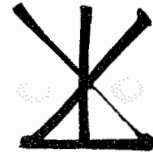


christian social responsibility



SEX
MARRIAGE
& FAMILY

A CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE



517
MARRIAGE
& FAMILY

Edited by Cedric W. Tilberg

*Commission on Marriage,
Board of Social Ministry,
Lutheran Church in America
1970*

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Man

Woman

Pregnancy

Family

God

Divorce

Abortion

Interreligious and Interracial Marriages



On October 20-21, 1966, the Executive Council of the Lutheran Church in America authorized the Board of Social Ministry to appoint a Commission on Marriage. The commission, "not to exceed ten in membership, and composed of Lutherans with knowledge and competence in the field," was to "study in depth the theological and ethical issues pertinent to sex, marriage, and family, and arrange for the producing of a publication in the Christian Social Responsibility Series, study reports and a draft of a social statement or statements for review and appropriate action of the Board of Social Ministry in preparation for the 1968 general convention of the church."

The creation of the Commission on Marriage was a major step in a process which dated from the beginning of the LCA in 1963. In response to a generally-felt need for a new examination of the subject of sex, marriage, and family, the statement on Marriage and Family which had been adopted by the United Lutheran Church in America in 1956 was

affirmed by the LCA in 1964, with the understanding that a new study would be begun. In the 1964-66 biennium the Board of Social Ministry arranged several consultations which considered possible study documents. These discussions and materials prepared the way for the Commission on Marriage.

The commission has included the following persons:

The Rev. Harold Haas, Ph.D., D.D., Dean of Wagner College, Staten Island, New York, *Chairman*
Kenneth H. Eckhert, M.D., Physician, Buffalo, New York
Avis R. Johnson, M.S.W. (Mrs. James A. Johnson), Social Worker, Chicago, Illinois
The Rev. Gerald K. Johnson, M.Sc., D.D., President of Illinois Synod, LCA, Chicago
Dorothy Jaeger-Lee, M.D. (Mrs. Robert E. Lee), Psychiatrist, Atlanta, Georgia
The Rev. William E. Leshner, Pastor of St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Chicago
The Rev. Obed B. Lundeen, Pastor of Augustana Lutheran Church, Washington, D.C.
Floyd M. Martinson, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota
The Rev. Lee E. Snook, Lutheran Campus Pastor, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

The Rev. Franklin E. Sherman, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Christian Ethics, Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, served as a member of the commission from April, 1967, to May, 1969.

The Rev. James P. Claypool, a member of the LCA Board of Parish Education staff with responsibility for family life education, participated regularly as a consultant.

The Rev. David M. Granskou, Th.D., Assistant Professor of New Testament, Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago; the Rev. Martin J. Heineken, Ph.D., Litt.D., Professor of Systematic Theology, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia; and the Rev. Aarne J. Siirala, Th.D., Professor of

Systematic Theology, Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, Waterloo, Ontario, made valuable contributions in a special theological consultation.

The Rev. Romaine Gardner, Ph.D., Professor of Philosophy, Wagner College, served as writer during the earlier stages of the commission's study. A document prepared for a prior consultation by the Rev. Carl E. Braaten, Th.D., Association Professor of Systematic Theology, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, was a major resource for the work of the group.

In addition to his participation in the theological consultation mentioned above, Professor Heineken assisted significantly in the writing of major portions of this report.

Board of Social Ministry staff service has been provided by the Rev. Carl E. Thomas, M.S.W., D.D., Executive Secretary; the Rev. Cedric W. Tilberg, D.D., Secretary for Program and Leadership; the Rev. Franklin L. Jensen, D.D., Secretary for Social Concerns; and Samuel M. Baker, M.F.A., Assistant Secretary in Study and Program.

The Board of Social Ministry Committee on Marriage, chaired by the Rev. William H. Lazareth, Ph.D., Professor of Systematic Theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, joined in one meeting of the commission and has made many valuable suggestions in the development of this report.

Others have contributed in various ways to the commission's work. To all of them, as well as to those named, grateful appreciation is expressed.

The commission has held seven regular meetings, one interim meeting, and a special theological consultation. Because of the complexity of its task, it sought and received the permission of the Executive Council of the church to report to the 1970 convention rather than the 1968 convention specified in the constituting resolution.

As the project proceeded, it became apparent that no document could be written that would truly represent the

thought of all the participants. The flux in both the theological and the cultural situations alone makes this impossible. It is likely that individual members of the commission, as well as other participants, would take exception to some statements or prefer different emphases at certain points. The report, however, does represent a general consensus on some of the things that should be said at this time. There is no pretense that all the important issues in the area of sex, marriage, and family are raised in the pages which follow, or that the issues raised are resolved. The discussion on these pages and the wider discussion it may stimulate are the things of primary value. A large amount of documentation and a bibliography suggesting scholarly areas of study would be beyond the purpose of this report.

It should be noted that this is primarily a report to the Lutheran Church in America. The situation of its constituency in the United States and Canada, therefore, has been kept especially in mind.

The material in this document has been prepared to stimulate thought and discussion. It is for information only. It is in no way to be construed as an official statement or policy of the Lutheran Church in America or of its Board of Social Ministry.

W. K. B. C. J. R. H.

The problem of Christian address to contemporary human experience embodied in sex, marriage, and family is difficult and perplexing. The following discussion is deliberately limited in scope and tentative in style. It is not the intention of this report to provide a breadth of historical, sociological, or theological analyses of sex, marriage, and family which can be found in abundance elsewhere. Instead, the attempt has been made to state, and in some cases to elucidate, certain cultural and theological perspectives that bear on the subject under discussion. The cultural analysis and the theological discussion are set down as the context out of which judgments on specific issues of sex, marriage, and family are to be made.

This report rests firmly on fundamental Christian convictions about the activity of God in human life and about the nature and destiny of man in an existence created and redeemed by God. At the same time, a certain tentativeness about making specific ethical judgments seems proper. Basic data from medical research and technology as well as from psychological and sociological research are still being gathered. We seek to make specific ethical judgments even as we are in the process of seeking to understand the factual bases of such judgments. Even more, new medical technology (e.g., the pill) or new social arrangements (e.g., social security) may create quite a different context within which specific ethical judgments must be relevant. The so-called "sex revolution" is a symptom of such underlying change.

The Christian community faces an especially vexing task in trying to speak to the contemporary problems of sex, marriage, and family. In a rapidly and profoundly changing culture, new facts are pouring in and new issues are being raised at a rate that makes it difficult to absorb them in any coherent patterns. Under the impact of a changed context, the church itself has been changing some of its historical ethical judgments (e.g., divorce, contraception). This process has taken place, neither as a repudiation of past judgments nor merely as a response to changing public opinion. Rather, it is due to two things. First, it is a serious attempt to get at the fundamental concepts and relationships that lay behind earlier judgments. Second, it is a recognition that the context of aspects of human life can change so radically that specific ethical judgments must sometimes be turned upside down if their essential meaning is to be preserved.

It should also be noted that we are living in an era of rapid theological change. We have not been accustomed to such pluralism as characterizes the theological enterprise today. The ferment is challenging and probably in the long run creative. We must, however, either embrace an ethical

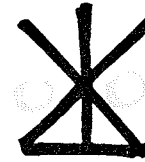
openness or be forced to it by contemporary theological flux. The task is, therefore, theological in a far more profound sense than that of applying accepted concepts and formulations to new social situations. Theological concepts and formulations are themselves part of the necessary investigation.

This report seeks to deal with sex, marriage, and family on three levels: 1) the descriptive; 2) the normative; and 3) the regulative. While these are inevitably intermixed, it is important to try to keep them distinct in our thought. The findings of the psychological and social sciences are essentially descriptive. They seek to set forth the facts and the interrelation of facts that describe the actual situation. The normative in the context of this report consists of a fabric of theological concepts that are in harmony with essential biblical faith. The regulative is the specific guidelines or judgments that take into account in a reasonable way the testimony of the descriptive and normative.

It must be admitted that it is often hard in practice to distinguish fully between the normative and the regulative. Regulative guidelines, judgments, or laws have often been considered as theological norms in the history of Christian thought about sex, marriage, and family. Later developments have often caused us to realize that some such judgments must be thought of as regulative and subject to alteration precisely to preserve that which is theologically normative.

There is great confusion about sex, marriage, and family in contemporary society. Attitudes and actions range from pornography, playboys and playmates, to prudery. There are openness and freedom and also suffering and tragedy. Christian churches cannot claim to be unaffected by such confusion; nor can they, on the basis of their faith in God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies human life, yield to it. It is the viewpoint of this report that human life is not simply flux. There are continuities in the human situation that derive from the nature of God and his activity in human

life. Such continuities are essential to the preservation of human life. As these are recognized and affirmed, we are able to make Christian ethical decisions with freedom in the present and an openness to the future.



SEX

MARRIAGE

& FAMILY

THE CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL CONTEXT



The impact of culture on fundamental aspects of human life—the understanding of life's meaning, values, and morality and the forms of institutional arrangements—is profound. It seems important, therefore, to set down some observations on contemporary culture and on dominant patterns of sex, marriage, and family in contemporary culture. Some of the particularly acute questions can then be raised in summary fashion.

Characteristics of General Culture

It is beyond the purpose of this report to seek a full description of the general culture emerging around the life of modern man. Strings of adjectives can be used to describe it; innumerable implications can be drawn from each description. Cultural analysts, however, use a number of key words which can, at least, evoke something of the temper of the general cultural situation as it affects sex, marriage, and family.

1. Contemporary culture is urban, industrial, mass, and bureaucratized. Urban areas of increasing size and complexity constitute the environment of more and more people. Since production is largely industrial, cities tend to grow around and support the industrial system. Both industrialization and urbanization bring people together in large masses. These processes of concentration have contributed to many of the vitalities and possibilities of our times. They have also led to many kinds of big systems surrounding the lives of individuals, for people must be dealt with in the mass if they are to be reached at all. In such situations, it

is inevitable that specialized bureaucracies develop in order to facilitate the entire process.

2. Contemporary culture is scientific and secularistic. Both knowledge and values tend to be judged in these terms. Religious ideas and eschatological views of life, while not necessarily dismissed, have diminished influence on personal and social decisions.

3. Contemporary culture is pluralistic and relativistic. Through the exposure to urban life, the impact of the mass media, the broader knowledge of other cultures and sub-cultures, the average person comes to realize the existence of different philosophies, values, and moralities.

4. Contemporary culture is open to the future as well as reliant on the past. Technological accomplishments have turned science fiction into accomplished fact within the short span of a single lifetime. There is in some circles apparent inhospitality to the systems and structures of the past. Appeals to authority, based on interpretations or usages of the past, often are not highly respected. The future is, however, tinged with threat as well as promise, making it difficult to rely on the uncertainties of tomorrow.

5. Contemporary culture, particularly through its technology, has put new powers in the hands of man. Contraceptive technology is one such power affecting attitudes toward both the personal relationships between the sexes and the structures of marriage and family. Genetic research and technology promises to give even newer and stranger powers.

Any culture is far too complex a phenomenon to be identified in a few paragraphs. All kinds of exceptions can be taken to the generalizations. Even so, the generalizations are more representative of the cultural situation of modern man than the exceptions. The task now is to look at the place of sex, marriage, and family within the general culture.

The Family in Contemporary Culture

The Nuclear Family and the Kinship Network

Much has been said in the past about the lack of a kinship family system in North American society. That is, there is little meaningful family contact other than among the husband, the wife, and their children. To many the only kin unit of significance is this nuclear family, the immediate family. It is the normal household unit in the United States and Canada, the unit of residence and the unit whose members rely on a common basis of economic support. Among all the family relationships the marriage partnership is the most intimate relationship in the North American kinship system, and the parent-child relationship is the second most intimate relationship.

The concept of a modified extended kinship system may serve as an alternative to the isolated nuclear family as more accurately describing the American situation. This system covers families bound together by affectional ties and performing supportive functions.

With marriages occurring at younger ages and with increased longevity, family unity is affected by the increase in overlap of years in the three generations—grandparent, parent, and child. In the 1600's grandparents did not live to see their children's children born. As the expectation of life increased, the lives of grandfathers overlapped their grandchildren's lives by two years in 1712, by three years in 1772, by ten years in 1784 and by 27 years in 1941.

Though the multi-generational household is not the usual pattern of family living in the United States and Canada, it is not uncommon to find a parent of one of the spouses or even a sibling or a cousin residing with the family. The three-generation household is usually a short-term or temporary arrangement.

