

The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality

by Fr. Paul Quay, S.J.

Chapter 4

Sexual Symbolism in the Scriptures

Sexuality in Scripture

1. Beyond narratives and laws, by what means does the Bible tell us the meaning of sex and offer grounds for an understanding of sexual morality?
2. Explain what the author means when he says that “our use of symbolism is not coercive as an argument” that can force a certain understanding of Scripture.
3. Describe the difference between the two kinds of sexual symbols that are easily confused.

Christ the Bride of Christ

4. In the ancient Semitic world, what did it mean to give something its name or to change its name?
5. In the second chapter of Genesis, we find the first mention of the two-shall-become-one symbolic theme. What meanings does this represent?
6. Describe the biblical teachings on the right use of sex that are found between Genesis and the prophets from the last years of the Divided Kingdom. Give an example.
7. What, does the author say, is considered one of the major gifts of divine revelation given to the Israelites?
8. What two themes did the prophet Hosea develop with regard to human sexuality? What spiritual realities were illustrated by these themes?
9. In the passage from chapters 1 and 2 of Hosea, what did the Lord propose to do that showed He was above the Law? To what human example is the Lord compared and what is His motivation?
10. Describe how this theme is further developed in Ezekiel chapter 16? What is the Lord “recalling” in this passage?
11. The final Old Testament presentation of this attitude of God is found in the Song of Songs. How is this text sometimes misinterpreted? How have authentic Jewish and Christian interpretations viewed this text?
12. As the Israelites began to understand more fully the meaning of these passages, how did this change their social practices regarding marriage?
13. In the New Testament, how does this symbolism change slightly?
14. When Our Lord used the term “adulterous generation” to what was He referring?
15. The author mentions two passage where Jesus uses nuptial imagery, one where John the Baptist does, two where St. Paul does, and lastly, two places in Revelations. Find these verses and copy them.

Father, Mother, and Children

16. How does the scriptural symbolism of spousal relations, and of father, mother and children differ from a natural family? Who is Father? Mother? Where is Christ in all this?
17. Explain how we become children of Holy Mother Church if Christ does not generate children of Her and she remains a virgin.
18. Why is it important for Christians to understand this kind of imagery?