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A Resource For The Catholic Schools and Pastoral Staff In The Diocese of Whitehorse

A GUIDE FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY TO YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

May the Holy Spirit guide us and give us courage to listen deeply and care compassionately to all the students entrusted to us in the Catholic Schools. In truth and charity we must care particularly for the pastoral needs of adolescents and young adults who question their sexual identity. This resource and guide supports Catholic schools and the pastoral staff in the Diocese of Whitehorse in this important work.

At the outset we want to acknowledge that much of this document was the result of the work done by the Alberta Catholic Schools Trustees Association, The Dufferin-Peel Catholic School Board, the Ontario Catholic Schools Trustees Association, and the Ontario Assembly of Catholic Bishops

Most Rev. Gary M. Gordon

Bishop of Whitehorse

28/ 9 / 12

An Ecclesial Context

1) We are not presenting the definite text on Catholic sexual morality in general. Our focus is a rather narrow one; the pastoral needs of adolescent and young adults who question their sexual identity or experience feelings of same-sex attraction. In the reading and application of this resource we ask that a number of considerations be kept in mind.

2) We want to highlight the theology and spirituality of communion. The Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio In-eunte* (The New Millennium)(par. 43) (Pope JPII not BXVI)of our Holy Father gives voice to the Church's sense of her need to "put out into the deep for a catch" (Lk. 5;4) and to face the challenges of the future.

a. To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings.

b. But what does this mean in practice? Here too, our thoughts could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up.

c. A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us.

d. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are a part of me". This makes us

able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship.

e. A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me".

f. A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to "make room" for our brothers and sisters, bearing "each other's burdens" (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.

g. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, "masks" of communion rather than its means of expression and growth.

3) We explicitly affirm the Church's teaching on same-sex attraction.

4) All persons, share the same rights and dignity and are called to live as God's children. In its document, "On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" (1986), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith affirms this truth, and condemns treatment that violates it.

5) The human person, made in the image and likeness of God, can hardly be adequately described by a reductionist reference to his or her sexual orientation. Today the church provides a badly needed context for the care of the human person when she refuses to consider the person as a "heterosexual" or a "homosexual" and insists that every person has a fundamental identity: the creature of God and, by grace, his child and heir to eternal life. (#16)

6) It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs. It reveals a kind of disregard to others which endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law. (#10)

7) Furthermore, a distinction must be made between homosexual orientation and homosexual genital acts. In general, sexual orientation is not freely chosen and is, therefore, not sinful. The expression of sexual orientation in specific acts, however, does involve moral issues, as is indicated in The Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved. (2357)

The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition (2358).

8) The Catechism of the Catholic Church makes a vital distinction between orientation and homosexual genital acts. This distinction is vital for clarity in pastoral practice which always acknowledges the objective morality of an action and personal culpability

"Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder." (#3 PCHP)

The Episcopal Commission for Doctrine of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, in the document on Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same Sex Attraction (PMYSSA) (June 2011)# 6 gives clarity in distinguishing inclinations from action.

In her teaching, however, the Church never condemns persons with same sex attraction. She carefully distinguishes between an individual's inclinations or feelings - some of which are transitory and/or situational and others which are deep-seated or permanent - and one's actions. While homosexual acts are always objectively wrong, same-sex inclinations are not in themselves sinful or a moral failing. To the extent that same-sex attraction is not freely chosen, there is no personal culpability in having such an inclination. Nonetheless, when oriented toward genital activity, this inclination is "objectively disordered". CCC# n.2358 This does not mean that the person as a whole is somehow defective or badly made, or that he or she has in some way been rejected by God. Inclinations to homosexual acts in no way diminish the full human dignity or intrinsic worth of the person. For many people, same-sex attraction constitutes a trial. They therefore deserve to be approached by pastors with charity and prudence.

9) Sexual genital expression is reserved for married couples so that children who may result from this union of minds, hearts and bodies can be nurtured in a stable loving relationship. Any sexual genital expression outside the context of marriage is morally wrong. The church teaches that extra-marital, pre-marital and homosexual acts are morally wrong.

Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection. (2359).

