in the attitude of his younger sister, who joked too much and too confidentially with the bold young man. The worm of jealousy began to gnaw even more painfully at her heart. On the one hand he refused to believe this atrocious suspicion, on the other he became more and more convinced of it.*

*She confided in her mother, who, calling her a 'jealous madwoman', reassured her one hundred per cent that her sister and the young man were correct and tried to persuade her that they would never do such a thing. The girl, however, unconvinced, continued the search for evidence, until, from her sister's mobile phone, which was full of love messages, she was certain of the horrible double betrayal: of her sister and her boyfriend. However, it did not take long to obtain a full confession of the crime from both of them. In fact, the sister, with the probable aim of distancing her competitor from the young man as much as possible, began to describe 'their affair', without omitting even the most intimate details: from the love that had blossomed six months earlier between her and her future brother-in-law, to the sexual relations they had had and the fact that he would accompany his sister home at 10.30 a.m. and then go out with her immediately afterwards to stay out until the early hours.*

Even the young man, when cornered, admitted his faults, as he considered his relationship with his sister to be unimportant and characterised only by physical attraction, whereas the best and highest feelings of love were devoted to her alone. After a few weeks, as his resentment towards his ex-boyfriend, his sister, but also towards his accommodating mother had become so intense that it disrupted every moment of his life, he decided to leave for the farthest possible place, never to return to his town, his family and his home. She thought she would never again be able to live in a house and a town next to people who had so blatantly betrayed her, and that she would never again be able to look into the eyes of her sister, with whom she had enjoyed a loving relationship for years, knowing what she had done and was doing with the person she loved most.

## **Understanding in the couple**

In order to establish a good understanding as a couple, various



measures are necessary:

A good balance of the three components of the couple.

A careful choice of partner.

## 7.1 CHOOSING A PARTNER

The choice of the person to love and with whom to share one's life is fundamental. The motivations that lead two young people to choose each other for a love journey together are the most varied.

- Meanwhile, the choice can fall on the person one likes. A person is liked if he or she arouses positive feelings or is associated with pleasant and agreeable feelings and emotions. If we like a certain person, we will like that person. Conversely, dislike is the result of negative feelings aroused by or simply associated with the other person. Since every relationship is a mixture of positive and negative feelings, if positive feelings prevail we will like that person; if negative feelings prevail we will dislike that person.<sup>100</sup>
- The choice may fall on the person with whom one is in love, or on a person from the same environment in which one lives,<sup>101</sup> or who has a social class that offers more security, stability or prestige.
- One can also choose a person who corresponds to one's sexual, affective, dialogue and relationship needs, or one can choose a person who is close or similar to one's character, morals, goals and values. Homogeneity in the way of thinking, living, dreams and aspirations is one of the springs that lead to choice. For example: John chooses Luisa because he perceives in her, albeit confusedly, the same values that dwell in his own soul, in her he perceives si-

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<sup>100</sup> BYRNE, D. E. - MURNEN, S. K., (2002), "The maintenance of the love relationship", in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.329

<sup>101</sup> Six times out of ten people get married to a person from the same municipality, while three times out of ten people get married to a person from the same province.

billion, equal aspirations and interests. She feels that she also has the same goals in life.

- But, strangely enough, the choice can be made for an opposite need. One can choose a person with complementary characteristics.

*Maria, a shy, closed, complexed woman, who had difficulty looking others in the eye and who had spent her life in books, never leaving the house except with her parents and a trusted friend, chose Francesco, a bold, brilliant, very sociable young man who loved the social life. In other words, she chose a man moved in the world, lived, loved and was active, as she would have liked but had never been able to do because of her shyness and complexes. She sought and innovated, therefore, because of a need complementary to her own. Sometimes, this type of choice can bring a good reward; at other times, as in the case of Maria, the choice was not a happy one because, after the brief phase of falling in love, the couple began to criticise each other bitterly, blaming the other for the very characteristics according to which they had first made their choice.*

- If, on the other hand, the mother, father or grandmother who brought us up or the sibling with whom we quarrelled as children awaken hateful feelings in us, the choice can fall on someone who does not resemble them at all. One chooses someone with a hair colour, physical features, smell or attitude that does not at all resemble those of the hated person who made us suffer or humiliated us.
- At other times, one looks for a companion or partner who can mitigate our anxiety. One then looks for a man or woman who can be a potential cure to our psychic ills.
- The choice can also fall on someone who is connected, even by seemingly insignificant details, to childhood memories: the much-loved mother or father. The older brother or sister or another relative one wanted to imitate and admired so much as a child.

*Marta fell in love with Emilio, who reminded her of a very kind and caring child who lived on her floor, with whom she had played for a long time in her childhood and to whom she was secretly very attracted, so much so that she cried when her parents moved to another town and she could no longer meet him.*

*Salvatore, a young mechanic, chose Daniela, because the way she spoke and behaved reminded him of his aunt Maria, who lived next door to his house and was always ready to welcome him and console him when he was harshly reprimanded by his parents and he would weep in her firm arms, while he smelled in her skin a good smell of welcome, listening and comfort.*

In some cases, the choice made eludes even a careful and rational examination of the qualities of the other and may arise from the most varied irrational motivations. These are sometimes very confused and contradictory motivations.

From a reproductive point of view, for Buss, in order to be able to seduce a good partner, it is necessary to manifest certain qualities coveted by members of the opposite sex, and thus the first aim is to signal one's gifts and resources through acts of love.<sup>102</sup> Also from a reproductive point of view, for Buss, those who aspire to be loved signal what the other does not have, especially as a dowry attributed to their own sex, but which they wish to have. Since women's procreative capacities are more limited than men's, they will have to choose a partner capable of investing all their resources in procreation. Women will therefore prefer males who give signals in this sense: physical prowess, money, wealth, ingenuity. Males, on the other hand, will seek out fertile women, who will become a resource of what they lack and will therefore seek out women who may have valid reproductive capacities. Beautiful, young, healthy women will be preferred, with soft skin that indicates good health.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> BUSS, D. M. (2002), 'The Acts Love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M., ed, *La psicologia dell'amore*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.121.

<sup>103</sup> BUSS, D. M. (2002), 'The Acts Love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed, *The Psychology of Love*, Bompiani, Bologna, p.124.

The more rapid the choice, as in the so-called lightning strike, the less chance there is of making a reasoned choice.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, it cannot be considered a real choice.

It should also not be forgotten that love, but above all in-  
namation, accentuates affinities, as the other tries to be and show  
himself or herself in our eyes as we would like him or her to be. At  
the same time, it may happen that we see in him or her  
characteristics that sometimes do not exist at all, which we  
consciously or unconsciously seek out and would like him or her to  
possess. Finally, it should not be underestimated that the elements  
that have a certain importance at the beginning of the relationship  
are not the same as those that play out after a few years or only after  
a few months.

### ***HOW TO CHOOSE A PARTNER***

In recent decades, interest and thus also the subsequent  
decision in the choice have increasingly focused on sentimental and  
aesthetic contributions, neglecting the rest. We know, however, that  
it is very risky and limiting for the stability, happiness and future of  
the couple and the family to make only or predominantly an  
assessment of the feelings involved or to evaluate only the physical  
appearance: "What beautiful green eyes he has. "What beautiful  
legs!" "What powerful muscles!" "How he loves me!"

The evaluation should be made on all parameters as it is the  
whole person we want to marry. It is with the whole person we  
want to live with, if possible for life, and not only with his or her  
body or ours and his or her feelings at that moment.

A choice made with only the aesthetic and sentimental  
elements in mind is undoubtedly a very risky choice, as it is as if we  
were buying a house to live in and perhaps live in forever, and our  
attention were focused almost exclusively on its aesthetic beauty  
and the feelings it arouses in us, neglecting other important  
elements such as the quality and solidity of the building and its  
suitability for our and our children's living needs. Such behaviour  
would be judged as at least reckless and superficial.

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<sup>104</sup> MUCCHIELLI, R. (1993), *Psicologia della vita coniugale*, Città  
Nuova Editrice, Rome, p 60.

For these reasons, the affective potential, i.e. the desire to love of many people, especially young people, can be badly invested or wasted when the qualities that are fundamental to a rich and solid couple's life and a serene family ménage are neglected.

The explanation for this juvenile behaviour is well known: in our western society, following the explosion of sentimentality in the last half of the last century, the most important elements in a relationship are considered to be aesthetics, sentimentality and passion, while everything else is neglected. On the contrary, it is unpleasant and out of place to talk about the other components of the partner, because in a relationship between two people it is enough to like and love each other. Everything else is just a frame that, if it can sometimes be useful, very often can disturb the loving feeling.

Emphasis is hardly placed on personality characteristics: resilient or rigid, serene or anxious, patient or easily irritable, joyful or sad. And again: gentle or aggressive, open or closed, active or apathetic, helpful or touchy, sincere or a liar, fair or unstable, mature or immature, helpful or arrogant.

Increasingly, fundamental qualities for a future family and couple life such as the capacity for sacrifice, commitment and self-giving are valued.

