

Sermon for Sunday, April 26, 1981, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"THE BRIDE WITH LOVERS ON THE SIDE"

* II Corinthians 11:16

Text: "...for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride
to her one husband."

One of the principal ways the church is described in the New Testament is as the bride of Christ. A good example of this is in our Scripture for this morning. But this description of the people of God as a bride or wife is not new and not limited to the New Testament. As a matter of fact, one of the most graphic books of the Old Testament is the little book of Hosea. The prophet Hosea is instructed by God to marry a prostitute and to love her and cherish her as his wife. Hosea is obedient to the word he received from the Lord and he marries a woman named Gomer. However, Gomer is not content with her life as the wife of Hosea and she begins to have other lovers. Finally, she goes off, leaving everything behind, to become a prostitute again. Yet, God tells Hosea to keep on loving her. Now, that is surely hard to do. When you have trusted someone with your love, when you have given that person all you can, and then to have your love rejected and refused--well, that is an awful lot to ask someone to forgive. But that is what God tells Hosea to do. The Bible tells us how Hosea goes searching for Gomer. He finds her on sale as a slave and he buys her back. And having bought her back, he restores her as his wife.

It is obvious that God is having Hosea act out a parable. God is giving Hosea an acted out lesson. And what is that lesson? It is the lesson that God's people--the church--is a bride with lovers on the side. God's people are always going off after false gods. They are always rebelling against God and rejecting God's love. They are always falling in love with someone or something else. Yet, God is a loving, forgiving God and he is always buying his people back. He is always acting to redeem his people even when they are faithless.

Well, that is the message that God gave Hosea for the people of God. It was a message that said God's bride--the church--had left God and was sleeping with other loves.

You and I live in a time when many mainline denominations--including our own--seem to have departed from God's house, when they have lovers on the side, when they are prostituting themselves to other loves. The questions we have to ask ourselves is this: do we want to be a part of a church that is committing adultery?

Up until about 1960 Americans in general believed that religious faith and worship were good. Most of the public media, including such things as the Luce publications, supported religion as being good for the nation. There was a broad religious consensus called the Judeo-Christian ethic. Our country was very much family oriented and we all agreed generally that divorce, living together while unmarried, homosexuality and other such practices were bad. Our schools, our papers, our television all generally supported this moral consensus.

However, after 1960 efforts began to be made to shatter this moral consensus. A vocal minority began to claim that in a democracy no one set of moral values

could be imposed on anyone and that every viewpoint deserved to be expressed. This viewpoint was called "pluralism" or the expression of all points of view.

Now, on the surface, that sounds good--it sounds democratic and fair. Yet, the fact is, in making public policies some set of values must be employed. If you make a policy, it must be based on some ethic. And when you do that, it is inevitable that one set of values will be elevated over another. The question became this: whose values would determine the policies being set?

At this point, the religious values of America began to be viciously attacked by the media. Traditional institutions began to be attacked. For example, in television, whenever religion was depicted, believers were shown as either hypocrites or stupid fanatics. Religion was never shown as a positive or supportive part of the lives of people. Again, our schools became increasingly sectarian--not so much as a whispered prayer was allowed, or the reading of a Bible verse or the mention of God's name. Using school property for religious meetings was forbidden and even the singing of Christmas carols was no longer permitted.

The attack of secular humanism focused primarily on two areas. The first area was sexual morality. It is a well-established fact that how one acts sexually is a reflection of one's basic personality. Therefore, an effort has been launched to change our sexual promiscuity, the advancement of homosexuality, and the proliferation of sexually explicit movies, books and plays. Astute secularists have shrewdly realized that if sexual values can be broken down and destroyed the hold of Christianity on the lives of people can be broken also. As an example, a book published by Seabury Press--the publishing house of the Episcopal Church--attacks Christian moral values. The author states, "Any culture that draws an artificial dividing line between homosexuals and heterosexuals thereby betrays a highly peculiar and very narrow view of human nature."

