

## The Meaning and Order of the Sexes

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,  
because she was taken out of Man."

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

—*Genesis 1:26-28, 2:18-24*

A concern for man has become something fashionable. At every anniversary celebration observed by a business organization it is definitely stated at the climax of the main address that in the last analysis the only thing that counts is not volume of production or profits but rather human beings. Even the technologists and atomic physicists tell us that man and not technological progress must be the chief concern of our time. Atomic power should serve man, instead of dominating and delivering him over to fear. Always we talk about "man." Who is this "man" anyway?

It is noteworthy that in the Bible this term "man" hardly occurs at all. Perhaps because it is far too general and weak. It is a distillate which is extracted in philosophical retorts. In the Bible, however, man almost always occurs as a special case.

Here there are rich and poor men, frightened and self-assertive men, masters and servants, old and young, men and women. And each of them has his special talents with which he must face life. But each one also has his special sins which rob him of peace with God in his particular situation. The poor man threatens to collapse because social injustice and the superabundance of his cares alienate him from God. Job, the afflicted, pours out his woe before God and cannot understand why he is so unfair to the devout, why he deceives and cheats them while the godless scoffers whose bodies are "sound and sleek" are given a place in the sun (cf. Ps. 73:3 ff.). But the rich and powerful too have their special peril: Mammon threatens to become their god; great lords easily forget that they too have a Lord and that he will not be mocked.

So the Bible presents only a vivid abundance of highly diverse, individual men, each of them with his own individual destiny with God; therefore each one of them also dies his own individual death. One who is old and full of days dies his death differently from one who is young and is summoned away in the midst of his hunger for life. Herod, who was eaten by worms, dies differently from Moses, who was still permitted to see the Promised Land from afar as he died upon Mount Horeb.

Now I find it tremendously comforting that the Bible does not speak of "man" and "sin" and "death" in general, abstract terms, but deals with them always as special cases which are taut and pulsing with life. And I find it comforting and fine and significant because this makes it clear that everywhere in our life, even in the remotest corners (the place where we work, our bedroom, our business trips, the night club, at a concert, or watching television), we are confronted with the presence of God. There is no corner or curve on our journey through life, no stage in our life story, in which God is not there, confronting us with the question whether we belong to him here and now, whether we are willing to obey him and grant him our trust here and now.

It is therefore certainly important that right at the beginning, when man is spoken of for the first time, the Bible does not speak of "man" but of a man, a particular, special man. God created him male and female, or more precisely, as man and woman. There is no such thing as a human being apart from a man or a woman.

This is far more than a matter of mere biological difference. Obviously, the polarity of the sexes affects all of the ultimate mysteries of life. It cannot be ignored in either the spiritual or the secular realm. We must realize, therefore, how far-reaching and consequential is the fact that here the Bible does not speak first of the creation of man in general and then *afterwards* of the difference between the sexes, but rather from the very outset speaks of man only in the framework of the polarity of the sexes.

Today let us do some thinking together on this mystery of the sexes. Besides hunger and the lust for power there is nothing that so fills our life and impels, torments, and delights us as does the mystery of our sexuality.

I should like to start out with a way of approaching the question which I believe affects every one of us, but naturally *young* people above all.

Every one of us, if he is not utterly dull and stupid, has at some time or other asked himself the question: "How can I gain

the greatest satisfaction in my life? How can I achieve my greatest development and get the maximum from my potentialities?"

This question by no means applies only to our vocation in which we want to get as far as possible. It also applies to what we may generally call "human happiness." Then we would put the question this way: "How can I attain the greatest wealth of experience, the greatest happiness in sex and love, the greatest fulfilment of body and mind in my life?" "How can I," asks Françoise Sagan (the young French novelist who has in many respects become the spokesman of our skeptical youth), "how can I find freedom from satiety and boredom? How can I become deeply 'engaged' to the fullest? How can I participate in something with every fiber of my being, be filled and brought to ecstasy by something?"

Now, for me it is of utmost importance to make it absolutely clear that it is gravely wrong to put the question in this way. The basic question which we all address to life: "How can I be happy and find fulfilment?" is really a question put the wrong way around. Why?

