

**The Family and
Contemporary Social Reality—
Pastoral Priorities and Challenges**



PROCEEDINGS

SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY

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In Christian tradition we have construed the relationship between sexuality and spirituality in many ways. On the one hand, we have consistently taught and defended the goodness of our created world including sexuality and sexual love as one of those good things. We have taught that we as sexual beings are made in the image of God and so partake in God's love in some mysterious way. We understand the very nature of the triune God to be love and to have expressed that love in God's becoming fully human - incarnate in flesh in Jesus who gifts us with the Spirit indwelling us. On the other hand, Christian tradition remains deeply ambivalent about sexuality. For much of our history we have privileged sexual abstinence as an ascetical means of pursuing holiness while neglecting forms of asceticism appropriate to sexually bonded relationships as an equally valid path of holiness. We have a clearer teaching about sexual morality and sexual sinfulness than we do about sexual holiness, sexuality in the service of love, and sexuality as a privileged locus of ecstatic and mystical experience. We have dignified marriage with its own sacrament. Yet in much of our public discourse and practice, we fail to recognise the primordial sacramentality of all forms of bodily loving which occurs through the graced presence of interpersonal communion and of the myriad ways of "touching" one another in life-affirming and creative ways in all the concrete actions of nurturance and care required by our bodily existence. In the mystical tradition, we have reserved spousal symbolism for the purely spiritual domain and neglected the mystical potential of marital sexuality.

Although our theological and spiritual emphases related to sexuality prior to Vatican Council II were not entirely negative in attitude, Vatican II did mark a dramatic shift in terms of appreciating and articulating the positive and important role sexuality plays in our spiritual development. *Lumen Gentium* asserted the universal call to holiness shared by the Christians and the role of the laity both within the church and within the world. And *Gaudium et Spes* elevated the unitive goal of marriage to the same level as the procreative end. Theologians, educators, pastors and lay Christians themselves have since then begun to explore and articulate these themes in relationship to their lived experience personally or pastorally. (Dreyer, 1989, 1994; Finn, 1990, Timmerman, 1984, 1992, 1999; Whiteheads, 1989; Wright, 1989). Many laity, however, have received insufficient positive support for appreciating the religious dimensions of their sexuality or for integrating the sexual dimensions of their lives with their spirituality.

DEFINITIONS

Since we come from such diverse cultural contexts, let's begin with some definitions of spirituality and sexuality to provide a common framework for the rest of my remarks. Theologian, John B. Nelson describes it this way: By spirituality I mean not only the conscious religious disciplines and practices through which human beings relate to God, but more inclusively the whole style and meaning of our relationship to that which we perceive as of ultimate worth and power. This includes disciplines and practices, but also myths, symbols and rituals, informal as well as formal. It includes the affective as well as the cognitive. Significantly, spirituality includes the ways in which our relatedness to the ultimate affects our understandings and feelings of relatedness of everyone and everything else (1983, 5).

By sexuality I mean not only physiological arousal and genital activity, but also much more. While human sexuality is not the whole of our personhood, it is a basic dimension of that personhood. While it does not determine all thought, feeling and action, it does permeate and affect all of these. Sexuality is our way of being in the world as female or male persons. It involves our appropriation of characteristics socially defined as feminine or masculine. It includes our affectional-sexual orientation toward those of the opposite and/or same sex. It is our attitudes toward ourselves and others as body-selves. It is our capacity for sensuousness. It is all of this.

The intimate relation between sexuality and spirituality is evident if one believes . . . that sexuality is both a symbol and a means of communication and communion. The mystery of sexuality is the mystery of the human need to reach out for the physical and spiritual embrace of others. Sexuality thus expresses God's intention that people find authentic humanness not in isolation but in relationships. In sum, sexuality always involves much more than what we do with our genitals. More fundamentally, it is who we are as body-selves who experience the emotional, cognitive, physical and spiritual need for intimate communion, both creaturely and divine (1983, 5-6).

