

when the love of God is broken upon the jagged edges of this world and we become our Lord's mother, brother, sister. The movement of our own lives should be to follow multi-coloured relationships back to their source, never fearing lest we should lose any of their richness in the pure light of God for he allows nothing to be lost. Sometimes the movement seems too slow and we try of our own initiative to bring the colours into one—as in that cry of longing, *Soror mea sponsa*—or in St Teresa's '*Yo muero porque no muero*'; but always God is drawing us into the one light where all longings are fulfilled, the source of all happiness. It is towards that source that all those one meets in the rush-hour are hurrying, lonely women and busy men, students and spivs, for tube stations full of folk will also join in the chorus of thanksgiving and victory, 'Thus was it well, and thus was it well'.



THE STRUCTURE OF RELIGIOUS CHASTITY

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A CERTAIN obscurity seems to surround the idea of religious chastity (manifest even in the various names given to it, chastity, perfect continence, purity, virginity), and there is a tendency to envisage it in a negative manner, as chiefly the exclusion of sex and marriage. On the other hand, many recent studies have emphasised the positive richness of the idea and the many elements involved in it. It may therefore not be out of place to try to give a synthetic view of the whole. Basically it is a special kind of temperance called chastity, balanced between lust and insensibility, and supported by the sense of shame and modesty, and by the attraction of a spiritual beauty. Its specific difference as religious chastity comes

from a vow, which belongs to the virtue of religion; while charity, both towards God and the neighbour, is its end.

TEMPERANCE AND CHASTITY

Although rising above ordinary human virtue, religious chastity presupposes the normal virtues which deal with its matter, temperance, and the special kind called chastity. Temperance is the moderation of desire, pleasure and sadness arising from the powerful animal passions which seek food and sexual pleasure, and which are ordained to the animal life of man. Hence the measure in all forms of temperance, the right use of its matter, is what is useful for a person's life. And this will vary with the aims for which the person is living. Chastity means perfect control of the powerful sexual appetite precisely in relation to the needs of a person's life. For the unmarried individual, the married, or the religious celibate, whose lives are dominated by different aims, chastity will dictate quite a different use of, or even abstinence from, sexual pleasure, determined by the purpose of the life of each. For the unmarried, temporary but purposeful abstinence; for the married, control and direction; for the religious, perpetual abstinence. But in each chastity is the appropriate degree of control, and if it is perfect virtue it will always include the ability to control when and as far as necessary. Hence in itself it is a positive attitude to sex: to use it when it is useful for the purpose for which it is intended. Only secondarily is it negative: not to use it when it is not useful.

Hence chastity supposes a right appreciation of the nature of sexual activity and a respect for its right use. It means a valuing of the purposes of marriage. Chastity appreciates the close co-operation with God's creative activity involved in the use of sex; it sees that its purpose is the good of the race and the building up of God's family, and that it must not be diverted to individual selfishness; it perceives how in it body and soul meet in an altogether unique unity, and how in every manifestation the whole personality is engaged; it sees that here the animal cannot be separated from the spiritual as in eating and drinking, and that in sex man must give himself wholly, so that its misuse is peculiarly

degrading. Chastity also appreciates the close connection between sex and spiritual love: how the very act which aims at procreation at the same time realises the greatest possible unity between human beings, is the fullest gift of one person to another and the greatest extreme from selfishness. So that it will refuse to use sex where full and proper giving is excluded. Lastly chastity sees in marriage the sacramental sight of Christ's gift of himself to the Church on the Cross through which the family of God is born, and that the use of sex is, for the Christian, inseparable from participation in Christ's sacrifice. Hence chastity tends to restrict and even abstain from the use of its matter, sex, out of reverence for its importance, its holiness and its value to God, our neighbour and ourselves. It deals with a sacred and mysterious region of human life, and in this sense can well be called the holy virtue.

