

# A pastoral

Sinful acts  
and some

## F. Problems in the living of human sexuality

In the area of our sexuality there are problems, which can come from a variety of sources.

Some of them represent deep psychological problems which distort sexuality and turn the sexual drive in the direction of violence or exploitation for some other end. There are aspects of sexuality that are used for criminal purposes which are rejected not only on moral grounds, but even on the basis of civil law.

There are also problems with sexual promiscuity, in which it is quite evident that there is no commitment, no true procreative aspect and no real interrelationship of persons.

These are a terrible affront to human dignity and basic human rights, and are currently within the focus of civil authorities and service agencies. They have been covered regularly by the press, and people are alert to the degradation and lifelong harm they cause.

Many of these problems already have been addressed and will continue to be considered in our educational systems. Since most people of good will recognize and abhor these human aberrations, and because of the length of this pastoral, I will confine my treatment in depth to those areas where confusion exists.

2. In 1975 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published "Persona Humana," a "Declaration on Certain Questions concerning Sexual Ethics." In that document particular problems in regard to sexuality were singled out as being the areas most in need of attention from the Magisterium.

Those same areas still remain with us and are still in need of attention, so we will consider them in the following paragraphs. None of the areas will be treated in a way that will be full, complete and exhaustive; but each will be considered within the framework of the values of sexuality as they were considered above.

3. The first such area is that of pre-marital sex. For some, this seems to be taken for granted as being allowable, desirable or even without moral significance at all.

Those who try to find moral justification for pre-marital sex tend to argue that the couple has the intention to marry or that the psychological bond which exists between them is already a sort of marital bond and so sexual activity is viewed as a necessary part of the relationship. There are numerous reasons why, on moral grounds, this cannot be truly justified.

First of all, there is *in fact* no permanent and stable bond, no permanent commitment. "However firm the intention of those who practice such premature sexual relations may be, the fact remains that these relations cannot ensure, in sincerity and fidelity, the interpersonal relationship between a man and a woman, nor especially can they protect this relationship from whims and caprices."

moral seriousness of each individual act, and yet there is a need to work toward real change in the situation if the individual is to grow into moral maturity.

6. The final 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, on the basis of psychology, a valid distinction between a homosexuality which is transitory — arising from circumstances, situations, curiosity or adolescent "experimentation." There may be homosexual acts in such circumstances, but the individual may not actually have a perduring homosexual tendency.

On the other hand, there are those who seem to have a lasting tendency or orientation toward homosexual relationships, with a corresponding temptation to homosexual activity. In these cases there is some disagreement about the etiology of such an orientation — whether, for example, it is to be found in genetic or psychological, or environmental causes. At the same time it seems to result in an orientation that is unchangeable or, at least, that could change only with considerable difficulty.

Regardless of the etiology, however, we must look at homosexuality within the framework of authentic human sexuality, and there it is found to be lacking. The procreative aspect is clearly impossible, and this defect renders the meaning of such sexual activity devoid of authentic expression of true sexuality.

There is here, however, another aspect that must be taken into account. If the orientation is, indeed, unchangeable, then the individual with that orientation may find it quite difficult to avoid carrying it out in action.

The pastoral approach here is to realize that the sinfulness involved is present when homosexual acts are performed, and not simply in the orientation (about which there may be little or nothing that the individual can do).

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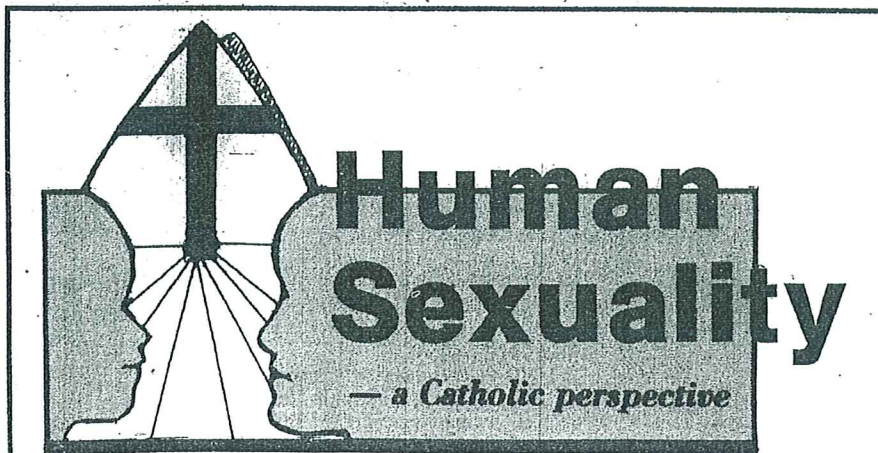
"In the pastoral field, these homosexuals must certainly be treated with understanding and sustained in the hope of overcoming their

Catholic  
Review  
4.8.87  
P. A3  
(p. 1 of 6)



4.8.87  
(p. 3 of 6)

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## Pastoral on sexuality at a glance

