

BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Lecture Number 18

HOLY MATRIMONY II

ROMANTICISM AND LOVE

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INTRODUCTION

I am going to begin by reading two quotations.

- “Every person has a right to human fulfillment in a sexual and mutually supportive relationship.”
- “Love is the experience of knowing that another person cares deeply, warmly, acceptingly, and dependably. This is the most indispensable need of any human being, to which all other heart hungers are tributary: to have a steady source of warmth and affection to offset the chill of depersonalizing experiences in the outside world.

“Such love given and received in marriage feeds self esteem. ‘Knowing that she loves me through my ups and downs makes me feel ten feet tall.’ Love helps one define his identity more sharply as he experiences himself vividly in both passionate and quiet caring.

“It reinforces a feeling of inner security by making the marriage a harbor where one is safe from many of the storms and threats of everyday life. Love is a force that welds a relationship at its points of meeting.

“The ancient insight of St. Paul has been confirmed and reconfirmed in the social sciences, counseling relationships, and successful marriage: ‘The greatest of these is love.’”

How did those quotations sound? Is that the way you think about love?

Well, the first quotation is a slogan in support of gay rights.

The second is from the book, *The Intimate Marriage*, by Howard and Charlotte Clinebell. When the book was published he was a professor of theology at Claremont College in California. She was a psychiatric social worker.

The second quotation actually is not so much a description of *love* as it is of the *experience of being loved*. In fact, it is really *romanticism*, which is an illusion. Marriage, on the other hand, is a grappling with reality.

THE HISTORY OF ROMANTICISM

About 2000 B.C., at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, society was agricultural. People lived in stable villages surrounded by walls. They farmed the land which surrounded the town. It was largely a *matrilineal* society, if not *matriarchal*:

They considered children to be the product of the mother; the father's part was thought to be insignificant. Genealogy was reckoned through the mother.

Their religion consisted of the worship of a goddess who personified the forces of nature. Her idols were large statues of a woman whose belly was an open furnace. They worshipped her by throwing babies into its flames. They said that every year she died and was reborn again in the springtime. Persephone, of the Greek myth, is a version of her.

Around 1500 B.C., there was an invasion of *patriarchal* people into Greece and Italy. They were people of Viking stock, blonde and blue-eyed, Indo-Europeans (aka Indo-Aryans) who worshipped a masculine sky god.

About the same time there came into *Canaan*, (or *Palestine*) the Hebrews who were dark, but who also worshipped a sky-god.

In Greece, that god was called Zeus; in Italy, Jove; in Canaan, JHVH (Yahweh).

They thought of babies as being the product of the father. The mother was sort of like an oven in which they were baked.

The Hebrews, for example, were very careful about their wives, because no man wanted to raise another's brat.

A thousand years later, about 500 B.C., in those places fertility religions began to revive in the form of the "mystery religions"—the first important rival of Christianity. The mystery religions were matriarchal, orgiastic, and anti-intellectual. "I believe" gave way to "I feel."

For its first 300 years or so, until 313 A.D., Christianity was an underground religion.

But by 400 A.D. it was dominant throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.

At least it was dominant in the cities, but fertility religion survived in the waterfront slums of the seaport cities (which was almost all the cities) and in the countryside among the hillbillies. The very word "pagan" itself comes from the Latin word *pagus* which means "countryside." The country folk tended to remain "pagan".

Two centuries later, in the 600's, the new religion of *Islam* swept throughout the eastern half of the Roman Empire. Islam was patriarchal and puritanical. However, Puritanism is always vulnerable to its mirror which is paganism.

Islam also swept westward across North Africa bringing along with it the surviving paganism of the eastern seaport slums. From there it spread up into Spain and Europe, and the paganism which it carried along with it combined with the rural paganism of the European countryside.

As a result, between 900 and 1100 A.D., strange things began happening all over Europe — there was an outbreak of *romanticism*:

- Teenagers were sneaking out after dark to gather in the meadows and hold what they called “courts of love”. They would choose a maiden to be the “Queen of Love,” and the other maidens would serve as her ladies-in-waiting.

They chose one of the boys to be her consort, and the other boys paired off with the girls. Then they performed intricate figure dances until they were all thoroughly excited. Finally, they engaged in sexual intercourse, and then, just before dawn, they sneaked back home. Their parents felt helpless to stop or control it.

