

CHAPTER XIV

WOMAN AND THE NEW MORALITY

UPON the shoulders of the woman conscious of her freedom rests the responsibility of creating a new sex morality. The vital difference between a morality thus created by women and the so called morality of to day, is that the new standard will be based upon knowledge and freedom while the old is founded upon ignorance and submission.

What part will birth control play in bringing forth this new standard? What effect will its practice have upon woman's moral development? Will it lift her to heights that she has not yet achieved, and if so, how? Why is the question of morality always raised by the objector to birth control? All these questions must be answered if we are to get a true picture of the relation of the feminine spirit to morals. They can best be answered by considering, first, the source of our present stand-

ard of sex morals and the reasons why those standards are what they are, and, second, the source and probable nature of the new morality

We get most of our notions of sex morality from the Christian church—more particularly from the oldest existing Christian church, known as the Roman Catholic. The church has generally defined the ‘immoral woman’ as one who mates out of wedlock. Virtually, it lets it go at that. In its practical workings, there is nothing in the church code of morals to protect the woman, either from unwilling submission to the wishes of her husband, from undesired pregnancy, nor from any other of the outrages only too familiar to many married women. Nothing is said about the crime of bringing an unwanted child into the world, where often it cannot be adequately cared for and is, therefore, condemned to a life of misery. The church’s one point of insistence is upon the right of itself to legalize marriage and to compel the woman to submit to whatever such marriage may bring. It is true that there are remedies of divorce in the case of the state, but the church has adhered

strictly to the principle that marriage, once consummated, is indissoluble. Thus, in its operation, the church's code of sex morals has nothing to do with the basic sex rights of the woman, but enforces, rather, the assumed property rights of the man to the body and the services of his wife. They are man-made codes, their vital factor, as they apply to woman, is submission to the man.

Closely associated with and underlying the principle of submission, has been the doctrine that the sex life is in itself unclean. It follows, therefore, that all knowledge of the sex physiology or sex functions is also unclean and taboo. Upon this teaching has been founded woman's subjection by the church and, largely through the influence of the church, her subjection by the state to the needs of the man.

Let us see how these principles have affected the development of the present moral codes and some of their shifting standards. When we have finished this analysis, we shall know why objectors to birth control raise the "morality" question.

The church has sought to keep women ignorant upon the plea of keeping them "pure

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To this end it has used the state as its moral policeman. Men have largely broken the grip of the ecclesiastics upon masculine education. The ban upon geology and astronomy, because they refute the biblical version of the creation of the world, are no longer effective. Medicine, biology and the doctrine of evolution have won their way to recognition in spite of the united opposition of the clerics. So, too, has the right of woman to go unveiled, to be educated, and to speak from public platforms, been asserted in spite of the condemnations of the church, which denounced them as destructive of feminine purity. Only in sex matters has it succeeded in keeping the bugaboo alive.

It clings to this last stronghold of ignorance, knowing that woman free from sexual domination would produce a race spiritually free and strong enough to break the last of the bonds of intellectual darkness.

It is within the marriage bonds, rather than outside them, that the greatest immorality of men has been perpetrated. Church and state, through their canons and their laws, have encouraged this immorality. It is here that the woman who is to win her way to the new

morality will meet the most difficult part of her task of moral house cleaning

In the days when the church was striving for supremacy, when it needed single minded preachers proselyters and teachers it fastened upon its people the idea that all sexual union, in marriage or out of it is sinful That idea colors the doctrines of the Church of Rome and many other Christian denominations to this hour Marriage even for the sake of children was a carnal indulgence in earlier times as Principal Donaldson points out in *The Position of Women Among the Early Christians* * It was held that the child was conceived in sin and that as the result of the sex act an unclean spirit had possession of it This spirit can be removed only by baptism, and the Roman Catholic baptismal service even yet contains these words Go out of him, thou unclean spirit, and give place unto the Holy Spirit the Paraclete

In the *Intellectual Development of Europe* John William Draper speaking of the teaching of celibacy among the Early Fathers †

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says The sinfulness of the marriage relation and the preeminent value of chastity followed from their principles If it was objected to such practices that by their universal adoption the human species would soon be extinguished and no man would remain to offer praises to God, these zealots, remembering the temptations from which they had escaped, with truth replied that there would always be sinners enough in the world to avoid that disaster and that out of their evil work good would be brought Saint Jerome offers us the pregnant reflection that though it may be marriage that fills the earth, it is virginity that replenishes heaven'

The early church taught that there were enough children on earth It needed missionaries more than it needed babies and impressed upon its followers the idea that the birth wails of the infant were a protest against being born into so sordid a world

Thus are we presented with one of the enormous inconsistencies of the church in sex matters The teachings of the Early Fathers' were effect the advocacy of an attempt to enforce birth control through abso

lute continence, while later it reverted as it reverts to day to the Mosaic injunction to be fruitful and multiply

