

CONFERENCE NINE

MORALITY IN SOCIETY

There are many issues of morality, especially those concerning sexuality and gender, with which the priest today must cope. To do so, I think one must step back and consider these issues in the context of the Gospel and anthropology. The Gospel is a revelation of the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ, addressed to sinners, to those who have a fallen human nature. A fallen human nature is one in which there is some disorder. Jesus has come to remedy this situation, and He has called His priests to assist Him. As the Creator, the Word knows what we need, and He supplies it at His own cost.

We are made for happiness, and grace is offered us to strengthen our reason and will so that we may pursue the appropriate means for obtaining happiness. These means are proportionate to their end, and also to us, to our nature, both of which are unchanging. I will deal with the possibility of our nature evolving shortly. This being so, these means do not vary essentially in time or place. They may indeed be adapted to cultural situations, but they themselves are the judges of whether cultural situations are healthy or harmful.

It is for these reasons that St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century could adopt in his *Summa Theologica* the analysis made by Aristotle in the fourth century BC of these means, which are the virtues, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle explains that to act well and humanly we must act in accordance with right reason. The virtues are those habits by which we do so. St. Thomas enriched Aristotle's analysis by the Gospel, which teaches us that the greatest virtues are faith, hope, and charity. As previously remarked these virtues unite us immediately with God – they have God as their object: by faith we believe Him, by hope we trust Him, and by charity we love Him.

But these virtues, of which the greatest is charity, work in the various situations in our lives through the moral virtues. Thus in danger charity is brave, in facing the allurements of illicit sense, charity is chaste, in the presence of evils, charity is meek, and in all things charity is prudent – that is, it chooses the means appropriate to union with God. This is not the prudence of the flesh nor of the world, but it is the prudence of Christ who overcame the flesh and the world.

A culture which facilitates action in accordance with faith and reason is a good culture, and a culture which opposes such action is an evil culture. Hence, we have John Paul II's distinction between the culture of life and the culture of death. In this understanding of things, human nature is essentially unchanged in history, while culture changes in history. Human nature is constituted of 1) a human soul, created directly by God and infused in the zygote formed by the fertilization of the ovum by the sperm and 2) a body, developed from that zygote in accordance with the DNA it contains, which governs the process of growth. Even for those who believe that human nature is in the process of evolution, several thousands of years, the time of recorded history, is simply an instant as far as evolutionary time is concerned, even ten million years is a blink of the eye in geological time and not sufficient to enable a change in our nature itself.

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I say even for those who believe in evolution, because evolution is a belief. This was acknowledged by Donceel in his *Anthropology*, where he said that even though the scientific evidence for evolution is not convincing, we should have faith and believe in evolution. This is harder to do after the recent studies and analyses, such as those of Phillip E. Johnson, retired law professor at the University of California, Berkeley. Johnson has shown that the basic assumption underlying evolution is an unproven philosophic premise, namely that only material things exist. On the basis of this philosophic premise, what other explanation of the existence of the gradation of plants and animals and human beings is possible?

Darwin believed that the fossil record would eventually show intermediate gradations between species. But the prominent evolutionists, Stephen Jay Gould of Harvard, and Niles Eldridge of the Natural Museum of History in New York have convincingly declared that after over a hundred years of study of the fossil record, the intermediate species have not been found, not in the case of the horse, nor man, nor any other species. They explain that all the record shows is the stability of species. One species begins and exists for a period of time and then ceases to exist while another begins, another that is totally different. Hence, they can only explain evolution, not as a gradual change, but as a sudden change from one species to a totally different one, and they call this punctuated equilibrium. Gould also rejects natural selection as inadequate to explain such a sudden evolutionary change.

Michael Behe, the microbiologist, in his book, *Darwin's Black Box*⁶ has shown that the simplest one-cell organism is so irreducibly complex that it could not have come into existence by evolution. It has numerous organs, nucleoli, nucleus, cytoplasm, a semi-permeable membrane as its circumference, and an extremely complex information system, the DNA. Like a watch whose parts work together and which won't work unless all the parts are present and interact, so the simplest cell.

