

Sexual hypocrisy and the western church

There is a transcendent wisdom to Church doctrine; Christian teaching helps us to live a good life

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Résumé

L'hypocrisie sexuelle dans l'Eglise occidentale

Jésus reproche aux Pharisiens de suivre la lettre de la loi mais pas l'esprit. Dans la chrétienté occidentale cette hypocrisie pharisienne est évidente : les siècles ont fait de la chasteté et de l'austérité sexuelle la mesure du jugement des personnes. Ainsi la bienséance sexuelle est-elle devenue la mesure de notre proximité avec Dieu.

Ne doit-on pas relire la parabole du Bon samaritain ou l'histoire de la femme adultère ?

Cette dernière ne signifie pas que celui qui cherche Jésus n'est pas appelé à une plus grande chasteté avant tout mais que ce doit être compris comme une étape du chemin vers lui.

Un changement de l'Eglise vers plus de compassion et d'acceptation de la différence est probablement difficile pour ceux qui se sont efforcé de vivre en accord avec sa doctrine sexuelle. Quel est l'objectif de leur chasteté et de leur fidélité si les autres peuvent faire ce qu'ils veulent ? L'enseignement de Jésus nous aide dans ce dilemme : dans la parabole de la vigne les ouvriers reçoivent le même salaire quel que soit leur travail.

Jésus montre que ce n'est pas à nous de discuter de la générosité de Dieu. Sa phrase suivante : « Les premiers derniers et les derniers premiers » nous renvoie à tous ses défis qui heurtent notre culture : aimer nos ennemis, servir nos frères, rechercher l'unité dans nos différences.

Le salaire des ouvriers de la première heure devient clair quand on entend le Père du frère du fils prodigue : « Mon fils, tu es avec moi toujours et tout ce que j'ai est à toi ».

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Jesus condemned the Pharisees for following the letter, but not the spirit, of the law. They valued religious observances that made them look holy, but which ordinary people could not easily follow.

In western Christianity, pharisaic-like hypocrisy is also evident, but over the centuries chastity and sexual austerity became the measures by which the goodness of people would be judged.

And just as loud prayers and costly animal sacrifices did not measure the true holiness of the Pharisees, so too has sexual propriety provided a false measure of one's closeness to God in the western world.

If someone has multiple sex partners but is helpful to strangers, are they better or worse than someone who has only slept with their spouse but is racist or unkind?

Celui qui a plusieurs partenaires sexuels tout en étant proche de l'étranger est-il pire que celui qui ne couche qu'avec son épouse mais est raciste ou loin de son frère ?

Principles of charity and humility must instead underlie our moral discernment. When Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the outsider, looked down upon by upright Jews, was the person who fulfilled God's law to love others.

Jesus made it clear to his followers that they needed to be humbly aware of their own failings rather than judging others, 'Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?' (Matthew chapter 7 verse 3).

Jesus did not denounce people for their human frailties. He refused to condemn the woman who had committed adultery (John chapter 8 verses 1-11), and spoke to the woman at the well, despite her five husbands plus! (John chapter 4 verses 4-18).

This is not to say that someone seeking Jesus will not be called to a life of greater chastity, but it should be seen as a part of their journey, not the whole.

Jesus presented a clear invitation for the woman at the well to follow a more holy life. He similarly offered the path of righteousness to the adulterous woman when he told her, 'from now on do not sin again' (John chapter 8 verse 11).

The challenge for the Church is to be invitational in the same manner as Jesus himself, offering God's love, first, and his call to holiness second.

Many Christians today are inspired by Pope Francis' teachings about homosexuality. Under Francis' leadership, the Church is coming to recognise the need to compassionately embrace the God-given dignity of all people, regardless of their sexual orientation.

The same sense of mercy is also evident in Francis' moves to be more inclusive of divorced couples, who have traditionally been alienated by the Church.

We are all sinners, but the Eucharist provides the ultimate source of grace that nourishes us on our quest to live more holy lives. How can it be right to punitively withhold this grace from those whose so-called 'weakness' is same-sex attraction or a failure to sustain a life-long marriage?

A redirection of the Church towards greater compassion and acceptance of others may be particularly difficult for people who have striven to live in accordance with Church doctrine on sexual morality.

What is the purpose of their own chastity and fidelity if others can do what they like and be equally embraced? Jesus' own teachings can help us with this dilemma.

In the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew chapter 20 verses 1-16) the labourers all received the same payment, despite starting at different times of the day. It seems patently unfair.

Yet Jesus points out that it is not up to us to dispute God's generosity. His next sentence, 'Thus the last will be first, and the first, last', links this teaching to the many other countercultural challenges laid down by Jesus — to love our enemies, to lead through service to others, to strive for unity despite our differences.

But we should not believe that living the best Christian life we can is a penalty. In Deuteronomy chapter 4 verse 6, God makes it clear that his laws will be of great benefit to his followers: 'other peoples will admire your [laws] ... they will exclaim, "No other people is as wise and prudent as this great nation!"'

And indeed, there is a transcendent wisdom to Church doctrine. Whether it is the value of a stable family in raising children, the protection of young people from sexual exploitation, or prevention of the trauma of abortion in girls too young to understand the harm being done, Christian teaching helps us to live a *good* life.

The prize for those who come to the vineyard early is clear when the father talks to his resentful older son in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, 'My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours' (Luke chapter 15 verse 31).

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