This question emanates from the assumption that I am alone in the world. I conceive of myself, so to speak, as an organism or—to speak in Goethean terms—"as a molded form" which is supposed to develop in a living way and be brought to the fullest possible development. Naturally, I am generally not conscious of this. But even unconscious presuppositions are capable of exercising power over my life. Now, over against this view of things, which is inherent in us all, our text presents this word of the Creator: "It is not good that the man should be alone." It is not good, therefore, that he should be a self-contained organism which proceeds to develop itself; he must rather have a vis-à-vis, a partner, a companion, a thou.

And here the text touches upon one of the fundamental mysteries of our life.

That is to say, it is a remarkable fact—and this has become

my personal conviction, confirmed at every step of the way by life itself—that I do *not* attain the greatest possible development of my personality when I consciously try to develop myself, when I am constantly considering: “where will I have the best chance to live to the fullest? How can I gain prestige in society? Where can I reach the maximum of accomplishment and where can I experience the greatest pleasure?” On the contrary, I arrive at this fulfilment of my personality and my life as a whole only when I do not think about it at all, but rather when I forget myself and devote myself to something else, to another person or to a task, in short, when I serve and love and in both do not think about myself at all.

I have often asked myself what actually happens when two people love each other. When another person enters into my life am I, as it were, thrown off the track—like a billiard ball which collides with another and thus must change its course? Am I *remolded*? Or is it my real nature which is brought out?

I once knew two elderly ladies who were sisters. One of them was the mother of a family who seemed to have within her all the fulness of life. She had poured out her life in service to her family and sacrificed herself for them, but in the process she had become a vivid, vital person who had developed all that was in her to an amazing extent. Her sister, on the other hand, was a highly cultivated old spinster, who all her life had thought of nothing but the development of her personality and had absorbed all the benefits of culture she could obtain. And it was she, the very person who wanted to develop herself and made her personality an end in itself, who seemed dried up and one-sided compared with the other who had forgotten herself and lived for others.

Now, I do not mean at all to say, and I want to emphasize this expressly, that this formation of my own personality is possible only within marriage. Life presents such a wealth of possibilities to love, serve, and suffer with other people that even the person who lives his life without a married partner is given

the same opportunity to find and fulfil himself in devotion to others. Marriage, to which the text refers, constitutes only a kind of model for the fulfilment of love in our life. So even the person who lives a single life can find his orientation in this text.

The point is that there are things in life—and one of them is the fulfilment of one's personality—which cannot be attained by going after them directly, but which come to us, as it were, incidentally, really as "byproducts." Only the person who loves and does not think of himself actually finds himself; and inversely, the person who seeks himself is always cheated.

Jesus was pointing to this remarkable secret of our life when he said: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." This means, surely, that one who is really, seriously, and basically concerned about God is given everything else besides. To him God gives bread and friends, opens doors in his vocation, and showers upon him the abundance of life. The man who pursues his task in self-forgetfulness, who, disregarding loss, serves and is lovingly close to those whom God has given him to be his neighbors, that man receives joys, merriments, and riches which he never would have found if he had sought for them directly and with egotistic desire. Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever gives it away and does not seek himself and his life is precisely the one who finds himself—and along with it the beautiful in life, indeed, the interesting and attractive in life. God always bestows the greatest things incidentally. This we must bear in mind.

I should say that this is meant to show itself in the very way in which we live our lives. The person who gets up in the morning with the thought in his mind: "How can I make as much money as possible today; what can I do to promote my career, my security, my vitality?"—and then, incidentally, says to himself: "Later when I have achieved it all, I'll take time to be religious (and donate a large contribution to charity)"—I say that the person who thinks in this way has set up a false calcu-

lation from the very outset. He is the very person who will *not* find the fulfilment of his life. And even in the prospective happy ending of his life, the planned rendezvous with God in the green pastures of satiety he will be the one who is fooled. When God is not the first, the primary thing in our life he vanishes altogether—“*Dieu se retire*, God withdraws,” said Leon Bloy—or we are aware of him only as a kind of spectral restlessness that keeps invading our life from its margins.

