

## HUMAN REPRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

MARK BROCKLEHURST, O.P.

THE members of a Committee of the British Medical Association, in giving evidence before the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce, have recently made proposals to add new grounds for divorce. The surprising thing is not the audacity of these marriage reformers, but their timidity. If it is true that the ancient Christian institution, in all its rigidity, is out of date and unworkable in the modern world, then the new circumstances should be studied and really sweeping changes made. The alarming increase in divorce makes it abundantly clear that all this tinkering with the ancient institution does not make it more workable, but less workable. And yet it is to *preserve* the institution that the changes are made. The committee say that they wish to stress the necessity for 'permanent and stable partnerships in marriage', and maintain 'that the greatest possible number of sound family units is essential to the nation's health and well-being', and would support 'every effort to ensure that marriage as an institution is both stable and permanent'. Without wishing to call in question their sincerity, it must be pointed out that it can only be utter confusion of mind and blindness to the realities that can lead people, who value marriage for what it should be, to take steps that have produced, and will produce, results that are the exact opposite of their hopes. Marriage is indivisible. On no grounds whatever is there any sense or soundness in trying to make it more permanent and stable for some by making it less permanent and stable for others. They are only two views that have any *prima facie* case for consideration, and the 'easier divorce' policy is not one of them. Either marriage is a mundane affair that can and should be supplanted as our scientific knowledge and technique progress, or it is part of the structure of the universe, to be accepted simply and absolutely. Either it is a utility which can be supplanted, as the telephone and radio have supplanted the beacon system of communication, or it is unchangeable. If the former, then the ideal to aim at and bring about as quickly as possible is something like the system described in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, with its artificial insemination, incubators, etc.,

1. This is the fifth article in the series, 'Some Contemporary Moral Problems'.

where, in a forthright manner, the whole system of producing children is organised and developed on strictly scientific lines and is taken out of the context of man and women living together for spiritual and physical companionship.

Perhaps there are some who hope for such a change. But they are probably not the real enemies of marriage, yet. There is not the slightest evidence that the members of the Committee of the B.M.A. are insincere when they say they want to preserve marriage as a stable unit of society. But there is also no doubt that they are the true enemies of marriage when, out of a well-meaning but confused desire to ease the burdens and difficulties of personal relationships in marriage (which in any case are not its essence), they change the thing in itself; in other words, destroy it.

In some matters the teaching of the Church finds a ready and willing response in the world at large; pronouncements of the Pope will be listened to attentively, and applauded and accepted. In some spheres the Church enjoys a position of respect and influence. But that is true only of matters in which the teaching of the Church and the aspirations and mood of the world are already in harmony. The Church even leads in matters where the world is in a mood to be led. One of the great exceptions, perhaps the greatest, is in everything connected with sexual morality and human reproduction. And here the mood of the world and the teaching of the Church are diametrically opposed. The recent mother-and-child controversy proved, if proof is needed, that the Catholic view of marriage and sexual morality is condemned and dismissed as the fruit of irrational religious fanaticism. The practical problem is not merely to understand, and be able to 'prove', the Church's teaching. We have to discover a wave-length, an idiom, that makes our convictions intelligible. The tragedy is that the truth which would save the world and society is rejected, not always out of malice, but because it fails to evoke a response; it does not impinge on people's lives. It comes to them like a curiosity out of the past that is equally irrelevant whether it is true or false. For our comfort we know that the gospel preached with Faith, Hope and Charity, though it will be rejected here and there out of malice, will always find a response. But perhaps to say that is no more than to repeat the problem: *to preach the gospel with Faith, Hope and Charity.*

