



*The Christian
Youth
Between Seriousness and
Cheerfulness*

FR. TADROS Y. MALATY

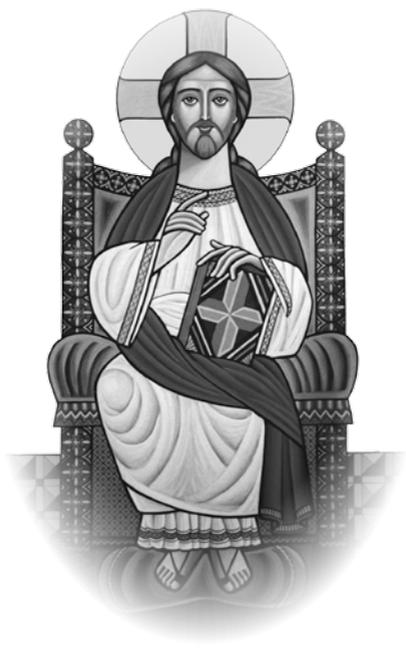
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“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life” [Revelation 2:10].

Usually, others say that I am serious in my life, honest in my studies and my work, and meticulous in my behavior. But, I still feel that I am inattentive and dishonest. Thus, what does seriousness mean?

The following questions are raised in my mind:

- ❖ Does the seriousness in life go against a life of joy and cheerfulness?
- ❖ What does seriousness in life mean?
- ❖ Is seriousness bound to a specific age? In other words, why shouldn't I spend my youth in amusement, away from the weary responsibilities?
- ❖ Is it sufficient for me to be serious only in my studies, work, familial and social responsibilities?
- ❖ Is seriousness required in the spiritual life? And to what extent?
- ❖ Do I have to give up my relationship with others for the sake of being serious in my commitment to what is right?

THE SOCIAL SERIOUSNESS AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

It is appropriate for us to distinguish between social seriousness and spiritual seriousness. The first is the result of familial education, social behavior, the desire to have a strong personality. Also, it is used for the seeking of some reward or fearing the law. In the other hand, the spiritual seriousness, is a natural outcome from the believer as a sign of his fellowship with God “the Faithful and Holy One” [Hosea 11:12].

The first is usually a mask that can be put off whenever the person gets the chance or when the seriousness goes against personal needs. But the second is an integral part of the believer's life. Truly, it is one of the qualities of the children of God. Those who seek to resemble their heavenly Father: “God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the



fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” [1 Corinthians 1:9].

OUR SERIOUS AND FAITHFUL CHRIST

Seriousness is a gift of the Holy Spirit Who dwells inside you and longs to direct you to be the image of Christ: the “**Faithful** High Priest.” [Hebrews 2:17]. “**Faithful** and true witness.” [Rev 3:14]. St. John beheld Him in heaven, as he said: “and I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and He that sat upon him was called **Faithful** and True, and in righteousness he does judge and make war” [Rev 19:11].

“Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself” [Philippians 2:8], and with His tender humbleness He attracted the young children and called unto them to come to Him [Mat 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16], and in Him they found a fatherhood that is filled with cheerfulness and kindness. This cheerfulness attracted many unto Him as was testified by Pontius Pilate in his report that he sent to Herod; yet at the same time He was venerable and feared by the Pharisees who were feared by all.

That is how we bear His image. We present the cheerfulness that comes from the inner joy, along with seriousness and commitment in every aspect of life.

Our “Faithful” Christ is always cheerful. He attracts the trespassers and the sinners with His joyful love so that they could enjoy His salvation. Meanwhile, the hypocrites were not able to meet with Him. They used to go to Him in groups for His purposeful strictness.

There is a huge difference between a man who was raised in faithfulness since childhood or just practices it out of fear from an emotional or physical punishment. a man that delights and rejoices the faithful life as a fellowship with the heavenly God. This man is fond of “faithfulness” or the “seriousness in life” even in regards to his inner thoughts and feelings. We do not deny the role of the familial education and



the importance of the laws and rules of the society. Man remains in need of the divine grace. That is alone able to penetrate his depths and will always renew his spiritual life, so that he would resemble our Savior's traits. He lives with it, neither to please the people nor seeking some timely reward or out of fear of others' criticism or timely punishment, but he practices it with the righteous spirit inside him as well as in his outer behavior, so that this feature would remain touching his entire being forever.

