

The Church and the Sex Problem

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The Church and the Sex Problem

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The opportunity of addressing this Federation is a source of great pleasure to me. As a member of a church which during its whole existence has waged a constant, strenuous, intelligent warfare against the social evil consequent on the fall of man, and as a teacher whose life is consecrated to the education of boys and young men, I rejoice at the chance of paying tribute to the lofty purpose and unselfish zeal of the members of this society. Your purpose, gentlemen, is sublime; your zeal inspiring. And it is good that such is the case. For there is need of both in view of the delicate problem which is calling for solution.

This question of sex hygiene is not merely pedagogical, nor yet one that affects temporal interests only, such as the health of the individual and the present welfare of the family and state. Though it does not neglect these, still it reaches beyond them and has its chiefest concern with the eternal destiny of man, the fate of his immortal soul. Man's temporal and eternal interests are involved in the problem. Hence its unique importance.

In the final analysis, the question concerns the abolition of sexual sin. Many suggestions have been made for the accomplishment of this. That which is most in favor at present advocates the public teaching of detailed sex hygiene to our school children.

A careful study of the proposed courses reveals therein two elements, one intellectual, the other ethical. The former is detailed; the latter vague and purely naturalistic. The course adopted, therefore, will appeal primarily to the intellect. Its main effort will be knowledge, information; not will-power, not virtue, either natural or supernatural. The course is incapable of arousing strong moral forces. The appeal is made to the wrong faculty. The emphasis is put in the wrong place. Hence motives for right conduct will be weak and ineffective. Information, aye, even love of learning, can not keep a man upright before God, can not cleanse a

heart or keep it clean. Knowledge is not moral power. There is a deep psychological truth in the horrid sneer of Mephistopheles that man uses reason to be more bestial than the beast. Does not Coleridge insinuate a similar idea by saying that it is principally by the will that we are raised over the estate of an animal? Both men read history and knew something of psychology. They were not theorizing. Knowledge of itself saves nobody from delinquency.

Almost all our sinful men and youths realize that some dread disease follows sexual sin. The result is not virtue, but precaution to avoid the disease. Better sanitation, not more morality is the outcome. A race of hygienists, not a galaxy of saints is the result. An apostle of this movement sums up my contention in this pithy sentence: "I confess that I am not moral, but I am hygienic." Hygiene is a barrier of straw before the onrush of the primal passion in man. Christ, not hygiene, saved the world. Christ, not hygiene, will clean the world and keep it clean. Hygiene will but give point to Sophocles' burning words: "Fair to the eye, but a festering sore within."

Some ten or twelve years ago the physical dangers of this sin were brought to the attention of our college boys. The horrors of venereal disease were laid bare in lecture and pamphlet. Nothing was hid. A marked improvement in morals has not been noted. Your society is distributing a play called "Damaged Goods," whose lesson is my lesson, to wit: knowledge is not a protection against passion. The keen psychologist, William James, approaches the same truth when he insists that sensuous images must be combated by ideals that lie beyond the intellect.

Why, ladies and gentlemen, if belief in a personal God and an eternal hell is at times scarce sufficient to keep men clear of impurity, is it too much to say that insistence on hygiene will be altogether ineffective for the preservation of chastity? Solomon, who was wise beyond measure, answers:

"As I knew that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it, ...I went to the Lord and besought Him." As it appears to me, not only will the detailed teaching of sex hygiene prove ineffective of the very noble purpose in view, but it will even thwart that purpose.

This phase of the question must be examined critically and dispassionately. Such an examination necessitates the consideration of some facts concerning children of ten or twelve or fifteen years and youths of eighteen and nineteen years. At these ages the faculties are untrained and to a large extent undisciplined. The imagination is flighty and irresponsible and extremely susceptible to sensuous images. These images impress themselves on the fantasy and notably influence the actions and often the whole life of the youth. Moreover, the will of the child and youth is weak and vacillating and subject to the allurements of pleasure in whatsoever form it may appear. Now the sex passion is for the most part aroused through the imagination. As a rule the first impulse is not physiological. It is

psychological. It almost invariably begins in the fantasy. A vivid sensuous image occupies the fantasy. Sensible pleasure is then experienced, and there is no force to combat it effectively. The will is weak, untrained. It appreciates a good, and either falls to it forthwith or delays its poor resistance till the soul is aflame with the fire of concupiscence. The detailed teaching of sex hygiene, especially if it be done through book and chart, will make a strong impression on the young imagination. Sensuous images will crowd the faculty as bats crowd a deserted house. The condition already described will follow, viz., sinful thoughts, sinful desires, sinful conversations, preludes to other crimes which we prefer to pass over in silence.

Nor is this all. For obvious reasons this instruction is apt to put forward by some years the time of suggestion, and temptations which normally belong to the age of eighteen will be experienced at the age of twelve or fourteen. Experience and psychology tell the result. A month ago a medical doctor told me that the pastor of some boys who had attended lectures on sex hygiene complained that he found his boys joking and laughing unseemingly over the pictures drawn by the lecturer on the board. There is scarcely need of pointing the lesson; but I will say that we can not afford to concentrate the attention of our children on sex details. Safety lies in diverting their attention from them. In truth, the safety of most adults, trained though they are, depends largely on the same process. A moment's reflection will convince the thoughtful that even physiology supports this contention.