That’s why I think that we must begin the day with him (simply because the most important things, the scheduled things belong at the top), that we must commit to him everything we have to deal with today: our marriage, our children, the people we have to associate with and work with, and our sick and lonely neighbor who needs our help.

In any case, we hold on to this: only those who do not seek themselves find themselves. Only those who love quite simply and do not think of themselves also attain the fulness of their own lives. God gives the best things with his left hand; “he gives to his beloved in sleep.”

This fact that the best things in life cannot be sought for but are given also becomes clear in the command that is given to *marriage*. That command says: “Be fruitful and multiply.” And that at once warns us away from the cult of our own personality and also the cult of seeking happiness just for two.

How many marriages are begun with both parties saying to each other: “We want to live out our love for each other. We want to arrange our life for work and vacations, for being at home and going on trips. We love nature and music and we are going to build a love nest. And children would only be a burden to us. If we had them, as far as time is concerned and financially too, there would be too many things we could not do that would enrich our life.”

There are also not a few who say—and this they call rational marriage—“We are going to have a community of interests. We believe in marrying for money and keeping it in the family; we

hope to make the most profit from this financial and business alliance.”

And now the Bible tells us that both—the people who cherish this idyl of love *and* those who make a shrewd business proposition of marriage—are simply satisfying themselves and are therefore not entering into marriage but sidestepping it. In other words, marriage does not exist only for its own sake; it also exists for the sake of children. And here again the same thing applies in marriage as applies to the individual.

The love of two persons who live their lives together never reaches its fulfilment when the two make their companionship an end in itself and are completely taken up with each other, whether it be erotically or economically. It fulfils itself and is filled with pulsing life only as it is faithful to the command of creation and pours itself out in the service of children.

Naturally, there are situations—brought about by shortage of living quarters, illness, or financial stringencies—in which one must wait to have children. There are also not a few cases in which this blessing is denied to us altogether, and then God sends other fulfilments to his own. (For he is always the Giver, the one who pours himself out, and we need only to find packages addressed specifically to us and meant for our situation.)

But when young people, to whom the talent of possible parenthood is entrusted, assert their self-will contrary to the purpose of creation and heedlessly or even on principle renounce the blessing of procreation, then in time even their inner relationship to each other will be injured. Even this inner relationship to one's life partner cannot be desired as an end in itself. It too is bestowed upon us only incidentally; it is “added unto us.” All parents know this who have accepted their children as “dew from the dawn,” as Luther's translation so beautifully puts it. This dew has also refreshed their own relationship and matured it to fulfilments they never anticipated in their youthful dreams of love.

Our story touches upon still another mystery. The parabolic



reference to Eve's being created from the rib of the man points to the fact that they belong together, that one is a part of the other and both are a unity. "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," Adam cries out. Between the lines one senses something like the wonder of recognition: "Here is my *alter ego*, my other self." And the fact that it really is a wonder, a mystery, is indicated by the text in its reference to the fact that God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep. How it comes about that two persons are created for each other—that such a thing should even occur!—is concealed by the wings of mystery, this cannot be seen by human eyes and can be spoken of only in a parable.

In any case, the biblical text here gives us to understand that in our life we are not only joined to our particular neighbor as such, the associate who needs a good word from me, the woman beside me in the trolley who is tired of standing, and the youngster in my class who is having trouble with something—but that he quite specifically gives to me *one* person who is good for me and for whom I likewise have a purpose to fulfil, and therefore a person who is in fact something like my other half and whom he has appointed precisely for *me*.

And here we must listen very carefully; otherwise we shall not get the point. God has given me a *human being*, not merely someone who performs the *function* of a human being. So in marriage it is not merely a matter of another person's performing certain functions for me, perhaps the function of erotic satisfaction or physical intercourse, or perhaps also merely the function of providing for me as a money-earner, or of acting as a contributing honorary member of my family or—from the husband's point of view—of furnishing a cheap housekeeper. If the other person is only good for performing such functions for me, then I really have no fellowship with him of the kind that God wants. And then too, he is "finished" as far as I am concerned as soon as he can no longer perform his functions.