Nor is the presence or absence of a serious and responsible or unwillingness to give, sacrifice and care taken into account.

One does not properly appreciate and evaluate in the person one meets and with whom one wishes to exchange feelings of love, the presence or absence of psychological disorders with consequent signs of immaturity, neurosis or worse psychosis. And one does not ask how much and how these psychological disorders influence his life, his thoughts, his choices, his goals.

While it is true that the presence of psychological disorders not always result in a fracture of the union, so that sometimes the neurosis of one is compensated for by the neurosis of the other, it is equally true that the presence of an evident psychological disorder in even just one of the couple's elements almost always results in educational damage to the offspring. The possibility of such damage should by no means be underestimated when choosing a life partner. Just as one should not underestimate all addictions: drug use, alcohol abuse, gambling, etc., when choosing a life partner.

Another fundamental background that should be assessed when choosing a partner concerns values. How many and which religious, human and civic values does he or she carry in his or her soul and mind? And if he brings values, in what order do they stand and how much do they influence his life? Which ones are the most important? Which ones does he put in first place? Does he put success, money, beauty, the pleasure of conquest first or does he put family, caring skills love for the education of children, commitment to others?

As far as experiences are concerned, what experiences have marked you? Are they disappointing, frustrating, impoverishing experiences, or are they enriching, formative and positive?

Proper attention should also be paid to gender identity and gender role. Do you have a rich or poor, clear or confused, full or limited sexual identity?

And again: does he have an educational and cultural background that makes him capable of care, attention, tenderness, and willingness to meet, or does he have a predominantly technical-professional background that is incapable of listening and welcoming?

Finally, the characteristics of the family, friendship and social network in which the young man or girl is embedded are crucial. Is your family network rich or poor? Is it healthy or sick? Does his or her friendship network serve the purpose of helping, supporting and guiding couples and individuals, or does it only have a recreational function? Do you hang out with a group of friends with whom you only have fun and spend pleasant evenings, or do you spend your free time with young people with whom you can deal with committed and important topics, capable of stimulating the maturity of your behaviour, capable of opening up important new horizons in your soul and mind?

While poets and writers extol romantic love, most scholars agree that the vitality of a relationship depends only to a small extent on the initial feelings. Whether a relationship will withstand the years, endure over time, be fruitful in positive emotions, joy and mutual satisfaction, is not so much a matter of passion or, worse still, of falling in love in the initial phase of the relationship, but of all those other elements of personhood and familiarity that are often overlooked today and which we have discussed above.

It is clear from what we have said that, for a marriage to succeed, the main actors are the two young people who experience love or decide to love each other and build a new family unit together, but the secondary actors, equally important, are many others. First of all, his and her parents, and then their relatives, friends, and again the religious and civil authorities, and finally the entire human community where the couple lives and is permanently embedded. Each of these can make a considerable contribution, either positive or negative.

### ***The correct balance of the three components love***

The conditions for the three components of love to be in good balance and harmoniously present a healthy relationship are different.

1. *The first condition is the personality characteristics of the people concerned.* When a young man meets a girl, in a dance hall, in a school or university classroom or on a tram, as they make eye contact, touch hands, exchange the first lines of a dialogue that will be more or less long, more or less profound, each of the two brings with him many fundamental elements that will characterise the style of that couple and, in some way, condition the future course of that meeting. Each of the two young people, sometimes without it, begins to exchange and share with the other their inner world, which is extremely varied and rich. It is a world made up of a specific and unique genetic heritage, just as specific and unique are the experiences of affection, dialogue, relationships and sexuality, memories and experiences that can be pleasant or unpleasant, gratifying or frustrating, enriching or impoverishing, exciting or inhibiting. Each of the two young people brings to this meeting his or her own healthy psychological balance or inner conflicts and thus his or her more or less slight or serious neuroses, needs, melancholies and anxieties dreams and aspirations. It bears the traces left behind by the positive or negative



relationships it has established with its children.

fundamental factors in the formation of the human personality: his parents, brothers, sisters, family members, friends, past loves and passions. He is the bearer of a specific social status. Child of professional, worker, employee. Child of separated, divorced, cohabiting. Only child; first-born or last child of a large family. Child of parents who stayed together in life or of separated parents. Child of parents who lived their relationship with love and mutual dedication or child of parents who clashed violently for years. Child of parents who were responsible or irresponsible, attentive or superficial, rich or poor in spiritual goods. Child of parents capable of passing on mature values and experiences, or child of parents too busy having fun, too dedicated to their career, too busy climbing over their colleagues in the secret hope of being and staying ahead in politics, business or the profession.

2. *Contributions of an organic nature are not insignificant:*  
diseases, hereditary defects, disabilities.
3. *Then there are the feelings that everyone brings to this meeting:* friendship, passion, love, falling in love.
4. *Finally, there are the contributions of an aesthetic nature.* Everyone brings their own body: beautiful or ugly; pleasing or unattractive; stimulating or dull.

## **THE CONTRIBUTIONS**

### ***The contributions of the couple.***

#### *The quality and quantity of the targets.*

As far as the couple is concerned, the pre-marital journey may have, from the outset, a precise goal for which they have been prepared, trained and formed, or the goal may be the journey itself. There may be a path with the objective of forming a firm, strong and stable family, or there may be objectives.

much more reduced: such as that of enjoying, as far as possible, the pleasures and joys of love or falling in love without foreseeing any particular outcome. For Nicolais, only in about 50% of the couples examined does falling in love turn into love, but only in 7% is this love experienced in terms of planning.<sup>105</sup>

### *The ways in which the goal was reached.*

Equally important for the success of a marriage are the ways in which one arrives at the goal. One can arrive full of hope, enthusiasm and joy, or this goal can be reached by inertia, spiritually and affectively impoverished, after having squandered the best energies of youth on many other commitments and occupations.

### *Mutual help and support.*

It is also important how the road to marriage was travelled. Whether hand in hand, helping and supporting each other, encouraging each other and gaining more skills and maturity, or whether this premarital period was used for easy sexual and sentimental games, or worse, was used to enjoy the pleasure of doing or hurting each other, to humiliate or undercut each other by questioning their qualities and abilities.

### *The meetings we had.*

The success of a marriage also depends on what encounters took place along the way. Were they encounters that helped the two to get to know each other better? Were they encounters that encouraged them on their way? Were they encounters that filled their hearts with new energy and enthusiasm? Or were they encounters that pushed them to squander their deepest feelings, their most beautiful dreams, distracting them from important goals, impoverishing, confusing and emptying them of their best energies?

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<sup>105</sup> NICOLAIS, M., (2000), Falling in love and love, in *Mother*, March, p.49.

## *Motivations.*

Also important are the motivations for young people to take this step. One can marry to love and care for others, to build a family, for the joy of bringing up new human beings, but one can also marry for many other reasons: to make up for the consequences of a lack of responsibility in the use of sexuality; to escape from a family perceived as oppressive; out of boredom; because the calendar pushes one to take this step; because everyone is; of interest or convenience; out of fear of loneliness, or only out of physical attraction. Even worse, being together can be a way of not feeling different or impaired in relationships with relatives and the group of friends.

## *Experiences.*

The success of a marriage also depends on how this institution is fantasised and experienced. If marriage is seen as a goal and a definitive arrangement whereby, after the sumptuous ceremony, the two will undoubtedly 'live happily ever after' for the rest of their lives, the disappointment cannot but be bitter as, already, the first difficulties and quarrels will be felt with dismay, depression and anguish. If, on the other hand, the marriage is seen as a first goal, a first stage projected into the future, the commitment of one's energies, at the moment when the first quarrels appear, will be spent not in weeping and despair but in learning and learning.

Learning the best way to understand the other person and their needs. Learning the best way to meet them or the best way to accept them. It will then be like an expected and predictable challenge to be faced and overcome, without constantly fantasising about a better, more suitable, more accommodating spouse, with fewer demands, with more qualities.<sup>106</sup>

Marriage being a fundamental function of acts of love, each member of the couple has a duty to make available what is needed for this purpose.

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<sup>106</sup> ALBISETTI, V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Milano, p.67.

### ***The contributions of women.***

In particular, the woman in marriage should make available the specific characteristics associated with her femininity:<sup>107</sup>

- her reproductive functions;
- the ability to protect and care for children, husband and other family members;
- her qualities of gentleness, tenderness, warmth, empathy, welcoming, dialogue and listening;
- her specific educational capacities, which will be expressed above all in developing the world of feelings, emotions, affections and relationships in her children;
- special skills in the management of the affective-relational world both within and outside the family, with the aim of including each family member in the wider system of parental, affective and friendship networks.

### ***Man's contributions.***

The man, in marriage, should also make available the characteristics associated with his masculinity:

- his reproductive functions;
- protection, care, help, economic and psychological support for his wife but also for his children, so as to create a climate of serenity, security, tenderness and warmth in the mother and the family;
- his ability to manage the household;
- his talents in developing and maturing in his children, through education, the necessary skills of drive, dynamism, initiative, determination and autonomy;
- his innate skills in social, economic and service management
- skills to develop children's willingness and commitment to the family and society; observance of rules, laws and the rules of coexistence; the development and enhancement of social autonomy; the control of emotionality and affectivity.

