

# *On Pilgrimage*

Dorothy Day

## **April**

*Summary: Ponders the mystery of the love of God for man and man for man. Urges readers to come to their farm for a retreat to renew strength for the apostolate. Express disdain for the Kinsey report on American sexual behavior and presents a sublime vision of sexual love. Includes an extensive passage by Fr. John J. Hugo who himself quotes saints, mystics, scripture, and Church prayers to illustrate how the nuptial union is an analogy of God's love for us. (DDLW #479).*

April 10

WHENEVER I groan within myself and think how hard it is to keep writing about love in these times of tension and strife, which may at any moment become for us all a time of terror, I think to myself, "What else is the world interested in?" What else do we all want, each one of us, except to love and be loved, in our families, in our work, in all our relationships? God is Love. Love casts out fear. Even the most ardent revolutionist, seeking to change the world, to overturn the tables of the money changers, is trying to make a world where it is easier for people to love, to stand in that relationship to each other. We want with all our hearts to love, to be loved. And not just in the family but to look upon all as our mothers, sisters, brothers, children. It is when we love the most intensely and most humanly that we can recognize how tepid is our love for others. The keenness and intensity of love brings with it suffering, of course, but joy too, because it is a foretaste of heaven. I often think in relation to my love for little Becky, Susie, and Eric: "That is the way I must love every child and want to serve them, cherish them, and protect them." Even that relationship which is set off from other loves by that slight change in phraseology (instead of "loving," one is "in love") – the very change in terminology, denoting a living in love, a dwelling in love at all times, being bathed in love, so that every waking thought, word, deed, and suffering is permeated by that love – yes, that relationship above all should give us not only a taste of the love of God for us but the kind of love we should have for all.

When you love people, you see all the good in them, all the Christ in them. God sees Christ, His Son, in us and loves us. And so we should see Christ in others, *and nothing else*, and love them. There can never be enough of it. There can never be enough thinking about it. St. John of the Cross said that where there was no love, put love and you would take out love. The principle certainly works. I've seen my friend, Sister Peter Claver, with that warm friendliness of hers which is partly natural (she is half-Jew and half-Irish) but which is

intensified and made enduring by grace, come into a place which is cold with tension and conflict, and warm the house with her love.

And this is not easy. Everyone will try to kill that love in you, even your nearest and dearest; at least they will try to prune it. “Don’t you know this, that, and the other thing about this person? He or she did this. If you don’t want to hear it, you must hear. It is for your good to hear it. It is my duty to tell you, and it is your duty to take recognition of it. You must stop loving, modify your loving, show your disapproval. You cannot possibly love – if you pretend you do, you are a hypocrite, and the truth is not in you. You are contributing to the delinquency of that person by your sentimental blindness. It is such people as you who add to the sum total of confusion and wickedness and soft appeasement and compromise and the policy of expediency in this world. You are to blame for communism, for industrial capitalism, and finally for hell on earth.”

The antagonism often rises to a crescendo of vituperation, an intensification of opposition on all sides. You are quite borne down by it. And the only Christian answer is *love*, to the very end, to the laying down of your life.

To see only the good, the Christ, in others! Perhaps if we thought of how Karl Marx was called “Papa Marx” by all the children on the street, if we knew and remembered how he told fairy stories to his children, how he suffered hunger and poverty and pain, how he sat by the body of his dead child and had no money for coffin or funeral, perhaps such thoughts as these would make us love him and his followers. Dear God, for the memory of that dead child, or that faithful wife, grant his stormy spirit “a place of refreshment, light, and peace.”

And there was Lenin. He hungered and thirsted, and at times he had no fixed abode. Madame Krupskaya, his widow, said that he loved to go into the peace of the pine woods and hunt mushrooms like old Mrs. Dew down at Easton did, and we with her one October. He lived one time in the slums of Paris, and he lived on horse meat when he had meat, and he started schools for the poor and the workers. “He went about doing good.” Is this blasphemy? How many people are dying and going to God their Father and saying sadly, “We have not so much as heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” And how will they hear if none preaches to them? And what kind of shepherds have many of them had? Ezekiel said in his day, “Woe to the shepherds that feed themselves and not their sheep!”

And if there have been preachers, has there been love? If people will not listen, one can still love, one can still find Christ in them to love, and love is stronger than death. Dear God, may Lenin too find a place of refreshment, light, and peace. Or don’t we believe in retroactive prayers? There is no time with God.

It is an easy thing to talk about love, but it is something to be proven, to be suffered, to be learned. That’s why we have our retreat house at Newburgh. Last week after my return from Berkeley Springs, I went up on a foggy day, taking a train at Grand Central because the bus which leaves at 6:30 and passes our door at Newburgh was on strike. The train was slow, and the ferry slower. A fog which kept us floundering in the middle of the river for half an hour was so heavy that it was hard to breathe. It was a great relief from oppression to reach the high ground, where the retreat house stands, six miles inland, and to get to bed early after the oppression of the city.

