

1930

CHRISTIANITY
AND SEX

[Sociology + hist.]
BY

CHRISTOPHER DAWSON

[Vs. Russians]

↳ had attempted to
abolish family

~~T.S. Eliot~~

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CHRISTIANITY AND SEX

I

WESTERN civilization at the present day is passing through a crisis which is essentially different from anything that has been previously experienced. Other societies in the past have changed their social institutions or their religious beliefs under the influence of external forces or the slow development of internal growth. But none, like our own, has ever consciously faced the prospect of a fundamental alteration of the beliefs and institutions on which the whole fabric of social life rests. Underneath the self-conscious activity of the ruling classes the daily life of the majority of men went on unchanged. The statesmen of the past would no more have thought of altering the fundamental social and moral relations than of interfering with the course of the seasons. But on the contrary the change which is actually taking place in the modern world leaves no aspect of social life or moral life unaffected. Civilization is being uprooted from its foundations in nature and tradition and is being reconstituted in a new organization which is as artificial and mechanical as a modern factory.

In Western Europe, however, the traditions of the older culture, although greatly weakened, are still strong enough to prevent the full development of this process. It is in the outlying territories of our civilization, in Russia on the one hand, and in North America on the other, that its success has been greatest and that its

results can be most easily studied. In Russia the change is being carried through consciously and deliberately by the power of the government in the face of the passive resistance of a society which still rests largely on the foundations of a primitive peasant culture. In America, on the other hand, it is the unfettered development of the new economic forces which has produced the change, and public opinion and social authority still attempt to preserve as far as possible the moral and social traditions of the older culture. But in spite of this important difference, there is a curious similarity between the two societies. In both cases there is the same cult of the machine and the same tendency to subordinate every other side of human life to economic activity. In both the individual is subjected to a ruthless pressure which produces a standardized type of mass civilization. And finally we see in both societies the breaking down of the family as a fixed social unit and the rise of a new type of morality, based upon the complete emancipation of sexual relations from the old social restrictions. Although America has not gone so far as Russia, where marriage is now a purely voluntary arrangement terminable on the demand of either party, it has rendered divorce exceedingly easy, and there are those, like Judge Lindsay, who believe that the institution of trial or 'companionate' marriage is also necessary in order to introduce some regularity into the sexual relations of the rising generation.¹

¹There is, moreover, a very noticeable tendency among the American protagonists of the new morality to follow the example of Russia. Mr. Calverton, for example, condemns companionate marriage as 'a patch on the face of a volcano', and celebrates the Russian achievement in a strain of lyrical enthusiasm. 'Love and sex-life', he writes, 'have been freed of the superstitions and silences which clouded, confused

Of all the symptoms of change that I have mentioned this breakdown of the traditional morality is undoubtedly the most important, for it involves a profound biological change in the life of society. A society can undergo a considerable transformation of its economic conditions and yet preserve its vital continuity, but if a fundamental social unit like the family loses its coherence and takes on a new form this continuity is destroyed and a new social organism comes into existence. This is not always recognized by the advocates of the new morality. Mr. Havelock Ellis has even gone so far as to maintain that the new tendencies may 'purify and fortify, rather than weaken, the institution of the family.' He writes: 'The greater facility of divorce aids the formation of the most satisfactory unions. A greater freedom between the sexes before marriage, even if it has sometimes led to licence, is not only itself beneficial but the proper method of preparing for a more intimate union. And the exercise of contraceptive control is the indispensable method of selecting the best possibilities of offspring and of excluding from the world those who ought never to be born. As a matter of fact marriage, so far from dying out, tends

and bound them; marriage has been liberated from the religious and ceremonial rites in which it had once been bound; divorce has been converted into an intelligent device, disenslaved from duplicity and deceit and accessible to all. As a result morality has been emancipated from the stereotyped stupidities of an enforced convention and an inelastic code. . . . This new moral life which Soviet Russia has endeavoured to achieve is new only in social realization for the radical. Far-flung Utopias had conjured it up in spheres remote from reality and sequestered from struggle. Dreamers had viewed it amid the effusions of fancy and talked of it as a hope winged upon angelic transformations.'

—*The Bankruptcy of Marriage*, p. 235.

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in various countries of the west to increase in frequency.¹

It is, of course, obvious that the frequency of marriage has nothing to do with the question. Under the Russian system, which is commended by Mr. Ellis, there is no reason why every adult should not have an annual marriage, but that does not mean that the institution of the family is flourishing. The fact is that, under the new conditions, marriage means something essentially different from what it has done in the past. In fact, as Mr. Justice Hill has decided in a recent lawsuit, the Russian form of marriage is not marriage at all, but a temporary arrangement.² According to European law and tradition, there can be no marriage without the intention of a permanent union, for it is obvious that only a marriage of this kind can render the family possible as a permanent social unit.

The European society of the past, like every other strong and healthy society, has always rested on this foundation. It is, however, incompatible with the complete mechanization of social life which is the characteristic feature of the new type of civilization.³ For if the primary social unit is a natural biological group which is defended by the strongest moral and religious sanc-

¹ *The Family*, by Havelock Ellis in *Whither Mankind, A Panorama of Modern Civilization*, edited by C. Beard, 1928, pp. 208-228. ² cf. *The Times*, December 18th, 1929.

³ Mme. Kollontai, the Soviet Ambassador to Norway, states this opposition very clearly. 'The old form of the family is passing away; the communist society has no use for it. The bourgeois world celebrated the isolation, the cutting off of the married pair from the collective weal; in the scattered and disjointed bourgeois society full of struggle and destruction, the family was the sole anchor of hope in the storms of life, the peaceful haven in the ocean of hostilities and competitions between persons. The family represented an individual class in the social unit. There can and must

tions, society can never become sheer mechanism, nor can the economic organization of the state absorb the whole life of the citizen. If, on the other hand, marriage is transformed into a temporary arrangement for the satisfaction of the sexual impulse and for mutual companionship, which is not intended to create a permanent social unit, it is clear that the family loses its social and economic importance and that the state will take its place as the guardian and educator of the children. Society will no longer consist of a number of organisms, each of which possess a limited autonomy, but will be one vast unit which controls the whole life of the individual citizen from the cradle to the grave.