How many marriages there are which end in divorce for this

very reason, because the other person has become unattractive to me and his erotic “function” no longer clicks. Then I look for a younger partner who can better perform the function.

God does not will that this should be so and he binds me to the *person*, not merely to his functions. This is clearly expressed in the ancient order for marriage, for in the vows it employs the words: “till death us do part.”

Now, I can be willing to belong to another person till death—and therefore not allow myself to be separated from him by any period of separation, any stroke of illness no matter how severe, any other infatuation or even deeper engagement of the heart—*only* if I accept him as *himself* and not merely something *in* him. God has committed to me another *person*; he has lent to me something that belongs to him. “God gave you to me,” said Matthias Claudius, “no other hand pours out such blessings.”

But perhaps for us moderns, particularly when we are relentlessly honest with ourselves, this message sounds like something from the remote past. Isn't it true that we think that life is far more complicated than it appears to be in these simple lines of an ancient but perhaps naïve story?

Is there any certainty at all that this particular man or this particular woman is the only possible choice given to me by God? Is this so sure after all? If man must not put asunder what God has joined together—yes, but *was* it God who joined them together or was it not all too often just two deluded persons, who for a moment were filled with a lot of airy dreams and thought they were Romeo and Juliet, but after a short time simply choked with boredom and disgust whenever they looked at each other? “Marriage reminds me of a sugarplum,” said Matthias Claudius in one of his letters to Andy. “At first it tastes sweet, and people think it will go on that way for ever. But the bit of sugar is soon licked off and then inside, for most of them, there comes a piece of rhubarb—then they pull a long face.”

But even if there are not such rude disillusionments, are there

not in almost every fateful relationship between two people moments when the question arises whether I should not have made a different choice, and thus whether the other person is really the hundred-per-cent complement for me, the flesh of my flesh of which this simile of the rib speaks.

In my lifetime I have learned to know many troubled marriages. Perhaps the crisis arose only because—and this is definitely not the most trivial situation!—the mildew of boredom and jaded monotony has settled down upon a relationship which began with gushing protestations like, “Every thought I have is of you, dear.” For now they know each other, there is nothing new to say, and the enchantment ends in banality.

Or perhaps the crisis may come because another fascinating person crosses our path and sets to ringing sides of our personality which we never knew were in us. And then the question always arises: “Was it really true in my case—what according to this ancient story ought to be true—that I was assigned by a higher hand to the one person who really is suited for me? Or when I chose him back there did I make a wrong turn and am I now doomed to travel for the rest of my life in a direction which is alien to me and which leads me farther and farther away from my real self and all the fulfilments I dreamed I would have?”

Now, this question cannot be dismissed with a wave of the hand or with a cheap pious consolation. The preacher who has nothing more to say on this subject than the fact that he is “against sin” is undoubtedly taking the easy way out. Nevertheless, when I make two brief comments on this human difficulty and allow myself to be guided by the healing power of what Jesus Christ has taught us about love, I do so because I am convinced of one thing, and that is that nobody who is caught in this difficulty and does not know whether he should find his way back or be divorced, dares to ignore these two thoughts. One way or another he will get it all wrong if he does not face them.

The first thought is this: It is in any case utterly foolish to brood over the question whether the other person is the one conceivable partner for me. Perhaps I *really* could have married another man or another woman! That this particular person is the only person for me is not the thing which creates the foundation of marriage. It is the other way around: it is marriage that makes him or her the only one for me. Let me give the reason for this briefly.

Now that God has brought me together with this other person I have a life and a history with him. The other person has revealed to me his secret in his psycho-physical wholeness. We have gone through many trials and vicissitudes together. Perhaps we have been refugees together. Perhaps we have been hungry together, been homesick for each other in long years of military service, built up an existence for ourselves together, seen our very being reproduced anew in our children—and so put our stamp upon each other, each has become a part of the other. Has *become!* We no longer are what we were in the beginning; we each bear the mark of the other.

