

THE ORIENTATION GOD GAVE TO SEX

**Teachings of the Catholic Church
on Human Sexuality**

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Part I

The Orientation God Gave to Sex

God opens His mind and heart to humanity to let us in on the design of human life. In our religion we call this “revelation”: God revealing the big picture and inner meanings of what is and what is going on. Receiving what God wants to share with us, incorporating it into our attitudes toward, and choices about life, and acting in accord with that information and wisdom is the foundation of our religion as Christians. The Bible is a record of God’s revelation of the design and plan of many things, sex included.

God created man in His image, in the divine image God created him; male and female God created them. God blessed them saying, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.”
Genesis 1:27-28

Here God sets out the purpose of sex: it is about the creation of life. The sexual drive is a way we are connected to the forward impulse of creation. The sex act is the miraculous context for the creation of human life. Essentially they are both about the continuity of the human community. This is the “orientation” God gives to sex. We share this orientation to sex with the other living creatures on our planet. The Bible records the same revelation about sex for them (Genesis 1:22) that it does about sex for us (above).

The Lord God said, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.”... That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.
Genesis 2:18, 24

For us as human persons, there is more to the orientation God gives to sex. Sex for us is also oriented to bonding – to a stable bond of permanent unity with a “suitable partner.” In the Bible, God makes it clear that the “suitable partner” for a man is a woman – one woman with whom he becomes “one body.” And the “suitable partner” for a woman is a man – one man with whom she becomes “one body.” For human persons sex is a sacred bond to spouse and an act of allegiance to family. Even before spouse and family arrive on the scene they are always in view when it comes to human sex.

We are more than the other species on our planet. We alone are “created in the divine image.” We have intelligence and freedom. The orientation God gives to sex is established by instinct in the other living species of our world. In human beings it must be established by using our intelligence to recognize the truth of what God tells us, and using our freedom to choose it and order our personal lives in accord with it. When we do, we validate our dignity as persons called to live in communion with God.

If we refuse to establish in our lives the orientation God has given to human sex, that doesn’t mean that it is not true. The truth isn’t the truth because we accept it. The truth is the truth because it is verifiable. The truth of what God reveals to us about sex and many other things is often verified by the sheer chaos, pain and suffering created in us and the world around us when, by our choice, we refuse to establish it in our lives. For this, studying the record of human social and political history is invaluable.

Our psychological and social development can and does exercise an influence on who we are sexually attracted to and to what degree of intensity we feel that attraction. The ways and

degree to which we allow ourselves to act out sexually in our imagination and physically with others also plays a role. Attraction, however, is not orientation. There is a divinely given orientation to human sex no matter where your attractions draw you. The orientation God gives to sex remains the same if you are celibate, if you are single, if you are attracted to men or to women, to one person or to many. The choice lies before every human being either to embrace this orientation and bring our attractions and moods into order with it, or to reject it. The consequences for our personal life and the social world flow from there.

Human sex, as God reveals it, is the impulse for life, harnessed by our intelligence and employed by our freedom as a gift of self to spouse and family and the future of human life and community. For Catholics, how we order our sexual lives and how we conduct ourselves sexually is always a religious issue: it is either an act of faith in God and the truth God reveals, or a denial of it.

Part II

Learning Sex

When someone refers to “learning sex,” most people understand it as meaning learning the dynamics of physical arousal and the mechanics of intercourse. But sex is learned in another way of equal, if not greater, importance: namely, how to lay hold of it mentally, embrace it emotionally and sculpt it spiritually.

Sex as Entertainment.

Sex can be “learned” as entertainment. This happens when sex is laid hold of mentally as a self-authenticating freedom of expression, a harmless and innocent diversion, or as “gaming”; when it is embraced emotionally as an induced “high”, a release from tension, and even as escape from reality; and when it is sculpted spiritually as an immersion into self and left morally unbridled to run where it will.

Sex as Bond

Sex can be “learned” as bond. This stands in sharp contrast to sex learned as entertainment. This happens when sex is laid hold of mentally as an immersion into the forward impulse of creation, as the miraculous context for the creation of life and the continuity of human community; when it is embraced emotionally as a sacred bond to spouse and allegiance to family; and when spiritually it is harnessed as a living force and sculpted as a gift of self to spouse and family that leaves one free to connect to others and give of self in a rich, diverse multitude of ways.

It is a common assumption that learning “sex as entertainment” enables you to attract a partner. It may very well, but it will not enable you either to be or attract a “suitable partner” (see Genesis 2:18ff) – a partner with whom you can bond. It is also commonly (and more tragically) assumed that once you get married, sex learned as entertainment will work for your marriage. Nothing could be further from the truth. If anything, sex learned as entertainment works against a stable bond – as sex and marriage in Hollywood (where sex as entertainment is glamorized) has proven over and over again. The absorption with self, the wandering eye, the constantly “checking others out”, the compulsion for another arousal and release, the verbal and non-verbal language of suggestion and invitation cannot just be shut down

or transformed into a vehicle of loving dedication to your spouse.