In addition to Nelson's individual definition and initial explanation of sexuality and spirituality, you will find in Appendix I, some selections from Church Documents, primarily educational and pastoral ones developed by the Vatican as well as by the United States National Bishops Conference which guide catechists, educators and pastoral ministers. There is clearly substantial agreement between these two sets of definitions and assumptions.

SEXUAL DIFFERENCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

In my reflections on sexuality and spirituality I am intending to reflect on ourselves as sexual beings, embodied spirits, who express our sexuality in a variety

of ways including but not limited to genital activity alone. In addition, when we reflect on the broader definitions of sexuality, we come face to face with sexual differences as constitutive of full human personhood. For each of us, our entire experience of ourselves as embodied spirits is contextualised by whether or not our sex is male or female. Our entire somatic reality is profoundly affected by gender and the differing somatic and social experience and conditioning which accompanies it.

It is in this context that I cite two paragraphs from the *Fourth UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing* in 1995. It asserted that:

Since 1975, significant knowledge and information have been generated about the status of women and the conditions in which they live. Throughout their entire life cycle, women's daily existence and long-term aspirations are restricted by discriminatory attitudes, unjust social and economic structures, and a lack of resources in most countries that prevent their full and equal participation. In a number of countries, the practice of prenatal sex selection, higher rates of mortality among very young girls and lower rates of school enrollment for girls as compared with boys suggest that son preference is curtailing the access of girl children to food, education and health care and even life itself. Discrimination against women begins at the earliest stages of life and must therefore be addressed from then onwards. (# 38).

The girl child of today is the woman of tomorrow. The skills, ideas and energy of the girl child are vital for full attainment of the goals of equality, development and peace. For the girl child to develop her full potential she needs to be nurtured in an enabling environment, where her spiritual, intellectual and material needs for survival, protection and development are met and her equal rights safeguarded. If women are to be equal partners with men, in every aspect of life and development, now is the time to recognise the human dignity and worth of the girl child and to ensure the full enjoyment of her human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights assured by the Convention on the Rights of the Child...yet there exists world-wide evidence that discrimination and violence against girls begin at the earliest stages of life and continue unabated throughout their lives. They often have less access to nutrition, physical and mental health care and education and enjoy fewer rights, opportunities and benefits of childhood and adolescence than do boys. They are often subjected to various forms of sexual and economic exploitation, pedophilia, forced prostitution and possibly the sale of their organs and tissues, violence and harmful practices such as female infanticide and prenatal sex selection, incest, female genital mutilation and early marriage, including child marriage. (# 39).

Literally, we begin with the differences we experience as a result of the sexual difference of our embodiment. Without belabouring the point, women and men do experience themselves in the world differently by virtue of different musculature, different proportions of muscle to fat, different erotic processes, different ways of processing information and response in our very brains, differing experiences in procreation-insemination for the male, and pregnancy, child-birth, and lactation for the female or these capacities-differing bodily forms with which we touch one another, support one another, protect one another, nurture one another, tend one another while ill or play and enjoy one another when well. Most cultures of the world have ascribed normative value of the male mode of embodiment as constituting full personhood and thus diminish women's sense of self and restrict her social power. John Paul II, in his "Letter to Women" issued prior to the Beijing conference apologised to women for the role the church has played in contributing to this discrimination against them and boldly asserted as church teaching that women should enjoy all of the rights, duties and privileges accorded citizens in free societies. For women, sexuality is as likely to mean some form of personal violence as it is some form of human love.

Against this acknowledgement of radically different experience, social conditioning, and social power based on each culture's construction of gender, we reflect now on the mystery of human sexuality in a spiritual perspective.