Hence it is easy to understand the reasons for the hostility of the Communist, and even of the milder type of socialist, represented by Mr. Bernard Shaw, to the traditional code of sexual morality and to the old form of marriage, since the destruction of these is an indispensable condition for the realization of their social ideals. But this does not altogether explain the strength of the modern attack on marriage and morals. The ordinary follower of the new ethics is not necessarily an admirer of the ideals of social mechanization and mass

be no such thing in the communist society. For communist society as a whole represents such a fortress of the collective life, precluding any possibility of the existence of an isolated class of family bodies, existing by itself, with its ties of birth, its love of family honour, its absolute segregation.'

Mr. Calverton, who quotes this passage with approval, notes that some of the older Bolsheviks such as Lunacharsky regarded her views as 'too rash and precocious'. The recent modifications in the Soviet marriage laws which remove the distinction between registered and unregistered unions, have however, quite justified her views.—Calverton—*Bankruptcy of Marriage*, pp. 276-277, 281.

loss of family = state

civilization. He or she is often just the reverse—an individualist and a rebel who is in revolt against every kind of social discipline and external compulsion. He seeks not mechanism but freedom, and his hostility to marriage springs from a romantic idealization of sex and a desire to free his emotional life from all social constraints. The intellectual propaganda against the traditional morality which is so evident in England to-day is, in fact, the tail-end of the great liberal assault on authority and social tradition which had its origins in the eighteenth century. In Catholic countries the moral aspects of the liberal revolt were evident from the beginning. The Encyclopædists attacked the moral code of Christianity even more fiercely than its theological doctrines, and all the stock arguments of the modern English sex reformers are to be found stated in their most incisive and paradoxical form in the writings of Diderot, La Mettrie and their friends. In Protestant lands, however, and above all in England and America, the revolt against tradition did not extend to moral principles. Indeed, the leaders of 'advanced thought' and particularly the feminists were usually persons of exceptionally strict traditional morality, while the Victorian agnostics professed an unbounded admiration for the ethical ideals of the religion which they combated on intellectual grounds.

To-day all this is changed. The attack on tradition has shifted to the sphere of morals, and men no longer believe that it is possible to throw over the religious doctrines of Christianity, and yet preserve the moral and social traditions of European civilization intact. Consequently our civilization is now faced with a definite issue. We have to choose between two contradictory ideals—on the one hand, that of the traditional Chris-

tian morality which find its most complete expression in Catholicism—on the other, the ideal of a purely hedonist morality, which involves unrestricted freedom in sexual relations and the reorganization of marriage and the family on the model of the new Russian legislation.

Faced with these alternatives, the ordinary Englishman is in a difficult position. He is instinctively favourable to the traditional morality on which English law and social organization is based, and at the same time he is uneasily conscious of his lack of any clear system of ethical principles with which to justify his attitude. The defence of orthodox morality is consequently left more and more to those who still adhere to dogmatic Christianity, above all to the representatives of the Catholic Church. The advocates of the new morality, on their side, are only too ready to acknowledge the Catholic Church as the representative and champion of traditional ethics, for since their propaganda is based on the irrational character of orthodox morality they are anxious to emphasize its theological origins. They maintain that the Christian view of marriage and of sexual morality in general has no basis in natural ethics. It is an irrational system of taboo created by mediæval superstition and oriental asceticism. According to Mr. Bertrand Russell 'those who first inculcated such a view must have suffered from a diseased condition of body or mind or both' . . . 'A view of this sort, which goes against all the biological facts, can only be regarded as a morbid aberration. The fact that it is embedded in Christian ethics has made Christianity, throughout its whole history, a force tending towards mental disorders and unwholesome views of life.'¹

So too Dr. Briffault: 'The moral standards applied to

¹ *Marriage and Morals*, pp. 50 and 43.

sex relations are the residual product of that exaltation of ritual purity which pronounced a curse upon sex, stigmatized women as the instrument of Satan and poured scorn upon motherhood. It is in the doctrines of Ambrose and of Origen, of Augustine and Jerome that European sexual morality has its roots.' 'To the Christian authorities of the patristic age, and for long after, it was more than doubtful whether the state of matrimony were not a state of sin. Married men commonly regarded themselves as unworthy of partaking the sacraments, and deferred doing so, even as regards baptism, until their wife's death or their own approaching end had placed them in a state of grace. The very suggestion that marriage should be regarded as a sacrament would to the Christian Fathers have been gross blasphemy.'¹

If this strange travesty of patristic teaching were to be believed, it is clear that the true representatives of Christian ethical tradition would be found, not in the Catholic Church, but among the most fanatical of the Russian sectaries, much as the Khlysti and Skoptsi. In reality, however, the Church has always based its teaching on marriage and sexual morality, not on its ideals of asceticism, nor even on its theological dogmas, but on broad grounds of natural law and social function. Even St. Augustine, who certainly develops the ascetic and anti-natural side of Christian ethics to its extreme conclusions, is far from being the Manichæan sex-maniac that so many moderns imagine. His fundamental attitude to sex is extraordinarily rational and even scientific. 'What food is to the conservation of the individual,' he writes, 'that sexual intercourse is to the conservation of the race.' Hence in so far as the sexual appetite is directed to its true end, it is as healthy and good as the desire for

¹ R. Briffault, *The Mothers*, Vol. III, pp. 506, 248.