It is always a terrible thing to come back to Mott Street. To come back in a driving rain, to men crouched on the stairs, huddled in doorways, without overcoats because they sold them perhaps the week before when it was warm, to satisfy hunger or thirst – who knows? Those without love would say, “It serves them right, drinking up their clothes.” God help us if we got just what we deserved!

It is a terrible thing to see the ugliness and poverty of the cities, to see what man has made of man. I needed those few days at Newburgh to brace myself for work. Father Anthony, a young Benedictine from Newton, New Jersey, was with us that week, giving a retreat on the sacraments, and the conferences I was in time for continued what I had been pondering of the love of God for man and man for man. “From Genesis to Revelation,” he said, in one conference, “it is the story of God’s love for man. All the story of God’s dealing with man is a love story. Some say the Old Testament tells of God’s justice and the New of his love. But there is not a page but emphasizes God’s folly in ever forgiving and drawing man back to him.” I remembered the book of Hosea, the prophet and holy man who was commanded by God to love and marry a harlot, who had children by him, and who left him again and again, having children also by her lovers. And how Hosea again and again took her back. How he must have been scorned by his generation, he a holy man, so weak and uxorious, so soft-minded that again and again, “he allured her” to him, on one occasion even buying her back from her lover, even providing her, while she was with her lover, with corn and wine and oil. And God even commanded it so that down through the ages there would be this example of God’s love for a faithless people, of the folly of love, a foretaste of the folly of the Cross. If we could only learn to be such fools! God give us the strength to persist in trying to learn such folly.

We had three conferences a day, of an hour each, and a fifteen-minute period of prayer after each conference. There was silence for the week, and manual labor, in the house and out. There was rosary after lunch and a holy-hour midnight on Thursday. Every morning the day began with Prime, the first prayers of the Church for the day (after Matins and Lauds), and then there was a sung Mass, the first Mass in the Kyriale for the festive season, and it was pure beauty that strengthened the heart to learn to love.

There was just a handful of us there, since we have not begun to send out our retreat notices for the year. We are urging our friends to study the following dates and figure out their vacations, and try to plan to spend some time with us this summer and fall.

May 1 there will be a study weekend on WORK.

Memorial Day weekend there will be a retreat for men conducted by Father Francis Meenan, Holy Ghost Father from Norwalk.

June 13-19 – First study week.

July 4th weekend – A basic retreat for women.

July 18 – Father Veales, a Josephite from Washington, D.C., will give a basic retreat for men.

August 14 there will be another study week.

Labor Day weekend – Father Purcell, an Augustinian, will give a retreat for families, and there will be several girls to care for the children, who will have their own little retreat at the

same time.

There will be extra weekends and also through the fall, to be announced later.

We cannot overemphasize the importance of these retreats and beg our readers to try to plan to come to some of them. While it is true that love sweetens all of life and makes light of pain and suffering and brings us to the happiness we all desire, one must learn to love, and there is no place better than a retreat house to learn such lessons. We must withdraw for a time to renew our strength for the great struggle of the apostolate. Without the use of our spiritual weapons of love, which include prayer and penance and work and poverty and suffering, our future is harsh and ugly to contemplate. Great struggles lie before us in this era of war and revolution through which we are passing, and which we in America have not begun to suffer as yet. We must prepare, so we do beg you to come and help us. "A brother helped by a brother is a strong city."

The retreat house, of course, is not just for our readers who can afford to take train or bus and get to us for this time not only of rigor but of delight. ("All the way to heaven is heaven, since He said, 'I am the Way.' ") But it is also for the poor, the lame, the halt, and the blind. We always have a few from our House of Hospitality, and come the summer, we are also going out on the highways and byways and persuade our brothers in. There is many a sick one just out of Bellevue or off the breadline who needs "refreshment, light, and peace," here and now. The retreat house is for us all, but most especially for those who can go no place else for lack of funds or because difference in race, color, and creed has kept them from this sweet rest of a retreat. God will raise up amongst us all those He wishes to work for Him, and He will give us all the strength we need for the work we all will have to do.

The farm of ninety-six acres, attached to the retreat house, is going to provide meat and vegetables also for our breadline at Mott Street. It was a wonderful sight to see John Filliger out there on the horizon at the end of a long field, ploughing with his team, and the hound dog trailing along behind. A number of the fields are ploughed now, and the greenhouse is filled with cabbages and tomato plants, not to speak of spring salads. Hans and Charlie and Louis Owen and a new arrival by [the] name of Murphy are busily at work these spring days, and before he left Father Anthony blessed the house and the fields. Our chapel has been greatly enlarged, thanks to Hans Tunneson, and the conference room floor painted, and we are ready for our friends and fellow workers.

Peter will be taken up to the farm again next week, where for some hours every day he can sit under the crab apple tree out in front of the adobe-like house which the men and the priest share. Nothing is blooming yet, no buds show green, and the wind is still harsh. But the spring sun is warming, and after the desperately hard winter on Mott Street, the warmth is a touch of God's love on us all.

