

SEX LOVE AND MARRIAGE<sup>1</sup>

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**W**HY do we say, rightly, that sex is something that, generally speaking, should not be talked about in public, in mixed groups, especially between boys and girls? Is it because sex is mean and shameful, perhaps even sinful? Is it because sex is the private concern of men only, something, therefore, that women need not bother about and are not entitled to know about? Is it because sex is something holy and sacred, something to be protected; a mystery whose secrets we penetrate only gradually; something, therefore, to be kept secret, in various measures, from the eyes of the uninitiated; and all this in order that this holy thing might not be abused by ignorant, careless, or wicked people?

Certainly not for the first reason. Sex is not dirty and shameful, still less sinful. 'God created man to his own image; male and female he created them. And God blessed them saying: Increase and multiply and fill the earth. And God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good.' God created man and woman, and so he created sex. And since God is love, the mystery and reality of that love relationship we call sex with reference to human beings, is to be found, as a divine mystery and reality, within the Godhead in the love relationship of the Trinity. Adults can sometimes give a boy the impression that sex is not quite nice. More often than not it is not that they say this in so many words; it is their way of talking about the subject: their behaviour, their whole attitude, the atmosphere of unease and embarrassment they create when answering his questions, or, often enough, by their complete silence and refusal to meet the questions. When that happens it is because the grown-ups themselves have a false attitude and an inadequate response to sex. Uneasy themselves, they naturally breed uneasiness in others

<sup>1</sup> This essay is an amalgam of some points made in a number of talks on this subject to different groups of people, from school-leavers to young married couples. It is an attempt to present the theme in broad outline, rather than a discussion of any one aspect in close detail. Inevitably, there are a number of different levels of thought and a certain unevenness in writing.

when forced to think and speak about something they have managed to shut away more or less successfully from their conscious acceptance. Among married people one sometimes finds the most fantastic notions: sex is thought of as something different from love. A young wife will sincerely declare her love for her husband, a love which she genuinely feels, but she does not want anything to do with 'the sordid business of sex'; or, at best, she is prepared to accept it grudgingly and with many misgivings because, as I have heard more than once, she supposes marriage 'makes it all right'.

If, then, we should never talk indiscriminately about sex, but on the contrary always approach the subject with care, tact, and reverence (but not, I hope, with guilty misgivings or anxious fear), it is not because sex is sordid and brutal. It is because sex is, as I have just suggested, something holy and sacred, and is a reflection in human activity of the infinite mystery of the life of the Blessed Trinity. The Christian view of sex is that its use in the married state or its dedicated surrender in the celibate state is an act of the virtue of chastity; and given the inter-relation of the virtues in the total pattern of the life of holiness, that use of sex by married people and that dedicated surrender of its use by single persons and religious is at the same time an act related to the virtue of religion; an act of worship and sacrifice made to God because we love him.

I suggested a second possible reason why we do not always discuss sexual matters in a mixed group. Sex is not the private concern of men any more than it is of women. Clearly the use of our sexual functions in the married state is the privilege and duty of both husband and wife. Nevertheless it is right and necessary at times that discussions should be directed to each of the sexes in separate groups. I say that not merely from considerations of morality. The danger of sinning in these circumstances is, I feel, sometimes exaggerated, and, by just such an exaggerated isolation, increased. But let us be honest: if original sin has not totally corrupted human nature, nor made it essentially evil, neither has redemption through grace restored us to that state of original innocence which Adam and Eve enjoyed in the garden of Eden. But apart from any possible occasion of sin, it just is a fact of experience that those aspects of sex that are specifically masculine in character are more helpfully and readily ventilated