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<sup>107</sup> TRIBULATO, E., (2008), *Mondo affettivo e Mondo economico*, Centro Studi Logos, Messina, p.81.

### ***7.3.4 The contributions of the family, affective and friendship network.***

Numerous and no less important are the contributions of the family, affective and friendship network.

#### **7.3.4.1 Contributions of an economic nature.**

While the parents should provide a dowry for the children, the relatives and friends of the couple should contribute their gifts to the construction of the new family. The contribution of these figures, no matter how large or small, is important, as it enables the couple to face the future with greater financial security.

It was very nice what used to happen, and perhaps still happens, in small rural and mountain communities where, when a new couple was formed, the whole community participated in the material construction of the house where the future spouses would live. Many members of the small urban society provided what they had and what they could. There were also those who offered their time and skills as bricklayers, painters, carpenters or electricians free of charge. Just as there were those who offered lime and bricks. The community as a whole worked to give the newlyweds the most precious and indispensable gift on their wedding day: a house; a symbol of commitment, help and acceptance of the family that was about to be born.

#### **7.3.4.2 Contributions of an affective nature.**

The dialogue, the support, the comfort, the possibility to vent, the special attention that parents, relatives and friends offer to the newlyweds, should be aimed at better anxiety control, support and encouragement indispensable in moments of crisis.

#### **7.3.4.3 Contributions of an educational nature.**

Fundamental is the way in which the two families brought up their children.

Did the two families prepare the children to take on the important new roles of husband and wife, father or mother, or did they only think about their professional future? Did the parents of the bride and groom value this important step op-

even belittled him or her in their eyes, selfishly thinking that they would lose something or a part of daughter or son he or she went to the altar? Did the family members facilitate, help and support the couple in their difficulties and perplexities, or did they leave them alone, or worse, did they work to divide and not to unite, with the intention of taking back the son or daughter they considered lost?

If training in the life of a couple and the assumption of the roles of husband and wife, father and mother is carried out early, carefully, steadily and effectively from childhood, and then continues gradually, with appropriate adjustments, during adolescence and youth, the results will be clearly better and more valid than when, on the other hand, training is not carried out or is carried out sporadically and inconsistently, at a late stage in the individual's life. As Albisetti states: 'Believing that a good marriage does not require effort, that it is easy, or it happens by a miracle, by luck, for free, is a great illusion, it does not belong to reality'.<sup>108</sup> How, then, are we judge those societies and states that not only fail to help couples and families in this fundamental educational work, but also allow, through the mass media, both public and private, images and content to be sent into every home that not only have no educational value, but also convey highly uneducational content and examples on the most delicate aspects sentimental, sexual and family life?

To drive a car or motorbike in city or ex-urban traffic, a driving licence is required, which is obtained after long and demanding studies, tests and examinations. The same applies to trades and professions Unfortunately, when it comes to the role of man or woman, of husband or wife, of father or mother, of newcomer or son-in-law, of aunt or uncle, of grandfather or grandmother, not only is there no specific course, but there are also no valid and consistent teachings and examples.

In recent decades, on the contrary, there seems to be a race to downplay the importance of specific education. Why educate women to know how to tidy the house, sew, cook, care for children and spouse,

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<sup>108</sup> ALBISETTI, V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Milano, 1994, p.44.

manage the family network? There is a risk of turning them into cooks, domestic helpers, baby-sitters, if not into slaves devoted to the needs and cares of children and boys. Why educate men to take responsibility as heads of families, as the ones primarily responsible for economic well-being and educational and social direction? There is the risk of perpetuating an antiquated authoritarian attitude among men, which is incompatible with the women's liberation movements, the new family law and the new roles within the family.

Yet a specific education is essential. The harmony, understanding and joy, if not the happiness of entire generations, is at stake, as the conflict between spouses does not stop with them but extends to their children, their families of origin and the social environment as a whole.

Every marital disharmony burdens society with considerable negative consequences. Society, like an enclosed lake, can be supplied by sources of pure, crystal-clear water that make the habitat healthy and clean for the benefit of all its inhabitants. On the other hand, it can be supplied, as unfortunately often happens today, with putrid, foul-smelling water that pollutes and muddies the waters, making the lake environment dangerous and unlivable for all the living creatures it contains.

Education on sex roles, love, couple and family life is, therefore, essential. Love also needs good teachers, good curricula, good apprenticeships as well as many positive examples.

If, as in all other areas of education, the best teachers are the parents, they must necessarily both be there; they must be willing to take on this difficult task; they must be able to carry out this type of education and, finally, they must be able to and know how to activate themselves in the best possible way.

We have said that both must be present because, in childhood, adolescence and youth, the father and mother must give their children specific knowledge and educational input. According to Di Pietro, 'The presence of the dual parental figure is necessary not only in the early stages of life but also throughout the course of development ...'<sup>(109)</sup>.

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<sup>109</sup> DI PIETRO, M. L., (1994), 'Educating for sexual difference in the family', in *La famiglia*, 164, year 28, March - April, pp. 46.



A daughter should learn from her mother how to be a woman and a wife. A mother must be able to make her daughter understand what a man is, what his needs are, what his possibilities and potentialities are, but also what his limits are. Similarly, a father must be able to educate his son to prepare him for future roles, so that he knows how to relate to his wife and newborns.

There are educational elements that are indispensable to couple and family life. When these elements have been effectively developed, the chances of living well in both conditions increase considerably. Conversely, when education is not geared to a harmonious and balanced relationship with the partner, but is aimed at the achievement of individuality, freedom and autonomy, the sacrifices and renunciations in partnership and family life appear insurmountable.

Unfortunately, in the field of education, not only - as Dacquino says - the 40-year-old generation does not have time or is not capable of educating their children, as they are too busy with careers, work and leisure activities <sup>110</sup>, but the and disaffection between the two sexes, which have increased enormously in recent decades, send misleading messages, both in words and in deeds. They are messages contempt, bitterness and aggression towards the opposite sex and consequently also towards the maternal, paternal and parental roles.

Moreover, today's parents, who are increasingly struggling with old and new loves, often let their children share in their emotional travails and disappointments, establishing relationships of friendship and trust with minors that have nothing to do with the guiding and supporting functions that should be the prerogative of parenthood. Very often, the roles are reversed and therefore it should be the children who advise, guide and support their parents and not vice versa. This is obviously impossible and regrettable, because it is detrimental.

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<sup>110</sup> DACQUINO, G.,(1996), *Che cos'è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p.55.

## *Qualities that must be educated and developed*

The qualities that need to be educated and developed are numerous.

- *Inner serenity, maturity and responsibility.*

A correct education should aim at forming serene, mature and reliable young people. If, on the other hand, the objective of education, as is the case in the Western world, is only the happiness of the children at a given time, parents, in their efforts to eliminate the emotional and relational pain inherent in every process of growth and transformation, in an attempt to have children who are always happy, are likely to bring up considerably immature and fragile children.

Lacking in permissive education are those little frustrations that serve learn and accept the limits that life together, and even more so family life, makes indispensable. Limits that are among other things necessary for the child to help him build and maintain his own identity, preventing him from losing his sense of self. In the Western world sick of too much: too many images, too much noise, too many things,<sup>111</sup> the young generations, educated in a permissive way, are therefore sick of material well-being.

these young people are overprotected by other adults and educators and over-gratified with too many toys and too much money,<sup>112</sup> they are often deprived by their parents, who are always busy with work and the many ludical, social and political activities, of the essential elements for a healthy emotional growth: dialogue, presence, listening and care.

- *Altruism.*

An education that is attentive to the problems of couples and families should necessarily tend to emphasise altruism, which is configured as availability to others.

Opposite to altruism is individualism, which is characterised by exaggerated striving for individual and personal rights. In individualism, a disproportionate and false use is made of individual freedom, as one places one's own person at the centre of everything. Personal needs and wants become more important than the needs and wants others and the community. The individualist goes

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<sup>111</sup> DACQUINO, G., (1996), *'Che cos'è l'amore'*, Mondadori, Milan, p.58.

<sup>112</sup>DACQUINO, G., (1996), *'Che cos'è l'amore'*, Mondadori, Milan, p.56.

He organises and plans his life by providing for the present and the future according to personal self-fulfilment goals. He does nothing for the other, nor will he surrender anything unless in exchange for something that, in some way, compensates for his performance or donation. The individualist rejects mediation, which is experienced more as a defeat than an achievement.

