

communion with Emmanuel, which brings both sex and reason into the flow of charity, purifying, harmonizing, elevating all that is in us. Christians are too diffident, too distrustful; if we believed more in grace we should experience its effects more fully. Such is the lesson of every page of the Gospels.

Christianity and Sex: Orientations¹

CORNELIUS ERNST, O.P.

'It is the way our sympathy flows and recoils that really determines our lives. And here lies the vast importance of the novel, properly handled. It can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead. Therefore, the novel, properly handled, can reveal the most secret places of life: for it is in the *passional* secret places of life, above all, that the tide of sensitive awareness needs to ebb and flow, cleansing and refreshing'.

This eminently quotable and much quoted passage from *Lady Chatterley's Lover* allows us to indicate the purpose and scope of the reflections which follow. It is certainly an exploration of consciousness (and conscience) that we propose to make, but neither as novelist nor as saint, concerned to illuminate and purify the secret springs of life, so far as these are accessible to the intelligence of feeling and sympathy; it is rather from the viewpoint of the Christian theologian that an attempt will be made here to explore consciousness and conscience, to analyse its ingredients, to take stock: an exercise of intelligence sensitive enough, it is hoped, to avoid the crudities of brute imperatives, but none the less conceptual and discursively rational, while at the same time resorting to those privileged sources of insight available to the Catholic in divine revelation.

'Christianity and sex,' it is clear, is as much a disjunction as a conjunction: the 'and' separates as much as it combines. For the Catholic

¹The substance of one of the Dominican lectures given at Cambridge in March 1961.

theologian sex becomes relevant by being situated in an economy of salvation, the intelligibility of which is condensed in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ; objects of our consideration which possess their own intrinsic intelligibility, accessible at least in principle to the unaided reason, acquire their theological significance by being considered in the light of this revelation, by being referred mediately or immediately to God in Christ. We should not suppose in advance that this 'situating' or 'referring' must be a matter of logical map-work merely, such that sex, more or less exhaustively analysed in its purely natural significance, may be analysed theologically merely by the addition of some further reference on a map only extended in the same dimension, as it were, or even by the addition of some co-ordinate in a new dimension. The situating, referring, 'orientation,' involves the assumption of the theme of sex with its natural intelligibility into a Christian context in which a new significance, till then hidden, is disclosed in the theme itself—revelation illuminating it from within. The illumination, however (and this is the point here), must take place in our human minds, as the consequence of an effort of intelligent inquiry and analysis: we have to make ourselves amenable to the light.

We may as well remind ourselves at the very start that one obvious context in which sex is and must be considered is the biological one. For the biologist, sex is a means (or as is often said, a 'mechanism') of reproduction. It is certainly not the only means of reproduction: non-sexual reproduction is common among the simpler organisms, and is found together with sexual reproduction in many plants. These elementary truths of biology are not being rehearsed here as an evasive device to 'demythologize' sex by reduction to the 'facts of life': the purpose is to indicate the wide community of life in which human sexuality finds a place while differentiating itself from it. For the community of life is not only to be noted objectively, human sexuality thus being related to other objects of biological science; it needs to be rediscovered and re-enacted subjectively, in the living experience of the individual person. What is thus rediscovered in experience is a solidarity of generations in time; a human solidarity which is not merely the simultaneity of a pictorial order, but a solidarity in coming to be and passing away of a musical order, a rhythm of generations. To be a human being is to be born (we must allow for our curious tendency to think about things as though we had never been born) and to bear in each of ourselves the power to prolong the race into which we have been born: we are, precisely as human persons, members of the human *race*, the human

stock, and our human sexuality is ordered by its very nature to the continuity of the race. We bear in ourselves the potent virtue to prolong the human stock; and as moral persons of a human nature we bear the responsibility for the future of the race, just as, by being born into the race, we must accept a responsibility for the past of the race as the temporal human solidarity into which we have been born.

We may now turn to the forms of simultaneous solidarity in which we are involved in virtue of our sexual nature. Again obviously, sexuality involves mutual human engagement, notably in the social institution of marriage and the family.² To speak of a social institution here is to indicate that the connection of man and woman, husband and wife, in marriage, is a matter of concern to the larger social solidarity of the human community of which marriage is an institution, and a subject for the regulating and directing activity, the legislation and government of that community; it is also to raise the question as to what criteria are available in accordance with which that legislation and governments are to proceed. It is the emphatic assertion of the Catholic Church that these criteria and norms exist by divine institution, and also that they may be given explicit formulation at least in part.