food. But, on the other hand, any attempt on the part of the individual to separate the pleasure which he derives from the satisfaction of his sexual appetite from its social purpose is essentially immoral. And since the purpose of sex is social, it requires an appropriate social organ for its fulfilment. This organ is the family, the union of man and wife 'which is the first natural bond of human society.' Nevertheless, St. Augustine teaches that the institution of marriage does not rest solely on its fulfilment of its primary function—the procreation of children. If so, there would be no permanence in a childless marriage. It has a 'second good' the power of friendship, which has its root in the essentially social character of human nature. The union of male and female is necessary not only for the procreation of children but also for mutual help, 'so that when the warmth of youth has passed away, there yet lives in full vigour the order of charity between husband and wife.' In other words, marriage has a spiritual as well as a physical foundation, and it is the union of these two principles, both alike social and natural, which determine the character of the family and the origin of all sexual morality.¹

Thus the resistance of Catholicism to the hedonism and individualism of the new morality rests not on an irrational system of taboo but on a solid foundation of biological and sociological principle. It condemns contraception as an unnatural attempt to divorce the sexual activity from its biological function; it forbids irregular sexual intercourse, because it involves the separation of sex from its proper social organ; and it is opposed to divorce and remarriage, because they destroy the permanence of the marriage bond and thus break down the

¹ St. Augustine, *De bono conjugali*, caps. 1, 3 and 18.

organization of the family as the primary sociological unit.

And for the same reasons the Church maintains the original and inalienable rights of the family against the claims of the modern state to override them. Leo XIII writes: 'No human law can abolish the natural and original right of marriage, ordained by God's authority from the beginning. . . . Hence we have the Family, the society of a man's house, a society limited in numbers, but no less a true society anterior to every kind of state and nation, invested with rights and duties of its own totally independent of the civil community.'¹

Hence, as Leo XIII pointed out elsewhere, in his encyclical on marriage,² the alteration by the state of the fundamental laws that govern marriage and family life will ultimately lead to the ruin of society itself. No doubt the state will gain in power and prestige as the family declines, but state and society are not identical. In fact the state is often most omnipotent and universal in its claims at the moment when society is dying, as we see in the last age of the Roman Empire. As the vital energy of society declined, the machinery of bureaucratic administration grew more vast and more complicated, until the wretched provincial was often glad to abandon his household and take refuge in the desert or among the barbarians in order to escape from the intolerable pressure exercised by the ubiquitous agents of the bureaucracy.

At the present day we have reason to ask ourselves whether modern civilization is not threatened with a similar danger owing to the absorption of the whole of human life in the artificial order of bureaucracy and

¹ Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, 1891.

² Encyclical *Arcanum Divinum*, 1880.

industrialism. The introduction of the new moral code would remove the last obstacle to the complete mechanization of society and lead to the final supersession of the independent family by the state. No amount of governmental organization can supply the place of the natural reserves of vitality on which social health depends. If the Catholic theory of society is true, the supersession of the family means not progress, but the death of society, the end of our age and the passing of European civilization.

II

We have seen that the traditional Catholic attitude to marriage and morals is essentially social and takes full account of the primary biological significance of sex and of the sociological significance of the family. The partisans of the new morality, on the other hand, are for the most part singularly indifferent to the biological and sociological aspects of the problem. They base their propaganda on a superficial philosophy of hedonism and on an appeal to the romantic ideals of passionate love and emotional freedom. Some writers, such as Mr. Calverton, seem to be entirely reckless of the social consequences of their theories. In fact their new morality consists simply in the emancipation of sex from all social restrictions. Others, like Mr. Bertrand Russell, adopt a more moderate position. The virulence of Mr. Russell's contempt for Christian ethics and the boldness with which he states paradoxical opinions are apt to blind one to the fact that he is relatively conservative in his attitude to the family and to the question of divorce. He admits unrestricted sexual intercourse only on condition that the birth of children is avoided by the use of

Abolition of family = death of society

new morality

contraceptives, and he recognizes the importance of preserving a quasi-permanent union from the moment that a child is born. He does not however explain how such a state of permanence is to be attained under the new conditions; indeed, it seems little more than a pious aspiration.

There are, however, a few writers, such as Mr. Havlock Ellis and Dr. Briffault, who approach the problem in a more scientific way and who justify the modern revolt from traditional morality on anthropological and sociological grounds. They regard the Christian doctrine of marriage and the family as based upon a misreading of history. The monogamous family has not the fundamental importance that has been attributed to it by Christian tradition. It is a temporary phenomenon, which originated in particular circumstances and which is bound to pass away with the change of economic and political conditions.

Now it is quite true that the traditional view of the family was founded on a somewhat naïve and one-sided conception of history. The knowledge of the past was confined to the history of classical civilization and to that of the Jews, in both of which the patriarchal family reigned supreme. But when the European horizon was widened by the geographical discoveries of modern times, men suddenly realized the existence of societies whose social organization was utterly different to anything that they had imagined. The discovery of Totemism and exogamy, of matrilinear institutions, of polyandry, and of customs of organized sexual licence, gave rise to a whole host of new theories concerning the origins of marriage and the family. Under the influence of the prevalent evolutionary philosophy, scholars like Lewis Morgan elaborated the theory of the gradual

evolution of the family from a condition of primitive sexual promiscuity through various forms of group-marriage and temporary pairing up to the higher forms of patriarchal and monogamous marriage as they exist in developed civilizations. This theory naturally commended itself to socialists. It received the official imprimatur of the leaders of German Socialism in the later nineteenth century and has become as much a part of orthodox socialist thought as the Marxian interpretation of history. It was, however, never fully accepted by the scientific world and is to-day generally abandoned, although it still finds a few supporters among anthropologists. In England it is still maintained by Mr. E. S. Hartland and by Dr. Briffault, whose vast work *The Mothers* (3 vols. 1927) is entirely devoted to the subject. According to Briffault primitive society was purely matriarchal in organization and the primitive family group consisted only of a woman and her offspring. A prolonged sexual association, such as we find in all existing forms of marriage, except in Russia, is neither natural nor primitive and has no place in matriarchal society. The original social unit was not the family, but the clan which was based on matrilinear kinship and was entirely communistic in its sexual and economic relations. The family, as we understand it, owes nothing to biological or sexual causes, but is an economic institution arising from the development of private property and the consequent domination of women by men. It is 'but a euphemism for the individualistic male with his subordinate dependents.'