The very force of the sex urge in humanity compelled the church to abandon the teaching of celibacy for its general membership Paul who preferred to see Christians unmarried rather than married, had recognized the power of this force In the seventh chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians (according to the Douay translation of the Vulgate, which is accepted by the Church of Rome), he said

8 — But I say unto you the unmarried and the widows it is good if they continue even as I

9 — But if they do not contain themselves let them marry, for it is better to marry than to be burnt

When the church became a political power rather than a strictly religious institution it needed a high birth rate to provide laymen to support its increasingly expensive organization It then began to exploit the sex force for its own interest It reversed its position in regard to children It encouraged marriage under its own control and exhorted women to

bear as many children as possible The world was just as sordid and the birth wails of the infants were just as piteous, but the needs of the hierarchy had changed So it modified the standard of sex morality to suit its own requirements — marriage now became a sacrament

Shrewd in changing its general policy from celibacy to marriage the church was equally shrewd in perpetuating the doctrine of woman's subjection for its own interest That doctrine was emphatically stated in the Third Chapter of the First Epistle of Peter and the Fifth Chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians In the Douay version of the latter we find this

22 — Let women be subject to their husbands as to the Lord

23 — Because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church

24 — Therefore as the Church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their husbands in all things'

These doctrines together with the teaching that sex life is of itself unclean, formed the basis of morality as fixed by the Roman church

Nor does the King James version of the Bible generally used by Protestant churches to day differ greatly in these particulars from the accepted Roman Catholic version as a comparison will show

If Christianity turned the clock of general progress back a thousand years it turned back the clock two thousand years for woman Its greatest outrage upon her was to forbid her to control the function of motherhood under any circumstances thus limiting her life s work to bringing forth and rearing children Coincident with this, the churchmen deprived her of her place in and before the courts, in the schools in literature art and society They shut from her heart and her mind the knowledge of her love life and her reproductive functions They chained her to the position into which they had thrust her so that it is only after centuries of effort that she is even beginning to regain what was wrested from her

Christianity had no favorable effect upon women says Donaldson but tended to lower their character and contract the range of their activity At the time when Christianity dawned upon the world women had attained

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great freedom, power and influence in the Roman empire. Tradition was in favor of restriction but by a concurrence of circumstances women had been liberated from the enslaving fetters of the old legal forms. They enjoyed freedom of intercourse in society. They walked in the public thoroughfares with veils that did not hide their faces. They dined in the company of men. They studied literature and philosophy. They took part in political movements. They were allowed to defend their own law cases if they liked, and they helped their husbands in the government of provinces and the writing of books.

And again. One would have imagined that Christianity would have favored the extension of woman's freedom. In a very short time women are seen only in two capacities — as martyrs and deaconesses (or nuns). Now what the early Christians did was to strike the male out of the definition of man, and human being out of the definition of woman. Man was a human being made to serve the highest and noblest purposes; woman was a female made to serve only one.

Thus the position attained by women of

Greece and Rome through the exercise of family limitation and in a considerable degree of voluntary motherhood was swept away by the rising tide of Christianity. It would seem that this pernicious result was premeditated, and that from the very early days of Christianity, there were among the hierarchy those who recognized the creative power of the feminine spirit, the force of which they sought to turn to their own uses. Certain it is that the hierarchy created about the whole love life of woman an atmosphere of degradation.

Fear and shame have stood as grim guardians against the gate of knowledge and constructive idealism. The sex life of women has been clouded in darkness restrictive repressive and morbid. Women have not had the opportunity to know themselves nor have they been permitted to give play to their inner natures that they might create a morality practical, idealistic and high for their own needs.

On the other hand, church and state have forbidden women to leave their legal mates or to refuse to submit to the marital embrace, no matter how filthy drunken diseased or

otherwise repulsive the man might be — no matter how much of a crime it might be to bring to birth a child by him

Woman was and is condemned to a system under which the lawful rapes exceed the unlawful ones a million to one She has had nothing to say as to whether she shall have strength sufficient to give a child a fair physical and mental start in life she has had as little to do with determining whether her own body shall be wrecked by excessive child-bearing She has been adjured not to complain of the burden of caring for children she has not wanted Only the married woman who has been constantly loved by the most understanding and considerate of husbands has escaped these horrors Besides the wrongs done to women in marriage those involved in promiscuity infidelities and rapes become in consequential in nature and in number

Out of woman's inner nature in rebellion against these conditions is rising the new morality Let it be realized that this creation of new sex ideals is a challenge to the church Being a challenge to the church it is also in less degree a challenge to the state The

woman who takes a fearless stand for the in coming sex ideals must expect to be assailed by reactionaries of every kind Imperialists and exploiters will fight hardest in the open but the ecclesiastic will fight longest in the dark He understands the situation best of all he best knows what reaction he has to fear from the morals of women who have attained liberty For, be it repeated the church has always known and feared the spiritual potentialities of woman s freedom

