

St. Augustine of Hippo, *bishop & doctor* (†430)

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Morals of the Catholic Church

CHAP. 33. Another Kind of Men Living Together in Cities. Fasts of Three Days.

70. Still I would not on this account cast a slight upon a praiseworthy class of Christians, -those, namely, who live together in cities, quite apart from common life. I saw at Milan a lodging-house of saints, in number not a few, presided over by one presbyter, a man of great excellence and learning. At Rome I knew several places where there was in each one eminent for weight of character, and prudence, and divine knowledge, presiding over all the rest who lived with him, in Christian charity, and sanctity, and liberty. These, too, are not burdensome to any one; but, in the Eastern fashion, and on the authority of the Apostle Paul, they maintain themselves with their own hands. I was told that many practiced fasts of quite amazing severity, not merely taking only one meal daily towards night, which is everywhere quite common, but very often continuing for three days or more in succession without food or drink. And this among not men only, but women, who also live together in great numbers as widows or **virgins**, gaining a livelihood by spinning and weaving, and presided over in each case by a woman of the greatest judgment and experience, skilled and accomplished not only in directing and forming moral conduct, but also in instructing the understanding.

On the Good of Marriage

27. ...But he who said, "*If thou shall have taken a wife, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin shall have been married, she sinneth not:*" and, "*Let her do what she will, she sinneth not, if she be married,*" hath made it plain enough that marriage is no sin. But on account of the sanctity of the Sacrament, as a female, although it be as a catechumen that she hath suffered violence, cannot after Baptism be consecrated among the virgins of God: so there was no absurdity in supposing of him who had exceeded the number of one wife, not that he had committed any sin, but that he had lost a certain prescript rule of a sacrament necessary not unto desert of good life, but unto the seal of ecclesiastic ordination; and thus, as the many wives of the old Fathers signified our future Churches out of all nations made subject unto one husband, Christ: so our chief-priest, the husband of one wife, signifies unity out of all nations, made subject unto one husband, Christ: which shall then be perfected, when He shall have unveiled the hidden things of darkness, and shall have I made manifest the thoughts of the heart, that then each may have praise from God.

28. Therefore, if we compare the things themselves, we may no way doubt that the chastity of continence is better than marriage chastity, whilst yet both are good: but when we compare the persons, he is better, who hath a greater good than another. Further, he who hath a greater of the same kind, hath also that which is less; but he, who only hath what is less, assuredly hath not that which is greater. For in sixty, thirty also are contained, not sixty also in thirty. But not to work from out that which he hath, stands in the allotment of duties, not in the want of virtues: forasmuch as neither is he without the good of mercy, who finds not wretched persons such as he may mercifully assist.

29. And there is this further, that men are not rightly compared with men in regard of some one good. For it may come to pass, that one hath not what another hath, but hath another thing, which must be esteemed of more value. The good of obedience is better than of continence. For marriage is in no place condemned by authority of our Scriptures, but disobedience is in no place acquitted. If therefore there be set before us a virgin about to continue so, but yet disobedient, and a married woman who could not continue a virgin, but yet obedient, which shall we call better — shall it be (the one) less praiseworthy, than if she were a virgin, or (the other) worthy of blame, even as she is a virgin? So, if you compare a drunken virgin with a sober married woman, who can doubt to pass the same sentence? Forsooth marriage and virginity are two goods, whereof the one is greater; but sobriety and drunkenness, even as obedience and stubbornness, are, the one good, and the other evil. But it is better to have all goods even in a less degree, than great good with great evil: forasmuch as in the goods of the body also it is better to have the stature of Zacchaeus with sound health, than that of Goliah with fever.

30. The right question plainly is, not whether a virgin every way disobedient is to be compared to an obedient married woman, but a less obedient to a more obedient: forasmuch as that also of marriage is chastity, and therefore a good, but less than virginal. Therefore if the one, by so much less in the good of obedience, as she is greater in the good of chastity, be compared with the other, which of them is to be preferred that person judges, who in the first place comparing chastity itself and obedience, sees that obedience

is in a certain way the mother of all virtues. And therefore, for this reason, there may be obedience without virginity, because virginity is of counsel, not of precept. But I call that obedience, whereby precepts are complied with. And, therefore, there may be obedience to precepts without virginity, but not without chastity. For it pertains unto chastity, not to commit fornication, not to commit adultery, to be defiled by no unlawful intercourse: and whoso observe not these, do contrary to the precepts of God, and on this account are banished from the virtue of obedience. But there may be virginity without obedience, on this account, because it is possible for a woman, having received the counsel of virginity, and having guarded virginity, to slight precepts: even as we have known many sacred virgins, talkative, curious, drunken, litigious, covetous, proud: all which are contrary to precepts, and slay one, even as Eve herself, by the crime of disobedience. Wherefore not only is the obedient to be preferred to the disobedient, but a more obedient married woman to a less obedient virgin.