Archbishop William D. Borders' pastoral letter on human sexuality, makes several major points:

- Sexuality is a key factor in what makes a person a man or a woman. It touches on the biological, psychological, spiritual — even affecting relationships with God.
- There is a radical difference between sexuality in a human being and sexuality in other forms of life. A psychological dimension points out the capacity to know and love at a deeper level.
- Human sexuality must be understood in its fullness within marriage. Sexuality is both unitive and procreative.
- Marriage is an exclusive lifelong loving covenant which no other can enter. A husband and wife should be the most intimate confidant of the other.
- Amoral society affects us all but as Christians we must stand in opposition to norms far removed from Christ's teaching.
- Media and art — which reflect sexual exploitation — endanger children's values formation and should be confronted.
- Problems of sexuality distort its nature, violating civil law as well as morality.
- Pre-marital sexual union, promiscuity and teenage pregnancy have undermined the country's moral fiber.
- Pastoral concern should reach out to the homosexual, as well as the single heterosexual with spiritual and moral assistance to help them remain chaste.
- Chastity is the ability to live out our sexuality in its fullness according to the particular state of life, whether single or married.
- To become complete, we must take charge of our life and use the means available in God's providence.

When genital sexuality is used as a "short-cut" to love, it never succeeds. It is necessary to realize that love and pleasure are not simply the same thing.

All the dimensions of sexuality must be allowed to develop if that sexuality is to have its real meaning, and there are circumstances in which those dimensions simply cannot come to fruition. 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.

The sign value of celibacy, especially in our own times, is to point to the reality of a love which goes beyond sexual expression in a genital way. It becomes an expression of the real human and Christian endeavor of growth into true love.

It expresses love beyond the limits of the sexual shortcut and reveals a kind of love which must exist even in a married couple if the true meaning of their sexuality is to emerge.

9. One more point remains to be made. We have looked at specific areas of sexuality and

achievement. It is what every person becomes when he or she realizes his or her unique essence, something that is clearly known only when it is lived. It is lived completely when one surrenders to the most fundamental of all commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, thy whole soul and all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself."

In this love, a person is happy and at peace in the adventure of life.

2. Therefore, the virtue of chastity is more than a passive admirable quality; it is active, an effective force, a power of directing one's sexuality in harmony with all human gifts and the basic units of society.

Virtue is an ability given by God and developed in practice, and it results in the capacity to lead a certain kind of life and to perform certain actions.

Progress in virtue is an ability, not unlike the ability to play a musical instrument, which comes from effort and leads to an ease in doing what at first was difficult and not always successful. The virtue of chastity

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It expresses love beyond the limits of the sexual shortcut and reveals a kind of love which must exist even in a married couple if the true meaning of their sexuality is to emerge.

9. One more point remains to be made. We have looked at specific areas of sexuality and have considered certain acts as sinful. But it has also been pointed out that such sinfulness may not be the result of malice.

Sin is wrong first because it is a rejection of the love relationship with God so clear in divine revelation and then it hurts and, in time, can destroy the sinner.

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## 'Chastity is power of directing one's sexuality in harmony with all human gifts and the basic units of society.'

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What we are concerned with, therefore, is not simply the enforcing of moral norms. Rather we must be concerned with the welfare of people, with their need to surpass the limits of a sinfulness which holds them back and can destroy them.

To speak of hating the sin and loving the sinner is no empty slogan. We must receive people with compassion and do all in our power to encourage and sustain them in their growth toward God.

This responsibility falls not only on the counselor or confessor, but on each and every Christian. It is a real injustice, therefore, when society causes pressure on the individual to relinquish ideals and yield to the force of sexual drives without consideration of their true depth of meaning.

We do people an injustice when in any way we lead them into sin. We do them a injustice when we lightly condone or excuse their sinfulness. This may be done out of a false kindness, but it is nonetheless harmful.

We do them an injustice when we easily dismiss the reality of sin and speak lightly of "alternate lifestyles," when such lifestyles are based on a misconception of what our lives are truly meant to be.

We likewise do people an injustice when we condemn them for what they do and treat them unfairly in consequence. This has happened, especially, in reference to those who struggle with homosexuality. The true Christian is one who cares enough about others to love them, to care for them, to draw them past the limits of their own weakness and to realize that he or she, too, is a sinner and in need of God's help and mercy as much as is anyone else.

### G. The Virtue of Chastity

1. In trying to understand and live any virtue, one must experience the most basic virtue of all — that is, charity; the love of God and neighbor.

Love is more of a lived reality than an

capacity to lead a certain kind of life and to perform certain actions.

Progress in virtue is an ability, not unlike the ability to play a musical instrument, which comes from effort and leads to an ease in doing what at first was difficult and not always successful. The virtue of chastity fits into this category. God's grace together with our efforts to lead a chaste life draw us to a greater ease in the living out of our own sexuality.

As we grow in a proper understanding of that sexuality and make the choices which lead to its proper living, we become chaste. We begin to acquire the virtue of chastity.