Learning Sex

In our society, unless you make the deliberate effort to learn “sex as bond” and teach it as such to your children, you and they will be immersed in a cultural context that overwhelmingly instills an acceptance of “sex as entertainment.” For an alarmingly large number of people this leads them into sexual addictions of all kinds. As Christians, letting each other go his own way, and leaving our children to learn sex in the ebb and tide of society, is to betray them and foreclose on their right to a stable bond in marriage and their freedom to connect with others in diverse ways built upon a respect for the integrity of others and their relationships. Those who teach and glorify “sex as entertainment” are simply preparing a field of candidates they hope will be available for use in attaining their next “high”.

Unlearning Sex

Unlearning “sex as entertainment” and relearning “sex as bond” requires a serious commitment: the courage to confront self, the resolve to change, the humility to get help, and a sustained effort to unlearn and relearn a good deal of mental and emotional information and patterning. It can be done, but not without faith in God and daily turning to Him for help. Redemption comes only through faith in a Wisdom and Power greater than our own.

Our Obligation to Each Other and to Our Children

We owe it to each other and to our children to inform them about sex in all its aspects, before they might be caught off guard and unaware by the world. We need to remind each other and explain to our children that sex can be learned as “bond” or learned as “entertainment”; that there is a clear difference between the two, with enormous and lasting consequences; that they have a choice; and that with courage, sustained effort, and turning to God for help, even those who have learned sex as entertainment can relearn it as bond and find the blessings of human relationship.

Part III Chastity and the Mind

What is Chastity?

It is God's will that you grow in holiness: that you abstain from immorality, each of you guarding his (sexual) member in sanctity and honor, not in passionate desire as do the Gentiles who do not know God; and that each refrain from overreaching or cheating his brother or sister in the matter at hand... God has called us not to immorality but to holiness; hence whoever rejects these instructions rejects, not man, but God who sends His Holy Spirit upon you. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

Chastity is about a right orientation to sex and the right boundaries for sex. Chastity also extends to a respect for the complete integrity of yourself and others. The Catechism of our faith says:

The chaste person maintains the integrity of the powers of life and love placed in him.

This integrity ensures the unity of the person ; it is opposed to any behavior that would impair it. It tolerates neither a double life nor duplicity in speech. (2338)

Chastity begins in the Mind

You have heard the commandment, 'You shall not commit adultery'. What I say to you is: anyone who looks lustfully at a woman (or man) has already committed adultery with her (him) in his (her) heart. Matthew 5:27-28

It is what we allow our minds to consider and dwell upon that is the real beginning of the choices we make and the actions we take. Often we cannot keep thoughts from randomly popping into our mind or images from being thrust uninvited into our view. We can, however, and must, control what we consciously bring into view and what we allow our minds to consider and dwell upon. "Acting out" is always just that: acting out something that has already been entertained within.

It is no sin to find a woman or man sexually attractive. It is no sin to feel the urge of sexual drive. This is part of the impulse to create life and the call to the embrace of a spouse (even when that spouse is not yet in view or not yet yours to embrace sexually).

What *is* wrong and a sin is to entertain thoughts of sex with some-one who is not your spouse. It is wrong because the longer we dwell on the possibilities of sex with them, the less willing we are to take account of the rest of their integrity as a person: their personal values, their religious commitments, their freedom of choice, their commitment to other relationships (wife, husband, children, community), and the damage that would be done to them and others by violating a moral boundary that preserves them as a person. It is also wrong because the longer we dwell on the possibilities of sex with someone, the less we are willing to take into account our own personal integrity: our moral values, our religious commitments, our commitment to the other relationships in our life, and the damage that we would do to ourselves and others by violating a moral boundary that preserves us as a person. The longer we dwell on the thought of sex with another, the more *who* they are as a person is pushed to the margins of our awareness by a growing obsession of sex with them.

Wicked designs come from the deep recesses of the heart: acts of fornication, theft, murder, adulterous conduct, greed, maliciousness, deceit, sensuality, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, an obtuse spirit. All these evils come from within and render a man impure."
Mark 7:21-23

In our culture, a mind with free reign to wander where it wills is often considered an appealing attribute, even a creative gift. Discipline is often denigrated as confining this creativity and diminishing its possibilities. Not all possibilities for a human being, however, are human. When it comes to preserving the freedom to be a truly complete and integrated human being, the discipline of our thoughts and the corralling of some of our possibilities is essential.

Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cloak for vice. In a word, live as servants of God. You must esteem the person of every man. 1 Peter 2:16-17

Part IV Chastity and the Imagination

As for lewd conduct or promiscuousness of any sort, let them not even be mentioned among you; your holiness forbids this. Nor should there be any obscene, silly or suggestive talk; all of that is out of place. Instead, give thanks. Make no mistake about this: no fornicator, no unclean or lustful person – in effect an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with worthless arguments.
Ephesians 5:3-6

Chastity requires that we not expose ourselves to talk, magazines, books, television and movies that are sexually suggestive and stimulating. Does this sound prudish? After all what could be wrong with a natural curiosity and fascination with sex? The answer, of course, is nothing – if that is all it is. But it isn't, is it? Addiction to pornography has reached epidemic proportions in our society. It is as festering a personal issue in the lives of people on the streets as it is in the lives of people in the pews.

Sexually explicit images seed themselves easily in the mind. They are driven deeper into the soil of the mind by the sexual excitement they arouse, and all too often by the acts of sexual self-stimulation and release that follow. They come to dominate the whole mental landscape, filling every mental space except those where they are forced back by moments of sustained focus and concentration. But as soon as a moment of relaxation breaks the concentration, the images flood back. Pornography on the *Internet* is particularly virulent. Here the social restraints of the risk of discovery and recognition are gone. There are no boundaries or restraints. You can have all you want and you never get enough of the erotic images, and the fantasies and arousal that follow. You find yourself returning to “surf” for them night after night, glued to the screen hour after hour, unable to pull away and undaunted by neither the weariness encroaching on your consciousness nor the thought of the spouse sleeping in your bed.

To say that this does not affect the balance of one's interpersonal life with spouse and family and one's wider world of relationships, defies all rationality. The effect is devastating. You start to prefer the characters in your pornographic fantasies over the people in your real life. In the sexual embrace of your spouse you find your mind absent from the given moment, and in a scene with a person drawn from the secret world of your fantasies. You steal time relating with your spouse, family and friends, to be alone in your secret world. You even find yourself pressuring your spouse to appear as the partners in your fantasies and to act out the scenes you carry in your mind.

Exposing ourselves to what is lewd and suggestive, and to pornographic images, sears the sensitivities of our soul. It blurs our perception of the boundaries that belong to our own integrity and that of others. It prompts us to reduce people to objects of sexual stimulation. We lose our ability to be attracted to, interact with, or embrace others on any level but the sexual. Chastity calls for a vigilant guard over and control of the images we entertain. Into the pattern of our thoughts will our lives take form.

Masturbation

Masturbation is morally wrong because it leads us radically away from the orientation God gives to human sex: the giving of life and the bonding to spouse. The dangers of masturbation are serious. It is essentially an intensely self-absorbing act. The focus on self and absorption with self entailed in the act, is reinforced by the intensity of the pleasure of sexual stimulation and release that is experienced. Masturbation reinforces the idea that sexual pleasure and release are essentially about self-gratification, when the contrary is true: they are essentially about the gift of self and an encounter of another. What follows masturbation is not a sense of connectedness to life, to God and to others, but a heightened sense of selfness, aloneness and emptiness. Masturbation is usually connected with either the viewing of erotic imagery or the drawing to mind of erotic scenes with past or imaginary sex partners. The intensity of the pleasure of sexual simulation and release attaches us mentally and emotionally to these images and scenes, driving them deeper into our mind. We bond to illusion rather than to the real. We end up preferring sexual fantasy to sexual reality, because they are always exactly as we want them to be. Masturbation is no friend of sexual stability.

Part V Chastity and Friendship

Live as servants of God. You must esteem the person of every man. Foster love for the brethren, reverence for God, and respect for authority. 1 Peter 2:16-17

For those who are unmarried, chastity means keeping clear of sexual involvement and sexual intercourse in relationships. God calls us to dress, to speak and to act in such a way as to proactively respect the sexual integrity and purity of others.

Building Human Community

If I am in a group of people and mention that John and Mary are in a relationship, almost every person listening will assume that they are sexually involved with one another. In our society the word “relationship” has become synonymous with “having sex.” It is disturbing to think that the rich dynamics and infinite possibilities of human relationship have been reduced to one. This is a loss for everyone and for the human community as a whole.

Chastity is an important component in successful human community. It prevents a highly charged sexual atmosphere from forming. It creates an environment in which human community can be explored and its arts learned. Chastity transforms relationship from being about sexually attracting someone, checking them out, and pairing off with them to entertain the possibilities; into being about getting to know and enjoy others, learning to relate with them in ways that are inclusive of others, and building human groupings that are warm, personal, safe and a good place to both be and grow together.

