

General Doctrinal Class

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The View of the Church on the  
Changing Moralities of the World regarding Sex

In the history of the so-called Christian world there have been many changes with regard to the morals of the peoples in relation to marriage and sex. There have been times when a very strict moral sense prevailed, and there have been times when there was scarcely any moral sense. There have been all manner of ups and downs in this relation, and every conceivable combination and mixture of ups and downs. There have been times when the ruling classes had a strict moral sense, and the common people had hardly any; and other times when the ruling classes were worse than what we have today, and the morals of the common people were much better than their rulers. There have been times when all the pre-marital relations between the sexes were strictly governed, but after marriage, at least on the part of the men, varying degrees of adultery were commonly accepted. And vice versa.

To me the whole question of the morals of Christians in relation to marriage and sex is a wonderful thing. As to doctrine, even from the beginning, there was the absence of any idea of the eternity of marriage. Consider the teachings of Paul about marriage: "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn." (1 Cor. 7:8,9.) From a misunderstanding of the Lord's words about marriage in Heaven, they had the idea that marriage was only for this world. At the same time they saw that the Lord in the New Testament likened His whole relation to the Church to marriage, many times, in both the Old and the New Testaments. And they had the Ten Commandments, confirmed and infilled by the Lord in the New Testament. And from this they could know that there was something very holy in marriage. But in general it must be said that the doctrinal teachings of the Church, making marriage a thing of this world only, did not help the Christians in their moral view of marriage and sex.

Yet consider the fact that the Christians altogether rejected polygamy. The Lord in the New Testament indeed taught monogamy, but not directly; that is, there is no direct command about it. Why did they reject polygamy? Modern scholars might say that it was because Christianity spread among people inclined already toward monogamy. But it was more than that. The whole idea of the Divinity of the Lord, the acknowledgment of the Divine in the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the soul of Christianity, is against polygamy. So much so that that acknowledgment and polygamy cannot be together at all. You can see this from the fact that conjugal love cannot exist unless between one man and one woman, and never with more than one. And conjugal love is out of the marriage of the good and the true. And the conjugal in its inmost and supreme is the union of the Divine and the Human in the Lord. (A.C. 6179,6343.) Again you can see this in this way, that the Lord united the Human to

the Divine. This He did in order that the minds of men, their human things, might be united to Him. If a man acknowledges the Divine in the Lord, there is present with him, working in Him, the idea that the human of man can be conjoined to the Lord, thus also the human thing of marriage. And the only kind of marriage that can be united is monogamous marriage. It is important for us all to see this, for in it we can see a relation between the inmost things and the outmost things of life, which those of the Church must come more and more to see in the things of life.

The Christian Church existed by influx from the Divine Human of the Lord, and it existed where the Divine of the Lord was acknowledged. And from this there came a kind of perception, not rationally formed, but living in their minds, of the holiness of marriage. From this there was a kind of perception even of the eternity of marriage, which came forth not in doctrine but in the ideas of the common people and in their poetry and literature. There was something of this in the souls of Christians, and the stamp of it is still there by a kind of heredity, in Christian peoples, and in those from their stock.

When there arose in the Christian Church a denial of the Divine of the Lord, there arose also an adultery, a love of adultery, worse than with other people. The separation of the Divine and the Human in the Lord, the separation of the good and the true, when they could have been conjoined, made possible that love of adultery. And the Third Testament testifies that the worst adulterers in the spiritual world are from among Christians. But this refers to the interiors of men, and not necessarily to their external moral views and habits. Such an interior state can exist when the general state of morals is strict, as well as when it is loose. But it is necessary to see the internal reasons why the whole matter of marriage and sex is so important to Christian peoples, both out of its internal origin in the acknowledgment of the Lord, and out of that interior origin in the denial of the Divine in the Lord.

In the sixteenth century Puritanism arose in England, and took command of the country in the following century, for a time. I mention this because the Puritans settled in America and influenced the moral outlook of this country. Puritanism was a rebellion against the dead formalism and against the moral laxity of the Church in England and related European countries. It could be defined as a kind of reformation and even as a revolutionary movement, but in the direction of stricter moralities. Associated with this movement was the idea that all pleasures are somehow sinful. This idea of course had been present in Christian conscience before, but became more pronounced. The Third Testament does not mention Puritanism as such, as far as I know, but it does speak of this idea that all pleasures are wicked. In A.C. 3425 it is said that they thought this, that is, they who supposed that they must renounce all the world, and all pleasures, because they were in the opposite themselves: that is, they were interiorly in things which made their pleasures wicked, and therefore regarded all pleasures as wicked,

whereas pleasures in themselves when they serve good loves, are not evil, but good. From the Puritans there came in certain Christians countries, by not means all of them, a very rigid moral code. In England the Puritans lost power, and the moral code was relaxed, especially among the ruling class. In the Nineteenth century another reformation took place under Queen Victoria. And this influenced America as well as England. Victorian moralities prevailed until the first world war, when a far freer and looser trend set in. This trend, with minor ups and downs, has continued ever since then, led especially by so called "thinkers" and avidly embraced by some young people. This movement, blown up to great size by magazines, newspapers, television, embraced by university professors, calls itself a sex revolution.

