

THE CHURCH'S TEACHING SERIES

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THE CHRISTIAN MORAL VISION

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be all negative. We may, in the process, learn something new about the nature of human sexuality, about the extent and the limits of our freedom and accountability.

That being the case, then perhaps we ought to exercise great restraint in the passing of judgment, as Jesus commanded us to do. We need not be either naïve or sentimental about such matters. We are free to voice our own convictions regarding the behavior of those around us. But if our attitude is worthy of the Gospel, it will be characterized by sensitivity and compassion, rather than judgmental moralism.

A corresponding responsibility is laid upon those who engage in such experimentation. Some people feel that they have discovered ways of living that are superior to the failures and hypocrisies involved in conventional sexual and marital standards. But even if they are convinced they are right, they still need to maintain a decent respect for the opinions of others and not flaunt their unconventional behavior in ways that will shock people whose views are more conventional.

When Paul asserted his freedom from conventional standards (for him the issue was eating meat that had been offered to idols), he expressed his concern that his behavior not offend the brother whose conscience dictated different behavior (1 Cor. 8). That advice is still valuable, for if we are to coexist as one united people within a dynamic, pluralistic society with changing rules and standards, we need to respect and care for one another, especially those with whom we differ the most.

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Marriage and Family Life

Marriage is a universal human institution. It exists in every society, in every age. Can we, then, speak in any meaningful sense of *Christian marriage*? If by that term is meant something unique and exclusive, something significantly different from marriage as other human communities conceive it, then the answer must be *No*. But the answer is *Yes* if we mean merely that the Christian community maintains a particular view of marriage, even though it may be shared by many outside the Christian fold. Christians look at marriage from the perspective of certain presumptions about what marriage ought to be.

We have to concede that our view of marriage is historically conditioned. It has changed with time, mostly for the better, we believe. At one time, the marriage partner was selected by the parents; women especially had little choice about who their mate would be. The fundamental bond of marriage was not love but faithfulness which, it was hoped, would ultimately grow into love with the passage of time. Marriage was an alliance of families, sealed by contract and accompanied by payments and promises.

In previous ages, the husband dominated the marriage. The wife was his property; no outside agency could interfere with his treatment of her. She could own no property in her own right. In many countries she had no independent legal existence.

In its early years, the church took a rather dim view of marriage, as it did of all matters related to sex. The church

fathers, to be sure, did acknowledge that marriage was ordained by God for the procreation of children and the perpetuation of the race, but marriage was a subordinate good. Virginity was the highest good, but since, as Paul put it, "It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (1 Cor. 7:9), marriage served as a "remedy for concupiscence," a legitimate context for accommodating man's sexual needs.

Christian Presumptions Concerning Marriage

Most of us today find these older views of marriage quaint, if not revolting. It is clear, then, that our view of Christian marriage has undergone some change. Some of our presumptions about marriage have also changed, while others have remained constant through the ages. These presumptions are summed up in the Declaration of Intention which is to be signed by anyone who seeks to be married in the Episcopal Church. They include the following:

We hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife. . . . We believe it is for the purpose of mutual fellowship, encouragement and understanding, for the procreation (if it may be) of children, and their physical and spiritual nurture, and for the safeguarding and benefit of society.¹

PERMANENCE

The Christian presumption is that marriage is intended to be permanent. This view is an outgrowth of the biblical teaching that in marriage the man and the woman have been made one flesh. Paul's observation that if anyone joins his body to a harlot they become one flesh (1 Cor. 6:16) bears witness to the fact that sexual union creates and strengthens a deep and lasting bond between man and woman. It symbolizes and celebrates that bond at the same time. Marriage is the public act by which a man and a woman declare their intention to create and preserve such a bond. By committing themselves to one another in a permanent, unconditional,

unqualified, and unreserved union—for better or for worse—they create a climate of security and stability within which the full range of sexual interaction and union can take place.

Since we are at our most vulnerable, most open to hurt and failure, in our sexual interaction, the security of permanence is necessary to enable the full flowering of the deepest kind of interpersonal and sexual relationship. Thus the Christian community declared itself opposed to any casual "contract of convenience," which is what much of secular society regards marriage to be.

FELLOWSHIP

Anglicanism early recognized that interpersonal relationship is one of the most significant aspects of marriage. The earliest Prayer Books listed "mutual society" as one of the purposes of marriage. Seventeenth-century divines—Jeremy Taylor most notably—extolled the blessings of married love, the "queen of friendships" as Taylor called it. Taylor went on to celebrate the role of sexual intercourse in strengthening the love between husband and wife.²

Even the ancient biblical writers recognized that marriage helped to overcome the loneliness of the single life. In Genesis, God looks at Adam and observes, "It is not good that man should be alone" (2:18). Marriage can thus be seen as a testimony to the inherently social character of our humanity. We all need deep and lasting human companionship, intimate and caring relationships.

MUTUALITY

The conviction that the relationship of husband and wife should be founded on mutuality is a rather late development in Christian history. Paul's dictum that "the husband is the head of the wife" (Eph. 5:23) had long been accepted without argument. Not until fairly recently has this standard been challenged and ultimately repudiated. The marriage rite itself signaled the change when the 1928 Book of Common Prayer

eliminated the traditional promise of the wife to "love, honor, and obey" her husband. Mutual vows were substituted; both husband and wife thereafter vowed to "love, honor, and cherish" each other.