The "seriousness in life" bears a reward in its folds. It brings the enjoyment of the fellowship with the Faithful Holy. It forms you into the image of your Savior. It does not cause pressure unto the soul due to the torture of the responsibility, but it is considered joy and happiness as it is a true virtue of the bride that bears the features of her Groom that is fairer than the children of men [Ps 45:2].

SERIOUSNESS AND THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Since seriousness is a gift of the Holy Spirit that works inside you, then you bare it as a sign of the new life that became yours in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

When you practice this seriousness and faithfulness in your spiritual life, it will overflow not only in your behavior but also in your hidden thoughts. You would surrender the keys of the doors of your mind and heart in the hands of the Son of David. He is the only one who is able to open them up and build His Kingdom inside you. Also, He can close them up so that no defiled thoughts sneak in. He sets your depths straight and sanctifies them on the account of His Kingdom, the city of God, the icon of His heaven, so that you would praise and say: "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman wakes but in vain" [Ps 127:1].

As you surrender your life in the hands of your Savior, you will truly long for the seriousness in your personal or group



prayers, in your fasting, repenting, worshipping, praising, giving, and in your execution of the divine commandment. He is the only One working inside you.

Seriousness is not limited only in the spiritual life, but it also includes all aspects of your life. You will feel the seriousness in the clarity of your goal, your faithful behavior, your precision in your studies, work, and familial relations, in your care for the others, even in what is related to your body and your entertainment and comfort. The apostle said: “if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit...” [Philippians 2:1]. Thus, the believer that is serious in his life and faithful in the image of his Master would know how to be resolute even in his comfort or entertainment.

Seriousness does not imply gloominess. As we mentioned before that Pontius Pilate wrote to Herod about Christ, the Lord, that He was always cheerful. However, He was never seen laughing, but He was sometimes found crying. He also said that one would desire to look upon His face.

Be faithful even in your cheerfulness and in your tender actions with the members of your family. For, if you were faithful in the Lord in the matters that are within your capabilities, He would grant you faithfulness and seriousness in the matters that are not within your capabilities. For example, the young man that is not joyful with his parents and bothers, but he is joyful with his friends and with the strangers, is usually overcome by the thoughts of the bodily lusts. Since he was not faithful in the matters that seem simple, he would not find the divine help to support him against the thoughts that are not under his control.

Thus, let us be faithful over the little things so that God would make us rulers over the many things [Luke 19:17]. St. Paul said: “Watch, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” [1 Corinthians 16:13].

The Greek word “*Greegoreite*,” which means watchfulness and alertness, is a military expression that is used in regards to



the watch-soldiers and those who monitor the movements of the enemy. Thus, the apostle urged them to be serious and attentive to the ways of the evil lest he defiles their faith with deception and false teachings, or ruin their lives or their inner peace with familial or church problems. He demands them to stay awake, for they were as if in a state of slumber. They ought to stay awake. The believer is like a soldier of Christ that is always in a state of battle as long as he is alive. He is always in danger, for the enemies are lying in wait for him.

He asks them to be awake in order to accept God's grace, and to exercise the sacred life in the Lord. He said: "be strong", for God has granted you the strength and the power to work with the spirit of strength, not weakness. He speaks with them here in a military accent as an army in a battle.

- ❖ He asks them to stay awake lest they are secretly attacked in their faith. It is appropriate for them to stand fast, so that they would be encouraged to testify with what they have learned, and to be strong in the word and in the act, for this is a true commitment to the to reach maturity¹.

Ambrosiaster

- ❖ St. Paul tells them to be brave and strong like a soldier and a gladiator of Christ, doing everything with love unto God and unto each other.

St. Didymus the Blind

SERIOUSNESS AND YOUR EVALUATION OF YOUR LIFE

Possibly, one of the main reasons behind being unserious is man's unawareness of the value of his life and his position in God's eyes. You are not a creature that happened "by chance" as a result of your parents' marriage, but as God said to the prophet Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you..." [Jeremiah 1:5].



You should know the value of your life which Christ the Lord had died for. You must appreciate your being. Your understanding of your mission as the image of Christ will grant you seriousness in your life. You will know the value of each and every moment of your life.