Now you know the origin of “folk” dances and square dances. It came to be called “going courting.” Homecoming queens and even beauty pageants can be traced back to this custom.

- In the spring time, teen-age boys ran off from home and wandered around with guitars (lutes) singing “love” songs as long as the weather was bearable. Then in the winter they would attach themselves to some estate until the weather was mild enough to hit the road again.

These teen-age boys were called *troubadours*. Their songs were in the vulgar language which was actually a broken-down form of Latin, the *Roman* language. Thus the songs which the troubadours sang in that language were called “romances.”

Their songs were scarcely more than translations of the ancient hymns to the fertility goddesses.

In fact, the first literary composition in a romance language was the “romance” of the lovers, Tristan and Isolde.

The famous novel by Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, was written as a parody or criticism of romanticism. But it miscarried, and people took it seriously. The modern musical comedy *Man of La Mancha* was based upon it. And the song from it, “The Impossible Dream,” became very popular.

The fertility rites which survived in the countryside were referred to as witchcraft. And so in that sense the country girl, Joan of Arc, really was a witch.

Witchcraft, fertility religion, is still with us. I once knew a man in a former parish who could never go to church on Good Friday. Because on that day he always had to plow and plant his garden—which happened to be right across the street from the church.

And today in our country, there are people who openly claim to be witches.

By the early 1800s, romanticism was in full flower in Europe and America. Marriage was expected to produce romantic values, but it could not and it can not. Either all those romantic expectations had to be abandoned or the institution of marriage would disintegrate.

And that is exactly what is happening faster and faster, because people are clinging to the

romantic illusion. Actually most people don't know there is an alternative.

THE NATURE OF ROMANTICISM

Deep in his heart, Johnny (and Mary) is a romantic.

At 15, he knows he is made for rapture;

At 25, he'll settle for happiness;

At 35, for peace;

At 45, for security, or;

He has a "mid-life crisis" and starts looking for his dream girl all over again.

The Christian believes, on the other hand, that we are made for ecstasy all right, but he also knows that it is available only in heaven.

The romantic pagan believes it is available on earth ("personal fulfillment in a sexual and mutually supportive relationship") but somewhere else, or in different circumstances, or with someone else.

The search for the Holy Grail in the Middle Ages was an example of romanticism;

So was the Puritans' trip to New England to found a "really righteous" community;

Communism is romanticism—the destruction of all the decadent institutions will allow the goodness of man to achieve "paradise;"

So is modern political liberalism—"change" will produce social harmony, prosperity and happiness;

And likewise, conservatism—"the good old days".

The Romantic illusion always slips through our fingers. Remember what Yogi Berra is supposed to have said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." But we can't, because as we use our freedom, we use it up.

The tired old romantic is a pitiful figure, and his motto is "if only..." This plaintive old song with its touch of sadness might be his theme song:

"With someone just like you, a pal that's good and true,

I'd like to leave it all behind and go and find

a place that's known to God alone,

a little place that we can call our own.

We'll build a little nest somewhere in the west

and let the rest of the world go by.”

NOTE: It is not that we cannot be happy, but that our happiness lies in submitting to God's will in circumstances that we cannot dominate and control.

It seems that in this world the closest most folks ever come to the total absorption of self— body and soul—in an experience of delight is in sexual orgasm. And so sex is found hovering at the center of all our romantic aspirations and strivings.

THE IMPACT OF ROMANTICISM ON OUR CULTURE

Perhaps the most powerful single influence on what young people expect from the boy-girl relationship comes from popular love songs.

Of course, beginning in the last half of the 20th century, more and more our most popular “songs” are no longer about love, but about hate and violence.

But our traditional popular songs have been almost identical with the most ancient pagan hymns, not to mention the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament, which appears to allude “to the ancient myth of the love of god and goddess on which the fertility of nature was thought to depend.” (The editor of the 1976 Oxford annotated RSV Bible)

Apart from the songs of hate and violence, the popular song is a love song and a sad song. Its characteristics usually are these:

In these songs:

Men speak to women or about them;

The language of religion is used: she is an angel or a goddess—“heaven is in your arms;”

Romantic love is said to be the greatest good—“Love is the greatest thing,” “Love makes the world go ‘round;”

Fatalism (It was all arranged by fate)—“That Old Black Magic has me in its spell...;”

Lust—the word “Love” means need, want, desire. But to think of love in these terms is to be a five year old (more on this later);

The man is the servant of the goddess;

Sexual intercourse equals death—in romantic operas the lovers are united only in the grave, e.g. Romeo and Juliet, Aida, Tosca.

