

TOWARD A HEALTHY SEXUALITY

For centuries, the prevailing theological teaching attributed no more than a functional character to human sexuality. Corresponding to the sexuality of the animal world, it was evaluated chiefly or entirely on the point of view of procreation.

On the basis of an anthropology, or study of man, that is concerned with the totality of the person, new points of view for the understanding and evaluation of sexuality present themselves nowadays, leading to changes of emphasis and additional insights and making the current teaching more complete.

Sexuality must be numbered among the essential determining factors of the human being, whether as man or woman, and affects the behavior of the individual even in his or her mental attitudes and processes.

Statements in revelation

The statements of the Old Testament have preserved humankind's primal consciousness of one's own human nature and his or her created existence as man and woman. This sexual differentiation has been determined by the Creator and expresses part of what is contained in the assertion that humans are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

The entire person is created good. Therefore, sexuality as a gift from God is entirely good. The relationship of man and woman united in love reflects something of God's love in its free giving of itself and of the unity within the Divine Trinity. Man and woman are to help complete each other through communication with the person who is the partner of the opposite sex.

The similarity of sound in the Hebrew terms *ish* (man) and *isha* (woman) could be seen as already pointing to the fact that in this "partnership" there is fundamentally no subordination and superiority. The "two-in-one-flesh" connotes more than a passing sexual relationship of man and woman. It expresses the total unity which both form, breaking through even the bonds of blood and family (Genesis 2:22-24)

The total surrender in the sexual act is termed in the Old Testament "knowing". In this profound interpersonal meeting, both parties reveal themselves in their deepest personal sphere of intimacy; irreversible knowledge and self-revelation come about. But beyond this, human beings receive from God in principle the responsibility of the transmission of life (Genesis 1:28).

The New Testament takes up a natural attitude to sexuality and nowhere connects it with the ritual laws of purification of the Old Testament. Jesus replaces it with a fundamentally new concept of purity -- right intentions come from the heart (Mark 7:1-23). Through the proclamation of the Kingdom of God now beginning in Jesus, however, the future and final condition of human beings is emphasized to such an extent that sexuality and its fulfillment in marriage no longer appears as the only normal or universal way for human beings in this world; the way of virginity, or consecrated single-hood, appears beside it as a genuine possibility (Luke

20:27-36). Also, in the relationship to Christ, the difference of the sexes becomes a matter of indifference, of like value (Galatians 3:26-28).

Anthropological analysis

The sexual difference between man and woman constitutes an essential part of human nature. It finds expression in the psychological make-up of the person and may not, therefore, be regarded in isolation or in a merely functional way. Everybody lives in the sexual situation, male or female.

Sexuality is not something added on to a neutral human nature but determines the person as man or as woman. For the development of human personality, sexuality is of considerable significance. Long before marriage, one comes into the field of force of one's sexuality and is molded by it. How one's body image is developed, and the presence or absence of adequate role models, have an important influence in this area. Thus, sexuality must be dealt with not only in relation to marriage; it has a place in all anthropology.

Only in the differentiation between man and woman can the human potentialities and roles be realized to the full. In sexuality, the person experiences his or her insufficiency and dependence on the "You" of the other--and that, first of all, on the human plane: on the partner of the opposite sex.

However, sexuality, even when finding its realization and fulfillment in marriage, is still lacking an ultimate fulfillment. It points beyond to something outside of the human life-partner. A person achieves the deepest fulfillment only in the meeting of the "You" of God. This Christian understanding of the person as one "called" by God and with a "calling" to fulfillment with God makes possible for the Christian a deeper view and evaluation of human factors and permits him or her to come to a certain understanding of the transcendental relationship of the person through the lack of entire fulfillment in human sexuality.

The actual primary sexual relationships, if they are to correspond to the nature and dignity of the person, must always be contained in the framework of *eros*, in the affection and love that is directed to the entire person of the other, and accepts the other not merely for the sake of one's own need but also loves him or her as a person. But, this acceptance will correspond fully to the dignity of the other person only if it takes place not merely ego-centrally in a self-gratifying self-love, but is joined to a love that gives itself, is prepared to make sacrifices, and is directed to the "You" of the other, a love that is ultimately a weak reflection of that love of God for humans that entirely offers and gives itself.

Where sex and *eros* become separated from the personal, and sexual activity is no longer the means and expression of personal attachment but sought for its own sake, it loses its natural meaning and legitimacy. This is what happens with pornography, pedophilia and ephebophilia, incest, homosexual activity, and all other forms of sexual abuse, with gratuitous recreational sex that use the other merely as an object for self-gratification even if mutually sought, with the impersonal use of sex in advertising, and with the casual portrayal of the sexual act outside of a

meaningful context such as is evidenced in modern books, TV, movies, and plays. Sexuality stands entirely at the service of the personal and must not be separated from it.

Total sexual self-giving leads to the giving and receiving of a knowledge and completion that affects the entire person. Where such knowledge and completion take place, those involved cannot part as though nothing has happened. But neither can they enter the total life in common that makes it possible unless the irrevocable will to share their entire life is present, expressed in a binding way, and accepted by both sides. Thus, the indispensable prerequisite for the legitimacy of the sexual act is the mutual and publicly proclaimed will to a binding acceptance that is total and permanent. Only in validly contracted monogamy is the full meaning of such a self-giving secured.