in a totally male gathering; and from such discussions the women are rightly excluded; just as, taking the other side of the picture, the men are excluded in similar circumstances from certain discussions with the women. And this sense of the fittingness of each sex keeping to itself something of the mystery of its own role and nature is worlds apart from a prim and prudish isolationism. This sense of taboo, especially where boys and girls in the younger age-groups are concerned, has important evolutions later on in married life, on which a great deal of the success and happiness of the marriage will depend. For it awakens one to the realization that it is the duty and privilege of each partner to initiate the other to an understanding of his part; and this is true of the whole sphere of life together, and not merely of the sexual relationship in the strict and limited sense. And, secondly, it foreshadows and should safeguard a truth often forgotten in married life, namely, that each partner is ultimately a person in his own right; neither of them must become absorbed into the other. This will mean that each must claim a certain sphere of privacy. If economic circumstances do not permit of a personal room into which one can retire at times to be quiet, then at least one must be allowed to retire within oneself on those occasions when one feels the necessity. This is a withdrawal in order to be able to give oneself the more. And just as in our earlier years that sensitive appreciation of the need for privacy between the sexes on occasion was not to be equated with a prudish isolationism, so that same appreciation carried over into married life, but now deepened and more refined, and finding expression in the need to withdraw for a time on occasion, is not to be thought as an act of selfishness or as a desire to lead a private life of one's own independently of the rest of the family. I remember a young wife, who really loved her husband, but who had broken down under the strain of living together, telling me that what did it most of all was the fact that she could never have a moment's privacy. If she had to go into the kitchen to do some job or other, her husband, sitting in the living room, would get restive and come through to be with her. It was the same wherever she went about the house. Even in the same room his eyes followed her about until, in the end, she felt like a hunted beast with no way of escape. Have you ever seen a little two-year-old toddler who never lets his mother out of his sight?

But I am getting ahead too fast and no doubt you are saying: 'What has all this talk about sexual love and marriage got to do with us? We're not likely to be thinking of marriage for another ten years at least.' True, but it is during these next ten years that you will be preparing yourselves in a very special way for the whole of your life. In these ten years you will be laying the foundation for your future marriage (or for your future religious vocation or single state in the world, if either of these ways should be God's will for you). And you will be preparing yourselves in four ways; physically, psychologically, economically and spiritually.

If you use these ten years well you will avoid later on in your married life the worst effects of what I shall call the Animal, Vegetable and Mineral attitude to love and sex.

Let me say a word about each of these four factors in turn.

Physically your body will not be fully ready for the living of an adult life until the early twenties. But that part of your body which is specifically concerned with sex starts to develop in a special way about the age of fourteen and completes its development in a matter of a year or two. So that by the age of seventeen you are sexually developed from the physical point of view, although not yet an adult and not likely to be married for perhaps another six or seven years.

Now these ten years between puberty and marriage can be a period of trial and difficulty. It is no solution to these difficulties to advocate sinful flirtations and liaisons with girls or acts of masturbation. It is no solution to advocate a complete upheaval of the social and economic structure of society in order to make marriage possible for young people of sixteen or seventeen. Apart from moral and other considerations, these are not solutions for the simple reason that it is false to be looking for a 'solution' at all. This is not a problem period to be met by slick and easy solutions; it is a time of challenge to be met with the full and free response of youth in search of great things. I have not the time, nor is it suitable to deal here with particular difficulties, especially in connection with masturbation. But I am convinced that a healthy, positive attitude to his difficulties during this time of life will never be fostered in a boy if he is threatened with hell or madness. In saying that I do not wish to diminish the wrongness of masturbation as such: masturbation is wrong and one may not

do such a thing; but objective wrongness and the personal guilt of sin, although connected, should be carefully distinguished. Nor am I unaware of the difficulties that may beset a young husband as a result of a settled habit of masturbation, but that is no excuse for a wicked threat which is based on a medical untruth. Such threats and others like them are a misuse of religious principles by lazy and unthinking adults who want a sure way of compelling conformity to the external letter of the moral law. At best that is all they will get: conformity to the letter. Again the hale and hearty advice of some cheerful disciplinarians about taking cold baths, playing hard games of football and generally toughening oneself, may be all right for some boys, but the physical and nervous exhaustion which this rigorous programme might cause in other boys of a different constitution and temperament would only increase their difficulties. Certainly it is true that one *has* to make an effort to counteract a tendency to laziness, self-pity and day-dreaminess and one must not allow oneself to hang about indoors slumped up in armchairs indulging one's imagination in all sorts of morbid thoughts about sex. Do not cheapen sex by making it a hole-in-the-wall affair—the subject of secretive, sniggering talk, guilty experimentation, or sly, morbid and uncensored reading in private. You have a right and an obligation to know about sexual matters—even if you never intend to marry. There are certain biological facts that you must know about your own body and its functions; how it differs from a girl's and why it differs. That is what we mean by getting to know about the anatomy and physiology of sex. But sexual instruction of this kind is a slow process; biological and scientific facts have to be given and acquired gradually and from approved sources, in step with your own individual physical, emotional and intellectual development.