Mutuality is more than a theory; it sets a standard for equal treatment in the marriage and in running the home. Not surprisingly, men have found it harder to accept this change than have women. Many men still seem to expect their wives to wait on them, pick up their socks, cater to their whims, and make them the center of their lives. Even wives who work full time are often expected to do all of the housework and the cooking. Many men still seem to feel demeaned if called upon to do household tasks.

Mutuality in marriage makes it appropriate for men to wash dishes, do laundry, and clean house. Of course, some division of labor is necessary in every marriage, but in a marriage grounded in mutuality, those decisions will be made together, with neither partner automatically required to perform any particular task—or automatically excluded from it.

On a more significant level, now that women have entered the job market more extensively, we can expect to see more and more family crises when either husband or wife is offered a new job or a promotion that requires a move on the part of the family. In the past, the expectation has always been that the man's job takes precedence and the wife makes the adjustment. Mutuality requires that any such decision be faced and made together, not by one party acting by fiat.

PROCREATION

Christians presume that, ordinarily, a marriage will produce children. A good marriage will provide the context of love, trust, and stability that enables children to grow into healthy and responsible adults. But the procreation of children is no longer seen as the central purpose of marriage. Indeed, many older persons marry long after they have passed the age of childbearing. Some married couples commit themselves to remain childless because they are convinced that the pressures of world population make it in-

cumbent upon some to refrain from bringing more children into the world. Others, often couples with heavy professional agendas or public commitments, may decide to forego parenthood because they know they are not likely to be able to extend to their children the care and attention a growing family requires.

In any case, modern marriage calls for responsible family planning: how many children to have, when to have them, whether to have them at all. These are questions which cannot be left to chance. The Anglican Communion has long been committed to the legitimacy and the value of family planning. As long ago as 1930, the bishops meeting at Lambeth acknowledged the decision to limit the size of one's family as a valid exercise of Christian responsibility. They were, however, exceedingly cautious in their approach to contraception. The 1958 Lambeth Conference went further by declaring that family planning is the moral responsibility of every Christian family.³

The availability of contraception does not eliminate the moral considerations in family planning. Couples may limit the size of their families, or even decide to have no children at all, for good and proper reasons. But their decision may also be the result of a tendency toward self-preoccupation, an immature dependence upon one another, or an inordinate concern for property and possessions.

Couples who choose childlessness or very small families should be aware of their need for outlets for their parental and charitable inclinations. They need to discover ways to manifest their concern for other people, their care for the next generation. Otherwise they will end up lavishing their affections upon possessions or pets, many of whom fare better than some children in our society.

SEX

Because of the presumption that marriage offers the only adequate context for the full expression of sexual love, most discussions of sexual morality tend to focus on the issue of sex outside marriage. But the moral dilemmas of sex are not

unknown within the married state. Sex can be used as a weapon for the manipulation of the marriage partner. It can be an expression of anger, hostility, resentment, aggression. It can even be a way of evading significant interpersonal issues, as evidenced by those couples who normally settle an argument by going to bed.

Marriage counselors tell us that the quality of sexual adjustment in marriage is usually related to the quality of the interpersonal relationship. Love, trust, caring, openness, and the capacity to forgive and be reconciled are important to the continuing health of the sexual dimension of marriage and are not always easy to maintain.

Because the sexual relationship is so dependent upon the level of trust between the partners, adultery has to be seen as the fundamental betrayal of the marriage partner. Adultery has long been regarded as sinful, as the seventh commandment makes clear, but its meaning has changed somewhat through the centuries.

In the ancient world, adultery was the violation of the man's property rights to the exclusive sexual use of his wife. It raised doubts about the legitimacy of his children and the integrity of his family. But today, marriage is seen more as a personal relationship than as a property arrangement. In that context, adultery becomes even more offensive because it intrudes into the intimate relationship that lies at the very heart of the married state.

Marriage Casualties

Marriage in contemporary society is something of a perilous journey. Since we live so much longer today, marriage has to be of a more enduring quality. Because our society is so dynamic, we tend to undergo more significant personal changes than did most people of earlier times. As a result, couples often grow apart rather than more closely together. At the same time we have been led to build up grossly unrealistic expectations about marriage—what it ought to be, what it can do for us—and then we are disappointed when life fails to measure up to the dream.

So it is not surprising that many marriages are in trouble. Couples often find it impossible to maintain the constant close communication that enables them to stay in touch with one another through the complex and manifold changes of life. Marriage today takes considerable effort in looking at, facing, talking about, and working on the quality of the interpersonal relationship itself.

When it appears that trouble is looming on the horizon, couples may need to seek professional help. When that happens, they are well advised to find a counselor who shares the Christian view of marriage, one who will see the marriage relationship itself as the client. Many marriage counselors today are more committed to the secular value of individual self-fulfillment and are unable or unwilling to help couples face and deal with the stresses and tensions in their relationship. It is always easier to advise the abandonment of the relationship in the hope that something better will turn up.