Chastity makes it possible for real friendships to form and guarantees what real friendship is all about: allowing us to explore and discover one another’s dreams, ideas, hopes, fears, values, attitudes and behavior free from the enormous emotional tension and pressure that come with being sexually involved. Chastity makes it possible for us to form many rich friendships and, in forming them, to gain a positive, full and balanced sense of ourselves

and others – our mutual identities, gifts and self worth. No matter how large the group of people, once the possibilities of sex charge the social atmosphere the dynamics of relationship can only work toward pairing off in twos. Remember what it was like in high school?

Growing Friendships

Too often people think that by becoming sexually involved, they will find friendship and what friendship has to offer: a sense of being understood, wanted, and valued; a sense of self and self worth. They soon discover that they find neither friendship nor the things that friendship offers. In fact, the tensions of their sexual involvement actually prevent them from developing. Missing is a sense of integrity as a person, an openness to others, and the freedom to move and connect with others in diverse ways. This is what chastity creates so friendships can form.

A sense of your own integrity and that of others, and the freedom to move and connect with others in diverse ways are essential if a person is to find a suitable partner for marriage. Friendship is the best school and the best foundation for marriage. In a relationship were two people are considering marriage, chastity preserves their ability to ask the right and even the hard questions of themselves and of their prospective mate. The tensions of sexual involvement all too often cause people to hide in themselves and to over look in their prospective spouse many serious issues that will not go away and that will inevitably rise later to threaten the marriage and wound them.

Establishing a Climate of Peace

Unless arenas of relationship between women and men are freed from the continually generated, highly charged field of a constant consideration of sexual possibilities with one another, there can be no joy in the givenness of who we are in the presence of others. There can be no room for innocence – for children or any one else, no free-ranging collaboration of minds, and no building of an interpersonal world that is richly diverse, inclusive of others, warm to all, safe and humane. Giving boundaries to our sexual nature is the first step in building this world. Chastity is connected to peace at home, in the market place and between the nations.

Part VI Giving Yourself to Another Sexually

*You are not your own. You have been purchased and at a price...
1 Corinthians 6:20*

You are the Lord's! You belong to Him. This, in essence, is what it means to be a Christian and what makes Christian morality specifically "Christian". The Bible teaches that as a Christian you have been ransomed from the bondage of sin and delivered from the death sentence it leads to. This was done by Jesus. He paid for your redemption with the price of his own blood:

*Realize that you were delivered from the futile way of life your fathers handed on to you,
not by any diminishable sum of silver or gold, but by Christ's own blood beyond all price.
1 Peter 1:18*

You received the power of deliverance from sin and the redemption of your life when you were baptized:

Are you not aware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Through baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life... our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed and we might be slaves to sin no longer... You must consider yourselves dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus.
Romans 6:3-11

Every time you receive the body and blood of Jesus in Holy Communion you acknowledge that you are not your own. You acknowledge that you are flesh of His flesh and blood of His blood. Jesus makes this clear when he says:

The person who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.
John 6:56

I have given them the glory you (Father) gave me that they may be one, as we are one – I living in them, you living in me -- that their unity may be complete. John 17:22-23

Saint Paul insists that we take responsibility for this truth.

Do you not see that your bodies are members of Christ?...Shun lewd conduct. Every other sin a person commits is outside his body, but the fornicator sins against his own body. Whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within – the Spirit you have received from God. You are not your own. You have been purchased, and at a price. So glorify God in your body.
I Corinthians 6:15-20

It is wrong and a sin to give yourself sexually to someone before you are married. It is wrong because God has oriented sex to the giving of life and the bonding of marriage. Even if you feel that you love someone and are already committed to each other, it is wrong because as a Christian you know that you are not your own to give.

Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may judge what is God's will, what is good, pleasing and perfect.
Romans 12:1-2

Your soul already has a spouse. This spouse is Jesus. Saint Paul explains this to the Christians he brought to Christ:

I have given you in marriage to one husband, presenting you as a chaste virgin to Christ. My fear is that, just as the serpent seduced Eve by his cunning your thoughts may be corrupted and you may fall away from your sincere and complete devotion to Christ.
2 Corinthians 11:2-3

If you are to give yourself to someone sexually, it is Jesus alone who has the right to do it. This is exactly what the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage is about: Jesus, your first spouse and only Lord, is present, and personally gives you to another to become “one body” with them. Jesus remains the spouse of both your souls and becomes the third partner to your marriage. It is from him that you will draw patience, understanding, forgiveness and strength

when you grow short of these with each other. This is why it is the teaching of Christ's Church that couples preparing for marriage are to remain chaste and not to live together prior to marriage. It is a witness to the lordship of Christ and his place in your life.

Part VII

Chastity And Marriage

Have you not read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female and declared, 'for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become as one!' Thus they are no longer two but one flesh.

