



With Archbishop Borders

I write to teach about God-given gift

My friends in Christ —

People of God of the Archdiocese of Baltimore:

Not long ago, a pilot flying over Alaska encountered a large, unidentified flying object which cruised along next to his plane at high speed and then suddenly disappeared. While there seems to be ample evidence that the object truly existed, no one has been able to explain what it is or from where it came.

Some have speculated that the UFO is operated by alien beings who have come to observe us. If the Martians have intercepted our television signals, imagine how confused they must be about human sex. They could be filing reports back to their home planet like this:

"Earlier reports tracing earthling reproduction to sex now considered in error. Purpose of sex seems to be to sell toiletries, automobiles, cigarettes, motion pictures, magazines and chewing gum. Based on amount of serious respect devoted to the activity, we have determined human reproduction takes place in the fall of the year in a sacred ceremony called football."

I have never had the privilege of watching Martians viewing U.S

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. television, but I have observed children watching it. Those who think that my fanciful alien account exaggerates how the media has cheapened our appreciation of sex need only spend a few moments talking to high school students about the moral philosophy of the average rock video.

Back in the 1960s, the unraveling of our sexual ethic was dubbed "free love." To me, that is a bit like calling our nuclear arms race "cheap peace." Clearly, "free love" is neither love in any Gospel sense of the word, nor is it particularly free. Just as we have abused atomic power, creating fearsome weapons, we have failed to understand and channel the great power of sexuality for our own good.

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'Sexuality designed to be sharing in love of God'

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For this, we pay a terrible price. The fabric of our family structure is fraying. The teen pregnancy rate is a national scandal — and the abortion rate is worse. The most dangerous, sexually-transmitted disease in history, AIDS, has reached epidemic proportions.

Yet these are only symptoms of a deeper problem: an inability or unwillingness to recognize that sexuality touches on the most sacred aspects of human life — the loving relationships of persons and the creation of life itself.

In a real sense, our sexuality makes us what we are. It makes us men and women. The way we live our sexuality is inextricably linked to the way we love and respect ourselves and each other.

These principles are at the heart of church teaching on sexuality. If the church has failed to make that clear, it is because, I fear, that in her zeal to make her point she has too often substituted simplistic formulas for the theology underlying those fundamental facts.

I remember the story of the young man who went to confession to beg forgiveness for a sexual sin. In those days, the Sacrament of Penance was more popular than it is today, and a long line of penitents was behind him. Upon hearing the confession,

'Your study and witness could be a source of support and happiness for your family and those who with confidence follow your example.'

the priest delivered a long sermon on the evils of lust, much to the discomfort of the young man — and those waiting at the confessional door.

When the youth finally stepped out, the next young man in line stopped him and asked, "My goodness, what did Father say?"

"He said, 'don't,'" the young man replied.

Indeed, many Catholics have reduced all church teaching on sex to that single word: "don't." Intellectually, theologically, philosophically, and morally that is not an especially satisfactory translation — and perhaps that is one reason the old-fashioned admonition is so widely ignored today.

Bishops have the pastoral responsibility to teach. Therefore, I am writing a pastoral letter on human sexuality in the hope that it will help move us beyond simple "dos" and "don'ts" and toward a better appreciation of this great God-given gift.

I am not out to judge or condemn individuals, but to appeal to Catholics and all people of good will to develop an attitude of self-evaluation in the light of the Gospel's moral imperatives.

Indeed, I am going to talk about "free love" — in the best sense of those words. When I speak of freedom, I mean an openness to absolute truth, to absolute love and ultimately to the absolute infinity of human life — knowing God as He is in Himself.

What does that have to do with sex?

All of us — yes, even archbishops — are sexual beings. Our sexuality has profound spiritual and psychological aspects in addition to the obvious biological features. The spiritual, psychological and biological aspects are inseparable from our sexuality. That is the way God made us.

And that is the way God made us different from animals, for whom sex is merely a reproductive act of preservation of the species.

For us, sex is a means of express-

ing love — the so-called "relational" aspect of sexuality. And it is also reproductive — "procreational," if you will. For a Christian, the relational aspect reflects the eternal bond of love and knowing that is present among the Three Persons of the Trinity. The procreational aspect reflects the creative power of God. Through our sexuality we bring forth new life — the begetting of another human being, capable of loving and being loved, of knowing and being known.

In short, our sexuality is designed to be a sharing in the knowledge and love of God. Human sexuality points us toward the love of each other and ultimately to the love of God.

It is understandable, therefore, why Christ has given us the sacrament of marriage as the proper channel for sexuality. The sacrament is not simply a "rite" for entering into the marital relationship. It is the visible expression of the transformation of the deepest aspects of sexuality into the framework of a new life in Christ.

Viewed from this Christian perspective, it is clear why sex does not include the spiritual as well as the psychological and physical aspects is sinful. This fragmented approach to sex is a turning away from our human nature — and from the One who created us.

If we try to fragment sex, we only

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FROM OUR HUMAN NATURE — AND FROM
the One who created us.

If we try to fragment sex, we only
wind up fragmenting ourselves.

That is why those who focus on the
biological aspects of sex find only
brief gratification rather than the
lifetime of love, happiness and peace
marriage can bring.

Yet there seems to be no shortage
of folks ready to exchange a lifetime
of happiness for a moment of plea-
sure — to live lives that resemble a
soap opera episode.

It isn't easy for this archbishop to
compete with the soaps. They have
"Miami Vice" and "Dallas;" I have
the Catholic Review. My car isn't
sleek and I don't carry a gun. I can't
even offer multiple costume changes
over the course of this pastoral.

But I do have a secret weapon:
you.

Won't you please take the time to
read over my pastoral as it appears
in the Catholic Review over the next
few weeks and discuss it with your
family and friends?

Because of the beauty, complexity
and aberration of human behavior in
sexual relationships my pastoral will
be longer, more technical and de-
tailed than this introductory column.
Today I will present a detailed
outline and in the following three
weeks the pastoral will appear in
serial form. Your study and witness
could be a source of support and
happiness for your family and those
who with confidence follow your
example.