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Sexual Freedom and the New Morality

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People today are inclined to question the teachings of the past. They question the traditional beliefs and values that our forefathers have handed down to us. In the field of sex, morality has become a dirty word. We are told that the Judeo-Christian moral code is no longer suited to the needs of the day, and that we must replace it with a new morality. Now it's a good thing that people exercise their critical faculties, but where sex is concerned, people will make judgments and decisions on an emotional basis, often in a way that is irrational. Many sex educators today have joined the parade: they bow down before the demands of the campus rebels. They reject premarital chastity as a guideline for our youth. I propose to present a case for the "old morality." For the physician who believes in it, but hesitates to buck the trend of the day, I shall try to show that he need not hesitate to stand up for his beliefs. For the physician who has already climbed up on the bandwagon of the new morality, I shall urge that he can serve his patients best by climbing right down again.

In speaking of premarital chastity as a guideline, I refer primarily to the girl rather than the boy. This does not mean I support the double standard. It concerns rather the illusion of the equality of the sexes. To be sure, the sexes are equal in their political and economic rights, but they differ in their biological and psychological nature. Sex freedom is a more critical issue for the girl because she has more to lose. I say this not because of the risk of pregnancy, but because the risk of emotional damage is greater for her than for the boy. The girl's emotional investment in love and marriage is greater than the boy's. When a love affair breaks up, they may both suffer a broken heart, but her fracture will be more severe than his. Where he may have no more than a simple fracture, she will have a compound fracture. In her case healing will take longer, and the residual deformity will be more crippling.

The timidity of our sex educators was evident at a symposium conducted in 1966 by the National Association of Independent Schools. The meeting was attended by headmasters and teachers. One of the panelists, an eminent physician, reported that he had been invited to speak to the students at a women's college, but he had declined the invitation. He gave the reason: "I said, 'You've come to the wrong person. I can't do it.' They said, 'Why not?' I said, 'Because I can't tell these girls whether it's right or wrong to have premarital intercourse. I don't know.' And they said, 'We don't know either.' " The panelist spoke of "the uncertainty I have in my own mind as to whether premarital sex is constructive or destructive."

The ability to confess ignorance is commendable. It takes courage to come forth with the candid admission, "I don't know." But a member of the audience voiced his dissatisfaction and the fear. He said, "We deal with adolescents at a time when they are terribly concerned about themselves, their relationships to one another and society, and we say, 'Let's give them five different views and let them sift it out.' I am not sure that this is good enough."

The man was right. It certainly is "not good enough." Premarital sex is a crucial issue, and to take an equivocal stand is to deny our youngsters the help they are looking for— and this includes even those who don't openly ask for help.

The Preacher said:
"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die;
A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing..."

I submit that this is a time to give guidance to our youth. This is no time to refrain from giving guidance.

Our youngsters are confused by what they see and hear and read. A bright college coed told me, "I really don't know myself. I want to establish my identity. People say I can do this best with drugs and sex." She was a virgin and she was puzzled and anxious about her sexual nature. An attractive lass, she was besieged by boy friends who volunteered to act as therapists and cure her anxieties. Their pitch was that in this day and age to remain a virgin is a sign of "rigidity." This increased her anxiety.

Now it's true that sex is a path to self-realization. It's good that we have freed ourselves of the inhibitions of our Puritanical past. We no longer think that sex is a dirty and sinful function, that a woman is not supposed to enjoy it and that she must "submit" to it as a "wifely duty," to cater to the base instincts of her husband. But freedom from inhibitions does not mean all inhibitions. There are healthy as well as unhealthy inhibitions.
Some educators have coined the phrase "fun morality" as an expression of their sexual philosophy. They teach that sex is a way to have fun, a way to satisfy a normal and healthy appetite, a purely personal matter which each person can decide for himself and in which society has no legitimate interest and no right to interfere. But this conception is much too narrow. Sex involves more than the satisfaction of an appetite; it has psychological and sociological implications. It is an instrument in the growth of character, in the attainment of emotional maturity and of a sense of personal and social responsibility. The sex act is the supreme expression of an interpersonal relationship.

A great difference between the immature infant and the mature adult is in degree of egocentricity. The infant is highly egocentric. He is self-centered. He can receive but cannot give. As he grows up and becomes mature, he acquires the capacity to give. The most dramatic test of the capacity to give is in behavior during the sex act. A husband and wife must be as eager to give sexual satisfaction as to receive it. Physicians are familiar with the complaint of a wife that her husband is "inconsiderate." He goes to bed with her with the primary aim of satisfying his own sex needs. He is bored by the measures that are needed to arouse her and build up her erotic tension so that she too will reach orgasm. He has his own orgasm and then rolls over and falls asleep, while she lies awake in frustration and resentment. A man who is devoted to his wife would never be satisfied with this kind of behavior. The sexual foreplay, far from boring him, would thrill him, and his wife, knowing this, would appreciate and respond to his love and would be so much less likely to be blocked on her way to the orgasm. A man and wife reach the peak of their potentialities as human beings in the sex act, when, in their quest of the orgasm, each one's deepest concern is not the satisfaction he hopes to get for himself, but that which he hopes to give to his partner. This is the ultimate expression of a mature interpersonal relationship.