Now there is much time being spent in arguments against Universal Training [and] Conscription, and the fog of threatened war hangs so heavy over us all. We beg the prayers of all our readers that we may hold our stand with strong love, with warm love, because without it we know that all arguments will be unavailing.

April 15

I HAVE just read a review of the Kinsey report, which appeared in the spring number of *Politics*, that very interesting quarterly which Dwight McDonald puts out on Astor Place. (I understand they have open nights Thursdays and intend to go up there sometime.) It was the completest review I've seen yet. I've not read Father Kennedy's, nor any other Catholic review, but intend to look some of them up. Anyway, here are some of the things I was thinking about the book.

In the first place, I remembered how I came across Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Pathology* at the age of seventeen, in the home of a professor at the University of Illinois, where I was working my way through – cleaning, cooking, caring for children – for my room and board. It was an ugly shock to me. I had been as knowing as most children, speculating about the things of sex at an early age indeed. (I can remember talking about it when I was six.) One might also say that an ugly tide rose in me, a poisonous tide, a blackness of evil, at reading there so many things that certainly do not need to be known by other than doctor or priest, by those who are schooled to bear it and trained to help in relation to it. Dr. Von Hildebrand writes about the poisonous fascination of sex, its deadly allure in the abstract. I felt it then in its most hideous form, and there was no beauty in it, no love, but it was like the uncoiling of a dank and ugly serpent in my breast. These may be extreme ways of expressing myself, but I am sure that at times there has been this consciousness of evil in us all. Evil as a negation, as an absence of good, as a blackness, a glimpse of hell “where everlasting horror dwelleth, and no order is.”

In physical depression, after illness, or after physical excess, there are feelings of guilt in us all, I am sure, and even those who deny there is a conscience feel this. I wonder why that very testimony of guilt in us all is not a witness against such books as Kinsey's. But of course, these days they are trying to make people overcome their sense of guilt, to deaden consciences. When we are little children, our consciences tell us what is right or wrong, and we know full well when we are choosing evil. The trouble with the Kinsey report is that it makes people cease to regard themselves as the least of all, as the guiltiest of all, as the saints say we should, and instead we say, “I'm as good as he is,” or “He is as bad as I am, in fact much worse.” And we compare ourselves with others instead of with God, horizontally instead of vertically. Christ said, “Be ye therefore perfect, as your heavenly Father is.”

St. Paul said, “Let these things be not so much as mentioned among you.” And he also said, “Whatsoever things are good and true and beautiful and chaste, and of good repute, think on these things,” and the lesson for Easter season is, “If ye be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above.” People say, “But it helps you in guiding and guarding your own children to know these things. You cannot be like ostriches, with your heads in the sand. You've got to know these things, regardless of how much they make you suffer (or what they do to you in the way of shock).”

I thought of a paragraph in a book review in *Time* magazine which spoke of two women who kept an inn at Dunkirk and who, in the thickest of the war, went . . . calmly, tranquilly, and serenely about their work, making an atmosphere of peace in the midst of war and horror, bringing courage to thousands by their very example. They went right on about their work in their routine, living as they had always lived, keeping to their work, and by thus maintaining strength and calm, helped build up a resistance movement that continued all through the

war. They probably never knew what they inspired in the way of work.

I thought too of a story I read of the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spain, how they lived on a boat and were rejected at one port after another, and were years at sea, and still kept to their life of prayer, penance, and study, running as it were a house of studies in the middle of the Mediterranean. “We have here no abiding city.” They were like desert fathers, except that they lived in the middle of the sea in their monastery, which floated about between heaven and earth, seemingly rejected for a time by both.

And I remembered an old friend, wife of a member of the I.W.W., who traveled about the country, and in every little room she stopped, she made a home with a couple of scarves, pictures, a deft arrangement of furniture and her suitcase of belongings. To live here and now the life of the spirit, to live as though this dear flesh were not the burden of pleasure and pain that it is – this is a great gift and to be cultivated in our time. “All the way to heaven is heaven,” said St. Catherine of Siena, “because He said, ‘I am the Way.’ ” We have too many samples of hell, and the Kinsey report is one of them.

Yes, we know what is in man. Cy Echele recognized that man is but dust, as well as little less than the angels, when he wrote this note this spring:

This evening Margaret and I set up Gregory’s first bed. It is quite an event for a little boy to graduate from the basket and crib stage to his own bed. What declares his coming dignity more effectively than having a special place like this allotted for his retiring in the evening, and for those precious lying-awake hours in the morning, when the gift of reflection surely begins to come to man? An important occasion calls for a blessing, and we went to the Ritual to find something appropriate.

In the end I composed a new prayer, adapted from the old, and based on the style of the collects, which are so beautiful and majestic. I simply read the prayer and sprinkled the bed with holy water, asking God if He might bestow a blessing through me, a layman and head of the family.

The words were composed new because we wanted a particular application on this occasion. The bed was bought with my labor; the mattress and pillow, the two sheets and pillowcase were made by Gregory’s grandmother, who has provided so much for our physical sustenance during our eight years of married life.

