

GOD
MADE
SEX

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God Made Sex

HOW SURPRISED the young bride would have been had she known that her wedding would become the most famous in history! It took place almost two thousand years ago in a remote Palestinian village, yet you can read all about it today in the second chapter of St. John's Gospel. It is famous because Jesus Christ was among the guests and because He chose that occasion for His first miracle. He turned water into wine.

By accepting the invitation our Lord, on the very threshold of His ministry, affirmed the goodness and beauty of marriage. And He teaches, by linking with it that particular miracle, that He can change marriage into something more wonderful still. He can use sex (along with all the other instincts) to draw us closer to Himself. He can transform our instincts into joyous, triumphant, loving union with Him; the great and final destiny for which He created us.

It is the fashion in many quarters nowadays to speak

frankly about sex even before children. On the whole it is good, but perhaps our grandmothers still might be able to teach us something. Shyness between the sexes is the barrier to premature experiences in the years before strong principles develop in its place. Perhaps we should be less reckless in breaking the barrier down by talking about sex when boys and girls are together; and in other ways. But that need not hamper us here. The innumerable books and articles which stress "self-expression" speak freely of sex. We shall do the same in asserting God's rights in the matter.

His first right is because He made us; and because He loves us more than we love ourselves. His second right is because He (not the devil!) created sex and planned it for our good and knows its purposes. It is reasonable, then, that we should look to Him for guidance in its use.

Alluring Purpose

God instituted marriage for many reasons. Some of them, such as the propagation of the race, the training of its young, the provision of a basis for social unity, are obvious. But in this article we shall contemplate a more hidden purpose which is the loveliest and most alluring of all; marriage offers a faint analogy—it gives a suggestion at least—of Heaven. The teen-ager who thinks that marriage is "heavenly" is not far from the

truth, at all events regarding the ideal. The thing that each of us craves more than anything else (and whether we know it or not) is union with God in love. And the essence of Heaven is not golden harps but precisely that loving union.

The God who made us is also our mighty Lover. He made us for Himself. He woos and wants each soul as though each were the only one. He wants YOU. It matters not whether you are young or old, rich or poor, charming or grotesque, brilliant or a dunce, popular or unpopular; nor even whether you have tried to be good or are miserably selfish and sinful. Those are the things men see. But God sees deeper. He sees your capacity to receive and react to love.

Of course He will not compel you to be His. (That is precisely what Hell means, that if you want you can live apart from God in this world and the next; but *only* if you want.) What man who is truly in love with a girl would compel her to marry him even if he could? He wants her with all the ardor of his heart. But he wants her as her own free gift of herself. In this and a thousand other things sex is an outstanding book of theology. It ought to be. God wrote it.

As the man pours himself, so to speak, into the woman, so God will pour Himself into every soul that is willing to be His bride. He will pierce to the very ego and possess it; and will pervade the soul to the

utmost of its capacity with His joy, His peace, His strength, His beauty, His knowledge, the tenderness and sweetness of His love. This is not a dream. It is the only thing that makes sense of our existence.

"Ah!" you say, "Aren't you projecting your notion of a human bridegroom and calling it God?" The answer is, "Yes; of course."

I do not say that it is a *mere* projection. God made all creatures; and our power to project. He did so in order to suggest to us something of His nature. The only trouble with the word projection is that it often is meant to imply that there is no corresponding reality. (The technical psychological usage has a third sense.) So it might be better to use a simple word with an obvious meaning—like picture. For pictures, excepting those by neo-impressionists and the like, God bless them, are "*of*" something.

Picture Gallery

God has crammed the world with pictures. Everything, from the largest to the least, has something to add to the composite concept we are forming of Him. It is great fun to pick out the hints, especially with the most unlikely things. What does a precipice suggest about God and His relations with us? or a toad? an amoeba? a hurricane? One of the best pictures is fatherhood; and equally motherhood, for we need the

beauty and tenderness of the woman in our concept of God along with the power of the man.