The Family and the Economy

In the past, there has been a great deal of interchange between the family and business enterprise. As late as the time of the American Civil War, new enterprises often began as family businesses. Today the corporation, not the family, has become the dominant functioning entity in the economic system. Today the majority of small family businesses—laundries, insurance agencies, restaurants, drug stores, bottling plants, lumber yards, and automobile dealerships—are not on a continuum with corporations. They are vital in that they service an economy, but they are not engaged in primary industry.

The contemporary family, viewed in economic terms, is chiefly a consumer rather than a producer. Producers contrive wants through advertising to induce the homemaker and other members of the family to spend rather than to save. To spend what they have not yet earned requires a change in attitudes as well as in overt behavior for persons reared on some version of the Puritan ethic of hard work and frugality. Installment buying is used extensively by families in the middle income group. They exhibit faith in the expanding economy, believing that tomorrow's income will pay for today's purchases, eliminating the need for self denial. They save little.

The abundance produced by the corporate economic system is a major factor influencing family life. For example, with approximately 6% of the world's population and only 7% of its land area, the people of the United States produce and consume one-third of the world's goods and services.

There are, however, many families still living in poverty. This may be "case poverty," traceable to some characteristic of the family afflicted, or insular poverty in which almost everyone in a particular area is poor. All such families could be taken out of a state of poverty without taking goods and services away from others in order to do so. Technology can produce the additional goods and services needed. This situation, however, is yet to be realized.

There is much current discussion and concern over the culturally and economically deprived family in general, and the poor black family in particular. The black family, since the time of slavery, has survived devastating socioeconomic conditions. Yet it has survived, and it continues to assist and fortify its members in dealing with the vicissitudes of daily life. What the nature and function of these hard-pressed families will be in the future depends in large part upon the socioeconomic conditions under which they are required to live.

Working Men and Working Women

In an industrialized corporate society, as in Canada and the United States, the point of articulation between the family and the economic world is the family member who is both a member of the nuclear family and the holder of a job in the economic system. The major breadwinner has both a role in the occupational system and a role in the family. The status of the family in the community is determined more by the level of the jobs the breadwinner holds than by any other single factor, and the income earned is commonly the most important source of the family standard of living and its style of life. Though the breadwinner is generally the man of the family, often today the woman is taking over the role or at least sharing it. However, the homemaker role is still the overwhelmingly predominant one for married women with small children.

The existence of large numbers of wives and mothers in

the labor force raises the question of the effect of their working on their families and marriages. No very definite conclusions can be determined on the basis of present empirical studies. There are many factors affecting the relationships within the home; whether or not the wife is employed outside the home is only one of these factors.

By 1961, one-third of North American married women were in the labor force. In 1970, the proportion of married women in the labor force will be about 40%. Reasons for this movement of women into the work force are numerous. Economic necessity is a factor. So is the desire to earn more money beyond basic need. Technological advances have contributed both to simplifying work in the home and to opening new jobs to women. Smaller families and the spread of an equalitarian family ideology are also elements influencing women's entry into the labor force.

In general, a woman's job tends to be qualitatively different from that of a man, and not of a status which seriously competes with the position of the husband as the primary breadwinner and status giver. It appears that more women will play the employed role noncontinuously than will be continuously employed. Despite considerations granted by employers, the employee role tends to be an inflexible and dominant role representing a major structural change in a woman's way of life.

The Family and External Control Systems

In complex, differentiated societies like Canada and the United States the primary structure charged with administrative function is government. Voluntary agencies, such as the church, also perform administrative or polity functions for those under their jurisdiction. The family has interplay with two major external systems that impose control. The control of one, the state, is mandatory; the control of the other, the church, is voluntary.

Since the family is a structure of society having to do with

disciplined sexual behavior (the control of sex expression, reproduction, child rearing, and relationships between sex and generational groups), it falls under the control of society's ultimate agency of discipline, the state. Family law reflects values of the society. Completely effective control of sexual behavior by the state is not possible; coitus and reproduction are biological processes and not dependent on state sanction for their performance. In privacy legal obstacles can be evaded.

Legal sources reflect the fact that the structure of the family has changed from a father-controlled system to one based on equality of the parents. Development of family law from 1850 to the present, for instance, reflects the emergence of the married woman as a legal personality. In general, the disabilities imposed upon her under common law have been removed by legislation or judicial option. The child still occupies nearly the status he had under common law, although legal developments are contributing to the emergence of the child as a person in his own right. Exceptions to his inferior legal status are already found in the support laws. The child's legal right to support from both his parents is now recognized. Furthermore, the prevailing standard for awarding custody in child-custody cases is the best interests of the child.

Despite accumulated regulatory and welfare legislation passed by the various state legislatures and by the Congress over the years, the United States does not have a national family policy consensus on a core of family goals toward the realization of which national program and policies are directed. The law does not define a family, for instance. There are married couples, nuclear families, three-generation households, broken nuclear families, unmarried persons, widows and widowers, and some extended families. This wide variety raises problems for the formation of broad policies. Programs must be formulated that support broken families without discriminating against intact families, and

that assist old people who want to live with their children as well as those who do not. The church is a deterrent to the development of national family policy in that a national family policy would come in conflict with varying positions of the three major religious groups. The churches have an interest in national family policy, but they do not agree on what the details of the policy should be.

Family policy of the state and family policy of the church are not always in agreement. The state presumes to interpret and administer the law of the land; the church presumes to interpret and administer what is conceived to be the law and the will of God. The church family policy is based on the Word of God, the interpretation of the Word, and church tradition. Significant texts related to the family or sexual relationships are Genesis 1:27-28, Genesis 2:18, Genesis 2:24, Genesis 3:16, Exodus 20:12 and 14; Psalms 127:3-5; Matthew 5:27; Matthew 19:9; Mark 10:9; I Corinthians 7:39; Ephesians 5:22-31; I Timothy 5:8; Hebrews 13:4.

The churches have felt it within their province to exert influence over marriage and the family by promulgating doctrine on the marital relationship, by encouraging marriage of believer with believer, by establishing rules for the marriage ceremony, by fixing permissible grounds for separation and divorce, by prescribing regulations as to the remarriage of divorced persons, and by the exercise of discipline upon those guilty of irregularities in their sex lives. Not only has the church aspired to influence directly the families of its members, it has also taken measures to secure general regulations affecting marriage and divorce by bringing pressure to bear on civil authority.

Some parents assume that a happy family relationship and religious faith are identical. One hundred suburban parents report that growth in religious faith was best stimulated within their families by recreation together, vacations, grace at mealtime, and discussion of behavior problems in the family. Bible reading and worship were placed far down

the list and were preceded by many other activities.¹ In a study of a Canadian community, parents showed rational concern for the child's spiritual life. Religious activity, like that of the school, appeared to serve to gird the child with a minimum of spiritual armor which he could shed easily in favor of other defenses should it seem to become obsolete or cumbersome for him.² Denominational distinctions mean little to parents who seek congenial fellowship within the community. Families find it convenient to unite with whichever congregation has its building located along their traffic pattern as they drive out of their residential area. Jewish and Roman Catholic parents as well as Protestant parents sometimes send their children to the nearest Sunday church school, regardless of its creed, because it is conveniently located.

The presence of three major religious groups (including the great number of Protestant denominations) and the spirit of individualism work to break down the denominational loyalties of Americans and Canadians. Many families, however, take a stand for their particular denomination.

Some, but not many, describe the church as a redemptive society—the people of God sharing Christ's mission to the world. It is the institutional view of the church, however, that prevails.³ People see church primarily as a building with an employed staff and a scheduled program. It is a bundle of organizations, a mass of activities, and a crew of volunteer workers engaged in about the same basic activities as other character-building agencies. In addition, the church is often seen as a teacher of morality. Many Sunday school teachers teach every lesson moralistically. Justification by

¹Roy W. Fairchild and John Charles Wynn, *Families in the Church: A Protestant Survey* (New York: Association Press, 1961), p. 138.

²John R. Seeley, R. Alexander Sim, and Elizabeth W. Loosley, *Crestwood Heights: A Study of the Culture of Suburban Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1956), p. 216.

³Fairchild and Wynn, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

faith may be propounded from the pulpit, but righteousness by works is often taught in the classrooms.

Some view the church as instrumental, useful chiefly for things beyond itself. Church membership can improve one's mental health; it can open the way to a desirable social status in the community, to job advancement, or to the development of a more desirable neighborhood. Viewed as a policing organization, the church appears to many as a good thing to have—like savings banks, swimming pools, or the city dump.

These views of the church and its purpose vary from family to family and even within the family as well. There may be a difference in outlook between fathers and mothers in regard to the church. One of the most striking differences is that there is greater church interest manifested by women.

There is a widespread impression that the totality of religious homes constitutes a religious nation. The level of sociological sophistication involved in this thinking is comparable to a view which would hold that the fiscal policies of the national government should adhere to the economic principles on which the family budget is operated.

The concern with the family and the almost complete disregard for other systems in society is dubious strategy for the church to be following.⁴ The church seems to have accepted uncritically the proposition that the family is the basic unit of society. The family can be regarded as a basic unit mainly in a psychological sense. That is, it is important in the lives of its individual members. As compared with the state and the church and the economy, the family is not organized to be a powerful social influence or force. Although the church has singled the family out as a strong unit in society, the church should not try to influence only the family. It needs to be the conscience of other forces as well.

⁴Peter L. Berger, "The Second Children's Crusade," *The Christian Century* 76 (December 2, 1959), p. 1399.

Marriage in Contemporary Culture

Marriage is extremely popular with North Americans and has grown in popularity over the years. The average age at first marriage has been going down. In the last United States Census (1960) the median age was 22.8 for grooms and 20.3 for brides. There is evidence of an increase in the proportion of church weddings over the generations. In earlier generations it was fairly common for weddings to take place in the home.

The goals of marriage are different from the goals of family. Major goals of marriage are love, companionship, and personal happiness of two adults; the major function of the family is the raising of the young.

Sexual companionship is a major marital function. Not duty, but desire, companionship, and the search for expression and happiness have become the motives of sexual conduct today. Both husband and wife have come to expect that intercourse will be frequent, pleasurable, and a major contributor to marital happiness. There are signs that both the contemporary church and the state are coming to appreciate the importance of companionship along with the "procreative" function of marriage. Satisfying sexual involvement with the spouse is important to marital success.

The genius of technology has provided ways of separating the conceiving function of coitus from the love-making function by providing chemical and mechanical means of conception control. As a result, this technology has made marriage a *de facto* reality apart and distinct from the family. Most couples become a family as well as a marriage; they apparently feel that the full expression of their sexual roles calls for the production of offspring. Reliable contraception techniques and emphasis on the need to counter the population explosion may result in smaller families and more childless families in the future. There are evidences of the desire of married couples to retain the marriage as a

functioning entity even if they choose not to raise children. By voluntarily limiting family size, couples find it possible to enact family roles and marriage roles without necessarily sacrificing the one for the other. The transfer of many functions previously performed in the home to other systems in the community has played an important part in releasing time for marital functions. The fact that many married women seek employment outside the home (with the launching of the children from the home) may indicate that marital roles have been permitted to deteriorate during the child-rearing cycle, that marital roles are not as rewarding as occupational roles, or that it is possible to combine marital and other roles.

A progressive loss of satisfaction in marriage appears to be the consequence of the passing of time. People cannot continue to live at the high emotional pitch characteristic of the first months of marriage. Men suffer more disenchantment in the earlier years of marriage than do women; with women it appears to be a more gradual process. For many, marital satisfaction tends to be heightened by the fulfillment of the desire for children.

A loss of certain types of intimacy has been noted in the later years of marriage; confiding, kissing, and reciprocal settlement of disagreements become less frequent and more individuals report themselves as being lonely. Personal adjustment and personality characteristics appear relatively unaffected by the process of disenchantment or loss of intimacy.

Not all marriages that are characterized by disorganization—the breakdown of interaction patterns of the spouses—disintegrate in separation or divorce. Permanence is a goal of marriage in America. Couples who are unable to work out a satisfactory marriage adjustment often continue to live together. A commonly stated reason is the desire to give children a normal home life. But an unhappy home, though intact, is not necessarily the best milieu for raising children.

As a substitute for a lack of marital satisfaction, men turn to their jobs, liquor, or other women. (Extramarital affairs tend to follow rather than precede marital failure.) Wives turn to their children, jobs, religion, or community service. Of the two sets of substitute satisfaction, it appears that those of the husband are potentially more destructive, and husbands appear to be more severely damaged by chronic marital failure than are wives.