But in spite of its logical coherence, and the undoubted existence of matrilinear institutions in primitive society, this theory has not been borne out by recent investigations. The whole tendency of modern anthropology has

been to discredit the old views regarding primitive promiscuity and sexual communism and to emphasize the importance and universality of marriage. Whether the social organization is matrilinear or patrilinear, whether morality is strict or loose, it is the universal rule of every known society that a woman before she bears a child must be married to an individual male partner. The importance of this rule has been clearly shown by Dr. Malinowski. 'The universal postulate of legitimacy', he writes, 'has a great sociological significance which is not yet sufficiently acknowledged. It means that in all human societies moral tradition and law decree that the group consisting of a woman and her offspring is not a sociologically complete unit. The ruling of culture runs here again on entirely the same lines as natural endowment; it declares that the human family must consist of the male as well as the female.'¹

It is impossible to go back behind the family and find a state of society in which the sexual relations are in a pre-social stage, for the regulation of sexual relations is an essential pre-requisite of any kind of culture. The family is not a product of culture; it is, as Malinowski shows, 'the starting point of all human organization' and 'the cradle of nascent culture.' Neither the sexual nor the parental instinct is distinctively human. They exist equally among the animals, and they only acquire cultural significance when their purely biological function is transcended by the attainment of a permanent social relation. Marriage is the social consecration of the biological functions, by which the instinctive activities of sex and parenthood are socialized and a new synthesis of cultural and natural elements is created in the shape of the

¹ B. Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, (1927) p. 213.

family. This synthesis differs from anything that exists in the animal world in that it no longer leaves man free to follow his own sexual instincts; he is forced to conform them to a certain social pattern. The complete freedom from restraint which was formerly supposed to be characteristic of savage life is a romantic myth. In all primitive societies sexual relations are regulated by a complex and meticulous system of restrictions, any breach of which is regarded not merely as an offence against tribal law, but as morally sinful. These rules mostly have their origin in the fear of incest which is the fundamental crime against the family, since it leads to the disorganization of family sentiment and the destruction of family authority. It is unnecessary to insist upon the importance of the consequences of this fear of incest in both individual and social psychology, since it is the fundamental thesis of Freud and his school. Unfortunately in his historical treatment of the subject, in 'Totem and Tabu', he inverts the true relation, and derives the sociological structure from a pre-existent psychological complex instead of *vice versa*. In reality, as Dr. Malinowski has shown, the fundamental repression which lies at the root of social life is not the suppressed memory of an instinctive crime—Freud's prehistoric Oedipus tragedy—but a deliberate constructive repression of anti-social impulses. 'The beginning of culture implies the repression of instincts, and all the essentials of the Oedipus complex or any other complex are necessary by-products in the gradual formation of culture.'¹

The institution of the family inevitably creates a vital tension which is creative as well as painful. For human culture is not instinctive. It has to be conquered by a

¹ Malinowski, *op. cit.* p. 182.

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incest

continuous moral effort, which involves the repression of natural instinct and the subordination and sacrifice of the individual impulse to the social purpose. It is the fundamental error of the modern hedonist to believe that man can abandon moral effort and throw off every repression and spiritual discipline and yet preserve all the achievements of culture. It is the lesson of history that the higher the achievement of a culture the greater is the moral effort and the stricter is the social discipline that it demands. The old type of matrilinear society, though it is by no means devoid of moral discipline, involves considerably less repression and is consistent with a much laxer standard of sexual behaviour than is usual in patriarchal societies. But at the same time it is not capable of any high cultural achievement or of adapting itself to changed circumstances. It remains bound to its elaborate and cumbrous mechanism of tribal custom.

The patriarchal family on the other hand makes much greater demands on human nature. It requires chastity and self-sacrifice on the part of the wife and obedience and discipline on the part of the children, while even the father himself has to assume a heavy burden of responsibility and submit his personal feelings to the interests of the family tradition. But for these very reasons the patriarchal family is a much more efficient organ of cultural life. It is no longer limited to its primary sexual and reproductive functions. It becomes the dynamic principle of society and the source of social continuity. Hence too it acquires a distinctively religious character, which was absent in matrilinear societies, and which is now expressed in the worship of the family hearth or the sacred fire and the ceremonies of the ancestral cult. The fundamental idea in marriage is no longer the satis-

faction of the sexual appetite, but, as Plato says: 'the need that every man feels of clinging to the eternal life of nature by leaving behind him children's children who may minister to the gods in his stead.'¹

This religious exaltation of the family profoundly affects men's attitude to marriage and the sexual aspects of life in general. It is not limited, as is often supposed, to the idealization of the possessive male as father and head of the household; it equally transforms the conception of womanhood. It was the patriarchal family which created those spiritual ideals of motherhood and virginity which have had so deep an influence on the moral development of culture. No doubt the deification of womanhood through the worship of the Mother Goddess had its origin in the ancient matrilinear societies. But the primitive Mother Goddess is a barbaric and formidable deity who embodies the ruthless fecundity of nature, and her rites are usually marked by licentiousness and cruelty. It was the patriarchal culture which transformed this sinister goddess into the gracious figures of Demeter and Persephone and Aphrodite, and which created those higher types of divine virginity which we see in Athene, the giver of good counsel, and Artemis, the guardian of youth.