But we must progressively interpret and combine our pictures so that we may have an ever-expanding concept of God; a concept that becomes increasingly suggestive, rich and well-balanced. There should be not only the father and the mother pictures, but pictures of a king, a farmer, a fisherman, a judge, a captain, an explorer; anything you will, and the more varied the better. And the personal pictures must be supplemented by the impersonal ones: darkness and light, the ocean, electricity, fire. We must stretch our minds to the uttermost and think big things about God; generous, magnificent and loving things. But, no matter how expansive and complex our idea of God may be, we must constantly remind ourselves that it is nothing compared with the Reality. God is infinite and mysterious and transcends all possible pictures. It would be disastrous, then, to freeze on to any one of them. Nevertheless, so far as it goes, the greatest of all is the marriage-picture. Here are three points to remember about it all along:

(1) God invites every soul to be His bride; and not only monks and nuns! In this respect there is no distinction between male and female. God created them both. He made their bodies to differ and to a great extent their minds and characters also. But in

relation to Him the strongest, most masculine man is in the same "passive" position as the woman; for both receive all that they have from God. The less hampered a man is by an abnormal sense of inferiority—the more manly he is, in short—the more freely he acknowledges his nothingness in respect to the Almighty and that, in the marriage picture, the bride represents himself and the bride-groom God. We, men and women alike, all flee from God's overwhelming love; and in the depths of our souls we all want to be caught—and ravished.

(2) Every marriage was intended for a picture of Heaven. But in many marriages the picture has been so vandalized by pride, brutality and selfishness as to be unrecognizable. When we use the picture we must imagine a bride-groom as nearly ideal as we can make him. We cannot make him too strong, attractive, understanding, tender; for the reality behind our picture, the true Lover of our soul, is God.

(3) Beautiful though the marriage-picture is at its best, it is (as we have been recognizing) *only* a picture and a pale picture of our union with God. One reason why it is pale is that it can be only partially successful. Human instincts are the same in all people and we can read from our own what the man really wants who is truly in love with his wife. He wants to get altogether inside her, to know her thoughts and experiences from

within, indeed to *be* her, while still remaining himself so that he can love her. And the woman wants this too. She wants to lay herself, her very heart, wide open to receive him; to submit herself utterly and be submerged in him, while still remaining herself so that she can love him. But in the very nature of things the union of man and woman is limited. Even on the physical plane, the bodies which unite them also keep them apart. On the spiritual plane it is the differences of antecedents, character, tastes and experience, etc., which make it impossible for them fully to know one another. God as God, on the other hand, is pure and infinite Spirit. He has not the limitations of a body; and His power to share our experience within us is unbounded. He, therefore, *can* be you, while still remaining Himself, transcendent and wholly other.

This is the reason for monks and nuns; to remind us that the reality—union with God—is greater than the picture. Saint Thomas says that, except for the Fall, every man and woman would have been married. But the Fall spoiled everything. As individuals and as a race we have tried to live our lives apart from God and we have turned the good things he has given us into idols. We have made an idol of sex. We have put it ahead of God Himself. Just because sex is so lovely and alluring we have thought of it as the great reality and Heaven as the picture. Hence God invites some

men and women to forego marriage in order to remind themselves and others that Heaven is the reality and marriage the picture. We need both groups. We need married people to provide the picture. And we need monks and nuns to remind us that union with God is the great and eternal reality.

The Sacrament of Marriage

Marriage, besides being a picture, has another wonderful aspect. When two baptized Christians are wed their marriage is a sacrament of the Church. And a sacrament is a vehicle of divine power poured into our hearts by God; as in Baptism and Holy Communion. Through Holy Matrimony God performs mighty works in our souls not altogether unlike His mighty work at Cana when He changed water into wine.

The grace of this particular sacrament, if the husband and wife will use it, helps them to surmount the difficulties of the married state; for example, in understanding and adjusting themselves to one another, in learning to trust each other, in dealing with their children. It helps them to be chaste; for chastity is a virtue of the married as well as the unmarried and there are difficult times and circumstances when they must exercise stern self-control. There even may be occasions when one or other of them will need the

strong grace of the sacrament to overcome temptations to infidelity.

Either of the partners can utilize this supernatural power even if the other does not; when either the husband or the wife is called upon to bear patiently and bravely the sins, the suspicions, the cruelty, the selfishness of the other. It must be a great comfort to realize that the heavenly Bridegroom is with us, helping us to bear the sorrow and to offer our earnest prayers for the one who is careless.

Course of True Love

In a moment we shall think of sex and the unmarried; but first let us trace its course in sincere Christian wedlock, wherein the devotion between husband and wife, as it matures, becomes more inward and understanding. The discipline of love turns the emphasis from what was at first chiefly physical and emotional to a deep sharing of thoughts, responsibilities and purposes, lifting both souls closer to God through their union with one another. Their love for each other awakens their power to love Him and helps them to realize something of the urgency of His yearning for them.

This does not diminish their love for one another but makes it more secure. For how can a husband or a wife be secure when the loved one is subject to vicissitudes

and death, unless it is recognized that he or she is safe in the hands of God? God planned and created that other and all his spiritual and physical beauty. God loves him even more than we do. It is God that gave that other to us in marriage and will hold the gift secure for us even after death. There will be pain in the death of him whom we love, but it will be a bearable and triumphant pain. We shall know that he is nearer to God and, therefore, nearer to us even than when he was on earth.