When sex breaks away from the totality of human love in the attempt to be autonomous and a law unto itself, the person experiences "the effects of sin", the dissolution of the inner harmony. Where sex is separated from the personal, it begins a vagabond life. There appears, then, no reason why the "partner" should not be changed at will. All promiscuity, whether homosexual or heterosexual, indeed all sexual chaos is a sign of a personal crisis on the part of the one concerned.

Formation of sexuality: sublimation

The enormous excess of energy contained in the sexual drive and the plasticity of human sexuality indicate that a person has the capacity of putting these powers at the service of further human purposes, of sublimating them. This redirection does not imply a repression of the sexual impulse but rather a positive reapplication of them for other spheres of fulfillment in life.

Sigmund Freud describes sublimation as a change in the goal as well as in the object of the drive so that what "was originally a sexual drive finds a fulfillment that is no longer sexual but has a social or higher ethical value." Freud sees sublimation as the de-sexualization and also the socialization of this drive. Precisely the freely chosen and inwardly accepted sacrifice of the actualization of sexuality, when it represents a genuine acceptance and re-formation of these drives, permits the release of great energies of mind and body that can express themselves in significant achievements of a charitable, religious, or cultural nature.

Sublimation is, therefore, the reorganization of sexual drives into a more widely inclusive human attitude. It presents itself for everyone as a task and prerequisite for the maturing of personality as also for the success of all interpersonal communication. Where no genuine formation of this drive takes place, but only a containment of repression, the road to personal maturity remains blocked. This can lead ultimately to false attitudes, reactive over-compensations, or perversions.

Consequences for moral behavior

The right evaluation of sexuality demands, first of all, a firm acceptance of one's own sexuality and its development as well as knowledge of the power and inner dynamics of sex and *eros*, of the dangers of false repressions, and of the place of true sublimation of these powers. Hence, the encounter with the partner of the opposite sex cannot be treated casually.

In correct companionship, which is also incumbent on the unmarried, important forces in both man and woman are released which help toward an integration of the entire sexual faculty and preserve from dangerous repressions without, however, leading to inappropriate sexual activity. Since all sexual relationships connote a mutual personal self-revelation and a certain surrender, they should take place only in full knowledge of this responsibility, that is, in remote or proximate preparation for marriage.

The right attitude to sexuality forbids all prudery and all pornographic and gratuitous exhibitionism; it calls for an acceptance of the sense of modesty. Stress should be laid especially on the total human implication of modesty, namely to protect the intimate personal sphere from unjustified intrusion. Yet, the limits of what is included in detail under modesty cannot be determined merely on Christian or religious grounds. It depends very considerably as well on the particular cultural tradition and on what precisely is likely to endanger the intimate sphere of the person.

Pope John Paul II has written, "sexual modesty cannot then in any simple way be identified with the use of clothing, nor shamelessness with the absence of clothing and total or partial nakedness. There are circumstances in which nakedness is not immodest. Nakedness as such is not to be equated with physical shamelessness. Immodesty is present only when nakedness plays a negative role with regard to the value of the person, when its aim is to arouse sexual desire, as a result of which the person is put in the position of an object for enjoyment. The human body is not in itself shameful, nor for the same reasons are sensual reactions, and human sexuality in general. Shamelessness (just like shame and modesty) is a function of the interior of a person." - "Love and Responsibility", 1981

Thus, nakedness cannot be condemned in principle. This is evidenced by the fact that nudity has always been accepted and venerated in art, even by the Church. A naked body is simply a naked body, the viewing of which, even in a family context, does not in itself lead to inappropriate sexual behavior among siblings. In fact, a casual acceptance of nakedness as nothing to be ashamed of can lead in children, with proper parental teaching and guidance, to a psychologically and spiritually healthy body image and understanding of one's own and another's body as an integral part of the total person, created as good by the Creator and thus to be given due respect, honor, and dignity. In this way, parents can enhance the development of a healthy sexuality in their children and eliminate problems usually associated with an unhealthy curiosity about the body of a person of the opposite sex.

Sexuality possesses for personal human development and for integration into human sexuality such a decisive significance that its theoretical or practical rejection in principle entails a serious disorder to be reckoned as an objectively serious offense against the structure of human existence and action. With regard to the question of guilt, one must also take into consideration the modern knowledge coming from depth psychology. The judgment of individual failures may not, therefore, be made without taking into consideration the total basic attitude and intention of the person concerned.

Both repression of natural desire for pleasure as well as a self-centered, autoerotic acceptance of sex are to be rejected as false forms of behavior. The same is true of pre-marital sexual intercourse: it could create a disturbance in the psychic balance of the future husband and wife. Pre-marital continence will, therefore, retain an importance that is not to be underestimated for the maturing of personality and preparation for marriage. A change in the attitude of the Church so as to favor pre-marital intercourse is not to be expected; this would essentially mar the concept of marriage. The step to promiscuity would then be a minor one. Because of the eminently super-individual significance, not only the Church but also all cultures to varying degrees have been concerned to set up some norms for sexual behavior.

--Johannes Gruendel, edited by Patrick J. Hession