When the prophet David, of whose righteousness the Book has testified, lingered and was careless with his gazes for few moments, his heart got drawn unto a series of sins, due to which the sword had never left his house for the rest of his life and every night he wet his bed with his tears.

When you realize the value of your life, you get to appreciate your soul, for which Christ the Lord had died, you will truly live in seriousness, and even consider the entire world as waste to win Christ. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” [Matthew 16:26; Luke 9:25] “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ... for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” [Philippians 3:7-8].

SERIOUSNESS AND JOY

“Worshipping keeps the heart and justifies it; it grants joy and happiness” [Sirach 1:18].

St. Anthony believed that joy is the food of the soul, without which it would famine and die. The inner joy supports the soul in its sojourn away from its heavenly home. Joy prepares the body to develop a feature that is more spiritual than physical, so that it will be prepared to become a spiritual being in the Great Day of the Lord.

❖ Just as the trees cannot grow if they are not watered, the soul cannot grow and ascend to heavens if it doesn't accept the heavenly joy. The secrets of the Heavenly Kingdom were revealed before them while they were still in the body. Thus, they found familiarity before the Lord in everything, and all their requests were fulfilled. The soul always grows with this joy and rejoices it, ascending with



it to heaven, for it is like the body in need of its spiritual food.

St. Anthony the Great

- ❖ God's Kingdom inside you is the joy that the Holy Spirit plants in your hearts. It is an icon and a recompense for the eternal joy, which the souls of the saints are enjoying².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ Christ declared that laughter comes from joy and happiness. As the Holy Bible stated: "He fills your mouth with laughing..." [Job 8:21]. Perhaps, that's why one of the Fathers (Isaac) was called "laughter," for this name means the divine joy³.

Origen

- ❖ A source of joy and glory for the men are to have children that try to alike them... how much more could God's pleasure be when man becomes spiritual in his deeds and praises, declaring the Divine Highness in his life⁴.

St. Cyprian

- ❖ When the soul is filled with the fruit of the Spirit it overcomes the gloominess, distress and boredom and acquires peace and joy in the Lord, and opens in its heart a door to love all mankind.

St. Isaac the Syrian

- ❖ "Your joy no man takes from you" [John 16:22], because **their joy is Jesus, Himself**⁵.
- ❖ Christ's joy is to see us joyful. But He says that it cannot be complete unless we had participation with Him. For that reason, He said to St. Peter: "If I wash you not, you have no part with me" [John 13:8]. Thus, His joy in us is the grace that He grants us, which is our joy as well.

Above all that, He has rejoiced from the beginning as He has chosen us before the foundation of the world [Eph 1:4], and we cannot say that His joy was not complete, because God's joy is never incomplete.



But, this joy was not inside us for we did not exist before. Even when we started to exist, this joy didn't start inside us. It was always inside Him, for He is always perfect. Who, through His pre-knowledge, rejoiced that we will be His own. He had pleasure in us, complete joy, as He rejoiced through His pre-knowledge and His pre-election of us⁶.

- ❖ It is appropriate for the Christian to be “Hallelujah” from His head to toe.
- ❖ Let us rejoice and be thankful, not because we became Christians, but because we became the body of Christ! Do you realize that? Do you understand the great grace that God has granted us? Stand in reverent joy, for we have become the body of Christ!

St. Augustine

“And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod” [2 Sam 6:14].

- ❖ Can you imagine the prophet dancing?! Can you hear the sound of the psaltery and the stomping of the dancers [Ps 81:2-3]?! It is like a wedding ceremony! You, too, take a psaltery, so that if you got to enjoy the touch of the Spirit, your inner strings would respond with the echo of the good deeds. Hold the harp so that there would be harmony between your words and your deeds. Take the timbrel so that the Spirit would grant you to praise inside through the instrument of your body⁷.

St. Ambrose

SERIOUSNESS AND SILLY JOKING

The satisfaction of the inner soul reflects on one's life great joy, happiness, cheerfulness along with seriousness, and realization of one's worldly and eternal mission. Meanwhile meaningless laughter, mocking others, and being sarcastic are serious signs of the emptiness of the inner soul. One can say



that they are a cover of the hidden wounds and weariness of the soul.