And in this lies the answer to the question why the opponent of birth control raises the moral issue Sex morals for women have been one sided they have been purely negative, inhibitory and repressive They have been fixed by agencies which have sought to keep women enslaved which have been determined, even as they are now to use woman solely as an asset to the church, the state and the man. Any means of freedom which will enable women to live and think for themselves first will be attacked as immoral by these selfish agencies

What effect will the practice of birth control have upon woman s moral development? As we have seen in other chapters it will break

her bonds It will free her to understand the cravings and soul needs of herself and other women It will enable her to develop her love nature separate from and independent of her maternal nature

It goes without saying that the woman whose children are desired and are of such number that she can not only give them adequate care but keep herself mentally and spiritually alive as well as physically fit can discharge her duties to her children much better than the overworked broken and querulous mother of a large unwanted family

Thus the way is open to her for a twofold development first through her own full rounded life and next, through her loving unstrained, full hearted relationship with her offspring The bloom of mother love will have an opportunity to infuse itself into her soul and make her indeed, the fond affectionate guardian of her offspring that sentiment now pictures her but hard facts deny her the privilege of being She will preserve also her love life with her mate in its ripening perfection She will want children with a deeper

passion, and will love them with a far greater love

In spite of the age long teaching that sex life in itself is unclean, the world has been moving to a realization that a great love between a man and woman is a holy thing freighted with great possibilities for spiritual growth. The fear of unwanted children removed, the assurance that she will have a sufficient amount of time in which to develop her love life to its greatest beauty, with its comradeship in many fields—these will lift woman by the very soaring quality of her innermost self to spiritual heights that few have attained. Then the coming of eagerly desired children will but enrich life in all its avenues rather than enslave and impoverish it as do unwanted ones to day

What healthier grounds for the growth of sound morals could possibly exist than the ample spiritual life of the woman just depicted? Free to follow the feminine spirit which dwells in the sanctuary of her nature she will in her daily life, give expression to that high idealism which is the fruit of that spirit when it is unhampered and unviolated

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The love for her mate will flower in beauty of deeds that are pure because they are the natural expression of her physical mental and spiritual being. The love for desired children will come to blossom in a spirituality that is high because it is free to reach the heights.

The moral force of woman's nature will be unchained — and of its own dynamic power will uplift her to a plane unimagined by those holding fast to the old standards of church morality. Love is the greatest force of the universe. freed of its bonds of submission and unwanted progeny it will formulate and compel of its own nature observance to standards of purity far beyond the highest conception of the average moralist. The feminine spirit, animated by joyous, triumphant love, will make its own high tenets of morality. Free womanhood out of the depths of its rich experiences, will observe and comply with the inner demands of its being. The manner in which it learns to do this best may be said to be the moral law of woman's being. So in whatever words the new morality may ultimately be expressed we can at least be sure that it will meet certain needs.

First of all it will meet the physical and psychic requirements of the woman herself for she cannot adequately perform the feminine functions until these are met. Second, it will meet the needs of the child to be conceived in a love which is eager to bring forth a new life to be brought into a home where love and harmony prevail a home in which proper preparation has been made for its coming.

This situation implies in turn a number of conditions. Foremost among them is woman's knowledge of her sexual nature both in its physiology and its spiritual significance. She must not only know her own body, its care and its needs but she must know the power of the sex force its use its abuse as well as how to direct it for the benefit of the race. Thus she can transmit to her children an equipment that will enable them to break the bonds that have held humanity enslaved for ages.

To achieve this she must have a knowledge of birth control. She must also assert and maintain her right to refuse the marital embrace except when urged by her inner nature.

The truth makes free. Viewed in its true

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aspect, the very beauty and wonder of the creative impulse will make evident its essential purity. We will then instinctively idealize and keep holy that physical spiritual expression which is the foundation of all human life, and in that conception of sex will the race be exalted.

What can we expect of offspring that are the result of 'accidents' — who are brought into being undesired and in fear? What can we hope for from a morality that surrounds each physical union, for the woman, with an atmosphere of submission and shame? What can we say for a morality that leaves the husband at liberty to communicate to his wife a venereal disease?

Subversion of the sex urge to ulterior purposes has dragged it to the level of the gutter. Recognition of its true nature and purpose must lift the race to spiritual freedom. Out of our growing knowledge we are evolving new and saner ideas of life in general. Out of our increasing sex knowledge we shall evolve new ideals of sex. These ideals will spring from the innermost needs of women. They will serve these needs and express them.

They will be the foundation of a moral code that will tend to make fruitful the impulse which is the source, the soul and the crowning glory of our sexual natures

When women have raised the standards of sex ideals and purged the human mind of its unclean conception of sex, the fountain of the race will have been cleansed. Mothers will bring forth in purity and in joy, a race that is morally and spiritually free