But there is more to sexual instruction than the acquiring of certain biological truths of nature. There has to be a development at the emotional psychological level and that is a work that will take much longer than growing to physical maturity. In fact it is the work of a lifetime and the task only really begins in earnest when you take up the responsibilities of adult life. But you will not face up to this task of working to achieve genuine, altruistic, personal relationships as an adult, either within marriage or outside it, unless you have met the challenge of this preliminary

period and begun to see something of the sacrifice involved in loving God with your whole heart and your neighbour as yourself.

For the last five or six years you have wanted nothing to do with girls—they have been just a lot of cissies to whom you have on occasion shown some tolerance. But now things are different. You are interested; at the same time you are afraid and angry with yourself. That is because you are mixed-up. You do not know what is happening to yourself; girls are a mystery; they interest you and yet there are so many things you do not understand about them and about your relationship to them. Later there will be a phase of infatuation when you will fall in and out of love with almost every girl you meet. Romantic love and ideals are then the centre of your thoughts and hopes. Concentration on work and study does not come easily at this period in our lives. And while I appreciate that a corrective is needed for young people at this stage, the efforts of some educators to keep them in touch with reality as the adult sees it, too often destroy all the spontaneity and naturalness of their emotional development. By your late teens and early twenties you will have already grown more mature in many ways. This is the time for serious (but not I hope solemn) friendships with girls; and it is out of these friendships that you will develop that special friendship with one girl that will tell you she means more to you than the others, and will make you consider her as a possible companion for life.

I would like to say a word here about friendship. We all have friends, and it is right and necessary that we should; they are a sure source of help, comfort and joy in our lives. But my friends are not necessarily yours, nor are your friends mine. Why is this? Briefly, because friendship is built on common interests, and until there is a mutual love between two people based on something which each has in common you cannot say that these two people are friends. The more things we have in common with someone, and the more we like to share those common interests together, so the deeper becomes our friendship with that person. Notice that friendship is an expression of love. May a boy then be friends with a girl? Of course he may; indeed it is necessary for his own development that he should talk and mix with girls; and it is natural and right that he should enjoy talking to and

being with a girl; and the deeper his friendship is the more he will enjoy her company. But we have to be perfectly clear about one thing: God has made man and woman different, physically and emotionally, for a specific purpose. There are any number of good and legitimate feelings of attraction between people of the opposite sex. I would speak of these attractions as *physical*, since the friendship is a love relation between two human persons. But there is one specific kind of physical attraction which you must not allow to develop in your friendships with girls, that is the attraction at the specifically sexual level. It is this sexual love (which I prefer to call in this context *carnal* love, as opposed to a healthy physical love), which is inimical to true friendship and charity outside of marriage. Even when you begin to think of some girl as a possible wife, and in fact especially then, you will have to help one another in all kindness and love not to spoil your future happiness by abusing, under the cloak of friendship, what God has given you in trust. The development of your friendship through the incorporation into that friendship of sexual love in anything like its fullest expression is part of the obligation and privilege of the married state alone.

I hope I do not offend anyone if I say that the judgment of the world at large, that the perfection of love is to be found in the young married couple, is quite false and rather naive. There is a phrase in a priest's breviary which runs something like this: 'I saw him and I fell in love with him; I believed in him and I grew in love with him.' I have used these expressions 'falling in love' and 'growing in love' to suggest the difference between two kinds of love expressed by the Latin words 'amare' and 'diligere'. This difference is sometimes expressed in English by the phrases 'love of de ire' and 'love of well-being' (which includes the love of desire). The young husband truly loves his bride, and the obvious happiness which we see in a newly-wed couple is not feigned. The husband we might say desires his wife (that is, loves her with this love of desire); and the young wife wants no less; she will, one hopes, have had the good sense to refuse a suggestion of marriage that was based on purely intellectual interests. But the desire of the husband is very much related to the well-being of his own person; and the same is true of the young wife's love. There is no point in being hurt or shocked at this. It is of course always possible, in a debased form which destroys any notion of marriage