DIVORCE

Despite the best and most conscientious efforts of a couple to salvage a troubled marriage, divorce sometimes seems to be the most responsible decision. But if marriage is seen as a permanent union, how can divorce be sanctioned, or even tolerated?

The church has had great difficulty with this issue from its earliest days. On the one hand, Jesus' pronouncement on the matter (Mk. 10:2-10) would seem to make divorce impossible, though Matthew's version admits unchastity as a ground for divorce (Mt. 19:3-9). On the other hand, since some marriages clearly should be dissolved, throughout most of its history the church has permitted divorce under certain extreme conditions, but has usually refused to permit the remarriage of divorced persons.

After 1946, the Episcopal Church permitted the remarriage of a divorced person, but only when a bishop pronounced the judgment that no true Christian marriage had existed in the first place. While this canonical provision was moderately serviceable, it put the emphasis on a legalistic, rather than on

a pastoral approach to divorce. It also put the emphasis, not on divorce, but on remarriage.

This provision also rested on the curious and rather dubious theological proposition that a true Christian marriage is indissoluble whereas another, presumably more ordinary marriage, may be dissolved. It was the anomaly caused by this contradiction that finally led the 1973 General Convention to adopt a new canon which explicitly recognized the termination of a marriage and the right of the partners to be remarried with the blessing of the church.⁴

How can that decision be reconciled with the traditional Christian commitment to the permanence of the marriage bond? Many people have raised this question, some even accusing the church of abandoning traditional moral standards and accommodating itself to the lax standards of an era that has no idea of what the church means by Christian marriage.

It is certainly true that divorce has become widespread in our society, to the extent that some social critics have said that America practices serial monogamy—only one wife at a time. We would have to concede that many couples rush headlong into divorce the moment conflict or dissatisfaction appear in their marriage.

The answer to these critics is that the church does not sanction a casual or neutral attitude toward divorce. Christians do intend their marriages to be permanent and are obligated to make every effort to achieve that permanence. Nevertheless it is clear that, at all times and places, some marriages have ended in disaster. There is no moral superiority in requiring a couple to continue living together long after the disappearance of the love and faithfulness that bound them together.

The Christian moral presumption in favor of the permanence of marriage places the burden of proof on the person who would make a case for getting a divorce. Still that case can be made under some conditions. Just as Christians make a presumption in favor of peace and against war, we can envision situations in which the decision to go to war is both valid and responsible.

Most of us know people who have gone through a divorce.

At best it is painful and perilous. Few conscientious people make that decision easily. The original marriage relationship is a real one, even when it has become distorted and destructive. Shedding a husband or wife is like losing a limb. It is a profound and violent trauma that may take years to heal. And even though society no longer relegates divorced persons to a life of isolation and contempt, still a divorce is perceived as a failure, one that is inevitably shared by both partners, although one may seem more obviously guilty than the other.

The painfulness of that process may be the best safeguard to insure that divorce will not be resorted to as a way of evading hard choices in a marriage. The conscientious Christian will approach that decision with caution and skepticism: Is this divorce really necessary? The effect of the divorce on children of the marriage must be taken into serious consideration. Adequate financial provisions need to be made and carried out. Guidance from experienced and thoughtful counselors should be sought.

The final decision for a divorce can be made only by the persons involved. No amount of advice can substitute for the risk of personal choice. But once that choice is made, it is incumbent on the whole Christian community to show the divorced persons the love and care and support that will enable them to persevere through their crisis and begin to rebuild their lives. There is no room for moralistic judgment upon the brother or sister who has made that painful choice.

REMARRIAGE

While the church now finds it possible to sanction the remarriage of divorced persons, it is still advisable to undertake a second marriage only with considerable forethought. Second marriages suffer a high rate of failure. Once one has resorted to divorce as a strategy for dealing with a marital problem, it becomes that much easier to take the same route a second time.

A more subtle issue in second marriages is the persistence of unresolved conflicts left over from the first. Quite often

those conflicts get projected into the second marriage without the partners even being aware of the fact. For this reason it is advisable for such couples to seek counseling from a pastor or marriage counselor.

The counseling process can help the couple to identify and work through unsettled issues arising from the experience of the former marriage and subsequent divorce. The new marriage can then start off on the soundest possible footing, thereby sparing the couple from potential disaster in the years to come.

PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

Couples contemplating a second marriage are not the only ones who need premarital counseling. Given the precarious character of marriage in today's society, careful and competent premarital instruction is a key to building any healthy and successful marriage relationship.

In the past, couples would often consult the clergy only to set their wedding date and to arrange the service. By that time, it is usually too late to do much serious preparation. Robert Capon has described his own experience in offering premarital instruction under such circumstances: "... being in the same room is about as close as we ever get to each other. I talk *marriage*; they think *wedding*."⁵

Because they have become painfully aware of the many hazards facing newly married couples, many clergy have developed thoughtful and thorough programs for marriage preparation. Usually these last for several sessions, are participatory rather than didactic in character, and seek to convey the church's teaching about marriage. At the same time, they help the couple to examine their own attitudes toward such things as money, sex, work, children, their own families, and the ways they handle conflict. They suggest the importance of seeking help when trouble comes; they acquaint the couple with the resources available to them.