A young man and woman are not yet fully mature when they get married at the altar. They are only on the threshold of maturity. They reach full maturity when they have made their marriage into an enduring bond with a harmonious sexual relationship centered on the giving and receiving. When they have reached this point, they can appreciate, as never before, the meaning and the wisdom of the precept, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It is now that they really "know" each other and themselves, or, if you will, it is now that they have learned the truth of the saying: "It is not true, as so many youngsters believe, that their sexual behavior is none of their parents' business, to say nothing of society as a whole. To be sure, it would be an injustice for the state to enact legislation making it a crime for the zed and her boy friend to agree to "an arrangement" to shack up together, but it doesn't follow that their behavior is of no legitimate interest to society. Society is concerned with factors that advance or retard social progress, and one of these factors is the sexual philosophy of its members.

The Talmud records that the ancient Rabbis held a debate on the question, What could have motivated the Lord to deliver the Israelites from bondage in Egypt? Why did the Israelites left Egypt? If you were to guess the answer, we might suppose that the Rabbis, as men of religion, came up with a solution based on theological doctrine, such as that the Israelites refused to bow down before heathen idols. But no: the conclusion was that the Lord had to decide to deliver the Israelites because they did not go to prostitutes. The ancient Rabbis, whom our modern sophisticated might be inclined to regard with a smile of condescension, have given us an insight into the nature of man and society.

The passage of the Israelites from bondage to freedom was a cultural advance, a step forward in the evolution of their society. The Rabbis saw a connection between marital fidelity and the advancement of society. Young people grow up and take over their society from their elders. The progress of a society depends on its ability to raise successive crops of healthy children, fit to assume the responsibilities when their time comes. Marital fidelity is favorable to the healthy development of the child. Children need a secure foundation on which to build their future. A father must give time and love to his children. A man can't be a good father if he chases after other women. Instead of giving time and thought to his children, his mind is elsewhere: he is thinking what alibi he can cook up for the weekend, he hopes to spend with the blonde he met at the cocktail lounge. And so his children will be deprived of fatherly care and attention they need. But where there is sound family life, the children will prosper. They will have a decent chance to grow up and become mature and stable adults. To put the matter in today's terms, what the Rabbis were saying was that marital fidelity and sound family life serve the national interest. Here we see how shortsighted it would be to dismiss the Judeo-Christian code as arbitrary theological dogma unrelated to the needs of modern society. On the contrary, the code is an attempt to realize the conditions that promote social growth and human values.

But so many of our sex educators don't see this. They reject "moral indoctrination." One writer, a sociologist, rejects the moral approach as repulsive to the ideal of education. Referring to those teachers who "are morally indoctrinating children in the name of education," he writes: "Education is aimed at teaching people how to think and not what to think. Education is not propaganda or indoctrination." He specifically criticizes those who teach youngsters "the value of chastity" and who give "reasons why one should avoid premarital intercourse." He deplores this "moral indoctrination" and would prefer that youngsters make their own decisions.

Youngsters, of course, are going to make their own decisions. But it would be naive to exaggerate the capacity of adolescent children to work out for themselves a healthy set of values, without the aid of "moral indoctrination." No individual works out a set of values all by himself. He lives in a society and its values seep into him and become part of him, just as its language becomes part of him. We believe that honesty is the best policy, not because we have each arrived at this conclusion through the application of logic, but because it is the foundation stone of our society and we learn it from our parents and teachers in our earlier years. It's the result of "indoctrination."

Even if some critics will decry it as "indoctrination," we must teach our youth a conception of sex as something that goes beyond the instant gratification of an immediate craving. Sex is a path to the attainment of the highest goals in life. It provides the ultimate in interpersonal commitment. A commitment to shack up together lasts short of the ultimate. The ultimate...
commitment is made when a man and woman stand up in solemn ceremony before family and friends, a ceremony with legal sanction, and openly pledge their future to each other.

It's a mistake to overestimate the capacity of adolescent youngsters to judge for themselves what is in their best interest. The proponents of the new morality are prone to make this mistake. Kirkendall, a man who has devoted a lifetime to the study of adolescent behavior, writes:

"When it comes to sex in a relationship, the girl has several pressing questions: If I have intercourse, will it make my relationship with the boy stronger? What will he think of me? Will I please him, or will I lose his respect?"

A high school teacher spoke of her gratitude to Kirkendall. Like other high school - and college - teachers, she had been perplexed by the tendentious questions of her students. But, she said, after reading Kirkendall she was no longer uncertain: "Now I have an answer; I just tell the girls and boys that they have to consider both sides of the question: Will sexual intercourse strengthen or weaken their relationship?"

This, mind you, was not a college teacher; it was a high school teacher. We can imagine the turmoil in the mind of a high school girl: in the afternoons she heard from her teacher that there are two sides to the question, and in the evening she is faced with the question to consider. Why? Because she herself is perplexed by the inconstancy of her sex. She is free of the sexual degradation that is evident in the mad scramble to a false kind of sophistication. Gael Greene tells the story of the coed who got into some kind of trouble with her boyfriend, a graduate student. She found out that she was spreading unkind rumors about him, and he retaliated in a way that was diabolically clever. He threatened to go to all her friends on the campus and tell them that she was not the femme fatale that she pretended to be, but was in fact a virgin. Faced with this threat of scandalous exposure, the girl had no choice. She caved in. In the words of the author, she "shut up."

"The truth shall make you free." Let us help our people to know the truth about sex, and thereby we will help them to become free, really free, free of the sexual degradation that is contaminating the atmosphere in which we live today.

REFERENCES