The American divorce rate reached an all-time high in 1946—17.9 per 1,000 married females 15 years of age and over. After 1946 the rate dropped steadily. The rate showed considerable stability during the 1950-1960 decade with slight declines during the economic recession years of 1954 and 1958.

Marital separation, often caused by desertion, is a major type of marriage disintegration. Both desertion and divorce constitute breaks in the marriage relationship, but the consequences of the two are not the same. In desertion cases the issue is not clear-cut; the whereabouts of the deserter may not be known. Commonly, no arrangements have been made by the deserter for the support of spouse and children.

If remarriage is a mark of adjustment, then many adjust to disintegration of their first marriages. The median length of time that elapses between previous marriage dissolution and remarriage is 2.7 years for the divorced and 3.5 for those whose marriage ended in the death of the spouse. It is not uncommon that subsequent marriages are more successful than first marriages.

More and more couples who become divorced have children; hence, many children are affected by divorce. The effects of family disorders on children are not clear. Actually, adolescents in broken homes may have fewer psychosomatic difficulties, less delinquent behavior, and better adjustment to parents than do children in unhappy unbroken homes. The relationship is a complicated one and requires additional research.

Sex Culture

The sexual morality of the past was conservative and restrictive of sexual outlet, but today emerging patterns challenging tradition are more permissive and accepting of sexual activity. Formerly there was a great amount of sexual ignorance and naiveté in an otherwise literate society. Now there is an almost universal involvement in sexual life and much variety of conduct.

The revolt against the traditional sex code has emphasized the right of the individual to break that code or any social code, the freedom to engage in sexual practices that the code would label as deviant, and the right to pursue the goal of personal happiness with a fully expressive sexual life integral to happiness. Those who hold a liberal view of sexual behavior prefer no legislation or social attitude against sex acts performed by responsible adults who do not use force or duress in their sexual relations, who do not injure their partners, and who participate in their sex activities privately.

As evidence of a growing liberalism, leaders of youth believe that most parents accept some form of sex education for their offspring. It seems that parents prefer it, however, without emphasis on sex as an interpersonal relations skill and without instruction in rationale for and techniques of conception control.

To understand teenage sexual norms, it is crucial that one understand the custom of going steady. When the boy and girl are going steady, permissiveness-with-affection tends to become the standard of morality. Affection becomes a key justification of the sexual act. Couple members are not immoral in their behavior in their own eyes; their conduct is based on what they regard as an affectional relationship. The girl who is known to consent to premarital coitus with a variety of boys, however, loses her reputation as a "nice" girl, and most boys in her own socioeconomic class no longer consider her a desirable marriage partner.

Young couples are not chaperoned or supervised in any systematic way and most sexual involvement goes unheeded by adults. It is the consequences of sexual acts, particularly pregnancy and venereal disease, rather than the acts themselves which eventually awaken parents and legal authorities to the problems their children may be having with sexual involvements. Venereal disease has dramatically increased among teenagers.

The young person's eventual mate selection in the United States and Canada is by personal confrontation and personal choice. Parents and other responsible groups in the community generally have only indirect influence on the selection. It is still widely held that marriage should result only after the couple members are romantically in love with each other, but marriages resulting from romantic inclinations often lead to disillusionment for the participants and for others.

An important element influencing sex culture today is the prolonging of youth dependency. At the same time as many young people are devoting a longer time to education they are probably maturing more quickly. This is in contrast to the situation of former generations who became full members of society at an earlier age.

Further Observations and Questions

The social facts of the present time pertaining to sex, marriage, and family pose many questions. A few of these social facts can be summarized in the following statements.

1. At times and places in human experience, marriage and family have been *central* social systems incorporating within themselves much of economic and political life. In contemporary culture, they are *adaptive* systems. They maintain vital psychological and socializing tasks but are, in most other respects, much less important for social functioning than has been the case.

2. Women are playing a different role in contemporary

society, one characterized by freedom, independence, and public participation. Concepts of sexuality, relationships between the sexes, and the institutional ordering of these relationships are all deeply affected by the options contemporary culture offers to women. There is considerable ferment among women about all these concerns.

3. The increase in the average age span of persons living in contemporary society is a significant factor impinging on sex, marriage, and family. The change from under forty to about seventy anticipated years of life means more than additional time. A whole network of new relationships is involved.

4. Overpopulation, to the extent that it may threaten human existence, challenges traditional thoughts and values about reproduction.

5. The involvement of most human beings in some form of sex "outlet" is a fact that must be given serious consideration.

6. The ever-improving techniques of contraception have created a new situation as far as sex, marriage, and family are concerned. The "pill" is a symbol of something new in human experience; namely, effective control over conception. It is quite possible, perhaps even likely, that in the not too distant future conception will take place universally only as the result of a deliberate decision. In place of the present necessity to take some form of deliberate action to prevent conception after coitus, it seems possible that conception control may be almost automatically and universally applied with deliberate action needed to cause conception after sexual intercourse. Science, of course, is not at this point. Even present contraceptive knowledge is utilized in limited fashion. Yet the impact of present contraception knowledge and techniques is great. It affects concepts of sexuality, relationships between the sexes, and the structures of marriage and family.

7. Genetic research will create new possibilities and prob-

lems. Much of this research is too recent for us to feel the full force of the ethical issues it is raising. The possibilities of sex determination, manipulation of heredity, growth of a fetus outside the womb are all under investigation. It is likely that the list of ethical issues related to sexuality will continue to grow longer in the years immediately ahead.

Sex, marriage, and family have been closely interconnected entities in most of human experience. The connecting link was the birth and nurture of children. The *separability* of sex, marriage, and family is much more characteristic of contemporary life. Some of the cultural factors mentioned above have made this separation possible. Because of conception control basically, plus the social and economic independence of women and the increased average life span, there is no inevitable or necessary connection between sex, marriage, and family. Marriage is entered into for its own sake, not necessarily so that a family might be founded. Whether the latter takes place or not may depend on conscious decision. The conceptual basis of marriage has shifted from procreation to companionship.

A similar tendency to separate sexual intercourse from marriage is also evident. Marriage is, of course, still the socially sanctioned framework for this relationship. It is, however, not only actual practice that departs from this. New norms seem to be arising that would validate sexual intercourse even apart from the institution of marriage. The "new morality" has to do much more fundamentally with the attempt to establish such norms than with new practice.

These social facts of our time must be taken into account as Christian ethical judgments are made. Although such judgments are rooted in the whole Christian meaning of life and not simply in the realities of a given culture, the particular cultural context of human life is important if any kind of relevant word is to be spoken. Has that context changed so fundamentally, for example, that a search for the will of God in sex, marriage, and family also involves a

re-examination of past ethical formulations? To some extent this has been taking place.

Questions pour in from every side. Does the biblical injunction to be fruitful and multiply have validity under all conditions? Under one set of conditions, it undoubtedly means human survival. Under different conditions it may mean human extinction. The church in general reversed its ethical judgment on birth control chiefly because its continuing concern for human life requires such change. Older judgments were suited to a former context. A new context requires different ethical judgments lest the Christian concern for human life be violated. Is a doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage an absolute which admits to no exceptions? It is certainly a right and vital doctrine under the kinds of conditions where the welfare of women and children and even the stability of society could be affected by the stability or instability of marriage. Is it a necessary doctrine under quite different social conditions where the impact of divorce is not as harmful as it once was? Prompted largely by its concern for persons as over against structures, the church in general tended to modify its stand on divorce. Is it necessary, in the Christian view, that sexual intercourse be confined to marriage? Under conditions of inefficient or no conception control, such a teaching was probably indispensable as an expression of concern for social stability and the very quality of human life. Does the same judgment apply under conditions of effective conception control?

Such cultural relativity is an essential part of the thinking and feeling of modern man. To ignore it is to run the risk of being irrelevant. Neither can it be absolutized without the forfeit of important aspects of the Christian witness. Part of the church's task is to seek the essentials of the Christian understanding of life and of man and to explicate them in relation to sex, marriage, and family as these are experienced in contemporary society.



SEX
MARRIAGE
& FAMILY

A CONTEMPORARY
THEOLOGICAL
CONTEXT



2 SEX, MARRIAGE, AND FAMILY: A CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Retrospect and Perspective

More than two decades ago, Emil Brunner wrote: “. . . without being guilty of exaggeration, we may well maintain that the crisis in marriage presents the Christian ethic with the most serious and the most difficult problems with which a Christian ethic has to deal . . . For not only are we here dealing with the very foundation of human existence, but here, too, old ethical problems are condensed into a complex at one point, so that we are compelled to say: What an ethic has to say on this question shows whether it is any use or not.”¹

This is a formidable challenge to any ethical statement or system because the issues involved in sex, marriage, and family are an immediate part of human experience.

Only about two decades ago it seemed as if the main voices of Protestantism, and particularly of Lutheranism, could speak with one voice, not dogmatically, but with authority on the basis of a God-given revelation. Although perhaps an over-simplification, a summary of this fairly recent consensus can be given as follows:

1. An appreciation of man's sexuality, rejoicing in it while still being aware of the fearful possibilities of its abuse;
2. A recognition of marriage and family (whatever their particular forms) as part of the “structure” of God's creation, not only for the preservation of human kind but also for the human development of parents and children.

¹Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 341.

3. An affirmation of the nature of Christian ethical decision as based on conforming to the mind of Christ and doing God's will in specific situations, and rejecting biblical authoritarianism, code morality, and an ethic of principles. This affirmation included full recognition of man's sinfulness and God's grace. It also recognized that the specific situation always includes certain “givens”—the demands of the context of where one is at a given time and place and of certain basic, human, moral obligations, and the necessity of the role of just law.

Measured against the earlier years, these represented important “gains” which did not repudiate essential insights of the past but were meaningful for new aspects of human experience.

Within the span of a single generation, the situation has again changed to one of complexity with both reactions and counter-reactions evident. On the one hand, many are advocating extreme permissiveness in matters of sex. The clinical description of the sex act appearing in acclaimed literary works, on the stage, and on the screen (to say nothing of the pornographic material freely available on the news stands) has just about exhausted the possibilities. So books, the stage, and screen have taken over, making voyeurism a diversion no longer reserved for stag affairs or furtive peeping Toms. The very fact that the term “new morality” has been applied so generally to sexual behavior shows not only how “morality” continues to be connected primarily with sex, but also how sex-dominated our whole culture is.

This is the situation the church must face with all other

concerned human beings without getting hysterical. The talk of the "new morality" sometimes gives the impression that man himself has changed so radically that altogether new sets of values must be forged to meet a radically new and different age, as though there were no continuity in man's humanness.

On the other hand, there are those whose conservative reaction runs in deep currents in contemporary life. In matters of sex, their solution is merely to reiterate the old virtues and call for stricter laws and more discipline. This is another situation the church must face, for no simple repetition of what has been will serve present needs.

In between there is a growing number who reject both the advocates of the completely new and the upholders of the traditional. They want to break through the facade of outer conformity and pretense to what has integrity. Consequently, they, and especially many of the young, listen to the cries of the prophets of old calling for "righteousness" and "shalom." They accept Jesus as the rebel denouncing the hypocrisy of the "religious" establishment, driving the money changers from the temple, siding with the woman taken in adultery, eating with publicans and sinners, and then being nailed to a cross for it by that establishment. They have great difficulty accepting the Christ of some churches which seems only to confirm the status quo and to bless their comfortableness. Against this caricature they object and rebel—not to become wanton and libertine and self-indulgent, but to search for integrity and genuine concern for all fellowmen.

The church considers itself bound by a given revelation and by mighty acts of God in history centering in the Christ—acts to which the Bible normatively witnesses. This is the point of reference for all the church says and does; it provides both the impulse and standard for the thought and action of the church.

It does not follow that either the dogmas of the church or

its ethical principles can be forever fixed. The formulations of the past cannot simply be repeated, for they are not "timeless truths," but are addressed, like all the affirmations of faith, to a situation. They are human attempts to be faithful to the divine commission and possess all the limitations of finitude and the demonic distortions of man's sinfulness every such attempt involves. Restatement, therefore, is constantly necessary; misunderstandings need to be corrected; attempts at enlargement need to be made. Sometimes entirely new approaches have to be developed which, however, do not lose their continuity with the past.