THE FEAR OF WOMEN

Romanticism actually is quite *natural*. Paganism has permeated the last 4000 years of human history. And it comes naturally to feel that divinity is female. Because in our formative years, our infancy, we are with mother most of the time.

Daddy, on the other hand, is *exotic*—out of sight, out of mind. And the masculine sky-god of Jews and Christians is likewise *exotic*.

Mother is the earliest *embodiment* of wisdom, power, and providence which human beings experience.

All men tend to be afraid of women. Because the normal historic reaction to an experience of God, or a god or goddess, is fear.

Men know deep down inside that you don't go to bed with a goddess and live—"I probably couldn't bring it off, and if I did it would kill me." ...Furthermore,

Women have a hard time convincing themselves that they are goddesses. It is cruel to expect a woman to be a goddess, because she is doomed to fail and then feel guilty.

THE RESULT

When the man fails to find "human fulfillment in a sexual and mutually supportive relationship," he does not assume that he was expecting an unreasonable thing, but rather that he has married the wrong woman.

LOVE

INTRODUCTION

Our hero is a fourteen year old boy, six foot three, one hundred fifty pounds, size thirteen feet, and pimples! One thing he is certain of is that no girl in her right mind would look at him twice. In fact he is afraid of girls. But he is also fascinated by them. In short he is in *awe* of them.

One day after school he finds himself walking along beside one of *them!* She happens to say something about how dumb her parents are. He blurts out that he knows exactly what she means, because his parents are just as dumb. And they discover that each understands the other, *really!*

One thing leads to another, and before long he is sitting with her in the swing on her front porch. After an hour or so he gets up the nerve to try to kiss her. He knows she will slap his face and send him home. But, Lo and behold! She kisses him back! That night as he walks back home, his feet are six inches off the ground. He's in love!

EROS

In English we have one word which has to cover many different meanings. The Greeks had a word for each of them. Our word is *love*. And it can mean completely opposite things.

For instance, we say things like, "I love cheese cake!" which means that I want to take the being of cheese cake and consume it, to use *its* being to fill up *my* emptiness. This is the most frequent sense in which we use this word. It is simply desire. The technical name for it in Greek is *eros*.

That's the kind of love that our hero is "in." The girl is making him feel valuable, important, worth the time of day, understood.

THERAPY

Lots of adults in our society feel misunderstood, not worth much, rejected, alone, empty. Many of these folks consult psycho-therapists. Consider this woman:

When we first see her she is being shown into the office of Dr. Jones. He asks her to have a seat and explain why she has decided to consult him.

Well, she says that her old friends just won't have anything to do with her anymore.

He says, "That's too bad. What seems to be the reason?"

She says, "It seems to be because I like pancakes."

He says, "That's strange; I don't see anything wrong with that. I like pancakes, too."

She says, "Oh, you do! You have got to see my collection! I've got trunks full of them!"

He gets her talking about pancakes and the other things that matter to her and that bother her. He listens. He responds with understanding and concern.

Finally, after fifty minutes, he says, “I’m sorry, but your time is up. I’ll see you next week.” And she leaves.

Then he takes out a folder, and for five minutes he makes notes on their session. Then he puts that folder away, and for the next five minutes he reads from another folder about the *next* patient. Then he tells his receptionist to send in the next patient.

He begins by saying to that patient, “Now, last week you were telling me about...so and so...” This patient says to himself, “Wow! He remembers what I told him. He really is interested in me!”

Well, the Pancake Lady follows the usual pattern and falls in love with her therapist. “No one ever understood me before, etc.”

But eventually the day comes when she says to herself, “Of course he listens to me and takes an interest in me! I’m paying him \$100 an hour to do it!” So she starts displaying all sorts of negative behavior: she breaks appointments; she tells him off; she throws things; she just sits and won’t talk.

This behavior has a name. It is called *reality testing*. If the therapist loses his patience with her, he blows it, and it is all over. But if he remains calm and lets her misbehave without retaliation, then she feels secure in her relationship.

