

SEXUALITY

Sexuality is one of those givens of life, with which —rejoice us as it may, chafe us as it might — each of us must grapple. It is *given*, isn't it? — not something produced or manufactured by us, but something which we *are* when we enter into the world as created by God. So as you gather this evening, and tomorrow, to contemplate sexuality and spirituality, it may benefit us to reflect on the givenness of sexuality and to ponder its *why*.

It is interesting, isn't it, that this one total reality called creation is split from the moment of calling forth into two distinct polarities, male and female. From top to bottom, male and female: there are male and female hippopotami, male and female junebugs, even male and female roaches, forbid the thought! and male and female living souls, called man, called woman.

Think about all that for a moment. From the point of view of modern technocratic society, this split by God of his creation into two polarities, male and female, is unnecessary. Surely, one *person*, neither male nor female, could do the job of both. As well, this creation with two polarities is a totally inefficient way of going about things. The goal of modern society — in areas as widely divergent as sexuality and factory manufacture is to make everything much more efficient. And the way you do this is by making things exactly alike, or at least interchangeable.

But perhaps I'm being too harsh on modern society. For haven't we always thought God could have done things better, men often wishing women to be more like men, women often wishing men to be more like women? Such wishful thinking is born out of our daily struggles with one another, our struggles to put up with one another of the opposite sex (oh! what struggles sometimes!), to survive with one another and...even... to love one another. Sometimes it would be so much easier if we were all alike in every way. Remember the song we used to sing in 4th grade: "Reuben, Reuben, I've been thinking what a good world this would be, if the men were all transported far across the northern sea"? And then we boys would answer the girls in like manner. To live in a world where we are all alike! There are days in which it would seem like paradise!

Haven't you ever, if only for a moment, thought thoughts such as these? Poets have! And such thoughts are as good a sign of the Fall as any, for they manifest humanity's dissatisfaction with its own *givenness*!

Yes, maleness and femaleness, from our point of view, may be unnecessary. And yes, God may have been much more efficient if, in creating, he had not created such polarity and diversity. *But he did*. It would seem that God is unconcerned with such categories of ours as efficiency and necessity. So, might we discover the reason, or at least catch glimmers that make sense of this polarity and diversity, this maleness and femaleness of creation...this gift of sexuality?

I think we might, at least, capture or be captured by some glimmers into this scandal of male and

female. And this insight, these glimmers, are scandalous in the sense of that word's root meaning: they cause our fine intellects to stumble — but they can make our hearts trip with delight! The glimmers are these:

God is taking for himself a wife! That's the simplest way of putting it. — And you know who the wife is? *You and me... creation!* Isn't that a lark! Try as we might to avoid it, this is one of the recurring themes of biblical revelation. In fact the scripture itself begins and ends with a marriage and is shot throughout with wedding proclamation.

It begins with a marriage proposed in Adam, and with the union of Adam and Eve in a garden. It continues with a marriage contracted in Abraham and covenanted with Moses and that unruly band of his at Sinai's height. It proclaims a marriage sealed in Christ and rejoices in a marriage consummated in the *Eschaton* (cf. *The Revelation*)

Haven't you ever noticed that throughout the Old Testament, the people Israel will return again and again to speak of themselves as the bride of Yahweh?

Aren't we all aware of how this reality finds its real focus and fulfillment in the New Testament? Consistently when Jesus refers to the Kingdom of Heaven he talks in terms of a wedding feast... and presents himself as the bridegroom. The Church is proclaimed as his bride and even her reality as his body springs from her identity as his bride — for the bride is ever the body of her bridegroom, for she has been made one flesh with him in baptismal marriage and has become the flesh through whom he is given to the world. That is the way of a woman; she is always the body of man — it is through union with her that he is born and takes his flesh.

And the culminating vision held before us of the ultimate victory of God in redeeming us is that vision given by Holy Spirit in the Revelation to St. John the Divine. For there we hear of and perceive the heavenly wedding, when the Church (redeemed creation) is finally ready to be presented to her bridegroom, God the Son, as his Holy Bride, pure and without spot or wrinkle.