Every priest who officiates at a marriage should provide such preparation for the couple, or at least should refer them to someone else who can do it. Some couples may resist the

process, but most young people seem grateful for whatever help they can get in looking at the problems and possibilities that lie before them. A morally responsible church will do whatever it can to make that help available.

Family Life

Sociologists tell us that the family has undergone major changes in the period of industrialization and urbanization. In a rural agricultural society, the family was an economic unit. Children were assets because they helped with the work and they supported the parents when the latter became too old to contribute.

In contemporary society, however, the family no longer functions economically. It has become, rather, an emotional support group. The extended family of three or more generations, with its proliferation of uncles, aunts, and cousins has largely been replaced by the nuclear family consisting only of parents and their children, for that is the unit that moves most easily in our highly mobile society.

At the same time, the social context puts enormous pressure on the family, robbing it of the power and legitimacy it once had. Parents are no longer authority figures, regulating the information that tells the child what is real and what is not, what is true and false, good and evil. School teachers, newspapers and magazines, and, of course, the ubiquitous radio and television, all offer their competing views of reality, their value systems, their pronouncements about what is believable, what is important, what is in style. In such a setting the work of parenting becomes more difficult than ever, not because there are no guidelines, but because there are too many and they all conflict with one another.

RAISING CHILDREN

We cannot even claim to have a single "Christian model" for family life; a number of competing strategies for family living are available to us. Our society, for example, maintains an ongoing debate over how to raise children. In simplified

terms, we could refer to "strict" and "permissive" child-rearing patterns.

The strict family will govern children by giving them clear and comprehensible rules for their behavior and will enforce those rules by appropriate punishment when violated. They will emphasize discipline and respect for authority on the ground that well-governed children will be better able to govern themselves upon reaching adulthood.

The difficulty in that approach is that children may conform in their outward behavior without ever giving inner assent to the rules. In that case, they are likely to resort to evasion, deception, and in extreme cases, outright rebellion. Even if they are well behaved, such children may grow up to be loveless and self-righteous.

A permissive family will offer their children more opportunity to exercise self-government. Children may be permitted to make their own choices rather early in life, even in important matters. Behavior may be indicated only in general terms and the child may be allowed to enforce those standards with only casual monitoring from the parents.

The value of this approach is that it teaches children to exercise freedom responsibly, learning the lessons of initiative and self-reliance. The hazard is that they may be bewildered and demoralized by having to face choices they are not equipped to make. Furthermore, the lack of guidance by parents may be compensated by the readiness of peers, trend-setters, advertisers, and other less savory forces in the society which seem all too eager to tell undecided people how they ought to behave.

Both these ways of raising children have their advantages and disadvantages. Moreover, the approach that is admirably suited to one child may be entirely inappropriate for another, even within the same family. A Christian perspective cannot guarantee the right choice of approach, but it can indicate the values to be pursued in either. Rules, for example, should always be clear and reasonable, admitting of exceptions when appropriate. Children should be helped to understand why an action is considered to be right or wrong, so that they learn to distinguish principles from the rules intended to embody them.

Every child should have opportunities to exercise freedom of choice in order to learn how to be responsible—and to live with the consequences of that choice. Parents are the best judges of what freedom can safely be allowed. They need to be conscientious without smothering the child with too much attention. Somehow parents have to find their path between the extremes of indifference and overanxiousness. Perhaps the most important thing that parents can do for their children is to share the values which they themselves live by.

The extraordinary diversity of our society puts a severe strain on the process of raising children. Different kinds of families have different values, different standards of behavior, and different expectations of their children. The least demanding standards tend to prevail as children quickly learn to complain: "Everybody else is allowed to do it. Why can't I?"

Parents recognize that, if their own values are to be affirmed and their standards upheld, they need help. The parish community can provide some of this support by creating opportunities for anxious or bewildered parents to come together to confer with one another and to enjoy the benefit of each other's experience. Groups of parents may even band together to develop common behavioral standards for their children. In the absence of the extended family, the parish church may be the only supportive community available to conscientious parents.

Still no one is perfect, not even parents. There is no guarantee that children will turn out the way their parents hope for them to be, no matter how well the parents perform their functions. The children may repudiate the highest values of their parents. In the finest Christian homes, children may stop going to church, lose their faith in God, live in ways their parents cannot condone.

It may be helpful for parents to realize that they cannot control the way their children will turn out, no matter what they do or fail to do. They are not necessarily to blame when things go wrong. Children are responsible human beings just as their parents are. Parenthood is a limited liability enterprise.

The British psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott coined a

term, "the good-enough mother" to describe the parent who gives her child enough room to engage in the fanciful kind of play that expands the imagination. That term is a perceptive one; it helps us to see that parents do not have to be perfect. They have only to be adequate to the task of training and nurturing the young. The parent anxious to achieve perfection will always wonder, "Did I do enough? Did I do too much?" It is pointless to agonize. Most parents will be "good enough" to raise reasonably adequate children.