THE MYSTERY OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

Despite the certitude of our Catholic moral teachings on sexuality, human sexuality itself remains a mysterious feature of human experience.*In many cultures of the world, entire religious traditions treated sexuality as one access to the Sacred. Prior to our technological, scientific and psychological age, sexuality symbolised life itself. The power to bring human life into the world was a wondrous mystery-one to be revered, respected and even worshipped. Sexuality itself was sacred. The twin mysteries of human existence-life and death-bring us face to face with the divine. Who originates this life in which we participate? Who ends this life of ours or of our beloved's at some moment in time? Primordially in our human experience, the life force and passion, biologically and instinctively part of our creaturely existence, bring us face to face with the even larger mystery "in whom we live and move and have our very being."

At the same time, passionate love-our erotic attractions and pulls toward another remains both mysterious and fearsome. When we surrender to that love either in romantic pursuit of another, in response to another who desires us, or welcome its arrival in other ways, couples are brought together. Both the joy and ecstasy of self-transcendence may occur in sexual union and in the

delight related to childbirth and the nurturing of young life. Passionate love can also be blind, like a fire moving rapidly across the terrain leaving a wake of destruction in its path. Our love and our passion are not always ordered, not always enlightened, not always self-giving and mutually respecting. We often don't really know what we are doing. The dangerous aspect of sexuality is no less mysterious than the ecstatic and loving aspects.

Sexuality in its erotic playfulness and passion is inherently mysterious, participating in the deeper mystery and God's own life for women and men who live in a context of faith and love for God. Paul Ricoeur captures something of this mystery in human sexual love:

Ultimately, when two beings embrace, they don't know what they are doing, they don't know that they want, they don't know what they are looking for, they don't know what they are finding. What is the meaning of this desire which drives them toward each other? Is it the desire of pleasure? Yes, certainly. But this is a poor response, for at the same time we feel that pleasure does not contain its own meaning. That it is [symbolic]. But of what?

We have the vivid and yet obscure feeling that sex participates in a network of powers whose cosmic harmonies, are forgotten but not abolished; that life is much more than life-that is, much more than the struggle against death, or delaying the time when the debt must be paid; that life is unique, universal, everything in everyone, and that sexual joy makes us participate in this mystery...(1964, 83).

TRANSFORMATIVE SCHOOL OF LOVE

Church teaching recognises that this mystery "is bound up in the Mystery and purpose of God, who is the author of all life, and love itself". (HS, 5). It is participation in co-creativity with God who made us sexual in the first place. God must somehow be passionate and delight in spousal joy. God must somehow be at the root of our desire and longing and want to fill us full of divine life and love. For the majority of people, marriage is a path of salvation and transformation. Love begets love.

Because sexuality at its core is the "mystery of the human need to reach out for the physical and spiritual embrace of others," our familial and friendly relationships become a school of love. The drive toward sexual union is the source of our creativity both biologically and in other ways that serve the common good. Stability of relationship can foster profound growth into love which is faithful in season and out a season-a crucible of transformation into greater and greater love through all the joys and challenges of family life. Church teaching has been clear that "the one core universal vocation is to love and be loved". (1991, HS, 5). Faithfulness to love becomes revelatory of God. We learn to love,

to embody, to express, to be loved in our world. It has been less clear about how family life expresses and embodies that vocation for the whole church. Dr. Musgrave's presentations will elaborate the developmental process of the self in relationship, making this more concrete psychologically.

SACRAMENTAL NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS

I want to make further connections about the sacramental, symbolic nature of successful loving. Contemporary theology re-describes the Trinity as a communion of inter-personal love. It attempts to probe what we might mean by the two statements: God is love and God is a Trinity. If God's own self is a mutuality of loving inter-communion, then human loves which succeed in intimacy, communion and differentiation are powerful images of this God who is love and these relationships become sacraments for others of God's love.

Truly intimate couples bring people into the Church by witnessing to the inner life of God. For membership in the Church is a life, a life of not just imitating but participating in the very life of God. The church is, then, really a community of intimates. Even though no one ever observes them in the act of making love, their transfiguration has its effects on all who know them. They become credible symbols. Other people see that they have something, something that makes life deeply joyous and satisfying. (1985, C. Gallagher, 110).