Often I have wondered how a devoted couple react to our Lord's words in St. Matthew 22:30: "In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

There is every reason to believe that the husband and wife who have loved each other will love each other more ardently and joyfully in Heaven. But the manner of their love will be changed into something far more intimate and wonderful, like that of the angels. There will be no desire nor need of marital intercourse simply because husband and wife will at last achieve what here they longed for. By a mysterious new dispensation they will know one another from within and share one another's transcendent joy. But, even in this world, as love deepens it becomes less exclusive. Though, doubtless, we shall be given a special and eternal gratitude toward him who, under God, first

awakened our love, that love will extend to all God's children. Not only husband and wife but all the inhabitants of Heaven will participate, each to the degree of his capacity, in the joy of all the others because of "the communion of saints."

The water at the marriage-feast in Cana was not annihilated but transformed. What in this world are sexual desires will be "sublimated," in the magnificent sense of "rendered more sublime." They will be raised to a higher order and utterly fulfilled by the inpouring of the Holy Spirit. And what is true of sex will be true of our other instincts. They all will be combined and together irradiated in that union with God which constitutes the very core of Heaven. In fact an article like this could be written about each of them.

Our wonderful, new resurrection body "is to share, by a certain redundancy of glory in the beatification of the soul." The sweetness, the joy, the ineffable peace of the spirit will overflow into the risen body, pervading it from toes to finger-tips. For (I Corinthians 2:9) "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard . . . the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

We have been given some powerful witnesses to help our faith. St. Matthew, in his seventeenth chapter, tells how Jesus revealed at the Transfiguration something of the glory of the heavenly state. We read also

(Acts 2:13) that at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit inundated the disciples, people thought them drunk with "new wine." It was new wine indeed; the intoxicating wine of God's love. And all through the ages mystics great and small have struggled to suggest to us something of the joy and the wonder of what we might almost call their foretastes of Heaven.

Do we begin to catch a glimpse of the underlying reason why sexual acts outside the appointment of God are sinful and abhorrent? It is not because sex is evil but because it is, in itself, so beautiful and good. It was created by God and it has, in addition to its legitimate function in this world, a stupendous and supernatural destiny. There are many valid reasons for purity but the one which seizes our imaginations most is that impurity is sacrilege; to use sex outside the divine intention is something like using the consecrated Chalice for a debauch or like trampling on the Host.

Sex and the Cross

For married and unmarried the goal is the same and the road is the same. We all are sinners and members of a sinful race; therefore the only road to Heaven is the Way of the Cross. We indicated a few of the particulars whereby marriage provides an element of the Cross. There are many others. But now we shall think

how the sex instinct occasions suffering to the unmarried. It would make dismal reading except for the fact that God can change sorrow into joy.

Women, from girlhood on, have their special difficulties which, as the strange but inspired symbolism of *Genesis* suggests, result from our racial disloyalty. They can become truly consecrated, like all other tribulations, by accepting them bravely and patiently as a share in God's work of redemption. So can the loneliness and apparent fruitlessness of lives which have never known the rapture of loving or being loved. Whether or not a person is under vows, he or she can offer the single state to God and He will bless it. So, too, the agony of unfulfilled sexual craving can be offered as part of one's cross; an agony known to many women and to almost all men.

Next, there are those to whom sex is altogether repulsive. With many of them the instinct has been repressed (forced down into the unconscious) without leaving any memory of the ugly or painful or violent and terrifying incident which, often with strange irrelevance, connected itself with sex. But our energies refuse to be imprisoned. If, however unwittingly, we lock sex in the cellar it discovers a dozen trap-doors to pop up through in disguise. It may manifest itself as an impulsion toward jealousy or irritability, cruelty, joylessness, self-hatred, depression, prudishness, scru-

pulosity, nameless terror, etc. Occasionally it leads to neuroses serious enough to demand psychotherapy. Usually, however, through sacraments and prayer, we can derive courage and love to accept and control these forlorn urges and offer them as part of our cross. Perhaps, too, once we are aware that our tendency to intolerance toward sex offenders may itself stem from sex, we shall be more understanding and merciful in our judgements. We may recall our Lord's gentle words (St. John 8:11) to the woman taken in adultery, after he had saved her from being stoned to death: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, sin no more."