The patriarchal society was in fact the creator of those moral ideas which have entered so deeply into the texture of civilization that they have become a part of our thought. Not only the names of piety and chastity, honour and modesty, but the values for which they stand are derived from this source, so that even where the patriarchal family has passed away we are still dependent on the moral tradition that it created.² Con-

¹ *Laws*, 773 F.

² For this reason the Catholic Church has always asso-

it had been under the patriarchal system. The family was no longer a subsidiary member of a larger unity—the kindred or *gens*. It was an autonomous self-contained unit which owed nothing to any power outside itself.

It is precisely this character of exclusiveness and strict mutual obligation which is the chief ground of objection among the modern critics of Christian morality. But whatever may be thought of it, there can be no doubt that the resultant type of monogamous and indissoluble marriage has been the foundation of European society and has conditioned the whole development of our civilization. No doubt it involves a very severe effort of repression and discipline, but its upholders would maintain that it has rendered possible an achievement which could never have been equalled under the laxer conditions of polygamous or matrilinear societies. There is no historical justification for Mr. Bertrand Russell's belief that the Christian attitude to marriage has had a brutalizing effect on sexual relations and has degraded the position of woman below even the level of ancient civilization: on the contrary women have always had a wider share in social life and a greater influence on civilization in Europe than was the case either in Hellenic or oriental society. And this is in part due to those very ideals of asceticism and chastity which Mr. Russell regards as the source of all our troubles. For in a Catholic civilization, the patriarchal ideal is counterbalanced by the ideal of virginity. The family for all its importance does not control the whole existence of its members. The spiritual side of life belongs to a spiritual society in which all authority is reserved to a celibate

population has gradually acquired the family institutions which were originally peculiar to the members of the feudal nobility.

class. Thus in one of the most important aspects of life the sexual relation is transcended, and husband and wife stand on an equal footing. I believe that this is the chief reason why the feminine element has achieved fuller expression in Catholic culture and why, even at the present day, the feminine revolt against the restrictions of family life is so much less marked in Catholic society than elsewhere.

In Protestant Europe, on the other hand, the Reformation by abandoning the ideal of virginity and by the destruction of monasticism and of the independent authority of the Church accentuated the masculine element in the family. The Puritan spirit, nourished on the traditions of the Old Testament, created a new patriarchalism and made the family the religious as well as the social basis of society. Civilization lost its communal and public character and became private and domestic. And yet by a curious freak of historical development, it was this Puritan and patriarchal society which gave birth to the new economic order which now threatens to destroy the family. Industrialism grew up, not in the continental centres of urban culture, but in the most remote districts of rural England, in the homes of nonconformist weavers and ironworkers. The new industrial society was entirely destitute of the communal spirit and of the civic traditions which had marked the ancient and the mediæval city. It existed simply for the production of wealth and left every other side of life to private initiative. Although the old rural culture, based on the household as an independent economic unit, was passing away for ever, the strict ethos of the Puritan family continued to rule men's lives.

This explains the anomalies of the Victorian period both in England and America. It was essentially an age

of transition. Society had already entered on a phase of intense urban industrialism, while still remaining faithful to the patriarchal ideals of the old Puritan tradition. Both Puritan morality and industrial mass economy were excessive and one-sided developments, and when the two were brought together in one society they inevitably produced an impossible situation.

The problem that faces us to-day is, therefore, not so much the result of an intellectual revolt against the traditional Christian morality; it is due to the inherent contradictions of an abnormal state of culture. The natural tendency, which is even more clearly visible in America than in England, is for the Puritan tradition to be abandoned and for society to give itself up passively to the machinery of modern cosmopolitan life. But this is no solution. It leads merely to the breaking down of the old structure of society and the loss of the traditional moral standards without creating anything which can take their place. As in the decline of the ancient world, the family is steadily losing its form and its social significance, and the state absorbs more and more of the life of its members. The home is no longer a centre of social activity; it has become merely a sleeping place for a number of independent wage-earners. The functions which were formerly fulfilled by the head of the family are now being taken over by the state, which educates the children and takes the responsibility for their maintenance and health. Consequently the father no longer holds a vital position in the family: as Mr. Bertrand Russell says, he is often a comparative stranger to his children who know him only as 'that man who comes for week-ends.' Moreover the reaction against the restrictions of family life which in the ancient world was confined to the males of the citizen class, is

to-day common to every class and to both sexes. To the modern girl marriage and motherhood appear not as the conditions of a wider life, as they did to her grandmother, but as involving the sacrifice of her independence and the abandonment of her career.

The only remaining safeguards of family life in modern urban civilization are its social prestige and the sanctions of moral and religious tradition. Marriage is still the only form of sexual union which is openly tolerated by society, and the ordinary man and woman are usually ready to sacrifice their personal convenience rather than to risk social ostracism. But if we accept the principles of the new morality, this last safeguard will be destroyed and the forces of dissolution will be allowed to operate unchecked. It is true that Mr. Russell, at least, is willing to leave us the institution of marriage, on condition that it is strictly de-moralized and no longer makes any demands on continence. But it is obvious that these conditions reduce marriage to a very subordinate position. It is no longer the exclusive or even the normal form of sexual relations: it is entirely limited to the rearing of children. For, as Mr. Russell is never tired of pointing out, the use of contraceptives has made sexual intercourse independent of parenthood, and the marriage of the future will be confined to those who seek parenthood for its own sake rather than as the natural fulfilment of sexual love. But under these circumstances who will trouble to marry? Marriage will lose all attractions for the young and the pleasure-loving and the poor and the ambitious. The energy of youth will be devoted to contraceptive love and only when men and women have become prosperous and middle-aged will they think seriously of settling down to rear a strictly limited family.

