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Sex ethics

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Introduction

The following articles cover some, but by no means all, aspects of sexual relationships. Although there may appear to be an undue stress on the negative and prescriptive, nearly all the contributors have ended with an attempt to put the issue on which they are concentrating into a wider context. A discussion of sexual relationships cannot and must not be divorced from a consideration of relationships between people and needs to take account of the psychological, intellectual, spiritual and emotional, as well as the physical interaction. Relationships too have to be considered within a societal, historical and cultural context.

This issue of the Journal hopes to make some contribution to thinking on this subject, although the articles are far from comprehensive in their analysis coverage. We have tried, however, to give some idea of the range of issues both on a macro and micro level, with a separate section at the end on the complex subject of divorce. They necessarily represent the views the authors have come to hold, not only from their study of scripture, but from their own life experiences. These include the perspectives gained from the practice of various professions, among them those from a number of medical specialities—general practice, psychiatry, gynaecology, the law and the Church. Other contributors write from the standpoint of a missionary, and a wife and mother. My own perspective is influenced by my experience as a social worker and social work educator.

It is no wonder that the conclusions reached show some difference in emphasis. However, on the importance of the creation ideal, its realization completely in the future and partially in the past and present and on the view that the nearer we approximate to it, the happier the resulting relationship, all are agreed.

Male/female roles are under constant reappraisal and much of the inheritance of the past has had to be discarded and rethought in a radical fashion. The Christian should welcome movements which attempt to establish equality of opportunity; to recognize the reversibility of many roles; to acknowledge aggressiveness as a proper and normal attribute of women and sensitivity of men; and to remove the fear of pregnancy as the primary deterrent on extra or pre-marital intercourse. At different times, economic, social and legal dependence and a variety of other constraints have bolstered masculine authority and dominance. But can we, without such props, reach the relationship of mutual love and esteem with the voluntary shouldering of responsibility and giving of submission

which the Bible puts forward? This is a question for all involved in social intercourse in friendship, work and Church activity and not only for the married to work out within the most intimate of relationships. But how far the ideal relationship between the sexes put forward for Christian marriage should be reflected in these other relationships, and the Christian ideal be expected of society at large, are important questions hardly touched on in this Journal.

In the past, Christians have given all too little help to each other in discussion of such topics. Perhaps the more open atmosphere now prevailing can help us here, though it is a pity the Christian Church did not lead the way in this respect. The negatives of greater permissiveness however, and the temptation of constant bombardment with sexual stimuli are very real. But that does not mean that alternative attitudes cannot be maintained. As Professor Rendle Short once commented on Romans 12: 2, 'Any old dead fish can go with the stream.'

JOYCE GUY

EDITOR'S NOTE

'Brethren Missionary Work in Mysore State.'

We apologise to all our readers for the glaring misspelling of 'Brethren' in the heading to the map facing p. 9 of the above work. The error was detected only in final stages of printing and we felt that the cost and delay which would have been caused by reprinting was not justified.

Part I

**Problems and decisions
facing young people**

R. T. RICHARDSON

1: Morality and young people: a schoolmaster's view

What follows in this short article must be clearly understood to be based largely upon impressions, both personal and of other experienced colleagues, and also upon keeping in touch with some of the relevant literature over the past decade.

In general terms teachers have in the last four or five years become increasingly alarmed at the rising tide of disruptive behaviour in schools rather than with fears concerning the sexual morality of their pupils.

The disruption is manifest in behaviour which reveals thought-patterns, standards and values which are at variance with the norms of most (but not all) adults in School Communities. It is found in schools of all kinds, not just in the widely publicised large urban Comprehensive schools—although the problems may show up in their most acute form in such establishments.

It may be seen in a range of behavioural procedures, from rudeness and truculence, through to disobedience and sheer defiance. On the other hand there is evidence to suggest, for instance, that drugs do not have the same aura of attractiveness for teenage rebellion and escapism as previously. However, a greater incidence of smoking and drinking amongst both boys and girls is apparent.

So too is the phenomenon of the use of bad, and even obscene language. Amongst Primary children this is generally restricted to the playground, where four-letter words may increasingly be heard. Among Secondary pupils it is all too common in the classroom itself. When checked or disciplined such youngsters (including 'respectable' girls from middle class backgrounds) make it clear that it is part of the normally accepted speech pattern between members of the peer group and often within the family itself. Much of it would seem to stem from widespread use throughout the mass media and current literature. There is evidence too to indicate that increasingly teachers are being addressed in this way, even to the extent of being verbally assaulted.

Schools have always had their share of petty pilfering cases, often going in waves over succeeding years. Some reported cases later turn out in fact to be matters of loss through sheer carelessness, although parental wrath may often be assuaged by pointing the finger in the opposite direction! Likewise, some of the noise heard

about juvenile shoplifting may sometimes be attributable to cover-up moves by dishonest sales staff. Having said that it remains true that there has been an increase in indictable offences amongst juveniles and this is a very serious and worrying feature of the moral state of a growing number of young people.

Commander Peter Marshall, head of Scotland Yard's Community Relations branch, has referred¹ to juvenile crime as "the growth industry in Britain's cities and particularly in London". "It has risen by a staggering 40 per cent in the past five years and threatens to rise in London by at least a further 25 per cent in this year alone. In 1969 juveniles between 10 and 16 committed more than a quarter of all crimes. Last year (1973) this was up to almost a third".² Petty theft, burglary, car stealing, robbery, wounding and assault were among the most frequent offences. He also drew attention to something well known to experienced teachers for a very long time now, namely the close correlation between juvenile crime of all forms and the incidence of truancy, which in some areas has reached almost epidemic proportions.

However, perhaps the saddest, and most serious way in which standards have declined, is not so much in the areas already indicated, or even in the realm of sexual morality, but rather in the way in which violence and vandalism have developed. One must hasten to add that it would be totally wrong to suggest that all our schools are 'Blackboard Jungles'—far from it. However, both the Press and the Teachers Association have drawn attention to the situation. The Association even claims a 60-fold increase in the number of reported attacks against its members in the past ten years although this may only be a reflection upon the efficiency of information-gathering in the earlier years.³

The causes are many and complex. They include personal factors of a psychological and emotional kind, besides contributory factors arising from inadequate to downright appalling family and social backgrounds. The number of divorces, separations and marriages under stress seems to be on the increase, some teachers reporting as many as a third of their class members as coming from such a milieu.

Some of the problems facing schools today are due to the inadequacies of the Children and Young Persons Act (1969) where insufficient qualified social services staff and resources have led to added burdens being laid upon hard-pressed schools, themselves facing a crisis in staffing and facilities.

Sometimes, it must be stated quite frankly the problems are of the school's own making. Especially is this so where strongly academic teachers are unprepared to change their attitudes, curricula

or methods to cope with the pupils of average or low ability from a different strata of society. Here particularly the Christian caring teacher should have much to contribute, especially in a situation where Secondary Schools are reorganised along Comprehensive lines.

If the picture painted so far seems to be rather black, let me add that there is considerable evidence to indicate that there are very many young people who are honest, open and caring in their dealings with others. They can be extremely warm and generous, especially when given a lead, in their relationships with younger children, the handicapped and the aged.

Many schools today have developed strong community links, give generously of time, talent and money to worthwhile charities, and have established a healthy social services outreach. (Incidentally, it is sad sometimes to note the "pi" School Christian Fellowship staying aloof from this activity).

Turning now from general matters of morality as they affect young people and their schools, what of the much vexed question of sexual morality amongst our youth? With the lowering of the age of the onset of physical maturity, the raising of the school leaving age, the free availability of advice on contraception, the increasing use of the Pill⁴ and the legalisation of abortion, are our young people going on a sexual rampage? Is there evidence to indicate a decline of moral standards in this area too?

To help answer this question I would like to summarise the evidence produced by Michael Schofield and his team of researchers published in 1965.⁵ A fine point scale of sexual behaviour was developed running as follows:

STAGE I—Little or no contact with the opposite sex

STAGE II—Limited experience e.g. kissing

STAGE III—Sexual intimacies, falling short of intercourse

STAGE IV—Sexual intercourse with only one partner

STAGE V—Sexual intercourse with more than one partner⁶

His survey was based upon a sample of approximately 900 boys and 900 girls between 15 and 19 years of age from seven different areas and covering differing types of secondary education.

By 19 most of the boys had moved from stage I to Stage III or beyond, whilst for girls there tended to be a barrier at Stage III. More teenage boys than girls had had experience of sexual intercourse—about 11% of the younger boys compared with 6% of the younger girls, with 30% of the older boys against 16% of the older girls. "Intercourse before fourteen was found to be rare and by sixteen 14% of the boys and 5% of the girls had started."⁷

Usually the first experience was unpremeditated, took place with someone older (in the case of girls quite often an adult), and

more often than not took place in the parental home of the beginner or the partner. Although fewer girls had intercourse, those who had experienced it did it more often. The boys tended to be more promiscuous, indulging in a search for sexual adventure, whereas the girls were more often searching for love and security.

"Our results", says Schofield, "have made it clear that premarital sexual relations are a long way from being universal among teenagers as over two-thirds of the boys and three-quarters of the girls in our sample have not engaged in sexual intercourse. On the other hand it is equally apparent that teenage pre-marital intercourse is not a minority problem confined to a few deviates. It is an activity common enough to be seen as one manifestation of teenage conformity."⁸

Since the date of publication of this survey, increasing concern has been felt with regard to the number of girls under sixteen who become pregnant. According to the Lane Committee⁹ between 1965 and 1971 the number went up from 1,227 to 4,060. In 1971 nearly 2,500 abortions were performed on girls under sixteen compared with less than 600 in 1968. Sixty per cent of girls under sixteen who became pregnant in 1971 had abortions—a 5% increase on the year before. By 1973, 3,478 young teenagers had abortions, or about 10 a day for every day of the year.¹⁰ From 1968 to 1972 the V.D. cases also rose sharply for 11-15 year old girls from 233 to 427 (From a population of all 11-15 year olds of 1.8m).

However, these figures need care in interpretation. The increase in reported V.D. cases may not necessarily indicate increased sexual activity. It may just mean that more cases are being detected, or that there is an increasing resistance to antibiotics. Similarly, the rise in the abortion rate in recent years must be viewed against the passing of the Abortion Act in 1967.

Pressures upon teenagers to indulge in sexual experimentation however are strong indeed, although one G.P. in the same T.E.S. article is quoted as saying that the pressures of the permissive society were, if anything, less strong than they had been in the late 1960's. Fourteen year olds who came to his surgery were, he thought, "less concerned than their elder sisters had been with keeping up sexually with the Joneses."¹¹

Further evidence in the article indicated that whilst young teenagers are more exposed to open discussion and advice on sexual matters (through their peer groups and through the mass media and especially magazines like 'Cosmopolitan', 'Honey', '19', 'Over 21' and 'Petticoat'—and even explicit journals like 'Forum') it is not at all certain that their actual behaviour is influenced to any great extent.

Personal observations and consultations with colleagues—including the new brand of trained teachers known as School Counsellors—together with the informed comments and surveys as reported in the educational press would lead the writer to conclude that whilst there are very real problems to be faced, the evidence so far as young people are concerned (and particularly the younger teenager—if not for their parents where the picture seems to be sadly different) indicates no relative decline in sexual moral standards, although with the peak population now going through our Secondary Schools¹² the situation in absolute terms may indeed look depressing.

In answer to the question then about whether the decline in sexual morals in schools is as bad as we are sometimes led to believe, I would answer “no”—albeit in somewhat guarded terms. Most colleagues in the profession would, I feel, express as much, and more, concern about such matters as declining courtesy and good manners, the wave of petty thieving and shoplifting and the pernicious effect of a minority of disturbed children given to violent and abusive behaviour.

In view of the foregoing, a further question to be faced is whether we as Christians should try and impose our moral standards on others? A full answer to this would lead us deeply into a consideration of both the philosophy of religion and of moral philosophy and of their interplay, if any.

If, as Christian educationalists, we hold to the essential rationality of man, even though this has been affected by the Fall, then we are bound to the establishment of morality upon a basis of the giving of reasons and of seeing their point. Could therefore the imposition of ‘our’ standards upon other rational beings be itself a moral act? Certainly for very young and immature persons, strong authoritative action may need to be taken for the benefit and safety, both of the individual concerned, and for others who may also be affected harmfully. However, for moral standards to become meaningful they must be shown, within an educative context, to be relevant on the basis of rational criteria acceptable to the individual concerned.

For some this may be Bentham’s principle of the greatest good to the greatest number of people involved. For others it may be the principle of “Be ye holy for I am holy!”, but whether for these or others the development of true morality cannot surely be based on mere ‘authoritarianism’. There is I would suggest much in the realm of moral education that both Christian and Humanist can learn from each other, and much that they can achieve together. This indeed is being shown by the work of such leading and yet diverse educationalists as John Wilson, Dr. R. Deardon, Prof. R. S. Peters, and Prof. Paul Hirst to mention but a very small sample.

By his example, by his caring, understanding and sympathetic attitude, as well as by his relevant teaching and practice of sound scriptural principles, the modern, informed Christian teacher will no doubt seek to show that there is a life which can be lived humbly, joyfully, and positively to the glory of God and to the blessing of his fellow man, by the aid of the indwelling spirit of truth and holiness.

The teaching of the necessity and relevance of sound moral standards, attitudes and values is one of the greatest tasks facing home and school alike today. It is a task which the responsible, Christian teacher knows full well cannot be fulfilled without the understanding and intelligent prayerful backing of a revived Christian Church.

References

- 1 *Times Educational Supplement* 27.9.74 p8
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 A report on *Violence in Schools* published by the National Association of Schoolmasters Dec. 1974
- 4 It is estimated that of the 2m women on the Pill in 1973, 160,000 were between the ages of 16 and 20.
- 5 *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People* M. Schofield. Longmans 1965
- 6 *ibid.* p. 41
- 7 *ibid.* p. 247
- 8 *ibid.* p. 248
- 9 Report of the Committee on the Working of the Abortion Act Vol. 1. Report HMSO £1.75
- 10 *Times Educational Supplement* 1.11.74 p. 23
- 11 *ibid.*
- 12 The population in maintained Schools in England and Wales has risen from 7m in 1965 to 9m in 1974 according to a Department of Education and Science (DES) Report on Education (No. 80 Dec. 1974).

P. KIMBER

2: The communication of Christian standards

I was six years old when an urchin first told me the facts of life. Some time earlier I had approached my family on the subject.

'Do you have a chair that is empty one minute, and then the next minute there is a baby in it?' I asked.

'Something like that', I was told.

So when my mentor told me why there were structural differences between boys and girls, I disbelieved him, though he quoted impressive authority in his support.

'My brother told me, and he is ten years old.'

You can't argue with that.

That was a long time ago, mind you, and I wonder how many children now reach such mature years without a fairish idea about sex. Any discussion about sex education has to accept things as they are, and we have to accept that if it was once possible for children to grow to adolescence and even adulthood in ignorance of the facts of life, such a thing would nowadays be quite extraordinary. That being so, since children are going to know anyway, the questions to ask are, 'When' and 'How much?'

In my adolescence it was popular to laugh at the 'Victorian' prudery which maintained a stony silence on all sexual matters, and it was confidently predicted that since this conspiracy of silence was the cause of frigidity and impotence, perversion and prostitution, the dawn of frankness and permissiveness would bring an end to all these evils. Of course, only a fool or a knave or a propagandist could possibly have believed such a piece of nonsense. If taboos had caused the unhappy side-effects, why had the taboos grown up at all? Before the taboos, there was permissiveness, so what had caused the taboos? And developments since then have tended to show that there are worse things connected with sex than embarrassment and inhibition. You don't get rid of a neurosis by revealing it; you only exchange one kind of problem for another, and we have certainly created enormous problems by our minute and almost obsessive pre-occupation with the intimacies of sex.

We have to begin with the need for sexual instruction and guidance for our young people, for it is essential that they understand the distinctness of the Christian attitude to sex, since it involves additional difficulties and vastly greater possibilities than a purely secular view. Let's take the difficulties first.

I suppose Christians will never completely rid themselves of the old Greek ideas about the essential evil of the body, but we have to try. It can be an intolerable burden for boys in particular, perhaps, as they reach adolescence, to feel that their awakening sexual desires are wicked. I knew one young man who was almost crushed with guilt, since Christ had equated lustful thoughts with adultery, and his waking hours were dominated by just those thoughts which Christ seemed to condemn. His great wish was that he had not been brought up in a Christian home, since he presumed that non-Christians lived in a world of delicious pagan freedom and fulfilment. In short, to teach youngsters about sexual sins without giving far greater stress to sexual fulfilment, and teaching about forgiveness and spiritual victory, is to make 'the latter end worse than the first'. Everything about the Christian view of life must balance the neg-

ativeness of sin by the fulness of life in Christ or we shall produce religious neurotics and not Christians. There is ample evidence that we have indeed shirked our duty to our young people, not by telling them lies, but by teaching them less than the truth.

To take one more example of our failure in giving the right instruction about sex, I was speaking to a church elder recently who had had a sad case in their church of a young couple whose desires had exceeded their discipline. The elders suddenly woke up to the fact that they did not know what to do about it. Whose responsibility was it to give guidance to the couple in their distress? What was the right course of action for them to follow? How could the situation have been avoided? As a church, as a body, what was the answer? Amputation? Or were they as a body going to accept their responsibilities and put them right? He was sufficiently humble and gracious to realise that it is not just young people who need guidance in such matters, but their elders as well. One book I have found immensely helpful is *I Married You*, by Walter Trobisch, (IVP), for he points out that the Bible does not just suggest that we hustle young people through the temptations of adolescence into the haven of marriage, but that the gospel permeates every part of our relationship with the opposite sex. It is for that reason that we have to integrate our teaching about sex with the whole of what the Scriptures teach. The Bible has as much to say about the way elders treat their wives, or bachelors cope with their singleness as about the lusts of youth.

It is worth thinking about what Paul told the Corinthians. They, like us, lived in a society which worshipped sex, and Christians had carried their pagan attitudes into the church. Paul's attitude was to be very frank about their sins, but to develop his remarks into a paean, a triumphant hymn in honour of love. That is what the gospel does. It doesn't shy away from embarrassments; it glorifies them as everything about our bodies will one day be glorified. After all, the whole history of the church is going to end in a marriage one day, so it would be pretty silly to fight shy of the subject.

If, then, we are to give sex-instruction to our young people, whose job is it to do it? I am in two minds about this. On the one hand I think it is most happily done at home. Children need to grow up with the knowledge that they are the product of their parents' love. On the other hand, because sex is so big, powerful and complicated, so set about with subtle modesties and urgent drives, it is perhaps better to stand apart from our families and be objective. Certainly in adolescence everyone needs a confidant outside the home, and if the right person is available, a wise youth leader or a sensitive elder, then perhaps the responsibility should be theirs.

Finally, when should sex instruction start? There is considerable discussion about this, but my own feeling is that fore-warned is fore-armed. A prurient interest in sex is a universal characteristic, and at a very early age children will learn about sex, whatever their parents may wish. For that reason I am in favour of parents answering questions as they arise, encouraging their children to ask them about the things that bother them, thus giving an opportunity to put them in their right context. You can't just talk about the facts of life, as you can about servicing a car. Sex is inextricably bound up with moral and spiritual attitudes and we separate it at our peril. Conversely we separate spiritual things from the rest of life with the same risk.

