

The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality

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Chapter 6

Christ on the Cross: Sexual Lies and Counterfeits

1. In the context of this chapter, what is meant by “do what comes naturally”?

To “do what comes naturally is not a matter of mere spontaneous liking and desire, but of what is in accordance with the nature God has given us. For, our nature is a share in His, even apart from the life of grace, since our nature and entire being is made according to the Image of God which is Christ.

Natural Symbolism of Misuse of Sex

2. How does the author describe a sexual lie?

A sexual “lie” is any act where the outward symbol is undamaged—that is, it is in full conformity on the physical level with the way such actions should be done, but the mind of the actor is saying or intending something else. The outward act says, “I love you,” but the mind and heart contradict the physical action.

3. Why is adultery a sexual lie?

Adultery is a sexual lie because the couple uses their bodies to say, “I am wholly yours, your alone, forever,” at least one of them knows that this is not true. At least one cannot give himself to the other since he already belongs to someone else.

4. Why is marital intercourse done without charity a lie? For the man? The woman?

In the case of a husband who forces sex on his wife, he is using a symbol of love serve coercion, whereas true love reveres freedom; for personal satisfaction only, whereas love is for another; or for contempt or even hatred, the antitheses of love.

The man sins against charity if he is inattentive to his wife, seeking only his own satisfaction without regard to hers.

A wife sins against charity if she deliberately chooses to be cold, even frigid, towards her husband or who without grave reason, refuses to cooperate with him. This is withholding of the love that is symbolized by their actions; and is a rejection of the personal element in the symbol: one is taking for oneself rather than giving to the other.

5. Why is divorce-with-remarriage a sexual lie?

Divorce with remarriage is a sexual lie because the spouses originally pledged themselves to each other to overcome all their defects of love reject this pledge and seek to break the covenant because of these very defects that they have solemnly undertaken to overcome together. Hence their pledge to a new partner is a lie, since its sole basis is their refusal to honor such pledges.

Their act of intercourse has become adultery.

6. Why is fornication a sexual lie?

Fornication is a sexual lie because those who engage in it, even if they are engaged, are saying by their act, “I am yours totally, irrevocably, forever,” and yet in fact they know that, though they

love each other, their gift is transient, that is it not complete. They know that they do not mean by this word of love what it means in itself.

7. Why does promiscuity differ from fornication between two persons who at least love each other? Promiscuity and prostitution fall many moral levels below fornication between two people who truly love each other. These are far removed for what could be called truly human relationships, indicating at their root one's own selfishness and contempt for other persons. Such barefaced lies exclude from the sexual act almost everything God intended to be there except, at best, mere physical pleasure.

The Substitute Symbol

8. How does the author describe a sexual counterfeit (substitute symbol)?
A sexual counterfeit is an abuse of the sexual powers that so alters the basic structure of sexual activity that the resultant actions have new and quite different meanings. The nature of the act is changed and some fraud, some forgery, some shoddy substitute is passed off in place of the splendor of the integral act. What one is then saying is itself, whether so intended or not, corrupt and evil because he has perverted and undone the nature of the sexual act. All such acts symbolize some corruption of love or some refusal of love.
9. Why is masturbation a sexual counterfeit?
Masturbation is not a symbol of love at all, but it still has symbolic meaning. It symbolizes withdrawal from reality, of self-pitying loneliness, of the sterility of the self, loved in itself. What was meant for fertility, children, and family, the root source of life and human community, is turned into a mechanism for pleasure, relief of tension, or material to use in a laboratory-analysis or sperm bank. Hence, masturbation is a symbol of fear and anxiety—of fear of love, of anxiety with regard to other people, withdrawing from them and seeking to live without them. Masturbation binds the person to no one.
10. Why does slavery to masturbation make it almost impossible to enter into marriage?
It is almost impossible for anyone enslaved to the habit of masturbation to enter into marriage positively and fruitfully because masturbation chops away—at their roots—the love, the outgoingness, the generosity, the openness to life and to responsibility that the true sexual act is meant to have.
11. Why is the habit of masturbation so difficult to overcome?
To cure the habit of masturbation takes real effort under the competent direction, encouragement, and advice of one's confessor. The problem is usually not principally a question of chastity or sexual purity. Masturbation is linked to everything in a person, to the entire personality and emotions; all aspects of one's life are in some way tied in to that act. It is the whole person, himself or herself, that is somehow frustrated, anxious, unwilling to love.
12. Why are homosexual acts sexual counterfeits?
Homosexual acts are sexual counterfeits because what is ostensibly a symbol of love between two men or two women contains nothing that can be truly received, personally and as abiding gift, by the other person. It is a shallow symbol of sentimentality, of perpetual juvenility and adolescent ambiguity, of not really knowing which sex one is, and of a sense of sexual inadequacy. There is