B.C. →
decadence

It is impossible to imagine a system more contrary to the first principles of social well-being. So far from helping modern society to surmount its present difficulties, it only precipitates the crisis. It must lead inevitably to a social decadence far more rapid and more universal than that which brought about the disintegration of ancient civilization. The advocates of birth-control can hardly fail to realize the consequences of a progressive decline of the population in a society in which it is already almost stationary, but for all that their propaganda is entirely directed towards a further diminution in the birth rate. Many of them, like Dr. Stopes, are no doubt so much concerned with the problem of individual happiness that they do not stop to consider how the race is to be carried on. Others, such as Mr. Russell, are obsessed by the idea that over-population is the main cause of war and that a diminishing birth rate is the best guarantee of international peace. There is, however, nothing in history to justify this belief. The largest and most prolific populations, such as the Chinese and the Hindus have always been singularly unaggressive. The most warlike peoples are usually those who are relatively backward in culture and few in numbers, like the Huns and the Mongols, or the English in the fifteenth century, the Swedes in the seventeenth century, and the Prussians in the eighteenth century. If, however, questions of population should give rise to war in the future, there can be no doubt that it is nations with wide possessions and a dwindling population who will be most likely to provoke an attack. But it is much more likely that the process will be a peaceful one. The peoples who allow the natural bases of society to be destroyed by the artificial conditions of the new urban civilization will gradually disappear and their place will be taken by

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those populations which live under simpler conditions and preserve the traditional forms of the family. Thus in England and Scotland the native population will be replaced by Irish immigrants, in France by Spaniards and Italians, in Germany by Slavs, and in the United States by Mexicans and negroes and by immigrants from Eastern Europe.

Such a change would transform western civilization far more fundamentally than any social or political revolution. It is however probable that, long before it has been accomplished, the State will abandon its present attitude of *laissez-faire* and will take active measures to prevent the diminution of the population. If by that time the principles of the new morality are generally accepted, these measures would necessarily involve the complete regulation of parenthood and procreation by the State. Motherhood would be regarded as one of the chief branches of the public service and would be organized and controlled by the government on strictly scientific and impersonal principles. But such a system would outrage not only Christian morality, but the very ideals of individual liberty and freedom in love which have been the inspiration of the reformers themselves.

If sex has been liberated from the restrictions of marriage only to fall into the hands of a government department, the final stage in the dehumanization of culture will have been reached. It will mean the end of humanity as we have known it, and it will prove, as some have already suggested, that mankind is not the crown of creation, but is only an intermediate stage in the evolution of an ape into a machine.

Fortunately there is little reason to suppose that such things will be. The true alternative to social suicide is not sexual communism, but the restoration of the family.

Sooner or later the State will realize that it can neither take the place of the family nor do without it, and consequently it will begin to use all the resources of legislation and social organization to protect the family organism. Housing policy, education and taxation, instead of penalizing family life, will be directed to its protection and encouragement. Above all the individualistic tendencies of industrialism must be limited by some system of family insurance or family endowment.

No doubt it will be said that it is impossible to bolster up by artificial means an institution which is no longer adapted to modern conditions. But if human life is to exist at all under the artificial conditions of modern civilization, it must be safeguarded by artificial means. All our legislation for public health and social welfare is a recognition of the fact that nature can no longer be left to take care of itself. A simple peasant community can preserve its family life without external assistance, but it can also dispense with schools and drains and old age pensions and all the elaborate mechanism of urban civilization. We are slow to realize the implications of the new order. When the age of transition has passed, if our civilization has survived the crisis, the family will no longer be left to sink or swim in the economic current, it will be re-established not as an economic unit, but in its higher function as the primary organ of social life and the guardian of cultural tradition. The more we realize that the prosperity of society depends not on economic production but on the quality of the population, the greater will be the importance of the family which is the only true guardian of the race. At the present day the cause of eugenics is suffering, above all in America, from the championship of cranks and fanatics who are prepared to castrate anybody who fails

to conform with the accepted standards of successful mediocrity. But if it is to be taken seriously, eugenics must be based, in the future, on sound sociological, as well as biological, principles. True eugenics is the science of *good breeding*. It must aim at the improvement of the race by the combination of good blood with a high ethical and cultural tradition. This aim can only be fulfilled through the family, which, as we have seen, was founded from the beginning on a union of cultural and biological functions. In the past this aspect of the family has been overshadowed by economic needs, but it has never been entirely forgotten, and it still possesses vast potentialities for the enrichment and purification of social life. The ideals of eugenics can be best realized, not by governmental supervision and the sterilization of the unfit, but by the creation of a strong and enlightened family feeling. The aristocratic ideal must be separated from economic circumstances and given the widest possible extension so that even the poorest man and woman may be proud of their blood and may be the conscious heirs of a high cultural and ethical tradition.

III

But however important is the social aspect of sex, it is not the only basis of morality. Men will never regulate their sexual life entirely by considerations of social utility or the common good. Sexual passion is too strong for that. The attempt of the eugenicist and the sexual reformer to treat sex purely as a matter of personal and social hygiene fails to take account of the elemental forces of human nature. For not only is man incapable of rationalizing sexual passion, he is ready to make it an object of worship. All modern literature is full of the

exaltation of passion and the glorification of the lover who defies social conventions and sacrifices honour and happiness in order to attain his desire. This romantic attitude towards sex is no less contrary to Christian morality than the rationalism of the advocates of sexual reform, but it is far more coloured by Christian ideas. It is, indeed, definitely religious in that it regards sexual love as a means of moral purification and spiritual enlightenment. It shuts its eyes to the physical aspects of sex and sees love only as the mating of souls. Unfortunately this denial of the physical character of sex tends to produce not spirituality but an unhealthy and perverted sexuality. It finds its pleasure in frustration rather than in fulfilment. The greater the obstacles to the fulfilment of passion and the more hopeless its prospects, the more romantic it is. This explains the tendency to exalt whatever is forbidden, which we see in the romantic idealization of incest which is characteristic of Byron and Shelley and Poe and in the attitude of modern romantics towards sexual perversion.