At this point the whole pressure of the opposition between the Church and the world is to-day concentrated; and the clarification of the opposition is a first step towards its resolution, at least in the consciences of Catholics themselves, who are the chief victims of this conflict of aspiration. The Catholic claim that there are 'natural' norms of human sexuality is a particular instance of what is felt to be an intolerable restriction of the indefinite possibilities of human development, personal or social: the capacity for enlarged experience, a 'humanism' scientific or revolutionary, is offered as the source of achieved values which at the same time are inevitably partial and await further fulfilment in the process of history. Any Catholic theology of sex must concern itself not only with sex as a matter of human biology, phylogenetically, or with sex in sociology, but also with sex in the growth of the human person, individually and ontogenetically. The 'natural' norms we put forward have to be disclosed as norms of human growth, as constitutive of the dignity of the human person: we have to indicate (no

²Other lectures of this series, which will be published later in *Blackfriars* are explicitly devoted to this topic, which consequently need not be discussed in detail here. We may merely note in passing that in many languages, including Biblical Hebrew, sexual difference is indivisibly qualified *socially* and is never merely neutral: *homo*, e.g., is Man universally, while *vir* is man sexually and also 'husband,' the sexual differentiation implying the social link.

more would be appropriate here) a notion of human 'nature' which on the one hand provides a basis for the norms of Catholic teaching, and on the other is capable of assimilating and organizing the differentiated growth of personal experience. As human beings we are, and discriminatingly must be, images of our environment; but we are also, and more profoundly, in the image of God.

The recent controversy over *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is particularly interesting here, as an illustration of the mutual incomprehension of antagonists whose basic presuppositions have never become explicit. On the one hand, in the greater part of the Catholic press, for instance, uncompromising hostility, however absurd the reasons often produced ('obscurity,' 'the glorification of adultery'); on the other, an equally absurd enthusiastic rapture, the court's decision greeted as a great day in English history, the beginning of a messianic era of the liberation of the mind. The hostility, however unfortunately expressed and justified, must surely be seen as an honest endeavour to safeguard the notion of norms of human nature; the raptures surely as an expression of deep if incoherent convictions about the need to release and foster the living growth of human experience. The conflict of opinions has clearly been the expression of apparently irreconcilable world-views, rather than a difference in appraisal of an uneven novel which often succeeds in 'revealing the secret places of life'.

In *Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence himself attempted to answer many of the objections urged against the novel, though this short and powerful pamphlet has an intrinsic interest far greater than that of a sort of *pièce justificative*. For our present purposes, the point of interest is that even Lawrence's most solemn assertions of the sanctity of marriage continue to appeal to a human 'nature' given in enacted personal experience, apprehended in an act of self-creation, though discovering thereby a continuity and solidarity with cosmic rhythms which ratify and sustain the sense of that experience. It is, of course, in this feeling for sexual experience as creative of the deeper self that Lawrence can speak of the 'regeneration of England by sex'.

'Supposing, then, that I cannot see this Saviour and Salvation stuff, supposing that I see the soul as something that must be developed and fulfilled throughout a life-time, sustained and nourished, developed and further fulfilled to the very end; what then?

Then I realise that marriage, or something like it, is essential . . . Marriage is the clue to human life, but there is no marriage apart from the wheeling sun and the nodding earth, from the straying of

the planets and the magnificence of the fixed stars'. Here is human 'nature' as something lived out from within, where the living out can renew contact with the secret places of life within, in harmony with a more than personal Nature.

It should be clear that the only feature of this statement a Catholic would wish to quarrel with is an implicit claim to exhaustiveness: that human nature is *sufficiently* apprehended as a potentiality for experience, for 'life'. It is in fact the notion of 'experience' which is so deeply questionable, a 'consciousness' which appears to exclude 'conscience'. It is one of the chief concerns of this paper to argue that fullness of 'consciousness' can never be achieved except as fullness of 'conscience,' that an essential 'ingredient of experience' is a sense for norms in submission to which alone human growth is possible. Clearly, Lawrence's cosmic order has the role of such a norm, one which exercises a manifest authority for those who allow themselves to become sensitive to it; clearly too the norms of Catholic teaching about human nature are more often than not presented as a system of arbitrary imperatives with no apparent roots in an experientially apprehensible core of human personality. But there is a long tradition in the Church, endorsed for instance by St Thomas, which sees the 'natural' and normative core of human personality in its dignity as image of God; and in the present context it is important to insist that its *normative* character is *vocational*: that it enters consciousness and conscience not simply as a closed system of imperatives but as an orientation, a direction of growth. To be a human person is to be *called* by God into being, called into doing (thinking, feeling, loving), in accordance with a divine purpose for our fulfilment. This will only seem strange for someone for whom human growth is typically as aimlessly self-contained as the growth of a tree, for whom the growth of consciousness is or might be the effortless flowering of intrinsic virtualities. But, we argue, this is not so: human inwardness is derivative and created, such that its maturing essentially involves obedience, the ingredience as conscience into consciousness of extrinsic rule as an ordained way and sense of life. As image of God our human personality finds its fulfilment in the task of giving its source back to itself.