So far as direct temptations are concerned, most people are attracted by the opposite sex, but some by their own. Thanks largely to modern psychology the latter are regarded with more understanding and sympathy than they once were. But this sexual twist (for which they may be in no way responsible) does not deprive them of their freedom and, consequently, of the obligation to fight their temptations manfully and the need of confession and absolution if they fail. And then there are the numbers of young people who fight lonely battles for purity; their fears enhanced, very often, by the completely mistaken notion that failure might lead to insanity. If those particular battles carry over into adult years it means, in one way or another, that a person is not yet fully grown up.

If there ever are sex sins of any sort to confess you need not fear what the priest will think of you. (Should you really want to know what he thinks, it is: "This person must love our dear Lord a lot, since he comes and confesses this hard thing.") A sense of shame attaches to sexual sins that is often absent from sins which are in some ways even worse; such as meanness, cruelty, contempt, etc., or lack of trust. It may be that someone was so overcome with shame that, long ago perhaps, he omitted to mention a sex sin in confession. The answer is easy. Go to confession again and explain that you deliberately omitted such-and-such a sin that other time. You will receive God's forgiveness and you then will be the happiest person on the globe.

I cannot suggest specific remedies for all the above ills. What would be helpful for one person might harm another. Our confessor is the one to prescribe spiritual medicines as our doctor prescribes for the body. They know us as individuals. But here are some principles which apply to everybody.

First Aid

1. Be honest. Reject such rationalizations as, for example, that extra-marital acts are not really sinful but only seem so because society has condemned them. Personally I think it would be an over-simplification to hold that *either* conscience or social convention

completely explains the other; they interact. But I do not think—I know—what the law of God is: *Outside of wedlock, all voluntary sex acts of any sort whatever are prohibited.* So are all deeds (petting, looking at suggestive pictures, over-drinking, etc, etc.) or words, or even the willing consent to thoughts, which weaken our own or another's resistance to evil. I believe that deep down in your heart of hearts you, too, know and accept that law and that you could not quite convince yourself to the contrary if you tried. It is infinitely better to keep up an honest fight, no matter how often or for how long a time one may be beaten, than to seek refuge in what one's deepest intuition knows to be a sham.

2. Distinguish between repression, which is a bad thing, and self-control, which is good. Repression (though usually automatic and unconscious) seeks to hide facts. Self-control, on the contrary, faces the facts of our nature, lifts them to God for His blessing and deliberately disposes them according to His will. When we repress the energies of our bodies they are a menace. But when, by God's help, we guide them (as a skillful rider his horse) our energies find full and constructive release. Repression is motivated by terror; self-control by love. It is when we have fallen in love with God that we joyfully order our lives for him regardless of the cost. It has been well said that chastity is not

secure unless it is joyous.

Have you ever met with the quaint notion that we should give rein to sex, now and again, "because it is like hunger, thirst or the desire to sleep, which all demand satisfaction?" It is very *unlike* those other cravings in one important respect. If a person does not eat, drink or sleep he dies very quickly. But you can prove for yourself, if you have not done so already, that you can live year in and year out in the best of health without sex acts of any sort. If you accept the pain of such self-control with open eyes, but also with loving joy, your mind as well as your body can be healthy. For then the energies of sex are freed to re-enforce your other powers in every wholesome activity.

3. Keep on. "The saints are the sinners who kept on trying." All men undergo temptations of some sort until they die. Whether one's special temptations are to lust or to cowardice or to envy, hatred, pride, we all fail from time to time, in thought or deed. Your own particular battle is for purity? Perhaps God will enable you to conquer it speedily; if so, you will have other battles to fight. But some people have to strive all their lives against a particular temptation. Should you have to do so, it is that by the very process of exercising His strength against temptation you will become pure with the strong purity of Christ.

Even our failures can be put to good use if we learn

from them our own utter impotence and our need of God.

He loves you tenderly and realizes your shame and sorrow in defeat. He also knows how often you have fought bravely and the many victories which you have won. No matter how frequent or serious your failures, make your confession, get back into the scrap and persevere. Provided you never forsake God and give up the battle in despair He will lead you to certain triumph in the end.

What do You Want Most of All?

There is one more pit-fall to consider, a curious and rather subtle one. It takes many forms but none so definite, perhaps, as when a penitent at the end of his confession says: "I am very sorry, firmly purpose to amend," etc. He sometimes doubts if he genuinely wants to amend; and asks if he ought to receive absolution. God will bless him for his honesty which, if he only knew it, answers his own question. For that desire to be honest at all costs is itself a part of his strongest wish. Almost at the outset we affirmed that our deepest craving, "whether or not we know it," is for union with God in love. But union with God means union with Truth, Beauty and Goodness; and goodness includes purity. The penitent can rest assured that, regardless of surface emotions, his basic desire

validates his resolution to amend.