It is therefore most important that those vowed to perpetual chastity as religious should possess the virtue of chastity in its proper sense, and not a mere negative form of it. This is especially true for those who have to educate others. The vow should clear the mind and will for a more perfect understanding of married life and greater respect for it than is usually possible for the married, and hence make religious the ideal educators of those called to marriage.

LUST AND INSENSIBILITY

Like all virtues chastity is a balance between extremes: lust, or over-indulgence in sex, and insensibility, or lack of proper appreciation of its goodness.

Lust is the misuse of sexual pleasure: the opposite of all that has been said about chastity. It means a lack of respect for the creative activity of God involved; a perversion of a power given for the good of the race to the selfishness of the individual; a trivial use of a force which involves and degrades the depths of the personality; a giving to another which is false, not a real giving but a selfish taking, or not a permanent and total giving, as sex of its nature implies; a perversion of love; a subjection of the whole person to the animal in man in a way not found in any other sin. The sacred and ennobling domain of sex becomes degrading

to the whole character; the mind becomes blind and disordered and can no longer judge clearly, but is hasty, thoughtless and changeable; the will becomes dominated by self-love, and flees from spiritual things and God, the realm of sex becomes a seductive evil that corrupts the whole man.

This degrading effect of lust is true of all voluntary misuse of sex. While it is possible to perform a slight unkind action without involving the general will to be kind, it is not possible to will fully the slightest impure activity without willing to set in motion the whole sexual function with all its implications. The whole machinery of love, including the will itself, is involved. But when sexual excitement is not voluntary, although of itself it attempts to link up with the love of the will and so involve the person, it cannot do so without the consent of the will. It is thus important to watch the direction of the will in temptations against purity, since the will to lust transforms the physical and emotional disturbance into personal degradation. It is also important to realise that, so long as the will is aiming at a proper end, incidental sexual disturbance can be disregarded, so long as there is no real risk of the direction of the will being perverted by it. Again, the will is not fully involved when such sexual disturbance, though unjustified, is not fully accepted, but only allowed through a certain negligence or imprudence, without real consent to lust; and such can be venial sin.

Lust can also manifest itself obscurely in a love of excitement or of self-importance; in an obscure attraction, often joined to repulsion, for sexual matters; in prudishness and a proud purity. Although these are not sinful in a directly lustful sense, they impair perfect chastity, which has a clear appreciation of the good and bad in sex and is free in its regard, neither slave to it nor afraid of it. It is a clear, pure and radiant virtue, which does not merely hide away the attraction to sex where it will seek satisfaction in other ways, but overcomes and transcends it. There can also be indulgence of sexual appetite in minor ways not obviously such, as in a selfish or emotional love of others and of children or in many kinds of sights and thoughts. It is necessary to

purify all these obscure and indirect things in order to be really free from lust, for in all of them the same selfish indulgence of a deep and holy function is in some way involved, and the clarity of chastity is sullied.

The opposite extreme to lust is insensibility. There is a temperamental insensibility, an absence of appeal from sex or a sluggishness and laziness. This is not chastity, which is a positive attitude to sex, and which will overcome such a temperament if need be; and it is not even a disposition to chastity, being really an obstacle to acquiring the virtue. The dispositive temperament which aids chastity is, on the contrary, a sensitiveness and delicacy of feeling: the absence not of sensibility, but of gross and violent passions. Chastity will tend to develop such a temperament where it does not exist. The vice of insensibility is more than mere temperament; it is the positive acceptance of an attitude of insensibility to sex, where the whole realm of sex is not properly valued, or the person is too lazy or selfish to respond to it and deliberately avoids it. The voluntarily chaste must reject the vice of insensibility, and not confuse chastity with a sluggish temperament, but realise that it must be accompanied by a delicate and sensitive behaviour. This implies a complete victory over lust.