To further develop this sacramental aspect of sexual love, couples who relate to one another within a faith perspective frequently discover their spouse as embodying and mediating God's love for one another. This is true both in the romantic phase in an erotic relationship and in the settling down phase. In the romantic phase, couples often see each other as "God-like" or unconsciously project divine qualities onto their partner. The root of this desire is for God; "our hearts are restless until they do rest in God." In committed, faithful, marital relationships, the constancy and fidelity of all the forms of love which develop over time are often the most powerful image of God as spousal these couples will ever experience. God is present to them in and through their love for one another. Couples mediate a profound religious experience of loving and being loved not only by one another but by God as well. As Paul Philibert has said, "God is the hidden third" in such relationship, not a jealous God, but delighting in love's flourishing.

All of this does not happen, however, without some surrender to love in all its ambiguity and challenge. We not only need to control ourselves, especially our selfishness, we also have to give ourselves away. Love is not only about choice and autonomy but also about communion and self-giving sometimes in the face of rejection and mistakes. These leads us to deeper loving, greater self-

knowledge and to God's own self when we suffer the exigencies of love and reflect on that experience.

In his sociological study on love and marriage in American society, not restricted only to Catholic families, Andrew Greeley found a positive correlation between frequent sex, the romantic phase of relationship and religion or religious images. As he put it, "The two variables, joint prayer and feeling the spouse is like a God, have a powerful impact on (or result from) romance" (1991, 153).

Greeley also explored the role of images of God and their correlation with uninhibited sexual abandon within the marriage relationship. Although retreats together, therapy together, sexually imaginative spouse, and sexual play contributed to sexual abandon, religious imagery had an even more profound effect. "Men at the top of the 'grace' scale (God is mother, spouse, love and friend) are more than twice as likely to say they abandon all their sexual inhibitions at least sometimes (50% versus 23%). For women, the increase is from 32% to 54%. In both cases the warmer and more tender the image of God, the less likely men and women are to be inhibited" (257). The cool and distant images of God as judge, father, master and king correlated negatively with sexual satisfaction and sexual abandon. I would suggest these warmer images of God correspond more closely with the qualities of the God human relationship Dr. Shea described in his model of adult faith development. These warmer images also tend to support intimacy and mutuality with God and carry pastoral implications for preaching and supporting family life by making these images of God more available to couples.

In the context of Asian cultures, I wonder what your warmer and cooler images of God might be. Asian religions represent traditions of both sacred sexuality and celibacy. How do these affect couples and families in their spirituality and sexuality? The correlation between frequency of sexual expression, religious imagery, and prayer may not be as high when concerns about pregnancy or basic survival of the family unit predominate.

THE ROLE OF DESIRE IN SPIRITUALITY

The last dimension of sexuality I want to highlight is the role of desire in both partnered relationships and our divine-human relationship. Mechthild of Magdeburg describes both the soul's desiring and God's desiring in this way:

"How the Soul Speaks to God"

God, you are my lover,

My longing,

My flowing stream,

My sun,

And I am your reflection.

"How God Answers the Soul"

It is my nature that makes me love you often,

For I am love itself.

It is my longing that makes me love you intensely,

For I yearn to be loved from the heart.

It is my eternity that makes me love you long,

For I have no end (1998, Tobin, I.4; I:24).*

Many Christian mystical writers rightly assume that god's yearning for us precedes and arouses our yearning for God. They strongly assert that our desires, our want, our longings, our outward and inward searching when uncovered, expressed, and recognised at the core, all lead to the Divine Beloved. God is our heart's desiring. The insatiable nature of our desires lead us right into the Holy Mystery itself which is their origin and goal.

