



Temptations of Life

Lee Iacocca is a legendary figure in the field of American car industry. He is a man who experienced the ups and downs of life in its full sense. When he published his book, "Lee Iacocca an Autobiography," in 1984, millions of copies were sold out immediately. In all Business Management Schools, this book is a compulsory textbook. This book describes very touchingly how in the midst of severe sufferings of his childhood days, the catechism discipline and sacramental life which he received, sustained and supported him later in the difficulties and struggles of life. It goes like this: "Like many other families of that time, it is the solid faith in God that sustained us and helped us to go forward, We used to pray a lot. On every Sunday, we used to go to church and receive Holy Communion. In the early days, I used to doubt why it was necessary to confess before Holy Communion. But by the age of eighteen, I was fully convinced of the need of confession which the church demands. I used to tell my friends about it very frankly. Later in life, each confession gave me an indescribable experience of a new life, new spirit and enthusiasm. Besides, I used to attend the retreat conducted by the Jesuit priests regularly. These things helped me always to regulate my life, to realize the difference between good and evil and thus lead a good life." If we want to lead a life of faith in the midst of the temptations of this world, we must be aware of the main temptations of life and how to encounter them.

Temptations of Life

A Christian is one who accepts God as Father, Jesus as Savior and Holy Spirit as the guide and lives according to the word of God and the teachings of the church. When he lives in this world full of evils and defects, he may have to face many temptations that make him deviate from a moral life in accordance with his faith. Temptations are an invitation and persuasion to do evil. These may lead man to sin. God permits temptations. But it is the will of God that we conquer these temptations and lead a good life. We must consider temptations as chances for success in life. The harder the

effort, the greater will be our reward. God helps us to face any kind of temptations: "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it" (1Cor 10:13).

It is quiet natural to have worldly temptations. The greatness of a Christian is revealed in overcoming them. The modern world is led by the philosophy that everything is permissible. In such a context, greed, consumerist tendency, craze for power, unhealthy rivalry, pleasure seeking, hero worship and such other temptations come after us in attractive forms.

1. Greed for Money

Greed is the excessive or uncontrollable desire of man to earn money (1 Timo 6:10, Col 3:5). Bible looks at greed as the greatest evil. Wealth is necessary for man. But he should not become a slave to it. It is easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than for the rich man to enter heaven (Mt. 19:24). Greed for money is an obstacle to enter heaven. When agricultural civilization gave way to industrial civilization use of money and its infinite possibilities increased. Along with money, there grow up an attitude of exploitation. Earning wealth becomes immoral when money is earned through exploitation. Excess of money facilitates capitalist attitude. Then man places money in the place of God. Greed for money is idolatry. The tenth commandment forbids uncontrolled amassing of material things. This commandment forbids the evil desire that arises from the craze for money and power that comes along with it. It also forbids the desire to do injustice in the case of material things and thus offend the neighbours.

In modern society, we see businessmen who create artificial scarcity leading to sudden rise of price, monopoly of merchants, doctors who exploit the sick, lawyers who create false cases, officers who take bribe to give justice to the people, rulers who misuse their authority and power etc. Though their deeds aim only at the gain of money, very often they are given respectable position in society. Hence the culture of greed for money, which they create, spread all over the society. Then each one is tempted to earn money like them.

2. Vainglory (False pride)

The psychologist Abraham Maslow has presented human needs in the shape of a pyramid. Self-esteem is one among them. Self-esteem emerging from a sense of reality is the sign of a mature personality. Realistic self-evaluation is the sign of healthy personality. Vainglory is inordinate self-esteem. It is a personality defect like inferiority complex. Vainglory is one form of pride. When a person considers himself better than what he really is, he becomes a slave to false pride. When he keeps exaggerated ideas about one's family, wealth, education, employment, positions etc, it becomes vainglory. It is a misunderstanding that everything is the result of his

efforts. They don't give due place either to God or others. To a certain extent the reason for bitter rivalry between different religions and individuals, cold war between nations and other conflicts is vainglory. Ultimately it leads to the downfall of individuals and misery of people. St. Paul says: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (Phi 2:3, 4).

3. Consumerism (Consumerist Craze)

Materially it is the desire to use worldly things excessively for one's own comfort and pleasure. Man needs a realization that this world is fleeting and it passes like a dream and pleasures are momentary only. When worldliness goes beyond limits, we fall into passions and sensory pleasures. The present world encourages consumerist culture. Advertisements provoking instincts, attractions of life and conveniences put forward by modernity, undue eagerness to seek comfort etc produce in human minds an unquenchable desire to enjoy material goods and comforts to the maximum. Others are tempted to imitate the wealthy. Finally it becomes a usual practice of the society, and then it becomes a custom and culture. Then a utilitarian vision develops giving value only for the useful. The other becomes a hell for those who are influenced by this ideology.