As a consequence of the exaggerated individualism that characterises the Western world, bonds with parents and other family members are discouraged in adulthood, while the individual is encouraged to form intimate and exclusive bonds mainly with people outside the family. These ties, by their very nature, are more risky than relationships established within the circle of one's own family stock.<sup>113</sup>

When the individual isolates himself from the family network, he bears the additional burden of his own responsibility for achieving success and psychological well-being. In this type upbringing, while self-confidence must be considerable, so too must the competitive attitude towards everyone and thus also between the sexes. In individualistic societies, such as ours, rights prevail over duties; the values of personal autonomy, self-fulfilment, private initiative, success and the prioritisation of individual decisions are exalted. Individualism also uproots the individual from traditions, values, sex roles, social and institutional norms and controls.<sup>114</sup>

For Dion, individualist societies show a lowering of sexual morality; an increase in corruption and dishonesty; a drive to conformism with considerable racial and religious prejudices; a lack of realism in interpersonal and international relations; and a tendency to overly bureaucratic organisation with selfish and competitive goals:

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<sup>113</sup> DION, K. L. - DION K. K., (2002), 'Romantic love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed, *La psicologia dell'amore*, Bompiani, Bologna, 2002, p. 306

<sup>114</sup> DION, K. L. - DION K. K., (2002), 'Romantic love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed, *La psicologia dell'amore*, Bompiani, Bologna, 2002, p.314.

<sup>115</sup> DION, K. L. - DION K. K., (2002), 'Romantic love', in Sternberg, R. J. - Barnes, L. M, ed, *La psicologia dell'amore*, Bompiani, Bologna, 2002, p. 313.

By contrast, in societies where relationships with others are highly valued, the greater interdependence of individuals mitigates the intensity of subjective emotional experiences, which tend to be experienced in a broader network of social relationships. Moreover, since family ties are the source of lifelong intimacy, the individual does not feel the need to search for intimacy among peers outside the family circle.

Individualism is appropriate for the economic and service world but not for the affective-relational world because the more love is experienced autonomously, the more fragile it becomes.

If selfishness and individualism make us see the other as someone to have and take something from, someone to exploit, someone to bribe for profit, altruism makes us see the other as someone to give to; someone for whom we can happily strive; someone to support and help.

It is then a matter of developing in children the joy of giving, as opposed to the pleasure of having. Caring for others, be it a child, a husband, a wife, an elderly person, a sick person, entails commitment, work and sacrifice; only love others can make this sacrifice enjoyable and joyful. But love for the other must be developed, stretched and educated like any other human capacity.

- *Respect for the other.*

Alongside love for the other, respect must be educated. Respect for his ideas and for his diversity. Respect for his or her beliefs and role, for his or her needs and requirements. Diversity of ideas, of behaviour, of habits, of ways of doing things is not the exception but the rule. Getting used to accepting and respecting the diversity of others is fundamental for a future relationship.

Respect for the limits and shortcomings and weaknesses of others, which reflect the limits, shortcomings and weaknesses inherent in human beings, should also be educated. Respect for one's partner should also entail avoiding constant criticism and berating (it is said that some people mumble even when they are asleep!).

It is good to be aware that when blame towards others is excessive and frequent, it is our inner malaise that drives us to look around us for that order, clarity and inner cohesion that we cannot find within ourselves. In these cases, the focus should be more on oneself and one's own inner self.

problems rather than the people or things around us.

it is right to express one's dissent when it is absolutely necessary, always blaming the other person, criticising and blaming him for everything he does, does not do or does wrong, risks destroying, along with his self-esteem, the possibility of a constructive relationship, since excessive criticism automatically leads to defensive and retaliatory mechanisms that aggravate the disagreement to the point of making it irremediable over time.

- *Empathic skills.*

The ability to understand and listen deeply to the other person must then be educated, so that one is able to perceive not only his or her words and their universally connected meanings, but also the essence of the messages and the deep motivations of the feelings and behaviour of others.

To achieve this, rather than accustoming one's children to defending themselves against others and responding in kind, one should accustom them to listening in silence in order to understand and reflect. This putting one's heart next to the other's builds trust; it brings intimacy and well-being to the couple; it nurtures the growth of the relationship and makes conflict resolution easier.

- *The ability to apologise and forgive.*

The ability to apologise must be educated, just as the ability to forgive must be educated. If, on the one hand, apologising when one has hurt the other person with words, actions or behaviour is the only way to try to heal the wounds we have inflicted, on the other hand, the ability to forgive makes it possible to heal wounds that might otherwise infect and kill even the warmest and fundamentally healthy relationship. To forgive is to rebuild life together on a solid foundation. To forgive means to enter into deep communion with the other, to understand his or her reasons, to put oneself in the shoes of the offender, to understand why the other has come to offend us. This is why it is not an easy path. The more disruptive the crisis, the more the path of forgiveness needs to find strong motivations and high references. Although forgiveness is an art that can be learned by everyone and is part of personal growth. However, it is necessary to forgive out of love because, without

love, forgiveness has neither wings nor roots: it is an empty gesture with only apparent meaning.

- *Taking responsibility.*

The ability to take responsibility must be educated. In marriage, gratification and responsibility must be in perfect balance.

Responsibility towards those who love us and put their hearts in our hands is one of the most important and serious. When one is loved and commits oneself to a loving relationship, we cannot help but take responsibility towards the person with whom we have embarked on path of feelings. If betrayals and turncoats in business and economic life are unpleasant and frustrating, the same behaviour in the love sphere leads to much more painful and serious consequences. Committing one's heart to another cannot be regarded as an enjoyable game for two, which can be interrupted at any time when one is tired of playing. In the relationship with a person we love, a part of us passes into the heart and life of the other and vice versa. That part we share, however large or small, we have a duty respect it as if it were a part of us.

- *Bearing capacities.*

Life in a relationship, like any relationship, always involves limits and frustrations with regard to one's desires and needs. A lack of ability to accept frustrations and thus reacting disproportionately through crying, sadness or closure or through excessive reactivity, consisting of revenge and aggression, is detrimental and incompatible with life as a couple.

When we engage in a skirmish in which each of us responds to the other's provocations, attitudes and aggression by trying to do more and more harm, by hitting the other in his or her weak points or by bringing up episodes that should be considered dead and buried, we are actually digging the grave under the feet of mutual love and esteem, with very serious consequences.

- *The ability to trust the other.*

Being married means having faith in the other.<sup>116</sup> Trust in his abilities and intelligence, trust in his fairness and

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<sup>116</sup> ALBISETTI V., (1994), *Terapia dell'amore coniugale*, Paoline, Milano, p. 25.

in its responsibility. As Lo Iacono puts it: 'The trust shown by us will also increase the partner's self-confidence, with extraordinary benefits for his state of mind and for the use of his resources in coping with difficulties'.<sup>117</sup> Trust in the other has a positive effect on the relationship, makes the other more open to dialogue, makes him more committed to free giving. Economic and managerial autonomy, which has become, in our western society, a cornerstone to be conquered at any cost for every couple, rather than being help to the couple, accentuates the contrasts, as it is a sign of mistrust and suggests the erroneous idea of being able to do without the other at any time.

#### ***7.3.4.4 The contributions of the civil community and institutions.***

Responsible for the success of a marriage are also the social community, religious and political institutions, which may judge the marriage pact as an act of courage, self-sacrifice, readiness and openness to life, or as an obstacle to the duties and interests of work, production and trade. "He was a good worker: marriage, family and children have ruined him. He no longer makes as much as before'.

State, provincial and municipal institutions and services would also be responsible for providing

- promote the formation of stable and functional couples and families and not their dissolution;
- helping families in their educational, care and assistance tasks, without overlapping or replacing them;
- support and protect the institution of marriage, marriage vows and the economic needs of couples and daughters;
- protect both minors and adults from the psychological and moral pollution caused by the invasion of the mass media. In fact, when the mass media disseminate highly diseducative, vulgar and violent content, images, ideas and situations throughout the home, they succeed in undermining the normal development of the human personality, as well as preventing, limiting or rendering futile the educational and training efforts of parents and other educational agencies.

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<sup>117</sup> LO IACONO, G. (2005), *D'amore e d'accordo*, Erickson, Gardolo - Trento, p. 149.



### ***7.2.5 The contributions of religion.***

No less important are the contributions that religion can and should make.

Since this, unlike politics, has the characteristic providing universal answers that are valid at all times, the principles and values it proposes are valuable both for couples in the process of being formed and for families.

Numerous studies have shown that couples who live their spiritual relationship with religion and God daily and intensively are significantly more stable and close-knit. In these couples who live their religiosity to the full, the capacities for giving and caring are significantly greater and more attentive than in those couples who do not share their love with divine spirituality. It has also been observed that these couples are greatly facilitated in their educational and formative work.

There are essentially three reasons for this:

1. The first relates to knowledge, dialogue and communion with divine love, which, precisely because it is immense, perfect and infinite love, is surely the best light, guide and beacon for the design, realisation and conduct of fragile, difficult and limited human love.
2. The second reason concerns the relationship with the supreme Being. Daily dialogue and confrontation with God, through prayer and meditation, helps recognise and make better use of every element of the human relationship, giving it meaning and purpose that is no doubt more solid, stable and meaningful.
3. The third reason concerns the recognition of and consistency with ethical and moral principles. Both are much more easily learnt, appropriated and implemented for the believer than for the unbeliever.

