

SEX EDUCATION AND MORAL VALUES

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Nothing in this article will be intelligible unless we are agreed upon a general approach to a very special problem. In specific terms, this means interpreting sex in the light of a total consideration of man and his faculties; seeing sex education as a part of the total educational orientation of the human person; and viewing sexual morality as an integral part of a total system of moral values. My personal approach, of course, will reflect my own philosophical and theological convictions regarding God, man, and human destiny. One should at least expect that this total approach will be consistent, and indeed logical as well as theological. Because of the necessity of brevity, many of the principles invoked will be summary, and assumed rather than demonstrated. But they should all be amenable to philosophical and theological demonstration, however, were time, and in this case, space available.*

In beginning any discussion of sex education and moral values, one might begin with a brief historical background of where we stand today. One might almost say that the present preoccupation with sex, without any particular or sound reference to moral values, is a direct result of an earlier Victorian attitude that surrounded the subject with too much, or rather a very faulty moral preoccupation. As happens in most historical situations, we have developed by extremes, have experienced the pendulum at the widest points of its sweep, and are now hoping to veer towards the center. Fortunately, virtue, and often truth, is found between the extreme positions.

* For a fuller treatment of sex education from the Catholic point of view, cf. J. Buckley, Christian Design for Sex, Fides Publishers, Chicago, 1952.

The Victorian age surrounded sex with a conspiracy of silence. The best sex education then was no sex education. In Protestant America, the legacy of a false moral standard regarding sex might be termed Puritanism. Among Catholics in America, the root error was Jansenism. Both were imports that came from Europe with the immigrants. Both endured for too long a time. Both regarded sex with great suspicion, in some ways identifying it with concupiscence and sin. Under this scheme of moral values, it was impossible to integrate sex into any healthy philosophy of life. Sex became shameful instead of sacred; it was something divorced from any reasonable consideration of man's personal or social development. Sex was simply an outcast and an outlaw, the enemy of good people, especially women, something that was simply put up with as a real, but unmentionable necessity of human life, and fallen perverted man.

We have all read of the sad consequences of this Victorian approach to sex. Silence spawned unhealthy curiosity in the young. Sexual morality was negative, based on fear or falsely alleged and horrible consequences which the adventurous sought to evade and the scientific to debunk. The false conscience in matters of sex gave us unhealthy scrupulosity, the false guilt complex, or ultimate revulsion against this irrational, unfounded, and untrue view of life and the realities of sex.

Perhaps the most unhealthy and saddest consequence of the Victorian point of view was that it eventually led us into the opposite extreme which we are experiencing today, when sex in many quarters has become the great reality, not in any total context of human life and values, but per se, as an end in itself, as material and animal rather than human reality, as independently

distilled pleasure rather than pleasure accompanying the good life. Today, sex is the best advertising prop, the substance of our newsstand publications, the sensation behind the headline, the substitute for plot and style, even in detective stories, the indispensable ingredient of Broadway and Hollywood productions, the elan vitale of what Sorokin has called a sensualist culture. From too moral, or falsely moral, we have become amoral about sex. And because a sensualist culture plays down the spiritual element in man, physiology and technique, the "facts of life" and "the art of love" are looked upon as the sum and substance of sex education divorced from moral values. We have today a superficial philosophy of sex without the context of a total philosophy of man, his destiny and his values. In this modern context, the empirical search for "what is" (the Kinsey report) replaces the normative study of "what ought to be."

You may take your pick as to which is worse, the falsely moral Victorian, or the amoral modern point of view. In any case, both are inadequate if man is spirit as well as matter, if there is an objective moral order based upon his nature and destiny, if his total personality is superior to individual aspects of it.

Fortunately, there has been a recent development towards a more integrated pattern of sex education and understanding, not based upon Puritanical and Jansenistic negativism, or a sensualistic deification of sex. Responsible religious leaders and educators, and competent professional persons have condemned the excesses of a naturalistic sex education divorced from all moral

values, and have expressed the necessity of a sounder approach by all involved in the educative process. They have recognized sex as an integral factor in the human personality, in individual and social well being, and in establishing a harmonious relationship with God and our fellowmen in society. Groups such as the American Social Hygiene Association, the American Institute of Family Relations, youth groups such as the YMCA, YWCA, and the CYO, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and even the Armed Services through the Chaplains' Corps, have been responsible for the growing interpretation of sex in terms of its fulfillment in happy marriage and family life, rather than in the exploitation of sex for personal pleasure. This integrated orientation of sex education is well expressed in the statement of the American Catholic Bishops, The Child: Citizen of Two Worlds. (November 1950):

"Fathers and mothers have a natural competence to instruct their children with regard to sex. False modesty should not deter them from doing their duty in this regard. Sex is one of God's endowments. It should not be ignored or treated as something bad. If sex instruction is properly carried on in the home, a deep reverence will be developed in the child, and he will be spared the shameful inferences which he often makes when he is left to himself to find out about sex . . . To be of benefit such instruction must be far broader than the imparting of information . . . Sex is more than a biological function. It is bound up with the sacredness

and the uniqueness of the human personality. It can be fully and properly appreciated only within a religious and moral context. If treated otherwise, the child will see it apart from the controlling purpose of his life, which is service to God."