as an inter-personal relationship, for this love of desire to regard the other partner as a *thing to be used* for one's own well-being. But this debasement is accidental to the essential nature of the love of desire as expressed in marriage. Where a marriage has grown out of an already established friendship it would be preposterous to suppose that the incorporation of sexual love into that friendship within marriage necessarily undermines the friendship—when in fact it is meant to foster and deepen it. (This, however, does underline the supreme importance of true friendship as the natural basis for marriage.) But having said that, it still remains true that the love of desire in marriage, while not making the other partner a mere utility, is predominantly self-centred. And so far from this being a cause for despondency in young couples I suggest it is, on the contrary, a motive for hope. For were it true that you started out on your married life with the fullness and perfection of love between you, then you would be in the position of the miser who, having collected his hoard, has to give over his whole life to the anxious business of defending it. You would not be able to meet life and its challenge: every serious circumstance of life would be a possible danger to your love capital; every quarrel and disagreement an actual loss. Fear of failure, with possible recriminations and bitter accusations, would preclude any resolute ventures—and how many times do not the responsibilities of married life demand them?—and nothing much would be achieved in half a century of negative and passive resistance to life. But if you set out at the beginning of married life aware that your love is imperfect (and this is not to say that it is bad; it is only not good in that it is incomplete, not yet fully realized), then the whole outlook for the next fifty years is entirely differently orientated from that of the 'miser'. Sure of your love for one another, however imperfect it may be (and it is a certainty that comes only from an honest appraisal of things as they are), and aware of the fact that the trials and hardships of married life are the matter out of which you are to transform, deepen, and perfect your love, you will not fear life and its risks; set-backs, misunderstandings, and the rest, will not be seen as so many irretrievable losses in a rapidly diminishing love capital, but as so many opportunities for growing in love and building up that capital. But there is one condition. You must say 'I believe': 'I saw him and I fell in love; I believed in him and I grew in love'.



In a sense it is easy enough to 'fall in love'. But if you are to grow in love, then in the midst of your trials and suffering you have to hold on, unshaken in your faith, trust and love for your partner, however weak and imperfect that faith trust and love may be.

That the pattern of married life, rich in its potentialities, does not always, or even often, work out in the way I have suggested is possible, is not in many cases the result of downright bad will and selfishness, nor, very often, of illicit attachments to a third party. It is caused, among other things, by a fundamental lack of education in our young people for married life and community responsibility in general. I am not thinking now of difficulties stemming from emotional disorders; that is a situation requiring special consideration. But among normal people, even of some intelligence and education, and often enough really good and fervent in the practice of the faith, there is in my opinion an abysmal ignorance of the basic principles of the physical, psychological and theological implications of love, sex and friendship. Too many people get married today with what I have already called the Animal, Vegetable and Mineral attitude to these realities. By that I mean, very briefly, the attitude which would dismiss any talk about the physiology, psychology and theology of love and sex as just so much hot air: 'our grandparents did not have it; primitive peoples don't have it; we don't need it; nature will tell you all you need to know; and, besides, what more should a good Catholic want when he has the Sacraments and his beads?' I have not the time to meet these objections; but basically that attitude sets human love and its manifestations, at least by implication, on a level with the brute animals: *it's all a matter of instinct*. The vegetable (or plant) attitude is one that accepts and expects the presence of a human bee who will hold together and cement the marriage; the partners themselves cannot get down to the work of facing up to their own problems and dealing with them; in times of crises, small or great, they always and instinctively turn towards the intermediary. At the mineral level it is hardly fitting to speak of marriage in terms of a personal relationship between two people; it is an arrangement between two units unconscious of or indifferent to inter-personal relationships; adjustment is achieved more often by extrinsic factors than through any efforts on the part of the husband and wife.

I am not suggesting that any of these categories is to be found

among married couples in a clearly delineated form. Probably most people have traces of all three in varying proportions. But to the extent that the animal, vegetable or mineral attitude is present as a permanent feature, the marriage will not yield to either partner anything like the full fruits of its potentialities.