A good example of the difficulties and hindrances of language

can be found in the phrase 'the sanctity of marriage'. Wherever the fault lies, the fact remains that there is a general impression that 'holy matrimony' is a highly spiritual union, essentially restrictive, which on account of the restrictions is able to justify and tolerate sex simply because it is reduced to a minimum and made a mere utility. What the phrase actually means is that sex is holy. Matrimony is not a cloak to hide, but a pedestal to ennoble. All those things restricted and forbidden by Catholic teaching are not primarily restrictive because of a tendency to misuse, but are positive assertions as to the intrinsic value and special significance of human sexual reproduction. The word 'holy' is used, not in the first instance because it is now a sacrament and as such is now under the proper authority of the Church; it is called 'holy' because it is not quite in the same category as eating and drinking, but is more like birth and death which are not entirely of this world. Sometimes we are accused of not facing the realities and the necessities imposed on man by his lower nature. But the Church, with its Holy Matrimony, far from hiding or shying away from animal nature, is the only institution in the world today that takes a sexual view of marriage. Indeed, its whole doctrine is no more than a patient and thorough analysis of the one phrase: human sexual reproduction. On the other hand, it is the marriage reformers who do not give proper attention to the bodily nature of man. And if the phrase 'the sanctity of marriage' is regarded with suspicion, the phrase 'the breakdown of a marriage' is very revealing. We are told that when a 'marriage has broken down' we ought to be realist, and, after a proper legal process in which the causes will be investigated and weighed, the breakdown should be legalised. But such a phrase can be used only by people who turn their attention from the male-female nature of marriage and regard its essence as something like compatibility of temperament: a union of two people through love. Obviously a special kind of intimate love should be the motive and stay of married life. And that can break down. But when it does, it is not the marriage that has broken down. And the whole teaching and practice of the Church is, in general, that it is precisely the marriage union which still exists, and can and should be the motive and context of rekindling love.

The gaze of the Church is direct and simple, and by contrast the gaze of the world is confused. Perhaps one of the causes of the

confusion is animal passion, bodily sexual desire. The word is used to mean a simple physical fact, of itself amoral. Clearly such bodily dispositions are intended to be, in the designs of God, forces directing men and women towards marriage, i.e. to seek sexual union. Unfortunately, it is not a mere matter of words to distinguish between seeking sexual union and seeking satisfaction of bodily desires. To seek satisfaction of bodily desire in sexual union is virtuous and holy; to seek sexual union in order to satisfy bodily desire is sub-human and immoral. The Church makes this distinction by keeping its gaze directed at the nature of sexual union. Sexual desire is not of the nature of sex, but is accidental to it. And the Church makes this distinction, not by casting its eyes up to heaven and exhorting us to rise *above* our animal nature and redeem our passions in the high spiritual purposes of the Divinity; the Church makes this distinction not by rising higher but by sinking lower. Full attention is given, not only to our lower nature but to our lowest nature. Sexual reproduction takes its rise, not in animal nature, but in vegetable nature. Indeed, sex is the pride and glory of plants. It is their highest and proper life and their whole existence is taken up with it. They flaunt their reproductive organs in a rich variety of shapes, colours and perfumes, and we adorn our houses with them. 'Consider the lilies of the field. . . .' When the Church teaches that the end of marriage is the reproduction of the species, she is only asserting what is a clearly observed fact of the universe. When that fact is lost sight of and *in its place* is put the good of the partners to the union, we are in error about the nature of sex, and are confusing it with the satisfaction of bodily desire or with human love; both belong to marriage but do not constitute its nature.

Animals and plants show forth in a remarkable degree this subjection of the needs of the individual to the good of the species. It is sometimes said that the promiscuity of the animals would be a freedom that would be commendable, because more 'natural', in man. But to say so is to ignore the more astonishing truth that it is anything but a freedom; anything but a self-seeking. An animal is bound by 'marriage ties'. It is imprisoned in its nature. Through its own blind instincts it is 'married' to its kind, and in fact is so frequently sacrificed as an individual, for the good of the species.

The state of human marriage is precisely the human counterpart to that, but, because human, it frees and does not enslave. An

animal is possessed by its kind; a man possesses himself. Therefore *human* sexual reproduction will be a use of what is possessed, humanly, as a person. But as individuals we do not possess the powers of reproduction. It is our unique glory to be free persons among created beings, but, in the matter of reproduction, it is also our defect. Man is only half a being. And what is lacking can only be possessed by being freely given. So it is that the contract of marriage is a mutual giving of bodily rights, and the resulting state is the mystery of two *in one flesh*. Sexual union without that previous giving of rights is an offence against our own freedom and personality.

Moreover such mutual giving must, of its nature, be absolute and unconditional. What is given cannot be withdrawn. A temporary and conditional giving is no giving at all. The rights would be rights only in name. Presumably the whole case for divorce rests on the apparent truth that what has been freely given can, by mutual consent and with legal sanction, be forfeited or withdrawn. But the fact is that this talk of giving and taking is misleading. The give and take of the marriage contract is a creative act. A new reality comes into existence: a complete human being. It is constituted by the possession of mutual rights, but the creative power does not come from the man and woman. It was not they who made themselves male and female. When a man puts together the two halves of a torn bank-note, it is not he who makes it worth the £5. A man and a woman can choose to exchange mutual bodily rights; when they do so they are calling into being a reality that is greater than either of them and which is not in their power to destroy.