Matthew 19:4-6

In marriage sex fulfills its purpose. Here the beauty and power of sex serves the bonding of man and woman as life partners – they become *one body*. It is within this context that God has designed a secure, tender, and structured place to conceive a new human life, to bear it into this world and to nurture it physically, emotionally and spiritually as it grows to stature as a daughter or son of God.

Thou shalt not commit adultery. Exodus 20:14

Chastity in Marriage requires the absolute sexual faithfulness of both partners. This means staying clear of sexual involvement and sexual intercourse with anyone except your spouse. The business of making a common life, putting together a home, sorting out every day tasks, and contending with one another's idiosyncrasies can make your spouse appear less attractive in comparison to others – and there are always plenty of people around to find more attractive than your spouse. It is not difficult to tip the scales of your heart and go too far in making yourself emotionally vulnerable to a sympathetic friend. If you let yourself, you can “fall in love” with someone other than your spouse. It is important to know this. You must choose to be watchful over the dynamics of your relationship with your spouse. You must make a resolve that you will not allow yourself to become emotionally involved with anyone in any way that calls into question or weakens your commitment to your spouse. In marriage you have to work to stay in love with one another. The fact that it requires work is not bad. It's what life is all about. The people and things you end up loving the most are the people and things you work the hardest for. But there has to be a mutuality in this labor. As you work to meet your spouse in a suitable partnership, you need to see that he or she is working to meet you. Cherishing this in each other is the deepest love of marriage. The social structure that supports the human world rests upon points of commitment – like the vows of ordination, the oath of public office, and marriage. The life-partnership of a marriage supports the hopes, struggles, joys and even the entire physical and emotional world of many individuals. The number of people who depend upon a marriage and are vulnerable to it is never just two.

The circle of life that is affected by faithfulness to the commitment of marriage is wide and far reaching. This is why Jesus makes himself a full partner in the Christian marriage bond. This bond is so important to the world of God's design that it essential that God be present to it and in living communion with it. There is no sin that causes more pain and personal devastation, or that leaves a deeper emotional scar, than infidelity in marriage. Trust and faithfulness are living tissue – cut in one place, the wound and the weakening are felt everywhere. In a marriage, we are never just faithful or unfaithful to our partner.

We are faithful or unfaithful to God, to everyone whose life leans upon our marriage for support, and to the entire living tissue of trust that binds the human world together.

Every man should have his own wife and every woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his conjugal obligations toward his wife, the wife hers toward her husband. A wife does not belong to herself but to her husband; equally, a husband does not belong to himself but to his wife. Do not deprive one another, unless perhaps by mutual consent for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer. Then return to one another, that Satan may not tempt you through your lack of self-control. *1 Corinthians 7:2-5*

Chastity in marriage also means valuing the person your spouse is (physically and by way of personality) and not hankering after the person he or she isn't. It means keeping your body in good health and your appearance attractive to your spouse. It means never treating your spouse as a sex toy. Chastity requires that spouses motivate themselves to come together willingly, with esteem for each other's dignity, and in joyful anticipation of their sexual embrace.

Part VIII

Chastity and Homosexuality

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman, such a thing is abhorrent.
Leviticus 18:22

Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and the men gave up natural intercourse with women and burned with lust for one another. Men did shameful things with men, and thus received in their own persons the penalty.
Romans 1:26-27

Our psychological and social development can and does exercise an influence on who we are sexually attracted to, and to what degree of intensity we feel that attraction. The ways and degree to which we allow ourselves to act out sexually in our imagination, and physically with others, also plays a role.¹

Attraction, however, is not orientation. There is a divinely given orientation to human sex no matter where your attractions draw you. The orientation God gives to sex remains the same if you are celibate, if you are single, if you are attracted to men or to women, to one person or to many. The choice lies before every human being either to embrace this orientation and bring our attractions and moods into order with it, or to reject it. The consequences for our personal life and the social world flow from there.

The Immorality of the Acts

Some people have an attraction to persons of the same sex. If left unharnessed by their commitment to live the truth God reveals about human sex, and establish in their lives the orientation God gives to human sex, this attraction might, and often does, impel them to act

¹ An excellent treatment of the psychological dynamics of Homosexuality can be found in: [The Battle for Normality: A Guide for Therapy for Homosexuality](#), Gerard J.M. Van Den Aardweg, Ignatius Press.

out sexually with persons of the same sex. The Word of God in the Scriptures,² and our Catholic faith, teach us that this is wrong and when done it is a serious sin³ – as serious sin as when a heterosexual person acts out sexually outside of marriage with a person of the opposite sex.