Those who have transmitted Christian tradition often neglect the deeper dimensions of the reality of God's yearning and ours. Once a person awakens to God's love and responds, it is also going on a deep stream, a deep level of responsive yearning and desiring that is one with God's yearning. In fact, it is the healing of our disordered, misplaced willfulness and the beginning of its transformation into willingness, openness and spaciousness. This marks the beginning of discovering the convergence of divine and human love which is the phenomenological ground of all our yearnings. Ann and Barry Ulanov describe this process of desire as becoming conscious in prayer itself,

Desire leads to more desire. Prayer articulates our longing for a fullness of being, our reaching out of the mind for what is beyond it, and helps us find and love God and grow with our love. It is like the sun warming a seed into life, like the work of clearing away weeds and bringing water to the interior garden of St. Teresa's inspired imagery. Prayer enlarges our desire until it receives God's desire for us. In prayer we grow big enough to house God's desire for us which is the Holy Spirit (1982, 20).

* See chapters one and four in *Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginning*: Mahwah: Paulist Press, Spring 2000, for further treatment of this topic. Some portions which follow originally appeared in a different context in "Encountering Love Mysticism". In 20-33. *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* 1 (January, 1995).

God does not need to be told anything about what we need and want. Our words in prayer are not for God's instruction but our own. We discover this way what in fact we do desire, what we want to reach out to and love. Thus we come to hold in open awareness what before we had lived unknowingly (1982, 17).

Often the shape of desire is expressed in our romantic attachments rather than in a purely interior process. The vagaries of romantic attachments of all kinds are frequently the opaque manifestations of divine human intimacy wanting to happen. In so far as pastoral agents are uncomfortable with or judgmental about reports of sexual expression, sexual orientations, or romantic attachments, they will not be able to explore the depth of these experiences. Such exploration could reveal the soul's searching for its divine beloved and thus facilitate, often with therapeutic help, the harmonising of these energies in the person they counsel. Discerning what is or is not "of" God in these yearnings and relationships requires exploring the relational histories of those they accompany. Pastoral agents need to pay particular attention to their clients' histories of emotional intimacy, friendship, passion and sexual expression. These relational histories may shed light on understanding both the gifts for intimacy and the barriers which each person brings to the divine/human relationship.

Addressing these issues requires more than moral formation. (See Appendix II). It requires some knowledge of the Western Christian tradition of love mysticism and an adequate phenomenology of desire which relates all forms of human love to its fundamental goal, union with God. Human eros, desire, is as Augustine recognised unfulfilled until it rests in God. Rooted in the biblical tradition of a personal God, revealed by the self-donating love of Jesus, the Christian tradition of love mysticism draws on personal relationship with Jesus, the love mysticism of the Johannine Gospel and Epistles, and the Song of Songs.

Because Christian tradition has been ambivalent about sexual love and mystical love through much of our history, the role of desire and the relationship of human love to mystical love has been a major theme in theology and spirituality in the contemporary period, especially in the English speaking world. Sebastian Moore and John Dunne have both written a number of books on various aspects of these questions. Karl Rahner also emphasised over and over again that the fundamental experience of the believer is that we are not abandoned to our own devices, set loose in the world, longing for a transcendent experience of love we can never have, but that the very mystery itself solicits us, moves toward us in love and in mercy.

Our mystical tradition teaches that we are to enter fully into intimacy with this divine beloved. We are to become love, too. The search for the Beloved as

experienced by the believer is not initiated from the human side. It is the result of the reality that we have already been awakened to this divine love affair from God's side. No matter how confusedly we interpret this experience, no matter how many mistakes we make along the way, no matter how often this desire for the divine beloved gets displaced onto other loves or other objects of desire, God continues to solicit and elicit our love. Sebastian Moore says, "All desire [is] solicitation by the mystery we are in" (1989, 11). The mystical process itself is the path toward illumination-toward recognising what these desires are about, correctly interpreting them and directing them toward the divine. All our loves can be encompassed in this divine love. Our human love...all human loves contribute to our capacity for this divine-human intimacy. Our human loves, according to Bernard of Clairvaux, all become ordered in relation to the divine love. Whenever we fall in love, our beloved is god for us for a while. If our lover is not the divine beloved, we will eventually be called to forgive them for not being able to be god for us.