PETER WEBB

3: Premarital intercourse

It is almost impossible to examine interpersonal sexual relationships without preconceived ideas clouding our minds. But such consideration is important since there are a number of factors in contemporary society which are indicative of a rapid change in sexual behaviour. Firstly there is the advent of women's lib, which has for one of its goals the 'liberation' of women socially and sexually. Secondly there are improved contraceptive measures which are freely available. Thirdly there is a greater awareness of and sympathy for the sexual deviant. Fourthly there is a greater openness and willingness to discuss sexual matters previously rarely discussed even between husband and wife and almost certainly not in the church situation. Within this climate of change and re-examination of attitudes it is thus doubly important to base our ideas and actions firmly on Scripture: too often in the past other arguments have been put forward to enforce ideas about relationships between the sexes. One such was the unwanted pregnancy or fear of pregnancy. A number of well-meaning christian pastors used this as a back up argument with such force that it became the main argument against premarital sexual intercourse. Now that contraceptive advice and help is free for the most part and abortion more easily obtainable legally this argument loses most of its force. Thus I believe a stand needs to be taken on clear scriptural principles.

From the outset of Genesis the Bible views the sexual relationship as naturally occurring and not necessarily associated with sin or guilt. Gen. 1: 27f. states that God created male and female, blessed them and exhorted them to "be fruitful and multiply". Later, v. 31,

God saw everything that He had made "and behold it was very good". A clear statement of the Divine creation and approval of the sexual act. Throughout the Old Testament sexual relationships, as other relationships, are openly described. There is no attempt to conceal. The Old Testament adopts an essential naturalistic approval. The Israelite man was allowed a leave of one year from military duty following his marriage in order that it be established. It was the clear duty of a man to produce offspring, through whom God's plans could be fulfilled. If a man died childless it became the duty of his brother to raise up with the widow seed for his brother's line to be continued (Deut. 25: 5 ff.). In some ways it would seem that the O.T. Israelite had more opportunity for sexual freedom, yet throughout the Pentateuch there are rules for sexual activity clearly laid down. In broad principle sexual relationships were allowed within the bond of marriage and for the procreation of children. The O.T. thunders its disapproval of sexual acts which contravene a holy God's statutes. Passages like Lev. 19: 1-5 should be considered in order to obtain an overall balanced view—"be ye holy, as I am holy."

The New Testament broadly contains the words of Jesus and Paul with respect to sexual relationships. Before considering passages in particular the broad principles on which Jesus taught should be borne in mind. Firstly, Jesus was concerned, in the Sermon on the Mount particularly, with the motive behind the action. This is also illustrated elsewhere by His parable of the two men praying in the temple (Luke 18) or the account of the widow's mite (Luke 21). He criticised the Pharisees openly and fiercely for being "whited sepulchres, outwardly clean but within full of dead men's bones". (Matt. 23: 27) Jesus's view of man was that he should be an integrated whole in which good deeds sprung forth from a good heart. Secondly He dealt with people as individuals, not rigidly. The woman taken in adultery (John 8) portrays this clearly since Jesus forgave her sin but did not condemn her. Jesus considered the law as of secondary importance to man. "The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath". Thirdly, Jesus preached the central theme of the law of love. "You have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemies. But I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you". (Matt. 5: 43). His parting words to His disciples in the upper room contained the exhortation that "you love one another even as I have loved you". (John 15: 12). Matt. 5 and Matt. 19 make it clear that Jesus's standards were higher than those of His day and higher than the law. But yet for all that there is an understanding of human frailty (Matt. 19: 11).

Paul, much misunderstood, believed the second coming of Christ to be imminent. He made it clear that spiritual matters were the primary and important consideration, and that personal re-

relationships should take second place (1 Cor. 7: 32-35) "I say this . . . to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord". But immediately (v. 36) he goes on to state that sexual relationships were not sinful. Far from being the "prude" non-Christians consider him to be, Paul was essentially modern in his view of the married state. He encourages husband and wife to fulfil their conjugal rights (1 Cor. 7: 5). He encourages women to be active within the relationship (1 Cor. 7: 3 f.).

Thus the Bible takes an open natural view of sex as being part of life, in which an individual may fulfil or transgress God's will as in any other. Immorality, fornication and adultery are clearly viewed as evil (1 Cor. 5: 6 f.). What however of the unmarried betrothal relationship, the relationship between two people deeply in love with each other and intending to marry? Paul obviously had this in mind when he wrote 1 Cor. 7: 36. The clear implication is that the situation is out of control emotionally. Paul's advice was that they should marry in order that wrong should not be committed. This passage aside there is no other advice given about this specific relationship; the question is often asked, how far should they go? The words of Jesus in Matt. 19 suggest a clear pattern, leaving father and mother, cleaving unto a wife and becoming one flesh. In other words the marriage vows are confirmed by the sexual act. Paul uses the same quotation from Genesis 2: 24 when considering the illicit union with a temple prostitute (1 Cor. 6: 16). Paul goes further by saying that such action constitutes a sin against the Spirit since our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Scripturally this sexual intercourse outside of marriage is unlawful. But what of the natural foreplay leading to intercourse described as 'groping' or 'petting', what 'rules' apply to this situation? The relationship of two people deeply in love, intending to marry is a delicate one which develops slowly or quickly according to personality differences or situation needs. I believe the ground rules should be the general principles mentioned before taken within the context of the sexual act occurring within the marriage bond. Thus sex should be open, natural and not the subject of shame or guilt. There is no evil intrinsically associated with sexual desire, it is part of God's gift to us for the procreation of children and our enjoyment. (Gen. 1). However if we adopt Jesus's view of man when we consider our partner, we will view them as an integrated whole, we will love them with an overwhelming benevolence which seeks no personal reward (Agape). If we considered another as highly as this would we indulge our sexual desires using their bodies for our gratification? Would we start off a chain of God-given physiological mechanisms only to cut short just before its natural end, knowing that this may make sexual enjoyment and fulfilment later, in the marriage situation, more difficult? Patterns of behaviour established during the courting relationship may persist

on into marriage with unhealthy results. On the other hand are we to abstain from all sexual enjoyment before marriage refusing a gentle embrace or other gesture as a means of expressing love and affection? Between these two extremes lies the path that most tread. The exact pattern of behaviour for an engaged couple is a personal decision. They should be encouraged to openly discuss the problem recognising their own sexual needs and desires, but should each consider the other's highest good, and each other as integrated wholes not consisting of a sexual part which can be exploited for satisfaction and a non-sexual part for church activities. Let them recognise and acknowledge their physical relationships to be secondary in importance compared with their relationship with Christ, who is the pioneer and perfection of our faith, and who for the joy that was before Him endured the cross, in order that He might bring us to Himself. (Heb. 12: 1 f.).

JULIAN W. CHARLEY

4: The Christian attitude to the single life

In the purpose of God a married life is the norm for men and women. The principle is vividly set out in the second chapter of Genesis but Jesus taught his disciples that the norm would not always be operative. Some will be born incapable of such bi-sexual relationships (presumably for either physiological or psychological reasons); others will be made incapable by men; yet a third category will deliberately choose the single life 'for the sake of the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 19: 12). Since both men and women are made in the image of God (Gen. 1: 27), a single life need not spell incompleteness. Indeed the earthly life of Jesus, the 'express image' of God (Heb. 1: 3), ought to put paid to any such suggestion. The apostle Paul goes so far as to say that both the married and the single life are 'special gifts' from God (1 Cor. 7: 7). The word he uses is *charisma*, the same as that employed to describe spiritual gifts within the church. That surely suggests a pattern of divine dispensation by the Spirit to be accepted as readily and gladly as the Lord's distribution to his servants of every other gift.

This is the proper starting-point for a Christian attitude to the single life. It is neither superior to the married life, as one Christian tradition has long implied, nor is it inferior. The essential thing is to discover God's special gift for one and to accept it happily and

realistically. The tendency for the single person is to see all the credits on the side of marriage and all the debits in celibacy. But every walk of life has its problems and limitations as well as its blessings. A self-pitying, unrealistic and romantic view of marriage is no help in coming to terms with a real-life situation. Many a harassed housewife or exhausted husband feels at times a yearning for freedom from home-ties, but that equally must be tackled as a selfish desire to escape from God-given responsibilities. Paul was not the misogynist that some people have suggested, but he valued the opportunities for the gospel's sake of being single—'I wish that all were as I myself am' (1 Cor. 7: 7). The picture has two sides.

To be single gives a considerable measure of freedom that the married person lacks. In Christian work it provides the opportunity for undivided attention to the job in hand, without the pressures and responsibilities of a home always needing to be taken into consideration (1 Cor. 7: 32-35). Personally I have valued this in numerous ways—as a youth leader able to have my home regularly trampled over by London kids; as a college lecturer able to spend far more time informally with the students; as a preacher able to travel widely abroad for considerable periods of time. If you love people and serve them, God gives you a large family of a different sort as a rich compensation for what you lack in a home of your own (cf. Mk. 10: 29 f.). Of course there are some limitations, but this is in the very nature of the Body of Christ and the sharing of God's gifts. There is even greater freedom in the way you may choose to spend your times of relaxation. Here is a privilege not to be treated lightly.

It is important to remember that God's gift at one stage of a person's life may be altered later. We may believe we have an inner assurance about God's purpose for our future, but I guess we are very rarely certain. This is not to advocate being in a state of constant wistfulness, but it is to reject also a sense of fatalistic resignation to 'being on the shelf'. God is good and loving, knowing our needs and innermost desires. His gifts and His timings are for our ultimate good, if only we can believe it. Even a relationship that proves a cul-de-sac may be a very precious and enriching experience in the purpose of God.

Vital also is the awareness that sex never dies. The attraction of the opposite sex, not just physically, is part of being human—and this does not disappear as we grow older. Feelings of loneliness and insecurity are sure to come, and we must be ready for them.

Let me end with two practical lessons. First, maintain a wide range of interests. God gave us all things richly to enjoy. So often it is boredom that leads to self-pity. We can even be so absorbed by

'religious' things that our life is stunted. A family compels parents to pursue the questioning interests of children, constantly varying as they grow up. The single person should make due compensation—and he has the freedom to do so. Second, maintain a wide range of friendships. If the depth of marriage commitment to one person is not yours, then discover the wealth of relationships with many people, male and female, young and old. In the process your personality will find itself blossoming instead of remaining a bud that grows wizened as the years go by. The initiative will need to be yours: the rewards are great.

Rejoice in God's good gift, whatever it may be.

Part II

Marriage

A. STEWART

1: Customs on betrothal and marriage in the Old Testament

Introduction

The Bible is concerned to make known the truth about God and man and their relationship to one another. The central theme of the Old Testament is the revelation of God to a specially chosen people who had a unique origin and an unusual sense of destiny. God made a selective agreement with the founder of this race¹ the terms of which were repeated and explained from time to time as the nation developed.² It is significant that when the people of this covenant revolted against God the figure used to illustrate and to remind them of their relationship to Him is that of betrothal and marriage.³ It is important, therefore, to understand the teaching and customs of Israel against this background of covenant relationship.

Basic Principles

At creation one man and one woman together formed a whole human being⁴ in which man was dominant, because he was the ruler, and woman was dependent, because she was created out of something taken from man. In this unity of relationship there was love, companionship and mutual help which led eventually to the founding of the family. In Israelite society the family was central and its character and maintenance was determined by marriage.

With the severing of the fellowship between man and God,⁵ however, love became imperfect and marriage less than ideal. Relationships became sub-personal and led, for example, to the practice of polygamy, an unbalanced view of marriage in which the woman was regarded simply as a means of increasing the family. God in His wisdom did not rebuke this arrangement and His restraining grace permitted the practice even amongst some of the heroes of the faith.⁶

Customs in Israel

In the normal marriage practice a man's wife was chosen from within the ranks of his own people, the parents generally making the choice.⁷ A fine example of this is Abraham's choice for his son Isaac.⁸ If Rebekah is an example of the norm, the bride-to-be was asked for her consent.⁹ When the Israelites became established as a nation limits were laid down as to the closeness of the related group from which the wife might be chosen.¹⁰ These rules, no doubt, arose from the intimate character of family relationship and marriage. The levirate law,¹¹ which may appear to be in conflict with the law

in Leviticus, was to enable a dead man's family name to be maintained. The brother had the option of refusing, but if he did, he risked the wrath of his sister-in-law.¹² Onan incurred the wrath of God.¹³ The book of Ruth shows that the custom extended farther than the husband's brother.¹⁴ The levirate law did not apply if daughters had been born.¹⁵

Betrothal

Exchange of gifts took place on the occasion of the betrothal. The bridegroom or his family gave a compensation gift to the family of the bride.¹⁶ This appeared to be more than a material compensation and might be considered as a kind of mental balancing of the relations. The bride's father gave a gift (dowry) either to his daughter or to her future husband.¹⁷ The bridegroom also gave a gift to his bride.¹⁸ On occasion the woman was covered by the skirt of the man's cloak as a sign of his care and protection over her.¹⁹ In the interval between betrothal and marriage the bride was busy preparing herself for the great day.²⁰ Betrothal was a signed and witnessed legal contract and was as important as the marriage ceremony itself. Unfaithfulness during this period was described as adultery and punishable by death.²¹ The story of Mary and Joseph²² is instructive as revealing the covenant aspect of the committal to marriage. The marriage contract had been signed but the wedding had not yet taken place. It followed that if Mary was pregnant she must have given herself to someone other than Joseph. He had the right to dissolve the contract²³ but was unwilling for Mary to be exposed to the shame of public disclosure.²⁴ While he wondered how he could make a secret separation his problem was solved by the appearance of the angel who declared the truth of the matter to him.²⁵ The wedding took place but no act of sexual union occurred until after the birth of Jesus.²⁶ At this stage of their experience it was vital for Mary to have the pledged support of Joseph and equally important for him to know that she was in truth a virgin.

Marriage

The public acknowledgement of the marital relationship was an important feature of the many ceremonies which surrounded the occasion of marriage. The wearing of distinctive clothes²⁷ and being accompanied by one or more companions and friends²⁸ added dignity to the occasion. The bridegroom and his friends went in procession to the bride's house and escorted her back to his own or his parent's home. The procession was usually accompanied by music, singing and dancing.²⁹ At the marriage feast which followed, relatives and friends attended wearing festive clothes.³⁰ It was an insult to refuse an invitation.³¹ A friend of the bridegroom supervised the feast which could continue for several days. Parents and friends

blessed the couple and wished them well.³² A covenant of faithfulness bound the pair³³ as they prepared to consummate their marriage³⁴ in a specially prepared bridechamber.³⁵ The verb "to know"³⁶ is used to describe this most intimate of relationships suggesting that sexual intercourse was viewed as primarily personal rather than purely sensual. Self-revelation on the one hand and appreciation of it on the other is implied. A blood-stained cloth was later exhibited as proof of the bride's virginity.³⁷ The Song of Solomon extols the preciousness of human love and the Proverbs of Solomon encourage a man to rejoice in the wife of his youth and to let her affection fill him at all times with delight.³⁸

Christian Practice

New Testament Standards

To the Christian, as to the Israelite, right living cannot be dissociated from right thinking. Throughout the Bible men and women are represented as equal in their standing before God and Jesus Christ did not allow any departure from this truth.³⁹ In contrast to the generally accepted social pattern of His day, where women were treated as second class citizens, He maintained their rights and treated them accordingly. The New Testament writers endorsed the basic teaching of the Old Testament. The picture of the covenant relationship between God and Israel is paralleled with that of Christ and His Church.⁴⁰ Paul sets Christ's sacrificial love before husbands as an example for them to follow.⁴¹ Wives, on the other hand, have to be in submission to their husbands,⁴² a state which may be understood as the acceptance of an order of life in which one affords protection and support to the other, so that both together may find true development and purpose of being. The relationship is dynamic and is practical, functional, creative and mutually agreeable. In this partnership the husband accepts, and the wife acknowledges, his headship as in the order of authority and leadership laid down by God.⁴³

Peter encouraged wives to cultivate a gentle and quiet spirit, and husbands to conduct their married lives with understanding and due respect for 'the weaker sex'. This exhortation had a spiritual purpose; together they were heirs of the grace of life and their prayers must not be hindered.⁴⁴ When people became Christians they were not to separate from their unbelieving marriage partners but to try and win them over to the Faith.⁴⁵

Today's Pattern

Marriage has been defined as the state in which men and women can live together with the approval of their social group. (Biblical teaching, of course, goes further than this). The basic physical and psychological make-up of men and women is fairly fixed and

unchanging, whereas the general run of beliefs regarding right and wrong forms of conduct between the sexes varies from one culture to another and from one generation to the next.

In the West today we live in a society where it is increasingly taken for granted that traditional standards (mainly of Biblical origin) about sex and marriage must be questioned and abandoned in favour of a 'liberated' outlook. The Christian thus finds himself as an alien in a hostile world where his avoidance of flirtation with the opposite sex, his practice of chastity before marriage, his dependence on a heavenly father for wisdom and guidance in the choice of a partner, his submission, perhaps, to the wisdom of parents and elders, his sensitive cultivation of a friendship leading to engagement, his taking of his marriage vows in the presence of Christian witnesses, and his determination to follow the example of Christ's love for the church, seems strange to those whose lives are ruled by human passions.⁴⁶

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| 1 | Gn. 12: 1-3; 15: 17; 1-8. | |
| 2 | eg. Ex. 6: 4ff; Dt. 7: 6-8; 9:4-6; 14:2. | |
| 3 | Dt. 31; 16; Je. 2: 2; 3: 20f; Ezk. 16: 8,60; 23; Hos. 19: 20. | |
| 4 | Gn. 1: 27. | |
| 5 | Gn. 3: 22-24. | |
| 6 | eg. Abraham, Gn.25: 6; Gideon, Jdg.8:30; David, 2 Sa.5: 13. | |
| 7 | Gn. 21: 21; 38: 6; Ru. 3: 1f; 1 Sa. 18: 21. | |
| 8 | Gn. 24: 3f. | |
| 9 | Gn. 24: 58. | |
| 10 | Lv. 18. | |
| 11 | Dt. 25: 5f. | |
| 12 | Dt. 25: 7-10. | |
| 13 | Gn. 38: 8-10. | |
| 14 | Ru. 3: 12. | |
| 15 | Nu. 27: 1-11. | |
| 16 | Gn. 34: 12; Ex. 22: 17; 1 Sa. 18: 25. | |
| 17 | Gn. 29: 24; Jdg. 1: 15; 1 Ki. 9: 16. | |
| 18 | Gn. 24: 53a. | |
| 19 | Ru. 3: 9; Ezk. 16: 8, cf. Dt. 22: 30. | |
| 20 | Rev. 19: 7. | |
| 21 | Dt. 25: 23f. | |
| 22 | Mt. 1: 18-25. | |
| 23 | Dt. 24: 1. | |
| 24 | Mt. 1: 19. | |
| 25 | Mt. 1: 20. | |
| 26 | Mt. 1: 25. | |
| 27 | Ps. 45: 13f; Je. 2: 32; Is. 61: 10. | 37 |
| 28 | Ps. 45: 14; Ju. 14: 11. | 38 |
| 29 | Je. 7: 34; Ps. 78: 63. | 39 |
| 30 | Mt. 22: 11f. | 40 |
| 31 | Mt. 22: 3-7. | 41 |
| 32 | Gn. 24: 60; Ru. 4: 11. | 42 |
| 33 | Ezk. 16: 8; Mal. 2: 14. | 43 |
| 34 | Gn. 29: 23. | 44 |
| 35 | Joel 2: 16; Ps. 19: 5. | 45 |
| 36 | Gn. 4: 1 et al. | 46 |
| | | Dt. 22: 13-21. |
| | | Pr. 5: 18f. |
| | | Mt. 19: 3ff. |
| | | Eph. 5: 23, 32. |
| | | Eph. 5: 25. |
| | | Eph. 5: 24. |
| | | 1 Cor. 11: 3. |
| | | 1 Pet. 3: 1-7. |
| | | 1 Pet. 3: 1. |
| | | 1 Pet. 4: 4. |

CHARLES R. MARSH

2: Polygamy

a) *In view of the Old Testament examples of polygamy are there now any situations or countries where polygamy is right?*

Let it be said that a foreigner has no right to legislate for those of another country, or impose his culture on them. At the same time his teaching within the church will ultimately affect their culture. He will not insist that a convert should conform to his culture in the matter of clothes, habits, hours of meetings etc., nor will he condemn such customs as accepting a gift with both hands. Where the culture includes female infanticide, human sacrifices, initiation rights involving occult practices, female circumcision or mutilation which usually results in severe suffering or haemorrhage at childbirth, he must in all good conscience speak the truth, remembering that one role of Christianity has been and still is, to emancipate women and avoid suffering.