Here is the prayer:

O Lord, God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth and of all things, who has willed that by rest and sleep our bodies are restored to freshness and a measure of integrity after periods of activity and labor: Bless this bed which we Thy servants, Cyril and Margaret, have disposed for the use of our dear son, Gregory. May it be the means to him of Thy great blessing of health, soul, and body. Guard him also, we beseech Thee, against all defilements which the evil one may in his stealth attempt to impose upon him during the hours of peace and passivity of body. Through this creature, a bed, may he come to Thee, our only true and lasting God, to enjoy the blessed fruit of a life spent in Thy love and service. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, world without end. Amen.

Every night at Compline we say the ancient hymn,

Procul recedant somnia,  
Et noctium phantasmata;  
Hostemque nostrum comprime  
Ne pollutantur corpora.

Our beds may be altars at which we kneel to pray, and on which we receive the sacrament of matrimony, giving and receiving in a communion which is a foretaste of the beatific vision, and which *can be* consummated with recollection and dignity and joy. Or they may be something else again, to the sardonic and the cynical and sensual, who in all their talk and writing of sexual play smack more of the goat or rooster than the lamb. After all, we are not animals, we are men, and as Eric Gill said, man must ever be more or less than the animals; he can never be on their plane.

Among the sets of books my father bought for the household and which included Dickens, Hugo, Stevenson, and Scott, there was also de Maupassant, which was kept locked away from us children. Of course, we read him, and I found nothing glamorous or attractive in his stories, which were frankly fleshly. They contained to me all the ugliness, the sadness, and the degradation of the flesh, which I saw aging and corrupting and dying all about me. Children at times are very conscious of death, of the penalty of original sin. And I think it was in de Maupassant that I read his lament that bodily functions the most repulsive as well as the most sublime were bound closely to the same organs, so that often there was an element of the grotesque in what should be the greatest and most dignified act of man, when he was co-creator with God. It is this consciousness that has led to what people term the Jansenism of the Irish and Anglo-Saxon prudishness in regard to sex. We know our children are being presented with other points of view, and it is time indeed that there should be more talk on the subject of sex and marriage on the part of Catholics.

God knows women have enough of the ugly and the lowly to do in the work of this world. In their sufferings they see clearly the result of the Fall. They are closer both to heaven and to hell than men are in a very literal, material, earthy sense.

I'm certainly not going to read the Kinsey report. But it needs to be considered and thought about. What people ought to read is Eric Gill's *Autobiography*, *The Life of Thomas More* – and here are good books on the shelf in front of me right now: *The Meaning of Love* by Solovyov; *The Mind and Heart of Love* by Father D'Arcy.

Here is a letter I received this week from a young mother:

I haven't read the Kinsey report either, but I have read several reviews, including the one you mentioned in *Politics*.

I do not wonder that it is a best-seller, that people turn to books of this kind and to Freudian psychologists for help. There is no part of Catholic doctrine so neglected as the teachings of the Church on sex and marriage. Not even those on social justice are so unknown and unpracticed.

There is good and plenty taught on the negative side – what is forbidden – but when it comes to holding up the vision of a holy marriage with sex as an integral part, to any positive

and integrated teaching on this vital subject, there is a conspiracy of silence, an attitude of embarrassment and evasion.

Being a product of the Catholic middle class, Irish-American, I know that tinge of Jansenism well. Sex is shut off from the rest of life, tolerated in marriage as a necessary evil for the procreation of children. Instruction is given reluctantly and with embarrassment, and delayed until adolescence, when the problem becomes impossible to ignore or suppress. That our parents and teachers did not intend to produce such an effect I am certain. It arose from a panicky concern to protect us, whom they loved, from the sins of the flesh. Also, they knew that sex life fell with the Fall. But it can be renewed by the graces of the Redemption received in the Sacrament of Matrimony, and this is what they forgot to tell us or make real to us.

All things must be restored to Christ; our bodies were redeemed too. Children should be learning healthy and holy attitudes unconsciously as well as consciously from infancy so that they can fuse the natural and supernatural in every part of life. The beautiful prayers of the Nuptial Mass could be studied with profit long before it is time to think of being engaged.

I agree with you, there is very little of the evils of sex that anyone needs to know, but kept in ignorance of the good made by God, we turn to the evil made by man. Coition is grotesque, yes, but then the union of spirit and matter which makes man is a grotesquerie. That a man should put food into a hole in his face is grotesque: that is why gluttony is so repulsive, whether it expresses itself in taking too much food or “wolfing it down,” in fussiness, Epicureanism, or excessive preoccupation with eating. But who thinks of the grotesque side of eating when he is taking his food as befits a Christian and a man, properly, in company, with the object of nourishing himself, that he may be a better servant to God? And knowing that this eating is a kind of sacrament, a natural figure of the Agape, of Christ’s feeding our souls with Himself in the Eucharist. Our Lord gives us Himself in bread and wine. He knows we are flesh and blood as well as spirit, and we need a visible sign. Yet we eat quite naturally and simply, aware of these things, although we are not always thinking of them at the moment of eating.

