

AFFECTIVE MATURITY

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This paper will focus on the ability to make sacrifice and the capacity to accept responsibility as two major characteristics of affective maturity using practical examples. Maturity allows one to freely choose love. Affective maturity is when one's emotions and passions are subjected to one's will and intellect, a well formed intellect. To be mature is to be fully developed and capable of fulfilling what is expected of you. Our emotions are a gift from God and can help our maturity when they are governed by the will and intellect. "Love of the Lord and genuine, mature and sacrificial love to our brethren is the only path to maturity and to holiness."¹ Growth in affective maturity leads to authentic love and freedom, which can serve as a foundation for holiness.



While emotions can help one grow in self-knowledge and self-awareness, one should not rely solely on their emotions to govern their decisions and way of life. Emotions are intended to inform the intellect which then directs the will to act in a particular manner according to a value system. Unformed emotions have the capacity to lead one away from God instead of towards Him and His will. "Feelings or passions are emotions or movements of the sensitive appetite that incline us to act or not to act in regard to something felt or imagined to be good or evil."² It is a common error of our society to place too much attention on emotions and not enough on reason or intellect. Instead of the human person possessing their emotions our society encourages the emotions possessing the person. If one's emotions are ruling their behavior that person is no longer free.

Emotions can be triggered by many different elements and can also evoke various responses. A person is always free to respond to the emotion or reject the emotion if they are submitting the emotion under their will and intellect. In the choice and action to respond the person takes responsibility for their actions and how they respond to the emotions that arise. Especially when expressing sexual emotions it is important to tie them closely to responsibility; so one can respond in a mature manner engaging their intellect and will not only a strong desire for satisfaction.

The ability to make sacrifice is an essential aspect to affective maturity. The initial felt emotion may have to be sacrificed or altered according to the intellect and will. As G.K. Chesterton said, every choice is an act of renunciation, "Every act of will is an act of self-limitation. To desire an action is to desire a limitation. In that sense, every act is an act of self-sacrifice. When an individual chooses anything you reject everything else."³ A clear example of what he saying can be seen in a committed relationship, where two have chosen to be together; in the act of choosing each other they naturally reject all others. The fulfillment that the two experience in choosing the other lessens the feeling of emptiness from the renunciation aspect of the choice. But the feeling of renunciation in the sacrifice is not always covered by the overwhelming sense of love. Love demands sacrifice; sacrifice of self for the good of the other. When I love another I am choosing to love them over myself, love is a choice. St. Clare of Assisi was known for saying "Love without sacrifice is not worthy of the name." Here we see that the ability to make sacrifice is an important aspect to affective maturity and allows one to love another in the large choices of life and in the small choices as well. When a person is overcome with a desire that may not be appropriate at that time they must learn to sacrifice that desire or want. Consider hunger, many times people will experience a craving for a specific food, but if they do not have it available, a mature person cannot throw a tantrum because they cannot have what they want they learn to sacrifice that desire.

The human person has to be formed and grow in affective maturity. Our culture does not encourage self-discipline or personal responsibility; we need to seek to overcome natural tendencies, environmental norms and circumstances. "Sacrifice in the form of suffering is also a way of expressing our emotions and our needs in a healthy way...suffering can have a redemptive value."⁴ This is especially true when we are able to unite our suffering or sacrifice with that of Christ, or to offer our sacrifice for the benefit of another in need. A greater union with Christ or a specific offering can serve as a motivating factor to grow in the ability to make sacrifices and grow in affective maturity. Choosing for the other and not for oneself is making a gift of oneself to the other, which requires responsibility. God has created man with the freedom to choose but with this freedom comes responsibility. "Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility. By free will one shapes one's own life. Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness; it attains its perfection when directed toward God, our beatitude."⁵ When one's freely chosen actions are carried out with responsibility it is a natural movement towards maturity.

Moreover, when one's emotions are under the direction of their intellect and will they are able to possess them and are free to act as one deems necessary not enslaved to one's emotions or passions. Then and only then can one choose to make a gift of themselves or give themselves away in love through donation. "Love is not originated in sentiments, but in a choice... Love will be stripped of its most profound meaning if we do not choose to live according to its most piercing demands."⁶ Love is a gift and all gifts require responsibility. Love and responsibility are like two sides to the same coin. If love is not given responsibly it will cease to be love. Love is our greatest gift and at the same time it is our task. All the aspects of affective maturity are important but the ability to make sacrifice and the capacity to accept responsibility are foundational and they are very closely connected and provide a necessary base to grow in maturity.

1 Mother Adela Galindo, Foundress SCTJM, Letter on the Feast of the Visitation, May 31, 2014

2 The Catechism of the Catholic Church, St. Pauls Publication, 1994, paragraph 1763

3 Fr. Anaeta, Dominic, Holy Apostles College, PS 908, Week 11 Class notes, May 15, 2014

4 Ibid.

5 The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1731

6 Mother Adela Galindo, Foundress, SCTJM, May 31, 2014

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