

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

COMMANDMENT 6

(Catechism nn. 2331-2400)

Sexuality

The Sixth Commandment (Catechism n. 2331-2400) reads:

‘You shall not commit adultery’ (Exodus 20:14 & Deuteronomy 5:18).

Jesus probes more deeply to the attitude that underlies such behaviour:

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart’ (Matthew 5:27-28).

If we want to imitate Jesus in his self-giving love, we must learn not to misuse our sexual energy in irresponsible ways. The Catechism (n. 2332) writes:

‘Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of our body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others.’

The way we live our sexuality profoundly influences the way we love. Hence the importance of the discipline required of us by the sixth commandment.

Holistic thinking is important in the area of sexuality. What we say with our body should be in harmony with what we are saying with our heart and with our soul and spirit. Our sexual drive is not there so that we can siphon off some dead-end narcissistic gratification. It is not there to give us power over others, to seduce, use or abuse them. It calls us out of ourselves to reach out to another to receive and to give love. Ultimately, of course, it is an expression of our longing for God. As Saint Augustine says:

‘You have made us for yourself, O God, and we are restless till we rest in you’ (Confessions 1.1).

Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. God who is love dwells within us. Our sexual energy is an impulse to share this love with others and to receive with wonder their longing to share it with us. It takes many forms according to the reality of our relationships: love of parent for child, of teacher for student, of friend for friend, of priest for people. It is ultimately the one energy impelling us beyond the narrow confines of our own person to reach out and engage lovingly with the whole of creation to which we belong.

It is said that Michelangelo saw in the uncut marble a form, which he gently and delicately released as a Pietà or a David. All true love is like that. We see and are attracted by a beauty that we see in another (a beauty that they may not be aware of), and we surround them with a love that draws this beauty out.

The sacrament of marriage and the maturing of human sexuality

There is plenty of evidence to show that it is possible to grow to sexual maturity and to nurture it in others in a single life committed to loving service. For most, however, the way to sexual maturity is found in marriage communion: that special relationship of committed love that binds two people together as wife and husband, and, through the fruit of sexual love, as parents of children. In the Christian Church the holiness of this love is recognised as a sacrament: a vehicle of grace, ebbing and flowing between two people who in their weakness and their strength have chosen to commit themselves to each other in a bond of trust (see Chapter 26).

Their genital sexual union, physical, emotional and spiritual, has its own special healing, its own special promise and its own special grace. It is a sacrament of God's love one to the other: a symbol of Jesus' love for the Church; a statement to the world of the faithful, forgiving and life-giving love of God for us. This and much more is beautifully expressed by Pope John-Paul II in his '*Letter to Families*', issued for the Year of the Family in 1994.

Chastity

The Catechism has the following things to say about the virtue of chastity: a virtue to which everyone is called, since we are all graced to love purely according to our state of life:

'Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of human beings in their bodily and spiritual being'(n. 2337).

'Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery, which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either we govern our passions and find peace, or we let ourselves be dominated by them and become unhappy'(n. 2339).

'Chastity leads the one who practices it to become a witness of God's fidelity and kindness'(n. 2346).

The development of sexuality

In a child's first year touch is linked with being close, being safe, accepted, wanted, the affection of unconditional love, and trust in the other. Between the ages of one and three touch is linked with the pleasure of accomplishment. The child is learning to trust him/herself, as well as learning to handle negative feelings like feeling foolish, embarrassed, ashamed. Between the ages of three and five the child begins to experience a sense of his/her unique worth as a person. Touch is still important, but there is a deeper interiority and some distance is being established. The child needs to be recognised, wanted, and appreciated as a little person. In adolescence the young person experiences a dramatically renewed interest in the body as a source of attraction to others and of a new pleasure to the self. The experience of 'falling in love' is a feeling of being recognized, wanted and appreciated as a sexual person. New needs are experienced – for knowledge, touch, affection. There are also new anxieties about self and new dangers, especially the danger of separating physical feeling from affection.