In the same way, one does not perceive that sexual union is grotesque when engaged in making love (a beautiful and homely phrase, the *making* of love). I think that the communion of husband and wife could be thought of as a visible sign of the Sacrament of Matrimony, and in the Nuptial Blessing the priest prays, “O God, Thou hast sanctified marriage by a mystery so excellent that in the marriage union Thou didst foreshadow the union of Christ and the Church.”

The marriage union has always seemed to me to be an earthly shadow of the Blessed Trinity. As the love of the Father and Son is the Holy Spirit, the union of man and woman produces a child; the family is a little trinity of love.

Some choose evil because they have not seen the good, and I could write a little Kinsey report myself of sin and damage and unhappiness in the lives of people I know who never learned to bring grace into the realm of sex. Those who suppress sex wrongfully, who hate the flesh, either become neurotic prudes or fall into the opposite extreme of excess. Those unwilling or unable to accept the attitudes of the conventional and puritanical bourgeoisie are easily



betrayed by that “poisonous fascination” of which Dr. Von Hildebrand writes. They begin the descent to the Dark Angel, through the mysticism of Evil, only half knowing what they are doing. The novels of Aldous Huxley, who savagely strips away the fascination, are the best antidote I know to this kind of poison, and I shall always be grateful that I read them in early youth. But he, in his turn, is a Manichee with no compassion for this dear flesh.

For a more Christian view of life, the best books I have run across are *Life Together* by Wingfield Hope (which I frequently re-read for the vision – for its true idealism and refreshing common sense); *In Defense of Purity* by Dietrich Von Hildebrand; *Love in the Western World* by Denis de Rougemont; the Encyclical on Christian marriage by Pope Pius XI. And the Nuptial Mass in the Missal.

There are such treasures of wisdom and beauty within the Church – buried treasure. Remember how Peter used to go around saying that on the subject of sex the Catholic Church is foolproof? He was quoting some doctor in the middle west – Minneapolis or Chicago. There is so much that is good and beautiful to mediate. Do you know *At the Wedding March* by Hopkins? It was written, I think, for his brother’s wedding. Lettered and framed, it makes a good gift to give a bride and groom.

#### AT THE WEDDING MARCH

God with honour hang your head.  
Groom, and grace you, bride, your bed  
With lissome scions, sweet scions,  
Out of hallowed bodies bred.

Each be other’s comfort kind:  
Deep, deeper than divined.  
Divine charity, dear charity,  
Fast you ever, fast bind.

Then let the march tread our ears:  
I to Him turn with tears  
Who to wedlock, His wonder wedlock,  
Deals triumph and immortal years.

And of course, the chapter from the *Imitation* beginning, “Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, etc.”

I did like Cy Echele’s blessing for the bed so much, and I read it at an appropriate time, as we have just bought their first beds for Elizabeth and Michael. They are to be delivered tomorrow, and we shall set them up, sprinkle them with holy water, and read the prayer composed by Cyril. So many thanks for sending it on and much love to you.

In Christ  
Mary

April 18

“WOMEN’S JOB is to love,” Sister Peter Claver used to say to me when I was overflowing with indignation over the injustices and suffering I saw around me. She was always reminding

me that the greatest weapon we had to overcome evil and hatred was to love all men for the Christ that was in them.

The more I thought on this subject of the love of God and the love of man, the more I thought of the nuptial love spoken of so often in the Bible. There are other relationships used as an expression of the kind of love which must govern our conduct. On this earth we must often be thinking in terms of the love a child has for its parent. When the heart is dull and work oppresses, we think in terms of the duty of servant to master, the created to the Creator.

Strangely enough, even though this love is so often spoken of not only in the Bible but by the saints in their writings, there have been many objections because of it, made to the retreat we have at our Newburgh farm (when we can get the retreat masters who give this retreat), a retreat which has also been given in Pittsburgh by Father Hugo and by Father Lacouture in Canada.

A great controversy has arisen about this retreat which is not settled yet, mainly because of the implications of the teaching that we are sons of God and must so behave. The controversy is over nature and the supernatural and man's death and resurrection to a new life, putting off the old and putting on the new man.

The teaching has been that love which is of the Lover for the Beloved can only be between equals, and so to achieve this we must die to the natural and live supernatural lives, doing everything for the love of God.

Not being a theologian or a philosopher, I have written little on the subject and wish to talk and write less.

But while we are on the subject of the Catholic teaching in regard to love and sex, I should like to quote from a book by Father John J. Hugo called *A Sign of Contradiction*.

He is dealing with one objection made by a Censor in the Society of Jesus to this aspect of Father Lacouture's teaching.

The quotation is extensive, but because it deals so beautifully with the love of God and man, I wish to quote it in full, and I am sure that Father Hugo will not mind, and that our readers will be glad to have this clear expression of the teachings of the saints.