SHAME AND MODESTY

Chastity is aided by certain dispositions or external aids, one of the chief of which is the sense of shame. This is a passion or feeling, not a virtue; it is fear of opprobrium. In a state, such as that before the Fall, where there was perfect virtue and perfect subjection of the passions to the will, there was no shame. In relation to chastity shame is a rich passion: it fears the uncontrolled and animal character of sex and its tendency to reduce man to the sub-human even when used rightly; it fears sin and all the sin associated with sex in human life; it fears to expose such a personal and central emotion to others; it fears to profane that which is in close relation with God. Hence shame is a compound of fear of evil, and of reverence for good with fear of its misuse. It is an instinctive reaction to whatever threatens to cause either in ourselves or in others an uncontrolled

activity of the sexual instinct. Hence it is a relative thing, varying for different persons and in different social conditions, and no general rule can be made. The test of what is shameful is what is liable, in the particular circumstances of time, place and persons involved, to cause uncontrolled sexual activity, or what is an unwarranted and irreverent treatment of sex.

Shamelessness, the opposite of shame, is due to abandonment to sexual sin; though there is also another shamelessness (only partial in this life) due to the perfection of chastity and the absence of the reaction of fear of sin. There is also a relative shamelessness, due to the fact that what one person or race finds shameful, another does not, owing to diversity of upbringing and other circumstances.

Modesty in the modern sense is allied to shame, and is also an ally of chastity: it is the avoidance in dress, movement, etc., of what will arouse uncontrolled sex instincts. Modesty in the older sense—that mostly used by theologians and in official documents—is quite other: it is the accommodation of our dress and behaviour to current usages, without any direct reference to chastity.

The sense of modest fear, and reverence for sex, is thus a potent aid to chastity, eliminating those unnecessary stimuli to the sex instinct which naturally strengthen it and render it more difficult to control. It is necessary in acquiring chastity to pursue a double course: the normal and unavoidable everyday stimuli (which may be very great) must be so dominated by control that they cease to disturb deeply, while at the same time abnormal and avoidable stimuli must be eliminated until the virtue is strong enough to ignore them. The aim is some partial restoration of the integrity of our *primaeval* state, and a gradual diminution of the objects which arouse sex, and therefore shame.

SPIRITUAL BEAUTY

Another condition of chastity, the opposite of that which gives rise to shame, is an appreciation of its honourableness, decency, praiseworthiness and spiritual beauty (*honestas*). The spiritual beauty of human life consists in its illumination by the light of reason, and the exclusion of what clouds

its rational order and beauty, and degrades man to an animal level. It is this aspect of chastity which can be called purity in a natural sense: the appreciation of the value of the beauty of reason in all man's actions, and the avoidance of the abuse of sex as something which above all spoils that beauty. Such purity must be a real appreciation of spiritual beauty; not merely a temperamental shrinking from sex arising from sensitiveness, independence or dislike of violent excitement.

But there is a superior supernatural purity, based on the appreciation that man's spiritual beauty consists not merely in right reason, but in union of the mind with God. Such purity avoids all that impedes the union of man's mind with God; it is a purity of the type of the angels, not directly concerned with chastity, but with the realisation in man of a spiritual likeness to God by the subjection of the mind to him. Hence Christian purity does not primarily avoid the sensual, but directly seeks spiritual and supernatural beauty through the domination of reason, grace and God over the whole soul and all its thoughts and action. Chastity is one element necessarily found in it. Such purity will often negative possible dangers to chastity by perceiving the spiritual and God-given beauty of even materially impure things: this is the case in a truly pure art. On the other hand its absence, and the presence of a fundamentally impure attitude, can infect even things which externally seem impure, as again occurs in art.

Another condition of chastity, often spoken of by the Fathers in their sermons, is humility. Chastity requires the knowledge that submersion in the flesh and the loss of spiritual beauty is at any moment possible, and that its conservation is only the effect of God's grace. Pride destroys the proper beauty of purity, its relation to God, by perverting it to self; a chastity based on pride is fundamentally impure and spurious.

(To be concluded)