That may be hard to believe at a time when children are going through what has become almost a cliché: teen-age rebellion, a process that may last for twenty years or more. Often what looks like rebellion is merely part of a movement toward what Kohlberg calls the postconventional stage of moral development.⁶ Young people coming into adulthood need to assert themselves, often over against those who are closest and dearest to them, as a way of establishing their own identity. If all goes well, the child will ultimately come to accept the parents with all their faults and limitations, thereby opening the way to a new relationship of parent to child on an adult-to-adult basis. That new sharing of love, affection, and mutual respect may be the finest flower of modern parenthood.

GROWING OLD

The chief drawback of the nuclear family is that it has no place in it for old people. Most children in America grow up with very little regular contact with older people. Grandparents often live at some distance, so that children see little of them. Thus they miss the chance to see their own parents in the role of sons and daughters. They fail to see that what they may perceive as a unique generation gap is a persistent phenomenon in human history. They lack contact with family history, traditions, customs, rituals, and myths. Many adults likewise lose contact with their parents in middle age, thus losing valuable opportunities to work through unresolved issues in their relationship.

Foreigners coming to this country are frequently shocked

by our treatment of the elderly. They find it incomprehensible that we do not take primary responsibility for the care of aged parents. While their attitude is helpful in confronting us with an ethical issue we tend to disregard, they sometimes fail to understand that many older people prefer things the way they are. Older Americans are just as individualistic as the young. They value their autonomy. So long as it is economically feasible, most of them would prefer to remain on their own, rather than live in their children's homes. They do not want to be dependent, or to intrude on their children's privacy.

How can we best keep the biblical commandment to honor our fathers and mothers? That commandment was addressed not to children but to adults. What kind of honor do parents want and need?

At the very least, children should assume responsibility for the physical well-being of their parents. If retirement pensions are inadequate, if medical costs threaten, if older people require physical care, children ought to do what they can to see that their parents are relieved from care and worry. Beyond that, they need to keep in touch and not shut their parents out of their lives, for their own sake as well as for the parents' sake. Children need to know their older relatives, to the extent that communication is possible.

Where such contact is prevented by absence or death of the parents, children need other ways to relate to older people. Contact with the elderly in their own community offers a useful alternative to contact with unavailable grandparents. Children can learn to love and respect older people who live nearby, rather than ruling the aged out of our lives, as has happened too often in the past. Personal contact with people of all ages can help children to enlarge their understanding of what it means to be human, which was one of the valuable by-products of the extended family of a previous era.

THE SINGLE LIFE

No discussion of marriage and family life would be adequate without a positive word about the single life as well.

For our affirmation of genuine values is too often accompanied by an attitude of contempt, or at least indifference, to competing values. There is evidence that we have oversold marriage in our society. Since it is a Good Thing, we have acted as though everybody ought to be married. We try to match up our single friends. We treat marriage as a cure for personal shortcomings. We treat single people as though they suffered from some moral defect and we often exclude them from our company.

We live at a time, however, when there is no longer any compelling reason why everyone should be married. We certainly do not need the help of every adult to sustain the population. And when we consider the difficulties inherent in contemporary marriage, we are forced to conclude that many otherwise adequate and attractive adults may simply not be cut out for the married life. Thus we ought to accept and affirm the decision to remain single, just as we affirm the married state.

There are signs that we are beginning to make this shift. Single people are more generally accepted today than they were a generation ago. Still many married people leave their single friends out of their social lives. And churches which emphasize a family orientation often act as though single people did not exist, except perhaps for a special "young adult" group, which often serves as an informal dating bureau.

The Christian community, because it affirms and exalts the married state, has a peculiar obligation to affirm the legitimacy of staying unmarried. Churches need to open themselves up to greater participation by single people, in interaction with the married, so as not to treat singleness as a form of social disease.

Marriage and the Future

Our society is feeling a considerable degree of anxiety about the status of marriage and family life—and with good reason. A rising divorce rate, increasing evidence of troubled marriages, a variety of live-together arrangements that seem to

indicate a repudiation of marriage by the young—not to mention such phenomena as swinging, open marriages, communal living, group marriages, free sex—all of these things support the view that marriage as we have known it is in trouble. Do marriage and the family have a future? What kind of future do they have?

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, we need not fear that either marriage or the family will disappear. These are the basic institutions of any society. They have proved tough and viable over many centuries. They may undergo considerable stress and significant changes, but we are too committed to them to let them die.

The stresses that we see in marriage and family life today are signs of significant changes and pathologies in the larger society. At the same time they represent efforts of the family to cope with and adjust to those changes.

We are beginning to see, for example, the effects of other social institutions on marriage and family life. The most prosperous members of the middle class seem to be the most vulnerable to frequent relocation, an experience that rips the family out of its social context, separating its members from friends, neighbors, familiar sights and sounds, and from other caring persons such as teachers, leaders, guides. Such families, left to their own resources, often become overly dependent upon one another.

Countless families, both rich and poor, find themselves subject to the pressures of a work life that removes the commuting or traveling father from the family circle. An increasing number of two-income families find that they can provide the children with all that money can buy but cannot provide what money cannot buy—caring and available parents. Even churches that proclaim the importance of family life nevertheless develop separate programs for every age group, thus contributing to the fragmentation of family life.