The church is on pilgrimage under a living Lord and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It looks simultaneously back upon the crucial event that gave it birth and forward to the fulfillment of God's purposes. The newness in question does not represent a complete break with the past. It is always the newness of the creation (a re-creation) which restores and fulfills that which is broken, distorted, and unfulfilled. The world for all its brokenness, is a fit theater for the realization of God's purposes. It is altogether unrealistic to think of this world as open to any and every possibility without any given structure. While the metaphors of that which is in flux rather than that which is fixed should receive pre-eminence, the times also require a commensurate emphasis on that which does not change with every wind. This is an ordered universe or no purposeful action would be possible.

The church must speak with proper humility and in the mood of repentance. Nothing is to be gained by merely defending all past teachings and actions of the church (altogether these must be seen in the perspective of their times) or by not recognizing that sometimes the church has been unwilling to listen to and understand those who had something to say about sex, marriage, and family.

Biblical faith cannot sit in judgment on matters which are within the competence of scientists to discover. The natural and social sciences are essentially descriptive and

not normative. The various "scientific" descriptions of man all have certain presuppositions and are sustained by "convictions" not derived from the observations themselves. If, however, man is his own question, then he cannot from within himself solve his own problems no matter how astute his observations. If at this point no revelatory answer is given from an existentially transcendent point of reference, then there is no reason whatsoever for the church to continue to exist, except perhaps to cater to the "religious man."

The church lives in the faith that such a revelatory answer to the problem of man's existence has been given. It is from this perspective that we need to reiterate, expand upon, and modify the same three issues with which the church dealt in earlier times; namely, (1) the ambiguity of sex; (2) the God-given secular reality of marriage and family; (3) the Christian mode of ethical decision, particularly as it applies to sex, marriage, and family.

The Ambiguity of Sex

In Christian thought, sexuality has been given its rightful place in God's creation. It is *good*, not only for procreation, but also for the full and joyful expression of one's God-given humanness. This assertion is not a reluctant concession to the times; it is persuasively argued on the basis of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, especially because of a renewed appreciation of the Old Testament witness.

Created by God as a sexual being, man lives out his sexuality in every moment of his life, giving expression to it in manifold ways. The ordained purpose of sexuality and its varied possibilities of expression are good. Sexuality contributes to the enrichment, enhancement, and fulfillment of human life.

Sexuality is rich with creative possibilities but, like all man's endowments that lift him above the animals, is capable of the most fearful abuse. Its expression, therefore, needs

to be curbed by the right kind of personal discipline, laws, and social restraints. This is the ambiguity of sex. In its essence it is good; in its expression it can both create and destroy at the deepest levels of human life and personality.

Sex and sin are not to be equated. "Sin" is a basic misrelation to God (overestimation or underestimation of man's finite freedom) and, therefore, also a misrelation to the self, one's fellowman, the non-human world. Because of the pervasiveness and power of man's sexuality, this misrelation manifests itself in peculiarly fearful ways in that sphere. Thus, even while sex and sin are often profoundly intermixed in human experience, they are by no means synonymous.

The sexual role is not simply "given" as with animals. It is one that needs to be learned and that will be shaped differently in different cultures. From Christian perspective, the sexual role is set within the framework of an I-Thou relationship in which there is respect for the personhood of each other and neither is merely used for selfish satisfaction. This is not to neglect or deprecate the element of finding satisfaction in the other. It is rather to emphasize that this element finds its proper place only within the larger dimension of full personhood.

The meaning of the sex relation in coitus is exemplified in the fact that the same word "to know" is used in the Bible for the relation of God to his chosen people (to whom, incidentally, he is everlastingly faithful) as well as for the most intimate union of the sexes. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). "Adam knew his wife" (Gen. 4:1). This is a far cry from the use of the four letter word which frequently has the connotation of "using" and "being used" for nothing but selfish gratification.

In biblical faith, there is also the affirmation that sexuality is only for this life; it is not an ultimate phenomenon (Matt. 22:30). It points to a fulfillment of human life beyond his-

torical existence (I Cor. 2:9). This also indicates that man should not deify sex, but should preserve a sense of humor about his sexuality which he shares with the rest of creation. This is necessary; but, at the same time, he should preserve a sense of "mystery" and "sanctity" before this awesome force.

Marriage and Family as Secular Reality

One cannot talk about sexuality without being precipitated into a consideration of marriage and family. It is true that in the past the particular modes of marriage and family with which we were most familiar were "normalized" and projected as standard on the rest of the world. Recognition of this as a fallacy should not lead us, however, to another fallacy that sexuality exists in human life without structures. The most fundamental structures tend to be those of marriage and family. These may be expressed in a variety of forms.

From theological perspective, marriage and family are regarded as structures of God's created order. "God's created order" needs explanation, however, lest it be regarded as some kind of static order of the past into which all of human life is moulded. Creation is not to be understood as a once-and-for-all act of the past but as an ongoing activity by means of which God constantly sustains the world as a fit theater for the realization of his purpose. There is a dynamic quality about creation. It cannot be apprehended only in terms of what once occurred. It must also be perceived in terms of what now is and what seems to be emerging.

Bi-sexuality must be recognized as one of the "givens" of life, however modified this may be by biological or cultural differences. Man is not self-sufficient as an individual but exists as human only in community. Among humans, although there is equality, there is no equality (sameness); by their differences, including the basic sex differentiation,

men are always set down in a situation of mutual interdependence. Marriage and family are also "givens," however variable the forms they take in different cultures.

Marriage and family not only preserve the species but also constitute basic "structures" in which man's humanness is creatively nurtured. The human infant leaves the security of the womb and is dependent on the care of parents and the community. Interactions of parents and children, as well as of parents with each other and children with one another, are important components of humanness. Marriage and family have the function both of continuing the race and of establishing a pattern of interrelationships which are rich with creative possibilities.

There is an essential connection between the Christian faith and the kind of personal interrelationships involved in monogamous marriage. *From a theological perspective, a life-long, covenanted union of one man and one woman, based on fidelity, is indicative of the creator's intention for a cradle of community.* By this is meant that one man and one woman promise to be faithful to each other in all their relationships, including the sexual. Within this cradle of community, other things being equal, the maximum possibilities for the development of persons (man, woman, child) in their interrelationships are offered. This is the import of Jesus' words, "in the beginning," and concerning the "one-flesh" relationship (Matt. 19:3-9). This concept does not refer to some conditions of the past made normative for all subsequent times or some legalistic notion that because two people have had intercourse they are knit forever. Far more fundamentally, it refers to continuing conditions and possibilities of the human situation. Monogamous marriage has been continuously supported by the Christian tradition. It is in harmony with the Christian conception of life's nature, meaning, and purpose.

There must be caution, however, against elevating into a theological concept the monogamous form of marriage,

especially as manifested in the typically middle class family of our culture. Alternate arrangements may sometimes exist which are more beneficial to individuals and society than a relationship which has the full form of monogamy but is humanly destructive. Christian concern is deeper than form; it focuses upon the quality of the interrelationships. Although form is always important in human life, it is, however, less important than the dynamics of interrelationships.

Marriage and family are secular matters in the realm of God's creation. Thus, there is no "Christian marriage," and there is no "Christian family;" but there are Christians who, along with others, enter into the God-given estate of matrimony and establish families. The essence of marriage is that a man and a woman take each other in a covenanted relationship. This is, however, a relationship that goes beyond the two persons immediately involved. The community has a stake in it, and must regulate marriage practices by law (including the casuistry necessary for applying general principles to particular situations) for the well-being of all, protecting the rights of the individual as well as the community. The church will in its normal ways seek to influence the culture, but it must not impose on society at large the particular standards it sets for its own members.

What has been said to this point can be summarized in broad outline as follows: (1) Marriage and family are secular structures created by God for the preservation of human life. (2) The inherent structures of marriage and family take various forms in human life. This is true not only in different cultures but within any complex culture. The existence of some kind of structure is, however, the point to be made theologically. (3) Marriage in its essence can be viewed theologically as a covenanted relationship between a man and a woman. Marriage (and family) have effects which go far beyond the individuals immediately concerned. They are, therefore, inevitably surrounded by social sanctions, and by regulations devised for the protection of indi-

viduals and the community. (4) There is an essential congruence between the Christian view of life and monogamous marriage and the kind of family relationships it engenders. This does not mean that this form of marriage depends on Christian faith. It is part of the secular reality of human life and is, for whatever reasons, the fundamental form that structure tends to take in human life. The perspectives, dynamics, and logic of Christian faith lead, however, to monogamous relationships.

Marriage and Family as Christian Calling

There are within Lutheranism as well as elsewhere two divergent views. Starting with Jesus' affirmation of the Genesis phrase, "one flesh" (Matthew 19:5), there follow two lines of thought. According to the first, in I Cor. 6:15-20, "one flesh" is identified with copulation, including that engaged in with a prostitute. "Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For as it is written, 'The two shall become one (flesh)'" (I Cor. 6:16). In this view, all "carnal knowledge" (the physical act of coitus), no matter under what circumstances or with what motives, in its very nature affects the participants ontologically. So there can be no casual, perfectly indifferent intercourse like having a coke together if you both happen to like cokes. This line of thought asserts that the physical act of copulation *per se* always has a profound effect on the participants. Hence there develops the view that the "one-flesh" relation is legitimate only within the given structure of monogamy and a publicly recognized marriage. The result is a rigorous, uncompromising, legalistic attitude.

At least this view takes seriously the fact that human beings are not just animals and that the most intimate self-disclosure and mutual sharing of the self in sex on a *human* level can and does deeply affect the persons involved. Nevertheless, actual sexual practices around the world and through the years call into question the extent of the

“ontological” involvement. There is too much diversity among human beings and too much diversity in sexual practices to warrant the conclusion drawn. In countless instances the sex act is actually performed as casually as a handshake and with about as much effect as any other release of tension.

The other line of thought leads first to Ephesians 5:21-23 where the relationship between husband and wife is compared with the relationship between Christ and his body, the church. The concept here is trans-sexual (which includes sex) and describes a communion of beings who are inescapably sexual beings. Each is the recipient of the freely bestowed gift of the other in his whole being. Such a relation can never be casual or superficial since it involves the entire person. It must have its own integrity. In it the promise of fidelity is paramount. Biblically it is based upon the covenant relation between God and Israel to whom he betrothed himself forever. This covenant relation between God and Israel is transferred to Christ and his bride, the church. In this view, it is the responsible, interpersonal relation that matters, not primarily the legal contract.

This is in harmony with the church’s tradition. The essential theological thought of the church has never insisted upon the necessity of an ecclesiastical ceremony to validate a marriage, or for that matter upon a legal contract. The essence of marriage is that two people voluntarily take each other and promise fidelity. In a Christian marriage ceremony, the pastor or priest functions only as a witness and as the spokesman for the congregation as it joins in prayers and intercessions on behalf of those who take each other in marriage. This concept of marriage is obviously broader than coitus; it involves a responsible personal relationship with its own integrity which cannot be hallowed more by a priestly blessing. Nor can it receive its integrity from the legitimacy of the legal contract. Although such a view conflicts with the prevailing legalistic, moralistic attitude toward marriage, there should be no question about its being in

accord with the mind of Christ. It certainly leaves open the possibility of a responsible, personal relation outside the legal contract.

Marriage as public witness and legal contract is, of course, vitally important for the ordering of human life. It is necessary that social order be upheld. Marriage as a social system includes the relationship of persons, the public witness, and legal arrangements. The Christian accepts all of these as a public expression of his intentions, while not losing sight of the fact that the essential nature of marriage is the faithful relationship of a man and woman to each other.

Consequently, as has already been stated, marriage is a “secular reality” and is not specifically Christian. Yet Christians who enter into it do look upon it from the perspective of a covenant relationship. This covenant is not the same as the covenant of God’s grace in which God freely accepts sinners and is everlastingly faithful; nevertheless, it reflects the covenant of God’s grace.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that the church might be presented before him in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one (flesh). (Eph. 5:25-31).

The glory of this relation consists in a life-long covenant of fidelity between one man and one woman in which each gives to and receives from the other freely.

Although this view issues from the Christian tradition and puts specific obligations upon the Christian, it does not mean that those outside the institution of the church should not also reflect a measure of this same responsible personal

faithful relationship. The gift of sex is the same whether the persons are Christian or not. Both Christians and non-Christians remain sinners in the marriage relationship and the Christian can never be so presumptuous as to claim a higher "perfection." This is for God to judge. Every marriage needs to be covered by God's grace.