This is what I meant when I said: That the other person is the only person for me is not the thing which creates the foundation of marriage; it is rather the other way around. For this uniqueness of the other person, this unrepeatable belonging together, this business of your being cut out for me is not all something that is there beforehand. Rather we *become* unique and irreplaceable for each other only when God brings us together, gives us a life and a history together, and blesses us, if we will only trust him and watch for his directions. Anybody who does not trust that in everything God works for good with those who love him, and that his life partner is also included in this plan for his good is a poor wight indeed. For then there is nothing left but to try to puzzle out with his reason whether or not he has caught the right man or the right woman. (I say “caught” intentionally, because he is delivered over to chance or his own dubious calculations and now he must constantly compare his partner with

others, incessantly comparing and never getting away from his uncertainty and his everlasting testing.)

And then the second thought. It is the more important and serious of the two.

In order to determine whether my life partner is really the right one for me, I would have to be able to ascertain objectively—in a clinical diagnosis as it were—who or what this other person is, and besides this, who or what I am, in order to compute by exact calculation whether we best complement each other.

I should think that one would need to go through this experiment of thought only once to find out how absurd it is. And if we stop and think why it is so absurd, and why it will not work, we shall discover a profound spiritual secret.

I once knew a very old married couple who radiated a tremendous happiness. The wife especially, who was almost unable to move because of old age and illness and in whose kind old face the joys and sufferings of many years had etched a hundred runes, was filled with such gratitude for life that I was touched to the quick. Involuntarily I asked myself what could possibly be the source of this kindly old person's radiance. Otherwise they were very common people and their room indicated only the most modest comfort. But suddenly I knew where it all came from, for I saw these two speaking to each other and their eyes hanging upon each other. All at once it became clear to me that this woman was dearly loved. And it was as if she were like a stone that has been lying in the sun for years and years, absorbing all its radiant warmth, and now was reflecting back cheerfulness and warmth and serenity.

Let me express it this way. It was not because she was this kind of a cheerful and pleasant person that she was loved by her husband all those years. It was probably the other way around. Because she was so loved, she became the person I now saw before me.

This thought continued to pursue me and the more it pursued me the more it lost all its merely edifying and sentimental fea-

tures, until finally they were gone altogether. For if this is true, then I surely must come to the following conclusion. If my life partner or my friend or just people generally often seem to be so strange and I ask myself: "Have I made the right marriage, the right friendship; is this particular person really the one who is suited to me?"—then I cannot answer this question in the style of a neutral diagnosis which would list the reasons for and against. For what happens then is that the question turns back upon myself, and then it reads: "Have I perhaps bestowed too little love upon this other person, that he has become so cold and empty? Have I perhaps caused him to become what perhaps he really has become? The other person, whom God has joined to me, is never what he is apart from me. *He is not only bone of my bone; he is also boredom of my boredom and lovelessness of my lovelessness.*"

And it is exactly the same with our relation to God. If a person is steeped in emptiness and boredom and is tired of life, the reason for it is that he has not allowed himself to be loved by God and has not put himself in his hands. One who does not love makes the other person wither and dry up. And one who does not allow himself to be loved dries up too. For love is a creative thing.

Perhaps it may really be hard to love another person because we have become estranged and an oppressive coolness has settled down upon our relationship. But then we should remember that love never waits until the other person has *become* worthy of love, but that love which is ventured (expressed perhaps through some little, diffident sign, a flower, or a look) is creative and awakens the other person to something that we have long since failed to perceive with our appraising minds and no longer counted upon at all.

After all, God did not wait until we were worthy of his love. He loved us long *before*; he ventured his love upon us (Eph. 2:11–13). Did Jesus love the publicans, the harlots, the beggars, and the lepers because they were so attractive? No, they were in

great darkness, withering and dying in their utter inadequacy. But then the glance of the Lord fell upon them and they were touched by a ray of his love. That's how they became new persons. It was the creative, the resurrective power of love that wrenched them out of nothingness and for the first time in their lives made something of them.

The other person is waiting for my love, for the creative breath which God has entrusted to me too. And only as I love with that creative breath will I learn what the other person is at all. Otherwise he remains an undeveloped negative and I have no idea what image lurks within him. Perhaps I have never yet realized who it is that walks beside me. The other person is what my love makes of him. For we too are what God's love makes of *us*.

SAMPLE