no gift of one's substance or fruitfulness, no openness to the creation of human life. Each party remains essentially alone.

13. Why is contraception a sexual counterfeit? For the man? For the woman?

Contraception substitutes something alien for the symbol of love. Contraceptives are either physical barriers or chemical withholdings of the conditions of fertility. They enable what appears to be the marital act to be so performed that it does not embody an exclusion, a withholding, a negation of the most basic effect of sexual power. In the case of the woman, she refuses the power of the man over her body. In the case of the man, he refuses to let her fruitfulness present him with another like himself, whom he does not want.

Whether condoms or diaphragms, pill or IUD, or even permanent sterilization, the true symbol of love which is mutual gift and reception, is excluded. Intercourse then becomes a symbol of feminine dominance instead of masculine, of masculine impotence instead of strength.

14. Even for the couple who truly love each other, how does contraception serve to set up barriers to love?

The psychological and moral power of this barricaded and obstructed union works gradually, slowly, imperceptibly, because of its intrinsic meaning and symbolic significance, on the subconscious minds of the spouses and eventually on their conscious minds to generate that cold and self-centered hostility to new life known as the "contraceptive mentality." Though there may be deep love between the spouses, it is love that is somehow disjointed. There are spiritual results to the twisting of the body's actions out of joint from their true meaning.

15. Summarize how sexual symbols ought to be used.

In sum, sexual symbols must only be used in truth. If one cannot use them to express the truth, they should not be used at all. No sexual symbol should be set aside to have something else substituted for it. If it is sometimes difficult to wait until one can use sexual action properly, the difficulty can always be overcome by steady reflection and prayer upon the true meaning and depth of love God had intended it to convey.

16. How is the use of Natural Family Planning different from contraception? How can it be abused?

In using Natural Family Planning, the couple knows that they are not fertile as a couple, that he will not beget, she will not conceive. Yet the act itself is not altered. The couple remains essentially open to life.

The couple can mutually lock themselves in against children as effectively as they can with contraception. Yet this need not be the case, and the method itself helps against such misuse. Periodic abstinence invites the couple to offer a greater gift, sacrificial in character, and to transcend one's own desires. Additionally, to use NFP effectively, the couple must come to greater trust in each other about their sexuality and to take all its aspects into account, thinking as a couple whose fertility is a property of the couple, not of either individual alone.

Dating

17. Why is it a misuse of sexuality for the unmarried to embrace or caress to the point of arousal?

Like intercourse, necking and petting are symbolic actions. They signify the desire to give oneself to another and they manifest externally the feelings of the heart, but they are in some sense incomplete. They arouse and stimulate but do not satisfy. They also tend to draw the couple to even more stimulating action. But caresses and embraces are the natural preludes to intercourse,

intended by God as partial symbols, by means of which the couple suitably prepare themselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually for consummation in intercourse. The unmarried cannot say, by these actions, that they are intended to say. It is a sort of fornication or masturbation in emotion and desire, even if not in act.

18. Why is the “repeated and unfulfilled” use of the symbols of love problematic for the unmarried?

There is, in the constant use of a language intended to be only preliminary, in the repeated and unfulfilled use of these symbols of love, a wearing down of their meaning, a loss of sensitivity and expressiveness. When some day they wish to use these symbols to express the depths of the unique love to which they are then resolved to consecrate their whole lives, they find they don't know how.

19. How is this different for those who are engaged and shortly to be married?

Even though not yet fully committed, the engaged have sufficient reason to manifest their love, even by prolonged kissing and embracing, providing that this leads neither of them into sin and provided that the engagement does not go on forever.