10) All of us are called to give witness to chastity, and with God's grace, to the avoidance of behaviors which are contrary to God's loving purpose in our lives. "Since chastity is a way of loving, it entails far more than the avoidance of sin. Like love, it can grow indefinitely. Becoming a chaste person follows the laws of growth and development and therefore requires not only self-control but also perseverance. The Triune God's presence in the soul of the baptized person, through the Holy Spirit, is the foundation of Christian life. That same Spirit assures us that living chastely is possible for everyone and can become a source of great joy.

Adolescents and young adults need to be taught by word and example that the virtue of chastity means "the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being." Through a Christ-centered love Christians can be fulfilled in all aspects of life, including the gradual integration of their sexuality. On this challenging journey, only a greater love can heal a lesser love.

Through his life of self-giving and chaste love, Christ has left all of us an example to follow for living our sexuality, whether as single or married persons. For everyone, chastity means integrating one's thoughts, feelings and actions in the area of human sexuality so that they reflect the moral order. Chastity teaches the way of self-mastery and is "the spiritual power which frees love from selfishness and aggression." It makes self-giving possible and is the prerequisite for generous love and true fulfillment.

All young people, whether or not they experience an inclination to same-sex attraction, strive to understand and appropriate their sexual identity. The progressive maturing of a person's freedom is a long-term process that can be encumbered by numerous obstacles. These include pressures from the media (particularly on the internet), a widespread moral relativism, and the hedonism propagated by secular society itself.

For young people who experience a same-sex attraction and for whom marriage is not an option, choosing chastity as a positive value is even more of an ongoing challenge. We must encourage them to live their single lives chastely as disciples of Jesus, who followed the path of sacrifice to the glory of eternal life. Responding generously to the call to chastity involves suffering and difficulty, but Christ invites us to place our burdens on him: "Come to me, all you who are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ... For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt 11.28, 30). Countless Christians through the ages have found that Jesus' friendship and

care bring inner healing and peace, and enable them to bear fruit for the life of Christ's Body, the Church (cf. Col 1.24).

A person with homosexual inclinations is not called to a "loveless" life, but to live in the love and grace of Christ Jesus. He alone fulfills our human personalities and lifts them up to the Father. Such a life entails both self-giving and self-sacrifice, the marks of true love for God and one's brothers and sisters." (PMYPSSA) #7,8

11) Parents and educators should not assume that same-sex attractions during adolescence are necessarily indicative of a fundamental homosexual orientation. It is not uncommon for young people to experience strong feelings or crushes on individuals of the same sex, or to have little overt interest in members of the opposite sex. Identity is particularly fluid during adolescence, and questions related to sexual orientation must be treated with great caution and sensitivity. What is communicated in educational settings or in families can profoundly affect individual students. All young people need compassion, understanding, acceptance, clear moral guidance, and, above all, time as they meet the challenge of integrating their sexuality.

12) Finally, there is more to a person than one's sexual attractions or orientation. To refer to a person as "gay" or "lesbian" in our culture is not only to use politically charged language but to succumb to a reductionist way of speaking about a human person someone else. Such labeling is not only inaccurate but tends to re-enforce and, in some cases, legitimate an arrested psycho-sexual development. We should seek to be more precise in our language and work towards the day when we will be able to even avoid using the term "homosexual" as a noun, or as an adjective directly describing the person (i.e. the homosexual person). Although it will take more words, we should seek to speak of "persons with same-sex attractions. (great to include this point)

CONCLUSION AND PASTORAL ASSISTANCE

Blessed Pope John Paul II's call to build a civilization of love, as briefly outlined in the quotes above from *Novo Millennio Inuente*, challenges church, home and school to communion; to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings is a joy and challenge in these times. The spirituality of communion and desire for a communion of love is imprinted on every human heart because we are made in the image and likeness of our Triune God. "It is a force that has its origin in God, Eternal love and Absolute Truth. All people feel the interior impulse to love authentically: love and truth never abandon them completely, because these are the vocation planted by God in the Heart and mind of every human person. The search for love and truth is purified and liberated by Jesus Christ from the impoverishment that our humanity brings to it and he reveals to us in all its fullness the initiative of love and the plan for true life that God has prepared for us. In Christ, charity in truth becomes the Face of his person, a vocation for us to love our brothers and sisters in the truth of his plan. Indeed he himself is the Truth (cf. Jn14:6)" *Caritas in Veritate* 1 Pope Benedict XVI 2009

The courage to affirm the God given life and dignity of each person from conception to natural end is the hope of this guiding document for the Catholic schools of Whitehorse and the pastoral staff of the Diocese of Whitehorse.

The Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Whitehorse want all students to be to fully alive as children of God becoming all they can become in God's plan for them now and for eternity.

This resource is an integral part of the Catholic Schools' mission statement that approaches each student as a unique person needing a holistic education of mind body and soul.

This resource is consistent with a culture of Catholic life and Catholic social justice which is so vital to what we are as a Catholic Institution serving the common good of society.

Administrators, teachers parents, students, and parish pastors, all have a part to play in creating that culture of life and justice so that each student can have life and have it to the full (cf Jn 10:10). This resource is but one as-

pect of assisting our schools to be communities of nurture, living a life of charity, truth and justice in our relations with one another, so that all forms of bullying and unjust discrimination toward persons of same sex attraction is eliminated from speech and action.

The very nature of the Catholic school as outlined in our mission statement creates a whole school environment that ultimately addresses every form of unjust discrimination and bullying. While we can be proud of the school climate and the tireless work of our staff, we also recognize that there is always work to be done to grow in virtuous living of charity, truth and justice. Our Catholic faith places a responsibility on us to provide a caring communion within the context of our Catholic faith.

We want to express gratitude to those who lovingly guide young people with a same sex attraction, parents, counselors, educators, and pastors. May the Lord grant all of us wisdom and courage in understanding, educating and loving all youth in our care. May we all grow in our journey to “live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” .(Eph. 5.2)

Guiding Policy for Student Groups

The Administration working in collaboration with the school counselors and the school council, with the approval of the Bishop, may wish to advance the well-being of students of same-sex attraction by establishing a group as an added resource to build on the existing climate stated so clearly in our mission statement: “Through the sharing of knowledge and Christian values and by celebrating our Catholic faith, students are assisted in developing a personal faith and an understanding and appreciation of self and others”

“Love - caritas -is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous engagement in the field of justice and peace” Caritas in Veritate #1 for the integral human development of the hearts and souls of our most precious gift, our children.

Any and all students may participate

The name for the potential group is “One Heart”

The signs or symbols of the group will be either a heart / cross.

A safe, open, educational, healing environment to meet, discuss, and socialize.

Staff adviser appointed by the school administrator in consultation with the Bishop must be present for all meetings from beginning to end.

Speakers, programs, resources and outside school events must be approved by the administration after consultation with the Bishop.

All materials, whether for group use or public/community awareness must be vetted by the staff adviser and administration. It is suggested that any new material be submitted a minimum of 3-4 weeks prior to event or meeting.

All students involved in “One Heart” must agree to strict privacy guidelines including restrictions of all personal electronic devices during meetings, posting on social media sites or breaking of confidentiality of any discussion held in meetings. Failure to do so may result in the suspension of the club.

If fundraising is done for a charity the choice of the charity organization must be vetted by the staff supervisor/administration. (compatible with our Catholic faith)



Sources:

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (1986)

Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association A Resource for an Inclusive Community (June 13 2001)

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board Community Support for Students Open Arms (September 2011)

Episcopal Commission for Doctrine of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction (June 2011)

Ontario Assembly of Catholic Bishops Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation, 2004

Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI Caritas in Veritate, On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth 2009

Catechism of the Catholic Church
APPENDIX 1

GENERAL GUIDELINES

As guidance counsellors, chaplains, pastors, and Catholic educators what do you need in order to apply prudent pastoral practice to youth and young adolescents?

One should possess the following:

- an appreciation of the values of home, forgiveness, humility, conversion, and spiritual growth in the way of the Lord;
- respect for the dignity of persons with same-sex orientation;
- an understanding of the Church’s teaching on human sexuality and marriage;
- an appreciation for the Catholic Church’s interpretation of scripture (see Appendix, 2)
- an appreciation for the natural law, conscience and conscience formation, sin, moral virtues and scandal as applied in Catholic ethics and moral theology;
- an understanding of the emotional, physical, social, spiritual and sexual development of adolescents
- a knowledge of the content in Family Life Programs used within Catholic schools.

The prudent counsellor remembers that the person whom they are assisting is a unique individual made in the image and likeness of God. The process of assimilation into Christ is also unique and different for each individual.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH A SAME-SEX ORIENTATION

In general, students with a same-sex orientation want what all students want; to be listened to and cared for. Here are some suggestions if a student discloses to you or needs to discuss same-sex concerns with you.