PHENOMENOLOGY OF DESIRE

There are both theological elements to this understanding of desire in our relationship with God and psychological ones. Western psychology leads us to feel isolated and longing for connection, our first step toward becoming adult lovers is to overcome our separateness, to develop our capacity to participate in intimate relationship and to learn how to be with another without losing ourselves. For many the first step may not be isolation but fusion with others and for these the first step is to become oneself. This psychological process is also the first stage in our development of affective prayer. The second step in spiritual development is to discover an entirely new, different, sense of "I" that is more my "I" than this relational ego self. It is to become one willing and one desiring with the love that moves the universe. This unitive oneness in love requires loosening up our sense of self so that this divine/human intimacy I no longer face my beloved, but become one with the beloved.

Instead of facing Jesus or God in imaginative contemplation, we enter into God and begin to love from within Christ, perceive from within Christ's vision. To do so requires that we shift from contemplating Jesus as other to contemplating life from his perspective. After we have overcome the emotional, physical and psychological barriers to a shared mutuality with God, we find our true selves as being oriented around God's reality as our centre instead of around our small egos (or at least during the time of contemplative prayer). That is why eventually, despite all the mystical love poetry of lover and beloved, one experiences the Beloved directly as the source of one's loving, the cause of one's desirability, and the mystery which encompasses oneself and the entire creation.

According to Sebastian Moore, this transformation of the self happens through a kind of grammar of desire... a series of experiences that leads to the source of the river of love which runs through the mystic. Moore does it in five steps.

1. Created by desire, I am desirable,
2. Desirable, I desire; my pleasure in myself wants to extend itself to another. Desire, in other words does not come out of emptiness but out of fullness.
3. Since it is out of desirableness that I desire, another who causes desire in me is touching my desirableness. To cause desire is to arouse desirableness.
4. It is my desirableness, thus aroused by another, that makes me want to be desired by that other.
5. Thus the vital centre of human relations is arousal; the awakening of a person's sense of being desirable, not (as commonly supposed) by being desired by another, but by being aroused by another to desire (1985, 44).

I want to highlight three aspects of this schema. First of all, God's love really is the source of our desiring, but we don't initially feel it that way. We feel it as desire for another who may or may not require my love. We must really understand both cognitively and affectively from within the mystical sense, that God's is the love that, utterly, surprisingly, creeps up on the inside of our sense of ourselves as desirable. Normally our desire is awakened from the outside by a person who excites our longing. However, it is God's loving, God's desire which makes us to be desirable, causes in us that sense of unique worth that energises all that people do and want to do.

Secondly, because we usually experience our desirableness indirectly by a human beloved who loves us or whom we solicit from the abundance of our desire, we are simply oblivious to the first step of the process. The mystical experience involves experiencing the first step of the process directly. All that we do in spiritual practice either through Scriptural contemplation of the mysteries of faith and the reality of Jesus or a centring prayer, leads to this experience of God's desiring us. God's love moves us and moves toward us, enabling us to reciprocate that love. The Beguine, Hadewijch described it as "contenting" her beloved (Hart, 1980, "Poems in Stanzas," 16.9).

The third concept I want to highlight from Moore, is how spiritual desire for God differs from all other desires. He says that "desire that is simply a felt need ceases once the need is satisfied, vital desire increases with satisfaction." C.S. Lewis described something similar in *Surprised by Joy*, according to Moore when Lewis described, 'the sweet desire, that the one thing one longs for once the desire has gone is to have it again, to be once again aching with it.' This increase of desire with fulfillment is only intelligible once we understand

desire as a trustful relationship. One can always to more trustful, more connected, which means more desirous" (1989, 11).

Couples may experience this kind of desire and intimacy with one another as a fruit of their long-term relationship with one another. The times of frustration of desire or of desire or of desire compel them to go to deeper and discover god within themselves, recognising that no human lover can fulfill these longings. John Dunne describes this as a process of an unknowing love becoming a conscious one.

