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2-26-1970

### Love and Sexuality Part 1

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#### Recommended Citation

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# LOVE

# and Sexuality

not only the most explicit I've ever seen, but also—and how can this be said without sounding odd?—the most truly sexual. It is simply a seduction, beautifully and delicately done." The director, she says, "creates in this movie . . . an entire atmosphere of women . . . so that within that context nothing is bizarre or strange, not even a crowded lesbian nightclub."—*Vogue*, Jan. 15, 1969, p. 100.

Yet despite the worldly sophistication that can write such a review, demonism and witchcraft have been drawn on for horror and sensationalism. A recent film relates the "birth of a mortal Satan through an innocent girl at the mercy of a pack of maddened witches. There is nudity, profanity, vulgarity, intimate sex scenes, orgiastic episodes, but most of all madness. Curiously, and this may sound somewhat mad itself, the movie is something of a classic in that it reflects the psychedelic theme of our times." I am quoting Vernon Scott, Hollywood correspondent for the United Press. He continued: "Perhaps it is a sign of our times, but the audience reaction to the nudity and sex shots was nil. . . . The genuinely important aspect of . . . the picture [is that it] reflects humanity here and now."—*South Bend Tribune*, June 17, 1968, p. 12.

This picture and others like it represent the nadir of taste and practice in the film industry. The question facing many in the world now is this, What do we do next to titillate our senses?

In the "literary" world, many novelists seem to feel that gutter-level vocabularies and clinical details of sexual episodes will create the realism and integrity that can lift their "works" from obscenity to art. Others evidently write what will sell well. In a recent issue of the *Ladies' Home Journal* an excerpt was published from a current novel of a woman author whose first was recently on the best-seller list for 65 weeks and sold more than 8 million copies. Naturally, it has already appeared as a moving picture.

## Obscenity or Art?

The editors, in introducing a portion of the new book, said that the first novel's success was not entirely due to its "sensuality and candor." Yet at the same time they say that literary and film mores have moved so far and so fast that a novel by this author would today be considered "tepid stuff indeed."

The television industry has more and more programs that are becoming increasingly vulgarly explicit in their treatment of sex. What used to be suggestive is now standard fare, and wholesome programs more and more stand out like small islands in a vast ocean. Humor becomes the medium by which most of the questionable material is transmitted—evidently "dirty" and "joke" cancel each other out.

Up to this point I have used the word *sex*, but it is with reluctance, since the word has taken on much negative and

coarse meaning. Perhaps we can, by common consent, overlook some of the current usage, and accept it as a "shorthand" way of alluding to all phases of human life that involve sexuality, with particular emphasis in this article on the sexual relationship in marriage.

In dealing with this area of life, the people of God are faced almost with a dilemma—how to maintain the purity expected by the Lord without being "puritanical," and how to stress the importance and pleasure value of sex without seeming to surrender to pagan philosophy permeating the world's thinking.

One of the marked characteristics of the antediluvian world was its low regard for marriage. The relationship was not respected; whoever coveted another man's wife took her by force (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 92). "Polygamy was practiced at an early date. It was one of the sins that brought the wrath of God upon the antediluvian world. . . . It was Satan's studied effort to pervert the marriage institution, to weaken its obligations and lessen its sacredness; for in no surer way could he deface the image of God in man and open the door to misery and vice."—*Ibid.*, p. 338.

In these last days divorce is one obvious symptom of the lessened regard for marriage. While there are various reasons for divorce, in many cases a contributing factor is the failure on the part of one or both partners to maintain loyalty to the promise of being exclusively for each other in the "one flesh" part of marriage. Marital infidelity and premarital sexual relationships are symptoms of this moral malaise. Some regard sex casually. Some make it an end in itself. Some subordinate all other values in marriage to this. Some see it only in the context of the "playboy" philosophy.

Up to now, the church has usually entered marriage at two points: the ceremony and the marital crisis. Not too much has been done to prepare members for this highly significant relationship. Particular neglect has been shown for the sexual aspect. Often the church has dealt with this area of life largely in terms of condemnation—almost as though religion made of sex a forbidden subject, while the devil made it attractive.