In considering this question we must revert again to Gen. 2: 18, 24; where God's ideal is set forth. Polygamy, or rather polygyny started with Lamech, Gen. 4: 17-24. His boast to his wives that he had killed a mere lad simply because the boy had wounded him reveals the character of the man. Derek Kidner comments, "The attempt to improve on God's marriage ordinance sets a disastrous precedent on which the rest of Genesis is comment enough". Custom sanctioned Abraham's action in taking Hagar to wife in order to have children, but the sad consequences were immediately seen in the false pride of Hagar, the unjust reproach of Sarai, leading to friction and division in the home. Hagar was involved in intense suffering, Ishmael was an embittered man, (Gen. 16: 12) and the consequences for the world today are still seen in the rival faiths of Islam and Christianity, the Arab-Judaic conflict, the persecution of Christians and the plight of Muslim women. This all happened because Abraham followed the counsel of his wife, and was *guided by reason and not implicit trust in God*. Does not the question suggest a similar approach to polygyny, viz: the expediency of polygamy in some circumstances? In any community where this is practised the status of women is lowered, men become arrogant and dominate women, there is friction within the home and the children are divided in their loyalties.

Similar lessons are taught by the action of Esau. "They made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah", Gen. 26: 34; and by Leah's words concerning Jacob:- "The Lord knows that I am hated", Gen. 29: 32 f. Solomon's wives turned away his heart from the Lord, and David bitterly regretted his sin against the Lord in taking Bathsheba.

It is obvious that human reason would argue in favour of polygyny in a tribe where many of the men had been killed by intertribal warfare, and the tribe was faced with extinction, or in the fact that when women are in excess of men an unmarried woman is exposed to immorality etc. We must remember that God's laws were made for all mankind and that to transgress them in any culture is to deprive women of their freedom, to render them the slaves or playthings of men, often to involve them in intense suffering, as well as to debase the character of the man. All this is the very antithesis of Christianity; as C. G. Scorer reminds us, 'Lifelong monogamy alone *preserves to society* the possibility of growth in moral character of all the members of the household'. (*The Bible and Sex Ethics Today* p 19.)

b) *What would you as a missionary do when a man with more than one wife is converted and wants to come into church fellowship?*

The aim of a missionary should be to form churches according to the pattern of the New Testament, In such churches the elders must decide on all matters relating to church fellowship, and they will do so by applying Scriptural principles to their own culture, bearing in mind the effect of their decisions on the non-christian community. In the Republic of Chad a man with three wives was converted and applied for fellowship. The elders baptised each of the three wives and received them on the grounds that each wife had only one husband. The husband attends the meetings, but is not allowed to partake at the breaking of bread or to engage in assembly activities as he has three wives! To European Christians this appears to be rather hard on the man, as he had married his wives before conversion. The elders argue that to receive the man into fellowship would be to create a precedent, and encourage younger men to obtain several wives before professing conversion.

Elders throughout Africa would insist that the man who desires to drink pure water must go to the fountain head. The further the stream is from its source the more danger there is of pollution. They would therefore go back to the one man, one wife relationship as stated in Genesis 2: 24, and maintained by the Lord Jesus (Mark 10: 2-9). In all His teaching he referred men back 'to the beginning'. The taking of other wives involves the transgression of the commandment: "You shall not commit adultery", Ex. 20: 14. See also Matthew 5: 27 f. Both overseers and deacons are to be "the husband of one wife" 1 Tim. 3: 2, 12. These are the principles which I, as a missionary teach, and as a fellow-elder with African brethren, seek to maintain.

I would also point out to my African friends that there is a very real danger in assemblies of legalistic Christianity, and that

each case should be decided individually in a spirit of love. The permissive society in Africa, and in the homeland, at present makes it possible for a man to have had intercourse with a number of women before his conversion. Each of them has in one sense been his wife, yet if such a man really repents he is ultimately received into fellowship.

Apart from the Scriptural issue the main difficulty is obviously the maintenance of the wives. There are several possibilities:-

1) He could retain the first wife, send off the others, making adequate provision for them until they were able to remarry, but in so doing he would cause them to commit adultery. In many African communities such a woman would be sorely tempted to become a prostitute. A young Christian would hesitate to marry her, regarding her as a little 'secondhand', and she would be embittered by the action of her husband who she would feel was not acting in a spirit of love.

2) The man could permit the younger wives to still live in his house, supporting them, refraining from intercourse, and maintaining intimacy with his first wife, and on these grounds be received into fellowship. In this case both the man and the women would be exposed to serious temptation, jealousy would be incurred, and the world would misjudge his action.

3) He could wait until the death of one of his wives resolved the situation, but it could well mean waiting a very long time. African elders would not be prepared to baptise a man with more than one wife. They know their own people and their decision is certainly Scriptural.

Obviously these do not exhaust the possibilities, and as a servant of God I would suggest that each case should be considered sympathetically in a spirit of love, bearing in mind the principles of the Bible.

HELEN COOKE

3: Barriers in communication

For too long, Christians have naively pretended that Christian marriage is *per se*, total bliss, and utterly devoid of the many problems of the marriage next door. In the seventies, we have suddenly become aware that marriage, and—dare we say it, Christian marriage, has fallen from its pedestal. Most of us have Christian friends whose

marriage relationships, if not completely broken, are sadly impaired. It would seem a tragedy that by the time the first sign of trouble in the relationship of a Christian couple is evident to friends, a great deal of bitter estrangement has taken place and the rift between husband and wife is considerable.

The Christian husband in the 1970s is under much more attack by direct sexual stimulus than his counterpart in 1940, '50 or even '60. Television, radio, newspapers, literature and magazines, and subtle advertising of all kinds make sure that he does not escape their titillating appeal. The Bible is right when it says "No man ever hates his own flesh", and modern living makes sure that fulfilling the needs of his own flesh is the all-important success image in the life of any man.

How then does this affect his marriage relationship? Perhaps well aware of the teaching of Ephesians 5, and 1 Cor. 7, he nevertheless sees himself as a sexual tycoon, ready to bring to the girl he marries a depth of passion quite unsurpassed by his non-Christian contemporaries.

But what of his wife? Her needs are *so* different, and perhaps no one has ever told him. For example, he may feel rebuffed to discover that whereas his response to some small physical caress from his loving wife is immediate and dependable her response to such a caress by him may be quite the opposite. This puzzling female reaction may catch the young husband unawares, and it may not be his fault that he is hurt by this lack of response. It is simply that he has not understood that female response, even in a woman capable of intense passion, is at times low, or non-existent, and that this is not in any way due to his failure as a lover.

Certainly we live in an age of increased awareness and knowledge of biological function than our forbears did. The average ten year old will unblushingly be aware of the nature and function of male and female sexual organs, but he is less than well prepared for the lifelong business of living together in love and harmony. In fact he is in some instances taught that sexual intercourse is for personal gratification only, and that this has no connection with love and even less with marriage.

This is a very different premise for sexual relationships from God's description in Genesis 2: 18., and is it therefore surprising that even among Christians, the relationship is seen through worldly-wise eyes? The rich relationship of Christ and his loving bride is worth studying.

Let us look at some of the problems as they arise. It is possible that Christians have problems at the outset of marriage because they believe that sexual intercourse for the Christian couple is out before

marriage and therefore sexual arousalment is to be discouraged, by fondling, petting, etc. For a couple much in love, this can create very real tension. In addition to the yearnings of their own love and desire, they live in a society screaming its deafening message of instant self-gratification and indulgence. But then when marriage does come, sometimes the problems start, especially for the girl. For months or years she has been restraining her passions, and then may find to her horror, and his, that her response to his love-making is cold and passionless. It may take days, weeks, months or even years of patient tender love on his part to bring her, and so himself to sexual fulfilment.

Many men are unprepared for the emotional and perhaps the physical changes which will take place in a wife during pregnancy. The delicate body balance suddenly functions in unexpected ways, and in the early days of pregnancy some wives have a distaste for physical contact with their husbands. She may be feeling sick and tired, and it is at this time that selfless giving in little practical ways on the husband's part can greatly endear him to her.

In various women's conference weekends which I have attended from time to time, the topics which unfailingly cause most problems to the young Christian wife relate to family planning, and unwanted pregnancy. The young, virile, aggressive husband is ready to jump into bed and his tired and jaded young wife is exhausted with the unceasing demands of an infant or two, the housework, garden and shopping. The very thought that if they have intercourse tonight she may become pregnant again has already caused such physical resistance within her that she is not capable of any kind of response to his demands. Yet she desperately needs his understanding and support, his warmth and comfort. He misunderstands, taking her lack of physical response to mean that he himself is no longer needed by her, or attractive to her, and he goes to sleep, as she does, restless and unhappy, full of unspoken misunderstanding and blame. A few nights like this and the situation becomes tense with each partner becoming more insular, and the relationship has suddenly gone all wrong. There is often an element of conflict with regard to the use of contraceptives by Christians who feel strongly that the gift of life is God's alone. "He surely has planned our number of children, and therefore I will only conceive if it is His will". Obviously every couple will have to work this one out sooner or later and given a dozen Christian couples there may be as many different ideas as to the best solution. It may be that some artificial means of contraception is decided upon. Another couple will decide that they are not happy about this and they decide that they will plan to have intercourse at safe periods only. The all important thing is that they come to a decision together and before God, and then by His help they work out the relationship. The couple who decide to

limit their family will be asking more of one another, if they decide to do this by natural restraint, and will therefore need to have an increased amount of tolerance and grace towards one another. There is no doubt that the larger the family the more money is needed to house and feed them. The Christian couple knows that He has promised to provide, but we live in a world drastically short of food in a situation of growing unemployment. We may not like to admit it, but the question of the family budget does cause disharmony in the bedroom.

Lest young husband feels he is being unfairly represented, let us look at young wife to see if she is in fact without fault. Is she as attractive as she was? Is she as keen to please him as she was? Does she cleave to him as much as she once did? Does she fully realise how much he needs her love and response at the end of his busy day, with pressures in the business world making increasing demands upon him? To know that she will welcome him, cook him an enjoyable meal, be ready to listen to him, and be his warm and comfortable help-meet means such a lot to him at the end of a hard day. To be able to talk to her about the ups and downs of work and home, and to know that she will endeavour to bring godly advice will be of great encouragement to him.

In conversation at women's conferences, I have been saddened to find that while many couples pray together, some feel unable to pray together about any physical aspect of their marriage. Could this point to the fact that they cannot talk together to one another concerning these delicate things? Modesty on the wife's part is a desired Biblical characteristic, but at the same time within this union of two of God's children, could there not be something of the situation of Genesis 2: 25, where they were both naked and were not ashamed? It was in the plan of God that they both become "one flesh" and this complete harmony of body mind and spirit is such a superb gift of God that it must be nurtured and guarded closely.

The loud voice of Women's Lib. and the teaching of Ephesians 5 pose problems for the woman whose forcefulness of character may be stronger than her husband's. Mutual respect is a healthy component of any friendship, supremely in the marriage bond. Some women say that it is difficult for them to be in any way subject to a man who will not make any decisions, or take the lead when it comes to lovemaking. Some women have overcome this problem by concentrating on giving respect to their husbands as godly men, if not as aggressive lovers.

When Jesus said "those whom God has joined together let no man put asunder" did He mean "no man" as an outside force, or could He also have meant the partners of the bond? One is increasingly aware of the number of Christian marriages being broken by

husband and wife and not by a third party. I believe that we each must guard our marriage bond jealously from this kind of thing, so lightly viewed by the world. An attractive young wife came to me recently in tears because her married relationship was so boring and she was desperately attracted to another single man in her meeting. She knew this was wrong, but had let her feeling for him grow to such an extent that she had come near to the point of a nervous breakdown, and communication with her husband had almost ceased. He seemed unaware that their marriage was anything other than it should be, but her children were distressed and puzzled by Mummy's obvious unhappiness.

Let us not be so smug as to pretend that this could never happen to us. We are human and we are tempted, so what do we as Christians do if we find ourselves being attracted by other than our spouse? Could I suggest two practical things? a) prayer: prayer for forgiveness—we have broken God's law. Prayer for the Lord to take away this attraction from us, and a belief that He will do this. He is able. b) action: act on this belief and remove the possibility of this feeling developing. Do not go to where this person might be e.g. do not plan a holiday with this family and do not put yourself in his or her path willingly.

Then we must tackle the root cause. Why is this marriage not satisfying each partner? It is the unsatisfied partner who will consciously or unconsciously seek to be admired, needed and appreciated by another. A husband and wife need to reassure one another constantly of their love to each other and of their satisfaction in one another. Perhaps she forgets to tell him how glad she is to see him as she hears his key turn in the lock . . . does he remember courteously to thank her for taking trouble to get a tasty meal . . . does he notice when she has shampooed her hair . . . does she encourage him to relax and do what he would like to do instead of getting tight-lipped about the still half-painted bathroom wall . . . do both remember it is more blessed to give than to receive—or does each get hoarse shouting it at the other?

Are we the kind of people whom those in trouble with their sexual relationship could approach? Are we loving and concerned as a group of God's people, and as individuals, to help young Christian couples to become established as one flesh? Do we give the impression that we never have any problems, and are smugly satisfied with our lot? Or have we got so used to one another that we have quite forgotten the early days of getting used to living together.

It is not easy to be concise about an answer to the question of rectifying our guilty silence over sexual problems in marriage. Books? Yes, these certainly help, if they can be got into the hands of those who need them at the right time. *Christianity and Sexual*

Liberation by Peter Cousins. *I married you* by Walter Trobisch, a very readable book on the nitty gritty of day by day living as a Christian couple. *I love God and you* by Marion Stroud, deals with the unusual yet not so uncommon situation where a wife becomes a Christian after her marriage. *Marriage Problems* by Paul Tourner examines more closely some of the unhappy situations which he as a Christian psychiatrist has come across.

Conferences? Yes, and although more time is available at a weekend to get to know one another, there is much which can be accomplished on a day basis. There must be an opportunity for small group discussions with good leading questions and above all an open question session with plenty of opportunity for written anonymous questions. These sort of sessions are most useful if a good panel of down to earth speakers can be found, representing a number of different home backgrounds.

Above all, the individual counsel of a loving, concerned and approachable mature Christian friend is invaluable.

Whatever the source, all advice in the end points to the couple together working out their sexual problems. Marriage as seen in the Bible is a rich, deep lifelong commitment, for all mankind and not for Christians only. Perfection will never be attained in a fallen world, and the joining together of two imperfect people, even within the fellowship of the body of Christ, will not be all it should be.

The prayer of Paul for the Roman Christians, Romans, 15: 5, could well be the prayer for every married couple.

“May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Jesus Christ, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

GEORGE E. HARPUR

4: A comment on abstinence mentioned in 1 Corinthians

The prophets were explicit in their denunciation of extra-marital intercourse of a specific kind, but offered little or no instruction, or advice, on the regulation of marital relations. This was not due to any prudishness but to the fact that they regarded the control of marital affairs as lying entirely within the competence of the persons concerned, the husband and the wife, to the exclusion of all

outside. This accords with the wide variation possible, when desire and competency vary as much as they do, and temperament, physique, circumstances are taken into account. No norm is laid down.

It is interesting and important, therefore, to note that in one place where the matter is referred to in some detail (1 Cor. 7: 1-6) Paul makes it quite clear that what he writes in answer to their questions is written by permission and not given as inspired instruction. He explains himself in the following verse. He clearly states what he himself would prefer in the Corinthian context, but is ready to acknowledge that it is God, not Paul who chooses what is right for each man's portion in life.

A number of matters dealt with in the Bible are not as clear to us as they might be, for elsewhere as here, the word translated 'man' (verse 1) is the same as the word translated 'husband' (verse 2). So also 'woman' (verse 1) and 'wife' (verse 2) are varied translations of the same original word. It devolves on translators to decide what is appropriate in each case. Plainly the translation "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" is very different from "It is good for a husband not to touch a wife". Translators rightly prefer the former, which is in keeping with verses 3-5. But verse 8 also uses the phrase "It is good"; and Paul is indicating that in his opinion it is preferable not to marry. We conclude, therefore, that he is not advocating abstention from intercourse within marriage. On the contrary, he regards abstention in marriage as dangerous, and he treats marriage as the proper answer to the common need of men and women (verse 2).

It is curious that people as prone to lasciviousness as the Corinthians (whether pagan or Christian) should entertain ascetic notions about the legitimate realm of divinely instituted marriage. Asceticism is often a clear pointer to inner personal weakness.

Since one of the reasons for marriage is to avoid the temptations of immorality, Paul goes on to show that conjugal rights (or rites) are of the essence of marriage. Without these it lacks validity and must fail of its purpose, for it opens again the door to Satan's temptations.

Intercourse is not something for married people to refrain from, but rather a course of action to which they are committed. What the KJV renders vaguely as "due benevolence", the RSV clarifies as "conjugal rights", but the original is blunter still and commands each partner to "pay the debt". Each partner has vowed to give the right and control over their own body to the other. To withhold or refuse this control is to commit a species of fraud. Paul uses the same word 'defraud' as is used in 1 Cor. 6: 8.

It is against this background that any Christian's abstention from intercourse should be considered. Intercourse will be automatically regulated by the normal affairs of life i.e. age, health, temperament and circumstances. Illness, absence, pre-occupation and other factors all produce different experiences for married people, and even a variation over the years for the same couple. The basis of marriage in love will ensure that the debt is not paid or exacted with indifference or callously, but as a joyful expression of affection and love.

However, Paul had permission to suggest that intercourse might be interrupted for spiritual reasons if certain qualifications were observed. First that there should be a time limit agreed for the abstention, they must be 'together' again. Second that the purpose of abstention is a spiritual one, to give themselves to prayer (the old MSS omit fasting). It is not implied that a normal married relationship prevents prayer, but rather that there are special occasions when more time and leisure is needed for urgent prayer. Such an occasion is seen in Acts 12 when many (not all) were giving themselves to a night of prayer for the apostle in prison due to be executed the next day (Acts 12: 5, 6, 12, 18). The third essential is that the arrangement be a mutual one. Exodus 19: 14-16 is an Old Testament case of very special circumstances in the spiritual realm.

There are two other things to be taken into account. First, that there is no obligation to abstain. The couple is completely free to make a decision suited to their own circumstances, to which they will be well advised to give full consideration. For, secondly, abstention carries with it an element of moral risk. Either partner may lack sufficient self-control and the experiment may end in moral disaster. They are warned that they have an Adversary who is on the watch for just such an opportunity to damage the work of God and ruin the life of the married pair. Moral breakdown in a Christian man or woman may do more irretrievable harm to the witness of a Church than their participation in a night of prayer may do good.

Part III

**World population
and contraception**

JANE E. HARPUR

1: The population explosion

After the Flood God told Noah and his sons to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. Man has fulfilled this command but has now gone too far. He is no longer in tune with his environment and has again spoiled God's world. The whole human race is threatened with disaster in the next 100 years unless something is done now to halt the exponential population growth. Urgent action is needed.

In 1650 the population of the world was around 500 million; by 1850 it had doubled to 1,000 million; by 1925 it had doubled again to 2,000 million; by 1975 it is expected to be 4,000 million; by 2,010 it could be 8,000 million. This 2% annual growth rate is unique in human history. What has caused this great increase? Firstly, there has been a reduction in death from infectious disease; e.g. in the Black Death in the 1340's one quarter of the population of Europe died. Then there has been a great decrease in infant mortality due to better medical care, earlier sexual maturity and higher fertility due to better health, and an increase in longevity.