Excerpt from *A Sign of Contradiction*

The comparison between sexual union and the Beatific Vision, the Censor says, is to be viewed "with horror." And why, pray, with horror? Is it that there is something evil in sexual union? If there is anything evil in it, then indeed we would have to view "with horror" any comparison between it and God. But is it evil? To say so would be to fall into that very Manicheism (teaching that material nature is evil) of which Father Lacouture himself has been falsely accused. Here, however, we see how wide a circuit Father Lacouture cuts around Manicheism: far from regarding nature as essentially depraved, he is ready to find even in sexual union itself – most deeply wounded of all our faculties by the Fall, if St. Thomas is correct – the very image of the Creator and of that most glorious attribute of the Creator, His love. In *Le Seminaire* Father Lacouture

was condemned for teaching the very Manicheanism that he is here condemned for so clearly avoiding. Just where may the poor man turn? “John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a devil!’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a glutton and a wine-drinker!’ ” (Matt. 11:18-19).

But if sex and sexual union are to be considered creatures of God, as indeed they are, then there is no reason why they may not be compared, by way of analogy, with Him Who made them. For the Creator leaves His image, more or less perfectly, in all His creatures. And this tracing of analogies holds an honored place in Catholic theology: outside of divine revelation itself, it is the only *positive* means we have for studying and contemplating God. By means of it theologians seek to fill in the gaps left by revelation in our knowledge of God. And in this particular case, the analogy between sexual union and the union of love between God and the soul is at once affirmed by reason and pointed out by divine revelation itself.

The trouble is that the Censor himself is not free from a certain Manichean tendency! Like so many others, when he thinks of sexual union, he’s thinking only of the physical union of sex; and he speaks of this as though it were in some sense evil. Now sexual union of course is at once physical and psychic (or spiritual). When the physical union of sex is divorced from the spiritual element of genuine love, as in prostitution, then sexual union is just that: prostitution. But when the union of sex is spiritual as well as physical, as God intended it to be, then it is a noble thing, the consummation and fulfillment of the highest human love, that between man and wife, which is blessed by the Church in the Sacrament of Matrimony. All love is perfected in union; in its fullest sense, it *is* union; so that sexual union, being the climax and consummation of the highest human love, is the very noblest of God’s creatures; there is nothing in all creation which provides a more apt or truer analogy for the contemplation of God. Is it to be wondered at that almost all of Father Lacouture’s comparisons are taken from sexual union? I think not; you will find the same thing, if you care to look, in all the mystical writers of the Church. Let us glance at some examples.

God Himself indicated this analogy; its source is the Holy Scripture. Should we, for example, view “with horror” such passages as the following from the Canticle of Canticles, which not only point out the comparison but describe it with some intimacy of detail?

Show me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou liest in the midday. . . . Thy cheeks are beautiful as the turtledove’s, thy neck as jewels. . . . Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, and comely. Our bed is flourishing. . . . His left hand is under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me. In my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loveth. (Canticle I, 6, 9, 15; II, 6; III, 1)

This Canticle, ever a treasure to Catholic mystics, is so perfectly a love poem that rationalistic Bible critics maintain plausibly that it is *only* a love poem and not the inspired word of God at all.

Does the Censor subscribe to this interpretation? Or will he accept the orthodox view that the Sacred Writer is here writing of divine love by allegory and analogy?

Jesus, when He appeared, described Himself as “the Bridegroom.” A bridegroom is a man having a bride: who is the bride of Jesus? Obviously, He was speaking in a spiritual or mystical sense: He was fulfilling the prophecy of the Cantic. So, Catholic nuns speak of themselves as brides of Christ. But not nuns alone – every Christian soul is the bride of Jesus. Hence every Christian soul can find in the sexual union of bride and groom the best analogy and most perfect illustration of the relationship existing between himself and God.

Saint Paul (we hope the Censor is not too oppressed with “horror”) does not fail in turn to point out this analogy: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church” (Eph. 5:25). Again, he says, “For I have betrothed you to one spouse, that I might present you a chaste virgin to Christ” (II Cor. 11:2).

Without knowledge of this imagery, the Catholic mystics could not be understood at all. One unacquainted with it might be shocked, for example, at the poems of St. John of the Cross:

O night that guided me,  
O night more lovely than the dawn,  
O night that joined Beloved with Lover,  
Lover transformed in the Beloved.

Upon my flowery breast,  
Kept wholly for himself alone,  
There he stayed sleeping, and I caressed him,  
And the fanning of the cedars made a breeze.

I remained lost in oblivion;  
My face I reclined on the Beloved.  
All ceased and I abandoned myself,  
Leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies.

Such imagery is very bold – what the Freudians could make of it! Should it, however, be viewed “with horror”? Presumably one who undertakes the office of censor is acquainted with such works as these. How then can he condemn a brother religious and priest for using language and illustrations that are wholly in accord with the age-old teaching tradition of the Church? True, St. John of the Cross, whom we have quoted, is a mystic. Nevertheless, the relationship he speaks of is that of every Christian to God. Accordingly, not to mystics alone but to every Christian, and that in the very ceremony of baptism, the Church addresses these words:

Observe the commandments of God, that when Our Lord shall come to His nuptials, thou mayest meet Him together with all the saints in the heavenly court, and live forever and ever.