Some families are beginning to understand the effect of these external forces upon their corporate life. Some are going so far as to take direct action to cope with those forces, even though the cost may be high in terms of professional success or individual self-fulfillment. Men increasingly reject moves,

even those that involve promotion, when it appears that their family will suffer too much from the dislocation. It is encouraging to see the readiness of people to preserve the stability of their family life in view of the price they have to pay.

We have begun to realize, then, that marriage and family life are not static conditions. "So they were married and lived happily ever after" is not a realistic or even credible comment any longer. Marriage in our time is a voyage in faith, a pilgrimage, as theologian John Snow has called it.⁷ Over the long haul, the landscape may change, the people themselves will change, the issues change as will the nature of the relationship. The one constant in marriage is the commitment of the partners to one another, their conviction that, with care, patience, and a willingness to forgive and be forgiven, it will be possible to sustain their common life and to grow in love, trust, and affection in the process.

Christians see something profoundly sacramental about marriage. Paul saw in it a symbol of that mystical union between Christ and his church, which is to say that the deepest relationship between man and woman is somehow like the relationship between God and his people. Thus that relationship is close to the center of the Christian life. Christian men and women are called to bring that metaphor to the level of everyday reality as they live together in the love and trust and faithfulness to which the metaphor points.

Part Three

MORAL ISSUES IN THE SOCIAL ORDER

need to go beyond church affairs, however, and learn something of the political and economic context in which that mission takes place. Then we can begin to make the connections between what we have learned and what our country's policies are doing to other nations.

Christians, singly or together, can mount an informed critique of public policy, foreign and domestic. We can discuss political issues within a theological framework, identifying our Christian presumptions and testing various policies in their light. We cannot deal with everything, but we can deal with some things. Dealing with even one thing will put us ahead of most people.

Even those of us who are not politically active can be a part of an enlightened public opinion. We can do more than just reflect the findings of the latest public opinion poll. We can form our own opinions and express them when we get the chance.

We can occasionally let our elected representatives know what we think about a particular issue, especially when we suspect that our view may run counter to the main stream of opinion. Suppose thousands of Christians were to let their congressmen know that they are willing to tolerate higher taxes in the interest of providing adequate public services to all, especially the poor. That might effect a political revolution.

But some people are naturally nonpolitical. They may resonate to the arts, perhaps, rather than politics, and define the good life in aesthetic rather than political terms. That, too, is a legitimate Christian response. There is no disgrace in being nonpolitical.

But in a democracy, even the most nonpolitical types are obligated to participate at least minimally in public life. They ought to vote. They ought to know, when election day comes, where the polling place is located and who is running for what. They should follow the campaigns at least closely enough so that they can vote with reasonable intelligence. Total apathy is a disease that responsible Christians must cast off. Our participation in the political process is our personal contribution to justice and peace in the social order.

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The Church and the Moral Life

Most of the discussion in this book has focused on the moral life of the individual. We have considered the development of moral character, how decisions are made, and what kinds of issues face us in personal and family life as well as on the larger social, economic, and political scene. How shall I live? What shall I do? have been our primary concerns.

This approach would seem to assume that our moral life is lived out in isolation. But that can be only part of the story, for Christianity is a venture in community. The Christian faith is a common possession of the people of God, the company of faithful people who gather for prayer and worship, fellowship and service. No consideration of the Christian life would be complete without putting it into the context of community: the church.

Anglicans have always taken the church very seriously, regarding it as more than an aggregate of individual believers. In the creed we confess our faith in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, the universal body of Christian believers down through the ages. The church is the divine society called into being by God, in which Christ is encountered in word and sacrament, in which we are empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit. To be a Christian is to be a member of the church, a living part of a living body.

The church appears in history in many forms. The religious organization, the denomination, is the church—the Protes-

tant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, for example, with its constitution and canons, its officials and assemblies and stated positions. The local congregation is the church, perhaps the most influential form of the church for the life of the ordinary Christian.

But the church is also those less formal associations of Christians who come together outside the official structures of the church. "Where two or three are gathered in my name," Jesus said, "there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20). The Christian family is one of these assemblies of the faithful. A neighborhood group might be one too, or a prayer group on the job, an informal group of friends, a church-related interest group. All of these communities partake of the character of the church, and in all of these settings the church has some impact on the moral life of the Christian.

The Church and Moral Formation

We noted at the outset that this book is intended to be helpful to people of faith who are committed to Christ and who care about doing the Lord's will in their lives. They need help in learning how to work out the implications of their faith, figuring out what they ought to do and how they ought to do it. In other words, we presume the existence of the committed Christian moral agent.

Where do such persons come from? Not everyone shares this commitment and concern for doing the Lord's will. Even many Christians have a very restricted view of their own moral responsibilities. How are serious, ethically sensitive Christians produced?

Such people are the product of a long process of nurture. They have been shaped by their environment, which has enabled them to become morally sensitive and concerned. For the Christian, that environment is the community of faith, the church.

The family is, of course, the most important agency in the moral development of the child. Children pick up the faith of their parents, their convictions, their attitudes, their moral commitments. Often the process is unconscious. The chil-

dren may be well along into adulthood before they realize that they are living out moral commitments quite similar to those of their parents.

