

Morality part 8

Sexual Ethics

Every society has wrestled with the topic of sexual ethics. What is the proper way to use our sexuality? What characterizes a relationship? Do relationships matter in the realm of sexuality? Even though cultures vary widely on acceptable or expected sexual norms, the same issues persist throughout cultures and the same biological problems remain. Sexuality cross sects the major parts of being human: physical, emotional, biological, and spiritual.

Before we venture into the main ethical topics related to sexuality, I need to set a foundation for the topic given the four main parts of the human person described above. Sexuality is rooted in the core of being human. As Saint Pope John Paul II tried to explain in his groundbreaking work *The Theology of the Body*, the very nature of our bodies and souls is related to sex. The most prominent way in which our bodies relate to sex is biological. Every species has an innate desire to produce offspring and “spread its seed.” This biological urge is part of the sex drive of humans. The biological component runs deeper than mere biological urges. Researchers discovered that sex forms a biochemical link between the two people engaged in sex. Most likely this is a carry over from when females wanted to ensure that their mate would help in the rearing of offspring. The biological is greatly intertwined with the mental/emotional side of sex. The biological pairing of two people in sex is felt on an emotional level causing great loss and resentment should the couple separate after the sexual act. Similarly, in many cultural settings sex outside of the norm or the unmitigated act of sex causes emotional loss in the feelings of loneliness, guilt, or shame. On a spiritual level sex is rooted in the nature of human beings as created in the divine image. As sharers in the divine image we were meant to give ourselves to each other and to receive the from each other as an extension of divine love. The intimate sharing between a man and a woman during sex emphasizes the gift we give to each other and the complementarity in the partnership.

Contraception

From the society’s perspective contraceptive use is both a moral decision and a necessary decision. Those who desire to have sex rarely desire children as the product of sex. Thus the best option in order to have sex without children is to use contraceptives. Some also argue that contraceptives are necessary for preventing over population.

Before discussing the Catholic Church’s perspective on contraceptives, I want to emphasize a few of the arguments used by society to encourage contraceptive use. The main goal in contraceptive use is reducing the number of children. Thus parents can determine how many children and how often they have them, to an extent. The second main argument is the ability to have unlimited sex. Notice the challenge with this perspective. Divorcing the commitment from the sexual act also causes rifts in the emotional, biological, and spiritual side of sex leading to a loss of self. Unmitigated sex causes only despair and emptiness as the person has continually given themselves to another without receiving anything but pleasure.

The Catholic Church and contraceptives. Contraceptives break the two ends of sex leading to a degradation of the sexual act. The sexual act becomes a source of pleasure and union not one of procreation. Those who challenge the Church's perspective on contraceptive use argue that the Church encourages couples to have many children as possible, which is unethical. The Church counters this argument with the nature of a woman's menstrual cycle. Since the menstruation cycle of a woman has periods of infertility, then the very nature of a woman's cycle lends to having sex without becoming pregnant. The data over contraceptive use would change if women were perpetually fertile. How exactly it would change is up for debate.

Contraceptives are largely misleading by the media. Most assume that the use of contraceptives will prevent pregnancies and allow for sex on demand. These ideas are wrong. The birth control pill requires women to take the pill everyday, at the same time everyday, unless she wishes to get pregnant. Most of the contraceptives targeted towards women have serious side effects. The pill causes depression, anxiety, and changes to the chemical nature of her body. Other forms of female contraceptive have increased chances of internal bleeding, serious health effects, and major lifestyle changes. Similarly, condoms are known to break or men wear the wrong size. Although condom companies claim a 99% effectiveness, factoring in the chances of them breaking, being worn wrong, or slipping off leads to a 70% effectiveness at preventing pregnancies. A new form of male contraceptive is now available which is a pill that prevents the motility of sperm. Contraceptives for men have always been a challenge. It only takes one sperm to fertilize an egg, so it seems easier to prevent the fertilization of the egg than stop the sperm. The greatest hindrance for male contraceptives are men who also far more unlikely to choose contraceptives than women. A final form of contraceptives are vasectomies and hysterectomies. These procedures are irreversible surgical means of contraceptives.

Abortion

Closely linked with contraceptive use is abortion. The main goal of an abortion is to kill the child conceived when the parents are not willing to have children. From a social perspective, abortions give freedom to women. Women are no longer forced to have the children they conceived, and men are not required to stay with that woman or provide child support. Similarly, access to abortion allows women to have normal lives like men and not feel required to change their life trajectory because of a pregnancy. The main proponents of abortion focus on the rights of women. They argue that women have a right to choose what happens with their bodies.