I said earlier that an appreciation in youth of the fittingness and mystery of the role and nature of each of the sexes was important, in that it helped to awaken each partner later in the marriage to an awareness of his obligations and privilege of initiating the other; and so gradually teaching the other that men look at things in a different way from women, and why they do so; that they have different opinions and prejudices about so many things, do things differently, have different likes and dislikes, different mannerisms, and different needs. It is not that a man's way is right and a woman's wrong, or *vice versa*. It is just that they are different: basically complementary, they are, nevertheless, often radically opposed in particular instances. These differences are often resolved for the occasion by outbursts of aggressive assertion of one's own will, or by a weak yielding to the other. But meeting difficulties in this way, as the occasion dictates, is not the same as achieving a harmonious relationship; we can only begin to achieve that if we are prepared to listen to, to try and appreciate and understand, and finally to meet the other partner's point of view.

There is one aspect of marital awareness that is important for each partner to achieve. Blindness on this score can be a source of many difficulties of far-reaching consequence.

The masculine and feminine attitude to marital love are different. In the male the sexual instinct in the strict and narrow sense is something of immediate value and importance; it is impersonal in that being ego-centred it does not, at the instinctual level, help to establish a relationship with the other partner; and it is transitory, a consequence of the mechanism of sexual expression in the male. For the female the sexual instinct again in the restricted sense is, on the contrary, something ultimate; not being of immediate value and importance in itself, it has to be reached through a personal relationship which alone gives meaning to the physical expression of the sexual powers; and so it is something lasting, both in terms of time and value. A husband's love, then, naturally and spontaneously orientates

towards the first or specific level of marital love, the sexual level; whereas a woman's love naturally tends towards the second or generic level, that of friendship. To understand this we must distinguish within the notion of sexual love between the biological act of sexual union and all those acts of affection, tenderness, and gratitude, which form the background to the sexual act as such, both immediately and in the wider context of the totality of the friendship relation within marriage. A husband instinctively desires to express his love immediately in the sexual act of union; the expressions of affection and tenderness, the need for meeting his wife at a deep friendship level, are alien to his *instinctive* masculine nature and awareness, and have to be learnt; on the other hand these personal expressions of love are of primary and immediate importance to the wife, and it is the act of sexual union taken in isolation that is alien to her *instinctive* feminine nature. Thus where the act of sexual union is concerned, the danger from the man's side is that of shocking and hurting his wife by appearing to be too demanding, lacking in sensibility, and indifferent to her needs. The danger from the woman's side is that of irritating and causing frustration in her husband by being, or seeming to be, unco-operative and over-sensitive. In each case there is a lack of conscious awareness of the emotional make-up of the other partner, which results in a failure to meet each other's needs—the husband tends to ignore those aspects of love that are of immediate and personal value to the woman; and the wife misunderstands the more primitive masculine attitude.

As a result a wife can be reduced to tears and tantrums, outbursts of jealous recrimination, hysterical accusations, bickering and nagging, because she feels that her husband is not sufficiently attentive to her legitimate needs; and she equates this lack of attentiveness with a lack of love. The husband, on his side, can be reduced to exasperation, despair, and drink, because of what he feels to be his wife's constant demands for attention and assurances of his love, which he equates with a lack of trust on her part of his love for her. It is not unreasonable for a woman to want her specifically feminine attitude to love and marriage recognized and met by her husband; nor is it unreasonable for the husband to want his masculine outlook appreciated. But it is unreasonable for the wife to make claims for her feminine view-

point to the exclusion of the legitimate claims of the masculine spirit, or for the husband to assert his masculinity and ignore the feminine aspects of married life.

The only way to break through this unconsciously possessive attitude is for both partners to become more conscious of the deeper implications of sex and love. In theory no adult may shirk this responsibility, whether he be male or female, married or single or a religious: it affects, for good or ill, and to a marked degree, one's ability to relate satisfactorily to other people; but in practice what is called in technical jargon psycho-sexual maturation, is, like the counsels of perfection, for the few who can take it. Were this expansion of consciousness a mere matter of intellectual knowledge then the natural spontaneity and rhythm of love between husband and wife would be endangered; and there might also be a warping of the fundamentally male and female sexuality. But when a man makes contact with his wife through an inner experience in which he has first made contact with the feminine aspects of his own nature, then what was before a basically instinctual drive is humanized, becoming other-centred in the process and losing nothing but rather gaining in natural spontaneity. And so too with the woman. And in the relationship set up between a man and a woman who have each discovered something of the other's spirit in himself (and in the discovery shattered the personification which each partner had become, through projection, of the unconscious, complementary, 'ideal' nature of the other), the man becomes husband friend lover and father; the woman, wife friend bride and mother.