In a paper directed to those responsible for the training of seminarians (though it has a more general application), the Sacred Congregation of Catholic Education (1974 n. 41&46) writes:

'We need to help them transform this knowledge and choice into action and persevere in its practice in such a way that its maintenance becomes second nature and a normal characteristic of their lives ... Sexual maturity goes hand in hand with emotional maturity. Education for chastity means, in large part, educating the heart. It is a matter of love. Human love is not perfect from the start. It has to develop and become perfect through a long process of growth and purification. In a child it is sense-oriented, egotistic and self-indulgent. In an adult it should become spiritual, unselfish, altruistic, self-sacrificing, an image of the kind of love God has for us ...

Lust

‘There is a necessity to develop the young person’s own enormous reserves of affection. Ideals should be urged upon them – ideals of truth, beauty, justice, goodness, purity, generosity, self-giving, and heroism. They should be helped to form real and uplifting friendships ... and to anchor their affections in both reason and faith.’

To find our full sexual identity and to live it in a creative, love-giving, life-giving and self-giving way engages us in a journey of maturing that takes all our life. We cannot achieve it on our own, of course. We need others to love us well and to help us discover who we are. Above all we need the healing grace of God, whose Spirit of pure love is constantly being poured into our hearts. It is never too late to go to God incarnate in Jesus, and to seek from him a share in the purity of his heart. In communion we respond to his invitation: ‘This is my body given for you’. May we learn to be as loving and self-giving as Jesus in our sexual self-giving.

We need good education in sexuality. The Sacred Congregation of Catholic Education in its *Educational guidance in human love: outlines for sex education*, 1983 n. 105) states:

‘Remedial intervention, which calls for a profound transformation of the individual from within and without, is laborious and long, because it must help to reconstruct the personality and relationships with the world of people and values. Preventative action is more efficacious.’

Lust: the abuse of sexual energy

Paul warns against hurtful, dysfunctional, irresponsible and therefore sinful abuse of this God-given and powerful energy (1Corinthians 6:3-20):

‘The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body ... Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? ... Anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.’

Paul is encouraging his readers to resist the many stupidities of their culture in this matter and to recognise the contemplative dimension of sexuality when it is an expression of the love of God dwelling in our bodies.

The Catechism writes (n. 2351):

‘Lust is disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.’

Masturbation

Learning the discipline of personal chastity is a key to learning to be chaste in one’s relationship with others. The Catechism (n. 2352) defines masturbation as ‘the deliberate stimulation of the genital organs in order to derive sexual pleasure’, and states:

‘It is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action. The deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose ... which is mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love.’

To divert our sexual energy into thoughtless and frustrating self-gratification runs the danger of breaking the glass to get at the wine.

Great care is obviously necessary here, for it is well known that fear, threats, and intimidation encourage obsession and compromise the possibility of a balanced sexual attitude. They turn people in on themselves instead of opening them up to others. We are to direct the adolescent towards real people and adult sexuality. We are to direct the adolescent towards a God of love and so into forgiveness, not to a punishing God.

In his post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on *The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World* (1981 n.37), Pope John-Paul II states:

‘Faced with a culture which largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something commonplace, since it interprets and lives it in a reducing and impoverished way by linking sexuality solely with the body and with self-centred pleasure, the educational service of parents must aim firmly at a training in the area of sexuality that is truly and fully personal. For sexuality is an enrichment of the whole person – body, emotions and soul – and manifests its inmost meaning in leading a person to the gift of self in love.’

Relational Sex outside Marriage

The Catechism (n. 2353) writes:

‘Fornication is carnal union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children.’

It goes on to speak of relational sex without commitment: living together (n. 2390) and trial marriage (n. 2391). Jack Dominian in his *‘The growth of love and sex’* (1982, page 51-52) writes:

‘It is natural for young people to wish to meet, enjoy each other’s company, receive pleasure and joy from their bodies with some inevitable genital tension. But this tension is not to be a prelude to sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse is not a part of this adolescent discovery; it is clearly the seal of a love between two people who have reached the stage of life-commitment, and are ready to raise children in the permanent union which we call marriage ... For sexual intercourse to be fully human, there has to be a union of affection and genital sex. Affection means the presence of trust, security, and knowledge of feeling recognised, wanted and appreciated, and the possibility of continuity and reliability. These aspects of affection grow as a relationship deepens and finally meet in a permanent commitment we call marriage.’

