

**My friends in Christ —
People of God of the Archdiocese of Baltimore:**

For some months, I have been reflecting on a need and my duty as pastor of the archdiocese to reflect with you on a vital, beautiful, misunderstood and misused gift of God: human sexuality.

Because of the complexity of the subject, I am going to present it in three parts, and today prior to the pastoral itself, present an extended outline so you may have an overall grasp of the subject matter.

A. Nature, purpose and beauty of human sexuality

1. Sexuality is one of the key factors that gives to each person's life the principal traits that distinguish it in the order of nature; e.g., biological, psychological and spiritual characteristics that makes a person a man or woman.

2. The nature of sexuality is such that it touches on the most sacred aspects of human life. Relational aspects of sexuality include both procreative and spiritual dimensions without which neither will be properly understood.

3. Psychology alone cannot explain the nature of sexuality, because relationship is primarily spiritual and ultimately affects relationship with God. To beget a child is far more than simply to reproduce.

4. The beauty of sexuality is the willingness to share with God the creative process and the generous commitment to beget and nurture new life.

5. The sacramental aspect of marriage and sexuality is not just a rite of formal commitment, but a covenant to share in a life-long communion.

B. Integration of the aspects of sexuality

1. An understanding of the meaning and purpose of life is essential for the integration of the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of sexual life.

2. Sin introduces disorder in the human personality and, in effect, causes a person to lead a double life and be pulled in contradictory directions. Sin is not a question of violating rules laid down by authority, but violating moral norms inherent in human nature and substituting some pleasurable or prideful desire or action contrary to the law of God and the nature He gave us.

3. There is a radical difference between sexuality in a human being and sexuality in other forms of life. The psychological dimension of human life points out the capacity to know and to love, and within this context the biological finds itself at a new and deeper level. In the human context, bonding is an expression of love in a freely chosen commitment.

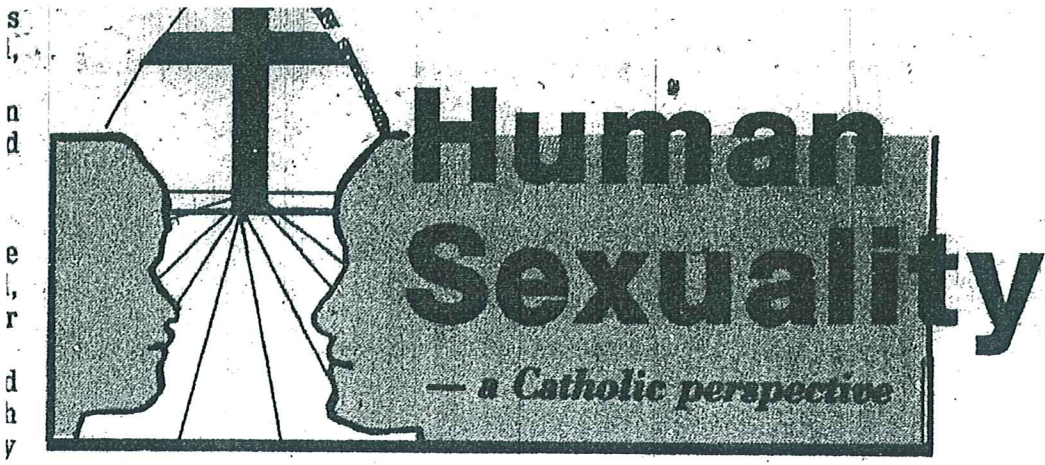
4. Beyond the psychological, there is also the spiritual, the fullest relationship with others, with God.

Commitment and exclusivity

1. Human sexuality must be understood in its fullness within the framework of marriage, that is, in a covenant relationship entered into freely, permanently, and with an openness to the procreation of human life. An old theological axiom states: "Goodness seeks to share itself; love seeks to create."

2. The permanence of marriage is much more than a legal requirement, it is an exclusive life-long loving covenant at a level at which no other person can enter. No one should know a wife as her husband; no one should know a husband as his wife. A husband and wife should be the most intimate confidant of the other.

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3. Love is understood not merely as a natural instinct, nor emotional drive, nor a static experience, but an ongoing commitment with a dynamism that reaches forward with an active growth, a deep personal friendship leading to a unity of one heart and one soul.

4. Fidelity includes not only physical faithfulness, which precludes adultery, it also includes emotional fidelity and the sharing of intimacy in which no other person can enter.

Sexuality and modern society

1. We live in a world that is not fully Christian — in fact, to a large extent amoral. This, of course, is not something new. Each generation, in a sense, begins anew and learns the meaning of life by experience. People of each generation must learn to internalize and live the real meaning of morality.