3. It is not unusual for people to have the idea that chastity implies merely abstinence. But this is not what it really means.

Chastity means the ability to live out our sexuality in its fullness, according to our particular state in life. The unmarried person who practices abstinence from genital sexuality is living in 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 of chastity . . . is in no way confined solely to avoiding . . . faults . . . It is aimed at attaining higher and more positive goals. It is a virtue which concerns the whole personality, as regards both interior and outward behavior." 6

Thus even for the unmarried person chastity is not merely abstinence, but is the positive living out of sexuality with its capacity for love and warmth and human relationships.

Chastity is not merely a matter of disciplining our external behavior; it is an internal reality, an inner capacity from which flow actions that properly express the truth of our sexuality. It is this virtue which makes it progressively easier to live up to the ideals that have been emphasized in the preceding parts of this pastoral letter.

Yet chastity is a virtue that must grow, and our actions and attitudes can contribute to that growth. The sorts of choices that we make can determine whether this virtue is strengthened or weakened within us. As it is strengthened, we become increasingly aware of the values of our sexuality and correspondingly unlikely to choose to act against those values.

What at first may begin as a struggle to perform certain acts eventually becomes an inner desire to live in a chaste way.

4. Traditional moral behavior norms are still realistic today even in a society that ignores these norms. These include personal discipline of the mind and senses, prudence in companionship and recreation (known as avoiding the proximate occasion of sin), positive and fulfilling interest and work, a prayer life that is personal and real, spiritual guidance in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and a deep appreciation of the Lord's presence in the Eucharist.

There must be a mixture of the positive and negative if one is to grow. Unless there

4.8.87  
(p. 4 of 6)

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4.8.87  
(p. 5 of 6)

is progression in character development, there will be a retrogression.

No one ever remains the same spiritually. A person each day is either better or worse. Reverence for sexuality is essential if one is to be a whole and balanced person.

All of the above becomes a part of one's person and personality through accepting the providential love of God in daily life.

## H. Conclusion

1. We have now looked at the nature and purpose of sexuality, its beauty in human life, its sacramental aspect, the proper integration of its various facets, its place in society, the problems that we encounter in its living, and the virtue of chastity which gives us the internal ability to live out our sexuality to our fullest advantage.

None of what we have said can be understood if treated in isolation from the fact that sexuality is meant to be both unitive and procreative. But to say that it is unitive and procreative is also to say that the place where the dimensions of sexuality will be most clearly visible, most concretely expressed and most susceptible to growth is the family.

2. If our culture is substantially humanistic and pragmatic, then the life of the Christian is bound to be viewed as counter-cultural.

The Christian is, as was noted before, the sign of contradiction. Christian life brings into the world a set of values that draws us into a new dimension and that cannot help but be a challenge to all other values which fall short of it.

It does not mean that Christianity will always find itself at enmity (although that, too, may happen) with the values of the culture in which it lives and grows. But it does mean that Christianity will not rest content with values that are incomplete or that fall short of what we are truly meant to be in union with the life of God.

We should note also that Christianity is not meant to be some sort of mass movement in the world, causing other realities to yield to it by force or by sheer magnitude.

Instead, it is, in a sense, the smallest of things. It is the mustard seed which, when planted, grows into a tree in which the birds can nest. It is the presence of God's grace within the individual, transforming each of us into an incarnation of the love of God and so allowing that love to spread out and touch the lives of all around us.

4.8.07  
(p.6 of 6)

us into an incarnation of the love of God and so allowing that love to spread out and touch the lives of all around us.

The nurturing of the seed of new life is not something that takes place in an atmosphere that is impersonal and that is so large as to leave us feeling overawed. Rather, it should take place in the locale that gives rise to each of us — the family.

It is there that we are nurtured and grow. It is there that the love of God finds its incarnation in the dedication and devotion which come from the love of a couple — a love which they choose to share by assuming the responsibility for new children of God.

3. In the concluding document of Vatican II, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," we read: "Everyone who exercises an influence in the community and in social groups should devote himself effectively to the welfare of the family." 7

The history of civilizations gives evidence that a stable family is vital for survival. We of our culture and our time must come to grips with the fact that for happiness, stability, and fulfillment, human beings must commit themselves, entrust themselves to others. Otherwise, we are the victims of our own selfishness and live within the prison of our own isolation.

One might say that the risk is too great. Not so, if there is an ongoing discernment of values.

This quality of another's relationship with God and treatment and loyalty to family and friends provides a plus for limiting the risk and invites one to entrust himself or herself to others.

We are called into being in this world for happiness both in time and eternity. God grants us the freedom to use the means to attain that happiness.

Footnotes:

4. Sacred Declaration for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona Humana, Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics* (Hereafter referred to as *Declaration*), December 29, 1975, USCC translation, no.8, p.9.

5. *On the pastoral care of homosexuals*, no. 16.

6. *Declaration*, no. 11, p. 12-13.

7. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 52.