

More on Adultery in the Heart

Following is the text of Pope John Paul's address for Oct. 8, as reported by "L'Osservatore Romano," in which he concludes his dissertation on "adultery in the heart."

Today, I wish to conclude the analysis of the words spoken by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount on "adultery" and "lust," and in particular of the last element of his enunciation, in which "lust of the eyes" is defined specifically as "adultery committed in the heart."



We have already previously seen that the above-mentioned words are usually understood as desire for another's wife (that is, according to the spirit of the ninth commandment of the Decalogue). It seems, however, that this interpretation — a more restrictive one — can and must be widened in the light of the total context. The moral evaluation of lust (of looking "lustfully") which Christ calls "adultery committed in the heart," seems to depend above all on the personal dignity itself of man and of woman. This holds true both for those who are not united in marriage, and — perhaps even more — for those who are husband and wife.

The analysis which we have made so far of the enunciation: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart," indicates the necessity of amplifying and above all deepening the interpretation presented previously, with regard to the ethical meaning that this enunciation contains. Let us dwell on the situation described by the Master, a situation in which the one who "commits adultery in his heart" by means of an interior act of lust (expressed by the look), is the man. It is significant that Christ, speaking of the object of this act, does not stress that it is "another man's wife," or a woman who is not his own wife, but says generically: a woman. Adultery committed "in the heart" is not circumscribed in the limits of the interpersonal relationship which make it possible to determine adultery committed "in the body." It is not these limits that decide exclusively and essentially about adultery committed "in the heart," but the very nature of lust, expressed in this case by a look, that is, by the fact that that man — of whom Christ speaks, for the sake of example — "looks lustfully." Adultery "in the heart" is committed not only because man "looks" in this way at a woman who is not his wife, but precisely because he looks at a woman in this way. Even if he looked in this way at the woman who is his wife, he could likewise commit adultery "in his heart."

This interpretation seems to take into consideration more amply what has been said about lust in these analyses as a whole, and primarily about the lust of the flesh as a permanent element of man's sinfulness (status naturae lapsae). The lust which, as an interior act, springs from this basis (as we tried to indicate in the preceding analyses) changes the very intentionality of the woman's existence "for" man, reducing the riches of the perennial call to the communion of persons, the riches of the deep attractiveness of masculinity and femininity, to mere satisfaction of the sexual "need" of the body (with which the concept of "instinct" seems to be linked more closely).

As a result of this reduction, the person (in this case, the woman) becomes for the other person (the man) mainly the object of the potential satisfaction of his own sexual "need." In this way, that mutual "for" is distorted, losing its character of communion of persons in favor of the utilitarian function. A man who "looks" in this way, as Matthew writes, "uses" the woman, her femininity, to satisfy his own "instinct." Although he does not do so with an exterior act, he has already assumed this attitude deep down, inwardly deciding in this way with regard to a given woman. This is what adultery "in the heart" consists of. Man can commit this adultery "in the heart" also with regard to his own wife, if he treats her only as an object to satisfy instinct.

It is not possible to arrive at the second interpretation of the words of Matthew, if we confine ourselves to the purely psychological interpretation of lust without taking into account what constitutes its specific theological character, that is, the organic relationship between lust (as an act) and the lust of the flesh, as, so to speak, a permanent disposition derived from man's sinfulness. The purely psychological (or "sexological") interpretation of "lust" does not seem to constitute a sufficient basis to understand the text of the Sermon on the Mount in question. If on the other hand we refer to the theological interpretation — without underestimating what remains unchangeable in the first interpretation (the psychological one) — it, that is, the second interpretation (the theological one), appears to us as more complete.

Thanks to it, in fact, also the ethical meaning of the key enunciation of the Sermon on the Mount, to which we owe the adequate dimension of the ethos of the Gospel, becomes clearer.

Sketching this dimension, Christ remains faithful to the Law: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them." Consequently he shows how deep down it is necessary to go, how the recesses of the human heart must be thoroughly revealed, in order that this heart may become a place of "fulfillment" of the Law. The enunciation of Matthew, which makes manifest the interior perspective of adultery committed "in the heart" — and in

this perspective points out the right ways to fulfill the commandment: "do not commit adultery" — is an extraordinary argument of it. This enunciation refers, in fact, to the sphere in which it is a question in particular of "purity of heart" (an expression which — as is known — has a wide meaning in the Bible).

