

Papal preacher: Separating types of love can lead to ‘moral deviations’

VATICAN CITY – Human love and divine love go hand in hand, and separating the two leads to problems that create alienation within and outside the church, said the papal preacher.

Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa said that the mistaken belief that the love people have toward one another and for God is incompatible with the unconditional love God shows for man has contributed to the secularization of the West as well as deviations among consecrated people.

The two expressions of love can be reconciled by putting love of Jesus Christ before everything, Father Cantalamessa said in the first meditation for Lent delivered to the pope and Vatican officials March 25.

Father Cantalamessa, who as the pope’s preacher is called on to deliver sermons, homilies and meditations for special occasions – including Lent and Advent – said Pope Benedict XVI joined some important doctors of the church in explaining the unity of “the two faces of love: ‘eros’ and ‘agape.’” The priest referred to Pope Benedict’s 2006 encyclical “Deus Caritas Est” (God Is Love) to explain the importance of integrating the concepts defined by the Greek words “eros,” the erotic love between a man and woman, and “agape” or self-sacrificial love.

Secularization and its emphasis on “eros,” Father Cantalamessa said, has “separated human love in all its forms from God, reducing it to something purely ‘profane’ in which God is ‘too much’ and even bothersome.”

On the other hand, he said, a love of God distinguished by “agape without eros” that is common to some men and women of the consecrated life is a “cold love.”

If the human love that leads to relationships and an emotional love for God is denied or repressed, Father Cantalamessa said, the result is for individuals to just carry on with fatigue for sense of duty, or to “seek compensation that may not be legitimate, including the very painful episodes that we have seen,” an apparent reference to

sexual abuse of minors by church figures.

The origin of many of the “moral deviations” of some consecrated people, he said, “is the distorted and contorted concept of love,” he said.

“If worldly love is like a body without a soul, this sort of religious life is like a soul without a body,” he said.

He pointed out that, in his encyclical, Pope Benedict said “eros” and “agape” were “ascendant and descendant love” that could “never be completely separated from each other” and that “they are united by the source of love, which is God.”

The acceptance of human and erotic love explained by the pope, Father Cantalamessa said, is helpful for people in love, including young married Christians by “showing the beauty and dignity of the love that unites.” The pope’s message, he said, is one of “hope for the world.”