

My Wife Wants to be 'Liberated' From Marriage Responsibilities

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5 arate ways. Your problem did not start yesterday.

Song of Thanks

Los Angeles — (NC) — Students of Mount St. Mary's College students sang a Te Deum in thanksgiving that their campus was spared from destruction in last year's Bel-Air forest fire.

By FATHER JOHN L. THOMAS, S.J.
Sociology Professor St. Louis University

After eleven years of marriage my wife has suddenly become obsessed with the need to assert her sense of "liberation" (primarily from me!), and to demonstrate what she calls her "maturity." Although we can't afford it, she doesn't need it, she sees her psychiatrist once a week and claims we all need one. Lately, she's started going around with a young divorcee. When I protest that this is a bad example for our three growing children, she says she has a perfect right to choose her own friends and she's sick and tired of my telling her what to do. Her mother is disgusted with her, and I've just about had it—what would you do?

Your description sounds like some of the caricatures of the "new woman" which appeared in this country around the turn of the century, Steve. As you may recall, one radical branch of the European feminist movement had been talking about

the liberation of women for over a century. Marxist thinkers later popularized their own version of it, and in one form or another it gradually received fairly widespread diffusion among the upper classes through the efforts of avant-garde writers.

It never caught on very well in America, primarily because American women have traditionally enjoyed greater freedom and legal protection than most of their European sisters.

I feel it was necessary to preface my remarks with this historical note because when discussing the changing status of women in the modern world, we must always carefully distinguish between their legitimate aspirations for equality as persons and some of the irrational ideas or ideologies historically associated with the feminist movement.

NO MATURE Christian can fail to regard with favor the

increased educational opportunities and juridical status women currently enjoy in our country. On the other hand, conceptions of feminine "maturity" or "liberation" that ignore man's social nature and Christian responsibilities are justly rejected as irrational.

Judging from your account of the situation, I would conclude that your wife is either sadly confused or is using terms like maturity and liberation to justify her desire to escape her responsibilities and to do what she likes. Since experience has taught me that I am certain to be accused of forming a biased judgment, Steve, let me point out at once that I am not assuming that you or other American husbands are without fault.

I am well aware that men can be irresponsible and domineering, treating their wives as if they were children and regarding any show of intelligence on their part as a

personal challenge to their superiority. I have frequently criticized such conduct as utterly unbecoming a Christian.

My judgment in the present instance is based on your wife's shallow endorsement of psychiatry as a newfound cure-all for the ills of mankind and also on her rejection of your criticism concerning her choice of friends. Here again I must be careful to make my position clear.

I HAVE high esteem for competent psychiatrists—none of whom pretend to have the answers to all man's woes. But I have little patience with the shallow belief that everyone needs psychiatric care—even if they could afford it! Your wife's attitude reflects a sad, unfortunately rather than therapeutic.

Also, I wish to make it clear that I do not feel that a husband has the right to choose his wife's friends—any more than she has the right to choose his. But both

husband and wife have the right and the obligation to object to friendships that may reasonably be judged either harmful or scandalous. Your wife has no right to reject her responsibilities as your spouse and the mother of your children; and you are well within your rights in objecting to her present association.

Research findings show clearly that one of the major ways that stable families protect themselves is to confine their associations to other stable families.

Your wife's definition of liberation is evidently based on the false assumption that if responsibilities stemming from past commitments cramp one's style, one is free to reject them. This is what I meant by the term "moral brain-washing." There is a school of thought which maintains that most mental health problems are caused by irrational restraints imposed by religious or social norms and

values, so that therapy consists in thoroughly cleansing the mind of these moral obstructions to personal freedom. Your wife is apparently receiving "therapy" from a member of this school of thought.

What can you do? Well, Steve, it is one thing to define your right and obligations, and quite another to get your wife to agree. At some point in your marriage you have lost contact with each other, and each seems to have developed along sep-

Hence you both need a counselor who will help you see the nature of marital companionship, as well as the meaning of maturity and liberation in marriage. Your wife is obviously confused, but remember, before she reached this stage, something must have gone wrong with your marital relationships.

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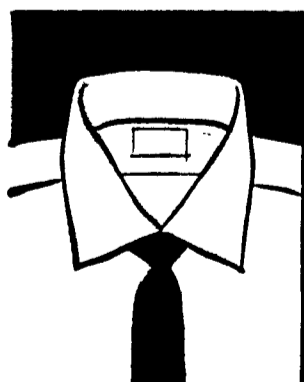


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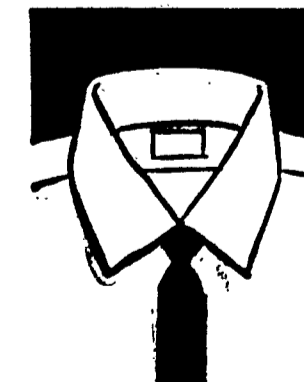
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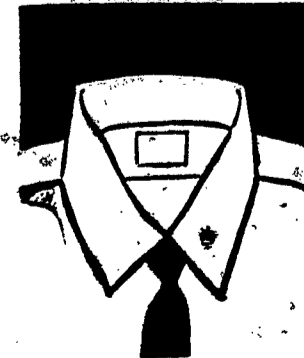
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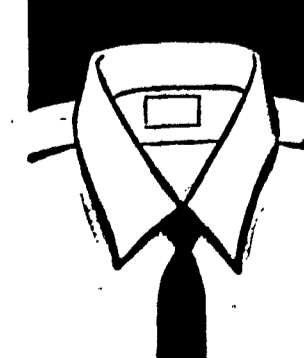
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