The Catholic Church teaches that abortion is the killing of an innocent life. Abortions are the medically induced or surgical means by which a pregnancy is terminated and the child in-utero dies. Most people collapse the effects of abortion to the death of the child. When a fertilized egg is implanted in the uterus, a biochemical bond is formed between the mother and the child. When this bond is ruptured due to miscarriage or abortion, the effects can be detrimental to the mother leading to depression, anxiety, and a series of other mental health effects. The effects of abortion are not simply the death of the child but also the health of the mother.

The main fight between advocates of abortion and those against it center around the right of a woman to choose what happens to her body. The Church agrees that women have a right to

choose what happens with their bodies just like men do. This choice presupposes that our choices are good and moral. When the choice becomes immoral, although we still have the right to choose, we are still held accountable for our actions. Thus the consequence of sex is children and a biochemical bond. We cannot dismiss the consequence or kill an innocent life because we don't like the consequences.

Fornication

So much of the debate regarding sexuality focuses on the topic, or similar topic, of fornication. How often are we allowed to have sex and with whom? Some claim that sex is at an all-time high with people having sex more commonly today than in any other era. I would like to see their data. The Romans were one of the first civilizations to encourage and promote widescale contraceptive use. The plant they used for a contraceptive was so commonly used that the plant is now extinct. The Middle Ages also saw wide spread contraceptive use and many forms of prostitution. Even the United States has much higher levels of prostitution 50 years ago than today. Regardless of which era was the most sexually active, the same moral issues apply.

One of the most prominent ethical issues of our time is fornication and adultery. More marriages have been ruined by a breaking of a marriage commitment than most other forms of marital problems. The issues involved with fornication and adultery showcase the truths the Church teaches. The commitment of marriage solidifies the social contract that this person is the only one I will be intimate with. Thus the biochemical bond strengthens this commitment, the two feel emotionally bonded, and the marriage contract has meaning. Fornication and adultery stem from the same issue discussed in the topic of contraceptives and the following topic: I want to have sex when I want it with whom I want it.

Sexually explicit content in media

Although not new to the modern era, sexually explicit material drives the debate of sexual ethics. If people are constantly inundated with sexually explicit material that forms their concept of sex and their ethics regarding sexual behavior, the only outcome is an overly sexualized world that takes sex out of its proper context. The media shows images and movies in which sex has no consequence, relationships are proved and solidified through sex, and the greatest of human experiences is sex leading people to believe these fantasies and live their lives in accord to them.

Pornography is the best example of sexually explicit material that drives the mindset of especially the youth. The superabundance of sexually explicit material on the internet makes it nearly impossible for anyone using technology to avoid the images and movies further heightening the pornography industry's hold on us. These pornographic materials not only showcase sexually explicit material, but showcase sex in situations which are not healthy and actions that are harmful. They also traffic people, mainly youth, to perpetuate their industry.

With all this in mind, I think we need to hear the Church's teaching on the issues of sex and sexuality. Sex is the intimate gift of a committed person to another for the strengthening of their union and the procreation of offspring. This intimate sharing is mirrored in the biological nature of the human person whereby the man gives of himself for the good of his wife and the wife

gives of herself for the good of her husband. This sharing and mutual care heightens the experience of sex and gives it its proper context and beauty. Anything outside of this intimate sharing between a committed couple deprives the sexual act of its beauty and dignity.

Homosexuality

As an introduction to this topic, I will start with our common ground. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is very clear on a few of the major issues surrounding homosexuality. The first teaching reminds us of the dignity of the human person. No person is to be prejudiced or harassed because of racial, cultural, or sexual differences. Meaning that we are not to discriminate against people who have same-sex tendencies. The other point the Catechism makes is a silent point. We do not claim to know of the origins of homosexual tendencies nor do we propose them. Knowing the origins leads to judgementalism and a “fix it” mentality, which are detrimental to the human person. Lastly, the Church clearly states the need to meet those who experience same-sex attraction with love and understand that their struggles are real and pose significant challenges.

Our differences: the society pushes an agenda that homosexuality should not only be accepted but celebrated. After years of oppression, the goal is to liberate those who experience these tendencies and allow them to live their lives as they see fit. Thus we must not only accept them, but morally accept their sexual actions. The Catholic Church accepts those who same-sex attraction as people created in the image and likeness of God and tasked with fulfilling his mission, but that does not extend to actions. The Church teaches that sexual actions outside the context of marriage between a man and a woman are sinful and against the natural order of the human being. Therefore people of the same sex can love and support each other but sexual actions are immoral.

The reasoning for the claim that sexual actions between two people of the same sex are immoral stem from the definition of sex and its moral context. As stated above, sex finds its greatest and most complete expression when it is coupled with the union of the spouses and the procreation of children. Homosexual couples cannot procreate neither can they give and receive in the same way as a heterosexual couple. Therefore homosexual sexual actions are immoral since it separates the two integral parts of the sexual act.