Is there a system of objective moral values in which sex can find true meaning? I believe that there is such a system and would like to summarize its salient postulates, although as mentioned above, the scope of this article does not permit me to demonstrate each postulate. Consequently, I must ask indulgence for my assumptions in this instance, even though I do not personally assume these postulates philosophically or theologically.

Morality might be defined as a relationship between a standard of right conduct and the total human act, which is the product of an intelligent human mind and a free human will. We must postulate the existence of God in relation to His Creation, in this instance, man, to establish an absolutely and universally valid norm or standard of right conduct. The nature of God is the ultimate entitative basis for an absolute moral order. The Eternal Law of God is a product of divine intelligence and will, ordering all things, as created reflections of the divine perfection, to their proper end or fulfillment, according to the nature of each.

The Eternal Law does not imply morality in relation to its application to inanimate nature, or in relation to plants and animals. Only in its application to humanity is morality involved, because here we encounter

intelligence and free will, knowledge of the law and conscious free acceptance or rejection of it. The eternal law as known by reason alone has traditionally been termed the Natural law of mankind. As known by divine revelation and accepted on faith in God's Word it has variously been termed the Divine law, the Ten Commandments, or Christian morality.

Thus while the Divine Nature is said to be the source of an absolute and unchanging moral order, human nature in its unchanging reality and totality may be called the proximate entitative basis of the moral order. Limiting our considerations for the moment to Natural law, the moral order may be said to be formally and intrinsically constituted by the "ought" judgment of human reason, considering human nature in its 1) intrinsic constitution, 2) its essential relationships, and 3) its ultimate end or destiny, or perfection, if you will.

Considering the intrinsic constitution of human nature, we see ourselves to be a spiritual-material composite whose powers tend towards action and the perfection of human personality. In relationship to each other, the spiritual powers are superior to the physical powers, so that when in conflict, the higher powers should be preferred to the lower, whose use should be directed by man's higher faculties of mind and will. In turn, this total hierarchy of powers in man should be directed to the total perfection of the human personality, for man is neither pure spirit nor pure animal, but human. Philosophy or life or character might be seen as the consistent ordering of the various goods that man's powers seek, according to a proper scale of values. For example, we seek "useful" goods, such as money, as a means to higher goods; "pleasurable" goods

as a stimulation towards higher human goals, for to seek pleasure exclusively and for itself is irrational. Even intrinsically higher goods, such as wisdom and virtue, which perfect the higher powers of mind and will, are sought in relation to the total good and perfection of the whole man, the integral personality. Obviously, the use of sexual powers can be integrated into this scheme of morality, and several conclusions will immediately follow: sex is not the highest of human powers, not an end in itself, not simply pleasure for its own sake, not unrelated to the higher directive power of mind and will, not to be perverted from its intrinsic purposefulness, and so forth. Chastity is the traditional name for the virtue by which man regulates the use of sex.

Considering the nature of man in its essential relationships, man is related to God as creature to Creator, with the moral obligation of consciously establishing in his own life, through the intelligent use of his freedom, that order which will make for human perfection, the use of all human faculties for the development and perfection of the total human personality. Phrased in the terms of divine revelation: "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." The moral order indicates justice and charity in man's relationship to his fellow men who are equal under God and endowed with the same inalienable rights that are required for their free achievement of human perfection. In the relation of human nature to material nature, man is to be the master by reason of his spiritual endowments, and to use material things in a reasonable manner, again related to an over-all hierarchy of values.

Lastly, considering the end or perfection of human nature, this has been best described as happiness, or even peace of soul which might be described as the tranquillity of order.

It should be added here that the moral imperatives of natural, and divinely revealed law are clarified by human and ecclesiastical laws, and are ultimately enjoined on us by the subjective judgment of our conscience. Moreover, the natural system of a moral order is believed by faith in God's Word to have been elevated to an altogether higher supernatural order, in which man is endowed with divine life in Baptism to become a child of God and a temple of the Holy Spirit, destined to enjoy ultimately not merely human happiness, but the happiness of God in the Beatific Vision, and that he is aided in this quest not by human faculties alone, but by the continual grace and presence of God. It is not unrelated to our subject that divine revelation has enunciated as one of the beatitudes: "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God."