Latin America has the highest annual growth rate of 2.8%, i.e. it will double its population in 25 years; Africa has a 2.6% growth rate which will double its population in 28 years (although its birth rate is the highest at 46/1000 population, its death rate is considerably higher than Latin America); Asia has a 2.3% growth rate which will double its population in 30 years, while Europe has a growth rate of 0.8% which will double its population in 100 years. (1970 U.N. figures). Two thirds of the world's population live in the developing nations; more people are now migrating to the towns and cities to find employment or a 'better job' leading to excessive crowding causing an increase in pollution and many psychological ailments.

There is very little potentially arable land left to be developed—what there is left is of a very poor nature. Since 1950 increased agricultural technology has enabled food production to increase at 3% per annum; therefore world food production doubled in the 20 years up to 1970, but this massive input has mainly been in the developed world where food production per head has risen by 32%. In the developing world total food output per person has only risen by 6% in this period and there are indications that since 1971 food output per person in these areas is actually declining because of the population growth. Between 20% and 30% of people in the developing nations still receive insufficient calories per day. An increase in

irrigation and the use of nitrogenous fertiliser to increase food production has led to an increase in bird and plant disease: now a shortage of fertiliser is threatened by the energy crisis. Another way round the situation is to try and increase the food supplies from the sea but this upsets the balance of nature and, therefore, has ecological significance. Success in new strains of cereals is only a stop-gap and there is evidence that they are becoming susceptible to viral diseases. All this means a great increase in cost and food production will still lag behind population growth.

Many people are becoming very concerned about the overpopulation of the world. In recent years the United Nations has been giving increasing help to governments who want assistance in family planning programmes. In August 1974 the first United Nations world population conference was held in Bucharest. The results of this conference were rather disappointing as no definite policies regarding action to be taken were reached. Some of the developing nations insisted that no population problem *per se* existed. They staunchly maintained that the question was merely one of redistributing wealth between the developed and developing nations. It is estimated that one third of the world's population living in the industrialised countries consumes 80% of the world's energy and raw materials. e.g. "The same amount of food that is feeding 210 million Americans can feed 1.5 billion Chinese on an average Chinese diet". They also say that development should have a higher priority than family planning. The most powerful voting block was the Argentine-led group often drawing support from the Vatican-led Catholic countries, sometimes from the Communist block and commanding a majority of the Latin American and African votes. A nation in Latin America is bound to be influenced by the policies of the nation next door. Some countries in Eastern Europe have recently reversed their policies on limiting population growth e.g. Rumania in 1966 put an end to freely available abortions and made contraceptives difficult to obtain because the birth rate fell so low—since then it has started to rise again. Delegates said, however, that only a few of the nations shared the aims of Argentina and Brazil in wanting to greatly increase their populations.

What then can be done about the developing nations where the growth is so rapid? The task seems almost impossible. China has made considerable progress in reaching the target of less than 1% annual population growth by the year 2000. Strong emphasis is given here to initiative and self-reliance of the people themselves. The marriage age has been raised; there is free mixing of the sexes prior to marriage but sexual relations are frowned upon. All types of contraception are freely available, also abortions. What is the Christian answer to this apparent success? There is obviously a great loss of personal freedom in China, but should it not challenge us as

to whether we as Christians are as concerned about the rapidly increasing world population? South Korea, Mauritius, Taiwan and Singapore have also succeeded in dramatically reducing the birth rate through education in family planning techniques, the high literacy rate e.g. in Mauritius, economic and social conditions with, in Singapore for example, new opportunities for women to fully participate in society, tax benefits for less than three children and lowest priority in housing for large families. We must, therefore be concerned about trying to change the concepts of the people in the developing nations. In many countries there is still a high status value in having many children; in the past the more children, the more hands there were to do the work and the more money came in; now they must be educated to see that children are potential consumers not producers; the leaders of society must act as examples in this respect; barrenness must no longer be despised.

What then can we do as Christians? Do we just let things go on as they are knowing that in the last days there will be an increase in families and wars? Surely we should be concerned about the quality of life, about relieving human suffering; about giving people a hope in life. Our Lord said "I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn. 10: 10). He was concerned about the social evils of his day. The question is not how many human beings can be kept alive on a minimal diet, but how many human beings can be given a life which is not entirely taken up by the effort of mere survival. What about the hazards of grand multiparity and the misery brought to so many women? Let us help people in this tremendous problem and through it seek to show them the love and mercy of the Lord. Christians throughout the ages have been responsible for changes for good in society e.g. the abolition of the slave trade. Let us not fail in our task in this generation. Only one third of the world's population have knowledge of even one method of birth control. As a result a vast number of pregnancies are terminated often illegally with all the resulting risks to life and health. The Christian way of life must bring liberty to women not bondage as is seen in so many cultures. The Christian working in developing countries has an opportunity to be involved in sex education and family planning in a number of ways (see articles by Dr. A. Townsend and Mr. J. Hart in this journal). Those in high positions can use their position to influence their governments in adopting birth control programmes. People must be able to see a reason for limiting their families. For example the failure of intensive birth control programmes in India was due to the fact that they were never integrated into a comprehensive programme of social and economic development.

And then what about ourselves in this country? Even in the advanced countries where the birth rate is relatively low the decision to have three children rather than two makes a difference between a

stable population and one which doubles every 43 years. Britain is already overcrowded; we have to import a proportion of our food supplies, to say nothing of the rising pollution in this island. So Christians should consider prayerfully how many children they produce in the light of the world population and economic crisis. We must be good stewards in this matter remembering that to whom much has been given much will be required, not only as it affects ourselves but also future generations. The object must be to enhance the quality of family life. What about the infertile couple? How far should they go in using artificial means such as artificial insemination or drugs in order to conceive? Also is it wrong for a couple to remain childless voluntarily? We must also be concerned about decadence in our own nation. The unwanted excess of births could be reduced considerably if there were no sexual relationships outside marriage. Only the power of the Gospel changing men's lives can alter the basic desires of human nature. There is still a lack of sexual responsibility amongst teenagers.

We can see, therefore, the magnitude and the almost impossibility of the task, but let us be concerned about this world problem and seek the will of the Lord as to the part each one of us should be playing.

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JANE E. HARPUR

2: Contraception

Family Planning should concern every Christian couple today. With the rapidly increasing world population (see previous article), economic situation and shortage of accommodation, a Christian couple have to think seriously about how many children it is right for them to bring into the world. There are still some Christians, however, who have not thought much about the different methods of birth control. Today the marriage relationship should not be under strain because of the fear of another pregnancy. Most people find they cannot cope physically, mentally and spiritually with looking after more than two young children at a time; some find one plenty.

What then are the different methods of birth control and what factors should a Christian bear in mind when considering which method to adopt?

A. Coitus Interruptus

This is still the only method employed by quite a number of people. Its disadvantage is its unreliability and it depends on the husband's control. We have an example of this in the Old Testament but have to note that Onan was not condemned for doing this but for not fulfilling the Levirate law. It therefore puts a strain on the husband and may interfere with the wife receiving complete satisfaction; also there are often sperms present in the lubricating fluid produced prior to ejaculation which could possibly result in a pregnancy. This is not, therefore, a very satisfactory method and should not be relied on.

B. Safe Period

This means that sexual intercourse is only possible during the ten to eleven days (depending on the length of the cycle) prior to the next menstrual period and two to three days after menstruation, but the latter is rather unreliable as ovulation may occur early. The egg/sperm may remain viable for 1/3 days respectively. The probable time of ovulation is calculated from reading a graph of the early morning temperatures, a rise in temperature taking place after ovulation and remaining high for the second part of the cycle. It can, therefore, be very difficult for those with irregular periods, which of course become more common as the menopause is approached. This method can, therefore, leave a strain during the time of abstinence as this has to be fairly long to be sure of being "safe". It is, however, the only method available to strict Roman Catholics. Some do find it practical, but for many it is a very difficult method and therefore has a high failure rate.

C. Sheath or Condom

This is the method used by the male; he, therefore, takes complete responsibility. Some people find this method very efficient but it can interrupt the spontaneity of intercourse. It is always advisable for the wife to use a contraceptive cream/foam as well; this increases the safety in case there is an accident e.g. a "burst sheath" or spilling; it also adds some lubrication if this is needed. 'C' films do not offer enough protection and should not, therefore, be used.

D. Occlusive Cap

This has to be introduced by the woman with a coating of contraceptive cream each side of the cap and particularly round the perimeter. It should fit from behind the neck of the womb to the pubic bone in front so that the neck of the womb is completely covered by the cap; the smaller cervical caps are not advisable as

they are difficult to fit and are more liable to fall out of position. They all have to be left in for about eight hours. Many women find them rather cumbersome and messy, but some on the other hand find it a very suitable method. They are not used nearly so frequently now with the increasing use of the Pill. The failure rate is similar to the sheath used with cream.

E. I.U.C.D. (Intra-uterine Contraceptive Device)

The I.U.C.D. or otherwise known as the loop is a fairly popular method after the family is completed; they are not generally recommended before the first child unless other methods are found unsatisfactory. It is the commonest method used in developing countries where people find other methods difficult to understand, or are unwilling to use them. It has still not been completely worked out how it works. It may destroy the sperm, egg or young embryo and prevent implantation because it alters the lining of the womb. It may also alter the motility of the Fallopian tube and prevent fertilisation this way. It can, therefore, act as a pre or a post-conception method of contraception. I would suggest that even if it acts as an early post-conception method there is not really any ethical difference between this form of contraception and the others that prevent fertilisation as the end result is the same. (An action of intercourse has not resulted in a growing foetus which eventually becomes an independent life. (See also point 2 of the later article by Mr. P. S. Firth). Its advantages are that it does not interrupt the spontaneity of intercourse, the insertion is not a difficult procedure, and it is very safe medically. (The incidence of perforation of the womb is very low). Heavy periods which can be painful, and irregular bleeding are sometimes problems. Apart from the Pill, it is the safest method of contraception (about 2-6 pregnancies per 100 women years¹ in those where the device remains inside). It can often stay in situ for several years. Six monthly check-ups or yearly (if the patient can feel it) are advised; more in the first year as they fall out more commonly at this stage. The new copper devices, which also have a chemical action in the womb, need changing every two years but seem to produce less side effects and have the lowest failure rate of the I.U.C.D.'s.

F. The Pill

There are still quite a few women who are reluctant to use this method, although it is practically 100% safe and there are now very few serious side effects since the introduction of the low oestrogen pills. The combined oestrogen/progesterone pill prevents ovulation (it also prevents the build-up of the lining of the womb and alters the cervical mucus so that it is more hostile to penetration by sperms). It is ideal for the newly married with the possible exception of those who have very infrequent periods and are therefore likely

to be less fertile. The technique of intercourse can be learned and improved without having to get used to mechanical methods as well. Over the age of 35 there is a slightly higher risk of side effects: (see article by Miss E. Sibthorpe for the side effects of the pill). Some people complain of loss of libido, headache or depression but usually one variety can be found to suit.

In a few it has to be discontinued because of the development of hypertension. There are now also some progesterone only pills on the market (mini-pill). These are sometimes useful in those people for whom the combined pill is contra-indicated; they are not quite as safe as the combined pill and some find irregular bleeding a problem.

G. Sterilisation, Male and Female

This is a simple operation in the male with no loss of libido or impotence after the operation. In the female it is not a difficult operation, though it involves a longer stay in hospital due to two small incisions through the abdominal musculature. This method should definitely be considered in those where there is a contra-indication to further pregnancy on health grounds, and could also be considered in those over the age of thirty when there are difficulties with the existing methods and no further children are desired even if something happened to the spouse or present children. The operation must be regarded as irreversible.

¹ The number of pregnancies per 100 women years is the number of pregnancies which would be expected to occur in a hundred women over a period of one year of sexual exposure.

ELSIE M. SIBTHORPE

3: The long term effects of the "Pill"

The "Pill" is usually considered to be the oestrogen-progestogen combination, which now contains 50 microgrammes or less of oestrogen. It is still less than 20 years since the pill was introduced in Puerto Rico, and the first results were reported in 1958.¹ It is now estimated² that there are 50 million women on oral contraceptives throughout the world, of which 2½ million are in Britain. The mass of books and papers published on the subject is unbelievable, but we still cannot answer some of the most elementary questions.

The interim report of the Royal College of General Practitioners published last year concluded that "the estimated risk at the present

time of using the pill is one that a properly informed woman would be happy to take".³ The survey was a prospective one involving 23,000 pill users and comparing them with an equal number of matched controls. The survey confirmed the slightly increased incidence of thrombo-embolic conditions, cerebrovascular disease and hypertension in pill users, and also found a slight deterioration of glucose tolerance. On the other hand pill users were less anaemic, due to less menstrual loss and there appeared to be some protection against innocent breast tumours and ovarian cysts. There was no increased incidence of breast or uterine cancer. Excellent though the report is, it covers too short a period to be really dogmatic and the further reports are awaited with interest.

As a contraceptive the pill is almost 100% safe. Pregnancies in pill users are nearly always due to patients failing to take the pill properly. In order to assess the safety of the pill, we have to compare the risks of not taking it. It has been shown that of 1 million pill taking women a year 21 will die as a direct result of the pill, but if the same number used no contraception 223 would die through complications of pregnancy. The users of condoms and diaphragms as contraceptives run a risk of 33 deaths per million users through unplanned pregnancies.⁴

Although it is still impossible to be dogmatic on the long term effects of the pill, it is an efficient contraceptive, which in many women produces a sense of well-being, results in a moderate or scanty menstrual loss without dysmenorrhoea, thus eliminating loss of time from work or studies. On discontinuing the pill, fertility is quickly restored to normal, and even the patients who develop amenorrhoea can usually be treated successfully.

In these days when so many young women, whether married or not, are having regular sexual intercourse, it is preferable that they should take the pill rather than risk an unwanted pregnancy, with the possible subsequent trauma of a legal termination. There is little doubt that the safety of the pill has encouraged the more responsible young people to indulge in extra-marital sex, the less responsible will not hesitate even with no protection. As Christians we deplore the present day attitude which encourages extra-marital and pre-marital sex, and we try to teach the young Christians we know, that obedience to the word of God is the way of happiness.

1 Garcia, C.R., Pincus, G. and Rock, J. (1958) *American Journal of Obstetric Gynaecology*. 75. 82.

2 *Oral Contraceptives, Population Report, Series A*. No 1, 1974.

3 *Oral Contraceptives and Health: an interim report from the Oral Contraceptive Study of the Royal College of General Practitioners*. London: Pitman Medical. 1974.

4 *The Daily Mail* January 1970. quoted from the British Medical Bulletin.

ELSIE M. SIBTHORPE

4: Comments on the free prescribing of contraceptives

It is difficult to comment at this stage on the free prescribing of contraceptives, as the full implementation of the service has not yet taken place. There is no doubt that the announcement of a free contraceptive service was political and had not been worked out with the profession.

If prescription charges had been abolished, so that patients who are dependent on drugs for their well-being were supplied free, then the additional supply of free contraceptives would be a rational measure, but it seems unfair that those who are ill should have to pay, and fit persons get contraceptives free.

The actual costs of the pill or other contraceptive appliances are very small compared with the amount many people spend on tobacco or alcohol, but even so there are women who would refuse to pay, but who can be induced to accept a free service. As these women are usually those in the lower social scale, who tend to have large families, this is a good thing.

It is more important for married couples to be able to obtain contraceptive advice easily and from competent advisers than that it should be provided free. While many people can get all the help they need from their general practitioners, some doctors for personal reasons do not wish to be involved in a contraceptive service, and so the provision of special clinics is necessary.

For some years now certain London Boroughs in conjunction with the Family Planning Association have run a free contraceptive service, and there is no doubt that many young women have appreciated the ease and anonymity with which married and unmarried alike could obtain advice and supplies of pills, etc. However much we may deplore sexual intercourse outside marriage, it is much better to encourage a responsible attitude and provide contraception, rather than have to deal with an unwanted pregnancy.

JOHN HART

5: Family planning—a missionary responsibility

The days have long since gone when a missionary was somebody who only preached the gospel and taught the Bible. However, most missionaries today would agree that the real missionary job involves

establishing churches. And happily, many churches are getting away from the ideas of 'just having three meetings in the week' and "spirituality is determined by faithful and punctual attendance complete with hat". There are now many professional missionaries, doctors, nurses, engineers, accountants, pilots, radio technicians, musicians, and a host of others. Many go to the mission field intent on doing a specific job, for example flying missionaries in jungle areas, or running radio stations. This article refers to those missionaries who find themselves in the rather do-it-all situation of evangelising, establishing churches and building up churches in areas where many of the normal facilities for living just do not exist. Many are trying to give specific attention to the needs of the area in which they are living, apart from regularly preaching and teaching the Word of God. However, even if the job in hand is 'mundane', most are working with a means to an end, that of establishing mature, independent fellowships under local leadership.

Of all the obstacles to spiritual growth and maturity in Ecuador, probably the greatest is the marital, family and home situation of the people. I suspect the same to be true of the majority of cultures throughout the world. Whether it be in the high class people of the society, the near to starvation poor people from the country, or the up and coming 'gente' of the cities, many marriages are on the rocks and many homes are at breaking point. The real problem is neither poverty nor riches, but ignorance, and/or lack of adequate facilities. There are many thousands of unwanted children in Ecuador who are suffering the consequences of the ignorance of their parents. Some, the majority, are uneducated, hungry, poorly dressed beggars and robbers. Others are sophisticated, educated, unpleasantly wealthy children who have been brought up by the maid.

The missionary both can and should be prepared to step into these situations with education and, if other facilities are not available, with practical help. Can the missionary take the 'gospel' to these people without feeling the responsibility to share in their problems? Can a Christian keep quiet who has the knowledge so desperately needed by others?

During four years from 1968—1972, we were able to hold a special clinic in our area for Family Planning. At first I worked with a doctor who is a specialist from the U.S.A. The local medical facilities were unable to provide any form of family planning. Four thousand women were treated in the clinic, and we consider that about 12—16 thousand unwanted pregnancies have been avoided. Nevertheless we still have a good Sunday school. In 1972 we were able to hand over to a group of national doctors, specialists in family planning. The time involved in our clinic was one day per month seeing patients and one day per month for making preparations.

All costs were covered by the nominal charge made, well within the limits of the lowest income.

Many ask, "what help has this been to the 'work'?" Naturally it was a good evangelistic opportunity. Bibles and New Testaments were always on sale and free literature available. I know of some who are keen Christians today as a result of a first contact in the clinic. The homes of the believers in the fellowship are most certainly reaping the benefits of the clinic. In many cases it has transformed the economic situation, many women have had their broken health restored, marriage relationships have improved, and *more* children are growing up normally.

(Note: For general information and help on this subject, the excellent book "Birth Control and the Christian" is highly recommended.

Editors—the Christian Medical Society.

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Coverdale House Publishers Ltd., London.)

ANNE TOWNSEND

6: Missionary kids . . . unnecessary luxury?

Any Christian couple in England or overseas should seriously and prayerfully consider their responsibility before God, in bringing children into this world.

The 'full-time Christian worker' faces peculiar problems of his own. For instance, it might be argued, "Surely a Spirit—filled evangelist, and his wife (a well-trained teacher) should be free to fully exercise their God-given gifts at all times? He should surely be excused all the nuisance and tiredness resulting from babies which cry in the night, and make the average young father prone to periods of exhaustion? Surely he should be freed from these distractions to devote his life to evangelism. His hours of prayer should never be broken by his infant's pleas for paternal attention?"