This may not be immediately evident, but we are doing a great service both to the truth and to the world if we at least try to dispel the confusion by making clear exactly what is the reality that the Church is talking about. Marriage is not any sort of union between two people. The Church does not say that divorce is wrong. The Church says that divorce is impossible. It is not that the marriage vows are of such a nature that they should not be broken; they *cannot* be broken. And this arises, not because the man and the woman are human persons solemnly pledged to love one another, but because they are male and female dedicated to the purposes of the universe. For sexual reproduction to be human it must be the function of a unity and identity that already exist.

A confusion between bodily desire and sexual union was spoken of above; a more serious confusion exists between human love and human sexual union. It is the nature and perfection of love to be universal and comprehensive. It is the nature and perfection of marriage to be individual and exclusive. When the Church reminds the husband and wife that they must love everyone including their enemies, she is talking about a reality without which the grace of God is a fiction, and she is not urging upon them something inconsistent with their marriage vows. But this universal and comprehensive love is not a disembodied, vapid, indiscriminate love of everyone *in general*; it is a discriminate love of everyone *in particular*, in accordance with an individual's relationship to us. Indeed, we can be said to fulfil this universal obligation in the degree to which we love those known to us and those near to us. It will begin in the child quite spontaneously in that love of utter dependence on its parents. That same love is broadened and deepened as it extends to, and includes, brothers and sisters and friends. It comes of age when it extends to and includes the woman, who is loved as woman, with soul and body. That is to say, passionately. 'With my body I thee worship.' It is this latter that makes married love individual and exclusive. The child's world is its love of its parents. It possesses the world through them. The world of married people is each other; they possess the world through each other. Their love is the life that they lead as two in one flesh, but that one flesh is the marriage bond. Ultimately it cannot be healthy for human life in the world to sacrifice the marriage bond because the absence of love has made married life impossible. It is to go against the deepest instincts within us. To do so is to make impossible any integration of human nature and human living.<sup>2</sup>

Marriage, and the family unit of which it is the basis, is the vital organ, the heart, of the human community. From it stem out all the other organs and functions of society, including the State itself. And they all share something of its nature. Human society is in the nature of things an immensely rich and delicately balanced organism, the main function of which is to educate, in the fullest sense of the term, the next generation. 'Increase and

<sup>2</sup> In a recent work, published in translation in this country (*What God Has Joined Together*. By Gustave Thibon; Hollis and Carter, 10s. 6d.), Christian marriage has been analysed in terms of human love and its implications.

multiply.' Life in this world is *self-renewing existence*. That is the essential pattern of it, whether it be the life of the lily or the life of the man. And that pattern is not changed by redemption in the grace of Christ, through the Church. Christ is the second Adam. Life in him is essentially human. Grace and ultimate happiness are to be won, not by turning away from the realities of our nature but by redeeming them. Marriage and family life are now fortified by a sacramental status.

The very process of redemption itself was a family affair. Christ is the Son of God and of our Lady. In this world he lived with his Mother, and with her husband, St Joseph, who in the designs of God was to be thought to be the father of our Lord. The truth that the marriage was chaste and virginal, far from detracting from the holiness of sex, surely only emphasises it the more.

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO MODERN LOGIC

IVO THOMAS, O.P.

IT is a feature of much contemporary philosophical writing that an amateur of the literature finds himself unable even to think he understands it because of the extent to which the writers draw on the technicalities of modern logic. Usually such a reader does not know where to turn for enlightenment, and very frequently on being given some references to introductory books he finds himself baffled by an austere and technical exposition of the very technicalities that he wishes to understand. These few pages contain some preliminary remarks addressed only to such investigators.

Formal logic is, and so far as it has remained true to itself, always has been, an exact science. The syllogism, we once heard a theologian remark, is not an essay in *vers libre*. There are indeed degrees of exactness. Aristotle, who founded the science so far as concerns its European development, laid it down as a principle that phrases equivalent in significance should be interchangeable, but what phrases these might be is left to be discovered from his usage and forms no part of his system. We find for instance the sentence 'all medicine is science' treated as a substitution in the scheme for a sentence '*B* belongs to all *A*', it having been stated

B