We can begin to see at this point how this total philosophy of life and of a moral order can provide a meaningful framework for sex education, as a part of a total education for life. First, there is a hierarchy of values which gives proportion and meaning to the contribution of sex to the total human perfection which a person must consciously, freely, and responsibly seek throughout life. By possessing reproductive faculties, men and women are privileged to cooperate with God in the production of life. The purposefulness of these faculties should be respected. There is pleasure connected with the use of sexual faculties, but they are not intended for selfish pleasure.

Through sexual differences, men and women are attracted to each other, and learn of the capabilities they have to express love, sympathy, understanding, and to attain in the state of marriage a mutual self-perfection. Marriage is also a way of life, and the ordered use of sex in marriage can become a way of perfection, yes, even a way of spiritual perfection when marriage is seen in the supernatural order as a sacrament, a visible sign of invisible grace.

There is nothing Puritanical or Jansenistic in this plan which conceives man and wife as being "together in Christ," in an indissoluble and fruitful union. Nothing shameful can be seen in the sexual differences which God has designed so that man and woman may complement each other. Nothing is unmentionable about the sexual drive that God designed to bring man and woman together for the propagation of the human race and the personal perfection of each other. Nor need we disguise the pleasure that God designed to ease the burdens and responsibilities of married life, and to highlight the perfect communication of marital love. There is only evil in this scheme when the pleasure of sex is sought for itself alone, and separated from the responsibility of sex. Outside of marriage, playing at love with another, or with ones own self, are examples of seeking sexual pleasure without the responsibility attached to sex in God's plan. Within marriage, seeking only the pleasure of the state with deliberate and artificial frustration of the procreative purposefulness of the sexual act is another example of divorcing responsibility from pleasure.

If what we have said thus far is true, any serious sex education is

ultimately education for marriage. To relate sex education to moral values necessarily involves a moral consideration of the marital act. This is the normal expression of the reproductive drive, and in marriage is not only good, but sacred. The marital act has a double function in marriage: it is by nature reproductive, but this actual effect is outside the will of man, and it is also a divinely ordained and specially unifying act of love between husband and wife, and this, in a happy marriage, is always within the will of man and wife. It seems important for a healthy and wholesome approach to sex education that while the primary and intrinsic function be recognized, the secondary and no less essential function of manifesting mutual love be presented to young people as a purposeful goal for sex.

Sexual compatibility is treated at great length in marriage manuals, but too often the young are led to believe that this is largely a question of erotic techniques that must be observed with clinical precision. Much more might be accomplished if against the whole background of moral values, a young person might view pre-marital chastity as a conquering and constructive force, that views the giving of oneself through sexual union as a most precious gift, expressive of personal integrity, and of the ultimate choice of another person as the life partner with whom one might well hope to achieve perfection and fulfillment in life. Courtship then becomes a method of intelligent and loving choice, and marriage is the consummation of that choice. God has given love its own perfect means of communication, not based on selfishness, but on the complete gift of self to another. This gift, like the love of God is creative, not always, but in God's good time. And the

act of love is especially sacred, because it calls ultimately for a tripartite act of creation: man and wife preparing the cells for the body in love, and God awaiting their action to create an immortal soul. The child that results from this highest cooperation of man and wife and God on the natural level is in a true sense the incarnation of marital love, and the beginning of a family which is the basis of all human society.

This view of sex in the total context of human perfection and development is far more rich than the usual physical details of birds and bees that may strike far below the idealism of youth, and do indeed leave young people to wonder why sex in humans should not be casual as it is in animals. Whether sex instruction be imparted in the family, the church, or the school, it would seem that these broader moral values should always be respected if youngsters are to learn that sex is a human reality, not just biological, or physiological. We should never underestimate the human quality of everything that human persons do. Sex does involve a physical act. So does speech. But in humans speech is more than the creation of physical sound waves. The waves are there, but they are freighted with spiritual content, thought, that communicates love, trust, inspiration to another human. So too with sex. It is physical, but with proper moral and human orientation, it speaks its own language of completion, love, understanding, tenderness, while it is intrinsically creative. Sex then is no plaything. It is not sordid, or shameful, or evil unless it be viewed irresponsibly and used irresponsibly. In the context of God's plan for human participation in creation, in the total social perfection of men and women in this world, in the loving and responsible giving

of self for the good of another, sex is another of those marvelous realities of human life for which we should thank God, and through which we should serve Him.