The Christian's "call" is, in the New Testament, univocal and clear: it is the call out of darkness into light, from being no person to being God's people, from not having received mercy (I Peter 2:9-10). But now that a man is thus "called" he is a part of "the priesthood of all believers" and is to serve the neighbor with the gift he has received. By the word of forgiveness and renewal he is freed to put his energies into the world's work that needs to be done by those who are God's "masks." This cannot be done in general; it can be done only in concrete, specific situations, in the places where particular men and women are standing—not in special holy places. "Everyone should remain in the state in which he was called" (I Cor. 7:20). That is to say, every man will find opportunity to live his life as a Christian, in whatever state the "call" comes to him, even under the most untoward circumstances, not excluding, of course, making use of the opportunity for betterment of the situation (I Cor. 7:21).

This leads then to the exercise of the Christian "calling" within marriage and the family where each person first meets his neighbor. Since every person is born of the union of one man and one woman, there is no need to look far away for startling and attention-arousing occasions of service. God has provided the place to begin. In the family there is a basic God-given place of nurture, a school of community, an occasion for development of personhood as a little Christ to the neighbor.

Especially with changing family patterns, there is no greater challenge than within the family itself. What does not happen here is not very likely to happen elsewhere. As already stated, it is not a matter of trying to preserve or

restore the typical middle class family, but of working creatively under present conditions, even, for example, in the frequent situations of today of absent fathers, working mothers, or parents without partners. Who knows what new patterns of family living may emerge under the guidance of God's spirit? The point is that here is a primary responsibility which must not be shirked. The responsibility rests not only upon the parents but also upon the children. It should be kept in mind that the commandment to honor father and mother is the first commandment with promise, "that your days (i.e. the nation's) may be long in the land the Lord your God gives you" (Eph. 6:2; Exodus 20:12). The stability and longevity of a people depend in part upon what happens in the family.

Many persons in our society remain unmarried. The reasons are varied. Some find the conditions of single life better suited to their temperaments, tastes, or situations. Some are single because they have not had the opportunity for marriage, at least under conditions that appeal to them. A few choose to remain unmarried for the sake of concentration on some particular form of service. No exaltation of the single or the married state, one over the other, is proper. It is a matter of gratitude when the conditions of life make possible free and open choices by persons. When such choice is not possible (for example, in the case of those who are single against their will and desire), church and society must be ready to respond to solutions with creativity and understanding.

Marriage is, in this view, not a "sacrament," either in the Roman Catholic sense of the infusion of graces or in the evangelical sense which equates the "sacrament" with the fulness of "the Gospel." A person is not "saved by God's grace from the just judgment of God" when he marries, but he who remains a sinner is freed by God's grace and empowered by it to meet the responsibilities and participate in the joys of marriage. Nor does marriage somehow con-

tribute to the progress man makes in his ascent to sainthood and worthiness of the "beatific vision." But it remains in that sphere of sacred secularity within which man must live out his earthly life. He is freed by the Word and sacraments for his life within marriage and the family where he meets the neighbor whom he is to love and serve.

This by no means excludes God from this whole area. It is *not simply after the incarnation* that God became involved in the "material world" hallowing it by his presence. *He hallowed it when he made it*, brought it forth by His Word, and then continued his "hidden" presence in it, giving men all his powers and blessings, never directly but always through these worldly media. So God gives life as well as joy through the union of the sexes. The fact that the "secular" was freed from the presence of demons, capricious gods, and even one supreme "interfering" God, and was instead given its own sphere of ordered "independence," does not mean that the creator God withdrew from that world. The phrases that Luther used for the openly *declared* presence of God in the fullness of his grace "in, with and under" the earthly elements in the Lord's Supper apply also to the *hidden* presence of that same God "in, with and under" the whole created world, whose presence, however, may also take the form of "wrath." This was so from the beginning and continues to be so. There is reason enough, accordingly, joyfully to celebrate the presence of the creator in "the masks of creation" and therefore also in the marriage bed without confusing creator and creature and worshiping the creature rather than the creator. This must be done in full recognition of the fact that the "gracious redeeming God," after all, is not found there until He has first Himself found man in the time and place of the encounter through His Word.

Although marriage thus remains in the sphere of sacred secularity, for Christians it is a "mystery" comparable to the unending love of Christ for his one bride, the Church (Eph.

5:32). It is in this analogy, as has been stated, that the sanctity of marriage culminates. It points up the place which "agape" is to have in this most intimate relation as in every human relation.

The Several Realities of Love

Marriage in our day tends too often to be based on sexual attraction and romantic love. As a result, it is frequently doomed to begin with. Love has several realities; erotic love is only one.

There is no question about the rightful God-given place of "eros" in the sexual relation. The need and desire of one person finds satisfaction in the fullness of what the other has to give, not only in the ecstatic sensual delight of coitus but also in the whole range of complementary relations between the sexes.

Erotic love alone cannot sustain the enduring relationship that is the essence of marriage. Those who are romantically in love mean to love each other forever and suppose that no one else in the world could possibly fulfill their particular need. Such fervor is soon disillusioned, both by the vagaries of the lover's desire and by the imperfections of the beloved.

There is also need for the dimension of love which is simply for the sake of the other and which makes sacrifices and forgives. This element of love, "agape," is important to all human relationships; it is particularly significant in the intimate relations of marriage where the demands of the one on the other are so great. It is at this point especially that those who are consciously "new beings in Christ" (II Cor. 5:17), who live in daily repentance, who are nurtured by God's Word and sacraments, and who can draw on the love (agape) with which they were first loved (I John 4:19), should have resources of grace not possessed by others. Yet Christians can never claim that they alone have access to God's free gifts. God is not bound, and He is the ceaseless fountain of all love, wherever it manifests itself.

Another reality of love is that in which persons are attracted to each other as kindred spirits, with similar likes and dislikes. Such love, "filia," is the love of friendship as exemplified in St. Augustine's ode:

All kinds of things rejoiced my soul in their company—to talk and laugh and do each other kindnesses; read pleasant books together, pass from lightest jesting to talk of the deepest things and back again; differing without rancour, as a man might differ with himself, and when most rarely dissension arose find our normal agreement all the sweeter for it; teach each other or learn from each other; be impatient for the return of the absent, and welcome them with joy on their homecoming; these and such like things, proceeding from our hearts as we gave affection and received it back, and shown by face, by voice, by the eyes, and a thousand other pleasing ways, kindled a flame which fused our very souls and of many made us one.²

There are, therefore, several realities of love. It is essential that all of them come to bear in marriage. Each has its proper role in enhancing the goodness and fulfillment of this basic human relationship.

Underlying all is "the libido," the deep seated sexual nature of man, so pervasive and powerful. It is theologically important that the testimony of the biologists and psychologists concerning the sexual nature of man really be heeded. Otherwise, we are readily tempted to become moralistic and judgmental. Heeding such testimony, we see much that is branded as willful "sin" in a different light and much that poses as "righteous indignation" unmasked as to its hidden motivation.

In the Christian understanding, marriage is fundamentally based on *fidelity*. This consists of a declaration to be faithful—to provide the setting in which love can grow. It is characterized by a responsibility to assist the other to grow to his

or her fullest potential in life. It has the components of trust and forgiveness. Only fidelity can form the basis for an enduring union that can stand up under all the difficulties that are bound to come.

If it is difficult to get this across to a culture that is obsessed with sex and romantic love, it is all the more difficult to get across the notion that insistence upon fidelity as the basis of marriage does not then mean that marriage partners must remain together under any and all circumstances, even to the ruin of all concerned. On the one hand, if there is no genuine fidelity, all the glory of human friendship, to say nothing of marriage, is gone. What can responsibility for the wife or the husband as a person possibly mean, if whim and fancy, lack of courage, and fear of hardship and suffering are allowed their way? Without the promise to love, comfort, honor, and keep each other so long as both shall live, no marriage can fulfill its potential. It becomes nothing but an "arrangement of convenience" as long as it lasts and should be labeled that and not be solemnized by the church as a "holy estate."

On the other hand, it is folly to insist that marriage is actually indissoluble, even though it is begun under circumstances which doom it from the start, and no matter what may subsequently destroy the human beings involved. In addition, such an assertion is not in accord with an evangelical ethic.

The Christian Mode of Ethical Decision

There is a substantial measure of consensus on the Christian ethical approach as distinguished from code morality or an ethic of principles. The defects of naturalism (the good life is according to nature—the sub-rational vitalities are deemed good while it is the reason which corrupts) and of idealism (a basic trust in reason to discern universally valid principles though they take a variety of forms) have been recognized.

²F. J. Sheed, trans., *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York: Sheed and Ward Inc., 1943), pp. 69-70.

By way of contrast, the Christian ethic is a way of living in the faith-relation which, while it includes the law, can never be reduced to a code morality or an ethic of principle. The Christian conception of "the good" differs from every other conception at this point; namely, it cannot be defined in terms of principle at all. What is "good," therefore, can never be abstractly determined in advance of the concrete situation and without taking into account the motivation.

The "good" consists in always doing what God wills at any particular moment, however difficult His will may be to determine. One is not guided authoritatively by reason, or by hearing voices, or by conscience, or by a prefixed code—either the biblical commands or canon law. Instead of having a set of rules which one must slavishly obey, one has a model to which one must conform. This model is the conduct of God himself as it was revealed in His acts, particularly in Jesus, the Christ. "We love, because he first loved us" (I John 4:19). "Be ye, therefore, imitators of God as beloved children" (Eph. 5:1). "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away, all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17). This does not mean a literal imitation, of course, but it does mean having the "mind of Christ" and doing in a given situation what would conform to the mind of Christ in that situation. It must be clear that this refers to the conduct of the reborn Christian, and to the higher righteousness of the kingdom of God which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). It is not an attempt to set up a universal ethical system. Nor is it to be confused with "situation ethics." To avoid this confusion it is best to speak of "an evangelical ethic—Christian decision without a code."

It is particularly important to recognize that "love" is not a new abstract principle. Nor are the paradigms of love given in the Sermon on the Mount to be made into new rules or principles. Concretely, it is God himself who defines love in His actions, and this love will, therefore, take on

the greatest variety of forms, depending on the situation. It will sometimes even appear as its opposite. Love has ten thousand times ten thousand ways.

Two fundamental issues need elaboration. The first is the question of how an individual Christian is to be motivated and guided in his daily decision. The second is the problem of how human life is to be regulated by just law. The answers to both must be derived from a mode of relationships between God and man, and man and man, rather than from some ethical principles.

The motivation and guidance of the individual Christian always arise at levels more profound than the letter of the law. This is recognized in the summary of the law known even before Jesus (Luke 10:27). It is paradigmatically illustrated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7; Luke 6:17ff.) and then actually lived out in His life so that He inevitably came into the conflict with the legalists which brought Him to the cross. St. Paul's summary, after he had been radically torn loose from his self-righteous legalism, was:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill. You shall not steal, You shall not covet" and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:8-10).

A prime example of what is involved in the fundamentals of such a Christian ethic is found in Luther's explanation of the Ten Commandments in his Small Catechism.

First of all, he makes everything rest on the introduction to the Ten Commandments which is not a commandment but proclaims the gracious action of God to which the Christian is expected to respond. "I am the Lord, thy God" (who has graciously delivered thee from bondage). *Therefore*, thou shalt have no other gods before me, thou shalt

not be an idolator, worshiping, giving your allegiance, trust, obedience to anyone or anything else. We should fear, love, and trust God above all things. This sets up the right God-relation of trust, proper fear, and love, and out of that kind of relation all human conduct is to flow. The rest of the commandments, therefore, give only a few basic examples of how the proper fear and love is to show itself. We should fear and love God and not do this but do that—by way of illustration. So, for example, the fifth commandment is fulfilled not simply when we do not actually take a life, but only when we fear and love God and do not hurt nor harm our neighbor in his body but help and befriend him in every bodily need (Cf. Matt. 5:21ff.) It is significant that the one explanation which is put in entirely positive terms is that of the sixth: We are to fear and love God so that in matters of sex our words and conduct are pure and honorable, and husband and wife love and respect each other.

This kind of interpretation of the relationship between man and God, and man and man, is to result first of all in the recognition that one *is a sinner* and that there is *no one* who stands before God in his own righteousness. This kind of basic recognition will make all the difference in the world in the way ethical problems are approached, particularly in matters of sex where the temptation to be self-righteous and judgmental is so great. It will alter completely the attempt to find in every instance the “right” (apparently sinless) way in order to justify oneself. If every act is recognized as *the act of a sinner* whose intent is not to justify himself but in all humility only to do God’s will, there will be not only greater openness toward the other, forgiveness and acceptance, but also much more flexibility and less rigidity. *The concern will not be to justify oneself but to seek the genuine well-being of the other.*

This orientation will make it impossible to judge the breaking of a rule by itself a sin. For example, what makes

extramarital intercourse a “sin” is not the fact of having sexual intercourse outside whatever the accepted rules for a “legitimate” marriage may be in a given society. Rather it is that a “sinner” has committed the act, and that there is neither the proper fear and love of God nor regard for the fellow human being involved (not only the partner in the sexual intercourse, but others who are deeply affected). The homosexual should not be judged a “sinner” because of his homosexuality, but because he is a “sinner” in the same way that everyone else is, viz., because he is alienated from God, self, the neighbor, the world.

