

THE CHRISTIAN ORDER

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The Family



By

RT. REV. MSGR. FULTON J. SHEEN

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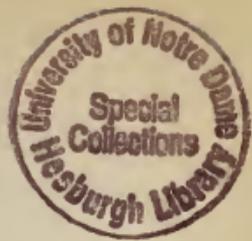
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THAT the family is disintegrating in our national life, no one will deny. Courtship takes place outside the home, generally in a crowded room with a low ceiling, amidst suffocating smoke while ^{the} listening to ^{couple} a tom-tom orchestra glamoured by a girl who invariably cannot sing. The wife listens to radio serials with their moans, groans, and commercials, where triangles are more common than in a geometry book. She reads magazine articles by women who never stay at home, saying that a woman's

place is in the home. The Family Bible recording dates of birth and baptism, is no longer existent because few read the Bible, few give birth, and few are ever baptized.

One of the most evident symptoms of the breakdown of the family is divorce. The universalizing of easy divorce means that the institution of marriage is slowly degenerating into State-licensed free love.

This modern polygamy and polyandry are recognized now on condition that husbands or wives, as the case may be, do not harness other wives or husbands together to the coach of their egotism, but that they hitch them up in tandem fashion, or single file. To the extent that the courts disrupt this natural unity of a nation, they will incapacitate themselves for international fellowship. For if we destroy this inner circle of loyalty, through disloyalty, how shall we build up the larger international circles of loyalty from which world peace is derived?

OUR ARGUMENTS ARE POWERFUL

Divorce makes the right of living souls to love dependent on caprice of the senses and the terminable pact of selfish fancy. We Christians argued with those who believe in divorce, but we know no one was ever convinced by our arguments. Not because the arguments are not sound. That is the trouble. They are too good! Good reasons are powerless against emotions. Like two women arguing over back fences, we are arguing from different premises. The majority of people who are opposed to the stability and continuity of family life for the most part do not believe in the moral law of God. They may say they believe in God, but it is not the God of Justice.

Instead then of arguing against the modern pagan who believes in the disruption of the family, let us—for the sake of argument—assume that his premises are right, namely, that man is only an animal; that morality is self-interest; that if there is a

God, He never intended that we should not do as we please; that every individual is his own standard of right and wrong; that the amount of wealth one has must be the determinant of the incarnations of mutual love; that when we die that is the end of us—or, if there be a heaven, that we all go there independently of a moral law.

IF DIVORCE IS RIGHT...

Now once you start with these principles, then certainly divorces are right; then certainly we should shirk sacrifices. If we are only beasts, and love is sex, then there is no reason why *anyone* should assume responsibility.

But why not go all the way? By the same principle anything is right if I can get away with it. If bonds between husband and wife are revocable at will and for advantage or self-love, why should not the treaties between nation and nation be revocable at the will of either partner? If a husband may steal the wife of another man, why should

was it

^{wrong} ~~is~~ not Germany ^{to} steal Poland? If John Smith can break his treaty to take Mary Jones until death, who shall say Italy ^{was} ~~is~~ wrong in breaking its treaties with Ethiopia, or that Japan ^{was} ~~is~~ wrong in seizing Manchuria?

If divorces from marital contracts, why not divorces from international contracts? If in domestic society moderns sneer at marital fidelity as "bourgeois virtue," what right have they to ask that "bourgeois virtue" be recognized in world society?

What are the Christian principles concerning the family?

First, marriage is one and unbreakable unto death, naturally and supernaturally. Naturally, because there are only two words in the vocabulary of love: "you" and "always"—"you," because love is unique: "always," because love is eternal. Supernaturally, because the union of husband and wife is modelled upon the union of Christ and His Church, which endures through the agelessness of eternity.

MARRIAGE BUILT ON LOVE, NOT SEX

Second, the foundation of marriage is love, not sex. Sex is physiological and of the body: love is spiritual and therefore of the will. Since the contract is rooted not in the emotions, but in the will, it follows that when the emotion ceases, the contract is not dissolvable, for the love of the will is not subject to the vicissitudes of passion.

A lifetime is not too long for two beings to become acquainted with each other. Marriage should be a series of perpetual and successive revelations, the sounding of new depths and the manifestation of new mysteries. At one time there is the revelation of the mystery of the other's incompleteness—which can be known but once, because capable of being completed but once; at another time, the mystery of the other's mind; at another the mystery of a fatherhood and motherhood which never before existed; and finally, the revelation of the mystery of being shepherds for little sheep, usher-

ing them in to the Christ Who is the door of the sheepfold.

THE ~~REAL~~ REAL TRIANGLE

Third, love by its nature is not exclusively mutual self-giving, otherwise love would end in exhaustion, consumed in its own useless fire. Rather it is mutual self-giving *which ends in self-recovery*. As in heaven the mutual love of Father for Son recovers itself in the Holy Ghost, the Bond of Unity, so too the mutual love of spouse for spouse recovers itself in the child who is the incarnation of their lasting affection. All love ends in an Incarnation, even God's.