In this connection we should remember that the knowledge of sex is not a product of the tree to which Eve strayed. The human body was part of the creation of God. The maleness and femaleness, the anatomy and psychology of sex, the method intended

for the procreation of the race, the way provided to keep man from being lonely—all finding their center in the marriage relationship instituted by the Creator Himself.

It seems safe to assume that there was a "sinless" time during which Adam and Eve enjoyed the sexual relationship in their marriage. Perhaps helped by the Lord's instruction, they learned how to "know" each other as man and wife made in the image of God.

### Theology of Sex Needed

Possibly it is time for the church to formulate a theology of sex. There are, in one sense, theologies of recreation, of dress, of diet. There is a relatively large theology of Sabbathkeeping. Yet the Sabbath is not the only institution coming to us from before the Flood. Marriage deserves attention and regard. Isn't it fair to say that over the centuries Satan has done almost as much harm to God's plan for man through damaging the marriage relation as he has through the substitution of a false Sabbath for the true one?

The Scriptures furnish enough material for a theology of sex. There seems to be as much said on this subject as there is on those of the resurrection, the state of the dead, tithing, the Second Advent, church administration, noncombatancy, and a number of others.

But what many think the Bible teaches about sex is as distorted as their ideas of its teaching on such subjects as Sabbath observance, the state of the dead, Creation, and the Flood. By remaining silent on this issue, by failing to formulate a Bible-centered "theology of sex," the church has indirectly contributed its share to the warped attitude prevalent regarding sex.

Equating the carnal nature exclusively with "sex," and making impurity in this area the most horrendous of sins, has led to all types of austerity and asceticism. A number of the early Church Fathers viewed marriage as almost a degraded form of existence. Its only justification was the responsibility for producing children. The function was not intended to be a happy one, but a necessity, and only this objective could erase the possible venereal pleasure it provided.

Tertullian wrote his wife that if he died she was not to marry again because "at that day" there will be "no resumption of voluptuous disgrace between us" (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, *To His Wife*, book 1, chap. 1). He also termed second mar-

riage "a species of fornication" (*ibid.*, *On Exhortation to Chastity*, chap. 9).

Augustine wrote: "But he allows, as matter of 'pardon,' that sexual intercourse, which takes place through incontinence, not alone for the begetting of children, and, at times, not at all for the begetting of children; and it is not that marriage forces this to take place, but that it procures pardon for it" (NPNF, First Series, vol. 3, *On the Good of Marriage*, sec. 11).

On the same subject he reasoned that "freedom from all sexual intercourse is both angelic exercise here, and continueth for ever" (*ibid.*, sec. 8). And "the better they [husband and wife] are, the earlier they have begun by mutual consent to contain from sexual intercourse" (*ibid.*, sec. 3).

It was his opinion that Joseph and Mary never had any such relationship in their marriage (*ibid.*, vol. 5, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, book 1, chap. 12). (Incidentally, Roman Catholic theology still teaches that Mary was a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Jesus.)

Perhaps one of the reasons for the failure to give marriage its rightful due in theology is the inference some make from our Lord's statement that we shall not marry in the resurrection life, but shall be as the angels. Because the next life will be of a different order from this one, some infer that the absence of marriage there implies that it is fit only for the sinful life of this world. From this the conclusion is reached that marriage, especially because of its sexual relationship, is by nature a somewhat less-than-pure way of life.

To think this way is to forget again that marriage, maleness and femaleness, and the sex relationship all preceded the Fall. The sin of our first parents did stain this whole aspect of life with real and potential evil, but this is true of the whole nature of man. Marriage is no more connected with this sinful life than eating or drinking or thinking. Yet no one seems to be anticipating with keen delight giving up these activities in the new life.

It is not ours to speculate on the type of relationship that will exist in the new earth. Since we have made a bad "mess" of God's gift of marriage, it hardly seems necessary for Him to let us know what He has in mind for the future. Perhaps it is in order to refer to a statement by Ellen G. White. "There the loves and sympathies that God has planted in the soul will find truest and sweetest exercise."—*Education*, p. 306. ♦♦

(Continued next week)