And then the day will come when the therapist will say, “I really don’t think there is much else I can do to help you. But if you ever need to talk, please call. I can always find time for you.” And they part as friends.

Psychotherapy has three stages:

1. Dependency (being in love with the therapist);
2. Hostility (reality testing);
3. Friendship.

The therapist must *not* be dependent on the patient or the reality testing, when it comes, will destroy the relationship and they will part with bitterness.

Being “in love” like the boy and girl above is really being in *mutual psychotherapy*.

But remember, it is necessary for the therapist not to need the approval of the patient. But in the love affair the therapist – the other lover – is completely dependent.

So the therapy – the love affair – is doomed to end in bitterness.

Lovers’ quarrels are actually reality testing. They start when the first hint appears that the other lover’s interest is really in what he is getting out of the relationship.

Notice what they quarrel about are things like “You said so and so” or some other indication of base or inadequate motive.

Marriages are destroyed by people expecting their spouses to be therapists.

If you need therapy go to a priest or other counselor. But unfortunately today’s marriage manuals usually try to tell you how to turn your marriage into successful psychotherapy. Therapy is not what marriage is for; it has a different purpose. We’ll get into that next time.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

All created things tend to actualize their natures. That is, acorns tend to become oak trees. And children tend to grow up and become adults. They have a built-in tendency or desire to actualize humanity.

Very early on (around two), children start to learn certain basic facts:

- The difference between *big* and *little* people;
- The difference between *mama* types and *daddy* types;
- Which type they are – some fail at this point;
- That he/she will never succeed in becoming *completely* adult, but only the *male* or *female*

So the next best thing (for a boy) to becoming both male and female adult is to be a man and “have” a woman, one with which to pair-bond.

So Johnny begins to compose a dream girl in his mind made up of the best qualities of all the women he has ever experienced: Mother, aunts, sisters, teachers, actresses, friends’ mothers, etc.

Then one day Johnny meets a girl/woman who seems like his dream girl and he is “in love.” While he is young we call such love affairs “crushes” or “puppy-love.”

Well, as time goes on, his dream girl fantasy is still growing and changing.

And he discovers things about his crush that aren’t so nice after all. So he falls out of love with Alice and in love with Betsy.

Johnny is really in love with his own fulfillment.

When his affair with Alice or Betsy is going sour, he says to himself: “She won’t do. But I’ve made love to her. If I reject her, I’ll hate myself.” He is also addicted to the approval she has been giving him. So he hangs on even after the spell is broken.

Johnny’s dream girl doesn’t exist anywhere except in his imagination. Nor does mine. [But SHE always loves me; SHE always understands me; SHE always approves of me; etc.]

And everything I have said about Johnny applies to Alice and Betsy and Carol as well.

GROWING UP

As a child grows up, he finds himself in progressively more dangerous situations. e.g., such as the first time—his mother leaves him at home with a baby-sitter ; or he is left at a nursery; or he goes to school; or he goes on a camping trip; or he goes off to summer camp; etc.

He always knows that when he is home with mother everything is all right. Home is where he is loved and is safe and is cared for, etc.

But eventually he cuts the apron strings. That is, he joins the Navy; or goes to college; or gets a job in another town. Then he can't go back home.

He feels the need to establish a new home base. So whoever his current sweetheart is when this happens, that's the one he marries.

But that doesn't change anything! It just complicates it legally. So people have quit complicating it legally. They realize it hasn't changed anything. And that is largely why they don't bother to "get that piece of paper" any more.

THE HONEYMOON

One morning, six months after the wedding, at breakfast, Johnny looks across the breakfast table at Mary and smells the toast burning and says to himself, "My God! I'm married to that! Now I'm never going to find my dream girl. And it's all her fault!"

Now he has three choices:

1. Leave her for another;
2. Take a mistress;
3. Try to be a satisfactory husband.

If he chooses the third and says, "I really blew it! But, I made some solemn promises. So I'll play the man and do what I said I would." At that point real love begins to enter the picture.

AGAPE LOVE

This brings us to the second kind of love which is called *agapé*. This is loving with the *will* whether you feel like it or not.

Love which is unasked, undemanded, on which there is no price tag, is self-verifying. It does away with the "need" for reality testing. So on those occasions when Johnny is not getting anything out of it, Mary isn't tempted to think he is doing it for what he is getting out of it.

