

The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality

by Fr. Paul Quay, S.J.

Questions for Chapter 1
Christ: the Image and Likeness of God

The Uniqueness of Human Sexual Behavior and its Social Import

1. Even to the Jews, well versed in Scripture, Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage was shocking. In teaching this, what norm did Jesus set up for our behavior?
2. What characteristics of the Christian way of life became a touchstone as a means for pagans to identify Christians?
3. How did the martyrs themselves regard the practice of chastity? Of what was it a sign?
4. From the earliest days the teachings of the Church on sexual morality has been very firm. What happened as a result of this firmness?
5. The error of thinking that sexual behavior is only a private matter has led to erroneous thinking about the relationship between God and His Church, and between the individual and society. The author gives several results of this "privatizing" of sexual conduct. List these results—for the Church and for society.
6. What does the author say is necessary in order for our witness as Christians to ring true?

What We are Looking For

7. The author gives several reasons why persons may not be convinced of the goodness of their bodies. What are they?
8. What does the author say is the best protection from sin in this matter?
9. What does the author say are the three best characteristics for describing Christian chastity?

The Light of Christ

10. In recent times some moral theologians have argued that the Church cannot define moral doctrines which apply in all times and places. Explain their reasoning.
11. What does the Church, as pointed out by the Council of Trent, teach about the relationship between faith and morals?
12. What does the faith teach about sexuality? Who is the sole norm for what it is to be truly human?
13. What follows from the idea that we can get "a right picture of human sexuality only insofar as it is contained in Christ"?

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Questions for Chapter 2
God's Good Symbols: Christian Symbols

God and Matter

1. What is the most obvious thing about God's attitude towards material things?
2. What truth about the nature of God does the Judeo-Christian tradition know that is not known by some of the Nature Religions of the Near East? How does this misunderstanding of the nature of God lead to a misunderstanding of created things?
3. What is meant by the term *incarnation*? What are the truths Christians sometimes fail to realize that show the importance of Christ's physical body?
4. What then, is the seed and root of our salvation and glorification? And what are we called to do as a result?
5. The author states, "This is the reason why He gives us His body as nourishment when we receive Him in Communion." Explain.
6. The doctrine of the Assumption emphasizes something that is often forgotten. Explain.

Christian Symbolism

7. Through what means does God give us the greatest of His spiritual gifts? Name some examples. What is a sacrament?
8. Describe the difference between sign and symbol. Give an example.
9. The author discusses natural symbols as well as the role of symbolism in culture, psychology and psychiatry. Give an example of a natural symbol, a cultural symbol, a psychological symbol. What can result from skewed or damaged symbol structures in the human unconscious?
10. What definition does the author give for liturgy? List several symbols used in the Liturgy.
11. What historical events are re-enacted through the various liturgical rites? Give at least three examples.
12. What, according to the author, is the fate of those persons who fail to understand symbolism?

Symbols in Revelation

13. The author lists several reasons why God uses a profusion of symbolism to communicate with us. What are some of them?
14. What attitudes or experiences can cause us to distrust symbols?

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Questions for Chapter 3

Sexual Intercourse: The Natural Word of Love

1. Referring to sexual intercourse, the author claims that “even people without revelation can come to know the meanings that God built into these physical acts through internal likeness and parallelism of structure.” What does intercourse most obviously symbolize?

The Meaning of the Body

2. Describe the characteristics of the male body and how its structure parallels the male psyche and male action in the world.
3. Describe the characteristics of the female body and how its structure parallels the female psyche and female action in the world.
4. Explain what the author means when he says that St. Paul’s commands are “fully in accord with our nature.” What occurs when a husband falls short of this command?
5. Describe the meaning of nakedness for both male and female. How does the experience of nakedness differ before and after the fall?

The Meaning of Intercourse

6. What does the pleasure of sexual union symbolize?
7. What limitations does the interpersonal aspect impose upon intercourse? Include physical and psychic aspects. How do these limitations serve to remind us of God?
8. Describe the natural symbolic meaning apparent (though much muted today) when intercourse “has its total consequences,” for the couple together and for the man and woman separately.

Natural Marriage

9. Describe what is needed for a young person entering marriage to make the full meaning of marriage his own.
10. On what grounds is even natural marriage (with some qualifications) indissoluble?
11. In what ways does the natural symbolism of sexual intercourse point toward monogamy? How is this different for the male and the female? Why is polygamy a highly defective form of marriage?
12. Describe the ways that intercourse is a symbol of marriage not only in its static sense, but of marriage as progress and as growth.