But to continue: Two of the great natural protections of our children are modesty, or reserve, if you will, and shame; not prudery, mark you, but healthy and healthful shame. Both are sniffed at as an outgrowth and upgrowth of dogmas and superstition. They are neither one nor the other. They are an instinct of nature. This is true, especially of the latter, which is seen in children before they reach the age of reason. Modesty and shame, then, are natural protectors of chastity. But the public and frequent discussion of sex details will destroy both. Familiarity will breed carelessness. The lesson of the class will become the topic of conversation. Reserve will go. Shame will disappear. Sin will follow. Thus your good intentions will be frustrated. A few weeks ago a careful periodical announced that discriminating critics attribute the deplorable condition of morals in one of our high schools to the very cause just now discussed.

The more I ponder the means advocated to combat the social evil, the stronger grows my conviction that this whole movement will eventually fail of its high purpose. Successful house-building does not begin high in the air at the steepletop. It begins in the ground. Therein are laid firm and fast foundations which ultimately support the tower. Chastity is the tower. Deep down in the soul must be placed foundations for its support. Such foundations are self-control, self-

sacrifice, obedience to conscience and external authority, modesty, love of purity, respect for self and others, high reverence for motherhood, and all the traits which combine to make a sweet, noble, strong character. Elemental character-training is the first important step towards purity. Sex instruction will not give character, if for no other reason, because it is not deep and comprehensive enough. Without character, sex instruction is as chaff before the wind. And, sad to say, our children lack character. Their ideals are low. Their wills are slack of purpose. At home the youths are absorbed in luxury or frivolity, or both. And for reasons which we need not discuss here, our schools do not open the eyes of their souls to the higher and finer realities of life. For only too many, life is but food and raiment and pleasure. In their estimation, meat is more than life; raiment more than modesty; pleasure more than virtue.

If your movement would be successful it must first concern itself with this state of affairs. It must reach down to the very elements of character. It must acquaint the child with the things of the spirit, and then teach him to love the things of the spirit. A child is naturally moral. Even the new experiences of the age of puberty are accompanied by strong moral impulses. As a consequence the task of forming his soul is not supremely difficult. Failure in this matter does not come from the difficulty of the task, but from neglect of the task. A boy properly managed is as willing to care for the soul as the body. His delight over his growing muscles is often exceeded by joy over his growing strength of character. Athleticism of the spirit can be made as congenial to him as athleticism of the body. But, alas, his instructors are often more concerned with the latter than the former. *Mutatis mutandis*, all this is equally true of the girl.

But do not misunderstand me. Though I insist that such formation is both the first necessary step towards your final aim and an excellent, though perhaps indirect, training for purity, yet it is sadly inadequate. Life on the highest plane is impossible without God and religion. And chastity belongs to life on the highest plane. The conclusion is Solomon's: chastity is a gift of God. And if you dislike Solomon, the conviction is Plato's and the converted Carlyle's and others' who have fought the battle of life. This is not mere rhetoric. Experience as a priest has taught me that the children of religious schools are vastly more moral than the children of non-religious schools. The difference between the two classes is striking to a degree little appreciated by most people. And there is a certain fiery nation, a Niobe amongst nations, distinguished for its faithfulness to religion. The result is a purity which is the admiration of the unprejudiced.

Not long since a doctor who has given lectures on sex hygiene in one of our western States spoke to me of her work. No one could have been more earnest in your cause. Yet she insisted on two points: the difficulty of getting suitable instructors--an item worthy of your consideration--and the futility of sex

instruction which is not supported by an appeal to God and prayer. As far as she could see, the boys and girls got profit through that alone, if not entirely from that. Unfortunately her appeal to the religious sentiment raised so strong a protest that it had to be discontinued. Will the same not happen if this saving element is introduced into the lectures by this Foundation? And if such an element is not introduced, will your lectures be fruitful of good or evil?

Be convinced, ladies and gentlemen, that religion alone will be of lasting benefit in this campaign. God, not hygiene, is the supreme need of the hour. Our children must have brought home to them the idea of a personal, omnipresent, omniscient God, who rewards virtue and punishes vice. Nothing can replace God in their souls. The human heart is made for God. It is hungry for Him, thirsty for Him. Without Him there is a void in the soul, a craving for something that should be and is not, a haunting sense of lack, which, in St. Paul's judgment, causes the ungodly to make unto themselves gods of the things of earth. The need of this Federation bears eloquent testimony to the nature of the thing of earth which is the god of many.

On the other hand, if God is put into the life of the child, all is different. The child is consecrated to something holy and has no serious thought for sin. God is present in his thoughts, God is present in his words, God is present in his actions. The child and all that is his, thoughts, words, and actions, are wrapped round with divinity. He stands with God for God, not with vice and for vice. Herein is the lasting hope of your movement. Herein is profit, herein protection, herein eternal life.

These, then, are my convictions about the public and detailed teaching of sex hygiene. They are not favorable to your movement in all its details. Neither are they adverse to all its details. Eliminate from your lectures the details of sex hygiene; cast aside text-book and chart. Train your children's character. Teach them that purity is noble and possible; that vice is vile and carries with it its punishment; that marriage is inviolable; that the family is sacred. Your boys; teach them that their bodies are vessels of honor, the habitation of an immortal soul made in the image and likeness of God, redeemed in the Blood of Christ; train them from their early years to reverence womankind, to fall down in veneration before motherhood, God's sweet gift to women. Your girls; teach them reserve, modesty in manner and dress; tell, oh, tell them that in them, in their purity and self-sacrifice lies the hope of our beloved nation. This done, carry your campaign further. Purge the press, cleanse the novel, elevate the theater, abolish animal dances, frown on coeducation after the age of puberty. In the words of St. Paul: "Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, entreat," so that all men may realize the great obligation of life, which is know God and do His behests.

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