In general this so called revolution looks to the doing away with all restraints and inhibitions regarding marriage and sex, and to complete license for all man's bodily desires. The prevailing idea appears to be that whatever man wills is good, as far as he is concerned, that all his loves are good, that all life is good, and since all sexual desires are forms of life, they are all good. And these ideas are backed by atheistic materialism and by atheistic existentialism. These combine with the interior adulterous sphere of the denial of the Divine in the Lord, to produce a kind of frenzied attack on every remnant of Christian morality with regard to marriage and sex. It is not a normal attack, but has a kind of fire in it such as never existed in gentile nations. From a kind of inner struggle with the Christian stamp on their own souls, they have the greatest delight in trying to blot out with themselves and with all every remnant of Christian thought and feeling on the subject.

Is there anything good in all this? One good thing is the doing away with the idea that the love of sex in itself is evil. This had come to be very prevalent in the Puritan and Victorian movements. In the history of the New Church in America we have a very good example of that idea, namely, in the Kramph Will Case. In that law suit one body of the New Church contended that another body of the Church should not receive the Kramph bequest because it upheld the teachings given in Conjugal Love, and that these were against the public morality. The Convention had become so influenced by the ideas of the world on the subject that they could not receive Conjugal Love as a revealed book, and tried to make it out to be just Swedenborg's personal ideas about marriage and sex. I presume they thought that the world had advanced so far since Swedenborg's time, due to influx by permeation out of the New Heaven, that the morals of his day were no longer acceptable. From this you can see that there was a great deal wrong with all that prudery which existed in the puritanical and Victorian moralities. And it is at least possible for people now to see that the love of sex is a natural love, and not something in itself evil.

The Puritans regarded all sex as bad, along with other pleasures, because with them it was bad. But the opposite does not hold true,

namely, that the so called moderns hold sex to be good because with them it is good. There is no real evidence that it is any better with them than with the Puritans. If it were really better, they would be open to some real instruction on the subject, and would be able to see the real use of the love of sex. But there is no evidence of this at all. At present there is no evidence of any real sense of the holiness of marriage, nor any openness to its holiness, in that movement. It is dominated not by any genuine gentile feeling about sex and marriage, but by the breaking down of the Christian forms of morality, the good together with the bad. For this reason we can draw little comfort from this movement. It opposes equally the essentials of the New Testament with regard to marriage and sex as it does the pruderies that grow up around the misunderstanding of those essentials.

The present decay of Christian morality is more serious than former low periods in its history. The reason is that there is no power in that Church internally or externally to bring about any reformation. A reformation might come, but it will probably have to be out of political origin. No country could endure if the family life were destroyed. The Communists tried to do away with marriage, but after a short time they reluctantly came to the conclusion that marriage, although a bourgeois institution, was the best basis yet discovered for Society. For this reason a politically motivated reformation is possible.

In the meantime, what is the attitude of those of the Church toward these changes in the world? The acknowledgment of the Divine Human of the Lord, the striving toward the Conjugal, in the minds of individuals and in marriages, requires not only monogamy, but all the essential chastity taught in the literal and internal sense of the Word. It requires that we see what the real nature of the love of sex is, and how it can serve the Conjugal in the mind and in marriages.

One could say, well, we have to live in the world, and go along to some extent with its practices, and that the Church can survive somehow in all this disorder. But that is not true. If the Church leaves the Word, and cleaves to the world for its moral life, then the Church is already dead. You can say that we must come to a true understanding of the Word with regard to these things, and not just limit the understanding to the concepts received from the Puritan world or the Victorian world. That is right, and it is necessary to study the Word, and strive for an ever deeper understanding of it, freed from worldly influences. But it is the Word, and not the world that teaches what is necessary for the life of the Church, and we should not give up one iota of our understanding of the Word unless we can see that we have misunderstood it in some way.

And here is the principle which makes this whole subject of great importance to us: That the morality taught in the Word is for those to

whom an internal life is possible; and if one goes against that morality, the reception of internal life is injured. This is directly taught in the Word in relation to polygamy and monogamy, namely, that polygamy was permitted to the Jews and others because they could not become internal men, and that it is forbidden to Christians because they can become internal men. (A.C. 4837, C.L. 340.) Where men are internal, or can become internal, polygamy is an impossible thing, for it brings men into a fixed natural which is opposed to all things internal, opposed to the conjugal of husband and wife, opposed to the marriage of the good and true, opposed to the union of the Divine and the Human in the Lord. For the same reason, divorce, except for adultery, is not allowable to Christians. The Lord taught, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery." (Matthew 19:8,9.) So for the Jews divorce for slight reasons was permitted, but not for Christians, for the reason that they could come into the Conjugal.