But that process is neither simple nor certain, for we live in a world in which the family is under severe stress, as we have already seen. Other agencies in the society offer moral alternatives. Conflicting values are aggressively promoted. Acquisitiveness, competitiveness, and sheer selfishness are promoted all around us.

The perils of competing value systems require the Christian family to be more self-conscious and intentional about the moral formation of children. Parents need to be able to identify their own convictions and to speak freely about them. They need to share with their children their perception that something important is at stake in the preservation of their values. Parents need to be able to offer convincing reasons for their own moral choices so that children will understand what those values mean to them.

Beyond the work of the family itself, the local church can affirm and support this process of moral formation. It should be a major ingredient in the parish education program. While parents cannot expect the parish to do all their own work of moral instruction, in a time when even the most thoughtful parents feel inadequate to the task, the whole Christian community needs to learn to share that responsibility.

A more subtle but no less important instrument for moral development is the worship of the church. Regular participation in the hearing of the Word and reception of the sacrament contributes to moral formation. Even when ethical issues are not directly addressed, in worship we meet a Lord who loves us and who calls us out of our preoccupation with self. In worship we identify and acknowledge our moral failures, we offer up our moral dilemmas, we receive forgiveness of our sins and offenses. In worship we hear the call to share God's love with all of his children and are sent forth to serve in the cause of freedom, justice, and peace. Worship creates a context that contrasts sharply with the aggressive, competitive, and self-centered ethos of contemporary society.

Moral formation is not a matter that concerns only children,

for all of us are in the process of moral development. We all need constant feeding and nurture. We need to have heightened our awareness of the issues to which the Gospel speaks. Getting our consciousness raised may take some effort, especially where our self-interest is involved and where it is profitable for us not to raise moral questions.

It may be easy for me to see, for example, that the youth of the community are having problems with drugs. It may be harder for me to see that my own use of pills or alcohol may contribute to the climate that makes drugs a problem for others. The church can help me look for the links between these issues so that I become aware of the extent to which I share responsibility for someone else's moral quandary.

We have seen how the operations of business, labor, government, and various professional groups all raise significant moral issues. Many of the major decision-makers in these areas are members of local churches. Many of them would concede that their church has never provided them with any guidance or support in their public role. Indeed the church seems to have little interest in such matters. A responsible effort at moral formation would include such people within its compass to help insure that Christians in all sorts of occupations may become effective and responsible moral agents.

A parish might make use of Lawrence Kohlberg's analysis of the process of moral development as an instrument in building a program of moral formation. His conceptual model helps us to understand how we are led from one level of development to the next. It can suggest ways to teach—and ways not to teach—helping us to become more conscious of the effects of our behavior on the moral development of Christians, both youth and adults.

Kohlberg helps us to understand the power of socializing forces among teen-agers. Instead of inveighing against the demonic influence of peer-group pressures, for example, we might become more self-conscious about creating supportive peer groups, as many churches have done, often quite unconsciously. We can help adults to move beyond the moralistic law-and-order stage, in which so many Americans seem to

be stuck, by affirming the centrality of unbounded love in the Christian life.

Kohlberg's theory is not the only conceptual scheme available for moral development, to be sure. Whatever the theory, the important thing is to see the church as a major contributor to the development of responsible moral agents. When Christians can see the connections between their faith and their behavior, between their religious convictions and the great moral issues of the day, then the church has indeed fulfilled this most significant aspect of its mission.

A Community of Moral Discourse

Christians need the opportunity to talk about specific ethical issues. Many of those issues are so complex that a simple acquaintance with the facts is difficult to achieve. But we need to know the facts before we can make responsible judgments. We need to be able to discuss those facts and our responses to them, in a climate that is free of self-serving propaganda.

Many of those issues are bitterly controversial. We need to be able to talk about them in a context where opposing voices can be heard without lapsing into shrill and vicious name-calling. We need to be able to speak and hear the truth in a context of love and mutual support and concern. Only in such a context can faithful Christians thoughtfully relate the facts of the case to their religious convictions and then go on to make responsible actions.

A Christian congregation can provide a forum where ethical issues can be aired. We can look together at such controversial matters as drug abuse, abortion, homosexuality, child rearing, in an atmosphere characterized by a Christian concern for justice, truth, and love, and free from the rancor and deliberate falsification that cloud so much of our public discussion about controversial issues.

In the fellowship of the Christian community, we can begin to look at the concrete moral choices faced by actual people, bringing our ethical discourse out of the realm of abstraction. People who trust and care for each other can

even begin to share their own moral experience, referring their concerns and dilemmas to the thoughtful consideration of their fellow Christians.

Many parishes are reluctant to see the congregation engage in such discussions, precisely because the issues are likely to be controversial. Many churches are simply afraid of conflict. They believe that Christians should always be nice to each other. The introduction of controversy makes it hard to be nice, so we should deal only with things we all agree about.

That is a very limited view of Christian community. If the common faith and mutual love which binds the congregation together does not enable its members to engage in responsible discourse on matters that deeply concern them, then where is such interchange ever to take place? Speaking the truth in love requires both restraint and a willingness to take risks. A morally committed church will be able to provide the context in which moral discourse can flourish without being destroyed in the process.