Procreation then is not in imitation of the beasts of the field, but of the Divine God where the love that vies to *give*, is eternally defeated in the love that receives and perpetuates. All earthly love therefore is but a spark caught from the Eternal Flame of God.

Fourth, every child is a potential nobleman of the Kingdom of God. Parents are

to take that living stone from the quarry of humanity, cut and chisel it by loving discipline and sacrifice, mould it on the pattern of the Christ-Truth until it becomes a fit stone for the Temple of God, whose architect is Love. To watch a garden grow from day to day, especially if one has planted the seed himself, and cared for it, deepens the joy of living. But it is nothing compared to the joy of watching other eyes grow, conscious of another image in their depths.

A CHILD CEMENTS THE UNION

Fifth, at a time when the first wild ecstasies begin to fade, when the husband might be tempted to believe that another woman is more beautiful than his wife, and the wife might be tempted to believe that another husband would be more chivalrous—it is at that moment that God in His Providence sends children. In each boy the wife sees the husband reborn in all his chivalry and strength, and in each girl the hus-

band sees his wife reborn in all her sweetness and beauty. The natural impulse of pride that comes with begetting, the new love that overblossoms the memory of a mother's pain as she swung open the portals of flesh, and the joy of linked creatures in each other's fruit, are as so many beads in the rosary of love binding them together in an ineffable and unbreakable union of love.

Sixth, if the bringing of children into the world is today an economic burden, it is because the social system is inadequate; and not because God's law is wrong. Therefore the State should remove the causes of that burden. The human must not be limited and controlled to fit the economic, but the economic must be expanded to fit the human.

ONE GOD, ONE LAW FOR ALL

Such is the Christian position concerning marriage, and one that is, outside the Church, very largely misunderstood. It is so

often said: "They can divorce and remarry, because they are not Catholics," or "the Catholic Church says so-and-so about the duties of the married state." No! No! No! Divorce is not wrong because the Church says it is wrong. Why does the Church say it is wrong? The Church says it is wrong because it is a violation of the natural law, which binds all men. There is not one God for Catholics and another God for Hottentots. And all who violate the natural law will be punished by God. A modern pagan is no more free to break God's law than a Catholic.

But why does almost everyone outside the Church associate the objection to divorce with the Church? *Because the Church is today almost alone in defending the natural law.* If a time ever came when the Church alone defended the natural truth that two and two make four, the world would say: "It is a Catholic doctrine." And

if the natural law continues to be defended almost alone by the Church, a day will come when Catholics will have to be prepared to die for the truth that it is wrong to poison mother-in-laws.

LET'S NOT BE SELFISH

Men and women of America! Raise your altars to Life and Love while there is time! If you have not found the Citadel of married happiness, it is because you have failed to lay siege to the outer walls of your own selfishness. The purpose of war is not the loot of the private soldier, neither is the purpose of your marriage the loot of life. Like Apostles you have been sent out two by two, not that you may merely eat and drink, buy and sell, but that you may enrich the Kingdom of God with life and love and not with death. The soil that takes the seed in the springtime is not unfaithful to its messiahship of harvest, so neither may you play recreant to the responsibilities of love.

The fires of heaven which have been handed down to you as to an altar, have not been given for your own burning, but that you may pass on the torch that other fires may climb back into the heavens from which they came.

AN EARTHLY TRINITY

Your marital love is happiest when it becomes an earthly trinity: father, mother, and offspring; for by filling up the lacking measure of each in the store of the other, there is built up that natural complement wherein your love is immortalized in your offspring. If love were merely a quest or a romance, it would be incomplete; on the other hand, if it were only a capture and an attainment, it would cease to rise. Only in heaven can there be combined perfectly the joy of the chase and the thrill of the capture; for once having attained God, we shall ~~will~~ have captured something so Infinitely Beautiful it will take an eternity of chase to sound the depths. But here on earth

God has given to you who are faithful in the Sacrament, a dim sharing in those joys wherein two hearts in their capture conspire against their mutual impotence and recover the thrill of chase in following their young down the roads that lead to the Kingdom of God. It was a family in the beginning that drew a world of Wise Men and Shepherds, Jews and Gentiles, to the Secret of Eternal Peace. It will be through the family too that America will be reborn. When the day comes wherein mothers will consider it their greatest glory to be the sacristans of love's fruit, and when fathers will regard it their noblest achievement to be stewards of love's anointed ones, and when children realize that nature set no limit on the number of uncles one might have but that a man could have only one mother—then America will be great with the greatness of its Founding Fathers and the greatness of a nation blessed by God.

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