The fact that all men are sinners and need constantly to be covered by forgiveness is not to obscure the fact that sinners do also commit sins, not just by breaking a rule, but by not fulfilling God’s will of love in a particular situation. Hence, premarital and extramarital sexual intercourse may well be—and more frequently are than not—acts of sin, done by a sinner, because they betray God’s love in harming the interpersonal relationship. Lust (the burning desire to possess and use another simply for one’s own gratification) is and remains one of the seven “deadly” sins along with pride, covetousness, envy, gluttony, anger, sloth. All these are “deadly” because they work destructively back upon the self and destructively out upon the neighbor. They do this, however, not in abstraction, but only in particular life situations. Obviously, human beings, whether inside or outside a legally contracted marriage, are not immune to the stated manifestations of sin. Lust may run rampant in the privileged marriage bed.

The second thing that is to result from this interpretation of the law is the recognition that the full context of every individual decision must be taken into account. This is quite different from making love the only absolute. In every situation there are certain inviolable “givens.” This is again where the so-called “structures” come in. We are dealing not with man in the abstract but always with a particular

man and woman with "given" gifts and responsibilities living in specific situations. A person is a man, a woman, a child, a teen-ager, a youth, an aged person; he is a father, mother, or child, with the roles not reversible and the mutual obligations not the same. At the same time as he is engaged in politics, arts, play, he may not only be the breadwinner for his family, but may also be involved directly or indirectly in the production and distribution of the goods necessary for human life. This imposes certain definite obligations: for example, for the producer to see that food is wholesome and uncontaminated and for the truck driver to see that it gets to the market on time and unspoiled, at the same time as he may have conflicting responsibilities as a husband or father. Or a person is a teacher or a learner and these roles are not reversible. Or a person is a policeman or a soldier with the necessary task of enforcing order. There is also the "standing place" that goes with being engaged in art, in play, in entertainment. These all have integrity of their own and are determining factors in an ethical decision. Regimented play upon command of the drill sergeant scarcely fulfills the purpose of free, spontaneous, joyful "play" which is engaged in for its own sake and not because it fulfills some ulterior purpose. This is particularly important for the sexual life.

Man is also related to the earth, the material world, the whole non-human creation, which is not there just to be exploited. The plundering of the planet is unethical not primarily because this will somehow kick back and harm the plunderer, but because it destroys the integrity of the good earth itself, which has the right just to be, and also because of God's mandate to man, as in God's image, to have dominion over the earth. This, of course, creates the conflict between man's use of the earth for his survival and the earth's right to survive on its own.

This list could go on and on. The point is to show how tremendously complex any situation is, how there are always

certain "givens," how impossible it is for the rigorous moralist to avoid a tragic conflict of duties (A *tragic* conflict is only between two equal "goods;" a choice between a higher and a lower good is not tragic). From a Christian point of view, since man *is* a sinner and does not just commit sins, there is no act in which man does not need to be covered by forgiveness. This must remain a basic affirmation.

It would be a misunderstanding of the previous paragraphs to assert that because man is a sinner anyway it makes no real difference what he does. It is chiefly through what man does that the quality of human community is improved or harmed. Christian ethical decision takes seriously the sinfulness of man and the complexities of human existence. This perspective leads to greater understanding of specific acts; it also requires that they be judged in light of God's purposes for human life. An unwillingness to brand every act of extra-marital sexual intercourse as a "sin," for example, does not imply that such acts are relegated to a realm of indifference. To the contrary, it is the task of Christian ethics to provide guidance for judging the nature of acts within specific situations.

A third essential element in the situation is, for the Christian, the Christian fellowship. While every Christian's decision remains strictly his own before God, he can never arrive at such a decision in isolation but only within the context of the Christian Church as the body of Christ, people who are members one of another.

How then, very specifically, does a Christian make a decision, moving from faith to facts? The trouble with trying to give an illustration is that it can never actually reproduce the concrete situation in existence and so tends to be treated again as an abstract rule. Nevertheless, an attempt to give specific guidance must be made. Much of man's life is lived according to routine, habit, or ritual, and it is not true that every moment of life is fraught with crucial decision. This emphasizes the importance of the building of

good character and proper habits, while at the same time it makes all the more important those moments when a crucial decision must be made. It is also important that one's character not be so congealed by habit or addiction to a rigid code that a free personal decision is no longer possible.

This makes the whole outlook (for the Christian "the new birth in Christ") of primary importance. Whenever a Christian is confronted with a crucial decision (e.g. whether or not to sue for divorce), he must try to take all the factors into account. He begins with his own sinful involvement and all the factors of the past leading up to the crisis, plus the "given" structural elements we have mentioned, including such matters as the "standing place" in life, the revealed will of God, and the current laws of the land. He must consider his relationships to those who will be affected (in the case of divorce, the children, respected elders, and others who may be involved). He must try as best he can to determine both the immediate and long range effects of his decision. Every alternative possibility should be explored (in the case of divorce, the avenue of forgiveness and reconciliation as well as patient, suffering submission for the sake of the others who would be hurt).

All this cannot be done alone. A person must seek the advice of others, those expert in certain fields (e.g., medical doctors, psychiatrists, lawyers) as well as members of the Christian community (not only the pastor, but other members of the priesthood of all believers). Then there is no help for it; the final decision is one's own in personal responsibility to God and the neighbor. *In this context the particular must be allowed precedence over the universal.* The individual before God must bear the burden of his own decision as he must die his own death. Without this recognition of the individual before God in his particular place the whole Christian ethics of personal, responsible decision breaks down. This, however, implies the possibility of a responsible decision. Therefore, the particular situation

needs always to be taken into account. An immature child or one grown up in years but for some reason defective or irresponsible would have to be treated differently. Another approach is required to the child who lacks the necessary knowledge and maturity and who needs to be under the "discipline" of the more knowledgeable and mature. This is the area for a growing freedom and personal responsibility which is so difficult to manage. In addition, the necessity of the continued use of the law (traditionally the political use) even for the mature person must always remain as one of the factors in the situation. Otherwise, antinomianism and anarchism, which are utterly unrealistic, result.

This is perhaps the best that can be done in the way of instructions in advance of an actual situation. This will by no means satisfy those who want the answer in advance and who are afraid of the venture of faith. Such persons ask for the security of a codified solution. The Christian should be free for another course, not so as to be able to indulge himself, but so that "God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven."

It should be clear that the foregoing has been dealing with decisions that must be made by individual Christians. Its essential point is its radical freedom of decision within all the discernible factors of a given context. The proffered choices are not those between being a sinner and being righteous. Man is a sinner who is accepted by God through faith in Christ. His ethical decisions will reflect his condition. Ethical universals or principles are part of his situation. Individual Christian ethical decision always operates, however, at a deeper level of relationships in which there is a model to be followed, not merely a law to be obeyed. There is a particularity about individual Christian decision which cannot be encompassed by laws or principles.

Human life, however, must be regulated by means of "just" laws. This is a second fundamental issue. Such laws are always necessary because man is both finite (weak, im-

perfect) and sinful (proud and slothful—exceeding his limitations as well as not properly using his potential). Laws, whether they happen to be just or unjust, are always part of the given situation and cannot be ignored by the Christian or anyone else intent upon a responsible ethical decision.

Although laws can never be the *direct* expression of love (agape), they should be in the service of this love that seeks the well-being of the other person regardless of his worth.

A law necessarily generalizes and covers all cases of a certain kind. It cannot in its very nature be “particular.” The law, therefore, must be “just” in the sense of not being a respecter of persons. The law cannot “forgive” or make exceptions. It must treat equals as equals and unequals as unequals. Justice is blind, even-handed, balancing the scales. It must be so if it is to guarantee equally to all people certain basic rights, rationally discerned and constituting the wisdom of the ages, resting ultimately on the “golden rule.” The Christian has no greater insight into these rights than any other man who bears God’s image (in the Old Testament sense of that which lifts him above the animals and makes him God’s responsible representative upon the earth). It is these basic rights and freedoms which have been guaranteed, for example, in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Therefore, laws must always be flexible, subject to changing needs. Above all, every law requires a “casuistry” which tries to adapt it to the particular situation. Without this, the greatest injustices result from the strict application of a rule to all circumstances. Moreover, law, being quite impersonal, provides only the institutional framework within which there is freedom for persons to act. After all, the purpose of the law is only to serve the end of maximum human development and freedom.

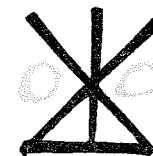
All this must then be applied to the laws regulating sexual behavior, marriage, and the family. One of the basic rights of man is the right over the sexual function. To deny this

right is to make a person the virtual slave of another individual or of the state. Rape violates the integrity of personhood. Yet no right is absolute since man is man-in-community. Consequently, there must be laws to protect and further the well-being of all. Marriage can never be a strictly private affair since it inevitably involves the community. The church cannot dictate such marriage laws; it cannot seek to impose by law an attitude and a relationship which in its very nature is not enforceable by law. For example, how could there be a law forcing people to fear and love God so that in matters of sex their words and conduct are pure and honorable and husband and wife love and respect each other? The church must, however, join with others in seeking laws which will provide the framework within which the sexual being can function with integrity. Here it is only too evident how much needs to be done to revise marriage and divorce laws—laws concerning contraceptives, abortion, prostitution, homosexuality, obscenity—to make them just and human.

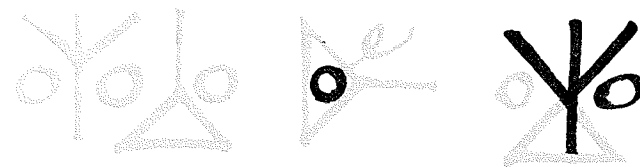
The church has no monopoly on information concerning marriage, family, and sex, for they are in the realm of “secular reality.” Nevertheless, the church does claim to have been entrusted with a revelation from God concerning man’s nature and destiny, which profoundly affects his understanding of and ways of dealing with sex, marriage, and the family. Therefore, the Church as institution, as well as through its individual members, is bound to join with others in framing laws which will allow for a maximum of freedom for responsible personal decision.

Statements on sex, marriage, and family, such as those in the third chapter, are not to be thought of as categorical laws or Christian answers to the issues involved. In accord with the theological position of this report they are regulative judgments or guidelines arrived at by seeking to take both the Christian faith and contemporary facts with utmost seriousness. As such, they form the anvil against which individual decisions must be forged.

The church has a two-fold task that is continuous in each generation. It must constantly seek to make clear how it views sex, marriage, and family, the interpersonal relationship, and the sanctity of life. This provides the ground for ethical decisions. It also reveals the evils of society that vitiate the possibilities of personhood. If there is no clear picture of what life ought to be like for all, there is little basis for protest against evils of any kind. Within this context, the church must also offer guidance on the specific issues that are faced in each generation in order to provide a Christian perspective on the always complex process of making individual decisions and of framing just laws.



SEX
MARRIAGE
& FAMILY
SOME CURRENT
ISSUES



3 SEX, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY: SOME CURRENT ISSUES

The ethical issues related to sex, marriage, and family are numerous and complex, and of genuine concern to nearly everyone. Despite the expectations of some people the church cannot express authoritative conclusions about all of these issues. Nevertheless, its teaching function requires that ethical judgments be offered on the basis of the best insights available from both the contemporary world and the church's biblical and theological heritage.

In earlier chapters this report has sketched some of the characteristics of present-day culture as they bear upon sex, marriage, and family. It has also developed a theological perspective of this crucial area of life and an evangelical approach to the making of ethical decisions. Thus what is presented in the first two chapters of the report is basic to an understanding of this third chapter.

It is often difficult or even impossible to apply biblical and theological norms to individual situations without falling into legalism. Individuals shy away from the painful struggle that often characterizes the making of serious ethical decisions. They find it hard to take stands which bring unpleasant consequences, and tend to want simple answers to intricate questions. Yet human life is too ambiguous and changing to be fitted neatly into any timeless laws, forms, or structures. Responsible living in a sinful world, however, is not possible without some guidelines governing man's "hardness of heart." In an evangelical ethic it is necessary to assert norms, admit that in many circumstances there will be deviations, and deal with each case in terms of "faith active in love."