The Religious Significance of Misuse of Sex

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

The Christian sees all sexual activity and judges of its rightness or wrongness by comparing what it signifies in itself with the truth he has from faith; his knowledge of the Father, who has regenerated us as His children in Christ, and his understanding of the union between Christ and His Church.

Christian Understanding of Sexual Lies

21. What does fornication symbolize on the supernatural level? For the man? For the woman?

Fornication symbolizes, at the supernatural level, the old paganisms. A man who fornicates could never represent God who married Israel, who knew in advance her weaknesses and infidelities, yet who committed Himself to her alone forever. Nor could he represent Christ in His union with the Church, for whose purification from infidelity He willingly suffered torture and death. Rather, he would resemble one of the old pagan deities, who conferred their favors on their people as they themselves capriciously chose at the moment.

A woman who fornicates can only symbolize those ancient peoples who worshipped such deities. This worship was always conditioned, If their gods failed them in battle or in harvest, the people would either abandon them for the more powerful gods of their conquerors or add them as minor figures to an empirically more powerful pantheon. Of unconditional devotion, the pagans' religious knew nothing. Obviously, the fornicator could not represent the Church, to whom Christ has given His Holy Spirit to keep her faithful forever to Himself.

22. What does adultery symbolize on the supernatural level? For the wife? For the husband?

Adultery denies the uniqueness of Christ or of His Church. A wife's adultery says in sign that there is some spouse suitable for the Church other than the Lord. Her adultery thus symbolizes the sin of idolatry when committed by believers, even as Israel before the Exile, while worshipping the LORD still went after and worshipped foreign gods.

A husband's adultery signifies in symbol that Christ could turn away at times from His only bride, the Church, and give Himself to some other, ignoring His marriage-covenant with her for whom He died.

23. Why was adultery not punishable by death under the New Law, though it was under the Old Law?

Christ chose to take our sins upon Himself and to die for His sinful and adulterous people, so that His bride might be thenceforth without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. If, then, a wife's adultery is the graver sin, and yet the Husband suffered death in her stead, we cannot demand more than He. The servant is not greater than his Master.

24. What does divorce of a consummated, sacramental marriage symbolize on the supernatural level? How does this symbolism apply to Christian marriage?

When a sufficiently grave crime has been committed against a consummated, sacramental marriage, divorce, on the supernatural level, corresponds to the Exile, to God's driving His people away into pagan lands, leaving them isolated and despised among those whose prosperity they had envied enough to worship their gods. Incapable of joining the pagans without total loss of identity, they yearned for the Lord but could not find Him until He had brought them to true repentance. But He could never simply abandon His people, no matter what their iniquity, to marry another; so also Christian marriage cannot ever be dissolved.

25. How ought Catholics to respond if their marriage fails tragically in human terms?

The permanence of that bond is their strength. Unable to give up or surrender, they must labor and pray all the more vigorously to help each other to the perfection of love, even at the cost of great sacrifice. For they know, by the joining of their agony to Christ's that sacrifice is the strongest language of love, beside which the act of intercourse itself is very little.

26. Why are marital insensitivity or frigidity utterly alien to the Christian spouse?

To the extent that it is willed, insensitivity or frigidity is utterly alien to the Christian. How could Christ be indifferent or unconcerned with those who love Him, He who dies for them? We Children of the Church can, indeed be cold to Christ, refuse Him support in His labors on behalf of all our race, pay Him no attention, not wish to hear Him speak. This is the sad state of tepidity, where Christians do little more than go through the external motions of their faith, content to be inert and uninterested in Christ. Yet the Spirit keeps the Church from such coolness to her Lord; and to act sexually so as to imply the contrary is evil.

Christian Understanding of Sexual Perversion

27. What does masturbation symbolize on the supernatural level?

Masturbation on the supernatural level symbolizes that Christ came, not to seek a bride, but only to please Himself. The truth is, rather than stay by Himself, He came and sought out His people, at the risk of rejections—and indeed He was rejected. Yes, He espoused her on the cross and made her fruitful by giving her His Spirit, that she might become the mother of all the living. The isolation, fruitlessness, and fear of rejection of masturbation symbolize a contrary reality to the true love of Christ for His bride.