Of course, it is important that both know that agapé love is going to be involved, so that they will not be suspicious when it happens.

Marriage is a 100% proposition—not a 50–50 deal.

Jesus' prescription for us is: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?... You therefore must be perfect, even as your heavenly father is perfect." [Matthew 5:43–48]

What Jesus means is, "I'll scratch your back if it itches; if mine itches, I'll rub it on the bed post."

When both Johnny and Mary are loving this way, each is getting an awful lot of love.

Note that in the quotation Jesus implies that there *is* reward *in* a certain kind of love: "...what reward *have* you?" He does not say, "...what reward *will* you have?"

Jesus goes on to say, "Where a man's treasure is there will his heart be also." {Matthew 6:21} That is the reason a woman loves her newborn baby: she has been inconvenienced and made uncomfortable by it, thus investing herself in it, for months before it is born.

As Jesus says, "She no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world." [John 16:21]

When agapé love is persisted in, it gives way to joy. Jesus says, "Whoever would lose his life for my sake will find it." [Matthew 16:25]

But if you try to stay on the level of eros love, or desire, even that will dry up. Jesus also says, "Whoever would save his life shall lose it." {Matthew 16:25}

Agapé love means drawing on the power of God to minister to my spouse. This is the opposite of eros love which uses up my spouse for my own welfare.

CO-INHERENCE

Eros does not teach me anything about the one I am desiring. I only see her (or him) in terms of my own need. I do not see her as she really is, or as she may become. I do not really know her.

But agapé leads me to identify with her and become part of her, to invest myself in her. And then when she rejoices, I rejoice; when she is sad, I am sad. I dwell in her, and she dwells in me.

This corresponds to the union between Christ and his Bride the Church: as we pray in the Eucharist, "that (we) may worthily receive the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son Jesus Christ, be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction, and *made one body with him, that he*

may dwell in us and we in him.” [1979 BCP, p. 336]

This identification with my spouse is the fulfillment of that desire and longing which I discovered in childhood—to grow up and experience what it is to live as both man *and* woman.

PHILIA

This brings us to the third kind of love, *Philia*—a Greek word, which is not to be confused with *filial* love which comes from Latin, is spelled differently, and refers to something else.

Philia, translated “friendship,” is actually a more profound notion than that would suggest. Jesus used the word at the Last Supper when he said, “This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his *friends*. You are my *friends* if you do what I command you, to love (*agapate*) one another.” [John 15:12–17]

Agapé leads to *philia*. Agapé involves dying to one’s self and, in a sense, rising to new life in the beloved. The new life in the beloved is *philia*. Husband and wife become united as friends—in Jesus’s sense of the word. In fact, this is the fulfillment of his words, “the two shall become one flesh.” [Matthew 19:5]

JOY

The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the way Jesus laid down his life for his Bride the Church in these words: “...let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking to (keeping our eyes on) Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the *joy* that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” [Hebrews 12:1b, 2]

The *philia*, friendship, that comes out of agapé love is also *joy*. The lover rejoices in the beloved. So perhaps *philia* should be called “joyful friendship.”

THE BRIDE AND GROOM

The Christian Gospel is that we shall achieve the purpose for which we were made, that is, to know God, to love God, and to enjoy him forever. This is not a “one-way” relationship. We are also to be known, to be loved, and to be enjoyed. In fact, we already are.

When it is persisted in, Holy Matrimony leads to that kind of union between husband and wife. They come to know and be known, to love and be loved, to enjoy and be enjoyed.

That union does not come without death, death to one’s self. But that is, after all, what we should expect from St. Paul’s words in the Epistle to the Ephesians as he talks about marriage: “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” [Ephesians 5:32]

Holy Matrimony, then, is a life long commitment to love, and to love without being able to run away from it. But everyone feels like doing that a thousand times. Every natural affection has to die in order for God to replace it with supernatural joy, and that involves pain.

The cross cannot be escaped. Just as a child must surrender his broken toy if his daddy is going to fix it, so every married couple has to accept the replacement of that first kind of love, eros, that desire for the other, with which the marriage begins. But we do it for the joy that is set before us.

Marriage always works for the one who works it. If you love, even if your partner does not, you will become a lover like your Lord.

So the Church says, "Don't quit. Stick with it. Good times are coming!"