Finally, David Foster, a computer expert, in his book *The Philosophical Scientists*⁷ has shown that the number of seconds in ten billion years, the time the universe is supposed to have existed, is 10 to the 18 power, (that is eighteen zeros after ten. Nine zeros after ten is a billion) whereas the complexity of the haemoglobin protein in a red blood cell is ten to the 650 power, while a T4 bacteriophage cell (which occurs in human blood) is ten to the 78,000 power.

Thomas H. Huxley, an avid promoter of Darwin's evolutionary ideas, declared that if six monkeys strummed at random on typewriters for millions of millions of years they would type all the books in the British Museum. Huxley did not do the mathematics, which he could have done with a logarithm. If we assume that "millions of millions of years" is the life of the universe at ten billion years, then a modern computer will tell us that these monkeys would only type one half line of sense, with the choice of matching any line in those 700,000 books in the British Museum. In other words evolution appears to be a statistical impossibility. Hence I say for those who believe in evolution, the human species as known in recorded history, which is a sliver of history from the evolutionary point of view is unchanged.

⁶ Behe, Michael. *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.

⁷ Foster, David. *The Philosophical Scientists*. New York: Dorset Press, 1985.

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Opposed to this is a theory that cultures undergo evolutionary change, and that morals change with them and with changing situations. Karl Rahner has stated that the projection of biological evolution to an evolution of culture is a false step. Moreover, as I have just said, from the point of evolutionary theory, the few thousand years of recorded history of human life are but the blink of an eye in evolutionary time, and do not support the idea of evolutionary change. This whole nineteenth century idea of inevitable progress, incorporated also in Marxism, has been shattered by the behavior of human beings in the 20th century, with genocides, world wars, criminal activities of all kinds on a vast scale, and a general deterioration of morals. We have no reason to accept evolving moral norms or moral relativism, or approaches to happiness, which belie the Gospel and reason.

At the same time we can affirm a kind of progress in history, such as in the development of doctrine, in certain refinements, in technical progression. Technical progression is an obvious fact and accelerates exponentially. This is because technological progress is brought about by invention of instruments, and new instruments permit the invention of further instruments. This is notable in regard to computers and the technological progress of the information age which has ensued as a consequence. While the world is becoming more united in possibility, this possibility is not being realized because of the waywardness of ethnic, national and other rivalries, and instead of a culture of life which technological progress makes possible, we have a culture of death.

This is a preface to the understanding of the Church's teaching on morality as the following of Christ and the way to human happiness. John Paul II has explained that human sexuality is relational. Inscribed in the body is this capacity of man and woman to give themselves as gift to each other in a union from which new life springs. This gift is a gift of persons through their bodies to one another in a lifetime commitment, a covenant. As such it manifests the union of Christ with His Church. The union of Christ and His Church is also an enduring and life-giving union, and one that is made through the body. The body of Christ is given through Calvary and the Eucharist to His Church which receives Him and offers itself in exchange. Christ's sacrifice is an example which the members of the Church are exhorted to follow by giving their bodies as instruments of good works and love of the neighbor for the salvation of all. If realized, this would portray on earth the nuptial banquet of Heaven, where all will be one in submission to the will of the Father.

Jesus said, "I will that they may be one as we, Father, are one, that they may be one in us, your love in them and I in them." The persons of the Trinity dwell within each other; as Jesus declared, "The Father and I are one" and "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." So we who make one body are united in a union of hearts, by having the same faith, the same hope, and the same love. This union is fed by obedience to the Father and by our increasing union with Him through our union with His Son.

St. Paul says, "Render to God your bodies as a reasonable service." And "Do you not know that you are temples of the Holy Spirit?" Hence our bodies are sacred and are not to be profaned by sin. Every other sin is outside the body but the sexual sin defiles the body. Hence the Church understands the commandment not to commit adultery to prohibit all sins of the use of the sexual faculty outside of marriage.