31. From this obedience that Father, who was not without a wife, was prepared to be without an only son, and that slain by himself. For I shall not without due cause call him an only son, concerning whom he heard the Lord say, *“In Isaac shall there be called for thee a seed.”* Therefore how much sooner would he hear it, that he should be even without a wife, if this he were bidden? Wherefore it is not without reason that we often consider, that some of both sexes, containing from all sexual intercourse, are negligent in obeying precepts, after having with so great warmth caught at the not making use of things that are allowed. Whence who doubts that we do not rightly compare unto the excellence of those holy fathers and mothers begetting sons, the men and women of our time, although free from all intercourse, yet in virtue of obedience inferior: even if there had been wanting to those men in habit of mind also, what is plain in the deed of the latter. Therefore let these follow the Lamb, boys singing the new song, as it is written in the Apocalypse, *“who have not defiled themselves with women:”* for no other reason than that they have continued virgins. Nor let them on this account think themselves better than the first holy fathers, who used marriage, so to speak, after the fashion of marriage. Forsooth the use of it is such, as that, if in it there hath taken place through carnal intercourse aught which exceeds necessity of begetting, although in a way that deserves pardon, there is pollution. For what doth pardon expiate, if that advance cause no pollution whatever? From which pollution it were strange if boys following the Lamb were free, unless they continued virgins.

35. Boys also and virgins dedicating unto God actual chastity we do before all things admonish, that they be aware that they must guard their life meanwhile upon earth with so great humility, by how much the more what they have vowed is heavenly. Forsooth it is written, *“How great soever thou art, by so much humble thyself in all things.”* Therefore it is our part to say something of their greatness, it is their part to have thought of great humility. Therefore, except certain, those holy fathers and mothers who were married, than whom these although they be not married are not better, for this reason, that, if they were married, they would not be equal, let them not doubt that they surpass all the rest of this time, either married, or after trial made of marriage, exercising continence; not so far as Anna surpasses Susanna; but so far as Mary surpasses both. I am speaking of what pertains unto the holy chastity itself of the flesh; for who knows not, what other deserts Mary hath? Therefore let them add to this so high purpose conduct suitable, that they may

have an assured security of the surpassing reward; knowing of a truth, that, unto themselves and unto all the faithful, beloved and chosen members of Christ, coming many from the East, and from the West, although shining with light of glory that differeth one from another, according to their deserts, there is this great gift bestowed in common, to sit down in the kingdom of God with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, who not for the sake of this world, but for the sake of Christ, were husbands, for the sake of Christ were fathers.

Marriage and Concupiscence

CHAP. 5 [IV.] The Natural Good of Marriage. All Society Naturally Repudiates a Fraudulent Companion. What Is True Conjugal Purity? No True Virginity and Chastity Except in Devotion to True Faith.

The union, then, of male and female for the purpose of procreation is the natural good of marriage. But he makes a bad use of this good who uses it bestially, so that his intention is on the gratification of lust, instead of the desire of offspring. Nevertheless, in sundry animals unendowed with reason, as, for instance, in most birds, there is both preserved a certain kind of confederation of pairs, and a social combination of skill in nest-building; and their mutual division of the periods for cherishing their eggs and their alternation in the labor of feeding their young, give them the appearance of so acting, when they mate, as to be intent rather on securing the continuance of their kind than on gratifying lust. Of these two, the one is the likeness of man in a brute; the other, the likeness of the brute in man. With respect, however, to what I ascribed to the nature of marriage, that the male and the female are united together as associates for procreation, and consequently do not defraud each other (forasmuch as every associated state has a natural abhorrence of a fraudulent companion), although even men without faith possess this palpable blessing of nature, yet, since they use it not in faith, they only turn it to evil and sin. In like manner, therefore, the marriage of believers converts to the use of righteousness that carnal concupiscence by which *“the flesh lusteth against the Spirit.”* For they entertain the firm purpose of generating offspring to be regenerated--that the children who are born of them as *“children of the world”* may be born again and become *“sons of God.”* Wherefore all parents who do not beget children with this intention, this will this purpose, of transferring them from being members of the first man into being members of Christ, but boast as unbelieving parents over unbelieving children, – however circumspect they be in their cohabitation, studiously limiting it to the begetting of children, – really have no conjugal chastity in themselves. For inasmuch as chastity is a virtue, hating unchastity as its contrary vice, and as all the virtues (even those whose operation is by means of the body) have their seat in the soul, how can the body be in any true sense said to be chaste, when the soul itself is committing fornication against the true God? Now such fornication the holy psalmist censures when he says: *“For, lo, they that are far from Thee shall perish: Thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from Thee.”* There is, then, no true chastity, whether conjugal, or vidual, or virginal, except that which devotes itself to true faith. For though consecrated virginity is rightly preferred to marriage, yet what Christian in his sober mind would not prefer catholic Christian women who have been even more than once married, to not only vestals, but also to heretical virgins? So great is the avail of faith, of which the apostle says, *“Whatsoever is not of faith is sin;”* and of which it is written in the Epistle to the Hebrews, *“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”*

CHAP. 15. Man, by Birth, Is Placed Under the Dominion of the Devil Through Sin; We Were All One in Adam When He Sinned.