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Chapter 4

Sexual Symbolism in the Scriptures

Sexuality in Scripture

1. Beyond narratives and laws, by what means does the Bible tell us the meaning of sex and offer grounds for an understanding of sexual morality?
2. Explain what the author means when he says that “our use of symbolism is not coercive as an argument” that can force a certain understanding of Scripture.
3. Describe the difference between the two kinds of sexual symbols that are easily confused.

Christ the Bride of Christ

4. In the ancient Semitic world, what did it mean to give something its name or to change its name?
5. In the second chapter of Genesis, we find the first mention of the two-shall-become-one symbolic theme. What meanings does this represent?
6. Describe the biblical teachings on the right use of sex that are found between Genesis and the prophets from the last years of the Divided Kingdom. Give an example.
7. What, does the author say, is considered one of the major gifts of divine revelation given to the Israelites?
8. What two themes did the prophet Hosea develop with regard to human sexuality? What spiritual realities were illustrated by these themes?
9. In the passage from chapters 1 and 2 of Hosea, what did the Lord propose to do that showed He was above the Law? To what human example is the Lord compared and what is His motivation?
10. Describe how this theme is further developed in Ezekiel chapter 16? What is the Lord “recalling” in this passage?
11. The final Old Testament presentation of this attitude of God is found in the Song of Songs. How is this text sometimes misinterpreted? How have authentic Jewish and Christian interpretations viewed this text?
12. As the Israelites began to understand more fully the meaning of these passages, how did this change their social practices regarding marriage?
13. In the New Testament, how does this symbolism change slightly?
14. When Our Lord used the term “adulterous generation” to what was He referring?
15. The author mentions two passage where Jesus uses nuptial imagery, one where John the Baptist does, two where St. Paul does, and lastly, two places in Revelations. Find these verses and copy them.

Father, Mother, and Children

16. How does the scriptural symbolism of spousal relations, and of father, mother and children differ from a natural family? Who is Father? Mother?
17. Explain how we become children of Holy Mother Church if Christ does not generate children of Her and she remains a virgin.
18. Why is it important for Christians to understand this kind of imagery?

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Chapter 5

The Church: Bride of Christ and Mother of the Living

1. On the natural level, bodily union between husband and wife symbolize “an entire life together”. Yet God has made natural marriage to symbolize something that lies entirely beyond the sexual. Explain.

Christ’s Unmerited Love for His Church

2. Complete the sentences:
Christ’s love was not given to the Church _____.
Christ loves her because _____.
He had to win her for Himself by _____.
He espoused her there when _____.
His heart was opened and water flowed forth, the sign of _____.
Only His death made her to be a bride without _____.
Her beauty was _____.
3. What does the author mean when he writes of the Church, “Without His grace she can do nothing?”
4. How is Christ’s pleasure in His Bride expressed?
5. What is Christ’s chief gift to His Church? How ought this gift to be received and manifested? How is this related to intimacy between husband and wife?
6. What did many in the Old Testament, and also the Church Father’s know about how God revealed Himself beyond the limits of Israel?
7. Why is the Church so concerned to bring ever more people to the knowledge of Christ?
8. How was this idea expressed by the Fathers of the Church?

Christ’s Fidelity to His Church

9. Explain how the Lord’s “marriage” with Israel and His “marriage” with the Church are NOT an example of divorce-and-remarriage.
10. How are Israel and the Church related to one another?
11. What will come about when the Jews by carnal generation finally recognize their Lord and come to Him?
12. How can it be claimed that the Church is indefectible while still recognizing the sinfulness within the Church?

Our Sexuality in the Light of Christ’s Mysteries

13. Explain as fully as you can the “ultimate reason that husbands and wives are called to sacrifice themselves...for one another”.
14. How does a husband’s initiative in lovemaking, and his wife’s response, shed light on the Catholic doctrine of grace?
15. What does it mean to say that the symbolism of marriage reaches even as far as the beatific vision? How does this bring us to an understanding of basic Christian sexual morality?

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Chapter 6

Christ on the Cross: Sexual Lies and Counterfeits

Natural Symbolism of Misuse of Sex

1. How does the author describe a sexual lie?
2. Why is adultery a sexual lie?
3. Why is marital intercourse done without charity a lie? For the man? The woman?
4. Why is divorce-with-remarriage a sexual lie?
5. Why is fornication a sexual lie?
6. Why does promiscuity differ from fornication between two persons who at least love each other?