This conviction about homosexual acts does not make someone *homophobic*, nor does it make the Catholic Church *homophobic*. *Homophobic* means a “fear of people who are attracted to persons of the same sex.” Not only does the Catholic Church not fear them, many stand, and have stood, in an honored place in our ancient community of faith doing what we all are called to do: embrace the truth God has revealed to us and seek to bring our personal lives into order with it. It is not *homophobic* to disagree with someone about the rightness of homosexual acts. How we order our sexual lives and how we conduct ourselves sexually is always a religious issue for a Catholic: it is either an act of faith in God and the truth God reveals, or a denial of it.

God has oriented human sex to the bonding of man and woman and to the creation of life in that context. Marriage is instituted by God as the bond between man and woman for this purpose. Does this mean that everyone is called to find a person of the opposite sex and get married? Certainly not. In the case of persons who are attracted to persons of the same sex, some feel themselves none-the-less called to partnership with a person of the opposite sex in marriage, and prepare themselves to do so. Most, however, do not. While heterosexual marriage is the only arena for sexual foreplay and intercourse, it is not the only arena for human relationship.

The question much labored over today is, *can you be a whole human being without genital sex?* The answer is: Yes, you can. You can establish a network of relationships that are deeply fulfilling, supportive, and even tender, without the dynamics of sexual foreplay and intercourse. As a matter of fact, the best way to guarantee that your most warm and fulfilling relationships (outside of marriage) will stay that way is to keep clear of genital sex.

The Dignity of the Person

Esteem the person of every man. Foster love for the brethren, reverence for God, and respect for authority.

1 Peter 2:17

As Catholics, we need to be sure that we never find ourselves paying mere lip service to these words. Persons should never be presumed anything, or labeled anything, merely because of their mannerisms. All persons have a right to cultivate close and supportive friendships. All persons must be defended from harassment and protected from violence. It is imperative that we treat every person with dignity as a child of God, and as a soul for whom Jesus surrendered his life. Only then can we witness the truth to others in a context that allows them to receive the truth as human persons. Only then can the truth set us all free.

² A excellent treatment of what the Bible says about homosexual acts is set out in: [Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate](#), Thomas E. Schmidt, InterVarsity Press. A excellent treatment of what the Bible says about homosexual acts is set out in: [Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate](#), Thomas E. Schmidt, InterVarsity Press.

³ A full explanation of Catholic teaching on Homosexuality is set out in [The Truth About Homosexuality](#), John F. Harvey, Ignatius Press.

Part IX Celibacy for the Sake of the Kingdom

*Some men are incapable of sexual activity from birth;
some have been deliberately made so;
and some there are who freely renounce sex for the sake of God's reign.
Matthew 19:12a*

These are the words of Jesus. They are recorded in the Bible and are part of the Gospel. This is celibacy. It is not a man-made invention, and it is not an imposed burden. It is a divine grace offered to some. Jesus reveals it and declares it to be such. By doing so he institutes it as part of the life of the Church. And in those to whom it is offered and who freely choose to receive it, it becomes a divine gift to the life of the Church.

A person is not celibate because he isn't interested in sex, because he isn't attracted to women (or men), because he does not have a sexual desire. Only one thing makes celibacy the real thing, and that is that a person "renounces sex *for the sake of God's reign*. It is fundamentally and essentially a religious commitment—a free gift of self from a man or woman, to God, and "for the sake of God's reign." The Catholic Church of the west (the Roman Catholic Church) wants this kind of commitment and this kind of grace in those it calls to the priesthood.

*Not everyone can accept this teaching,
only those to whom it is given to do so. Matthew 19:11*

These are also the words of Jesus. The Word of God insists that a person considering celibacy come to grips with himself sexually: that he understand his sexual need and how is he driven, and that he take responsibility for it. This means paying attention to his personal history and behavior. Can he live at peace without acting out sexually? (By "at peace" I mean "without being tormented.") If he can't, he is not given the grace to "renounce sex for the sake of God's reign". Can he draw "the solace that love can give" (Phil 2:1) from his relationship with God and the service of his fellow human beings? If he can't, then he should seek partnership with a spouse. If he can, however, he is in a position to make an honest gift of himself with a decision to "freely renounce sex for the sake of God's reign." This does not mean that a person with the grace of celibacy is not at times sexually tempted or allured. Even those in the sexual relationship of marriage can be tempted and allured. All chastity – celibate, single or married – requires discipline, and vigilance.