"His wife, similarly, should not have to waste her training in youth work, her potential for winning young folk to Christ, by turning into a machine for rearing young children?" Some would argue that for such a young couple to have children, would be for them to squander their obvious talents . . . whether they live in England or abroad as missionaries is immaterial.

On the other hand, others like myself, react vigorously to such attitudes. 'What a peculiar perspective on life!' we feel.

Are missionaries, or any other Christians some kind of machine? A machine, created solely to proclaim the gospel? Is there no more to the Creator's purpose in creating us?

Surely we are all still *people*? We are people, whose lives are sanctified, enriched and matured through the rough and tumble of rearing children, the same as everyone else. We are people, whom God is painstakingly and gradually conforming to the image of His Son. He is changing us daily to make us (we trust) channels through which His Holy Spirit can flow more freely every day.

God does this for most of us in the wear and tear of family life. The intense, passionate evangelist learns real patience and love (I know, I've watched him) as he relieves his tired wife night after night with their crying baby; he understands the Fatherhood of God in quite a new dimension as he cares for his own children (before it was all in a book); he learns how to "weep with them that weep" when his own children seem to be going wrong, and his understanding of humanity deepens.

The wife who denies herself motherhood, in order to 'win souls for Christ' may feel she is doing God's will for her life. She may be absolutely right. Yet she must face the fact, that when it is too late for her to have any children she may feel she has mistaken God's guidance terribly; and bitterly regret her youthful decision.

Deliberate childlessness may repercuss in the relationship between the couple. Deep-rooted psychological harm and misunderstandings may be caused. What meaning has sexual intercourse for such a couple if it is never practised to produce children? While God gave sexual union as an expression of a couple's union at all levels, should it always, only, be used in this way . . . only half of that for which it was designed by God? Might the wife ever begin to feel she was being 'used' as an object to satisfy her husband's desire . . . no more? Does this act, symbolising a very deep union, run the risk of becoming only a ritual? Is it right to prevent permanent flowering of a couple's union, into the fruit of a child?

To deliberately have no children, a couple must be very very sure that *God*, and no "Christian pressure group", have led them to take this step.

A missionary couple who have no children face many problems. What ever do the nationals of their adopted country make of them? In a non-Western uninhibited country, such a couple may daily in the bus queue, or at the market be asked, 'Why no children?' 'Are Westerners impotent?' 'If your husband doesn't know how to make love properly would you like us to try and give him a few

tips?' 'Has God cursed your womb and stopped you from being fertile like everyone else?'

Not only is this missionary couple peculiar because of their colour and creed, but because of their childlessness . . . a stigma and shame to the Easterner.

How does an emerging church learn about Christian family life if it does not see it lived out in front of them? What value is a lecture by the missionary wife (who has no children) on 'How to bring up your children for Christ', when everyone listening knows that she has no idea of the problems involved in bringing up children. It is the living example that counts.

Since Eastern society cannot be divorced from family life, it makes nonsense to the average Eastern mind to learn that a Western couple deliberately have no children (and there are no secrets in the East . . . the village will know in a few hours). An Easterner does not face life without his family: he and they form one unit. If he is to become a Christian it will often be with other members of his family.

I believe that the 'full time Christian worker' here or overseas, should be a normal person! He should live as a normal Christian. The quality of his life should be such that other ordinary people will see Christ in him, and turn to the Christ who transforms ordinary people into those who can have a life-giving relationship with the Creator God.

Contraceptives are available worldwide: cheaper in developing countries than here. Some have reasonably suggested that if couples in England are limiting the size of their families in order to support missionaries, then missionaries should limit the size of family that has to be supported. Family planning by the missionary (and freely discussed intimately with strangers in the train or on the bus, as their normal topic of conversation!) may help those in the Third World, facing immense overpopulation problems and food shortage, to realise its advantages, and disadvantages. Most governments value missionary co-operation in birth-control programmes.

Take pity on some missionary mothers! Some pass through a period of intense longing for another child when their last has gone thousands of miles away to boarding school . . . some have a 'second family' at this stage. Those who have not faced such separation perhaps do not realise the deep psychological loss some mothers feel at this milestone in their lives. This accounts in some cases for unusually (by today's standards) large missionary families.

I believe that all the basic principles for and against family planning apply as much to the missionary married couple, as to

any other Christian couple, (unless called *very* clearly by God to have no children . . . the very small minority).

I do *not* believe that children hinder the spread of the gospel overseas. They hinder a preaching machine from preaching . . . but, the gospel in its fullest sense is more richly proclaimed by the witness of a Christian family. I have seen other missionaries' children in Thailand, and seen the impact their family life has had in non-Christian cultures. I believe that this impact may have cut more ice spiritually, than hours and hours of preaching.

Speaking personally, my three children have helped me immensely, if indirectly. Not only have they shared Christ with their lips, but they are often God's channel through which He is changing me, and gradually making me more as He wants me to be. And after all, the more I become like Christ, the more others will meet Him in me.

So, thank you my children for the hours of washing nappies, and the days when you were sick and tested my patience to the limit, and the nights when I couldn't sleep because you were separated and far away from me at boarding school. God is using you, I believe, to establish and build His Church in Thailand, just as much as He is using my husband and me. I wouldn't want to be without you!

Part IV

Abortion

R. F. R. GARDNER

1: Abortion

What right has a woman to abortion? The surprising fact is that the British Abortion Act 1967 does not deal directly with the pregnant woman, nor with the fetus: it deals with the operator. Moreover it does not spell out what he shall do. It enacts that if, under certain carefully laid down conditions, a registered medical practitioner performs an abortion, he shall not be liable to punishment. In other words it is merely permissive.

How then does it come about that there is so much talk of the woman's rights, and of abortion on demand? There are several lines of argument.

1. The most recent and respectable one is that of the Lane Commission in its report (vol. 1, Para. 398) to Parliament in April 1974. Here it is argued that as the NHS was set up in 1946 to "secure improvement in the physical and mental health of the people", and as the only lawful abortions under the Act are "for the purpose of saving the life of the woman, or of preserving her health or of that of her existing children", the NHS has a responsibility to provide for abortion. This opinion has no standing in law.

2. There is the argument which quite openly twists the wording of the Act to mean the opposite of its intention. The grounds for termination in the Bill were "that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve *risk* to the life of the pregnant woman. . . ." During debate it was decided that *risk* was too vague, and should be quantified as "greater than if the pregnancy were terminated."

With glee advocates of easy abortion have pounced on this rider. It is possible to produce statistics to prove that a perfectly normal delivery carries a higher risk of death than does an early abortion performed by skilled hands. Eureka! As for any woman abortion is less risky than continuance of pregnancy, any woman can have one!

3. The most popular approach, however, is to maintain that the fact a woman mentions abortion indicates that she is depressed, depression is injurious to mental health, injury to mental health is a statutory ground for abortion: no problem!

It is now time to admit that the third sleight of hand is used on occasion by the present writer. This confession leads us into the heart of the problem. Let us look carefully into just one typical situation seen not infrequently.

A widow, scraping to bring up her school-aged children, happy to be courted, grateful that her children once more have a 'father-figure' coming about the home, is then seduced and deserted. She feels conscience-stricken. She feels angry at having been betrayed. She is afraid for the close-knit family relationship she has had single-handed to build up and maintain and enrich. She is not only afraid for the children's relationship to herself when they discover, but for their suffering at school, and for the reactions of the neighbours.

In our abortion committee of gynaecologists and social workers we accept these fears as genuine. The woman is going to lose her job. The children are going to be taunted at school. They are going to lose their previous trust and affection for mum: and the scars of this on the children will be life-long. The elder will leave home earlier: the younger are likely to shun home and there is a real danger that they will become delinquents. The child itself, when born, will not have an easy life—all the evidence being that such a child will be kept by its mother and not given for adoption. It will have the stigma of illegitimacy, be without a father, be bandied from child-minder to day-nursery as mother works to keep a roof over their heads. As the mother ages over the next forty years the loving care her children should have provided is less likely to be forthcoming, merely the loneliness of geriatric accommodation.

Knowing all this, and aware that at a stroke he can prevent these sorrows and the misfortunes to the innocent children, the gynaecologist needs very strong grounds indeed to refuse to abort. The question we have, as Christians, to consider is this—do such strong grounds exist?

Murder is forbidden in the decalogue, but murder implies malice for the victim: abortion is not murder. Life, as the gift of God, is to be treated with reverence but is not sacrosanct. In Old Testament days it was forfeit not only for wickedness (Ex. 22: 18-20), but even for criminal carelessness (Ex. 21: 29). Were all the children of Achan involved in his conspiracy? Was every toddler before the deluge, or of Amalekite blood, depraved? It is clear that in God's eyes the preservation of life does not have absolute priority: some values—the purity of his people, and obedience for example—were more important. This is, of course, accepted, otherwise in wartime we would excommunicate all combatants from our fellowships. But is abortion even the taking of life? If we were agreed as to what we meant by 'life' the argument would be easier. Many hold that the fetus is ensouled at conception or perhaps at implantation: I have argued against this at length elsewhere (*Abortion: The Personal Dilemma*, The Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1972). More important those who teach that a fetus has a soul are in a dilemma,

for if—as I think they must—they accept that abortion is sometimes justified, they cannot logically refuse the possibility of infanticide, and even for euthanasia.

Abortion then is not an impossible choice to the Christian, whether as gynaecologist or as patient, but it is still a terrible choice, never to be lightly accepted, but always to be considered with much serious thought and prayer.

Three further facets require consideration. In the case of an illegitimate pregnancy, such as that considered above, there is the factor of sin and its retribution. This is inevitable: one factor being the remorse not infrequently seen at the follow-up clinic. However am I commissioned to exact this? Who am I to cast the first stone? Do we not, each of us, daily have to come for the cleansing of the Blood? It is not irrelevant to notice that among some African believers, more guilt and remorse is felt after a bout of anger, than after fornication! And what of the innocent parties—the spouse betrayed perhaps, the trusting children whose home is to be shattered, the deprived child who may be born?

Then there is the forgotten factor of compassion—not the casual “we’ll get her off the hook” feeling, but the deep fruit of the Spirit, which shines so clearly in the gospels, and plays such an enormous part in our own testimony.

Pre-eminence, however, must in this, as in every facet of life, be given to the will of God. His we are. Our hands are His. Our reproductive capacities are His. In us the Holy Spirit lives His life and manifests Himself to the world. In His sovereign condescension He shares in the agonies of our decision making. With every thought brought into subjection to Him our decision making on abortion is among those “good deeds which He hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

P. S. FIRTH

2: Some underlying principles

The 1967 Law permitting therapeutic abortion is so vaguely expressed that it can be interpreted in any way from termination in all cases, to termination under no circumstances.

The following are some of the Christian principles that are involved in any request for termination of pregnancy:-

1) The Sanctity of Human Life

a) *Man is made in God's image.* God is a spirit and inhabits eternity, not the earth Is. 57: 15. Man is like God and differs from

others of the animal kingdom because he has this spiritual element in him. The spiritual element is what makes man a person, capable of self knowledge, abstract thought, moral sense and capable of a relationship with God, which at its height reaches that of child to its father by being a joint heir with Christ, Rom. 8: 17.

It is the divine image in man, and not any special or separate development of the physical body of man, which constitutes man's uniqueness. Lord MacLeod took this one stage further when he said "The only reason why man as man has special significance is because Christ died for him."

b) *The Value of Foetal Life.* Both Scripture and experience of reactions to loss of foetal life appear to show that, although of great importance, the value of early foetal life (when practically all terminations of pregnancy are performed) is not equal to that of the established life of a newly born baby.

In Ex. 21: 22 f. there appears to be a distinction drawn between the value of foetal and adult established life, for if as a result of a fight, a pregnant woman should lose the life of her foetus, the penalty was only a fine, whereas if she lost her own life the penalty was life for life.

Any person who has experienced personally or seen the great difference in the reaction of mothers to the loss of their baby shortly after birth to that of mothers who have early spontaneous abortions, however distressed they might be, will recognise that there is not, except in rare cases, the feeling of the loss of a personality but rather that of the impersonal pregnancy or foetus, which fizzled out as described in Ps. 58: 7 f.

The spiritual status of the foetus has been discussed for thousands of years and there is no clear answer as to when the soul enters the body. It is just as arbitrary to say at conception as at any other time, such as final implantation of the embryo into the uterus at about one week after conception or at about 7 months when the foetus is first capable of surviving as a separate organism.

If one does say that it must be the time when conception occurs and a new chromosomal organism first appears, what happens if this splits and becomes twins—does each have half a soul, or does the soul split with the chromatin material?

If, as seems probable, up to 50% of conceptions end in spontaneous early abortions, what happens to these souls which have entered at conception and never reached recognisable human tissue let alone human form or personality? Protestant theology on the principle of the mercy of God affirms that the souls of the innocent

are received into heaven. Clearly these 'souls' would make up the bulk of the human population of heaven but there is no reference to them in Scripture and surely this debases the whole concept of the soul.

On the other hand we see in Ps. 139: 14-16 that God's eyes saw our unformed limbs or substance developing in the womb, and indeed Jer. 1: 5 takes this one stage further back before conception when God says "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you for my own; before you were born I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

I do not know when the body either receives or becomes a soul, but even if this does not occur till later, therapeutic abortion at the least will remove the vehicle capable of housing the soul, and is therefore not to be lightly undertaken. Dietrich Bonhoeffer on this theme states:- "To raise the question whether we are here concerned with a human being or not is merely to confuse the issue. The simple fact is that God certainly intended to create a human being, and that this nascent human being has been deliberately deprived of his life. And that is nothing short of murder." I find the legal viewpoint helpful. It is retrospective, for if the foetus lives it is presumed to be a person from the time of conception, and can later sue for damages from this time. Whereas if it is an abortion or stillbirth it is not presumed to be a person and has no legal rights.

2) **The Sovereignty of God**

The Bible clearly teaches the Sovereignty of God and passages of particular relevance to this subject are Prov. 21: 1, Ps. 33: 11, Is. 14: 27, Is. 46: 9 f., and Rev. 4: 11.

There are two questions that we must consider:-

a) *Is every conception God's will?* On the personal level I quote from R. F. R. Gardner: "Granted that God can make the wrath of men to praise Him, and that He sometimes uses ungodly men as His instruments, Ps. 76: 10, Isa. 44: 28, I find it difficult to believe that God can look in anything but anger on a drunken wretch impregnating a terrified girl, or even his exhausted wife."

On the worldwide level, in areas where death from starvation has been endemic due to too little food and too many mouths, can it really be the will of a loving God that all these conceptions occurred with such disastrous consequences? Certainly many Christian doctors and nurses in these areas regard a very vital part of their task to be the provision of birth control facilities to help both the individual family and the country counteract the evil of excessive fertility. Indeed Gen. 3: 16 states that as a result of the Fall of man God will among other things "Greatly multiply thy sorrow and *thy conception.*" In summary, surely every conception is not God's will.

b) *Which ways of preventing the birth of children are permissible without contravening the will of God?*

Post-conception methods clearly involve the ethical problems of termination of foetal life, but do they infringe the sovereignty of God any more than pre-conception methods? Any pre-conception method could have thwarted the birth of an individual whom God had chosen. Indeed if Jeremiah's parents had not had sexual intercourse at the appropriate time he would not have been conceived and God's sovereignty would have been thwarted. As abstinence is the most efficient method of contraception known the logical conclusion of this argument is that no Christian married couple should abstain from intercourse lest they frustrate the sovereignty of God. In this way they limit the action of his sovereignty to the narrow field between sperm and ovum. Surely the sovereignty of God is linked to the work of the Holy Spirit in the minds and hearts of man. We fulfil His purpose in this sphere by using His gift of a reasoning mind (Is. 1: 18 and Acts 17: 2) seeking guidance concerning both the number of our children and the method that we should employ in order to achieve that end.

3) **Thou shalt not kill**

The Sixth Commandment (Ex. 20: 13, and cf. 23: 7) has been translated recently as "You shall not commit murder" as the Hebrew word *rasach* means illegal killing inimical to the community. In Matt. 5: 21 f. the Lord Jesus Christ looks beyond the act of murder to the motive behind it, namely anger against his brother. This is not present in the act of therapeutic abortion. Even this commandment was expressly modified by God in different circumstances:- a) An individual's life was allowed to be taken if he had committed pre-meditated murder, for if he had fled to a city of refuge after killing somebody, he was to be delivered to his pursuers if there had been premeditation, but not if the killing had been an accident. Ex. 21: 12 f. b) Genocide was commanded to destroy the Amalekites. c) The Flood (Gen. 7: 23) was the means employed by God for the deliberate killing of a vast number of men, women and children. d) The State at times had a responsibility to use capital punishment (Rom. 13: 4).

4) **Compassion and love**

Every request for therapeutic abortion evokes some degree of compassion but we must beware of relinquishing all other commands except 'love'. The Greek word in Matt. 22: 37-40 when we are told to love God first and our neighbour next is *agapao* which has been translated 'undefeatable goodwill' by W. Barclay. It has no connec-

tion whatsoever with erotic love which is so often what is meant when the word love is used today, and this meaning must not be allowed to slip in to try to justify wrong behaviour. No action can be accounted loving towards God unless it is in accordance with His nature and that is holy as well as undefeatable goodwill. It is shown in practice by keeping His commandments (1 John 5: 3) This love involves understanding, compassion, personal responsibility and accountability.

5) The lesser of two evils

Every case presenting for Termination of Pregnancy arises from a non-ideal situation, the commonest being the married woman, pregnant yet again who can hardly cope with her present family, and the single girl; often in her early teens. The theoretical possibility that the pregnancy will wreck marriage, home and/or career is all too often proved true in practice. No course of action is obviously right in this kind of situation where two related biblical examples apply :-

a) *The Lex Talionis* (an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; Ex. 21: 24; Lev. 24: 20; Dt. 19: 21). This law was given and prevented excessive personal revenge in private hands which was often the prevailing situation and instead brought the penalty into the sphere of public justice where it could be controlled.

b) *The Law of Moses concerning Divorce* (Dt. 24: 1-4, to which Matt. 19: 3-9 also applies). This is a parallel situation to that of abortion as both stem from general low standards of sexual morality to a varying extent.

These regulations concerning divorce were introduced which limited the grounds for divorce and protected the innocent party by giving her a proper bill of divorcement. This made the whole affair above-board, and was an act of mercy. Neither solution was ideal: both were enacted because of human perversity and hardness of heart; but both were an improvement on the existing state of affairs in that they brought the situation nearer to the ideal.

Two principles appear to follow from these examples:-

a) It is better to have an imperfect law and solution rather than none at all.

b) A course of action, namely divorce, (and therapeutic termination of pregnancy?) which is not right in the abstract might yet become our duty because it is the lesser evil when dealing with problems caused by the imperfections of our society.

How do we determine the lesser evil?

Rev. R. M. Horn suggests six questions that we should ask ourselves about any contemplated action in this sort of situation:-

- a) Does our action recognize God's absolute standards? This does not mean that we should speak about them but we should be allowing them to guide our mind.
- b) Would our action make a good general rule?
- c) Will it prevent or hinder a recurrence of the problem?
- d) Would our action help or harm conscience?
- e) What is our ultimate objective?
- f) Does it foster acceptance of personal responsibility and duty?

Part V

Other problems

1: The practice and ethics of artificial insemination

In contrast with veterinary practice, the procedure of artificial insemination is comparatively rarely carried out in human medicine. In general terms, two types of artificial insemination are recognised:

1) **Artificial insemination (husband) (A.I.H.)**

a) *Method*

In the practice of A.I.H., which is usually performed by a gynaecologist, the husband by masturbation produces a sample of semen. He will usually have been advised to remain sexually continent for a week or so before the sample is collected, in order that its quality and quantity may be satisfactory. To the semen is added a measured quantity of a specially constituted buffer solution; this is then frozen for purposes of storage. The insemination will be timed to take place around the phase of the wife's ovulation, i.e., about fourteen days before the estimated date of the subsequent period, when her fertility is likely to be greatest. It may have to be carried out on several successive days, during each of three successive months before conception occurs. A success rate of 70-75% within three to four months has been reported.

b) *Indications*

The need for A.I.H. arises in situations in which both husband and wife, as far as can be judged from clinical and other tests, are fertile, but for physical or psychological reasons cannot have satisfactory sexual intercourse.