At the present day the old romantic attitude is no longer possible. Psychology and psycho-analysis have stripped away all poetical illusions and have pointed with brutal directness to the crude realities which underlie the romantic sentiment. We are actually suffering from an equally exaggerated insistence on the physical aspect of sex and from a reaction to crude materialism. Nevertheless, romanticism still colours our thought more than we are aware. Nothing could be more incisive than Mr. Bertrand Russell's criticism of the romantic view of love, and yet for all his rationalism and psychological knowledge we cannot but feel that his own attitude to sex is fundamentally romantic. And the same is true of almost all the advocates of the new

morality whether they are scholars like Mr. Havelock Ellis and Dr. Briffault or popular writers like Dr. Marie Stopes. Their rationalism is mixed with romanticism in an inextricable tangle so that it is impossible to feel any confidence in their scientific impartiality. And if this is true of the intellectual leaders, the case of the ordinary man and woman is still worse. Their romanticism leads them to idealize their emotions, while their rationalism makes them sceptical of all ultimate principles. Consequently for them sexual life loses its depth and permanence and mystery and becomes a surface activity, a form of amusement from which they only hope to derive an emotional thrill.

The evils of this state of things have been most clearly realized by the one modern writer on sex who has steered clear alike of the Scylla of rationalism and the romantic Charybdis—the late Mr. D. H. Lawrence. No one could accuse him of undervaluing or belittling sex. To him it was the most important thing in the world and the only thing that was sacred. But for that very reason he was at one with the traditionalist in his hostility to the romanticism and rationalism of the modern attitude towards it. He saw the source of evil in the modern tendency to 'cerebralize' sex. As soon as we attempt to exploit love mentally, to make it an intellectual problem and a matter of conscious emotion, we make a mess of it, it becomes 'mind-perverted, will-perverted, ego-perverted love.' Sex is good, it is the intrusion of the mind that pollutes it and makes it turn rotten. Consequently it was his ideal to keep it apart from the mind, to preserve the chastity of pure sex from being messed about by reason and conscious emotion, to return to the spontaneous natural sexuality of the animal.

Now it is true that natural sexuality is a good and

that it is the highest and, as it were, the most religious activity of which the animal is capable. But in man this natural purity of sex is no longer possible, it is inevitably contaminated by egotism and conscious emotion. It passes beyond its natural function and becomes an outlet for all the unsatisfied cravings of the psychic life. It ceases to be a natural physical appetite and becomes a quasi-spiritual passion which absorbs the whole man and drags his nature awry.

Because Catholicism has always recognized this truth and has taught that concupiscence—the disorder of the sexual instinct—is an evil, it is condemned by writers like Mr. Russell, as a preacher of death. But the Catholic view is no Manichæan fancy, it is a fact of common experience which is amply confirmed by the teaching of modern psychology. Indeed, the Freudian psychologist insists even more strongly than the theologian that the sexual impulse is the chief source of psychic suffering and disorder. But he differs from the Catholic in that he believes that it is possible to heal this disorder by the methods of rational analysis. This may be successful as a means of curing the neuroses which are the most obvious symptom of the disorder, but it does not remove the spiritual conflict which lies behind them. The rationalization of the sexual life and the removal of repressions do not suffice to give men back their peace of mind and spiritual unity. The modern generation seems none the happier for its emancipation. Indeed, if we may judge by the descriptions of Mr. Aldous Huxley and other observers of contemporary life, sex has become a source of torment and disgust rather than of pleasure.

We may refuse to accept the Catholic solution of the moral problem, but we cannot deny the existence of the

problem itself. The rationalist who attacks Catholicism for its asceticism and its low views of human nature is himself more profoundly pessimistic. If Pascal views the world as a hospital, Voltaire sees it as a mad-house. Human nature has lost its dignity without losing its corruption. The evil is still there but it has become disgusting instead of tragic.

Whether we view the world from a religious or a naturalistic standpoint, we have to admit that man is an unsatisfactory creature. Judged as an animal, he lacks the perfection of an animal, because his spiritual powers impart something monstrous to his animality. And as a rational being, even the rationalist must admit that he is a failure, since for the greater part of his life he is at the mercy of impulse and passion. If he attempts to suppress the animal side of his nature by a sheer effort of conscious will, nature finds a hundred unexpected and unpleasant ways to take its revenge. If, on the other hand, he tries to come to terms with his instincts by the removal of all repression and the relaxation of moral restrictions, his sexual life becomes trivial and empty and loses its contact with the deeper forces of the personality. In either case, the attempt to rationalize sex and to shut our eyes to the deeper realities that lie beneath and above reason ends in failure. If man shuts himself up in the narrow limits of his rational consciousness, his whole life becomes arid and stunted. In some way or other he must open his being to the greater forces that surround it. If no other way is open to him, he must seek relief, like Mr. D. H. Lawrence, in a direct contact with unmentalized life of nature, above all in the physical ecstasy of sex by which he merges his little drop of rational consciousness in the life-flux of the material organism.