28. What do male homosexual acts symbolize in terms of Christ and the Church?

Who besides the Lord takes the initiative? Who else is other than and radically different from the feminine creation? There are two masculine "figures" other than our Lord that are shown to us in revelation—"Caesar" and Satan. The Old Testament sets before us in this guise the lovers of Israel: foreign gods and the foreign states they rule, including their technology which these

nations had but Israel did not: chariots, horses, elephants, and weapons of war. These things can be summed up in one word—Caesar. Male homosexuality then, symbolizes man as in love with one like himself, enamored of the strength of the state, seeking from it the strength to be savior of himself. It is a refusal of the femininity of the Church, her weakness in human terms. It signifies secular humanism, for which “the only God of man is man himself,” refusing to accept the true otherness of God.

Satan, who sets himself up as God, who takes the initiative in tempting and deceiving the whole world, who apes God’s majesty and His power to judge and condemn the sinner, but without understanding the love that God is.

29. What does lesbianism symbolize? What feminine figure or principle is given us in Scripture other than the Church? Who or what other also bears, brings forth, entices, responds to, and draws forth the male principle?

The answer, clearly, is God’s good creation, the whole created order. Lesbianism signifies a Church who would turn away from the Lord to embrace what is like herself; created, dependent for fruitfulness on union with Another who is not like herself, lovely with a beauty given by that Other, incapable of initiative with regard to God. What lesbianism symbolizes is not a Church at all, but nature worship, a worship of Isis or the Earth-Mother rather than Christ.

30. What does contraceptive intercourse symbolize on the supernatural level?

Contraceptive intercourse implies that God might give His grace and pour out His Holy Spirit without permitting them to have their fruit, without granting the Church to bear Him new children. Conversely, contraception signifies that God would not mind if His people were to enjoy the pleasures of His light and consolation and yet refuse to bear the fruits of grace: pure faith, strong hope, the vigorous activity of charity towards God and all His people, through lives of virtue after the example of our Lord.

Contraception has another aspect. As a barrier to the effective power of one’s love for one’s partner, it symbolizes what happens when a person goes to Confession, drawn out of sentiment, say, for Christmas or Easter, and deliberately withholds mention of some serious sin. This obstruction of the truth renders completely void the absolution received and adds to his prior sins the sin of sacrilege.

Contraception also resembles the act of those who go to Communion in a state of known mortal sin. Here also there is a withholding; a barrier is placed to the gift of all one’s self. Although one goes through the motions of love, yet by the imposition of this barrier of attachment to sin or of shame to accept forgiveness, whatever love may be present is rendered fruitless and inefficacious.

Life, Death, and Love

31. The author claims a link between sexual lies/counterfeits and death. Explain.

There is a relation between sexual sin and death that human beings have known for long generations. As far back as the epic poetry of Ugarit 4000 years ago, in the plays of Euripides 2400 years ago, in the gladiatorial shows of ancient Rome 1800 years ago, and in countless other cases, deviated sexual lust becomes bloodlust: frustration of the life-instincts begets the death-instinct. Separating the power to give life from those actions intended for the giving of life is a sort of killing, and ultimately symbolizes a putting to death.

32. The author claims a link between love and suffering/death. Explain.

There is also a connection between true love and suffering and death. It is just this link that is rejected by the misuse of sex. One refuses to risk the grief and pain that can be inflicted by a spouse or children. One is drawn by desire or driven by passion. One insists on pleasure, or, at least, a release of tension. In any case, one rejects the cross that is formed when sexual desire lies athwart the love of God, and refuses to suffer the pain of frustration.

33. What is the answer to all sexual problems?

The answer to all sexual problems is to take up this cross, to return in repentance to Christ on His cross, to accept the suffering that charity will bring to our lives. There is no reason to despond or to yield if we are tempted to self-hatred because of our sexual sins, or to self-pity because of the harshness of the battle to be fought against them. In truth and in love we go to the Lord. He loves us. If we doubt it, let us look long in faith at the crucifix. There we will see what true love is. We will see that which united Christ to His Church. We will learn what it costs, indeed, to be husband or wife; but at the same time we will gain from Him the power and strength to pay what is needed.

There will be life-giving pleasure, too, according to our state in life, if we do not seek that pleasure at the expense of the cross. We will then also find rejoicing in our life and a foretaste of the delights of heaven, as we come to realize more deeply what it means that Christ died for love of us and to sense that we are beginning to love in some degree as He does.