*Everyone who has given up home, brothers or sisters, father or mother, wife or children or property for my sake will receive many times as much and inherit everlasting life.
Matthew 19:29*

Sexual intimacy is, by God's design, exclusive to relationship with your spouse in marriage. The emotional intimacy that goes with it is equally exclusive, and demands time and focused attention to keep it alive and healthy. Saint Paul writes:

*The married person is busy with this world's demands and occupied with pleasing his spouse.
1 Corinthians 8:32-35*

Celibacy is not a renunciation of relationship or intimacy. Celibacy is a commitment to give yourself in relationships that are unique in character: 1) free of the dynamics of genital sex, 2) open to and welcoming of the inclusion of others, 3) free of emotional exclusivity with any one person, and 4) always at the service of leading people beyond self, to God and to each other. These relationships are rich and varied and in them is to be found both genuine freedom and a fulfilling intimacy.

Let him accept this teaching who can. Matthew 19:12b

What sustains celibacy in a person? Cooperating with the grace that God gives. This means 1) specifically asking Jesus to renew this grace in you each day, 2) nourishing your personal relationship with God with prayer and in religious exercises, 3) fueling your idealism and the inspiration of your ministry (“God’s reign”), 4) devoting yourself with enthusiasm to your religious duties, 5) surrounding yourself with colleagues and friends who are chaste in their own sexual vocations and who understand and respect the motive of your celibate commitment, and finally 6) staying away from the people, the conversations, the places, the images and the allusions that invite a violation of chastity—yours or anyone else’s.

X

In the Genes or Learned Behavior Human Nature and Personal Responsibility

Sex is a drive built into our physical nature. Sex is also conditioned and learned behavior. How much is it of either? The part that is conditioned and learned is much greater than most people today want to admit. One reason for this is that there is something in our human moral constitution that likes to believe that things are written in the stars...or in our genes. If it is, then it is easy to conclude that we don’t have to take responsibility for it.

In addition to this, there are many social, political and even commercial groups at work in our society that would like to have what they are selling accepted in the context of “the way things are.” Many of these groups would very much like to see people accept the idea that sex is all in the genes. Then there would be little cause for people to pause and think about the implications of their sexual acts and practices, and no need for these groups themselves to use restraint in the use of sex in marketing and entertainment. After all, “you can’t fight Mother Nature.” Building upon this assumption their message is simple:

“You can’t possibly be happy without foreplay,
induced arousal and intercourse.”

“You can’t be well adjusted and warmly connected
in a relationship unless you are having genital sex.”

“Chastity offends human nature.”

These elements in society often do a very good job of marketing their message, and in many places they become the most pervasive voice on sex. This does not mean that their voice is either sane or life giving. Because you are the loudest or even the voice of the majority, does not make your voice the voice of God or Mother Nature. In the 1930s and 40s the voice of the ascendant group in Germany “learned” a whole society a way of embracing race as a fixed part of nature. They taught that racial superiority was in the genes. It turned out that it wasn’t in the genes at all, it was in the propaganda. Much about sex and much that orders

sex isn't in the genes. It is conditioned and learned. Ironically, the advertising industry is built upon this fact and the entertainment industry floats its boat on it.

Being a Sexual Human Being

There is more to being a sexual human being than a drive to copulate. There also is a yearning to conceive, to bear life, to have children, to create a family and to be part of a future beyond self. No matter how well hedonism is disguised as human nature, these yearnings won't go away. Human sex *is* about arousal and intercourse. This is an important part of sex – but just that, a *part* of it. It is neither the beginning nor the end of it. Human sex begins with being conceived, carried and born into this world to be part of a family where you can learn to connect and bond with others. Connecting and bonding with others in a weave of richly diverse relationships *is* human intimacy. Chastity preserves the integrity not only of each human person in the weave but also the character of each relationship. Chastity makes human intimacy possible. Human sex ends where it begins: with you conceiving, carrying and bearing a child of your own, to be part of a family, and then to move on to a future beyond you. Arousal and intercourse outside the boundaries set by chastity *is not* human intimacy. The sad truth is that the people who have the most genital sex usually find the least human intimacy.

Choice and Human Sex

Being human means that intelligence and choice come into the picture somewhere.

Chastity is a function of these. To know the truth, to choose the truth and to order our life with the truth is what creates human character and a human world. Harnessing the natural drives within us and in the world around us is revealed by God to be the distinctively human vocation:

Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it, Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth.

Genesis 1:28

Only when we use our intelligence and freedom to *subdue* the forces within us, giving them boundaries and shaping them into a life giving character, can we have a *dominion* over the elements of creation around us that will be a stewardship of life instead of a tyranny of death.

We live in a society where, with astounding frequency, we can have everything we want. Many children are raised to believe they can and should. This breath of opportunity has brought us to the point where having everything we want is seen as a personal right. One negative side effect of this is that it has lead many people, Christians included, to give up faith in the value of self-control. To deny yourself in the face of an opportunity to do something or try something is widely believed to be a surrender of personal freedom. What is really happening is that we are being conditioned out of our freedom to make true choices: choices that deny self and shape moral character.