The second area on which the secular humanists focused was the family. It is widely recognized that more than any other institution in society, the family is the primary means of communicating moral values. Therefore, those who seek to change our society have sought to break down the traditional concept of the family. The Media depicts all kinds of relationships that are dangerous to the traditional concept of the family. Even the White House Conference of Families in 1980, supposedly designed to help the family, actually was exceedingly dangerous to historic and traditional concepts of the Christian family.

Now, the bad part about all of this is that most mainline denominations, including our own, seem to be on the side of this process of secular humanism. Many denominational bureaucrats are either apologetic for their religiosity or use it as a facade for promoting secular causes. It is no longer important in many churches what you believe. Doctrine has become secondary. What has become important is whether or not you support the latest secular fad. For example, in Presbyterianism, it has recently been demonstrated that it doesn't matter what one believes about Jesus--whether he is the Son of God, whether he is divine, whether his sacrifice on the cross was relevant--but it does matter tremendously where you stand on the feminist movement. While I share the concern for the fair and right treatment for women, somehow I can't help but believe our priorities are out of order.

It seems to me that the bride of Christ--the Church--has many lovers on the side today. Our own denomination has as one of its priorities supporting the establishment of a new world economic order. At our General Assembly which will meet the latter part of May they will vote on statements about Namibia and on El Salvador. It will be asked to endorse statements by the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches which seem to support revolutionary groups which are socialistic in character, and to condemn our government for its support of counter-revolutionary groups. Yet, so far I have seen no report on evangelism.

Recently conservative and evangelical groups have begun to be active in the political arena to elect persons to public office who support the values and principles of historic Christianity. Secularists and liberal Christians have reacted violently to this. They have claimed that religion and politics should not be mixed. Yet, they never objected as long as religion was supporting the secular and humanistic agenda. As a matter of fact, one writer, speaking of the National Council of Churches, has written, "at the present time it is committed to the elimination of the free enterprise system and its replacement with a government-controlled economy. It is opposed to all efforts to maintain American national strength. It has given aid and comfort to the enemies of freedom and, through its affiliation with the World Council of Churches, has contributed funds to terrorist organizations." The truth is, liberal church leaders without regard to what the members think--have exercised political influence. Our own denomination has a full-time staff person in Washington who is nothing more than a political lobbyist. He is given access to our denominational magazine to write articles that are extremely leftist in nature. So the truth is, they are not really opposed to political involvement of the Church, but they are opposed to involvement if it's goals are different from their own.

Let me share with you the comment of one religious writer. He states, "There has never been a society in the history of the world in which religion was not a dominating force, and our society is now seemingly attempting the experience of being the first. But there is no historical evidence that it is possible to have such a society." He goes on to add, "When Christians are accused of trying to impose their morality on others, it is appropriate to reply first that Christian beliefs have as much right to be heard in the public arena as any other. But beyond this it is also appropriate to inquire what alternative source of morality is being proffered." Then he concludes, "Secularism at present thrives on its ability to undermine traditional beliefs. It has offered no proof of its ability to construct a new ethic."

Yes, the Church--the bride of Christ--has gone off after other loves. Are you willing to sleep with some of those lovers? Must not we ask ourselves, "What other ethical system are we being offered and is it better than the one God has given us?" We must ask, "Is there some economic system, some governmental system, that is more Christian, more serving of mankind than ours?" Surely it is not the socialistic system of communism which has proved to be brutal and dehumanizing.

The issues that face the church today are plain. The issue is not so much what values we will have or what beliefs we will hold. Instead, the issue is whether we will have any values or hold any faith. That's the kind of a world we live in today. Too many of us have tried to pretend it isn't so, we would like to isolate ourselves on the corner of Davis Drive and Hanely Road and hope it will

go away. But it won't. It won't just go away. And the time is here when we as Christians must decide who and what we will stand for. Will we be a faithful bride to the Lord or will we have lovers on the side?

And that is a decision for you personally. What kind of Christian will you be? Will you be faithful to the Lord? Will you be obedient to His word? Or do you have lovers on the side? In the end, every person must decide for himself what kind of a bride he will be.