In the following pages several current issues, chosen from many possibilities, are discussed. The treatment of those selected will illustrate the application of the evangelical ethic in relation to sex, marriage, and family.

Human Sexuality

Man does not merely have sexual relations; he is a sexual being. Sexuality is integral to the total person. A Christian, therefore, celebrates the reality of sex as one of God's good gifts. However, there is ambiguity in that sex has the capacity either to enhance or to destroy man's humanity. Man often finds himself at some point between license and restriction.

But because man is made for fellowship the interdependence of the sexes is the prototype for man's being—a "Thou" in relation to another "Thou." This means that the expression of human sexuality in intercourse is right and fitting within the context of certain kinds of interpersonal relations. Within such relationships sex serves to enhance life, while outside them it tends to distort life. The continuing problem is to perceive anew the shape and reality of these relationships. Under the pressures of our day, it is not particularly helpful or good to eliminate or restrict unnecessarily such interpersonal relations.

The new openness toward sexual expression resulting from the changing of social and religious proscriptions, together with the widespread use of "the pill" and other effective methods and techniques of contraception, enables marriage partners to celebrate the reality of sexual intercourse freely and in the knowledge that it is right and good.

In marriage coitus enhances the meaning of life together and achieves its highest fulfillment and deepest meaning. The church has a responsibility to guide and teach persons to celebrate properly the gift of sexual intercourse within marriage. It is in this relationship, rooted in the covenant of fidelity, that the full capacity of sexual intercourse to foster real humanity, self-identity, and genuine intimacy is most likely to be realized.

On the other hand, not all intercourse within marriage is right and good. To suggest that sexual relations, in and by themselves, are the primary factor in determining the character of marriage is a mistaken assumption. The essential point is that marriage based on a covenant of fidelity—of which sexual intercourse is an important and normally accepted part—provides an optimum framework for growth and development.

In this light the church's role in relation to marriages is heightened. Precisely because the possibilities for developing full human maturity and sexuality are best within the context of marriage, the church undergirds this unit of society with institutional forms and rituals. More attention should be given to this part of ministry in the future so that the church's premarital instruction and counseling, as well as its symbolic rituals, adequately celebrate the possibilities for sexual fullness that are to be discovered within marriage.

Sexual intercourse outside marriage is a growing reality in our time. To state categorically that it is wrong is to come at it legalistically rather than contextually. Responsible guidelines need to take seriously the context in which persons find themselves. The strong assertion of this study is that a covenant of fidelity is normally expressed in marriage. This does not preclude the possibility of such a covenanted relationship existing outside marriage defined as a legal contract.

The existence of a true covenant of fidelity in these circumstances is extremely hard to identify. Relationships out-

side marriage often result in something less than a covenant of fidelity and do severe damage to the participants because of their limited possibility for success and their potential for harm. General approval, therefore, is not and cannot be given.

Furthermore, the practice of using sex as a commodity, a "thing" to be bought or sold, either personally or commercially, is destructive of God's good gift and the purpose for which it is intended in the context of a life under God. The exploitation of sex dehumanizes man and destroys his integrity as a person.

The church must deal with concern and understanding with persons who, for one reason or another, enter into relationships which do not fit the biblical concept of fidelity. It must be recognized that such factors as the cultural tradition of a people or the general social environment affect behavior in specific situations. This does not mean, however, passive acquiescence by the church in all such arrangements.

The church, furthermore, must minister to those who suffer mental and spiritual turmoil because of engaging in intercourse outside marriage, surrounding these persons with its fellowship and ministry, and mediating the Christian message of judgment and forgiveness.

The church must render its assistance to unwed parents and their offspring, helping them find resources to make wise decisions with regard to their future and that of the child. In some cases marriage may be the best answer; this, however, should never be an automatic solution. In other situations the proper course may be to place the child with a qualified social agency for adoption. In any case the decision should be made with the aid of a skilled and perceptive counselor who will work with the couple and with their parental families.

Homosexuality is another subject which must be considered in terms of the evangelical ethic.

The word *homosexuality* in its generic meaning, refers

to sexual attraction to a person of the same sex. For the purposes of this study, its use is limited to persons beyond adolescence who have an interest only in members of their own sex. To call a man or woman "homosexual" who has predominant heterosexual tendencies but has had a few homosexual experiences is highly misleading.

Homosexuality is found in the most diverse kinds of persons. The stereotyped image held by the general public fits only a small segment of the total. Furthermore, many experts believe that criminal actions, child molestation, and severe emotional maladjustment are not more characteristic of homosexuals as a group than they are of heterosexuals. A very large number of homosexuals live stable and socially useful lives.

Scientific research has not been able to provide conclusive evidence regarding the causes of homosexuality. Nevertheless, in the last decade or two the attitudes of churchmen have been changing noticeably, largely under the impact of increased knowledge coming from the disciplines of psychology and sociology, medicine and psychiatry.

In our society homosexuals are victimized by prejudice and discrimination. Bias against them is deeply-embedded in the thinking of a large number of people, including Christians. This bias is responsible for the retention of long-outmoded and punitive laws which in most places treat homosexual acts as felonies punishable by imprisonment for periods of from one year to life. Discovery could mean for the homosexual legal penalties, loss of his job and his status in church and community, and damage to his family and friends. This predicament makes him a ready victim of blackmail and of unfair treatment by police and the courts. It is no wonder that he is driven to associate with groups and go to places which he might prefer to avoid.

Homosexuality is to be regarded as a deviation from the norms which are expressed in this study. Nevertheless, homosexuals must be seen as persons and treated with justice.

Canadian and United States laws dealing with homosexuality should be reevaluated, removed from the criminal code, and in many cases changed. Exceptions would be such situations as aggression against minors and other persons, and offenses against public decency. The private morality of freely consenting adults, however, is not an appropriate subject for legislation or police action, a fact now officially recognized in Canada. It is essential also to bring about understanding and acceptance of homosexuals in the church and the general community.

Marriage

Marriage, understood as a covenant of fidelity under God, provides the highest potential for creative fellowship and joy, for the nurture of children, for mutual support in times of trial, and often for service to other people and the larger community. It is not simply a legal transaction which can be broken when the conditions under which it was entered no longer exist. It is an unconditional relationship, a total commitment based on faithful trust.

How do we evaluate a covenant of fidelity? Its validity can be confirmed in various ways. One of them is to make it public, to have a ceremony—a public earnest of a private intention. This is in harmony with the church's tradition, but the church does not insist on a ceremony. When one takes place, the pastor or priest functions only as a public witness. Nevertheless, the church views the ceremony as a fitting occasion to pray for the blessings of God as the partners marry each other. Furthermore, the personal covenant should be certified by a legal contract, a step, indeed, that is concerned with the protection of the man and woman, their children, and society.

It is necessary to stress again the distinction between marriage as a covenant of fidelity before God and marriage as a legal bond before men. A matrimonial arrangement may be valid in terms of civil law and public recognition yet not

be a covenant of fidelity. Conversely, a marriage may exist as a covenant of fidelity but not as a legal contract.

This distinction must be retained also in the consideration of the breakdown of a marriage. A marriage may deteriorate or be destroyed even if it remains legally intact. In such cases husband and wife may deal with their frustrations in a variety of ways, e.g. becoming absorbed in work, social life, community service, church activity, travel or sports; seeking refuge in alcohol, drugs or extramarital liaisons. Sometimes, because the persons involved focus their attention elsewhere and go their separate ways, an unhappy marriage gives the appearance of reasonable adjustment. At other times, there is open conflict between husband and wife, frequent quarreling and even cruelty.

In a marriage built on fidelity this destruction is not as likely to occur. Nevertheless, given the power of sin and of natural human tensions, it can happen in such a marriage, too. This is why marriage must be worked at, nurtured, prayed for, and enjoyed.

All the interpersonal problems which endanger marriage must be of urgent concern to the church, whether the marriage preserves an external tranquility or terminates formally through annulment, legal separation, or divorce.

Divorce

Divorce must be viewed in this larger context of the breakdown of relationships. To single out the legal action as sinful in itself is to obscure the evangelical insight that man is a sinner in his basic stance toward God. This misrelation with God bears fruit in misrelation with himself, his fellow-man, and his environment. An act is sinful (sin is always before God) because a sinner performs it, and does so without a right fear and love of God and without proper regard for his fellow human beings.

There are situations in which getting married may be a sinful act. There are other situations in which getting a

divorce may be more responsible than staying together, or in which divorce may even have rehabilitative effects. To suggest these possibilities is not to deny that divorce often brings anguish to everyone involved. But Christians must direct their attention to the brokenness which destroys human relationships with or without action in a civil court. In dealing with such brokenness the church is called, not to take a stand based on a legalistic rule, but in love to help the individuals involved toward an adequate perception of their problems and toward mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. It may be that a thorough examination of the situation in the light of faith will reveal that the good of all concerned requires that the marriage be continued or that it be dissolved.

A matter of serious concern is the confusing variation in divorce laws and the concept of adversary litigation which is characteristic of most of them. Adversary litigation, by seeking to prove the guilt of one party, may actually work to prevent reconciliation. By its very nature it discourages persons from acknowledging mutual guilt, increases their anxiety and that of any children in the family, and sometimes forces collusion and perjured testimony, making a mockery of the law. The American Bar Association among other groups has proposed that, instead of adversary litigation, concepts and procedures now followed in children's and family courts be adapted for use in cases of family disintegration. According to these recommendations the idea of guilt as a criterion for divorce would be discarded, and in its place the aim would be to serve the best interests of the family and of society. Practice in Canada is already moving steadily toward this goal.

Remarriage of Divorced Persons

Most persons who have been divorced will remarry, whether the church blesses the new unions or not. Two questions, however, present themselves: (1) What factors

should a divorced person consider in making a decision concerning remarriage? and (2) What role should the church play in the remarriage of divorced persons? At this stage both the individuals involved and the church will be on firmer ground if they look ahead to the potential of the new rather than back to the collapse of the former marriage.

There are questions about the past which should be dealt with by a divorced person considering remarriage. "Am I willing to try to understand the dynamics which led to the dissolution of my previous marriage and to acknowledge my share of responsibility for its failure?" "Have I forgiven my former partner, and do I earnestly desire to correct whatever factors within myself may have contributed to the divorce?" "Have I fulfilled all legitimate obligations to those involved in the broken family?"

A pastor must be satisfied concerning the same questions as he counsels with the divorced man or woman and as he determines whether he will officiate at the marriage.

The second marriage of a divorced man or woman may well result in a new union that witnesses faithfully to God's purpose in marriage. However, since personality traits and ethical attitudes which helped destroy the first marriage may threaten the second, the importance of training pastors to be skilled counselors is underscored.

Interreligious Marriage

The three major faith groups in Canada and the United States have tended to discourage religiously mixed marriages. This position undoubtedly reflects in part a fear of losing adherents. But it also reflects a frank recognition of the sociological, psychological, and religious problems confronting such a marriage, and the added strains which these problems can cause. Nevertheless, these marriages are on the increase in all possible combinations throughout our religiously pluralistic society.

Couples who enter into interreligious marriages seem to

follow one of three patterns: one or both drop out of church or synagogue (the predominant pattern); both try to hold firm to their separate faiths, with children most commonly identifying with their mother; or one gives up his faith and accepts the faith of the other. The last solution appears to be best for the sake of marital success, but it may also mean for husband or wife the sacrifice of basic convictions and relationships. Although Catholic-Protestant marriages still encounter psychological and sociological obstacles, these obstacles appear to be lessening today. Marriages between Jews and non-Jews, though not nearly as frequent, present a somewhat different set of problems—variations in food habits, holidays and days of worship, diversities in culture and ethnic consciousness.

It is important that each person who enters into a religiously mixed marriage understand and respect his own faith and the faith of his partner, and that both be intelligently informed about factors that can cause difficulty. As husband and wife seek to make the decisions and foster the relationships that will determine the strength and quality of their life together, the church must make available to them its resources of guidance, support, and perspective.

Interracial Marriage

Interracial marriages in the United States and Canada, involving persons from all racial and ethnic groups, have been growing in number in recent years. The theological position set forth in this report would support such marriages. All other factors being equal, a union between mature people of different races can be a witness to the oneness of man under God.