It must be admitted that this view of human personality is not likely to recommend itself to someone who is not a Catholic believer; but it has to be repeated that just as in the parallel case of the demonstration of God's existence, the Catholic morality of the 'natural law' is only *in principle* (in inalienable principle, certainly) accessible to the reason unaided by revelation. The 'nature' which is the basis of the natural

law is primarily a *theological* concept, located in the total revelation of God to sinful man. To identify, as is done here, this 'nature' with the 'image of God' is to give it a content in faith which the ordinary Catholic is depressingly aware of having to do without in most presentations of Catholic morality, the 'nature' being a largely unconvincing abstraction. We have to become familiar with the seeming paradox that it is only as Catholic believers that we may confidently insist on the rigorous validity of 'natural' law, because it is only within the total revelation of the God who is author of nature and grace that nature can definitively be located from without: human nature as 'image of God' is such a location, offering the opportunity of concrete realization in the experience of faith.

In the ontogenesis of the human person, then, sex has its place not only as an unfolding of experience but as a response to a divine vocation; and in the continuing course of that response it is our obligation manifestly to renew with every new occasion our dignity as image of God.³ It is perhaps time now to examine a little more closely what we learn from revelation about the content of that vocation.

The phylogenetic solidarity of the human race is given its profound sense for the Catholic believer in the revealed doctrine of the unity of human descent from Adam. That temporal community of the human race into which we are each of us born by a new intervention of God's creative freedom needs to be understood in the light of that first intervention in the biological process by which Adam was created; and that in its turn only finds its ultimate meaning in the further creative intervention of God which is the Incarnation, the establishment by God's grace of a new principle of human solidarity, the second Adam. God's creative interventions in time need to be understood typologically, so that the ultimate *mysterion* of his purpose for mankind is progressively revealed in a saving history whose culmination so far has been the Resurrection. The assumption of biological generation into saving his-

³This would be the place to discuss the problem of sexual anomalies. The connection between grace and freedom can be presented in accordance with the characterization (due to the Catholic psychiatrist Lopez-Ibor) of disease as a restriction of freedom, with particular reference to 'interior' factors restricting freedom in the ontogenesis of the person, the doors locked against the growth of the human spirit. Since the ultimate freedom, the will to will, is a gift of God's grace, the problem of sexual anomalies is to be seen as a special case of the problem of evil and its resolution in the paschal mystery, the source of our grace. Grace is the means whereby, in consenting to it, we *personally* appropriate Christ's victory over the *néant* of human existence.

tory means that the future of the race for which the partners of a marriage are jointly responsible, is now found in the eschatological figure of the New Adam: marriage finds its meaning as a figure of the union of Christ and the Church, and the offspring of marriage need to be introduced into the new solidarity by baptism.⁴

But the process of saving history is the enactment of a *moral* mystery, the making manifest of sin and love: it is through personal response in human beings that the cosmic process is given its redemptive sense. Sexual morality is informed by the redemptive mystery, by way of judgment or fulfilment: it exhibits God's love or his wrath in every succeeding historical moment. Catholic sexual morality can never cease to be a testimony to the world of the Passion and Resurrection, and indeed for many Catholics, in the West at least, it is the only true martyrdom which they may expect to face and endure. It is certain that they will fail in this test if they have not acquired a sense of the place of sex in the ontogenesis of the human person, the revelation of the sons of God for which all creation groans. 'This mystery is great; but I speak with reference to Christ and the Church'.

Authority and Radicalism

JOHN COULSON

This is not a statement of a political kind: a manifesto for yet another Catholic Guild; nor is it what Field Marshal Montgomery would call an excuse for belly-aching. It is rather an agenda for further study—a plea for a new attitude of mind. I say attitude of mind, because my own experience of Catholics has been that in this country they still tend to look at social questions differently from their fellow Christians—as aliens, not as members by birth of a society which 'belongs' to the members of the other denominations, in their capacity as citizens. This attitude is expressed in terms of keeping oneself to oneself, or the half-resentful assumption of a superiority which is not felt: 'They have the

⁴The place of virginity in the Christian economy was discussed in a separate lecture, to be published later in *The Life of the Spirit*.