

THE HOUSE OF GOLD

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

THE HOME, the Christian home based on the sacramental grace of matrimony, was the theme of one of the last series of sermons preached by Fr Bede Jarrett, O.P., in America. That was in 1929, only a few months before Pius XI's great encyclical on Christian marriage was delivered in Rome. Twenty-five years have passed since these sermons were first published and the welcome new edition¹ of the book gives us an opportunity to look back over this epoch which has been characterized by so much discussion and theologizing on the meaning of marriage. With the attack on marriage and the home growing to such intensity during this century it was inevitable that the Christian should have to think out his position anew in his defence of an institution so central to his life as a human being and as a sharer in the life of God. During these last twenty-five years in particular there have been many theories which seemed to place the love and companionship of the married couple above that of the family, that is of the children. Under the weight of so much discussion and argument things such as love or sex, the offspring or the sacrament, came to be isolated and given values which the authors of the distinctions and arguments often never intended. Argument breeds analysis, and analysis unless carefully handled breeds division. Relative values become absolute values; so that when people talk about the importance of the harmony of the husband and wife they seem to be setting the begetting of children in the background. In this way, perhaps, theories about the prime importance of the mutual love of the parents have become exaggerated and so frowned on if not condemned by authority, when the authors may not have intended to separate this 'secondary good' from the other 'goods' which have formed the traditional terminology about marriage for centuries.

It is of interest, therefore, to look back to the writings of Fr Bede Jarrett as well as to the famous Papal Encyclical which preceded so much of this discussion. Without referring explicitly to the three 'ends' or 'goods' of matrimony, Fr Jarrett lays continual emphasis on love as the foundation of Christian marriage. 'In all the teaching of the Catholic Church wherein she deals with the subject of marriage or the home, she takes for granted that it is built upon the foundations of human love.' He goes on to say that the apparent intransigence and hardness of the Church in face of the modern problems of married life

¹ *The House of Gold*. By Bede Jarrett, O.P. (2nd Edition, Blackfriars Publications; 9s. 6d.)

can only be understood in relation to Christ's teaching, and because the Church 'supposes the home, the married life, to be possible as Christ taught it, but on terms of love'. There is no question here of supplanting the primary end of marriage by a secondary one—the context of the whole series of conferences is the home, the Christian home which implies with God's blessing the presence of children. But the coming of children to the home has so often been isolated in our minds by constant discussion so that sometimes it seems as though the principle of holy matrimony was that of a cattle-breeder, to increase and multiply no matter what other elements might obtrude themselves. The best Catholic family is sometimes gauged by the number of children.

We can only focus these matters again clearly if we return to Fr Bede's principle that the home is based on mutual love and that the Sacrament is given to overcome the tendency of fallen nature to isolate sex and to seek in it personal satisfaction and so kill any true love between the partners. Fr Bede speaks mainly of human love, the friendship of husband and wife with the prudence and restraint in each other's regard which make it possible for them to be drawn together in the closest union without the entry of lust to destroy that friendship. He leaves us to fill in the full teaching on Christian love which is charity. And it is here surely that he intends us to find the solution to nearly all our matrimonial problems. For human love raised to the supernatural order by the divine love of our Lord becomes sacrificial and self-giving even to the extent of life itself. The insistence on the 'primary end of marriage' on the duty of each partner to respect the marriage rights of the other can so easily turn the matter of marriage into one of assuaging concupiscence, of self-satisfaction in a legitimate way. Some people seem almost to view marriage as primarily a way of legitimizing this sort of satisfaction. The love of concupiscence of course is an element in human and divine friendship, but it is subservient to the higher love of self-giving—most perfectly symbolized by the death of Christ on the Cross in which act his marriage to the Church was consummated and the two became one flesh. The husband gives himself to the wife and the wife to the husband, and in the most complete act of self-giving God is so intimately present as to create the soul as the new human person is formed. Marriage is centred round that sacred act, and in Christian marriage the sacramental grace is present to preserve it from desecration by merely animal desire. Fr Bede insists that throughout every aspect of married life there should be nothing 'merely animal'; it is all human, and since it is a question of two human beings this is a matter of having in mind and heart—intellect and will—the same ideas and the same desires.

