

# A pastoral Sexi mar

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Editor's note: This week, Archbishop William D. Borders continues his pastoral letter on human sexuality. Released March 18, the letter will conclude in next week's Catholic Review.

## D. Commitment and Exclusivity and Eschatologically

**M**arriage as instituted and understood by the church is an eschatological sign of salvation for the kingdom of God until the end of time. This sign, reflecting the unity of Christ and the church, calls for unity that is permanent and an expression that is creative. Sexuality is expressed in its fullness in marriage entered into freely and permanently with openness to the procreation of human life.

An old theological axiom holds that "bonum est diffusivum sui." This means that goodness seeks to share itself; love seeks to create. Human procreativity is a sign of the creative love of God from which our own lives have come.

2. The permanence of marriage is far more than a legal requirement. It is itself an expression of real love. It is the sort of love

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**'Marriage is the sort of love that says, "Whatever you may have to face in life, I will be with you and I will now and for all time take away the threat that I will ever leave you."'**

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that says, "I shall not forsake you. Whatever you may have to face in life, I will be with you and I will now and for all time take away the threat that I will ever leave you."

There need be no fear of abandonment and no fear that another will be put into this place, for the bond is not only permanent but exclusive as well. The bond that exists in the marriage is itself an expression of the deepest love.

Pope Paul VI when reflecting on marriage as a sacrament explained that this married love is to be seen within the context of the spirituality mentioned above. He spoke of the love of marriage as fully human, being defined as neither merely natural instinct, nor merely emotional drive. It is an act of free choice, an act of commitment with a dynamism that reaches forward not to mere

endurance, but to active growth toward human fulfillment.

Thus, husband and wife become ever more one in heart and soul. Such love should be total — a love of personal friendship always sharing, always faithful, always exclusive until death. This is not a dream, but the lived experience of so many happy Christian marriages.

3. This unity and exclusive relationship exists at every level — physical, emotional and spiritual. Husband and wife become two in one flesh, one life and one love.

Fidelity, therefore, includes not only the physical fidelity that precludes adultery, it also includes fidelity by reason of which the partners in marriage share the intimacy of their lives with each other in a way beyond that in which they share with anyone else. No one should ever know a husband as his wife, and no one should ever know a wife as her husband.

## E. Sexuality and Modern Society

1. Human fulfillment in the area of sexuality demands that sexuality be seen and understood in the proper interrelationship of its multiple dimensions. The highest of those dimensions is the spiritual, although this should not at all be taken to mean that the spiritual is essential while the others are not. Rather it is to be understood as meaning that it is the spiritual which gives the widest and deepest meaning to the others.

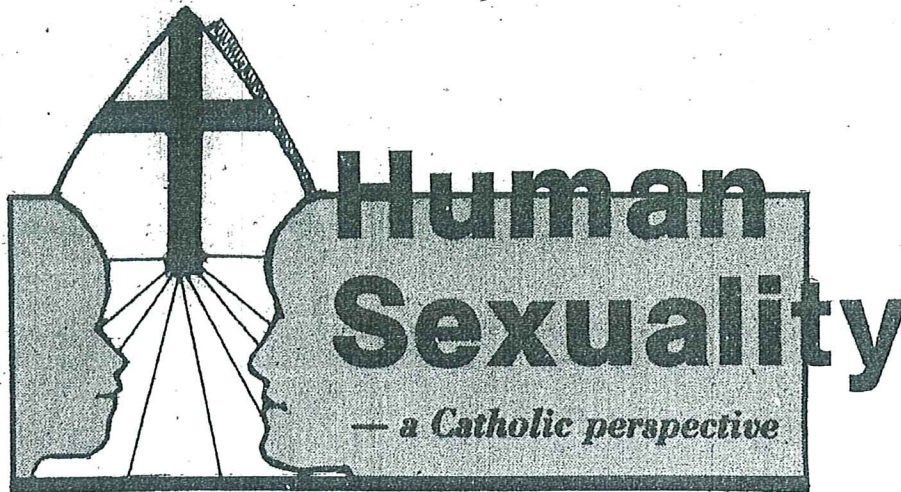
Yet it is this spiritual dimension itself which is so often overlooked in modern society. Perhaps it might be well to point out that this is not unique to modern society. In fact, what we see today may well be the same problems that have always existed, although today (because of rapid and widespread communications) we see them in a larger picture and with world-wide implications.

