



THE ARCHDIOCESE
OF KANSAS CITY IN KANSAS



THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC
BIOETHICS CENTER

Living a Catholic Life *Human Sexuality*

“Living a Catholic Life” is a collaboration between dioceses, parishes, Knights of Columbus councils, grassroots organizations, and The National Catholic Bioethics Center to educate the laity on principles of the moral life and their application.

When God made man, He did not make a conscious subject aware of itself as a self to which He then added a body as an afterthought. Rather, God made human beings to be the *kind* of beings they are—namely, bodily persons sexually differentiated into male and female—precisely so that they can freely receive from him the gift of his own divine life (grace) so long as they freely choose, with his help, to give themselves away in love (in a sincere gift of self) and thus form a communion of persons. It follows that human sexuality “is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such” (John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, n. 11). Men and women, complementary in their sexuality, are, as it were, two “incarnations,” “two ways . . . of ‘being a body’ and at the same time a man, which complete each other” (John Paul II, *Original Unity of Man and Woman* [Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1980], 79).

Since God is both giving and receiving, in imaging him, both men and women are giving and receiving. We might say that male sexuality is a giving in a receiving sort of way, whereas female sexuality is a receiving in a giving sort of way. This complementary differentiation is symbolized in the marital act, in which the husband gives himself to his wife by personally entering into her and in this way receives her, while she personally receives him into herself and in this way gives herself to him. Finally, human life can be received as a gift only through the intimate union of the man and the woman. (It can be made in the laboratory through various reproductive techniques, but this is a grave violation of the dignity of human life as a personal gift from God.)

From what has been said thus far, we can see that the great goods of human sexuality are the intimate personal bodily union of man and woman made possible by an act of genital sex and the new human life given existence by God himself with the cooperation of the man and the woman. In short, human sexuality has a *unitive* and *procreative* meaning.

For these great goods of human sexuality and of human persons to be respected rightly, the intimate sexual union making them possible must be marital in nature. Genital union between unmarried men and women does not, in truth, unite two irreplaceable and non-substitutable persons, because unmarried men and women are unmarried precisely because they have not given themselves unconditionally to each other and made each other irreplaceable and non-substitutable in their lives. Such genital union simply *joins* two individuals who are in principle

replaceable, substitutable, and disposable, and it in no way *unites* two irreplaceable, non-substitutable, and non-disposable persons. Such union is unworthy of human persons made in the image and likeness of God and called to give themselves away to others in love, in the sincere gift of themselves.

Likewise, human life can be generated in the random copulation of nonmarried men and women. But when it is generated in this way, such life is not being respected as a good of surpassing value. Nonmarried men and women, precisely because they are not married, have not equipped themselves to receive this life lovingly, nourish it humanely, and educate it in the service of God and man. They have not prepared themselves, in other words, to give it the home it needs to take root and grow. But husbands and wives, who have given themselves unreservedly to one another in the chaste covenant of marriage, have equipped themselves to cooperate with God and to receive new human life from him as a person, equal in dignity to themselves and meriting the home where it can grow in love and service of God and man.

Because of sin, concupiscence has entered the human heart and veiled the nuptial meaning of the body. Concupiscent desire leads men and women to separate the sexual values of the person of the opposite sex from the person and to seek to consume them in order to satisfy sexual desire or, more subtly, to substitute a pseudo-romantic, sentimental love centered on the pleasure that the other’s presence affords for deep interpersonal love between man and woman. Men and women, in fact, find themselves at war within themselves, possessed by their sexual drives and desires and not in possession of them.

There is thus need for a re-creation and redemption of man, male and female, and for men and women to come into possession of their sexual drives and desires by cultivating the virtue of chastity, which enables them to love others, particularly those of the opposite sex, as irreplaceable, non-substitutable persons. This re-creation and redemption of man, male and female, is made possible by Jesus, the uncreated Word of God made man, who shows us, his created words, how deeply he loves us. Through union with Jesus and his body the Church—which nourishes us with the sacraments, above all, the Eucharist, the new life He pours into our hearts through his Holy Spirit—we can indeed recover the nuptial meaning of the body, respect the goods of human sexuality, and make good moral choices that enable us to give ourselves away to others in love and to form a true communion of persons.