Sexual control is necessary not only for the single person but also for the married. A happy marriage depends upon it. If married persons make a gift of their bodies to each

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other, then they must be in control of their bodies in order to make that gift. Experience confirms this truth. Where there is a want of self control, there is a demand placed on the other partner (usually the wife) which eventually leads to a repugnance for intercourse, and it is not unusual for wives after a time of being treated as instruments for the gratification of an unbridled passion, to refuse to have further intercourse with their husbands, leading often to infidelity and the breakup of the marriage.

But this control is needed in single persons so that they do not seek illicit gratification. This applies equally to those with hetero- and homosexual orientations. The homosexual orientation, however, being unsatisfactory to the persons concerned leads to multiplicity of casual partners, which surveys indicate often run into a thousand for a single homosexual. To offset this, and the danger of venereal disease, particularly AIDS, many homosexuals attempt to live in a bonded two-some. They wish this relationship to be sanctioned by the Church and society, with all the benefits and privileges of married persons.

Those with homosexual orientation may be very considerate, conscientious, and gifted persons, and if they are chaste may attain a high degree of holiness. My approach to homosexuals is to explain to them that their orientation is an invitation from Christ to intimate union, a union that is necessary if they are to remain chaste, as Jesus desires. In order to respond to this invitation, they need to know and practice the spiritual program which these conferences explain. Homosexual persons can be just as chaste as heterosexual persons, and achieve just as high a degree of holiness

The Church's sexual morality is necessary for the happiness of persons and society and for the safeguarding of family life and the upbringing of children. Children need a full-time mother for the first three to five years of life, and they need a father who is affectionately devoted to the mother and to them. The parents are the pillars of the child's temperament and are needed that this temperament develop normally. The father is very important to the child. He gives guidance, discipline, security, and stability to the child and to the mother in her role of forming the child's personality.

While the absence of a stable home with mother and father as outlined above is injurious to the child, these injuries, like others suffered during early development, can be remedied to some extent by life's experiences, and some children come through tragic circumstances more intact than others. Their religiosity is one of the factors that make for this resilience. I remember a terribly deprived four-year-old child in Bellevue Hospital who kept saying that no one loved her except Jesus. The therapy was for a nurse to hold her continually throughout her term of duty. It is through bodily contact that the infant knows that it is loved. Even the separation of a newly-born infant from its mother is traumatic to an infant, who for nine months has been in intimate contact with the mother, is adjusted to her voice, to her smell, and who, when held by another, knows that this other is a stranger and not her mother. The adopted child suffers what has been called a primal wound.

Children need to be loved for their own sakes and not as prolongations of the parents serving the parents needs for example, in fulfillment of the unmet desires of the parent. Parent-centered parents, parents who are not child-centered cause the same damage in their children, whether this parent-centering is due to alcohol, mental disease, or an abusive temperament, or to absence from the child for such reasons as a prolonged

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hospitalization. The child feels rejected, has a low self-esteem, and may be always trying to please the parent and never succeeding or knowing its own identity and feelings.

A whole slew of wreckage of persons has followed upon the divorce of sexuality from its anchorage in marriage and in bringing forth new life. This anchorage matures parents who lovingly undertake their responsibilities. Its absence leads to self-centeredness, single parent families, divorce, contraception, and contraceptive mentality, abortion, euthanasia, child abuse, murder by children of their parents, cohabitation, AIDS, and many other misfortunes, many foreseen by Paul VI and enumerated in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. This wreckage has followed in the wake of its rejection. Ecclesially this rejection has led to the movement of dissent, which divides the Church.

The way back is fidelity to the marriage covenant, esteem for marriage and for child-bearing and child-raising. It entails fidelity to the sexual ethics of the Church, abstinence before marriage and in the single life, and the recognition of the complementarity of the sexes, each person being equally precious and deserving of respect.

The feminist movement, insofar as it upholds the rights of women to be treated equally as persons in marriage, in business, in the Church, is of great importance. But this movement should not be dishonored by inappropriate power lust. Similarly, the homosexual movement rightly seeks to overcome discrimination because of homosexual orientation, but it needs to be purged of its lust for power, and of its justification of immoral practices, whether performed by men or women, just as celibate or married heterosexual persons should refrain from immorality. In other words neither movement should become an ideology and seek a primacy. Men, women, homo- and heterosexually oriented persons should all realize that first of all they are human beings, which realization brings unity, and then secondarily they are distinguished as homo- and heterosexually oriented, men and women, etc.

