What is truth in SEX?

In the place of the old taboo sexual morality, a new, rational system of relationships between the sexes stresses maturity of personality.

James Hemming

Descent boys with lies about the effects of masturbation.

But all has not been gain. For one thing the pioneers of emancipation created a new set of anxieties by presenting sexual ecstasy as easily available for all who would master the techniques of love they propagated. This error has been perpetuated in a number of how-to-make-love books, which standardize procedures in terms of erotic zones and modes of caress, suggesting that a highly psychological relationship is primarily subordinated to the act of love. To point that out as an exaggeration is not to minimize the importance of skill.

These same books also assume that a perpetual high virility is normal in the male and that a woman, unless she is frigid, will frequently experience simultaneous orgasm, provided that her lover has the necessary acumen. Trying to live up to these over-stated expectations, women have often come unnecessarily to doubt their manhood and women their capacity for love.

Another disadvantage of emancipation is the commercialization of sex, which has become possible through the decline in prudery. This has tended to diminish human love into a kind of press button sexuality, actuated by the purchase of the right perfume, soap, and clothes. Again, the traditional attitudes towards sex has itself left many people confused in ideas, or behaviour, or both. Nonetheless, these problems of emancipation, seen against the secular and confusion of traditional sex values, are nothing more than subsidiary growing pains in a movement within society towards healthier sexual attitudes. And the movement towards emancipation has not spent itself yet. It is no very bold prediction that, within the next decade or two, divorce for incompetence, and homosexual relationships between consenting adults will be recognized by British law. Abortion law may also be reformed.

A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION

The escape of our society, during the past half century, from extreme prudery, prejudice and intolerance in sexual values has permitted the emergence of a new qualitative evaluation of sexual relationships, which is a brave and truthful step toward an earlier evaluations. The Church of England gives three reasons for marriage.

For the procreation of children.

As a remedy against fornication.

For companionship, help and comfort in prosperity and adversity.

Qualitatively these three reasons now seem rather incomplete because they omit the positive motivating value of happy sexual relationships. To quote Professor L. L. Moir, "A rewarding experience of sex gives more abundant life. To be without it limits your capacity as a human being." Dr. Anthony Storr writes: "The full development of personal personality can only take place in a setting of adult loving and being loved."

For awakening to the significance of the sexual relationship, the Church has directed attention to another qualitative aspect of human sexuality—its development in time. A fully satisfying sexual reciprocity is not to be achieved overnight. One may expect the outcome of a progressive refinement of feeling and sensitivity as one plateau of fulfillment succeeds another. The advance may be slow, but the value of sexual relationships growing in love, in which passion, tenderness and mutual respect are present, in essence the growth from the first pre-pubescent shy exchanges of glances to mature, reciprocal, passionate sexuality is a continuous and progressive experience, of which each step has its importance and may, in order that the mature experience may be ultimately flower.

Once we begin to evaluate human sexual relationships qualitatively and developmentally, it becomes plain that the primitive taboo system of sexual morality, with which it was sought to control sex in the past, is now inappropriate. For a modern society the morality is too rigid, insensitive, black and white, condemning and cruel. The alternative to the declining taboo system of sexual morality is emerging as a rational morality founded in human nature, human development and the need for the individual. The supreme individual need is personal worth; the supreme social need is happy marriage. These desired outcomes require that social evaluation about sexual behaviour should be based on qualitative assessments throughout the whole period of sexual maturation.

ABANDON TABOO MORALITY

This developmental approach collides with the existing remnants of the taboo system. Taboo morality evaluates sexual love within marriage as pure, noble, even divine, and within it condemns all sexual love outside marriage as dirty, ignoble and evil. This is not realistic. Quality in sexual relationships is not conferred by marriage. It is possible for

FATHER’S CRIME.