The only thing peculiar to the mystics is their vivid realization of the nature of the soul’s relationship with God, and their actual possession, following great fidelity to grace, of a very perfect degree of union with Him. It is one of the excellences of Father Lacouture’s teaching that he brings forcibly to the minds of ordinary Christians the essential nature of the soul’s union with God, as illustrated by the analogy of Bridegroom and Bride. Otherwise, for the

most part, we will have to go to the mystics to hear these divine nuptials celebrated and described – so reluctant are most Christians, including numbers of their teachers, even to hear of the King’s invitation to the wedding feast of His Son. St. Bernard (to go on with our citations) describes this union:

For although the *Spouse*, as a pure creature, is less than her Creator, and hence also loves less, yet if she loves with her whole being, her love is perfect and wanting in nothing. It is love of this kind that constitutes the *spiritual marriage* of the soul with the Word.

Mark that the Saint speaks of the spiritual marriage *of the soul* – not of the mystic – with the Word. He goes on:

Happy the spouse to whom it has been given to experience *an embrace* of such surpassing delight! This spiritual embrace is nothing else but a chaste and holy love, a love most sweet and ravishing, a love perfectly serene and perfectly pure, a love that is mutual, intimate, and strong, a love that joins two not in one flesh but in one spirit, according to the Apostle’s testimony: “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.”

Nor is the description of this love in terms of an embrace a mere accident:

This is in truth the alliance of a holy and spiritual marriage. But it is saying too little to call it an alliance: it is rather an embrace.

Not forgetting that the Bridegroom in this case is divine as well as human, and must therefore be treated with reverence as well as with love, St. Bernard nevertheless says:

The Word is indeed one Who deserves to be honored, Who deserves to be admired and wondered at; but He is better pleased to be loved. For He is the Bridegroom, and *the soul* is His Bride. And between a bridegroom and his bride, what relation would you look for other than the bond of mutual love?

The Church, moreover, gives her approval to this language. Here, for example, are the words she addresses to the newly wedded bride in the Nuptial Blessing, clearly indicating the symbolical and spiritual character of the marriage union:

O God, Who has made marriage sacred by a significance so sublime that in the nuptial union Thou wast pleased to forecast the mystical union of Christ and the Church. . . . Deus qui tam excellenti mysterio conjugalem copulam consecrasti, ut Christi et Ecclesiae sacramentum praesignares in foedere nuptiarum. . . .

Priests, especially, will observe that the word used in this blessing to designate nuptial union, *copula*, is employed in theology to describe not only sexual union in general but coitus in particular. Such a choice of words, fully justifying St. Bernard’s reference to the marriage embrace, cannot be regarded as an accident; had the Church experienced the Censor’s horror, she would have carefully avoided this term.

Other spiritual masters use the same language. St. Francis de Sales, for example, describing the attractiveness of the Bridegroom to the Bride, writes,

The sacred spouse wished for the holy kiss of union: Oh, said she, *let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth* (Cant. I, 1). But is there affinity enough, O well-beloved spouse of the well-beloved, between thee and thy loving one to bring to the union which thou desirest? Yes, says she: give me it; this kiss of union, O Thou dear love of my heart: for thy breasts are better than wine, smelling sweet of the best ointment.

The same saint makes quite explicitly the very comparison to which the Censor most strongly objects – that between sexual union and the Beatific Vision:

In fine, the heavenly King, having brought the soul He loves to the end of this life, assists her also in her blessed departure, by which he draws her to the marriage bed of eternal glory.

Again, this is no exaggeration: the Church sanctions the thought by her own usage. It is with a similar thought that she speeds her children into eternity. Over the grave of the Christian departing from this world she prays:

Teach us to watch and pray, that when Thy summons comes, we may go forth to meet the Bridegroom and enter with Him into life everlasting.

These various prayers of the Church that we have been quoting have a real doctrinal value; according to the axiom *lex orandi est lex credendi* (the norm of prayer is the norm of belief), they give us the official teaching of the Church.