Many psychologists now recognizes that religion is so integral a part of human nature that we cannot be "whole" without it. They will be still more realistic and almost magically successful in dealing with men's hearts when they realize, further, that the longing for God is basic; and that it is more powerful than all the merely natural urges put together.

What is it that you really want more than all else beside? Icecream is nice and so are mink coats; and beer and tobacco and baseball. But they are not what we want most. Neither are all those heavenly joys we were thinking about, apart from God Himself. What we most deeply long for is to be one with Christ; in His joy in Heaven, yes—but, meanwhile, in His sufferings upon earth. If there were space I think I could demonstrate beyond all question and from indications universally familiar that any one of us, granted the courage, and so long as redeeming pain is necessary, would rather hang with and in Christ on His Cross, in complete and loving submission to the will of the Father and on behalf of the souls of men, than have all the pleasures of either earth or Heaven. Our yearning for God usually is buried so far beneath the ephemeral but vivid impulses of our surface selves that we are all but unaware of it. Yet there have been moments in the lives of most of us, perhaps, when we could have

cried with St. Augustine: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."

Heart of the Bible

Like a golden thread the analogy of marriage to God's union with us runs through the Bible. At the beginning it shows man and wife to be one flesh. At the close (except for a four-verse Epilogue) the words are written: "The Spirit and the bride say come." The prophets paint the marriage-picture repeatedly; St. John the Baptist and our Lord Himself allude to Christ as the Bridegroom; through St. Paul and *Revelation* (not only at its close) God uses the analogy of marriage. Sometimes He speaks of us collectively as the bride; Israel is His darling, the Christian Church His beloved. Sometimes it is our own individual soul of which He sings.

Read the second chapter of Hosea. From verse 14 to the end is one of the most beautiful passages ever written. Be sure to remember the meaning of two key-words which our Bible leaves in the Hebrew. God says: "Thou shalt call me my husband (*Ishi*); and shalt call me no more my master (*Baali*)." As for *The Song of Solomon*, modern scholars agree that it probably dates from centuries later than Solomon and was simply a human love-song; or perhaps a series of little

love-songs strung together like pearls. That, together with the fact that it does not mention religion, has made generations of wise men wag their heads. We believe that Almighty God inspired the writers of the Holy Bible and guided the Church in their selection. Why, then, is there this secular love-song in the Bible's very midst? But now let me ask you another question. Be as honest as you can, for your answer will be a judgement on yourself. Which is closer to my idea of the true God—which, in a word, is more God-like—a Divine Being who never under any circumstances will have anything said or thought about Him except with awesome solemnity or One who inspires and then picks up a little human love-song and places it at the heart of the Sacred Book which is the written revelation of Himself?"

The trouble with us is that we are too little-minded to trust God, to hope for and expect great, lovely, "pleasant" things in Him, to believe that Love—sweet, blessed, understanding Love—and *strong, confident and altogether capable Love*—is holding each of us in His arms as if each were the only one; and also all of us together as a single organic group, Christ's body, His flesh, His bride.

However, the Bible speaks not only of God's tenderness but of His justice, His jealousy, His wrath. Our idea of Him would be whittled down to that of a

human lover if we did not balance it with the thousand other pictures God has given us, referred to at the beginning of this article. We must follow the Bible's lead and expand our idea to the uttermost; stretching our mind to include as best we can the concepts of God's majesty, His holiness, His infinite wisdom and His power. Then, and only then, may we remind ourselves that this stupendous Being who surrounds, sustains and pervades the whole created universe loves us more even than the bridegroom loves the bride. That is not fantasy but simple fact. God proved it when He took our humanity upon Him and died for our redemption.

Heaven knows that we have tried to get rid of His love. It was not only the Roman soldiers but ourselves, by our sins, who crucified Him. We mocked Him and scourged Him and spat upon Him; we nailed Him to the Cross and killed Him dead. Not content with that, we rolled a great stone against the door of His tomb; and sealed the stone and set soldiers to watch it. But He rose again and came back to us. It is hard to get away from Infinite Love, love which literally has no limit.

Post-Script

Do you see, now, what this article really is? It is a bit of a love-letter from God to you; to each of you,

individually, who reads it. We have just seen that He can use the simplest instruments. This time I am His pen. I am a clumsy pen and may have made clumsy blots. If so, forgive and forget me. What God says to you is that, despite your sins of any kind whatsoever, He loves you still and still He wants to transform you. He wants to purify you through the manifold disciplines of this life, that He may raise your natural love to love which is super-natural. He wants to change water into wine.