LIGHT SENTENCE FOR A TERRIBLE OFFENCE

A painful case, but a sad one. There was a trial at Glamorganshire Assizes, Walter Reynolds, 37, labourer, of Aberthaw, was charged with having embezzled £700 in December last from a little daughter, Norah, 10 years and a half, to have shamefully degraded sexuality within marriage and mature, creative physical love outside it. Taking the first grant, here are two outline case histories which indicate the second:

And a young Canadian left with several slight physical handicaps as the result of a riding accident in childhood. He was intelligent, and qualified for a profession. Emotionally he was timid and rather diffident in himself which impeded his relationships with girls, although he had one or
two deep attachments. In his late 20s he hit a rather bad patch. He began to drink and smoke rather heavily, to put on weight, and to lose interest in his work. At this stage he got to know a woman some years his senior, with whom he found he had many interests in common. They became friends and then of a more intimate nature. She was reading a social science; he was studying a technology with less enthusiasm but with an incentive in the big money towards which his degree was directed. The prospect of their relationship was to bring out the idealism of both and to convince the young man of the futility of pursuing his original goal. He decided to stay for a while in the same university in a field in which he could study people and, later, continue his new work as a profession. A difficulty arose because no vacancy for the relevant course was available at his first university. The young man and young woman talked the problem over and came to the conclusion that the young man should transfer to a university where there was an opening. This he did and they now see each other only in vacations.

The significant point here is that the young man was helped to find himself through his relationship with his young companion. He ceased drifting through a course that had become meaningless for him and gained sufficient sense of purpose to make the switch to a better course, to career and companionship of term in time that he might do so. Whatever we say about behaviour of this kind, we certainly cannot describe it as evil either in intent or consequences.

Case histories such as these serve to show that the absolute denials of taboo morality are not applicable to all pre-marital relationships. Taboo morality can take into account the quality of the relationships, the underlying motives and the developmental effects. It is merely nullified by such case histories, just as it is by an inquiry, like that of Logan and Goldberg, in which premartial relationships are judged to correlate, in some way with a higher level of maturity and socialization. Because of an excessive absorption with the sex act itself, taboo morality is forced to ignore the most important but more subtle aspects of human sexuality and to condemn responsible premarital relationships as all of a piece with irresponsible casuality promiscuity.

The crux of the matter is this: we have in our society two systems governing sexual relationships, an anciently established taboo system and an emerging developmental morality. Only confusion can result from trying to find sexual behaviour both on a rigid taboo system and on a qualitative standard. A choice must be made, and we shall ultimately be unable to cope for the qualitative standard because taboo morality excludes value judgments. Clinging to the old also tends to produce a breakdown of the sense of common purpose which permits the older generation more chance to be dangerous. In the last analysis, our best chance is for them to flourish and grow only if we manage to raise the level of responsibility all round. This is not contingent upon intellectual calibre but on personal dedication, which is an incentive to raise our level of education rather than to seek to reverse change and development in sexual relationships.

It is not tenable to suppose that the best marriages are necessarily the consequence of a single sexual confrontation. Some men and women probably need a wider experience than that before they are able wisely to select a partner with whom they can create a happy marriage. Not can we suppose that to bottle up the sexual impulse or to regard it as socially unacceptable, or to postpone puberty to marriage—if it is a long period—is a reliable way to lay a foundation for sensitive, passionate reciprocity after marriage. We need not regard the whole span from puberty to marriage as a single phase nor seek a single solution for all young people—chastity—is to neglect the physical and emotional development taking place throughout these years, and to ignore individual differences of make-up.

During the early post-pubertal years, society needs to use its influence to help young people resist the pressure upon them to-wards premature experiment. But, from about 19 onwards, young adults are likely to have attained a degree of emotional maturity and physical virility which demands definite expression. The social logic of this is, on the one hand, to assist early marriage, and, on the other, to be more tolerant of heterosexual relations, provided they are sincere and responsible, between young adults who are not yet married. Education about contraception is implied.

People fear that a more permissive attitude would expose young adults to emotional crises beyond their strength. But if we are to allow them the experience through these years which may be needed, we must not neglect the degree of suffering that acquiring emotional maturity entails.

We have to consider whether the emerging rigid system to sexual relationships involves a threat to marriage. There is no evidence that marriage as an institution is in any peril. On the contrary, studies showing light on the attitude of young people to marriage show that it is a secure part of the image of their lives. It is not the incidence of marriage but the quality of marriage that is the problem for the future. The foundation of social stability and mental health is not marriage as such, but marriages that carry within them the resources needed for their own vitality and endurance. These self-sustaining marriages do not come from nowhere with romantic suddenness but are the result of personal development, going back through the years, and founded in a qualitative standard of relationships. Such a perspective gives a sure basis for raising the quality of sexual life in society and makes marriage so much more than a licence to copulate.