There remains the Catholic solution. The concrete reality of sex, which is too strong for the abstract laws of reason, can be met only by the equally objective reality of spirit. Although sex cannot be rationalized, it can be spiritualized, for man finds in religion a force which is capable of taking possession of the will no less completely than physical passion. Of course the very idea of spiritual reality is to-day generally rejected. The rationalist regards it as a metaphysical delusion, while to Mr. Lawrence it is itself the offspring of rationalism, an abstraction of 'the white mind'. To the religious mind, however, spiritual reality is not an ideal or a metaphysical abstraction, it is a living Being—Deus fortis vivus. And even those who refuse all objective validity to this belief, cannot deny its tremendous psychological potency, for experience shows that it is the one power in the world that is stronger than self-interest and sensuality, and that it is capable of transforming human nature and altering the course of history. The real danger of religion is not that it is too weak or too abstract to affect human conduct, but rather that it is so absolute and uncompromising that nature may become crushed and overwhelmed:

oppressa gravi sub religione

Quae caput a coeli regionibus ostendebat

Horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans.

This is no imaginary danger. We have in Buddhism the example of a great world-religion which has founded itself on the radical denial of life and which regards birth and sexual desire as unmitigated evils. Nor is this attitude peculiar to Buddhism. It was equally characteristic of the Gnostic and Manichæan movements which were the most dangerous rivals of early Christianity and it affected the Christian mind itself through the apocry-

phal Gospels and Acts, and many other subterranean channels.

Nevertheless this tendency never captured the Church. She insisted from the first that 'marriage is honourable in all and the marriage bed undefiled.' Although Catholicism conquered the world by its ideals of virginity and martyrdom, it never denied the good of marriage or the good of life. If the asceticism of the monks of the desert appears to us purely negative and hostile to life, we must remember that it was only by a complete break with the old world—by going out into the wilderness and making a fresh start—that it was possible to realize the independence and autonomy of Christian ideals. Above all sex had to be rescued from the degradation and vulgarization that had overtaken it in the decadence of Graeco-Roman society, and this could only be accomplished by a drastic process of discipline and purgation. Catholicism stood for the existence of absolute spiritual values in a disillusioned and hopeless world, and consequently it had to assert these values by the sacrifice of every lesser good, not only the good of marriage, but the good of life itself. The essentially positive character of the Christian ideal could only be completely realized when the struggle with the pagan world was over, and consequently it is in the lives of saints such as Francis of Assisi and Philip Neri rather than St. Anthony or St. Symon Stylites that we may find the fullest expression of Christian asceticism—an asceticism which is fundamentally humane and friendly to life. It involves an heroic sacrifice of the natural life of sex and of the family to the service of God and the Christian people, but it is in no sense a denial of the values that it has transcended.

Moreover Catholicism is not content simply to accept

marriage as a natural good: from the first it has regarded marriage as possessing a positive spiritual value and significance—as a means of supernatural grace. This sacramental view of marriage finds its basis in the celebrated passage of the Epistle to the Ephesians¹ which compares the union of man and woman in marriage to the union of Christ and the Church—a passage which is strangely ignored by Mr. Russell when he declares that St. Paul never 'suggests that there may be any positive good in marriage or that affection between man and wife may be a beautiful and desirable thing.'² In fact, it is precisely in the mystery of love that St. Paul finds the meaning of marriage. It is not merely a physical union of bodies under the blind compulsion of instinctive desire, nor is it an abstract moral union of wills. It is the physical expression or incarnation of a spiritual union in which the sexual act has become the vehicle of a higher creative purpose. It is for this reason that marriage is regarded by the Church as a type and a sacramental participation of the central mystery of the Faith—the marriage of God and Man in the Incarnation. As humanity is saved and deified by Christ, so the natural functions of sex and reproduction are spiritualized by the sacrament of marriage.

At first sight this doctrine may seem infinitely removed from the realities of life and of little assistance to the practical moralist. But if we once renounce the vain attempt to rationalize sexual life, we must be prepared to find in sex a mysterious element which is akin to the ultimate mysteries of life. The religious significance of sex has always been felt by man. Primitive religion regarded it as the supreme cosmic mystery, the

¹ *Ephesians*, 23-33.

² *Marriage and Morals*, p. 42.

source of the life and fruitfulness of the earth; while the higher religions also made it the basis of their view of life whether in a pessimistic sense, as in Buddhism, or, as in China, in the metaphysical idea of a rhythmic order pervading the life of the universe. Christianity went a step farther by attributing a positive spiritual significance to sex and thus gave to Western civilization a higher ideal of love and marriage than any other culture has known. If these characteristically European ideals are to survive, it is essential to preserve a spiritual basis for sexual life. Romanticism attempted to accomplish this by making a religion of sex and exalting passion itself into the place of a spiritual ideal, but in doing so, it lost its hold alike on spiritual principles and physical realities. The true way of spiritualizing sex is not to idealize our emotions and to hide physical appetite under a cloud of sentiment, but rather to bring our sexual life into relation with a more universal reality. The romantic idealization of passion and the rationalist attempt to reduce love to the satisfaction of physical desire alike fail to create that permanent basis of sexual life which can only be found in a spiritual order which transcends the appetites and the self-will of the individual. It is only when a man accepts marriage as something greater than himself, a sacred obligation to which he must conform himself, that he is able to realize all its spiritual and social possibilities.

Hence the restoration of the religious view of marriage which is the Catholic ideal, is the most important of all the conditions for a solution of our present difficulties. Its importance cannot be measured by practical considerations, for it means the reintroduction of a spiritual principle into the vital centre of human life.

Western civilization to-day is threatened with the loss

of its freedom and its humanity. It is in danger of substituting dead mechanism for living culture. Hedonism cannot help, nor yet rationalism. It can be saved only by a renewal of life. And this is impossible without love, for love is the source of life, both physically and spiritually. But if physical desire is separated from its spiritual principle and made an end in itself, it ceases to be love and it no longer gives life. It degenerates into sterile lust. It is only when it is spiritualized by faith that it becomes vivifying love and participates in the mystery of creation. Love requires faith, as life requires love. The loss of faith ultimately means not merely moral disorder and suffering, but the loss of social vitality and the decay of physical life.