Artificial Contraception

The Catechism (n. 2350) writes:

‘Those who are engaged to marry are called to live chastity in continence. They should see in this time of testing a discovery of mutual respect, an apprenticeship in fidelity, and the hope of receiving one another from God. They should reserve for marriage the expressions of affection that belong to married love. They will help each other grow in chastity.’

By way of summary:

1. To give oneself to another in genital sexual union is appropriate only where there is genuine and mutual love
2. The nature of genital sexual love requires more. It requires commitment. Though it is possible to take measures to ensure that conception does not take place, genital sexual union of its nature is clearly in view of conception. It therefore requires the kind of committed love that is the foundation of marriage, parenting and family.
3. Sexual partnership and parenting are not simply individual matters but profoundly concern society. It is appropriate that the mutual commitment be celebrated in community. Then the living together enjoys the support of the community, and is a gift to the community, witnessing to the kind of commitment needed for faithful loving and for the raising of a family. In a Christian context, marriage is a sacrament: a sign to the couple and to others of God’s faithful love.

Human sexuality is meant to be relational and unitive. The dynamic of relational sex is always towards love and commitment. The dynamic of commitment is towards a relationship that is exclusive and permanent. Human procreation is fully responsible only in such a relationship. Society protects this crucial relationship by the institution called marriage. Marriage-union unto death is the highest ideal and goal of Christian marriage. It is a sacrament to the spouses, to the children, and to the world, of the unchanging, eternal, faithful love of God as revealed in Jesus.

Artificial Contraception

The Catechism (second edition n. 2366) states:

‘A child springs from the heart of the mutual love-giving of spouses, as its fruit and fulfillment. So the Church teaches that “it is necessary that each and every marriage act remain ordered per se to the procreation of human life”(Paul VI *Humanae Vitae* 1968 n. 11).

‘Every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, proposes whether as an end or as a means to render procreation impossible is intrinsically evil’(n. 2370).

The consultation that came prior to the encyclical ‘*Humanae Vitae*’ is interesting. In his biography of Pope Paul VI, Peter Hebblethwaite reproduces a summary by Patrick and Patricia Crowley (Chicago) of a survey of 3,000 devout Catholic couples from 18 countries on the rhythm method (see page 467-468):

- Does rhythm have a bad psychological effect? Almost without exception, responses were YES.
- Does rhythm serve any useful purpose? A few say it can help develop discipline. Nobody says it fosters married love.
- Does rhythm contribute to married unity? No. Instead of love, rhythm tends to substitute tension, dissatisfaction, frustration and disunity.
- Is rhythm unnatural? Yes. The physical and psychological implications of rhythm are not understood by the male Church.

At the meeting of the Commission on 3rd June 1966, the bishops and theologians agreed with the results of the survey (see page 469):

- Is contraception intrinsically evil? No.
- Is the encyclical of Pope Pius XI *Casti Connubii* (December 1930), which spoke against artificial birth control irreformable? No.
- Is the Church in a state of doubt? Yes.
- Could the Church change its position? Yes.

The report of the Commission was leaked and published by the *National Catholic Reporter* 16th April 1967 and the *Tablet* on 22nd April.

The World Congress of the Laity 1967 (see page 503) included the following in its conclusions:

“There is a very clear feeling among Christian lay people that there is need for a clear stand by the teaching authorities of the Church which would focus on fundamental moral and spiritual values, while leaving the choice of scientific means for achieving responsible parenthood to parents acting with their Christian faith and on the basis of medical and scientific consultation”.

Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical ‘*Humanae Vitae*’ which partly responded to this request. However, it also declared artificial contraception to be intrinsically evil.