Charity then measures all the problems of married life by the extent

to which each partner gives himself or herself to the other in the family. The application of this principle will be obvious, and the place of the permanent grace of the Christian sacrament of holy matrimony takes a very central place indeed in this matter of creating and perfecting true Christian love in husband and wife.

But there is one point which we should like to have seen developed by Fr Bede. His series concluded with Holy Week so that he delivered a moving and characteristically poetic discourse on the Blessed Sacrament in preparation for Maundy Thursday, but by that time he had rounded off the course on the Catholic home. It would have been of the greatest help to have seen the whole teaching on Christian marriage summed up in the Eucharist. For the Blessed Sacrament is the goal of all the other sacraments, and matrimony no less than the others is directly related to the Eucharist. The Nuptial Mass is not merely a devotional appendage to the wedding rites; the marital love which, as Fr Bede so often repeats, is the foundation of Christian marriage, is preserved and assisted by the sacrament, but it is only fulfilled in the act of sacrificial love of the Eucharist. It must be remembered that this sacrificial love is a gift from God as the very essential reality of Mass and Communion. The union of husband and wife may so easily become a merely material or physical one unless it is completed and perfected by the actual union of sacrificial love which is given them together as they assist at Mass and feed upon the heavenly bread. The disapproval of mixed marriages should be seen in light of the full sacramental teaching of the Church, which is a Eucharistic teaching. The family table at home round which father, mother and children unite in daily meals, must be bound to the family meal round the altar. There is room for a book on the Eucharist and Marriage.

This teaching on love as the foundation of marriage, as we have said, does not militate against the purpose of the union being the procreation of children; the purpose is the Christian family and home. But it holds the various elements of this sacred union together—for its essence is to bind together—and Fr Bede relates it to the Person of the Holy Spirit, the binding force, as it were, of the unity of the Three-in-One.

The Encyclical *Casti Connubii* must have seemed to Fr Bede a providential confirmation of all he had been saying. In particular the passage on 'Conjugal Charity' gives authority for a great deal that he had said. Some phrases from that section will set in perspective what has been said above.

... Marital love, which pervades all the duties of married life and holds in Christian marriage a sort of primacy of honour'.

"The mutual interior formation of husband and wife, this persevering

endeavour to bring each other to the state of perfection, may in a true sense be called as the Roman Catechism calls it, the primary cause and reason of matrimony, so long as marriage is considered not in its stricter sense, as the institution destined for the procreation and education of children, but in the wider sense as a complete and intimate life-partnership and association. The same charity must rule and regulate all the other rights and duties of husband and wife; and so in the prescription of the Apostle: "Let the husband render the debt to the wife, and the wife in like manner to the husband", we must see a rule of charity as well as a law of justice.'

So it is that after every epoch of controversy and development in the precision of doctrine we should return to fundamental teaching such as this in order to keep our new elaborations in perspective, integrated in the fulness of the Christian life which is one of charity fed by the Body of Christ. Fr Bede Jarrett's book will go far to help us in this work of synthesis through his insistence on the primacy of love.



REVIEWS

THE IMAGE OF GOD IN SEX. By Vincent Wilkins, S.J. (Sheed and Ward; 6s.)

Within the limits of less than twenty thousand words the author handles a difficult subject at four levels of consideration. He starts with God—sex considered 'in its vanishing point of infinitude, the eternal and infinite fecundity of God'—and for a few pages discusses the notions of generation and fatherhood in the Godhead. He then takes in turn three successive and descending orders of created being, from the divine and supernatural to the human and merely natural. Firstly, there is the theme of Christ and the mystery of the Incarnation, the union between the Son of God and human nature. Then we have the theme of the Mystical Body and the mystery of the union between Christ and the Church. And lastly, the theme of Christian marriage and the mystery of the union between husband and wife. At each of these levels one element in the mysterious union is represented as the male, the other as the female: *Son of God, Christ, and husband*, on the one hand, and *human nature, Church, and wife* on the other. The whole, we learn from a diagram (p. 19), is a theology of sex.

The author claims that too little has been written by theologians on this important subject of sex. But that depends on what we mean by 'sex' and what we understand by the phrase 'a theology of sex'. Fr Wilkin sees sex as something which ought not to be confined to the