4. Desire for Power

Desire for power is the tendency to misuse the power and position for one's own selfish gains, instead of using them for service of humanity. Greed for money, vainglory etc tempt a person to have desire for power. Alfred Adler, the psychologist, in his book 'The Will to Power' depicts this as one of the factors helping men to go forward. If we do not control this desire for power, it will become the most terrible social disaster. Autocrats like Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin; Mao Tse Tung etc were slaves to desire for power. When we look at authority as an end in itself, instead of a means to serve, it becomes dangerous. People in authority should become servants of society and not people who desire power. It is this desire for power that leads to the downfall of anyone in authority.

God has given the right for individuals and communities to share His authority over the universe. God has given all authority and power for the good and prosperity of man. But when we use it for personal gain and the growth of one's organizations and movements only, desire for power becomes dangerous.

5. Prodigality

It is excessive use of money. God gave this universe and all its resources as a gift for the whole of humanity. Coming generations also have claim on it. When individuals, communities and nations decide that it is meant for them only, God's plan is questioned. Misuse of money causes social problems and unbalance of the environment. Prodigality is excessive use of resources. We

cannot justify the prodigality displayed in family and community celebrations like marriage, birthdays and feast days. Misuse of earth and water is also prodigality.

6. Craze for Luxuries

It is an excessive desire for jewels and other things to adorn one. It is a danger fast growing through the influence of Medias and other decorative advertisements. This culture diffuses through blind imitation of sports stars and film stars. Globalization also helps to increase this fashion craze in young minds. We see the presence of riches, comforts and luxuries on one side and the tears and lamentations and groans of the poor who have no food to eat on the other side. In such a milieu, craze for luxurious things is a threat to social justice and is immoral.

7. Pleasure Seeking

It is a life-style looking only for pleasure using the comforts and conveniences obtained and obtainable. This is another temptation remaining close to craze for luxury. God's command is to work and earn bread. But man has a tendency to remain idle. Luxury and idleness goes hand in hand. Many see job as a means to earn money without doing the work. Modern structure and set-up, administration or political parties that support them, modern conveniences and technology make life mechanical. When body is given undue importance, soul is forgotten. The philosophy of pleasure seeking is : "Dead Yesterdays ,unborn tomorrows, only today is, so eat, drink and make merry". But human life does not terminate with the end of the life in this world. It is meant for eternal life. Hence we should be careful not to lose eternal joy by indulging in the pleasures of this world.

8. Unhealthy Competitions

Competition is good to some intent. It will help to discover the dormant talents in oneself, to develop them and to increase self-esteem. It is an inspiring force. But when competitions become unhealthy, it will lead to dangerous trends. Parents, being overanxious about the future of their children, push them into unhealthy competitions. It does great harm to them. Excessive rivalry in curricular and extracurricular activities may lead children to hypocrisy, quarrel and even suicide. In today's globalized world, the principle of "survival of the fittest" is prominent in life. The weak, the retarded, the old and the sick have no place in this world. Muscle power succeeds everywhere. The immoral trend-goal justifies means-is growing as a slogan of today. The noble thought that existence is co-existence gives way to another trend of thought – namely all are enemies among themselves. This attitude is quite contrary to Christian charity.

9. Hero Worship

A person trapped in the circle of material things forgets God and make himself god and turns to be an idol-worshipper. He is not able to attain the noble goal of existence and he depends

on people for material gain. Personal gods are very dear now because they fulfill only what is dear to persons. It is because of selfishness that man worships persons as god. We must respect persons who confronted life in an extraordinary way and succeeded. We must imitate their exemplary model. But it should not become worship. Heroes should not be made gods.

Christian life is a pilgrimage. The goal of this pilgrimage is heaven. It is a journey to the Father with Christ. A Christian should have the power of faith to overcome anything that keeps him away from this God. This world is full of temptations. In such a situation, the faithful need diligence, discernment and precaution to conquer such temptations and progress.

I. Find out the Answers

1. What are the forms of worldly pleasures that induce man?
2. Vainglory ultimately leads to the downfall of individuals and destruction of the people at large. Explain with examples.
3. Obedience to the word of God, our hearts have to be free from riches, is essential to enter heaven. Illustrate or elucidate.
4. How is church authority different from political authority?
5. How extravagance and pleasure - seeking become an obstacle to the perfection of Christian life?

II. Let us Discuss

1. A rich man gives a good percentage of his income for charitable services. Another rich man builds a house, using millions of rupees. How do you value them?
2. Let us share in the class the insight you gained through the description of the experience of an elder person who overcame temptations in practical life.

III. Activity

In my life, I will avoid all luxury and extravagances.

IV. Let us Enlighten our Hearts

“For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy” (James 3:16-17).