2. We of the western world no longer can expect to associate in business, political or social life with people who, for the most part, accept traditional Christian moral standards. In fact, many will have an amoral approach to life and make judgments on a purely pragmatic basis. And, we probably will not live long enough to see any dramatic change.

However, every period of history experienced difficulties and found situations difficult. Circumstances and cultures were different, but the most basic needs remain the same.

Among these is the need to internalize and live the real meaning of morality. Do we recognize as moral the willingness to live in harmony with the nature that God gave us? Do we recognize as immoral the deliberate disregard of the law of God, or rationalize in

# Sexuality is expressed in its fullness in marriage entered into freely, permanently



a manner of situation ethics? Do we accept permanent moral values?

3. The need to grow in moral depth is to be found in the area of sexuality as much as it is in other areas of human life and endeavor. Before one begins to appropriate to oneself the reality of true moral life, there is the tendency to fail to grasp the significance of permanent values.

It is all too easy for society to base its judgments of value on a vision of life that sees no spiritual dimension at all, and so to fall into a pattern describable as humanism.

It is equally easy to attempt to make all judgments in terms of the workability of their immediate consequences and so to fall into pragmatism.

Neither humanism nor pragmatism can, in the final analysis, give us the solid foundation that is needed for humanity to find its ultimate fulfillment. It is not so much that society is necessarily immoral, but that it does indeed tend to be amoral. Even in the effort to do what is right, it can easily lack the norms for judging rightness.

**'No one should ever know a husband as his wife, and no one should ever know a wife as her husband.'**

It is in such society that the church must proclaim its call to fullness of union with Christ.

We would be foolish to think that we are not personally affected by the attitudes of the society in which we live. At times we can see clearly that the Christian must stand in

opposition to norms and conclusions that are far removed from what Christianity would demand.

We ought to be equally aware that we ourselves also need to be confronted at times, for even within us we can find those areas as yet "unredeemed" and standing in need of the challenge that comes from Christ's grace and from the presence of Christ in the church.

The church and the individual Christian will often have to be the sign of contradiction that forces the individual and society to a renewed self-examination.

4. Within the society in which we live today, the news media have a far-reaching influence, and therefore a concurrent responsibility. These responsibilities touch on so many areas that influence moral judgments in news reporting, literature, art and drama.

Neither do the print and electronic media exist in a vacuum. The manner in which news is reported, the policies of producers, the value systems of editors and reporters can lead to value or disvalue judgments and decisions.

5. In the areas of art and drama there are also obligations in conscience. Both art and drama will, at times, represent moral evil in their depiction of the world. When either makes use of such evil merely to titillate and to draw an audience, there is a corresponding abnegation of serious responsibility.

Dramatic presentations can be a strong and forceful teaching device, and those who present them have an obligation in conscience to be aware of the impact that they create and to see to it that such an impact is for good.

Even presentations which claim that they intend a good result can find themselves, instead, involved in exploitation of evil for their own gain. The desire to draw the largest audience for financial success can easily

distort the viewpoint of those who produce entertainment.

6. There is no doubt that the last few decades have been witness to a greater tendency to the exploitation of sexuality in the media. This is evident in advertising, literature, cinema and television.

It is not always a case of directly advocating attitudes or actions that run contrary to the deepest values of sexuality. When there is such advocacy, it may well be clear and obvious.

What may, in fact, create even more of a problem is a sort of indirect advocacy which comes about when sexual values are ridiculed, made the subject of comedy, or are presented as actually having little value at all. On the part of viewers and readers this may present a more difficult problem of discernment, especially in the young.

There are obligations on those who produce such works, but there are also obligations which pertain to those who receive such

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"communications." One such obligation certainly falls upon parents in their concern for the effect that such things have upon their children. This is especially true in the area of television, which is so readily accessible to almost everyone.

At the same time, adults also have serious obligations to support and sustain the real values that they themselves hold, and they must, therefore, be aware of their own need for discernment in what they encourage or support.

7. It would be wrong to imply that the communications media is responsible for creating amoral conditions. Often, sadly, the media reflects the lack of moral standards within our society. The answers ultimately will be found in a true metanoia, an ongoing conversion of which the season of Lent is a constant reminder.

Next week: Problems in the Living of Human Sexuality.