Unfortunately, however, in most localities today's culture creates difficulties for husband, wife, and children in an interracial family. There may be rejection by both parental families and both races. Selection of adequate housing and even a community in which to live may be problems, and

the children may experience discrimination at school and at play. Such a home, furthermore, may be characterized not only by a mixed racial background but also by mixed religion and culture.

In an interracial marriage the couple should have an understanding of the difficulties that may be faced even while Christians and all men of good will work diligently to create a culture in which such unions will meet with greater acceptance in the future.

Questions Related to Conception and Parenthood

This section makes no attempt to consider all of the major questions related to conception and parenthood. Rather, in line with the scheme of this report, a few questions—of particular concern at the present time—are discussed to illustrate how the evangelical ethic may be applied in life situations.

Aids to Parenthood

Most couples have the problem of controlling the number and spacing of children. But there is also a minority who face the problem of childlessness. Such a couple should first seek the counsel of their physician, who may refer them to a gynecologist who specializes in aids to conception. There are measures that medical science may be able to take to help them.

If these medical efforts fail, the couple may seek to adopt a child. If so, they should make use of the services of a professional social agency which will be concerned to protect the interests of the child, the natural parents, and the adoptive parents, and will provide guidance as the new venture gets under way.

It is not unlikely that some couples who are concerned about the rapid increase in population and its attendant

dangers to human life will choose to adopt children even if they have the physical capacity for procreation. Furthermore, some husbands and wives will decide to adopt children who are "hard to place" because they are older, handicapped or of a different racial or ethnic background.

If a couple learns that they are not likely to conceive a child of their own, and if they do not wish to adopt, the physician may explain the techniques of artificial insemination. If he does so, he should help them realize that this solution is still surrounded with moral, social, and legal uncertainties. Artificial insemination should be undertaken only after the couple and their doctor have faced frankly all of the implications of their decision.

There is virtual consensus among Protestants that artificial insemination by the husband (A.I.H.) is not objectionable on a moral basis. Roman Catholics differ, not on the principle, but on the extent of medical assistance and the particular means of securing the semen. If there is a physiological or psychological obstacle to conception, a couple should seek professional assistance. On the other hand, if barrenness is caused by a profound deficiency in the marital relationship, of a kind that would also detract from the parental role, it is inadvisable that they should resort to an artificial solution to their problem. This kind of argument might preclude adoptions as well.

Artificial insemination by a donor (A.I.D.) inevitably raises more ethical questions than does A.I.H. Several persons are involved—wife, husband, doctor, donor. They all must give careful consideration to psychological, social, and legal factors. Since this impersonal medical intervention should not be interpreted as an act of adultery, Christian ethics cannot take a categorical position disapproving of artificial insemination by a donor. Nevertheless, there are psychological, social, and legal reasons which might lead couples to refuse A.I.D. for themselves. Finally, the decision rests with the persons who are involved.

Limitation of Conception

The progress of science in developing effective means of contraception has widened the area within which men and women must make ethical decisions. Since it is now possible with more certainty to separate sexual intercourse from procreation, choice can be made as to when coitus might lead to the begetting of children and when it is to be primarily an expression of a loving relationship.

The ethical significance of the use of medically-approved contraceptives depends upon the motivation of the persons involved. A responsible decision for or against having a child will take into consideration such factors as the following: the health of the wife and potential mother, a reliable prognosis concerning the health of a possible child, the number and spacing of other children, and the family's economic circumstances and housing.

People have a right not to have children without being accused of selfishness or a betrayal of the divine plan. Indeed, those who do not like children should not have them. It is essential to remember that every child has a right to be a wanted child, both as his birth is anticipated and as he is reared toward manhood or womanhood.

It is recognized that the general availability of means of conception control may provide encouragement for sexual intercourse that is not within the context of a covenant of fidelity. The possibility of abuse by some, however, is no argument against the responsible use of contraceptives by others for sound reasons and under competent medical advice.

A relatively new factor that a couple should consider is the population explosion and its role in intensifying world hunger and poverty. Without question, the effects of rapid increases in population must be taken into account in public policy decisions. Appropriate governmental and appropriate nongovernmental agencies should be free to make available

to the economically and socially deprived the same knowledge and means of conception control which are already available to others.

The most radical method of limiting conception is sterilization of either the man or the woman. There are situations when voluntary sterilization, decided upon responsibly, may be justifiable. It is a question whether such a choice should be made, however, if other methods will accomplish the same results, because of the generally irreversible effect of sterilization.

Sterilization by the state for eugenic reasons for the safety of society is justifiable only under the protection of wise and just legislation which guarantees the most humane means of implementation.

Abortion

Abortion is the termination of pregnancy before the fetus is sufficiently mature to survive outside its mother's body. When this results from natural causes it is called spontaneous abortion; when termination is brought about by outside means the process is called induced abortion. Since no ethical or legal issues are raised in the case of spontaneous abortion we are concerned here only with induced abortion.

Abortions may be done for therapeutic reasons. Abortions performed for other reasons are considered illegal when, as defined by present law in most jurisdictions, no medical problem exists which justifies the termination of pregnancy.

Because of the generally restrictive laws prevailing in the United States and Canada a large number of abortions are performed outside the law (one studied estimate: more than one million each year in the United States), with their increased danger to life and health, frequent mental and spiritual turmoil, encouragement to a flourishing black market practice, and a "double standard" of availability for rich and poor.

Traditionally, the churches have supported the more

restrictive laws. Today, however, opinion in both the churches and the general community has been changing slowly in response to current changes in society—in scientific knowledge of sex and procreation, in medical standards and practice, in social structures, and in the value systems of the people. Under the heavy pressures that weigh upon them, many conscientious doctors stretch laws that refer to the mother's life to mean the mother's health or well-being, and "therapeutic" to include broad psychiatric indications or the anguish of bearing offspring of rape. There is much variety in interpretation and practice among both physicians and hospitals, and a great deal of confusion and even contempt for the law among the public.

The key issue is how we speak of the unborn fetus. Certainly the fetus is valuable in its potential; it is the organic beginning of human life. The termination of its development, therefore, is a serious matter, not to be taken lightly. As part of God's creation, the fetus deserves the most careful consideration when its future is being decided. Nevertheless, a qualitative distinction must be made between its claims and the claims of a responsible human being endowed with all the human rights that are grounded in the image of God. This means that in decisions about abortion, in the light of God's purpose of life-together-in-love, attention must be given, not only to the goodness of germinating life, but to the mother's rights to life and health, her responsibilities toward other children and the father, the economic and psychological stability of the home, the laws of the land, and the consequences for society as a whole.

It is clear that a Christian woman, or couple—on the basis of the evangelical ethic outlined in this study—may decide responsibly to seek an abortion. Such persons are encouraged to consult with their spiritual counselors, and the church should give its support to pastors who counsel with them. Christians who secure abortions for reasons outside narrow legal limits should recognize that they would

be acting contrary to existing laws in many places, or else would have to travel to states or countries where abortions are less restricted legally. Churches, therefore, are urged to undertake broad studies and to initiate educational programs to enable Christians to reconsider together the social and legal conclusions that can be drawn from the evangelical teachings presented in this report.

A point of view is emerging in North America which argues that there should be no laws at all in the field of abortion, except to protect patients from inferior and dangerous medical treatment and to protect physicians from unjust charges of malpractice.

Although many regard this point of view to be valid, it is not recommended in our pluralistic society at this time. Rather, legislation ought to be enacted, roughly uniform throughout a nation, which permits abortion for such reasons as the following: when pregnancy (1) threatens a mother's physical or mental health, (2) results from rape or incest, or (3) is likely to produce a child with severe physical or mental defects. It should stipulate that abortion be done by a qualified physician and in an institution which is licensed by provincial, state, or local authorities to provide medical service. Such legislation should be in the realm of public health law, not the penal code.

Sex Education

Sex education is much more than learning human reproduction and the "facts of life." It treats the physical, emotional, social, and moral aspects of sexuality in ways appropriate to a person's levels of understanding and acceptance as he grows from childhood to adulthood.

This education properly begins in the home. As more and more parents realize that something is wrong with the ways their children learn about sex and sexuality, they recognize that sex education programs for their children are urgently needed. Although many feel that they are not qualified for

the task, parents already are educating a child in sexuality, knowingly or not. They have done so from his birth, in his early years more by their actions and expressions of feelings than by words. His feelings about his body and its parts, about relations between the sexes, about the expression of love—all are formed through the experience of living with his parents and other children in the household.

Parents continue to influence the child as he grows through childhood and adolescence, although increasingly the peer group becomes a stronger factor affecting values and behavior. This source is likely to convey incomplete or distorted information about sex; but, since adults do not always provide the facts to satisfy his legitimate need to know, the young person turns to whatever sources he can find. He very early learns from his peers.

Probably the area in which parents need the most help from the church is that of relating their religious understanding and value systems to their roles as sex educators. The church has an obligation to assist them in this through its educational program. Congregations can incorporate the training for parents and children in church school classes and ministry to youth. Opportunities for such learning frequently arise in study of the Bible, the catechism, and current news stories.

In addition, the church should encourage its members to support responsible sex education programs in the public schools. Some colleges and universities are already engaged in teacher training in sex education. The task of helping youth grow into mature men and women is so important that every available resource of the community must be involved. Voluntary agencies like the YMCA, YWCA, Scouts, 4-H clubs, and others can do much. But it is the public school that can provide this education for all—from kindergarten through high school.

Can the public school teach sexuality apart from morality? The answer is "No"—but neither can it teach history or

literature or any other subject without considering values common to all groups in the community.

Parental understanding and support are essential if public school programs in sex education are to be successful. Where school administrators have attempted to establish programs without this support, dissension has followed, and in some cases programs discontinued. The dissension indicates that, if children and youth are to understand and grow in their sexuality responsibly, it is essential that sex education be provided for parents, teachers, youth leaders, and others who deal with the young. Some schools have regular courses for parents, coordinating them with the programs offered their children. This continued involvement of parents can do much to enrich their own roles in the home. Adults who are emotionally immature, who have uncertainties about their own masculine or feminine roles, cannot effectively lead the young into sexual maturity. More important, however, is the understanding that youth work at developing their own values. Imposed values will not make a deep or lasting impression.

The long-neglected task of sex education calls for the home, the church, and the school to prepare themselves for their appropriate roles. No one of them can do the job alone.

CONCLUSION

In the Introduction to this report the Commission on Marriage defines the purposes of its study as follows: "to state . . . certain cultural and theological perspectives that bear on the subject under discussion. The cultural analysis and the theological discussion are set down as the context out of which judgments on specific issues of sex, marriage, and family are to be made."

It is recognized that diverse views on all these questions have existed in all times and places, and that there are wide differences of opinion within the Lutheran Church in America.

Because of the complexity and ambiguity of the issues involved, the commission speaks forthrightly but with humility. It speaks forthrightly in placing emphasis upon the responsible use of God's gift of sexual love within the framework of a covenant of fidelity. This emphasis is aimed not at the suppression of this gift but at its fullest and

richest expression. Sexual love which is not exercised within a covenant of fidelity can result in the degradation of men and women and the destruction of the meaning and intended joy of sex, marriage, and family.

It is hoped that this understanding of an area so basic to human experience can be incorporated into the life and witness of the church, especially at the following points:

(1) In its preaching and teaching. Recognizing its potential for influencing the thoughts, attitudes, and actions of people, the church should strive to help persons develop values in the realm of sexuality that will enhance rather than demean life. Toward the achievement of this objective it should make creative use of its channels of communication, such as its pulpit, schools, auxiliary organizations, and interest groups. Appropriate LCA boards and commissions are urged to give congregations and synods as specific guidance as possible.

(2) In its fellowship. The church as a redemptive community is called to assist and support people as they face ethical decisions with regard to sex, marriage, and family. It is also called to provide acceptance and strength to the unwed parent, the person who has been divorced, the homosexual, and any others who are in particular need of its vital, sustaining fellowship.

(3) In its pastoral ministry. The church, in its seminaries and its continuing education programs, should assist pastors to sharpen their skills in counseling people in making decisions, resolving tensions, and living constructively in relation to sex, marriage, and family.

(4) In its social services. The church should maintain the competence of its social service agencies and should also support those of the state and community that they may offer effective guidance to individuals and families in dealing with their problems.

(5) In its witness to the civic community. The church should seek to influence government at appropriate levels, to

enact just laws, essentially uniform across a nation, with regard to such areas as marriage, divorce, contraception, abortion, homosexuality, and sex education. The church should also work for legislation that will improve the economic and social conditions which influence the life styles of people.

BOARD OF SOCIAL MINISTRY



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