2. In our society, before one begins to appropriate to oneself the reality of true moral life, there is a tendency to ignore or fail to grasp the significance of permanent values and fall into patterns of humanism or pragmatism.

3. We would be foolish to think that we are not personally affected by the attitudes of the society in which we live.

4. As Christians, we must stand in opposition to norms and conclusions far removed from the teaching of Christ.

5. But it is not sufficient to develop a culture within a culture, we must penetrate the existing culture. We should use the communications media, literature, art and drama.

6. There is no doubt that the last two decades have been witness to an increasing tendency to the exploitation of sexuality in the media. This has been a great danger in value formation for children. Serious research has demonstrated that the average child spends four hours before television each day. Have we surrendered moral teaching to the entertainment world?

Problems in the living of human sexuality

1. In the area of sexuality, there are many problems from a variety of sources: psychological problems which distort sexuality and at times turn to violence and exploitation; aspects of sexuality used for criminal purposes which are rejected not only on moral grounds, but also on the basis of civil law; problems of sexual promiscuity involving both married and unmarried persons; and the sad reality of incest and pedophilia.

2. It is not possible to treat all of these in the context of one pastoral letter. Those recognized and rejected by most of our society I will leave for another time or for another writer. In the area wherein confusion exists and rationalization to justify immoral behavior, I will try to treat in more depth.

3. The first such area is that of pre-marital sexual union. Promiscuity and teenage pregnancy have reached such a proportion that the moral fiber of our country is seriously undermined. Pop music and soap operas treat sex as an accepted form of recreation.

4. Another concern is that of sexual immaturity that begins in

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adolescence leads to the disorder of masturbation.

5. Another specific area of concern in our present consideration is homosexuality. In this area, there are a number of distinctions that should be made. For example, there seems to be a valid distinction between homosexuality that is transitory — arising from circumstances, situations, curiosity or adolescent experimentation — and homosexuality that is perduring. Again, the distinction must be made between homosexual activity and homosexual orientation. Regardless of the etiology of homosexual orientation, pastoral concern should reach out to the homosexual as well as the single heterosexual with spiritual and moral assistance that will support the life style of remaining chaste.

6. In pastoral concern to assist a person in attaining true freedom and a full union with Christ, a recognition must be present for the difference between weakness and malice.

7. While love is integral to sexuality, whether male or female, love can be expressed and, for the most part, is expressed in personal relationships without genital experience.

8. We have considered the beauty of sexuality, the moral disorder of misusing sex, but we should also consider the welfare of people and the call to grow to be completely human. Any violation of God's law brings its own suffering, and a person becomes a prisoner of his or her own excesses.

9. When genital sexuality is used as a "short cut" to love, it never succeeds. It is necessary to realize that love and pleasure are simply not the same thing. Masculinity and femininity can find expression that is not genital, and it is in this context that celibacy can have a real sign value for the world right now.

10. In considering specific areas of sexuality, we have noted that certain acts are sinful. However, these acts in given circumstances are not always of malice. Yet sin is wrong not only because it is a violation of God's law, but also because it hurts and sometimes destroys the sinner. Therefore, we are not only speaking of moral norms, but of a basic welfare of people.

The virtue of chastity

1. Often people speak of virtue in a passive sense — i.e., the presence of certain characteristics. Virtue is more than that, it is active, it is a capacity, an effective force or power, an ability to grow to become a complete person.

2. Therefore, chastity is not merely abstinence, but the ability to live out our sexuality in its fullness according to a particular state of life. The unmarried person who understands his or her sexual nature and practices abstinence is living the virtue of chastity. The married couple who have intercourse within the framework of a loving Christian marriage are practicing the virtue of chastity. The virtue is concerned with the whole person.

3. In order to become a complete person, we must take charge of our life and use the means available in God's providence. Some of these means are discipline of the senses and mind, watchfulness and prudence in avoiding the occasion of sin, the observance of modesty, moderation in recreation, wholesome pursuits, daily prayer and frequent reception of the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist.

Conclusion

1. Having considered the complexity of sexuality, we must also recognize that one aspect should not be isolated from the others.

2. Sexuality is meant to be both unitive and procreative.

3. Since our culture has slipped into humanism and pragmatism, the life values of a Christian are often seen as counter-cultural.

4. Often the moral imperative of our faith will be, as scripture says, a sign of contradiction. Christian life brings values to the world challenges, even though Christians often fall short of the ideal.

5. The nurturing of spiritual values takes place primarily in the home, in the family. Parents must share their personal appreciation of personal dignity and, united in mutual affection, lead their children in the footsteps of Christ to strength, confidence and holiness.