But more “The central act of the Church on earth, the Eucharist, is not a celebration of life and genius...it is a more festal and more awesome thing: it is a marriage supper, *the wedding feast*. This is the supernatural action in which God who conferred his sensuality upon creation by breathing on primordial water fleshes our senses with lights and incense and color and, above all, bread and wine, marrying invisibility with visibility and ritually consummating the marriage...” (*Priest and Priestess*, Butler, George William, Trinity Press, 700 Bethlehem Pike, Ambler, PA, c. 1973, pp. 69–70)

Perhaps our mystics have broken through most for us in comprehending all this. Our mystical Jewish forebears, in their book the *Zohar*, called creation — the earth and all within her — the chosen, the Holy Shekinah (the dwelling place of God), cast off by God then reunited in an embrace.

And then, among many, there is St. John of the Cross. In one of his *Divine Songs*, he records this interior dialogue of God the Father and God the Son. I share it with you in paraphrase.

Father: Our joy is so full, how shall we let it overflow? Shall I create for you a bride?

Son: Yes, that is exactly what we should do.

Father: But if I do she may reject you, she may run from the altar. And since, if I create her, I shall put so much of myself into her, she shall be the only bride I shall create for you. If she does reject you, you must run after her and woo her back. You may even have to die for her. Are you willing to do that?

Son: Oh yes, I am.

Then from the Father's mouth come the words "**Fiat Lux!**" — the first words of creation in Genesis 1:3.

Have you ever heard a truer summary of Creation, Fall or Redemption than that?

All of this we must rehearse if we are to begin to capture a glimpse of the why of sexuality as gift of God, the *why* of male and female. God is a God who reveals, who wills us to know him and to know ourselves and the mystery of our destiny. How should we know the purpose of creation and the goal of her fulfillment... our fulfillment... if, on the plane of our earthly existence, God did not give a revelation of this, a sign of this?

The presence of male and female on the earthly plane *is* such a sign, *is* such a revelation. The presence, the *fact* of male and female, hold up before creation — before us who comprise her — the purpose, the goal, the intention, the destiny of creation. And that purpose, that goal, that intention, that destiny is for her to be eternally, beautifully, exquisitely, ecstatically united to God in the embrace of love, in the joy of love, in the peace of love, in the rest of love... and in the frolics of love. Yes, the frolics of love — that is why it is far more than sweet poetic license to speak of the morning stars dancing, mountains roaring, and the hills clapping their hands. It is more than poetic license and device... *it is true*.

In the interrelationship of man and woman we have the earthly manifestation of the supernatural reality: the wedding of God and creation.

For St. Paul, writing in the 5th chapter of Ephesians, the difference of the sexes, the *raison d'être* of the gift of sexuality, reaches its fullness in the fact that it enables men and women to perceive and comprehend the great mystery of salvation: "This is a great mystery", he says of the interaction and marriage of man and woman, "But I speak of Christ and his Church". (Ephesians 5:32)

It would seem that on earth, a man's first ministry stems solely from his sexuality as a man and it is a ministry of revelation: he is the effective symbol of, the transparency which points us to, a heavenly bridegroom — Christ.

It would seem that on earth, a woman's first ministry stems solely from her sexuality as woman and is a ministry of revelation: she is the effective symbol of, the transparency which points us to, a beloved bride for the heavenly bridegroom... creation.

In the standing of men and women on earth, in the fact of sexuality... of maleness and femaleness running up and down the order of creation... and in the dance of attraction and retreat, of union and distinction, of communion and flirtation which to some degree or another is part of *every* encounter between man and woman — in this we are pointed beyond to the heavenly dance of the heavenly marriage, for which creation was always intended and to which redeemed creation, the Holy Church of God, is moving.

“The Spirit and the Bride say ‘Come!’” (Rev. 22:17) These are some of the last words of scripture. And the bridegroom has answered: “Yes, I am coming soon!” (Rev. 22:20)