Grace and Human Sex

Grace is the power of God ready to work on our behalf. Many people, Christians included, have lost faith in it. Either they are not aware that it is available or they don't see the need for it (especially if they have falsely concluded that everything is pretty much determined by

forces beyond our control.) Grace helps us choose the right and persevere in it – even when our choices cut against the drives of our human nature, and our conditioning never to question our opportunities or our desires. The power of God to aid us in the exercise of our humanity is always present. By God’s design, it is essential to the exercise of our humanity. Grace is as necessary to human sex as it is to everything else human. Grace, however, has a price: it must be asked for:

Ask, and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened for you... If you, with all your sins, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to anyone who asks Him.
Matthew 7:7, 11

Who’s Right About Sex?

God asks you to understand and respect the power of the sexual drive within you. God teaches you to the meaning and purpose of that drive in human life. God calls you to use your intelligence and free will to harness the first in accord with the second. God’s Grace is close to you to give you the strength to do it. In all of this God wants to lead you to a rich diversity of relationships and genuine human intimacy. This is the whole truth about human sex.

So is God right about sex? Or all those other voices you hear every day? Time will tell. The answer will come for every person as either a life fulfilled or a life empty and broken. I want to suggest that the answer has already been written: a hundred times in the lives of the people who live around you, and a hundred thousand times in the history of those who have gone before you. You need not put your life or happiness to the risk to discover it. Look around you! The answer is there for all to see – but only for those who *want* to see it.

Choose life then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord your God, heeding His voice, and holding fast to Him. For that will mean life for you, a long life for you...
Deuteronomy 30:19b-20

Part XI

Purity of Heart and Integrity of Attitude

Blest are the single-hearted for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8

Purity of Heart is *a resolve* to live consciously in God’s presence and to be guided by the truth God reveals. It entails a conscious and courageous choice not to be led by the current drift of popular opinion or the ever changing moods and passions of your mind and body. Purity of Heart means that you have written into your very being, words that are as old as revealed religion: “All that the Lord has said I will heed and do.” (Exodus 24:3-8)

Unless your holiness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees you shall not enter the kingdom of God.
Matthew 5:20

Integrity of Attitude means refusing to justify or ‘soft soap’ any turning away from the truth God has revealed. It means ridding yourself of excuses like, ‘everybody is doing it’ and ‘it really doesn’t affect anybody but me.’ It means remaining true to what God tells us is good

and right even when you fail to live up to it. It means looking at all those who are affected by your sins and saying: ‘I was wrong. What I did was contrary to what I believe.’

Sluggish indeed is this people's heart. They have scarcely heard with their ears, they have firmly closed their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn back to me, and I should heal them..
Matthew 13:15

No matter how long we listen and look, if we have decided in our hearts that we no longer want to hear and see, we will remain deaf and blind. It is in our hearts that we allow ourselves to hedge on our sexual principles and to excuse and justify doing what we want when we want. Arguments like, ‘everyone does it,’ ‘it’s only natural,’ ‘it’s a part of growing up,’ and ‘it doesn’t hurt anyone,’ seed themselves easily in the conscience when your heart has made a decision to go for what it wants at the moment.

No matter what excuses might be made, the truth remains: we are responsible. We are responsible for the rampant spread of sexually transmitted disease, for broken marriages and wounded partners, for splintered families and emotionally devastated children, for disbanded circles of friendship, for the socially marginalized and for weakened structures of social life that have lost their power to support and stabilize human life.

Responsibility for sex comes to a head, not in feeling guilty about sex, but in a renewed commitment to be faithful about sex – faithful to all God has taught us and that we know to be true and right.

Christian responsibility leads us first to face the truth. From there it leads us to reflect on it, and then to reform our lives in accord with it. Finally it leads us to renew the world around us in light of it. In this series of articles my desire has been to set out the truth that God reveals about sex and to contribute to your reflection on God’s wisdom. These moral principles are not my opinion. They are the revealed truth of God and the mind of Jesus. No Catholic should have found anything new here, for this is what our Catholic faith has consistently taught about sex, from the beginning.

An Invitation

Are you willing to take a step beyond these reflections? Place yourself before Christ in your heart. Examine your conscience.

How much have you been willing to open your mind to what God has to say about sex? Tell Jesus that you want to have your ears and your heart opened to all that God has to teach you.

How faithful have you been in your personal life to God’s wisdom and plan for sex? Tell Jesus that you want to form your life in God’s truth about sex and that you want to help others do the same. Ask Jesus to give you the gift of the Holy Spirit to help you.

*You have been told, O man, what is good.
 And what the Lord requires of you:
 Only to do the right and to love goodness,
 And to walk humbly with your God.
 Micah 6:8*