We have described what each member of society should give or at least should strive to give to the couple that is being formed.

When one or more of these contributions are missing or deficient, the likelihood that the marriage union is lacking in some of its expressions or is in crisis cannot but increase.

## 7.2.6 Implementing appropriate strategies

Since we do not claim to have any more truth than those who have gone before us in this fascinating but thankless task, in the light of the teachings of history and human psychology we will try to indicate only a few fundamental strategies used by our ancestors in many parts of the world and at different times to achieve, if not all, then at least the most important goals for achieving and maintaining a stable partnership.

On closer inspection, the elements that distance or make the male-female relationship difficult and conflictual are more numerous than those that tend to harmonise the two sexes. For this reason, gender harmony is not, as is usually thought, a matter of course if it is based on a feeling of love, but can and must be built up by means of a series of measures, without which it is a pure illusion to think that the two sexes can have a serene and cooperative relationship just because one has experienced a feeling of love or, worse still, has been in love.

The strategies that the various social institutions, both secular and religious, have found over the millennia to foster integration and prevent the dissolution of marital bonds and the most serious conflicts between the two sexes are complex and numerous.

These are strategies that sometimes start very far back, moving even from early childhood, others develop in adoption, and still others in adulthood. They are strategies implemented the individual members of the couple, their families origin, local customs, civil laws and moral and religious teachings. When these strategies are present and properly implemented, the functionality of the couple and the family is clearly better than when they are not present or are only partially implemented and realised. It is even worse when laws and behaviours with characteristics opposite to those considered most reliable over thousands of years of experimentation are implemented.

### ***1. Clear rules and regulations.***

The first fundamental strategy that communities, as well as societies and states, have used over the millennia to encourage and assist such an arduous, difficult and delicate, but also essential, path to the future of society and the survival of the species, has been to include in the bond of a couple a whole series of rules and regulations that are as clear, clear and straightforward as possible. The purpose is clear. If the people concerned have clarity and certainty of what awaits them, they will be better able to choose, they will be better able to organise themselves, they will be better able to prepare themselves, and then they will be able to operate better. If, on the other hand, the rules and clauses regulating relations between spouses are excessively general, unclear and precise, it cannot really be understood what the specific features of the covenant and the contract being signed are, and therefore the willingness to enter into this covenant will also be modest and confused.

### ***2. Stable rules over time.***

Efforts were also made to ensure that these royal obligations were stable over time. Such a long and demanding course of action as a marriage bond is impracticable when the terms of the contract can change from one moment to the next or when others and not the contracting parties can interpret or change them. How can one trust the institution of matrimony if the State, on the one hand, invites you to sign a contract that binds you for life, while, on the other hand, it reserves the right to change or interpret the clauses of that contract at any time and at will?

The way in which the law has been legislated in Italy on the rights and duties of spouses, for example, by inserting, in the new family law, divorce law or abortion law, new regulations that are diametrically opposed to those signed at the time of marriage, is not in fact functional for the stability of the couple. Nor does it seem right to us that couples and families should have to submit to the decisions of the high court of cassation, which have the force of law, when these upset the clauses accepted and signed by the two spouses.

This way of legislating or interpreting the law cannot but have serious consequences on relationships within families and couples,

while at the same time discouraging and frightening young people.

They are embarking on a path and road perceived as confused, unstable, insecure and high risk.

### ***3. Avoid over-idealisation as well as pessimistic ideas.***

Societies and communities then sought to ensure that knowledge of mutual obligations was not clouded by excessive idealisations in the stages of falling in love or, on the contrary, by pessimistic and destructive ideas about the capabilities and possibilities offered by the opposite sex or the institution of marriage.

### ***4. Insertion of standards and rules of equivalent value.***

Over the millennia, every attempt has been made to ensure that mutual obligations have an equivalent value. We say 'equivalent' because the value of obligations cannot be measured in the abstract, but it is essential to take into account the specific characteristics, capacities and qualities of the two sexes.

For example, if it is more difficult for males to keep sexual fidelity, it is more difficult for females to keep sentimental fidelity. If it is harder for males to restrain their hands (physical violence), it is harder for females to restrain their tongues (verbal violence). If it is for men not to respond to sexual provocation, it is harder for women to avoid such provocation. If men are better able to express their abilities economically, women are better able to express their potential emotionally and relationally. If it is more difficult for men to work continuously, it is more difficult for women to concentrate a great deal of physical and mental energy in a few minutes, and so on.

In the legal field, the principle applies that 'situations or things that are not equal cannot be judged equally'. And as a corollary to this, 'there is no greater injustice than when people or situations that are not equal are treated equally'. By treating and judging two sexually unequal realities equally, due to genetic characteristics, one actually creates glaring inequalities and injustices.

## ***5. Protection of contracts.***

In order to prevent agreements from being easily broken, to the serious detriment of all, this type of contract has always been protected by severe economic, moral, social and religious sanctions by the family, by the social environment, by religion and by the laws of the state. Moreover, to avoid possible loopholes, these sanctions were already provided for in the covenant itself.

Again, the purpose is easy to guess. If breaking or breaching contracts provides no sanction or provides for derisory or variable penalties depending on the conviction of the judges and the skill of the lawyers, the attention and commitment to safeguarding them will be considerably less. Unfortunately, even in this field in many nations of the Western world, including our own Italy, no consistent legislative commitment can be seen. In many nations, the marriage contract can be broken as and when one wishes, after only a few months or a few years. By the way, it is sufficient to have the assistance a good lawyer to ensure that not only the guilty spouse is not charged, but, if possible, even receives an award in court!

## ***6. Family, social and religious involvement.***

Another strategy used by many civilisations and in every age, concerns the involvement in the construction and, subsequently, in the management of love relationships and families, of a multiplicity of subjects: parents, witnesses, affective and friendship networks, civil and religious communities.

If, in fact, only the two young people are involved in emotional, sentimental, sexual and family relationships, they will lack effective guidance and, above all, they will be alone. Alone in their choices, alone in the conduct of relationships, alone in the inevitable moments of crisis. The two young people will be free from the risk of oppressive controls, but they will also lack the indispensable support, help, protection and comfort of their parents and the family, social and religious environment close to the couples.

In this situation of loneliness and deprivation, it is much easier and more frequent for serious or unhealthy conflicts to arise and, consequently, for unions to break up than when, as a result of this situation, they are not able to be separated.

couples, the above-mentioned subjects are involved and activated with the necessary capacity and wisdom.

The demonstration of this is easy. It is sufficient to observe what has happened in our society when, on the path of the couple, the family origin, state institutions and the contributions of the emotional and environmental network have been withdrawn or almost completely excluded, while at the same time, the influence of religious dictates has become minimal. At the same time, the influence of religious dictates also became minimal. In peoples where this path was chosen, crises in couples and families increased considerably in number and severity.

There is no denying how difficult this relationship with the families of origin is, also because many serious conflicts within the couple seem to arise from the endless discussions about how to behave and the boundaries to be set with one's or the other's family members. "He wants to visit his father every day, as if he wanted his blessing for all decisions that the two of us should make together." "His mother has moved in with us and, under the guise of helping her daughter, not only does she not want to return to her home, but she also intrudes into our private life at all times." "This going to her parents for lunch every Sunday stresses me out: I can't take it any more!

These are the most frequent phrases heard in counselling in connection with relations with families of origin.

There are those who see in this persistent bond an asymmetrically negative dependence, an umbilical cord never severed because of the immaturity of the spouses, a convenient support for every difficulty, an exaggerated mammonism, and so on. Others, on the contrary, see in the presence and connection with the families of origin a physiological need, both psychological and practical, and a help and support, if not a lifeline in the most difficult situations of couple and family life. "If they were not there, what would I do"? "If my mother and father did not help me, I would not be able to cope with all the needs of the family". "My father's advice and experience are indispensable for me to better understand my wife but also my children's needs.

This different way of considering relations with families of origin leads to different and conflicting attitudes. There is no doubt that the problem is complex as there are many needs, which need to

be met in some way.



- On the part of young people, there is a desire to maintain the emotional bond and deep and intimate dialogue with their parents that has been established since the first days after birth, if not before. And since we know that the bonds of early childhood are the most solid and important for human beings, these bonds are the most difficult to sever. When one proposes to make a clean break in these relationships, one is actually asking to do something extremely painful, if not impossible.
- There is a need for emotional, material, moral and spiritual help and support from someone who can offer us their arms, their time, their advice, their heart, using precious tools such as love, experience, wisdom and maturity.
- On the other hand, it is undeniable that the construction of a new reality such as that of the family and couple requires a partial though substantial detachment. "The two will leave father and mother and be one".
- To these considerations must be added needs and requirements of those spouses who, for various reasons, have not established any deep ties with the acquired family. These persons, desiring a more complete and total relationship with their spouse, are often jealous of previous ties and feel the presence of the other's parents as an invasion and intrusion into their privacy.
- Consideration must also be given to the inescapable needs of the young couple's children. They need to be enriched by the affection, presence, wisdom and maturity of the people who make up the two family networks.
- Finally, there are the needs of the parents of origin. The latter have every right to continue their relationship with their son or daughter and with any grandchildren, but also with the son-in-law and daughter-in-law who are next door to their son or daughter.