There is a desire in all our desires, I believe, an enthusiasm in all our enthusiasms. It is an unknowing love of God. It is what I may call "my ancient soul of a child." To hear that love in all our loves is to hear "ancient voices of children," and I may have to go very far along love's road to know it and to love with a love that is knowing...

As love becomes more knowing, or more knowingly "unknowing," as I learn to discern the love of God in all our loves, I become more peaceful about love not being mine, about consummated in possession, about the words I love not being mine, about the music I love not being mine, about the friend I love not being mine alone. It is consummated rather in being "oned with God" who belongs to all, who is "mine own, and not mine own" (1993, 83).

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APPENDIX I

Assumption and Definitions about sexuality in Church Documents

"The mystery of what it means to be human-incarnate, embodied, and therefore sexual-is bound up in the mystery and purpose of God, who is the author of all life, and love itself."

"We are dealing with a divine gift, a primal dimension of each person, a mysterious blend of spirit and body, which shares in God's own creative love and life."

"Created in God's image, we find inscribed in our hearts one core universal vocation, that is, to love and to be loved. Love is our origin: love is our constant calling on earth; and love will be our fulfillment in heaven." (*Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*, 1991, NCCB/USCC).

"Love includes the human body, and the body is made a sharer in spiritual love" (John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, No. 11).

DEFINITIONS:

"Sexuality is a relational power, not merely a capacity for performing specific acts. The Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education speaks of sexuality as 'a fundamental component of personality, one of its modes of being, of manifestation, of communicating with others, of feeling, of expressing and of living human love.' (*Educational Guidance in Human Love*, no. 4) Sexuality prompts each of us from, within, calling us to personal as well as spiritual growth and drawing us out from self to interpersonal bonds and commitment with other, both women and men. It includes the qualities of sensitivity, understanding, intimacy, openness to others, compassion, and mutual support." (HS, 1991).

"In the fullest and richest sense, the gift of sexuality is both the physical and psychological grounding for the human person's capacity to love...It is a gift shared by all persons, regardless of their state of life." (Bishop Francis Mugavero, "Sexuality-God's Gift: A Pastoral Letter" 1976).

"Sexuality refers to a fundamental component of the personality in and through which we, as male or female, experience our relatedness to self, others, the world, and even God.

"Sex refers either to the biological aspects of being male or female (i.e., a synonym for one's gender) or to the expressions of sexuality, which have physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, particularly genital actions resulting in sexual intercourse and/or orgasm." (*Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory*, No.191).

APPENDIX II

DISCERNMENT AND CONSCIENCE ABOUT SEXUAL MATTERS

...[Educators] must be able to convey the Church's teachings regarding sexual morality and the various vocations in life with authority, candor, sound reasoning, fidelity, and a sensitivity to the age and maturity level of their audience. At the same time, effective educators must take the time to listen to questions, concerns, and insights from the learners; to respect their integrity and sincerity; and to facilitate their ongoing search for knowledge and a deeper understanding of truth about the mystery of human sexuality.

In the end, whether choosing one's vocation or making a moral decision that relates to or affects one's vocation, each person is bound to live with and to stand by his or her own discernment or perception of God's will. In either case, "the art of discernment of spirits" comes in to place. If the content of the experience is in harmony with the gospel data of revelation and tradition and results in a rekindling of faith, strengthening of hope, and fostering of love, then it probably is an experience of God. A sense of greater integrity, peace, and joy or renewed call to a personal conversion of heart are validating qualities. (*Spiritual Renewal of the American Priesthood*, 44).

Ultimately, each person-whether single or married; whether widowed, divorced, or celibate; whether adult or adolescent-must discern his or her own moral decision and wider vocational calling. With all the input and support possible, both from individuals and communities, one must still face the future based on decisions made before God in the recesses of one's own heart. As the bishops at Vatican II phrased it, "conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a person. There one is alone with God, whose voice echoes in the depths." (1991. *Human Sexuality*).