Elsewhere too, we will have the opportunity to consider in what way the commandment "do not commit adultery" — which as regards the way in which it is expressed and the content, is a univocal and severe prohibition (like the commandment "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife") — is carried out precisely by means of "purity of heart."

The severity and strength of the prohibition are testified indirectly by the following words of the text of the Sermon on the Mount, in which Christ speaks figuratively of "plucking out one's eye" and "cutting off one's hand" if these members were the cause of sin. We have seen previously that the legislation of the Old Testament, though abounding in severe punishments, did not contribute to the fulfillment of the Law, because its casuistry was marked by many compromises with the lust of the flesh. Christ teaches, on the contrary, that the commandment is carried out through "purity of heart," which is not given to man unless at the cost of firmness with regard to everything that springs from the lust of the flesh. He who is able to demand consistently from his "heart," from his "heart" and from his "body," acquires purity of heart.

The commandment "do not commit adultery" finds its rightful motivation in the indissolubility of marriage in which man and woman, by virtue of the original plan of the Creator, unite in such a way that "the two become one flesh." Adultery, by its essence, is in conflict with this unity, in the sense in which this unity corresponds to the dignity of persons. Christ not only confirms this essential ethical meaning of the commandment, but aims at strengthening it in the very depth of the human person. The new dimension of ethos is always connected with the revelation of that depth, which is called "heart," and with its liberation from "lust," in order that man, male and female, in all the interior truth of the mutual "for," may shine forth more fully in that heart. Freed from the constraint and from the impairment of the spirit that the lust of the flesh brings with it, the human being, male and female, finds himself mutually in the freedom of the gift which is the condition of all life together in truth, and, in particular, in the freedom of mutual giving, since both, as husband and wife, must form the sacramental unity willed, as Genesis says, by the Creator himself.

Jan Clayton Slated for Fund Raiser

Former television star Jan Clayton will be the main speaker at the Huther-Doyle Memorial Foundation's annual fund-raiser this Saturday evening at the Rochester Chamber of Commerce.

The foundation is involved in family counseling in cases of drug and alcohol rehabilitation. Ms. Clayton, who played the mother in the long-running TV series, "Lassie," is herself a recovering alcoholic and has worked with the National Council on Alcoholism.

The affair begins with a social hour at 6:30 p.m. to be followed by dinner and dancing. Reservations are still available by calling the Huther-Doyle Memorial Institute at 671-3591.

Hostages Remembered

An Interfaith Prayer Service took place yesterday at St. Mary's Church, downtown, in honor of the American hostages held in Iran. The ceremony marked the one-year anniversary of the takeover of the American Embassy in Iran.

Father Ronald Harley reported that most churches in the downtown area participated and Rabbi Judea Miller of Temple B'nai Kodesh was main speaker. Also in attendance was John Schaffer, a brother of one of the hostages held in Iran.

As is plain, the necessity which, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ lays on all his actual and potential listeners, belongs to the interior space in which man — precisely the one who is listening to him — must perceive anew the lost fullness of his humanity, and want to regain it. That fullness in the mutual relationship of persons, of the man and of the woman, is claimed by the Master in Matthew, having in mind above all the indissolubility of marriage, but also every other form of the common life of men and women, that common life which constitutes the pure and simple fabric of existence. Human life, by its nature is "co-educative" and its dignity, its balance, depend at every moment of history and at every point of geographical longitude and latitude on "who" she will be for him, and he for her.

The words spoken by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount have certainly this universal and at the same time profound significance. Only in this way can they be understood in the mouth of him who knew thoroughly "what was in man," and who at the same time bore within him the mystery of the "redemption of the body," as St. Paul will put it. Are we to fear the severity of these words, or rather have confidence in their salvific content, in their power?

In any case, the analysis carried out of the words spoken by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount opens the way to further indispensable reflections in order to reach full awareness of "historical" man, and above all of modern man: of his conscience and he for her.

NEW MASS SCHEDULE

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Spoken in 1531

Prayer of Pope Pius XII
"Hail, O Virgin of Guadalupe, Empress of America! Keep forever under your powerful patronage the purity and integrity of Our Holy Faith on the entire American continent."



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