From an examination of all these apparently conflicting demands, the most drastic solution, with the clear exclusion of families of origin, is neither practicable, nor even advisable or desirable. Again, statistics tell us that couples and families live better if they have a good relationship

with the family networks of origin. But this 'good relationship' can only be built if one accepts a priori, and makes one's own, all the requirements set out above, giving each its proper weight and consideration.

If, in fact, in extremely extended families there is the risk of losing oneself as a couple within a very large, strong and stable pre-existing nucleus, in nuclear families there is the opposite risk of not making use of all the help and valuable contributions that can come from the family of origin, due to an excessive defence of the exclusive couple relationship.

Therefore, a careful and wise relational commitment is necessary in order to harmonise the various needs and requirements. This commitment must necessarily be borne by the parents of origin but, at the same time, also by the young couple.

For this commitment to come to :

- It is necessary for all concerned to possess and implement a great deal of common sense, tact, maturity, helpfulness and openness, but also sufficient emotional-relational capacity;
- it is important that this commitment to successful integration and understanding becomes a priority objective of both the couple and the families concerned;
- A prerequisite for successful integration is the need for a correct, healthy and balanced relationship with the partner's family already during the engagement phase. Likewise, it is indispensable that dialogue and understanding also take place between the families of the young people concerned. If, on the other hand, as is often the case today, the relationship with the families of origin is poor or non-existent both at the time of choice and throughout the engagement phase, it will be very difficult for dialogue and understanding to be created and managed;
- A further prerequisite for a peaceful and productive relationship with the families of origin is a healthy and balanced inner life in all the persons concerned. If, on the other hand, psychological situations immaturity or neurotic ties with one or both parents are lost, these pathological ties are likely to have a negative influence on the parents.

relationships within the couple and between the couple and their families;

- The last condition concerns the contribution of state institutions. These have the task of preventing, by means of appropriate laws, the break-up of family networks. Otherwise, the number of spouses and families deprived of the relationship with their parents of origin will tend to increase more and more.

Not dissimilar, though on a more modest scale, are the issues concerning relationship with other family members: siblings, sisters, uncles, grandparents, etc. They too need to participate and fully experience dialogue and communion with the young couple. They too need to participate and fully experience dialogue and communion with the young couple. They too can make valuable contributions to the family that is being formed. It is therefore necessary for each member of the family network to make a careful effort to achieve the best possible relationships in order to meet these basic family needs.

### ***7. Divided sector responsibilities.***

Another strategy used by many peoples both in the past and in the present historical period has been, and still is, to separate the competences, giving each sector a single person in charge. By entrusting the competence and primary responsibility for the emotional-relational world to women, and the economic and service worlds to men, the result is that families are engaged in preparing children and then young people in such a way that they can fulfil their specific role in the best possible way, taking into account and enhancing the special characteristics and genetic qualities of both sexes.

This management method also has the goal of preventing or greatly reducing conflict, as each member of the couple gladly leaves the specific choices to the other, more knowledgeable and competent member of the couple.

When, on the other hand, the criterion of equality of roles is pursued, the experience of the last few decades tells us that preparation focuses above all on the economic and service world,

while the affective-relational world is almost completely neglected and therefore remains deprived. At the same time, using

This irrational method fuels conflict between the spouses and then between the two genders, as each, in order to impose or her own judgement and values, finds himself or herself fighting against the other over every decision, even if it is unrelated or scarcely related to his or her role.

### ***8. Sole family manager.***

With the inclusion of a single person in charge of family management, even those few decisions that remain outside the individual's remit and concern more general guidelines are more easily and serenely discussed and accepted. In this way, the reasons for clashes and conflicts are considerably reduced.

### ***9. An appropriate age.***

Important for a successful marriage is the moment of encounter. The beginning of this walking together hand in hand can take place at a physiologically appropriate age, since, both psychologically and physically, the best conditions are in place to live a conjugal relationship with joy, enthusiasm, ability and dedication, or this journey together can begin at an excessively early or late age.

*If there is too little maturity*, it is difficult to experience relationship, dialogue, motherhood and fatherhood well; on the contrary, *if there is too much maturity*, enthusiasm decreases, pleasure of intimacy, sexuality and the conquest of a new role and social status, while at the same time procreation becomes more difficult, just as it is difficult to abandon personal styles of behaviour and habits in order to consolidate common habits and behaviour.

Until a few decades ago, the biggest problems were about immature age of young people. People got married or ran away together at a very early age. People were rushing to get away from an over-rigid family or to seek self-determination and a more mature and demanding role as soon as possible. While for some couples the young age was not a serious limitation, for others it constituted a difficulty both in the choice of a partner, which could sometimes be too hasty, and taking on responsibilities at an age when maturity and abilities could still be ill-suited to taking on the burden of a family, a home and a conjugal relationship. In short,

there was a risk of venturing into the ways of love

with a lot of enthusiasm but little experience, with weak and fragile legs and with unsuitable companions.

At present, in all Western societies, the problem is an opaque one. On the one hand, at a very early age, people experience love affairs, sentimental and sexual ties that are for the most part inconclusive and empty, and which often, after a few days or a few months, end in nothingness, or else they carry on for many years in romantic or merely sexual relationships, which frequently end due to exhaustion of desire and of the passionate and sentimental drive in their thirties, when there should be all or almost all the economic and professional conditions for marriage. Burnt out by the end of this long, exhausting engagement, many young people, especially males, pull the oars in the boat, renounce any other serious relationships that might involve them and lead them to marriage, and seek only superficial, uncommitted relationships. Others, especially women, driven by the desire for motherhood and family, try to establish a lasting and stable relationship, often to no avail. Unfortunately, however, when maturity is too great and there is already a glimmer of hope, the air becomes colder, the light less lively, enthusiasm wanes, dreams fade, while the shadows of evening advance.

The formation of a stable couple is postponed not only because of the 'mommy' males who do not want to move away from the comfortable family arrangement, but also because of the women's search for a stable working arrangement, which tends to become more and more distant over time<sup>(118)</sup>.

As for the age gap between spouses, common sense and experience would have it that these ages should not be too different. Today, however, due to the many love affairs that have arisen from the ashes of previous relationships that have ended miserably, love affairs are undertaken in which the age differences are considerable. Often it is mature men who seek a much younger woman to boost their sentimental and sexual enthusiasm, but for "par condicio", even women, especially if they are rich and famous, do not disdain the courtship of young upstarts, in search of wealth and nobility, for the same reasons.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> PASINI, W., (2004), *La vita a due*, Mondadori, Milan, p. 119.

The risks are considerable. After the initial enthusiasm, these couples often break up, either because of a lack of true love or because of significantly different and conflicting needs and requirements.

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<sup>119</sup> Over the past ten years, there have been more than thirty thousand marriages between 'Over 70s' and young foreigners. At the same time, the number



of separations of people with a long marriage behind them has increased.

# Chapter 8

## 8.0 I SINGLE

The condition of being single is by no means new. It has always existed among all peoples and in all historical periods. Currently, however, in the Western world, it is an increasingly common condition. Suffice it to say that in the United States, singles make up one ninth of the population, about twenty-five million, with an increase of 120 per cent in the last twenty years.

There are various types of singles.<sup>122</sup>

### *8.1 Singles by choice.*

These are mature, healthy and balanced people who voluntarily choose to dedicate their lives to very lofty goals of a religious, social, artistic or cultural nature. An example for all is religious vocations: 'I want to dedicate my life to God, the Church and His people. "I want to dedicate my life to pre-gay, to fraternal solidarity, to evangelising missions. The

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<sup>120</sup> DACQUINO, G., (1996), *Che cos'è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p. 169.

<sup>121</sup> DACQUINO, G., (1996), *Che cos'è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p. 170.

<sup>(122)</sup> Leaving home: 1993 and 2001-2002 young women aged 25 to 29 living with their parents increased from 36.8% to 50.4%. Male peers living with their parents increased from 60.5% to 72.3%.

single status may help me or may be indispensable to achieve my goals'.

Some religions, such as the Christian religion, have historically linked certain priestly or vocational functions to this condition: 'If you want to become a priest, monk, nun and thus devote all, or almost all, of your physical and mental energies to God and others, you must renounce deep and intimate ties with the opposite sex, you must renounce a family of your own.

In these cases, chastity is seen as a necessity to better open one's heart to divinity, prayer, meditation or to better and totally render one's service to God and neighbour.

Single people by choice, however, maintain various affective ties: with the deity, with confreres, with family members, with people they have committed to helping and following. In reality, therefore, they are not alone.

Sometimes it is widowhood, especially in women, that leads to the choice of no longer binding oneself to another man, as one still feels united and in communion with the deceased spouse. This choice is, however, also partly conditioned by the need to fulfil the desire of the children not to grow up with another father or mother.