This general principle, that the possibility of becoming men of the internal Church makes certain disorders in regard to marriage and sex wholly impermissible, has its corollary in the principle that the moralities taught in the sense of the latter of the New Testament and of the Third Testament give the essential external on which an internal life can be given to men. And if the Church does not teach that necessary external morality as an essential preparation for an internal life of the Church, the people of the Church are exposed to the danger of becoming crippled as to their spiritual development. A serious hurt to the external can cripple internal development. And this is just as true of moral hurts as it is of some brain damage that cripples the development of the whole mind.

A man can repent of any evil he has done, interiorly, provided he has not so confirmed himself in it that he cannot see it to be an evil. But it must also be acknowledged that a deferred repentance retards the development of the spirit, and also that there are evils which cripple that development, even if man repents of them.

For this reason the members of the Church cannot take a permissive or lenient attitude toward any moral disorders, including those of sex and marriage. Who could knowingly be willing to take responsibility for the hurt to the eternal spirit of anyone?

Often we hear from those who defend the modern trend with regard to sex and marriage, that it is better than the puritanical and Victorian morality, because the latter were full of hypocrisy. This is an appealing argument, because hypocrisy and deceit enter into and defile the spirit of man more interiorly than other evils. But we must look into this question more carefully. Young people particularly come into the idea that if they have some strong desire, it is hypocritical



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not to express and act upon it. Because their external desires are very strong, and because they don't feel their love to be regenerated strongly in the external, they feel that it is hypocritical of them to shun any of their external desires. They feel that they are shunning them only out of the love of reputation, honor and gain, which is hypocritical.

In answer to this, we must point out that if this argument were valid, no one could begin to be reformed. Reformation does bring a division in the mind, with one part fighting the other. If this division made a man a hypocrite, no one could be saved. And the reasoning which would bring a person to so confuse all beginnings of reformation with the love of reputation, honor and gain is a deadly reasoning.

Again, it is taught in the Word that there are external bonds which are of great use to the human race. If all external bonds were loosed, the human race would perish from the running out of its evil loves to its own destruction. The external bonds are those of fear of punishment, fear of loss of honor, reputation and gain. A man is not a hypocrite because he lives within those external bonds. He has to do that. He is a hypocrite only if he pretends he is acting out of spiritual loves in so living. In the chapter of Heaven and Hell entitled, "It is not so difficult to lead the life that leads to Heaven as is believed," (H.H.528), it is taught that a man must lead a moral and civil life for natural reasons, and that it therefore is not difficult to lead such a life out of the Divine. It is in the thought and intention that evils ought to be seen and shunned, and it should not be necessary for them to go forth into act in order to be seen and shunned, except with children, who cannot reflect on thoughts and intentions.

Those who level the charge of hypocrisy against the leading of an external moral and civil life are simply trying to avoid any internal struggle in their life. They feel that there has to be some strong, externally felt love for doing the good, before they will do it. Otherwise, they think it is hypocritical. For example, they won't go to Church, if on Sunday they don't feel externally a strong desire to do so. They follow their desires, and cast out their reason. To act out of reason without external desire they regard as sham. Back of all this thinking lies the idea that man of himself is good, or if he is not, then he can never do what is good.

In the Word it is taught that there are many degrees of evil, as well as of good. Thus there are some disorders of sex which are not so harmful as other disorders. These are not to be regarded as one hodge-podge of evils. There are those which are opposite to the Conjugal, and destructive of it, and those which are not destructive of it. They are all disorders, and are not to be taken lightly, but those of the Church must learn to discriminate between the one and the other. If we are not willing to follow the Word in so discriminating, it is a sign that we do not see the essence of the evil at all, and that we are regarding it from a proprial and worldly view, and not from the needs of the spirit of man.

The love of sex, in itself, is a natural love. It is a love which is of great use with mankind. It can be regenerated. We must therefore put away that idea that because a thing is sexual it is somehow bad in itself. The Word speaks of the difficult conversion of concupiscences of evil into good affections. (D.P. 326:12) Not all concupiscences of evil can be converted into good affections, but there are concupiscences which can be converted. The love of sex, which in its origin is good, comes down into man's natural in forms of concupiscences. Some of these are wholly opposite to the Conjugal, and cannot be converted, but must be shunned as sins against the Lord. Such is all love of adultery itself. But other concupiscences of that love can be converted and become the affections of the Conjugal. Here the Church must learn to discriminate. If we do not learn to discriminate we can do much harm to ourselves and to others, and will be regarding the whole subject from the world, even though we imagine we are regarding it from the Word. We must regard these things from the Spirit of the Word, in its letter, and not from the sense of the letter alone. We must strive to see what the real use of bodily and natural things is, in their relation to the spirit of man, in its present state and with regard to the possibilities of its development.

In general, while those of the Church must uphold the teachings of the literal sense of the Third Testament with regard to sex and marriage, as with regard to all things of life, we must strive to enter into the interior things of those teachings, we must enter into the discriminations indicated in the Word, into the real relationship of the external things of life to the spirit of man. Only in this way can we advance towards a living morality, one in which the spirit is guarded, and at the same time open to the convertive sphere of the Lord's Mercy with men.