He then proceeds to ask: “Why, then, are they in the devil’s power whom God created?” And he finds an answer to his own question apparently from a phrase of mine. “Because of sin,” says he, “not because of nature.” Then framing his answer in reference to mine, he says: “But as there cannot be offspring without the sexes, so there cannot be sin without the will.” Yes, indeed, such is the truth. For even as “*by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so also has death passed through to all men, for in him all have sinned.*” By the evil will of that one man all sinned in him, since all were that one man, from whom, therefore, they individually derived original sin. “For you allege,” says he, “that the reason why they are in the devil’s power is because they are born of the union of the two sexes.” I plainly aver that it is by reason of transgression that they are in the devil’s power, and that their participation, moreover, of this transgression is due to the circumstance that they are born of the said union of the sexes, which cannot even accomplish its own honourable function without the incident of shameful lust. This has also, in fact, been said by Ambrose, of most blessed memory, bishop of the church in Milan, when he gives as the reason why Christ’s birth in the flesh was free from all sinful fault, that His conception was not the result of a union of the two sexes; whereas there is not one among human beings conceived in such union who is without sin. These are his precise words: “On that account, and being man, He was tried by every sort of temptation, and in the likeness of man He bore them all; inasmuch, however, as He was born of the Spirit, He abstained from all sin. For every man is a liar, and none is without sin, but God only. It has accordingly,” adds he, “been constantly observed, that clearly no one who is born of a man and a woman, that is to say, through the union of their bodies, is free from sin; for whoever is free from sin is free also from conception of this kind.” Well now, will you dare, ye disciples of Pelagius and Cœlestius, to call this man a Manichean as the heretic Jovinian did, when the holy bishop maintained the permanent virginity of the blessed Mary even after child-bearing, in opposition to this man’s impiety? If, however, you do not dare to call him a Manichean, why do you call us Manicheans when we defend the Catholic faith in the self-same cause and with the self same opinions? But if you will taunt that most faithful man with having entertained Manichean error in this matter, there is no help for it, you must enjoy your taunts as best you may, and so fill up Jovinian’s measure more fully; as for ourselves, we can patiently endure along with such a man of God your taunts and jibes. And yet your heresiarch Pelagius commends Ambrose’s faith and extreme purity in the knowledge of the Scriptures so greatly, as to declare that not even an enemy could venture to find fault with him. Observe, then, to what length you have gone, and refrain from following any further in the audacious steps of Jovinian. And yet that man, although by his excessive commendation of marriage he put it on a par with holy **virginity**, never denied the necessity of Christ to save those who are born of marriage even fresh from their mother’s womb, and to redeem them from the power of the devil. This, however, you deny; and because we oppose you in defense of those who cannot yet speak for themselves, and in defense of the very foundations of the Catholic faith, you taunt us, with being Manicheans. But let us now see what comes next.

CHAP. 38 [XXIII.]--Jovinian Used Formerly to Call Catholics 'Manicheans'; the Arians Also Used to Call Catholics 'Sabellians.'

“By your new mode of controversy,” says he, “you both profess to be a Catholic and patronize Manichaeus, inasmuch as you designate matrimony both as a great good and a great evil.” Now he is utterly ignorant of what he says, or pretends to be ignorant. Or else he does not understand what we say, or does not wish it to be understood. But if he does not understand, he is impeded by the pre-occupation of error; or if he does not wish our meaning to be understood, then obstinacy is the fault with which he defends his error. Jovinian, too, who endeavored a few years ago to found a new heresy, used to declare that the Catholics patronized the Manicheans, because in opposition to him they preferred holy **virginity** to marriage. But this man is sure to reply, that he does not agree with Jovinian in his indifference about marriage and **virginity**. I do not myself say that this is their opinion; still these new heretics must allow, by the fact of Jovinian’s playing off the Manicheans upon the Catholics, that the expedient is not a novel one. We then declare that marriage is a good, not an evil. But just as the Arians charge us with being Sabellians, although we do not say that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one and the same, as the Sabellians hold; but affirm that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost have one and the same nature, as the Catholics believe: so do the Pelagians cast the Manicheans in our teeth, although we do not declare marriage to be an evil, as the Manicheans pretend, but affirm that evil accrued to the first man and woman, that is to say, to the first married pair, and from them passed on to all men, as the Catholics hold. As, however, the Arians, while avoiding the Sabellians, fall into worse company, because they have had the audacity to divide not the Persons of the Trinity, but the natures; so the Pelagians, in their efforts to escape from the pestilent error of the Manicheans, by taking the opposite extreme, are convicted of entertaining worse sentiments than the Manicheans themselves touching the fruit of matrimony, inasmuch as they believe that infants stand in no need of Christ as their Physician.