## **8.2 *Singles by necessity.***

Singles by necessity consist of men and women who have not freely chosen this condition but who, for various reasons, are or feel forced into it.

The situations that can force a single life are diverse:

1. all illnesses that have a considerable influence on sexuality, such as impotence, frigidity, premature ejaculation, etc;
2. all major psychological problems such as severe characteropathies, severely disabling neuroses and psychoses. These psychological illnesses have, to a greater or lesser extent, a negative impact on interpersonal skills and communication, making it difficult to listen, understand and be open to others. For some psychologically disturbed young people, the refusal to indulge in relationship

Involved love affairs arise from the persistence, even in adulthood, of the Oedipal bond established with the parent of the opposite sex. Psychologically problematic individuals have always existed but, due to the serious shortcomings and educational errors in modern Western societies, their number is increasing considerably. Unfortunately, the type of society we have built in recent decades holds young people between two fires: on the one hand, it requires them to have considerable maturity, management skills and availability, while on the other hand, it produces people who are increasingly poor and emotionally incapable, immature, nervous and unstable. The sum of these two factors considerably increases the number of young people unable to fulfil the role of husband or wife, father or mother.

3. major organic or traumatic diseases such as blindness, deafness, mental retardation, severe paresis or spasticity;
4. the presence a very ungainly body or face;
5. the presence of particular and serious social handicaps, due to relevant criminal proceedings, drug addiction, alcoholism or particularly deplorable moral conduct. This category was much broader in the past when the family and social filter, in choosing a partner was well established. Nowadays, since individual choice based on emotions and feelings clearly prevails, the number of people who are unable to marry for social reasons has fallen considerably;
6. difficult or precarious economic situations. Such extreme poverty or lack of stable employment.

In the past, 'spinster' or 'bachelor' meant someone who had been unable, due to physical, psychological, economic or social problems, to reach a minimum condition that would allow them to take a husband or wife.

The son, or worse the daughter, who had not 'settled down', i.e. not married properly, was a heavy worry for parents and relatives, even though, in the role of uncles and aunts, were precious to the grandchildren and integrated very well into the affective and family network.

Young people suffering from these problems sometimes do not even attempt to establish meaningful romantic relationships because they fear rejection of their offers of love or are afraid that their feelings may not be sufficiently reciprocated. Therefore, they force themselves never to allow themselves to get involved in a meaningful relationship. These young people are ultimately afraid of losing themselves in love<sup>123</sup> and try to defend themselves by maintaining very poor and superficial relationships.

For these reasons, singles by necessity tend to channel their affectivity in other directions, seeking the necessary gratification in different roles. At other times, more simply, they turn their indispensable gratifications and their need to give and receive affection to some pet.

Some of them, taking advantage of the considerable freedom that exists today, establish very brief relationships with others, even of a sexual nature. Relationships, however, which they hastily abandon after only a few days, as they do not know how to handle them properly.

### **8.3 Singles for convenience.**

Singles for convenience arise, above all, from a seemingly enviable youthful condition.

Living in the parental home until late in life means having daily, free of charge, meals always ready and hot, cooked by Mummy's tender hands at the appointed times. Mummy, who, when shopping, will certainly take into account the wishes and whims of her son or daughter. Living in the parental home means not paying rents, mortgages and utility bills: electricity, gas, telephone, waste collection, etc. It also means having a daily, safe and secure environment in which to live. It also means having clean, well-ironed underwear and clothes in the drawers every day, ready to be worn. It means receiving a small but sufficient amount of money every Saturday, from parents or generous and obliging grandparents, to be added to the money earned by doing a little work. Money to spend in the company of the love of the day or with friends in the trendiest restaurants, pubs and discos, without time constraints, using Dad's well-fuelled and oiled car.

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<sup>123</sup> DACQUINO, G., (1996), *Che cos'è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p..

165.

The social and family acceptance of this once deplored condition has increased considerably in recent years, and so have the rewards. Instead of the spinster, seen with a critical and malevolent eye as someone who has not managed to find 'a shred of a man to marry her', there is the single woman who prefers not to marry, as she works, manages herself, is in no hurry to settle down, and is self-sufficient

The incitements of parents, relatives and friends are almost always the opposite of those present a few decades ago. If before these stimulated marriage: 'What are you waiting for at your age I was already married. "What are you waiting for? Years go by and you are still not married. I am not going to support you for long. Make your own home and go away". Now I'm of a different tenor: 'Don't get married; don't get in trouble. "Who is making you it; what do you lack in your home, that makes you coax yourself to take such a risky, difficult and painful path?"

Inducements from parents and friends are often supplemented by blackmail from the employer. "I have a management position, but I certainly won't give it to someone who has had the unhealthy idea of starting a family. Single people for convenience also enjoy the protection of the law, which forces parents to keep and support their children at home until they have found a job sufficient for their needs and, above all, to their liking!

#### ***8.4 Childhood singles.***

Then there is the population of childish singles. Also called Peter Pan singles. This is also a growing category. They are mainly males, but also women, who have not been helped to develop the necessary drive and desire for autonomy in life due to an overly sweet, soft and permissive upbringing. A so-called 'Nutella' upbringing.

Unlike the young people who have been educated in a permissive but unguided manner, they have been constantly guided and cared for by their parents, but in an overly gentle and condescending manner, resulting in studious, well-behaved and affectionate young people, but also essentially lazy, selfish and deep down 'eternal children'. They would like to get married, but only if they can find an

<sup>124</sup>DACQUINO, G., (1996), *Che cos'è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p.  
225.



wife or husband who allows them to live with the same care, attention and attention as their mother and father.

### **8.5 Scared singles.**

This group is made up of young people who are considerably frightened and discouraged by the current reality in which they find themselves or which they observe around them. For these young people, the messages coming from the social environment around them are considerably alarming with regard to marriage and building a new family reality.

As of our team, we have the habit of taking a long but interesting break mid-morning. And so, while we all have tea or coffee together with biscuits and, when providence permits, also with a few slices of home-made cake or pie, we talk about everything. We discuss the newly-born children, university examinations, but also youth problems.

In one of these breaks, while discussing engagement, marriage, and the difficulties young people have in getting married due to work or other impediments, a young trainee psychologist, the only male in the group apart from myself, who had heard the girls discuss these topics, came up with a simple, elementary question: "But why get married? To tell the truth, I expected that the young female colleagues, by whom he was surrounded, would bring not one, but a hundred good reasons to encourage young people to get married. Instead, to my surprise, the question fell on deaf ears. We all looked at each other awkwardly in search of a suitable answer without, however, being able to find it.

I then tried, with the help of the young people themselves, to focus on everything that frightens them away from or makes them give up marriage commitments, and came up with a remarkably long list that politicians, sociologists, clergymen and all those who care about the future of human society should reflect on.

#### **8.5.1 MALE FEARS**

##### *1. The frequency of conflicts and separations.*

Men are alarmed by the many conflicts in the families and couples around them.

"Why get married when conflicts in couples are so frequent and numerous? "Why get married and invest so much, not only emotionally, but also financially, if unions last so short and there is high probability that after a few months or, at best, a few years, you will be alone, without a wife and without continuous stable contact with your children, whom you will only see on Saturdays and Sundays, if they have the goodness to go out with you to a restaurant?"

"Why make a thousand sacrifices to buy or build and furnish a house when in all likelihood after a few years, or worse, a few months after getting married, there is a real risk of being homeless, without furniture, without furnishings, and locked, if you are lucky, in a one-room apartment with children and a wife to support for decades?"

2. *Family management.*

"Why get married when in the management of the family and children, the husband and father now count for almost nothing, as the laws tend to increasingly value, protect and safeguard women and children, to the detriment of men and fathers?"

"Why get married when in the family you are going to form, it is not clear who is responsible and what they are responsible for, and therefore, in all likelihood, the upbringing of the children but also the management of the family itself will be, on the whole, seriously deficient, deficient if not bankrupt?"

3. *The scarcity of mutual care.*

"Why get married when, with both of you working, your future wife's care of you, your home and children will be entrusted to some private, state or extra-community service and you will only be a taxi driver for your children, while they, when you are old or have serious problems, will only take the trouble to phone the cheapest clinic or hospital?"

4. *The remarkable frequency of betrayals.*

"Why get married when the chances of one or more betrayals by your wife, who will, day in and day out, frequent other men in the working world who will surely court her, are so high?"

"Why get married when the children you will have to support for de- signs will most likely be children of other men, with your wife has had fleeting or stable relationships?"

## **8-5-2 WOMEN'S FEARS**

### *1. Excessive commitments.*

"Are you sure that getting married is a good choice when it is known that you will have to take on the triple role of wife, housewife and working woman or employee, with the resulting stress, conflict, guilt and depression?"

### *2. The fear infidelity.*

"Are you sure you are doing the right thing by getting married when your man's love and interest may come to an end because of the many young and beautiful girls who will surround him with affectionate availability, so that you will be left with two or more children to look after for many years on your own, while your 'ex' will be able to freely associate with his young and enterprising colleagues as he pleases?"