We turn now to the economic factors in this period of preparation for marriage and for life, and here I must be unduly brief. Christian detachment should not be quoted in support of an attitude of indifference to our responsibilities to provide for ourselves and our dependents. A doctor said recently, when discussing a case of anxiety neurosis, that all his patient needed to cure his anxiety was a few more pounds a week in his pay-packet. There is more than a grain of truth in that statement. But to what extent is it not our own fault that we have not an income sufficient to live a decently human life? If young men of marriageable age and high ideals wish to live a simple and even ascetic mode of life in the service of their ideals it is obviously a good thing in some cases. But if these same young men marry they

should remember that they are then responsible for other people's happiness, and may be obliged to give up the luxury of their simple and idealistic existence for the rough-and-tumble and, in their eyes, perhaps, vulgar business of earning money. It is no part of a sound Catholic education to breed guilt feelings about money and success, especially not in anyone who hopes to serve God and the Church and save his soul in the married state.

Although it is relevant to the theme of this essay, I cannot here consider the many real difficulties which beset a young couple setting up home, and which stem from their attitudes to earning and spending. The economics of married life, in all its various manifestations—buying or renting a home, furniture, clothes, holidays, children's education, personal spending and so on—can only be fully understood and managed within the married state. Any discussion of these and many other matters prior to marriage is inevitably somewhat unreal; but not so unreal, it seems to me, as to make the discussion unnecessary. Fear of an honest and reasoned airing of problems and differences is a sign, ultimately, of the insecurity and insincerity of one's love.

But besides the physiological, the psychological, and the social implications of sex and love, there is the all-important business of growing in holiness of life, in developing good habits, in rooting one's life in virtue. Our Catholic religion is a wise and sane thing; it neither treats man as an angel nor as a mere animal, for he is neither. Well-meaning but foolish Catholics who have never truly appreciated and lived their faith, sometimes give the impression that the Church wants us to live as angels. These people are ashamed of the body and its needs and functions; they are afraid of sex and all that is implied by love and married life or, for that matter, a positive single life; they try to live a 'spiritual' life which denies or condemns the body; they try, in fact, to live as if they were angelic beings.<sup>2</sup> And unfortunately people outside the Church get the impression that this is what the Church teaches about sex: that it is a sordid business, and an obstacle to the spiritual life, something we have to rise above. But outside the Church an opposite and equally false view is often held: man is not an angel; he is a mere animal, different from other animals, of course, but still only an animal. The only important thing in

<sup>2</sup> I am not making moral judgments here, in any of the many senses that word seems to have. I am merely stating certain psychological attitudes.

life, we are told by these people, is sex; and by sex they mean nothing more than the achieving of venereal pleasures. The prude will tell you, at least by implication, that virtue and innocence consist in being ignorant of anything to do with sex; the sensualist will tell you that as long as you are well instructed in the facts of life and well versed in the art of love-making (which *are* important: I have no wish to be misunderstood here) then you are equipped to meet the responsibilities of married life. In their different ways both these attitudes to sex ignore the reality of original sin. Mere knowledge about sex, without the grace and the holiness to live a good life in conformity with God's will, is dangerous and useless. On the other hand to imagine that purity, love, and virtue are built on ignorance and error is equally dangerous and sterile. The Church has condemned both these false extremes. She will have man neither an angel nor a mere animal, but what he is, man; that is to say neither a spirit without a body, nor a body without a soul, but a body-soul union. But further, the Church will insist not only on what man is, in his own nature, but on why man has been made, on what his ultimate purpose in life is: to know, love and serve God here on earth, and to be happy with him for ever in heaven.

In man, then, there are three elements to be considered, three aspects of the total truth that goes to make up human activity: there is the supernatural element which comes from his divine vocation; there is the spiritual but natural element which is proper to man, since he alone of all the material creation has an immortal soul with the powers of intellect and will and the capacity to form friendships; and there is the physical element which man shares with the rest of the animal kingdom. These three elements—the supernatural, the spiritual and the physical, are all necessary. If we exclude any one of them there will be trouble. But there is a certain order between the three: the desires and needs of the body, good in themselves, have to be guided and controlled by the mind and will operating through grace, and the total human being with all the peculiarities of his own individual personality has, with God's help, to live a life that will take him to his ultimate fulfilment.