Many people, who think that they can provide a joy unto others or that they can snatch them from depression, are actually the ones who are in great need for someone to pour true joy inside them.

In Los Angeles, I met with a girl that spends her life in amusement. She lived with more than one guy during different times, and knows nothing but wild parties, drugs, drinking etc. When I asked her to answer truthfully whether she was happy or not, she said: “I’m the most miserable person in this world.” She is in need of her Savior, He is the only One that can penetrate the heart, dwell and satisfy it!

It was once told about a famous comedian that went secretly to a psychiatrist complaining about depression and frustration that he is suffering from. The doctor told him, among his many advices, to attend one of the parties of the famous comedian (himself). Then, he said: “I am that comedian. I can vibrate joy unto others, but I’m suffering from bitter depression inside me!”

St. John Chrysostom advises us against the silly joking:

- ❖ Joking makes the soul obscure and indolent. It provokes the soul and usually causes violent actions; it might even cause wars, what even more? In brief, if you want to be mature man, leave out the childish acts!⁸
- ❖ Words are the path to actions... thus, what good can joking accomplish? You just laugh!

Tell me, does a shoemaker occupy himself with anything else but what concerns the benefits of his profession? Does he buy any machine but the ones related to his job? There is no use for the things that we don’t need. Thus, you must not utter useless words, for they will lead you to stupid conversations. The present time is not a time for silly laughter, but a time for grief and mourning.



Would you joke about that? Does a gladiator that enters the ring to fight his opponent utter jokes?

Satan, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour [1 Pet 5:8]! He walks from every direction to turn all things against your life, plotting to deprive you from your rest. He gnashes his teeth and roars, breathing fire against your salvation. Thus, would you stand there uttering jokes and stupid words, talking about what is useless?! Now is a time of war (spiritual) and struggling. You must stand, watch and be on guard. There is no room for laughter, for that belongs to the world. Listen to Christ saying: “You shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice” [John 16:20].

Christ was crucified for your evilness, and you laugh?... Listen to what the prophet said: “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling” [Psalms 2:11]. Joking makes the soul lenient and dreary...

Nothing is more imperfect than joking, for there is nothing useful in it, rather it is full of weariness⁹.

St. John Chrysostom

FORCE OUT DEPRESSION:

- ❖ Force out grief (depression), for it is related to doubt and anger¹⁰.
- ❖ The Holy Spirit that dwells inside you does not stand depression or trouble¹¹.
- ❖ Depression, when mixed with prayer, prevents it from ascending with purity¹².

Hermas

CHEERFUL SERIOUSNESS AND THE ROYAL PATH

God called His people “the faithful city” [Isaiah 1:21], and when He blessed the way of Abraham’s servant, he said: “I bowed down my head, and worshipped the Lord, and blessed

the Lord God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way..." [Genesis 24:48]. Furthermore, God said about Moses that he: "is faithful in my entire house" [Numbers 12:7].

One of the blessings which are an outcome of leading a serious and faithful life is that you will feel safe as you enjoy the royal path. You will feel that you are in the embrace of the Holy and Faithful God [Psalms 91:12], covered under His wings as He brings you to participate in the eternal glories.

I COMPLAIN ABOUT MYSELF TO YOU

- ❖ Sanctify me, O Faithful Holy One, so I would live bearing the feature of Your faithfulness and be fit to dwell with You forever!
- ❖ I complain about myself to you only, for everyone might consider me as faithful, but You know my hidden weaknesses.
- ❖ Force out every slighting with the thoughts, recklessness with time, and carelessness with the emotions! You, alone, can protect me from my weaknesses!
- ❖ O, True and Faithful One, grant me faithfulness so that I would take You as my path, O Royal Path, and never deviate.

¹ CSEL 81:191

² *De Prop. Sec. Deum.*

³ *Fragments, 110 on Luke 6: 21.*

⁴ *Treatise 10:15.*

⁵ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101:3.*

⁶ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 83: 1.*

⁷ *In Luc. 7:18-25.*

⁸ *In Ephes., hom. 17.*

⁹ *In Eph. hom 17.*

¹⁰ *Hermas: The Shepherd, Command 10:1:1.*

¹¹ *Hermas: The Shepherd, Command 10:2:6.*

¹² *Hermas: The Shepherd, Command 10:3:3.*



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