



Fifth Sunday of Easter May 6, 2012 B

CHURCH TEACHING ON HOMOSEXUALITY AND ON PREMARITAL SEX

An important distinction when it comes to the issue of homosexuality

Media people like Piers Morgan and Chris Wallace would sometimes throw the question: “*Is it a sin to be gay?*” Politicians such as Rick Santorum, a devout Catholic, and church leaders like Joel Osteen, televangelist and pastor, would, predictably, respond in the affirmative. Last Sunday, when Chris Wallace asked Joel Osteen if he believed it was a sin to be gay, the answer was yes indeed, he believed it was.

I am amazed and irritated by how such newscasters, politicians, and church leaders blur the important distinction between homosexual *orientation* and homosexual acting out.

I wonder if Senator Santorum or Pastor Osteen would respond in the same manner if asked whether it is a sin for someone to have a homosexual orientation. I hope not. Do we ourselves believe that it is a sin to be gay or that being gay is a sexual identity that people intentionally *choose*? I wonder how many people fail to make a distinction between orientation and acting out sexually when it comes to this issue.

Catholic teaching on homosexuality

In my articles on the *Catechism*, I have summarized the Church teaching on this issue (see *Article 24*).

Homosexuality (C 2357-2359, USC p.407). Homosexuality is the term used to refer to men and women who have an exclusive, enduring and predominant sexual attraction towards persons of the same sex.

In its three paragraphs on homosexuality, the *Catechism* (paras. 257-259) makes the following five points:

- The genesis of same-sex attraction remains largely unexplained.
- Persons with same-sex attraction do not choose their condition or sexual orientation.

- Persons with same-sex attraction must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Any form of unjust discrimination towards persons with same-sex attraction is morally wrong and should be condemned.

- Sexual relations between homosexual persons is morally wrong. Why? Catholic newspaper columnist and author, Amy Wellborn, writes: “*To put it rather bluntly, the parts (i.e., our genital parts) were made to fit and fit for a purpose...namely, the creation of a family in the physical and spiritual sense. The purpose of genital sex is to create communion between a man and a woman (more specifically between a husband and a wife) and to procreate new life. Homosexual acts can never fulfill the twofold design of the Creator for genital sex.*” In stating that homosexual acts are morally wrong, we are not saying that homosexual desires are morally wrong, unless of course we deliberately will them.

- “Homosexual persons are called to chastity” (C 2359). Just as single persons with a heterosexual orientation are called to live a chaste life, so are persons with a homosexual orientation. Of course, a major difference is that marriage is always an option for the single person with a heterosexual orientation. Persons with same-sex attraction can and should cultivate warm, loving and caring friendships with persons of the same and opposite sex. Such friendships are usually tremendously life-giving.

Needless to say, this is a very difficult issue. In any church family today, there are some gay couples who love each other very much and do seek to live good lives.

While we should be very clear on Church teaching in this area, we should leave it to God to judge people and the way they choose to live their lives. I love the saying: “My job is to love people. God’s job is to judge them.”

Church teaching on pre-marital sex

In the same article on sexuality issues, I have written the following on the issue of premarital sex.

Even though we live in a sex-saturated society, hardly anyone spends time *thinking* about the *meaning* and *purpose* of sex. How often do we ask: What did *God*

have in mind when he implanted a sexual faculty in the human person?

According to Catholic Tradition, God had a twofold purpose, namely, the continuation of the human race (*procreative dimension* of sex) and the strengthening of the love bond between the man and the woman—husband and wife—so that they could raise their child/children in a loving environment (*unitive dimension*). We might add that in the language of love, genital sex is the way husband and wife say to each other: “I give myself totally to you. I am totally committed to our relationship and if God blesses us with a child, I will be here to love and raise that child with you.” The Church believes that the best context for that kind of relationship is marriage.

As much as they might like to do so, no couple can rewrite the meaning of sexual intercourse. It is tied to *committed love*—the love that creates new *life*. To let on that sexual intercourse is something else is to dispute the whole design of our Creator. When our Church speaks about “openness to new life,” it is directed only to couples for whom this is a biological possibility.