Valuable work of moral reflection can be carried on by intentional groups of people who band together to study and act upon some issue which they all regard as important. Some such groups have formal organizational structure: The Episcopal Peace Fellowship, Integrity, The Church and City Conference, the Church and Society Network.

Such groups are able to gather information about their area of interest, consult with knowledgeable people in the field, call on sympathetic theologians and ethical thinkers, publish and disseminate the results of their reflections. They may engage in action projects to bring about the results they advocate. Groups such as these can be expected to do most of the spade work of ethical reflection on particular personal and social issues on behalf of the larger church.

The Church as Moral Model

The church influences the world as much by what it is and does as by what it says. The moral life of the Christian community carries a message to the world, whether we intend it or not.

Too often the church teaches all the wrong things. When a parish plays the "Get the Rector" game, or when a power struggle in the congregation sets people against each other, when conflict becomes mean and spiteful or petty and meaningless, then the world sees the church denying by its life the truth which it proclaims. Thus the Christian community stands under the demand of its Lord to live out its own life with integrity and sensitivity, furthering the cause of justice and love in its own corporate life.

This demand applies not only to the interpersonal relationships within congregations, but to the institutional behavior of the church as well. It may be noble for the church to fight to raise the minimum wage, but its witness is subverted if that same church underpays its own employees. Churches have a generally poor reputation for their personnel policies, especially regarding lay employees: secretaries, sextons, etc. The pay is generally poor; there is little job security; most employees lack adequate pension plans. On the whole, churches are not good employers, a fact which the outside world knows quite well.

The church can best teach its values by exemplifying them. The witness of the historic peace churches, the Friends, Mennonites, Brethren, shows how powerful can be the effect of such acted-out commitment. Pacifism has been part of their corporate discipline for many years. Despite their small size, those churches have been quite influential in establishing the legitimacy of conscientious objection to war and in bringing the cause of peace constantly before the general public.

Because of its diversity and its legacy of commitment to personal freedom, the Episcopal Church has never been strong in the area of church discipline. Indeed it has almost seemed to some outsiders to have proclaimed a doctrine of moral laxity. Within the broad range of that freedom available within the church, particular congregations and other groups can frame a corporate discipline for acting out their moral convictions in specific ways. If we are to repudiate the cultural value of acquisitiveness, for example, we must discover ways to demonstrate that repudiation by the quality of our corporate lives.

Similarly, the church has repeatedly asserted its commitment to the city, especially to the poor and the other victims of urban blight and decay. Those proclamations will enjoy credibility only as the church engages in significant corporate activity consistent with that commitment. It will mean deploying our human and financial resources for the benefit of those who suffer exploitation and oppression in the city. That kind of advocacy will carry a message more powerful and convincing than any convention resolution or episcopal pronouncement.

Finally the church needs to discover ways in which its own life can testify to its commitment to the solidarity of the whole human family. In this most heterogeneous nation, our local churches normally consist of people who look alike, dress alike, have about the same income, hold similar jobs. There are few multiracial, multiethnic, classless congregations anywhere to be found. Changing this situation will require considerable thought and effort, but it must be achieved if the organized church is to make a credible witness in the midst of the diversity of our society.

The Church as a Community of Support

The moral life is a struggle in which we win some and lose some. The individual can be weighed down by the struggle, overwhelmed with a sense of failure, or, on the other hand, glide blissfully along on a wave of complacency, unaware of any moral lapses or even challenges. For these reasons Christians need to maintain their roots in a caring community of faith and love which can provide both accountability and support.

As we try to live out our moral commitments, we need to let others into our life, to know our concerns and our dilemmas, to help us look at the choices before us, to help us evaluate the choices we have made, to support us when we need courage, and to forgive us when we fail.

Failure is the hardest reality for us to face. We make excuses, blame others, practice denial. That is the nature of sin. But in the knowledge of the love of God, we can afford to face

our failures and repudiate our own evil deeds. We can dare to ask forgiveness in the knowledge that we will be forgiven.

The Christian community offers the fellowship in which all this can happen. We can be accepted and affirmed, renewed and strengthened to face another day, another choice, another dilemma—even another failure.

The moral life of the Christian is the most significant aspect of the Christian ministry in the world. That ministry is shared by every Christian and is carried out in every conceivable environment: in the home, on the job, among our friends, in our public roles, and in our private lives. Christian behavior rises to the level of ministry when it becomes a self-conscious response to the call of the Lord who saves us and redeems us.

Many congregations have come to understand the importance of this concept of lay ministry and have encouraged the creation of groups that provide accountability and support for one another. But this is a relatively new phenomenon in the Episcopal Church, for most church members still regard the moral life as strictly private and personal.

The most significant task facing the church in our generation is the mobilizing of our moral energies by bringing the moral life out of the closet and into the mainstream of our corporate life. Only then will we see how it is related to the totality of Christian life: our worship, our spiritual pilgrimage, our various public roles. For no facet of Christian life and thought stands by itself. The recognition of the interrelatedness of all of life—and all of our lives—is the ultimate consequence of the hearing of the Gospel.