Some of us fulfil our destiny and serve God in the single state, either as a religious or as a lay person. Most of you will work out your salvation with the help of a partner in and through the

married state. And in that married life, in the love relationship that is set up between husband and wife, the same three factors must be present if the partnership is to be truly human. There must be the love relationship of charity which is established and maintained only through grace; hence the supreme importance of the sacramental character of a truly Christian marriage. There must be the love relationship of friendship. And there must be that specific love relationship at the physical level which is sex in the strict sense. Notice that the love relation which is sex is part of the wider sphere of human love; that is to say, a truly human sexual relationship should contain the love relationships of friendship and charity. We can, of course, isolate sex from friendship and charity, and confine it exclusively to the bodily level. But if we do so then we have abused sex, cheapened it, made of it something less rich, less enjoyable and less satisfying than God meant it to be. If we use sex contrary to God's will, that is to say if we deliberately and wilfully misuse our sexual powers outside the married state, or if we misuse them within marriage, then we have not only sinned against God, but we have cheated ourselves of all the joy, pleasure and happiness that God means us to have from sex.

Although I have stressed the importance of developing a positive attitude to religious practice and virtue, a discussion of the living out of a Christian life of positive asceticism, whether within or outside of marriage, is beyond the scope of this essay. But I think a glimpse of the way we ought to be going is got from some words of Father Victor White:

'. . . for what is ethics but the pattern of habit and conduct with a view to the *telos*, the end and fulfilment, the balance and health, of the whole human soul and all its parts? This standpoint . . . seems to be virtually ignored in the kind of teaching which presents morality solely as an extrinsically imposed code of arbitrary regulations rather than a *life of virtue*, of a "second nature" which responds to and integrates the inner needs and tendencies of the whole man. The morality . . . which filters into our schools and homes in effect substitutes an external and casuistic jurisprudence for the cultivation of an immanent Prudence: resistance to, and suppression of, instinctive desire for its heightening and transformation by the disposition of Temperance *within* the *appetitus concupiscibilis* (the pleasure principle) itself; cold,



dutiful, anti-instinctual effort for the virtue of Fortitude *within* the *appetitus irascibilis* (the instinctive "will to power"). This loss of the traditional pre-Reformation Catholic moral theology is a veritable breeding ground of psychological conflict, frustration, psychoneurosis—and "leakage".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *God and the Unconscious*. (Harvill Press; pp. 157-158.)



## AN ADVENT SERMON OF ST GREGORY THE GREAT<sup>1</sup>

Translated by HENRY ASHWORTH, O.S.B.

OUR Lord and Redeemer, my dear brethren, wishing to find us prepared, intimates what evils will attend the world in its old age, in order to keep us from loving it now. He makes known the number of upheavals which will herald the approaching end, so that, if in times of tranquillity we do not want to fear God, we may at least fear his approaching judgment, when we are reduced to extremity by such catastrophes. Now, a little before the passage of the Holy Gospel which, brethren, you have just heard read, our Lord uttered these words: *Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be great earthquakes, and in places plagues and famines.*<sup>2</sup> And after a few verses he added the passage which has just been read: *And there shall be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on earth anguish of nations bewildered by the roaring of the sea and of the*

<sup>1</sup> St Gregory's Homilies on the Gospel were delivered during the first year of his pontificate. They have come down to us in the revised form which he gave them in 593. A critical edition is still awaited and it would be wise not to attach too much importance to the topographical indications which appear in the printed editions. Not all manuscripts give these stationary headings, nor is there complete harmony among those that have such indications. From internal evidence it would appear that St Gregory preached the present Homily during the Advent of 590. In it he alludes to the unprecedented tempests which had afflicted Rome during the November of 589, to the decimation of the population by the consequent plague, to the collapse of buildings and churches. All these details are corroborated by the words of Agiulf, deacon of St Gregory of Tours, who was an eye-witness of the events: 'In the preceding year' (589) he writes, 'in the ninth month, the River Tiber so flooded the City of Rome that ancient buildings were washed away, and the Church's granaries were submerged.' (cf. *Hist. Franc.* x, 1.) Much of the final passages of this homily is resumed in almost identical terms in the collect for the Vigil of Christmas.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxi, 10.