Now that we are clear about the Creator’s design for sex, let us look at some of the ways that people can fail to live out God’s purpose.

Dating couples. Many dating couples engage in premarital sex as a way to express their love and to see if they are sexually compatible. Others move in together because they believe it is a smart way to prepare for marriage. What can be said about these two modern-day aspects of dating?

It is normal for dating couples who are growing in their love for each other to want to express their love in a physical way. But when dating couples become sexually active with each other, they are usually allowing their bodies to say much more than their hearts are ready to give.

For a Christian couple, the dating period is a time to discern if God is calling them to the sacred vocation of marriage. It is a time to see if a person would make a lifelong partner, and what qualities, gifts, values and goals he/she would bring to the marriage table. It is a time to see how mature and good-hearted that person is, how he/she would handle pressure and difficult situations, how well he/she communicates and deals with conflict.

However wonderful sex might be during this period of the relationship, it could get in the way of two people making a good decision about their readiness for

marriage. One woman who had lived with her fiancé during the dating period decided to move out. She said: “I had come to the point where my judgment of the relationship was based on sex. When sex was on and good, I judged the relationship to be good and vice versa. So I moved out and stopped having sex to see how the relationship would be without the sex.” Often the sexual dimension of a dating relationship makes it very difficult for a couple to break up even though there are very good reasons for doing so.

Cohabitation. As stated above, many couples today think that cohabitation is a good way to prepare for marriage. But all the research shows that couples who cohabit prior to marriage have a much higher rate of divorce than couples who choose to go the traditional route. Perhaps there is truth to the old saying: “Easy to move in, easy to move out.” In addition, cohabitation can be a source of scandal to younger siblings and to friends. It also weakens the respect that we, as a Christian community, should have for the sacred institution of marriage.

The gospel ideal of saving sex for marriage is not an easy one and will make little or no sense to couples who do not have a personal relationship with Christ and are not serious about following his gospel message in this area.

Living the Church’s message of “saving sex for marriage” is very contrary to the world message of “safe sex.” But as we ponder the consequences of the world’s way—AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, increase in the number of abortions, unwed pregnancies, and divorce—we begin to see the wisdom of the Church’s message in this area of Christian life.

Impact of childhood experiences on sexual formation

If we were raised in an environment in which we received positive and wholesome messages regarding our sexuality, our bodies, and our male and female relationships, we are indeed very blessed. We are also blessed if during our teenage years, sexuality issues were openly discussed and talked about, and if we had mature adults in our lives to help us to negotiate the challenges of growing through our adolescent years.

On the other hand, if we grew up in an environment in which there was “great silence” around sexuality issues, or in which sex was always spoken about with overtones of warning and danger, or if we were told by parents or church teachers that all sexual feelings were wrong and sinful, we would most likely have picked up

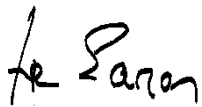
lots of negative messages about sex and sexuality. Worse still, if the key relationships in our childhood formation were dysfunctional or abusive, we are, most likely, deeply wounded in this important area of our lives.

Such woundedness would have made it very difficult for us to feel positive about our bodies and sexuality. It would also have wounded our capacity to enter into healthy relationships with other men and women. Furthermore, if we were raised in a home or church environment in which we were told that all sexual thoughts and feelings were sinful and that the *worst* sins were the sins against the sixth and ninth commandments, our ability to relate to a loving God would also have been negatively impacted. As a result of negative experiences and messages during childhood, many of us may have grown into adulthood with a certain amount of confusion, guilt, shame and awkwardness in the area of our sexuality.

Reflection questions

1. How would you rate the formation you received at home and at church on sexuality issues? How could it have been more helpful? When it comes to relationships, what are some things men can learn from women, and vice versa?
2. Women: What is one thing you would want men to remember when relating to women?
3. Men: What is one thing you would want women to remember when relating to men?

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Le' Sarah". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.