The indications for such a procedure include the following:

Hostile mucus in the cervical canal preventing penetration by the spermatozoa into the uterus.

Impotence on the part of the husband, possibly arising from central nervous system disease—e.g. paraplegia.

A painful spasm of the muscles of the vagina preventing adequate penetration during sexual intercourse.

Male sub-fertility. By collecting several samples of semen from such a male, the fluid can be concentrated before it is introduced into the female genital tract.

c) *Ethics*

It would appear that no ethical principles are involved in the practice of A.I.H., other than those of normal sexual relations. The practice is merely a technique whereby the husband's semen may be deposited safely within the wife's uterus, in the case of couples in which a disability of some sort prevents this taking place naturally. Christian couples need have no moral scruples in requesting that their doctor should arrange for this procedure to be carried out, if medical opinion confirms that the clinical situation is appropriate. It is important to appreciate however, that insemination should be considered only if the marriage is sound and stable. The hope that a marriage under tension would be made more secure by the wife's knowledge that she has conceived may well prove to be illusory.

a) **Artificial insemination (donor) (A.I.D.)**a) *Method*

The method of insemination is identical with that of A.I.H.; the fundamental difference lies in the fact that the semen is obtained from a source other than the husband. As a consequence, serious ethical, psychological, and legal questions surround the practice. The seminal sample is usually obtained from a university undergraduate whose heredity and health have been scrupulously examined. The fact that some attempt is usually made by the doctor involved in the procedure to obtain a sample from a male of similar build, colour and general physical characteristics to the husband, raises questions regarding the wisdom and morality of this form of eugenic practice.

b) *Indications*

A.I.D. is usually sought by couples of whom the husband is known to be infertile and the wife thought to be fertile. (The only certain proof of a woman's fertility is her ability to conceive.)

The cause of the husband's infertility may be local or general, resulting from disease, injury, or congenital abnormality. Certain types of hereditary disease passed on by the male, for example, haemophilia, or Huntington's Chorea, constitute a serious genetical hazard for subsequent generations. A condition in the wife that some authorities consider grounds for the practice of A.I.D. is that of maternal rhesus antibodies which preclude safe pregnancy if the woman's husband is the father of her child. Modern obstetric practice is causing a diminution of this problem.

c) *Ethics*

The main problems in connection with A.I.D. occur under this heading:

1. *Is the woman on whom A.I.D. has been performed guilty of an adulterous relationship?*

Churchmen have taught for many years that this is the case. The matter has been given careful consideration by Christian doctors; it appears that the general, but by no means unanimous view, is that adultery consists in sexual desire culminating in intercourse outside the bounds of marriage. Since in the practice of A.I.D. neither the sexual desire nor the act of intercourse are present, it does not seem that the situation that is created by A.I.D. is an adulterous one. The desire that the wife has, and that her husband endorses, is not for an extra-marital sexual experience but for a baby that she can truly call her own.

2. *If it is accepted that the procedure is not adulterous, is it wise?*
It is on the grounds of wisdom rather than morality that many authorities, secular as well as spiritual, question the practice of A.I.D.

a. Although it is conceded by all responsible practitioners that the procedure should be contemplated only in marital situations that are mature, stable, and happy, and in which the husband wholeheartedly agrees with his wife's wishes, the fact that the wife will have borne another man's child is a potential source of discord and strife for the remainder of the couple's life together. The effect on the marriage of the practice of A.I.D. may well be more hazardous than that of the adoption of a child by a childless couple. In the latter case, the child is as much (or as little) the possession of one parent as the other. The former is marked by a lifelong inequality—the child is the wife's in a sense in which it can never be the husband's.

b. There are a number of legal problems that surround the practice of A.I.D. As the law stands, a child born to a woman through A.I.D. is illegitimate: the husband is not recognised in law as the father. Legal actions in connection with adultery, divorce, inheritance, and the registration of the birth, are all affected by the fact that the child has been conceived through A.I.D. The doctor who has no moral scruples about advocating, or even assisting in, the arrangement of A.I.D. for his patient, will hesitate to proceed unless the patient has first obtained legal advice from his solicitor. Some couples have attempted to circumvent the problem of illegitimacy by resorting to the legal adoption of their child in its early days.

3. *Should it be assumed that every married couple has a right to children, even when they do not possess in themselves the ability to procreate?*

Although Scripture clearly affirms that parents should look upon children as "a heritage from the Lord" (Ps. 127: 3) the converse—that the Lord shows His disapproval by causing couples to remain childless—is an unwarranted assumption. It would be uncharitable to underestimate the disappointment that a couple naturally feels when they discover their inability to procreate. The experience, however, of the Christian Church, has proved time and again that a husband and wife without the responsibility of children, may become spiritual parents and guardians of a far larger family. The woman who finds the disappointment especially hard to bear may be able to sympathise more fully with the feelings of a single woman, who, despite her natural longings, has neither husband nor children.

Statistical analysis suggests that on the basis of approximately 470,000 marriages annually in the United Kingdom, the number of couples that would possibly benefit from A.I.D. is about 1,400 per year. In the current situation of a shortage of babies for adoption owing to the reduced birth rate, however, most medical authorities anticipate an increasing demand for A.I.D. The need for Christians, in medical and lay circles, to think through the ethical issues involved, is therefore becoming more imperative, both from the point of view of personal practice, and social consequences.

Christians believe that in all things God works for good with those who love Him.

Christian couples who find themselves childless because of the husband's infertility, and make use of a practice that has an element of uncertainty in terms of morality, and grounds for serious doubts on the basis of prudence, may well have cause in future years to regret what appears to be an attempt to manipulate the will of God to suit their own desires. A husband and wife in such a situation should be encouraged carefully to analyse their real motive in considering such a course of action.

The Christian doctor, asked to assist a couple without a Christian commitment to obtain a child by this means, may well feel that it would be wrong to recommend a practice that might offend his conscience in the limited number of cases in which A.I.D. might prove suitable, and not prove to be to the long term benefit of the patients concerned.

For all believers, patients and doctors alike, a clear conscience in a situation that may involve physical and moral hazards, is a possession not lightly to be thrown away.

K. C. HINES

2: Venereal disease

The use of the term venereal disease is restricted by law (The Public Health—Venereal Diseases Regulations 1916 and the Venereal Disease Act 1917) to the following three diseases: syphilis, gonorrhoea and soft chancre. For most non-legal purposes however the term is enlarged to include other sexually transmitted diseases such as non-specific urethritis, lymphogranuloma venereum and granuloma inguinale. Other conditions such as scabies, pubic lice, trichomonas and candidiasis (thrush) can also be spread through sexual contact.

The rapid and steady increase in the number of cases of sexually transmitted diseases has caused wide-spread concern in the medical profession. Had such an epidemic occurred in any other disease there would have been an enormous public outcry. As early as 1961 a British Medical Association committee was appointed because 'The Council had become greatly concerned over the increase in venereal disease and in particular at the relatively large increase among young people'. By 1966 the World Health Organisation was saying 'The rising tide of V.D. is one of Europe's most urgent health problems'. The British Medical Journal in February 1970 had an article, 'Failure to control Venereal Disease'. By September 1970 another article in the same journal spoke of a 'Crisis in Venereology'. Typical of the delay in public reaction is the fact that it was not until October 1971 that the Times managed to carry an article entitled 'A Resurgence of Venereal Disease.'

Some statistics will illustrate the enormity of the problem. In the five years 1968-1972 the incidence of gonorrhoea rose by 70% in the 16 to 17 age group and 40% in the under sixteens. The number of new cases included in the table of venereal and other sexually transmitted diseases in the D.H.S.S. statistics for 1971 was 307,664 compared with 116,462 in 1959. Syphilis, the most serious of these conditions, if undiagnosed or not treated, can cause disastrous effects in later life including insanity. The number of new cases of syphilis diagnosed in the first three months of 1973 in England alone was 779. The corresponding figure for 1972 was 583. This is an increase of 196 or over 33% in one year.

The advocates of sexual freedom and permissiveness will argue that venereal disease is a price worth paying for sexual happiness. It is just these same people who are advocating more easily available contraception, lowering or abolishing the age of consent, and abortion on demand as a natural extension of contraception. It is

the duty of Christians to be informed of the true facts of the situation and to recognise the subtle undermining of family love and Christian standards that is happening before the eyes of the silent majority. Remember that 'Evil triumphs when good men do nothing'. Are we really going to accept the claim made by some that V.D. is no different to catching a cold! Sir George Godber, until recently chief Medical Officer to the Dept. of Health commented in his report on the state of the nation's health that if every one had one sexual partner for life then venereal disease would quickly be eradicated.

Consider in some detail some sexually transmitted diseases and their effects:-

1. *Syphilis*. Syphilis is caused by a micro-organism called *treponema pallidum*. The first stage of this disease occurs two to three weeks after infection when a tiny painless sore develops on the genital organs. Even if the disease is not treated the sore soon disappears and within a few weeks or months the rash of secondary syphilis forms. In both the primary and secondary stages the condition is highly infectious and a pregnant woman is likely to pass on the infection to her unborn child. If still untreated, the secondary stage symptoms disappear and the disease becomes latent, possibly for many years. During the later or tertiary phase the disease can attack all systems of the body but especially the heart and the brain. A particularly distressing form of insanity can also follow.

2. *Gonorrhoea*. Gonorrhoea is due to an infection from a bacterium. In men, symptoms occur two to three weeks after infection. Commonly there is a burning pain on passing water and the presence of a discharge. In women there are usually *no* symptoms and she is unaware that she is infected. This is how it is so easily spread. Whilst symptomless it is far from harmless, often the fallopian tubes become involved and then severe abdominal pain may occur. The tubes may become blocked and sterility follow.

3. *Non-Specific Urethritis*. This is rather similar to gonorrhoea in its effects but it is much more common. In addition it may effect the eyes and joints causing a painful arthritis. It can prove very difficult to cure.

When teenage magazines talk of venereal disease as an inevitable by-product of sexual freedom they are either totally ignorant or deliberately deceptive in disregarding the true facts. How can it be no worse than catching the common cold? Recent research has also shown that the incidence of cancer of the neck of the womb is also increased in promiscuous women.

Studies in Aberdeen show clearly the associating with increased promiscuity and more use of contraceptive by the unmarried. In 1968

Aberdeen began to provide free contraceptives to the unmarried. Since that date there has been a steady rise in the number of unmarried patients attending Family Planning Clinics, a rise in illegitimacy, a rise in abortions, and a dramatic rise in venereal disease. The following table shows this:-

	1965	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971
Unmarried attenders at F.P.A. Clinics (1)	nil	nil	120	296	388	588
Illegitimate Pregnancy (2)	262	369	387	432	428	480
Termination of illegitimate pregnancies (1)	32	84	123	162	194	197
Cases of Venereal disease (3) 15 to 24 age group	1965		1972		1973	
	98		457		670	

Additional facts show that in 1971 after four years of free contraception:-

- One in two of all first pregnancies were illegitimate. (2 above)
- 41% of all illegitimate pregnancies were aborted (5% in 1961) (2 above)
- 11% of legitimate pregnancies were aborted (1.8% in 1961) (1 above)
- Illegitimate births were 22-25% of total births (2 above)
- There was a 5-6-fold increase in V.D. in the under 24's in 8 years (3 above)
- Aberdeen County has the highest rate of children in care of any county in Scotland. According to the Registrar-General the rate in 1970 was 10.2 per 1000 of the estimated population under the age of 18. Aberdeen City has the second highest rate of children in care of any town in Scotland. The rate was 11.2 per 1000. (The national average was 6.6 per 1000)

Dr. R. S. Morton, A World Health Organisation Consultant Venereologist in Sheffield, says, speaking of the pill being used by single girls, 'The accumulation of cases of long term misery and guilt and venereal disease as a direct result of its use is more calamitous than anything precipitated by thalidomide'. Dr. Cohen, a venereologist from Cardiff, says in a paper, 'The pill, promiscuity and venereal disease', that oral contraceptives are being increasingly used by both married and unmarried women. There is increasing extra-marital sexual activity by both married and unmarried women taking

the pill regardless of social or marital class. Decreasing use of the condom is an additional factor in the spread of venereal disease. Fear of pregnancy acts as a brake on promiscuity and the removal of that brake increases sexual activity and hence venereal disease.

We have seen clearly the effects of venereal disease. Its relationship with increased sexual promiscuity is obvious from the Aberdeen figures and indeed in V.D. clinics throughout the country. Christians need to take a long hard look at these facts. We must not allow liberalising ideologies to cloud our sight. Increasing prescriptions for the single girl is not decreasing illegitimacy or abortion; it is making things worse. Venereal disease is in epidemic proportions. Family life is being devalued. We must stand firm in our belief in the sanctity of marriage. Premarital continence and marital fidelity are the principles which the Christian upholds. These together with the blessing by God of the sacrament of marriage are the only way which these alarming trends in society can be stopped. Christians must stop being silent but stand up and argue to preserve what they believe and know to be right.

¹ *Aberdeen's Experience 1946-1970*—Pub. Birth Control Campaign.

² *Pregnancy outcome and Fertility Control in Aberdeen*. Brit. J. of Prev. and Soc. Med. August 1973.

³ Scottish Home and Health Dept.

⁴ Scottish Registrar General.

ROGER C. MOSS

3: Sexual deviations

The best known of the so-called sexual deviations is homosexuality. It may occur in men or women, and refers to the sexual, erotic interest which a person may have for those of his or her own sex, whether or not this results in any form of sexual behaviour. The other deviations may or may not be associated with homosexuality. They are, for the most part, not such clear-cut entities as homosexuality, and have not been studied so intensively. It is not easy to make general statements about the whole group, and most of what follows refers particularly to homosexuality. But as far as our attitude to these people is concerned, and as far as understanding and helping them goes, the general principles are sufficiently similar for the purposes of this article.

The other deviations include *trans-vestism*, the wish to wear the clothing of the other sex; *trans-sexualism*, the desire to change sex, often through the conviction that the individual should have been born with the opposite sex characteristics; *exhibitionism*, usually by

men of ill-adjusted personality, involves exposing the genitals in illicit situations, and is often accompanied by a feeling of sexual pleasure; *fetishism*, in which sexual feeling has to be enhanced by factors which are inessential and accidental to the normal sexual process, such as articles of clothing with say, a silky feeling; *sadism*, in which pleasure is obtained from causing pain to the partner; and *masochism*, in which satisfaction comes through receiving pain or humiliation. The original use of the last two terms was primarily in the setting of sexual experience, but usage has now of course broadened from this.

Genetic factors

In most conditions of psychiatric interest, the former controversies between heredity and environment, nature or nurture, have lost their force. In most instances, the modern question is, how do these two elements combine and interact to produce the situation under observation? And with an entity like homosexuality, which has to do with personality and is thus difficult to define precisely, the obstacles to clear scientific knowledge are considerable.

General opinion is uncertain how much a part genetic factors play in the development of homosexuality, and even more so in the other sexual deviations. Some evidence has suggested that it may play some part, but probably not in every case. A more modern view might be that if genetic factors do anything, they perhaps sensitise the individual, so that if during his development certain environmental influences are present, then he is more likely to become homosexual, or whatever.

The sex hormones circulating in the blood in adult life are no different in quantity, quality or balance between homosexuals and heterosexuals. But an interesting line of research is investigating the influence of abnormal hormone factors at critical periods during pre-natal life, for there is some hint from animal work that it may be this that sensitises an individual to the later development of a sexual deviation.

Environmental influences

There is considerable agreement that the kind of relationships the growing child has had with his parents is often important. And in a more general sense, many of the deviations are influenced by the setting in which sexual matters were first experienced. So that if a very puritanical outlook gave rise to the idea that sex was dirty and relationships with the other sex a bad thing, and if taboos and lack of discussion allowed such notions to persist, a child could be influenced for life. Indeed, many people with sexual problems say that this has been so for them.

In the case of male homosexuality, there may have been an unsatisfactory relationship with a father who was a weak figure in the home; indeed the father may have hardly figured at all in the boy's life. And the boy's mother may have been over-protective, and very often frankly sexually provocative. In the adult homosexual, the rather exclusive relationship with the mother often persists. In female homosexuality, the pattern is not quite so clear, but nevertheless, relationships are frequently poor, and the parents tend to be unhappily married.

The fact that parents wanted their child to be the other sex sometimes drastically influences the way they handle the child, and is probably a significant factor in explaining deviations. Moreover, if the young adult cannot find satisfactory outlets for his sexual drive, if a homosexual relationship gives him a sense of security, if his self-esteem is rather low, and if he can stand to gain materially from homosexual behaviour, an existing tendency can be encouraged and developed.

Personality Development

Do we all go through a homosexual phase in normal development? Are there bisexual elements in everyone?

This is a very difficult question on which to give a factual answer. The famous Kinsey studies in the USA found that about 30% of men and 13% of women had experienced some kind of homosexual encounter at some stage in their lives. When one thinks of the number of girls who develop a "crush" for an older girl during their school-days, and the experience of many boys in boarding schools especially, it would seem fair to assume that an interest in people of the same sex is pretty common during development. In any case, the mid-teens are a time when for a while there is preference for single-sex groups, and if the emergent sexual impulses have to be dealt with in such a context, perhaps it is not surprising that homosexual interest occurs. This process rarely sticks there, and can hardly ever be said to be the main or only reason for homosexuality.

Bisexuality is a term used in several ways. The basic physiology of male and female is of course remarkably similar, and each sex has both male and female hormones. We may all recognise within ourselves masculine and feminine characteristics, but the strength of them depends on what our own society and culture decides are appropriate for each sex. Some deviants refer to themselves as bisexual if they have a capacity for both homosexual and heterosexual relationships. Like most biological phenomena, there seems to be an infinite gradation from one extreme to the other, and here again, the concepts are far too imprecise to provide straight factual answers.

Do sexual deviations then indicate immaturity of the personality, or even a personality defect?

If you take the view that a mature personality is one who among other things is able to have a satisfying heterosexual relationship, then clearly something is 'wrong' with the sexual deviant. Most psychologists would not go as far as this in their definition. Psychiatric examination of homosexuals shows many to be free of personality disorder, psychosis or neurosis. Many homosexuals never go near a doctor, but appear to be mature and responsible members of society. There certainly are some who are mentally immature, some who are severely damaged personalities, and some whose sexual problems are part and parcel of their mental illness. Experience of the latter might lead one to suppose that homosexuality was always associated with personality difficulties, but this is not the case. Yet the fact remains that many of these individuals *feel* deficient, and have difficulty accepting themselves merely as a kind of variation of the human species. Common assumptions, and Christian teaching, lead to the belief that normal life includes heterosexual relationships. It seems forced to argue that this is not necessarily so (as some homosexuals might), but nevertheless in other respects many homosexuals seem remarkably well rounded as people.

Christian attitudes and help

Our primary attitude should not be difficult for us. These are *people*, made by God and for whom Christ died. Yet there is a welter of prejudice for us to work through before this attitude comes easily to us as Christians.

The first need is to take them seriously. These individuals are not joking. For many of them, life in society presents grave problems purely because they feel their state so intensely.

The second need is to be approachable when the theme is in the sexual area. Baldly stated prejudices may ensure that these individuals never come near us. Our own inhibitions with regard to discussing sexual matters are not appropriate to the society we are now living in, and if such topics are taboo for us, then we will be taboo to many who need deep spiritual help.