### *3. The difficulties in the world of work.*

"Are you sure it is worth getting married if, after studying for so many years and obtaining a degree and a specialisation, you have considerable difficulties in making a career in a world, the economic or political world, in which it is easier to reach the highest peaks if you are free?"

"Why get married if this condition will force you to jump through hoops to reconcile a thousand family demands with those of the company or office where you work?"

### *4. Poor suitability for the maternal role.*

"Why get married if, due to too many commitments and the lack of suitable training for the motherly role, you cannot give your children the gentle, loving, present, communicative, close mother they would like?"

"Why get married when, after a few years, you will find yourself with remorse and guilt for raising disturbed, aggressive, unstable, ill-mannered, arrogant children who hate and despise the world, but above all hate and despise those who gave birth to them?"

The feminine silence in the coffee break, more than any words, indicated that even for women, marriage is no longer that wonderful, rosy dream of a few decades ago.

### ***8.6 Single people because of economic problems.***

Then there is the economic impact on the formation and running of the family. The consumer society, also favoured by the state apparatus, flatters the poor wallet, constantly sending out messages inviting them to spend to buy or enjoy both the necessary and the superfluous. Therefore, the clear feeling of young people is that an enormous amount of money is needed to support a family and children.

Not only is the income from the work of only one of the spouses not enough, but to the work of both, in all likelihood, many hours of overtime and moonlighting must also be added. Young people are then presented with a life made up of massive work commitments and huge expenses, without the possibility of enjoying the relationship, children, home, family, friends. Under these conditions, invitations to face life as a couple with courage, trust, determination and generosity, can only be welcomed. to be in a vacuum.

When comparing the two conditions: married or single, the young people find that, even when there is no family behind one's back to care for, protect and, above all, provide food and money, and even when one is forced to live in a one-room apartment or in a shared house with others, single status is perhaps more convenient than married status, as one does not have to think of anyone but , and does not have to overspend, and can live free of family and relationship commitments.

### ***8.7 Returning singles.***

Another large portion of singles, called 'returnees', is made up of all those men and women who had entered into a marriage or stable cohabitation but who, for various reasons, separated and thus swelled the number of single people.

Some of them, especially women, often prefer to continue living in the family home; others, especially men, prefer to stay in the home.

they move into studio apartments or residences close to the workplace; while only a few prefer to return to their family of origin.

As the economic condition of returning singles has clearly worsened since the divorce, they continually check their shopping purses. Many of these, especially women, after a first burning experience, are not willing to enter into stable marital relationships; others, especially men, try to establish a stable relationship with other women much younger than themselves, building on past experiences.

All these singles, ironically called 'the recycled of the amore', are looking for a new companion by exploiting friendships, dis-cotheques, but also marriage announcements made by young and beautiful foreigners who wish to live in Italy and to obtain, by marriage, a good financial settlement as well as Italian citizenship.

### **8.8 Traumatized singles.**

Finally, we cannot fail to mention traumatised singles. This group is made up of individuals who have had an often highly emotional and life, which has led them into loving relationships rich in intimacy, sexuality and openness to each other, but who, due to various events such as infidelity, the progressive estrangement of the other, or a heated conflict, have been forced to break an important bond. Since an unsatisfactory relationship takes away not only the possibility of making plans for the future, but also the will to live,<sup>125</sup> the pain and trauma suffered make these people emotionally frigid<sup>126</sup> and thus temporarily incapable of any further emotional involvement. For these men and women, loving someone is tantamount to exposing themselves, taking risks, perhaps being even more traumatised or psychologically challenged. Fear of pain makes them seek defences of various kinds to avoid being hit by Cupid's arrows.

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<sup>125</sup> DACQUINO, G., (1996), *Che cos'è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p. 154.

<sup>126</sup> DACQUINO, G., (1996), *Che cos'è l'amore*, Mondadori, Milan, p. 162.

### **8.9 What does single status entail?**

Single status is not, as it is often described today, an enviable and happy condition of free young people, dedicated to pleasant work, conquests, adventures and travel, always open to new acquaintances, while experiencing upsetting sex experiences.

Statistics, in fact, confirm that the couple relationship is the psychophysical optimum for human beings and that a good, healthy family, with stable and rewarding interpersonal bonds, greatly improves individual well-being.

On the contrary, irregular and precarious ties, set in a context of poor planning, often bring sadness, insecurity, bitterness, disappointment and anxiety, as both women and men experience these conditions with an unpleasant feeling of incapacity, temporariness and incompleteness, as they feel they are not building anything, have no stable points of reference, are lost and out of place in society.

Those who marry enjoy a longer life and live in better health than those who do not marry. Those who are single double or even triple the probability of an early death. It is especially males who have the highest risk: they live on average ten years less, lead more disordered lives, smoke and drink more, go to bed late, have more car accidents.<sup>127</sup>

Single women, since for them especially, the couple dimension is always a goal to be achieved, sometimes try in every way to establish stable ties, at least from an emotional point of view, but they realise that the men's close courtship, the thousand attentions paid to them by the latter, in addition to their initial passion, soon fade away, sometimes gradually, sometimes precipitously, leaving a void in their souls and bitterness in their mouths.

They realise that for many men it is normal to go from a courtship phase to a seduction phase with accompanying heated declarations of love, but this usually ends after they have conquered the object of their interest, i.e. their body.

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<sup>127</sup> DEL COLLE, B., (2004), "Che triste vita da single", in *Famiglia Oggi*, No. 4.

Having reached the coveted goal, here they become indifferent: they do not bother to call, they turn up irregularly, they demand unreasonable amounts of attention.<sup>(128)</sup>

Many of these women then prefer to seek, in same-sex friendships, confrontation, comfort and support. With the help of gyms, organised outings, wellness and beauty centres, they try to care for their body and spirit. With these measures, as often recommended by psychologists in women's magazines, they try to 'love themselves'. But, as the biological clock inexorably ticks away the end of the fertile period, the same women, even if they are at the top of economic and working positions, feel the loss of the maternal experience and of a family of their own with increasing anguish and bitterness.

The sense of incompleteness made them judge the work, initially so coveted, as something hateful that prevented them from the deeper realisation of their soul.

For men it is even worse. They try to alleviate their loneliness and lack of a constant sex life by engaging sporting activities, or by going to gyms and the cinema, but single life makes them more depressed and aggressive; it makes them live even less than women, both because of their painful loneliness and because of the extravagance they often indulge in to try to compensate for the melancholy and sadness that oppresses them. Therefore, if discouragement and depression prevail, they tend to drink and smoke, neglecting the most basic care for their physical and mental well-being.

In summary, loneliness can be rewarding when it is temporary, if it lasts over time it can lead to despair.

But it is not all roses for society either. In fact, if from an economic point of view, apparently and momentarily, people who can freely devote themselves to their work commitments without worries and family commitments are more productive, then, lacking stabilisation, emotional gratification and family motivation, both sexes, but especially women, are more easily prey to anxiety, depression and many illnesses, both real and imagined. Therefore, the con-

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<sup>128</sup> DEL COLLE, B., (2004), 'What a sad single life', in *Famiglia Oggi*, N°4.

of singles in the long run significantly reduces their performance in both work and business.

## CONCLUSION

We have, together with our patient readers, walked the roads of love.

They are roads as old as the world. They were built and always run through a thousand difficulties when still animal skins and not Valentino's clothes covered the bodies, and when still, dark, damp caves housed families and not palaces of concrete and crystal. Despite this, even today, and especially today, we still cannot understand the best way to live them well. Even today, and especially today, we have not learnt to distinguish the ways that unite from those that divide, the ways that lead to understanding from those that lead to confrontation. The ways that build civilisations and those that prepare for barbarism. The ways that help human societies in their growth and those that lead them to degeneration and death.

Even today, we still cannot find the best ways to walk through them together, men and women, hand in hand, with mutual esteem and willingness, with mutual understanding and tenderness. Without illusions, of course, but also with the right trust and hope. Without useless infatuation, but also with care and love.

We have said in no uncertain terms from the very first pages that the paths love are difficult to tread, but this difficulty becomes impossible if the social environment and states do not provide the necessary, indeed the indispensable environmental, formative, educational and legislative prerequisites.

We have tried to highlight the many problems affecting societies such as ours, which, by favouring the economic and service world and depriving the emotional world of the necessary energy, have caused a real impoverishment of relational life through a series of ill-considered choices. These choices



have led to a series of events that tend to separate rather than unite; they tend to destroy rather than build. These are irresponsible choices that produce more confrontation than encounter, more distrust than trust, more psycho-affective malaise than well-being, more aggression than love and acceptance.

Once again, we did not want to give easy recipes because the solution to problems lies in the heart, mind, common sense and wisdom of each of us. The solution to the problems lies in the behaviour and attitudes of each person, couple and family. The solution to problems lies in every religious instruction, every law and every rule that communities and states are willing to give themselves.

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