Since Newman describes a gentleman as one who does not willingly give pain, it can be only the great importance of the subject that justifies so complete a departure from the gentlemanly ideal as is involved in setting down the above passages from the saints and prayers of the Church, which undoubtedly have caused convulsions of horror in the Censor and any others who share his views. For the matter is important; it is not simply a question of propriety in the choice of literary metaphors. We touch here, in truth, the very heart of Christianity, the essential relationship that it establishes between God and the soul, a relationship that marks it off from merely natural religion and a merely rational code of upright conduct. That relationship is one of love: the end of Christianity, the final goal to which everything else in the Church is ordered, is to unite the souls of the faithful to God in the love of eternal friendship. Therefore, the essential supernatural relationship between God and man is one of personal, intimate, eternal love. Natural religion, on the other hand, observes its correct norm of conduct coldly and exactly according to reason. Without doubt, there is also a natural love of God, enjoined upon man as a rational creature, but it differs *toto coelo* from supernatural love, sharing in the coldness, the abstractness, and the remoteness of the reason which is its principle. Christianity transforms this relation, makes it genuine affection, intimate, personal, tender – in a word, changes it into a true friendship, a most sublime love. Thus (not to speak here of membership in the Church and participation in the sacraments, which is presupposed in a Christian), the *practical* difference between Christian and pagan, that is, the difference in actual conduct, is that the Christian is motivated and inspired by love. After all, a Christian is human, and must, like a pagan, observe the ordinary conditions of human life; however much he may fast, he will also eat, drink, sleep, work, take his recreation. The kingdom of God is within. The Christian King Alfred, in a song that Chesterton put on his lips, thus describes the difference between pagan and Christian to his heathen conquerors:

Our monks go robed in rain and snow,  
But the heart of flame therein,  
But you go clothed in feasts and flames  
When all is ice within.

Now in order to bring home to our minds this essential relationship of love between God and the soul, the Scripture employs two analogies: it represents God as Father and Christians as His children; it also represents God as Bridegroom and the soul as Bride. These are the two ways, given to us by God Himself, for studying His love, for learning its exigencies, for discovering the manner in which it is to be expressed. Each of these analogies is useful, yet each by itself is insufficient; hence God has provided the two together. The relationship of child to parent reminds us that our love of God is one of dependence as well as of tenderness, and must therefore be accompanied by filial fear and reverence. The analogy of Bridegroom with Bride teaches us, as no other method could, that the love of God is one almost of equality (we having been elevated to the supernatural plane by grace), of deep and intimate and lasting affection, as between spouses.

Of these analogies, the most perfect is that between Bride and Groom: better even than the other it shows us the real nature of love: union between those who are beloved of each other. It also shows us the perfection of the union that should exist between God and the soul, since the union between husband and wife is the most perfect known to human love and friendship. Accordingly, St. Bernard, in distinguishing his four degrees of love, illustrates the third by filial love, but the fourth and highest degree he compares to nuptial love:

O truly a great thing is love. But it has degrees of greatness. In the very highest of these degrees stands the love of the Bride. The children also love, but they have an eye to the inheritance, the thought of losing which makes them suspicious of everything and causes them to regard with more fear than affection Him from whom they hope to receive it.

Showing again the superiority of this highest degree, which can be adequately described only in terms of nuptial love, he says,

For the soul that is such desires nothing for herself with a private affection, neither happiness nor glory nor anything else whatever, but loses herself completely in God, and has but one most eager desire, namely, that the King should bring her into His bedchamber, that she might belong to Him alone and enjoy his sweet caresses.

Clearly, to forget this essential relationship is to remove the heart from Christianity and reduce it, in practice, to the observance of the precepts of natural religion. It is to eliminate from Christianity Christ Himself, His teaching, His way of life, the End that He has fixed for our strivings. The special command that He laid upon us is that we should love God with our whole heart, that is, exclusively, as a faithful bride loves the bridegroom; and the highest gift and power that He gave us – charity – is that which binds us to God by Love. Accordingly, to throw discredit on the analogy, by which, better than all other means, it is possible to teach the meaning of supernatural love, is, in actual fact and effect, to eliminate that essential relationship of love from the practice of our religion, reducing it to a formal observance of rationally imposed duties, a reduction that the other analogy, with its accent on fear, is powerless to prevent.

As we have progressed in discussing this point, the reader must have been experiencing a mounting excitement; for we have come upon one of the most closely guarded secrets in the Grand Strategy of the High Command in Hell. It is really a magnificent plan, devised with such genius as might be expected from angelic intelligences resolved to divert Christians generally and Christian teachers in particular from attaining, or even pursuing, the essential purpose of Christianity. The devils, close students of human psychology that they are, accomplish this end by taking advantage of the false delicacy, on the one hand, and the prurience, on the other, with which sexual union nowadays is usually regarded: both attitudes, although quite different in themselves, are equally useful in causing sexual union to be regarded as something shameful and therefore unworthy, as the Censor has expressed it, of comparison with the Beatific Vision. And in this manner the analogy revealed to us by the Holy Spirit Himself for disclosing the secrets of divine love is thrown away in fear, contempt, and even “horror,” as though it were monstrous to suggest the thought.

Let those who share the Censor’s views look to their employ.

And if the Censor, or others like him, whether moved by sham-delicacy or prurience, regard this comparison “with horror” or similar sentiments, let them know that others, free from such distortions of spiritual insight, think very differently on this subject. There was, for example, the Catholic layman, married, who, hearing this comparison brought out clearly on one of our retreats, exclaimed to the priest directing it, “For the first time in my life I understand the true beauty and sublimity of Christian marriage, the reason why our Lord made it a sacrament, the spiritual significance of the wedding union, and its place in the overall plan of Providence.”