We have to work out our thinking on the sin problem. Is homosexuality, are the sexual deviations, basically and simply sinful? Even could we say that they were, we should not treat the individual like the leper of old was treated. It is true that the Bible condemns homosexual *practices*, especially on those occasions where it was a group activity and clearly associated with deteriorating social standards. But the Bible is silent on the homosexual *state*. And where a person's make-up causes him to be concerned about his attitudes, but where there is not necessarily any sinful behaviour, why should he be judged? Some of the sexually deviant practices are not con-

sidered abnormal or wrong when practised with mutual consent within marriage. The sin question is not a simple one.

Of course, if our attitudes are sympathetic—though they need not be condoning of deviant practices—the first step to helping people like this will be easier. When approached with a problem of this kind, it is important to try to establish exactly what the problem is. It might be assumed that the individual would like to be made 'normal'. Sometimes indeed, this may be the case, and if so, it will probably be best for a psychiatrist to be involved. Very often, however, this is not the difficulty at all. It may boil down to a need for companionship—the homosexual state having been accepted. Or, commonly for the Christian homosexual, it may be a legitimate anxiety about his feelings when dealing with young fellows at the youth club.

Deeper down, there may be all sorts of questionings and heart-searchings going on. Why should I be different from most people? What outlet can I be permitted to have for my sexual feelings? How can I have the experience of a deep personal relationship without being frowned upon by society, and especially my local church?

If no basic change is desired or thought possible, then these issues have to be faced. To some extent, the process is similar to helping people with a chronic handicap—paraplegia or loss of sight, for example. To find the greatest fulfilment within the limits of what is possible, and above all to find positive meaning for life is important.

Even so, some of the problems are difficult and intractable. Most Christian workers find them so, and professional skill does not necessarily add a great deal. One factor that will help greatly, and which does not depend purely on the person who has the problem, is the degree of acceptance he can find within the Christian fellowship. Just as important as devoting time to the airing of all his problems, is that given to the group in making sure the support given to such individuals is deep and loving. Sooner or later, the sexual problem may leak out. And if it does not lead to rejection of the individual concerned, then perhaps it is a sign that the love of God is being shed abroad in the hearts of the fellowship by His Spirit!

For further reading

Towards a Christian Understanding of the Homosexual, by H. Kimball-Jones, SCM Press 1967. A good, thorough review for the layman of the nature of the problem, its handling in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and what is needed for a Christian understanding.

The Returns of Love, by Alex Davidson, IVP, 1970. An autobiographical approach which gives a revealing insight into the problems a Christian homosexual faces.

Homosexuality, by D. J. West, Penguin, 1960. The standard popular paperback on the topic.

Part VI

Divorce

Divorce

Questions posed by the compiler of this issue:-

1. Is divorce ever permissible for the Christian?
2. What should a Christian do if his/her spouse is unfaithful and demands a divorce?
3. Can a Christian ever remarry? Is the innocent person condemned to remain single for the rest of their joint lives?

OUTLINE

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- 8 But I Say Unto You
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- 11 The First Stone
- 12 Your Hardness of Heart
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- 14 Holy Wedlock
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1 Preamble

The fundamental law for Christians must be our Lord's own words on the subject, and Paul's commands from the Lord supplemented by his personal judgment on certain points. But the Divine tolerance and clemency shown in the OT towards both polygamy and divorce are still of the utmost relevance in tempering our often inconsistent censoriousness and even Pharisaically schizophrenic attitude to the NT ideal and apparent absolutes.

Our Lord's teaching on divorce (stage 1) and re-marriage (a quite independent stage 2) is contained in four passages:-

Matt. 5: 27-32

Matt. 19: 3-12

Mark 10: 2-12

Luke 16: 18

Paul's teaching is principally in 1 Corinthians 7, with an example in Romans 7: 2 f., and elsewhere other important straws in the wind.

2 Plea in Mitigation

I write primarily as a lawyer having no theological training and seek forbearance accordingly for my inadvertent exegetical sins.

For the quarter century since my novitiate as a law student, the divorce question has been part of my daily business. I never intended to embark on a career in Matrimonial Law—rather, to avoid it—but it happened nevertheless. I believe that this was not by Divine inadvertence, and I would not seek to resile from helping to pick up (or often sweep up) some of the debris of disintegrated marriages. On rather rare occasions, there is some opportunity of helping to reconcile the fragments; even more rarely does such reconciliation outlast a year or two, perhaps because matters are, humanly speaking, irretrievable by the time either party consults a solicitor, the molehills of disagreement having become unconquerable mountains of discord, try though they may to scale the south face of Everest.

I fully respect my professional colleagues who believe divorce is beyond the boundary of a Christian lawyer's high calling. Nevertheless, in many spheres of life Christians are called upon to deal with the distasteful consequences of matters they may instinctively recoil from.

3 Neither do I Condemn You

Before examining the *ideal* which our Lord taught, consider His own attitude to those who had fallen from sexual virtue.

Barbed questions put to Jesus had a disconcerting habit of recoiling upon the questioner. Remember the Australian aborigine who was given a new boomerang and thereafter lost his head trying to throw the old one away.

1. *Caught in the act—John 8: 2-11*

When the righteous Professor Keyhole and Dr. Snoop brought the wicked adulteress for the Carpenter's opinion upon the mandatory death sentence of Deut. 22: 22, the boomerang curved back, from the dust in which He wrote, as gently as a rhetorical warhead: "If any one of you is without sin, let him begin stoning her". After the processional heel-taking, she heard from the One who on earth had authority to forgive sins: "Neither do I condemn you, go now and leave your life of sin". Having had such words spoken to us (however modest our own little faults), is it appropriate for us to judge by a 'higher' standard?

2. *The Sychar Sextet—John 4*

Five ex-husbands and a current paramour! But the record does

not suggest that the Saviour of the World required the Bad Samaritan to revert to her earliest surviving husband.

3. *The Prodigal Son—Luke 15: 11-32*

This Casanova was not enjoined to take as wife any (or all) of the harlots who so outraged the righteous soul of his elder brother—even though Paul treats the union as equivalent to marriage (1Cor. 6: 15-17).

4. *The Profligate Daughter—Luke 7: 36-50*

The gate-crasher at Simon the Pharisee's dinner party is often indentified as Mary Magdalene. This anonymous practitioner in the long line of Rahab joined the heroines of faith and heard words of forgiveness which shame our hard-heartedness.

4 In The Beginning

God created one Adam and one Eve, to become one flesh. He did not supply a harem of Eves to accelerate the commission to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. The original ideal, monogamy, was established.

5 It Is Written

A. *MARRIAGE*

1. *Prohibited Relationships*

See Lev. 18: 6-18; 20: 17-21; Deut. 22: 30¹

2. *Prohibited classes*

See Lev. 21: 7, 13-15. A priest was permitted to marry, but only to a virgin of his own people. Marriage to a divorcee (or a widow) was prohibited.

3. *Prohibited nationalities*

See Deut. 7: 1-3; and Ex. 34: 11-16. Inter-marriage was debarred with seven specified nationalities, all denizens of the Promised Land. Ezra included in a wider prohibition the Ammonites, Moabites and Egyptians. Boaz and Ruth would have fared badly under Ezra's stern measures.

4. *Polygamy—Voluntary*

The Law recognised and made express allowance for polygamous circumstances. See, for example:-

Deut. 21: 15-17 — the son of a favourite extra wife could not displace primogeniture.

Lev. 18: 18 — no contemporaneous marriage to sisters.

Lev. 20: 14 — no contemporaneous marriage to mother and daughter.

- Ex. 21: 7-11 — purchase of a Hebrew slave, taken as wife for master or son. If the husband took *another* wife, the slave-wife's marital rights were not to be eroded.
- Esther — apparently she co-operated fully and competitively in the twelve months preparations for King Ahasuerus's Miss World contest to surpass the harem and become his Queen, after Queen Vashti's compulsory abdication for pioneering Women's Lib.

5. *Polygamy—Involuntary*

See Deut. 25: 5-10. This custom is termed levirate marriage (Lat. *levir* = husband's brother). Sex-with-sister-in-law was forbidden (Lev. 18: 16 and 20: 21) but in the event of her being widowed without a son, the brother of the deceased was to take her as wife.² In default, he was liable to a procedural spit in the face, de-sandalling, and the eponym "House of the Unshod" (JB). The widow apparently had no option; and was prohibited from re-marriage other than to a brother of the deceased. *Brother* seems to have been interpreted liberally as being also a near kinsman's prerogative (e.g. Boaz).

B. ADULTERY

The penalty for breach of the seventh Commandment was death for both parties (Lev. 20: 10; Deut. 22: 22), with apparently no exception even if e.g. the offended spouse was willing to forgive, or if the offender would be leaving quads. short of a parent.

In a monogamous society, adultery is voluntary sexual intercourse by a married person with any one of the other sex. In Israelite society, it would have been the same for a married *woman*; but for a husband it would be sexual intercourse with any woman *other than one of his wives* (and, in practice, concubines).

Numbers 5: 11-31 prescribes unpleasant trial by ordeal for a wife suspected of *post-marital* infidelity. There was no penalty on husband for an incorrect challenge.

Against the risks of a husband wrongfully charging his wife with being second-hand shop-soiled when he married her, Deut. 22: 13-21 carried the powerful triple deterrent of a whipping, plus a fine, plus no divorce.³

C. DIVORCE

Deut. 24: 1-4 contained the basic provision. A husband (H1) could divorce a wife if he found in her:-

some indecency RSV, NASB, Amp.

something shameful—NEB

some uncleanness—AV
 some unseemly thing—RV
 some impropriety—JB
 (some immodesty)—Moff.

If she re-married and H2 merely:-

hates her—AV, RV
 dislikes her—RSV, Amp.
 turns against her—NASB, NEB, Moff.
 takes a dislike to her—JB

and divorced her, or if H2 died, H1 was not allowed to re-marry her.⁴

Deut. 21: 10-14 allowed for marriage with a captive and “if you have no delight in her you shall let her go where she will.”

Ezra presided over a mass session of about 108 divorces (only a week’s work for a modern English divorce judge). All foreign wives (including some nationalities not black-listed in Deut. 7: 1) were put away *with their children*. Thus, when it came to a choice between two evils, the unequal yoke or divorce, Ezra unhesitatingly required divorce. (Paul adopts the opposite view—1 Cor. 7: 12-16). Some inter-marriage had recurred by New Testament times e.g., Timothy’s parents.

The OT ends with the Divine *cri de coeur*: “I detest divorce and cruelty to a wife” (Moff; Amp. similar).

D. FINANCIAL PROVISION

There was apparently no express requirement of financial provision for the divorced and their families, apart from the very limited case in Exodus 21: 10 requiring that if a master or his son married a *Hebrew* slave and then took another wife, he must not diminish the slave-wife’s food, clothing or marital rights; but if he did not do these three things for her, she was to go out emancipated *gratis*.

E. MISOGYNISTS’ MONOPOLY?

There were no express corresponding provisions for a wife to divorce her husband; nor interpretation clause comparable to English Statute that the masculine includes the feminine save where the context otherwise requires. Our Lord treated divorce by wives as potential—Mark 10: 12: “. . . if she divorces her husband . . .”—although this is said to have been available only under certain gentile jurisdictions.

F. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE PENTATEUCH

The Law made allowance for polygamy and divorce, and they were viewed by the Creator as less nauseous than *sexual relationships without responsibility*. The supreme penalty for adultery appears not

to have been invariably (and perhaps only rarely) exacted. The standard, the ideal, had to be stated. But justice appears to have been tempered with mercy.

6 Foibles of the Fathers

The Patriarchs and their descendants, the World Champions of Faith of Hebrews 11, are shown warts and all in the OT.

Abraham, after the "indiscretion" with Hagar, and the death of Sarah, married Keturah by whom he had six sons, and had other sons by concubines (Gen. 25: 1-6).

Jacob accumulated two wives (the first by accident, so far as he was concerned) and two quasi-wives (Gen. 35: 23-26).

Joseph was made of sterner stuff.

Moses married a Cushite woman, which occasioned the outspoken resentment of Miriam and Aaron and led to Miriam's leprosy (Num. 12: 1 f.). Zipporah was a Midianite, a descendant of Abraham by Keturah (Gen. 25: 1-6). There is nothing to indicate whether Zipporah was still living when Moses married the Cushite, but there must have been somewhat extreme circumstances to have provoked such an over-reaction in Miriam and Aaron.

Gideon had many wives and a concubine (Judg. 8: 30 f.).

Elkanah, father of Samuel, had his work cut out to keep the peace between his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah.

David married Michal, Abigail, Ahinoam, Princess Maacah, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah. (1 Sam 25: 42-44; 2 Sam 3: 2-5).

From the heartbroken Palti(-el), he re-possessed Michal (2 Sam 3: 14-16)⁴ but, like the church at Ephesus, evidently they had lost their first love (1 Sam 18: 20; 2 Sam 6: 16, 20-23).

In Jerusalem, he took more concubines and wives (2 Sam. 5: 13-16).

When fleeing from Absalom, he left ten concubines to keep the house (2 Sam. 15: 16).

The nadir of his days in taking "the poor man's lamb", Bathsheba, brought the quite extraordinary denunciation by Nathan the prophet: "Thus says the Lord . . . I gave you . . . your master's wives into your bosom" (2 Sam. 12: 8). The closing words show they were given to David as more than mere status symbols, and were actually additions to his harem—divinely given.

Solomon's harem of 700 princess-wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11: 3) needs no comment. But Dr. James Ball Naylor could perhaps be understood for recording that:-

King David and King Solomon lived merry, merry lives,
 With many, many lady friends and many, many wives,
 But when old age crept over them, with many, many qualms,
 King Solomon wrote Proverbs and King David wrote the
 Psalms.

7 In the Course of Duty

Hosea's inaugural commission as a prophet was: "Go, marry a whore, and get children with a whore" (JB). We are sometimes told that this means someone who would *become* unfaithful. I wonder.

Was this followed by a divorce (not merely figuratively)? "She is not my wife, and I am not her husband" (2: 2). Later, "she will say, 'I will go back to my *first husband*'" (which was forbidden by Deut. 24: 4).

The prophet's next commission was: "Go again, love a woman who is beloved of a paramour and is an adulteress" (3: 1 RSV; NEB and Moff. to like effect).

8 But I Say Unto You

Construing Scripture by Scripture, the apparent absolutes of Luke and Mark are qualified by Matthew's records. Take the absolutes first.

1. *The ideal—Luke 16: 18*

Luke *isolates* the "new" ideal: "Anyone who divorces his wife *and marries another woman* commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

In Mark 10: 11 f., our Lord's answer to the disciples is recorded in substantially the same terms, adding that reciprocal consequences ensue if the wife takes the initiative in divorcing her husband and re-marrying.

It may be that there was no need for Mark and Luke to make (or record) an express exception to allow divorce for adultery, as everyone knew that under the various prevalent legal systems adultery was potentially the death of the marriage and perhaps of the offender.

2. *The reason behind the Law—Mark 10: 1-12*

Mark *explores* the ideal: it isn't a new one at all; it *has been there all the time*, obfuscated by the Law.

At the outset, Professor Poser quizzed the Carpenter: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" The boomerang skimmed back at him: "What did Moses command you?"⁵ Professor Poser

was undaunted; he knew his Deuteronomy 24: 1-4, and said so. But the Carpenter seemed to have inside information; there was a reason behind the permissive law; it was "because your hearts were hard" (or "because you know so little of the meaning of love"—Phillips). But from the beginning, things were different. The two become one. "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate". The last phrase seems more applicable to a petitioner or co-respondent than a judicial function, as Deuteronomy simply indicates a unilateral declaration of divorce by the husband without judicial process.

3. *The exception to the ideal—Matthew 19: 1-11*

This seems to be a parallel account of Mark's occasion. Perhaps Matthew had a spare Customs and Excise pad up his sleeve on which to note the tail-piece of the learned Professor's full poser: "... for any cause?" (RSV)

for any reason? (Moff)

for every cause? (AV, RV)

for any and every cause/reason/ground? (Amp., NIV, NEB, TEV)

on any pretext whatever? (JB)

for any cause at all? (NASB)

on any grounds whatever? (Phillips)

for any reason he likes? (Barclay)

We are told that this test was intended for the Carpenter to dissect Deut. 24: 1-4 as between the rabbinic schools of Shammai (limited interpretation) and Hillel (liberal interpretation). Deut. 24: 1 is translated variously (vide section 5C, *supra*). 24: 3 however supported the *broadest grounds* for divorce (all translations—section 5C, *supra*). Therefore, unless the Law intended to make it easier for H2 than H1 to divorce wife, or unless the Law implied into 24: 3 the "grounds", restrictively interpreted, of 24: 1, divorce seems to have been available to the husband at will (and possibly to the wife—Mark 10: 12 and section 5E, *supra*).

In verse 9 also, Matthew seems to have been making some extra notes on his shirt cuff: "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman, commits adultery" (NIV). The exceptive phrase is variously rendered:

fornication (AV, RV, JB)

unchastity (RSV, Moff., Amp)

immorality (NASB)

unfaithfulness/unfaithful/infidelity (Phillips, TEV, Barclay)

The disciples' apprehensive reaction clearly understood this teaching as being something fundamentally more prohibitive than

the Law. They chorused: "In that case, it is expedient/better not to marry."

TEV seems to have captured the spirit of the Lord's reply: "This teaching does not apply to everyone, but only to those to whom God has given it. For there are different reasons why men cannot marry: some, because they were born that way; others, because men made them that way; and others do not marry because of the Kingdom of heaven. Let him who can do it accept this teaching". Other versions read to the like effect.

Comparing the Creator's original ideal, and continuing hatred of divorce, with His extreme forbearance with the foibles of the Fathers and His actually making provision for polygamous circumstances and divorce, whilst absolutely condemning adultery in the Law yet forgiving it in grace, one concludes that HE *accepts* that not everyone can *accept* the counsel of perfection, the ideal re-emphasised in the Gospels.

4. *The letter and the spirit of the Law—Matt. 5: 27-30*

Do not look lustfully (and cf. Job 31: 1). Otherwise, gouge out your eye and throw it away (has this ever been taken literally?)

But the most ardent anathematizers of both adulterers and divorcees may give themselves liberal dispensation to breach the tenth Commandment. SPLINTERS AND PLANKS, how inconsistent we are! Truly,

"We compound for sins we are inclined to
By damning those we have no mind to."

Yet the tenth Commandment enlarges the seventh: You shall not covet your neighbour's superior residence in much sought after district; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife or his jack-of-all-trades or his *au pair* or his Jeep or his Jag., or anything you don't think your neighbour should have because you haven't got one.

5. *The reason for the "new" ideal—Matt. 5: 31 f.*

Verse 32 anticipates in substantially similar terms 19: 9.

Divorcing a wife "causes" her to commit adultery, indicating the then social impracticability of a woman being independent for home and livelihood.⁶

It seems perplexing if an absolute bar was intended by the Lord. If so, on the day preceding the Sermon on the Mount a divorce and remarriage did not constitute adultery (subject to Shammai's views) whereas on the day following the same facts would constitute adultery. Can this be a correct understanding? Or, rather, was our Lord employing a mode of apparently absolute expression similar to His hyperbole concerning a camel, a needle's

eye, a rich man, and the kingdom of God? The disciples' reaction there also is revealing: they understood him to mean not what was merely difficult but what was impossible. He *agreed*; yet He was not in fact excluding all rich men but dramatically demonstrating the problem.

6. *The ephemeral septet and the perennial widow—Luke 20: 27-40*

This was the boomerang's final fling. It was the Sadducees' turn: Tell us, Sir Carpenter, how does your resurrection theory square with a Levirate marriage—who wins the widow? [or has she a harem of husbands?]. You mistake the *quality* of the resurrection, He answers. Correspondingly, He had illuminated how people had lost sight of the true *quality* of lifelong monogamous marriage.