The Substitute Symbol

7. How does the author describe a sexual counterfeit (substitute symbol)?
8. Why is masturbation a sexual counterfeit?
9. Why does slavery to masturbation make it almost impossible to enter into marriage?
10. Why are homosexual acts sexual counterfeits?
11. Why is contraception a sexual counterfeit? For the man? For the woman?
12. How is the use of Natural Family Planning different from contraception?

Dating

13. Why is it a misuse of sexuality for the unmarried to embrace or caress to the point of arousal?
14. Why is the “repeated and unfulfilled” use of the symbols of love problematic for the unmarried?
15. How is this different for those who are engaged and shortly to be married?

The Religious Significance of Misuse of Sex

16. By what standard ought a Christian judge the rightness or wrongness of sexual activity?

Christian Understanding of Sexual Lies

17. What does fornication symbolize on the supernatural level?
18. What does adultery symbolize on the supernatural level?
19. What does divorce symbolize on the supernatural level?
20. Why are marital insensitivity or frigidity utterly alien to the Christian spouse?

Christian Understanding of Sexual Perversion

21. What does masturbation symbolize on the supernatural level?
22. What do homosexual acts symbolize on the supernatural level?
23. What does contraception symbolize on the supernatural level?

Life, Death, and Love

24. The author claims a link between sexual lies/counterfeits and death. Explain.
25. The author claims a link between love and suffering/death. Explain.
26. What is the answer to all sexual problems?

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Questions for Chapter 7

Christ, Father of the World to Come: Virginitly and Continnence

Symbolism of Premarital Chastity

1. Describe the symbolic meaning of premarital continence, both male and female.
2. What is the link between rites of passage from many cultures and Christian chastity?

Virginitly and Fruitfulness

3. What is the universally recognized meaning of female virginitly—even by pagans?
4. In Christianity, what is the meaning of consecrated female virginitly?
5. How does consecrated male virginitly differ?
6. What parallelism exists between premarital virginitly as preparation for marriage and lives of total continence?
7. Explain the concept of “virginitly and fruitfulness” as exemplified by Mary and St. Joseph.
8. Explain “virginitly and fruitfulness” as the basis for Religious life within the Church.

Eunuchs for the Kingdom

9. Christ uses the phrase “eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven”. Explain.
10. What does St. Thomas Aquinas say about the need for virginitly if man had not fallen?
11. How is consecrated virginitly or celibate chastity related to both an experience of “Christ on the cross” and also a “sense of charity and divine life growing actively and vigorously within”?
12. What are those who are unwillingly celibate being invited to do?

Further Reflections

13. What are the two aspects of virginitly or chaste celibacy described by the author?
14. How are these same two aspects visible even in natural human love?
15. Explain the statement, “There is no harm in perfect love” as it relates to virginitly or chaste celibacy either as a preparation for marriage or as a chosen state of life.
16. An unhealthy “chastity” may result for those who refuse or are unable to live at ease and in peace with the sexual body that God has given them. Explain.

Participant Study Guide Questions
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Questions for Chapter 8
Integrity: the Victory of the Risen Christ

The Nature of Integrity

1. How are virginity, celibacy and every form of chastity primarily to be understood?
2. Explain how “chastity is the splendor of love”?
3. What, according to theologians, is traditionally meant by the term “integrity” that belonged to Adam and Eve before the fall?
4. If “Christ’s victory is our victory”, why is it that we often feel oppressed, dragged down by our weakness, and enchained by sin?
5. Explain the sort of integrity that can be achieved even in our fallen state.
6. Why is the effort to regain such integrity worth making?

The Road to Integrity

7. Describe the similarity between the Scriptural account of Israel’s wanderings and our efforts to be chaste?
8. What is the error that some priests and religious, or those trying to help others in sexual matters, often make?
9. What is most needed in order to achieve the chastity and integrity we desire? Explain the role of prayer, the example of St Joseph and Mary, spiritual reading and charity in this endeavor.
10. What does the author say is the connection between chastity, charity and the Eucharist?
11. What ought to be the goal, purpose and focus of our reception of the sacraments?
12. The secret of all genuine sexual relationships is _____.
It is a matter of leaving _____, where a person is solely a recipient of his parents’ love, and entering _____, where he is fit to be a parent—of his own children or God’s—where he is capable of _____ even if he receives _____
_____, giving his own love _____, even as God gives.
Since He gave His only-begotten Son to _____ . So we must be willing to _____: to suffer and die for spouses and children, our own or others’—all of this for the sake of _____
_____ which is our marriage with _____ in heaven forever.