The family as an institution, under attack today especially in the West, will survive. But it is not so clear that a society that downgrades the family will survive. To save our society a renewal of the priesthood is necessary which will bring about a renewal of the Church and a renewal of society. And this renewal of the priesthood starts in an appreciation of the centrality of the Eucharist, our Lord's presence among us. A renewed priesthood will confirm the laity in their vocation as a royal priesthood, offering their daily lives in fulfillment of their calling. From this will flourish the family and vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Instead of dissent, we need loyalty to the teaching of the Church and of our Pope. For those entering marriage, a deep realization of the married state is necessary, as a life-time covenant, in which each makes the festive gift of their bodies to the other for their mutual unity and for the bringing forth of new life. Contraception, which leads to self-centeredness and to abortion is inferior in every way to natural family planning, in which self-control is exercised, mutual communication and co-responsibility is encouraged, and in which all the side-effects and artificiality of contraception, with its expense, is eliminated.

Society should not penalize married people by the so-called marriage tax, but rather should encourage marriage and the raising of children by a full-time mother and by a steadfast father. Fatherhood needs to be more appreciated and practiced in the guidance and nurture of children. All this for the Christian should flow from a supernatural love which aims at God and the spouse and children, and through which patience, gentleness,

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chivalry and devotedness is practiced. This sounds ideal because we have drifted so far from what is normal. Other means of curtailing violence, killing, incivility, and disorders of every kind may have a value, but without the transformation of persons and culture they will not avail. Children must learn from their parents that all human life, including the unborn, the aged, the disabled, the terminally ill, is precious, and is not dispensable. Aberrations in civil society such as pornography, TV violence, and obscenity should be curbed. This is not an abridgment of free speech, but is a responsibility to avoid license which destroys the value of communication, or uses communication for evil and socially destructive ways. If human life is valued, then experimentation with human embryos, with the discard of those which are unwanted, human cloning, fertilization in a tube, all these practices which denigrate the divine plan for the bringing forth of human life in the living embrace of mutually-committed married partners must be eliminated.

Do Christians have a right to act publicly, to speak and vote in accordance with a Christian conscience? Or must they suppress their consciences and allow the public square to be occupied by those whose opinions and practices are destructive to society? In the previous conference I mentioned the case of Dean Jerome Kerwin of the University of Chicago who saved a student from suicide by relating the story of the Gospel. He would have been in trouble today for speaking of religion. But had he directed her to satanic worship, or to self-destruction, that would have been legal. Is this not the culture of death?

Our century has proven that morality without religion cannot be sustained. The consequence of a morality without religion is the deterioration of society and democracy. This was already stated by that acute observer of the American scene, de Tocqueville, as well as by the founding fathers of this country. The degeneration of society is the grand result of the great experiment of secularism. The remedy for secularism is not a theocratic state, or the establishment of a particular religion, but the upholding of religion and morality. It is the church and its Magisterium, which upholds religion and morality and which is called to train the citizens of nations so that they become upright citizens capable of playing their rightful role in society for its benefit. And it is the priests and their pastors, the bishops who must accomplish this task if society is to be healthy. This is not to deny the role and participation of other Christian and non-Christian religions, and particularly the Jewish, in upholding religion and morality. For as Vatican II says, there are in other religions elements of truth and sanctification. Nevertheless, the mainline Christian denominations have allowed their allegiance to moral principles and the Ten Commandments to waver, while in Judaism, Orthodox Judaism has alone been uncompromising in its adherence to moral standards. But the strongest bastion of morality has been the teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church, and for that reason it is the most attacked by secular humanism.

The Church must uphold religion and morality in society. The priests must teach the laity to play their part in the forming a holy nation. The welfare of the Church, its people and of the nations depends on the renewal of the priesthood.



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