On 29th July 1974, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith gave the following reply to questions asked concerning *Humanae Vitae*:

‘In *Humanae Vitae* (n. 14) contraception is condemned as intrinsically illicit. This doctrine is an authentic expression of the Pontifical magisterium, which must be acknowledged with reverence and sincerely adhered to (LG 25). There can, however, be situations in which a couple have, in good faith, come to the erroneous conviction that in their particular case the use of contraceptives is justified. In this case, the use of contraceptives, although objectively unlawful, is subjectively excusable, on condition that the judgment of conscience is made on the basis of sufficient information and after serious reflection before God. This is traditional Catholic doctrine on personal conscience as the norm for responsible human action, and was applied to contraception by the Magisterium of various episcopates and of the Holy See itself in the decision in *The Washington Case*, 26 April 1971.’

Sins against chastity

The Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference in its pastoral letter on *Humanae Vitae* in 1974 offered the following reflection:

'It is not impossible, however, that an individual may fully accept the teaching authority of the Pope in general, may be aware of his teaching in this matter, and yet reach a position after honest study and prayer that is at variance with the papal teaching. Such a person could be without blame; he would certainly not have cut himself off from the Church; and in acting in accordance with his conscience he could be without subjective fault.'

Sins against chastity

The Catechism lists a number of ways in which we can fail to live chastely. It speaks of donation of sperm/ovum, and providing a surrogate uterus as 'gravely immoral' (n. 2376).

'Techniques involving only the married couple ... are perhaps less reprehensible, yet remain morally unacceptable. They dissociate the sexual act from the procreative act' (n. 2377).

'Pornography consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties ... It is a grave offence' (n. 2354).

'Prostitution reduces the person to an instrument of sexual pleasure ... While it is always gravely sinful to engage in prostitution, the imputability of the offence can be attenuated by destitution, blackmail, or social pressure' (n. 2355).

'Rape is the forcible violation of the sexual intimacy of another person ... It is always an intrinsically evil act' (n. 2356).

The Catechism lists also the following sins: adultery (n. 2380-2381); polygamy (n. 2387); incest (n. 2388); and sexual abuse (n. 2389).

Conclusion

We conclude this chapter with words from Dick Westley in his *Morality and its Beyond* (1984, 229-230).

'To those engaged in nonrelational, fun-and-games sex, Christians should uphold the ideal of relational, caring, and concerned sex. To those engaged in relational sex, but unable to commit themselves, Christians are to uphold the ideal of relational sex which is, in addition, committed. To those who have arrived at a sex life that is both relational and committed, the Christian community should uphold the ideal of openness to new life, whether through procreation or selfless service of others. And to those who already incarnate those ideals, we should uphold the highest Christian ideal, that of a special relationship that bespeaks the presence and fidelity of God, and that transforms human love and intimacy into a sacrament. And so, wherever people are struggling with the tremendous ambiguities of human love and intimacy, the Church should be upholding the ideal appropriate to the level they are on, and so present it as a gift that may be either freely accepted or rejected.'

‘The Church should do all this without a word about the dire consequences of rejecting so noble and good a gift. In short, the Church should be truly pastoral about it all. Threats are particularly ungracious and they transform the Christian enterprise into something akin to blackmail. This is a terrible way to go about witnessing to God in the world! An additional reason why threats are unnecessary is that life has a way of teaching the lessons of love and intimacy to those who frustrate the dynamic of relational love and relational sex. Failure to follow the built-in dynamic of those realities is bound to bring great suffering to oneself and to others. The appropriate Christian response to people in that predicament is not threats or inflicting more pain, but loving compassion as the Lord would give it – graciously. We must never lose sight of the ideal nor fail to uphold it for our world in the Lord’s name. But we must never lose sight of the fact that it is an ideal to be courageously striven for. As Christians, we are also called to deal much more compassionately with those who, for whatever reason, fail to achieve it. To do the first without the second makes us a countersign of, rather than a witness to, the Kingdom.’