9 Not Expedient to Marry?

1. *Corinthians*

Before plunging straight into chapter 7, it is salutary not to skip chapters 5 and 6. These chapters may substantially modify our inconsistent censoriousness towards those whom we may regard as having strayed from the straight and narrow.

Chapter 5

Verses 1-5 contain the dire remedial prescription (handing over to Satan) for gross immorality of a sort carrying the death penalty under Lev. 20: 10.

Verses 9-11 prescribe dissociation from “anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral *or greedy*, an idolater or a *slanderer*, a drunkard or a swindler” (NIV). In a parenthesis, Paul clarifies that this dissociation does not mean ostracizing “the people of the world” of that sort—otherwise “you would have to leave this world.”

There is an important guideline in verse 12: “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? . . . God will judge those outside”. This may put a somewhat different complexion upon our attitude to the divorce of non-Christians, grievous though it is.

Chapter 6

Verses 9-11 highlight our inconsistent censoriousness. In the catalogue of vice, two matters again stand out to which Christians are often prone—greed and slander. Interpolate those offences alternately after each other offence throughout the unsavoury list, and it puts more into perspective some of the sins we compound for. The apostle warns: “Don't you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither . . . slanderers . . . will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Verse 16 warns that: "He who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body, for it is said, 'the two will become one flesh' ". In passing, taking this at face value to mean that the first act of sexual intercourse can constitute marriage, it seems curious that the R.C. Church purports to grant absolution from 'casual' sexual intercourse 'before marriage', but will under no circumstances countenance divorce after marriage.

But the apparent absolutes of verses 9 and 16 are ameliorated by the Master, for: "The . . . prostitutes *are* entering the kingdom of God ahead of" the religious persons (Matt. 21: 31).

Chapter 7

Celibacy—verse 1

It is good for a man not to marry.

The married—verses 2-7

Mutual consideration is enjoined.

The single, and widows—verses 8 f

Stay single, and self-controlled, if you can; but marry, rather than burn with passion.

Christian partners and divorce—verses 10 f

These verses apply only to Christian partners, as verse 12 goes on to deal with "the rest" (meaning the unequally yoked). Paul gives the *prima facie* absolute command from the Lord: "A wife must not separate from her husband". He then immediately qualifies it: "but if she does, she must remain unmarried [implying that he meant separation in a sense equivalent to divorce] or else be reconciled to her husband". Paul does not say what *she* should do if the husband leaves her in the lurch. He concludes these two verses expressly: "and a husband must not divorce his wife."

Unequally yoked marriages and divorce—verses 12-16

Paul expresses his personal judgment. Christian husband must not divorce non-Christian wife who is willing to live with him. And vice versa. But the unbelieving spouse should be allowed to leave, if so minded. The believing survivor "is not bound in such circumstances; *God has called us to live in peace*". This seems a strong indication that the marriage, where the partners are not living *in peace*, is not "bound" indissolubly (save for a Christian who is able to "accept" the teaching of Matthew 19).

If some are unable to accommodate the above implications, do they accept that verse 14 teaches vicarious sanctification of an unbelieving spouse and vicarious holiness of children through one believing spouse/parent?

The status quo—verses 17-24

The law of sowing and reaping often means that what has been done cannot be undone—including separation and divorce. Paul could scarcely put it more startlingly: a man circumcised when he was called should not become uncircumcised (a rare feat indeed). “Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him.”

The ultimate in our inconsistency—verses 27 f.

“Are you married? Do not seek a divorce”. Christians endorse that one, then hastily don blinkers, for Paul continues: “Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife”. Few indeed seem able to “accept” the latter, yet many seek to impose the former.

Verse 29 recommends: “those who have wives should live as if they had none”; but this must be reconciled with the mutual consideration and duties enjoined in verses 3-7.

Generally on this chapter see Prof. F. F. Bruce’s *Expanded Paraphrase of the Epistles of Paul*.

10 Putting Asunder—English Law⁷*1. Divorce*

The Matrimonial Causes Act 1857 introduced divorce to England. This was only available on the ground of adultery. Its unrealities were highlighted by A. P. Herbert’s best seller *Holy Deadlock* (now out of print but recommended reading) which contributed to the passing of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1937. That Act introduced further matrimonial offences as grounds for divorce, but remained circumscribed by such legal pitfalls as collusion, connivance, conduct conducing, and condonation. The Divorce Reform Act 1969 (since consolidated in the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973) was designed to sweep away the old basis of matrimonial fault and to substitute as the sole ground for divorce the concept of irretrievable breakdown of marriage. But some of the offences which were thrown out by the front door sneaked back through the side door to avoid the colossal increase in time and expense which would have been involved if an “inquest” had to be conducted into the cause of breakdown of each marriage.

It is now provided that the court shall not hold a marriage to have broken down irretrievably unless satisfied on one or more of the following facts namely:-

- (a) that the respondent has committed adultery and the petitioner finds it intolerable to live with him.
- (b) that the respondent has behaved in such a way that the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to live with him.
- (c) two years’ desertion.
- (d) two years’ separation, the respondent consenting to divorce.
- (e) five years’ separation.

If the court is satisfied on the evidence of any of the above five facts then, unless it is satisfied on all the evidence that the marriage has *not* broken down irretrievably, it shall (save as provided) grant a divorce. Parties are regarded as living apart unless they are living with each other in the same household.

There are safeguards, including:-

- (i) No divorce proceedings can be commenced until the marriage is three years

old, unless the court grants special leave based on exceptional hardship or exceptional depravity.

- (ii) Although the old barriers of collusion etc. have been abolished, there are provisions designed to encourage trial reconciliation for an aggregate of up to six months without the parties losing accrued or accruing "rights" to a divorce.
- (iii) The respondent to a five year petition may oppose a divorce on the ground that this would result in grave financial or other hardship and that it would in all the circumstances be wrong to dissolve the marriage; but respondents who have tried to use this provision have almost invariably been unsuccessful, the courts generally taking the view that divorce itself would cause no graver hardship than the fact of the five years or more separation which will already have existed.
- (iv) the respondent to either a two year or five year separation petition may apply to the court for consideration of his financial position after the divorce, pending which the court must not make the decree absolute (save as provided).

2. Nullity

The grounds for nullity of a marriage celebrated after 31st July 1971 are as follows:-

Void

- (a) that it is not a valid marriage under the Marriages Acts 1949 to 1970 viz
 - (i) prohibited degrees of relationship, or
 - (ii) either party is under 16, or
 - (iii) disregard of certain formalities
- (b) that either party was already lawfully married
- (c) that the parties are not respectively male and female
- (d) in the case of a polygamous marriage entered into outside England and Wales, that either party was at the time domiciled in England and Wales.

Voidable

- (a) and (b) that the marriage has not been consummated owing to the incapacity of *either* party, or the wilful refusal of the respondent
- (c) that either party to the marriage did not validly consent to it, whether in consequence of duress (Esther?), mistake (Jacob and Leah), unsoundness of mind or otherwise
- (d) that at the time of the marriage either party, though capable of giving a valid consent, was suffering (whether continuously or intermittently) from mental disorder within the meaning of the Mental Health Act 1959 of such a kind or to such an extent as to be unfitted for marriage
- (e) and (f) that at the time of the marriage the respondent was suffering from venereal disease in a communicable form or was pregnant by someone other than the petitioner and in either case, that the petitioner was ignorant thereof. (Under the Mosaic law, which treated betrothal as tantamount to marriage Joseph was minded to "divorce" Mary³).

All the *voidable* grounds are subject to the limitation that the court shall not grant a nullity decree if the respondent satisfies the court that the petitioner, with knowledge that it was open to him to have the marriage voided, so conducted himself in relation to the respondent as to lead the respondent reasonably to believe that he would not seek to do so; and that it would be unjust to the respondent to grant the decree. Further, there is an absolute three year time limit from the marriage for reliance on voidable grounds (c)—(f).

3. Presumption of death and dissolution of marriage

A spouse may petition the court to have it presumed that the other party is dead and to have the marriage dissolved, and the court may so decree if satisfied that reasonable grounds exist. Seven years or more continuous absence without reason to believe that the absentee has been living within that time is evidence

that the absentee is dead until the contrary is proved. The addition of dissolution to the presumption of death is as a safeguard against the reappearance of the absentee after the petitioner has remarried.

4. *Judicial Separation/Separation Order*

For anyone who for conscience or otherwise is not prepared for divorce, but wants legal recognition and redress for his plight, there is the alternative of petitioning for a decree of judicial separation. This can be on any one of the five bases for divorce, but the marriage need not be three years old and the court does not have to consider whether the marriage has broken down irretrievably. Judicial separation is dealt with by the divorce court. Alternatively, an aggrieved spouse can apply for a separation order to the local magistrates (domestic court, where the jurisdiction is at present still based on matrimonial *fault*—but that is another story).

11 The First Stone

In Christian conscience, can a petition based on a single adulterous indiscretion and the petitioner's saying that he or she finds it intolerable to live with the respondent (however contrite) be any sadder than the following extracts from a petition (quoted by permission):

"The respondent has behaved in such a way that the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to live with him.

Particulars

(a) by way of general allegation the petitioner's case is that throughout the marriage the respondent has neglected her spending all his spare time either attending church or carrying out the business of the church which he attended preventing the parties from having any social life together

(b) that other than occasions when the petitioner and the respondent attended church and visited their relatives, he has only taken her out on two occasions since the date of the marriage [several years earlier]

(c) since the birth of [the child/ren] the respondent has attended church approximately four nights per week as well as all day Sunday and has refused to take the petitioner out on many occasions when she has requested him to do so

(d) since [several years past] the respondent has neglected the sexual side of the marriage

(e) in [date] on a Sunday the petitioner requested the respondent to take her and the family to the seaside and he refused, despite the fact that he had attended church every Sunday since the birth of [named child] leaving the petitioner to look after the child who suffers from [serious disability]

(f) the respondent would attend church even when the petitioner was ill despite her request for him to remain at home and look after her

(g) throughout the marriage the respondent has objected to the petitioner dancing or singing in the house and to her listening to popular music. She was made to feel uncomfortable in her own home and when any members of the respondent's family came round to visit them both the television and the radio had to be switched off and any alcoholic drinks there were in the house had to be locked away and the petitioner had to keep up a pretence that she had not been watching the television or listening to the radio and that there were no alcoholic drinks in the house

(h) by reason of the respondent's conduct the petitioner left the matrimonial home on [date] but returned approximately [date] to try an attempt at a recon-

ciliation. However, his behaviour continued as before despite the fact that she tried hard to get him to share some interests with her

(i) that in [date] the petitioner was forced to leave the matrimonial home and ever since that time the parties have continued to live separate and apart."

There were a few other specific matters complained of but the foregoing represented the gravamen of the situation. The reader may conclude that they must have been members of a notoriously exclusive or even avowedly open undenominational sect, but would be unwise to jump to ecclesiastical conclusions. Let it suffice that the parties came from fundamentally different backgrounds, one from a staunch Christian home, the other not. Both were acknowledged by their church leader(s) to have been well-established genuine and active Christians prior to their marriage, and theirs had not been a whirlwind courtship or a shotgun marriage.

The respondent in answer to the petition said that an entirely different construction was to be put upon the matters complained of, and that such as he admitted were exaggerated or distorted by the petitioner; and he was still willing for a reconciliation. But so far as she was concerned, the marriage had irretrievably broken down, and eventually she petitioned instead on one of the periods of living apart and the husband did not oppose, accepting that the second petition was the inevitable alternative to the first petition being dragged through to the bitter end to the dishonour of the parties, the family, the church and their Lord's name.

This may be a salutary warning that, in attempting in all things to give Christ the pre-eminence, instead there is the ever-present danger of giving the church/appearances the pre-eminence.

12 Your Hardness of Heart

Whilst the original and continuing ideal must be maintained, the God of the NT is the same as the God of the OT who has continuing compassion and longsuffering towards the frailty and failures of even the World Champions of Faith.

So, if divorce was permitted by the Law "because you know so little of the meaning of love" (Matt. 19: 8—Phillips), we should beware a corresponding littleness of love on our part towards those who in our estimation have "fallen". We would probably welcome to fellowships a repentant and converted murderer released on parole ("what a boost to the testimony!"), or even a rapist, but leave the barriers still up for divorcees.

Exceptional circumstances call for exceptional measures, exceptional understanding and exceptional compassion. e.g.

1. David's eating the consecrated bread. Our Lord did not express disapprobation of what He termed 'unlawful' (Matt. 12: 4)

when citing this as an example of the Sabbath-bashers' inconsistent censoriousness.

2. The curse on any rebuilders of Jericho—yet Elisha readily purified the water supply of the newly rebuilt city. (Josh. 6: 26; 1 Kings 16: 34; and 2 Kings 2: 19-22).

3. The diluvian law against taking human life (Gen. 9: 6) was not exacted against Moses the murderer (Ex. 2: 12), David the dastardly (concerning Uriah), or the Tarsus Terror.

Some may be unable to accept/receive the ideal of indissoluble marriage. But some of their fellow-Christians are equally unable to accept/receive *in practice* the NT injunctions against other matters e.g., some refuse to be reconciled to their brother, yet still claim to worship. Others may look lustfully without gouging out their right eye. Some find that their language is not unblemished. Many, struck on the right cheek, literally or mentally clobber the offender in return instead of turning the other cheek. Some do not go the extra mile. Some are sluggish lenders. Some stop short of praying for their particular enemies though manage to pray for their enemies at large. Hospitality is offered in hopes of reciprocal hospitality. The right hand of some knows what their charitable left hand is up to. Some are not very cheerful givers, and even give sparingly. There are those who appear to love to pray standing in the "synagogues" (if not on the street corners) to be seen by men. Some allow fasting (whatever form it takes) to disfigure their physiognomy—often as a permanent feature—and neglect to put oil (if not hats) on their heads. Others manage to store up for themselves treasures on earth in spite of the moth and rust and thieves, and even contrive apparently to serve both God and mammon. Some *do* worry about their life, what they will eat or drink or wear. Some fail to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. A few specialise in detecting dust or splinters in their brother's eye. But I must not multiply examples, or some may gently reprimand me that their 1 Corinthians 13 is in excellent trim, and that the Sermon on the Mount is inapplicable to us anyway.

Instead, we may feel like creeping away with the members of the inquisition of John 8, acutely conscious of James 2: 8-13. The law of liberty seems grievously shackled in some Christian communities.

The Psalmist, having faltered under the challenge of Nathan's accusing finger: "You are the man", composed a prototype prayer for forgiveness in Psalm 51; and a precedent of praise for forgiveness in Psalm 32.

13 Conclusions

1. *Is divorce ever permissible for the Christian?*

Yes,

(a) when the respondent has committed adultery.

(b) without adultery, where the petitioner (or both parties, in a two year separation and consent case) cannot accept/receive the ideal. In such cases the petitioner assumes a risk of "causing" the respondent to commit adultery.

2. What should a Christian do if his/her spouse is unfaithful and demands a divorce?

"Demands" is inappropriate—no spouse can demand that the other shall initiate divorce action.

But after five years separation the most evil spouse can petition on the sole ground of irretrievable breakdown of marriage, and the court in effect has no choice but to grant him a divorce; the "innocent" respondent has really negligible hope of establishing as a defence that religious objection to divorce amounts to "grave hardship."

Treating "unfaithful" first as a euphemism for adultery: if the "guilty" party bombards the "innocent" to divorce him, I personally see no Scriptural barrier.

If "unfaithful" is taken in its widest sense, see 1(b) supra. Again, the "innocent" spouse is not *obliged to do anything*.

3. Can a Christian ever remarry?

1. After ex-spouse's death

Yes (Romans 7: 3), but in Paul's judgment a widow is happier if she stays one (1 Cor. 7: 39 f.), save that he counsels younger widows to marry and in fact rules that they are ineligible to be listed as church pensioners unless aged sixty (1 Tim. 5: 14, 9).

2. During ex-spouse's lifetime

(a) if both parties are Christians

They are debarred from remarriage (1 Cor. 7: 11), except:

- (i) one is free to remarry if the other has committed adultery (Matt. 19: 9)
- (ii) if either remarries (the other not having committed adultery) this would seem to be homologous to adultery, so freeing the other to remarry
- (iii) if either or both cannot accept/receive the ideal

(b) if only one spouse is a Christian

(i)—(iii)—as 2(a) supra.

(iv) if the unbeliever leaves, the believer is not bound in such circumstances (1 Cor. 7: 15).

(c) nullity

Some at least of the nullity grounds are relevant considerations.

3. *Is the innocent person condemned to remain single for the rest of their joint lives?*

"Innocent" is sometimes a justified term, although it not only takes two to make a quarrel but it can also take two to let a marriage become so drab and uninteresting that it irretrievably breaks down; and any ensuing adultery or "unreasonable behaviour" on the part of the respondent (or often both parties) is often only the symptom of the antecedent malaise (cf. the Ephesians' loss of their first love, and the Laodicean complacency—a lukewarm spouse may make the other "vomit" the marriage). It may be the more innocent who breaks first under the strain and "commits" symptoms, giving the guiltier one the appearance of being wronged and the legal right to divorce.

Treating innocent as applicable, however, in many cases: "condemned" suggests that singleness is the last state this poor victim would voluntarily accept, notwithstanding 1 Cor. 7.

14 Holy Wedlock

A brief switch to the positive joys and potential of marriage seems a necessary antidote to the decline and fall we have just examined. Eph. 5: 21-33 and Col. 3: 12-25 and 1 Peter 3: 1-7 show only the fringe of the happiness designed for His people by the great and faithful Creator.

The monogamous qualifications for elders and deacons are firmly established in 1 Tim. 3: 2, 12; and Titus 1: 6.

15 The Bride of Christ

"I promised you to one husband, to Christ" (2 Cor. 11: 2). The ideal from the *beginning* is clear. The picture for the *future* is clear. In doing all we can to uphold these in the *present*, may we experience the love of God so shed abroad in our hearts that, even as He shows compassion for the exceptional cases, so may we.

Footnotes

- 1 English Law generally prohibits marriage within the third degree of consanguinity (the half blood being a bar equally with relationship of the whole blood; and each spouse being of affinity to the other spouse's kindred). For detail see the Marriage Act 1949 as amended by the Marriage (Enabling) Act 1960.
- 2 The phrase "if brothers dwell together" might import that only surviving bachelors resident there qualified, and that brothers who lived apart with their own family unit were ineligible, or not expected to take an extra wife; but this is possibly negated by Deut. 25: 10 referring to a disobliging brother's own household.
- 3 Cf. compulsory marriage and no divorce allowed for raping an *unbetrothed* virgin (Deut. 22: 28 f.). Betrothal was tantamount to marriage, e.g., Joseph

was minded to *divorce* Mary (NIV, RSV, JB, Barclay, Moff, Amp: and see NBC and NTC): “have the marriage contract set aside” (NEB): “break off the engagement” (TEV, Phillips); “put her away” (AV, RV, NASB). Culpable sexual breach of betrothal was a capital offence (Deut. 22: 23-27): save that in the case of intercourse with a betrothed slave woman the penalty was “only” a guilt offering (Lev. 19: 20-22).

- 4 Michal’s compulsory “transfer” from David to Palti (1 Sam. 25; 44) and back again (2 Sam. 3: 14-16) probably did not contravene this, either because there was no declaration of divorce by David or Michal, or as being void for duress if there had been a divorce. On the other hand, the weeping Paltiel is called her *husband*.
- 5 No distinction should be drawn between “command” and “permit” (Matt. 19: 7 f.)—they are transposed in Mark 10: 3f.
- 6 But Philip the evangelist had four unmarried daughters of age to exercise the gift of prophecy (Acts 21: 9); and Paul exhorted mass celibacy (1 Cor. 7).
- 7 References herein to English law apply to England and Wales.

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