

# AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION (1960)



It is sometimes said that only those who live a conjugal life can pronounce on the subject of marriage, and only those who have experienced it can pronounce on love between man and woman. In this view, all pronouncements on such matters must be based on personal experience, so that priests and persons living a celibate life can have nothing to say on questions of love and marriage. Nevertheless they often do speak and write on these subjects. Their lack of direct personal experience is no handicap because they possess a great deal of experience at second-hand, derived from their pastoral work. For in their pastoral work they encounter these particular problems so often, and in such a variety of circumstances and situations, that a different type of experience is created, which is certainly less immediate, and certainly 'second-hand', but at the same time very much wider. The very abundance of factual material on the subject stimulates both general reflection and the effort to synthesize what is known.

That indeed is how this book came about. It is not an exposition of doctrine. It is, rather, the result above all of an incessant confrontation of doctrine with life (which is just what the work of a spiritual adviser consists of). Doctrine – the teaching of the Church – in the sphere of 'sexual' morality is based upon the New Testament, the pronouncements of which on this subject are brief but also sufficient. It is a marvel that a system so complete can be based on such a

small number of statements. Quite obviously, they touch the problem at its most sensitive points, the crucial points which determine all further principles and moral norms. You need only have these few texts to hand – Matthew 5:27, 28, Matthew 19:1–13, Mark 10:1–12, Luke 20:27–35, John 8:1–11, I Corinthians 7 (throughout), Ephesians 5:22–33, to form sufficiently clear views on the subject. In the present book (which is not meant as an exercise in exegesis), this handful of most important statements is our frame of reference throughout.

But although it is easy to draw up a set of rules for Catholics in the sector of 'sexual' morality the need to validate these rules makes itself felt at every step. For the rules often run up against greater difficulties in practice than in theory, and the spiritual adviser, who is concerned above all with the practical, must seek ways of justifying them. For his task is not only to command or forbid but to justify, to interpret, to explain. The present book was born principally of the need to put the norms of Catholic sexual morality on a firm basis, a basis as definitive as possible, relying on the most elementary and incontrovertible moral truths and the most fundamental values or goods. Such a good is the person, and the moral truth most closely bound up with the world of persons is 'the commandment to love' – for love is a good peculiar to the world of persons. And therefore the most fundamental way of looking at sexual morality is in the context of 'love and responsibility' – which is why the whole book bears that title.

This approach calls for a number of analytical exercises. Although the purpose of the book is to synthesize, it is at the same time extremely analytical. The subject of analysis is in the first place the person as affected by the sexual urge, then the love which grows up on this basis between man and woman, next the virtue of purity as an essential factor in that love, and finally the question of marriage and vocation. All these problems are the subject of analysis, not of mere description – for the aim is to elicit the basic principles in which the rules and norms of Catholic 'sexual' morality find their *raison d'être*. The book is, by and large, of a

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philosophical character – for ethics is (and can only be) part of philosophy.

Does it have a practical significance? Does it deal with real life? Basically very much so, although it never strains to give ready made prescriptions or detailed rules of behaviour. It is not casuistic. Its concern is rather to create a view of the problem in its entirety rather than solutions to particular instances of it – all of which are in some way accommodated within the general view. The title of the book indicates most accurately what that view is: for in the context of relationships between persons of different sexes, when we speak of 'sexual morality' we are really thinking of 'love and responsibility'.

The most important concept here is that of love, to which we therefore devote the greater part of our analytical exercises – and indeed in some sense all the analyses in this book. For there exists, especially if we start from the Christian ethics born of the New Testament, a problem which can be described as that of 'introducing love into love'. The word as first used in that phrase signifies the love which is the subject of the greatest commandment, while in its second use it means all that takes shape between a man and a woman on the basis of the sexual urge. We could look at it the other way round and say that there exists a problem of changing the second type of love (sexual love) into the first, the love of which the New Testament speaks.

The problem awaits discussion. Manuals of ethics and moral theology tend to deal with these two kinds of love separately: with the first in discussions of the theological virtues, since love is the greatest of these, and with the second primarily within the framework of discussion of the cardinal virtue of continence, since sexual purity is connected with this. The result may be a certain hiatus in our understanding, a feeling that the second kind of love cannot be reduced to the first, or at any rate ignorance of the ways in which this can be realized. At the same time, observation of life (and in particular pastoral experience) shows that there is an immense demand for knowledge of these ways. And the moral teaching of the Gospel seems to provide a clear

inspiration for it. The Gospel is read both by believers and by unbelievers. Believers discover in the commandment to love one another the kingpin of the whole supernatural order, but believers and unbelievers alike are capable of discovering in it the affirmation of a great human good, which can and must be the portion of every person. In the present work, it is in fact on this second aspect that we lay the main emphasis.

In the commonest view it goes without saying that problems of sex are above all problems of the 'body'. Hence the tendency to allow physiology and medicine an almost exclusive right to speak on these matters – psychology is allotted only a secondary role. The same sciences are also supposed to be capable of generating ethical norms unaided. This book puts the problem in a fundamentally different perspective. Sexual morality is within the domain of the person. It is impossible to understand anything about it without understanding what the person is, its mode of existence, its functioning, its powers. The personal order is the only proper plane for all debate on matters of sexual morality. Physiology and medicine can only supplement discussion at this level. They do not in themselves provide a complete foundation for the understanding of love and responsibility: but this is just what matters most in the relations between persons of different sex.

For the same reason, the treatment of all matters to be discussed in this book has throughout a personalistic character. Physiological and medical details will have their place in the notes.\* I take this opportunity to thank warmly those persons who have assisted me in assembling the data, and in supplementing my bibliography and revising some of the entries in it.

The Author

\*In the present edition these matters are dealt with in Chapter V.