- Familiarise yourself with Catholic teaching on human sexuality. • Examine your own attitudes and get access to accurate information about same-sex orientation.
- Be aware that the student feels trust toward you, so don't overreact or act surprised.
- Provide a safe place to discuss the concerns of the student.
- Listen calmly and offer non-judgmental responses that will encourage further dialogue, for example: "tell me what you are concerned about" ... "how does that make you feel?" .
- Be aware that the student may be experiencing grief reactions such as loss, sadness, anger, denial, or confusion because of negative attitudes of society toward people with a same-sex orientation.
- Don't put words in their mouths. Allow youth to define their own issues. Our role is to help them deal with the issues they present. If a supportive environment is provided, youth who would like to talk about issues of sexual orientation will know that it is permissible.
- Use the vocabulary that the student uses. If the student uses "homosexual" or "lesbian/gay" follow her or his lead. Use the term "same-sex feeling" if the student appears uneasy with other vocabulary. For example, "so, you are concerned about your same-sex feelings for other girls".
- A student may appear confused about their orientation. Assure them that this is normal and that it will become more clear as time goes on.
- Be aware of your own comfort level and limitations. Your role is to be a good listener and let the student do the talking.
- Ask yourself and the student:
 1. Does the student have friends he or she can trust with the information?
 2. Do the student's parents know? What would happen if they knew?
 3. If the parents cannot support the student, are there other adults available for support.

Assure them of confidentiality except where you are required by law to disclose information. Some also include in this ground rule that they will not be able to maintain confidentiality if what is shared is illegal or dangerous to the student or others.

- Offer to continue to meet with the student if they so wish, unless you feel you wish to refer them to someone else. In that case, ask the student if they would allow you to refer them. Once again, it is important for the student's self-esteem and safety that they take the lead in this regard and give you permission to refer them. This also reinforces confidentiality.
- Compliment them on their courage in dealing with the difficult task of self-discovery. God's love is revealed through people who care about one another and help each other grow into the fullness of life.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR CREATING A SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS OF A SAME-SEX ORIENTATION

Guidelines for Administration

- Familiarise yourself with Catholic teaching on human sexuality. • Examine your own attitudes and get access to accurate information about same-sex orientation
- Actively promote a welcoming, safe environment rooted in gospel values of love, justice, and compassion.
- Do not tolerate derogatory remarks or jokes, name-calling or harassment in the school, and act immediately when this happens, with the necessary and appropriate disciplinary response.
- Be involved in working for school-wide support and education for understanding and tolerance of sexual minorities. There is a need for appropriate Catholic curriculum materials and library resources that broaden the awareness of positive role models in this regard among writers, historians, scientists, artists, musicians, and spiritual leaders.
- Provide grade level assemblies to address zero tolerance for discrimination of any kind as outlined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental/physical abilities) and be sure to include sexual orientation.
- Under the direction of the principal, identify a few staff members who can offer support and/or counsel sexual minority students.
- Provide information sessions for parents regarding a Catholic approach to homosexuality.
- Ensure that all teachers are adequately supported in order to teach the curriculum on human sexuality, including homosexuality. Provide them with opportunities for in- service and the necessary resources both human and material.
- If you are uncomfortable dealing with issues of homosexuality, guide students to others on staff who can provide pastoral care (e.g. chaplain, guidance counsellor).
- At the Catholic school board level, work to develop a policy with respect to assisting students of same-sex orientation in partnership with the Bishop of the Catholic diocese.

Guidelines for Staff

- Make it clear that harassment of and discrimination against students with a same-sex orientation will not be tolerated in staff rooms, classrooms, in hallways, or anywhere on school property. Respect the confidentiality of students.
- Ensure that the required lessons on homosexuality, chastity, and sexual morality outlined in educational curriculum documents for your grade are taught well. If you are uncomfortable with, or not knowledgeable about the topic, seek help from department heads, board consultants and/or administration. Attend in-services/workshops that will help you to become more comfortable and knowledgeable.
- Inform yourself about the needs of and resources for students.
- Do not assume that all students or their parents are heterosexual. Use inclusive language when referring to this relationship• Do not apply labels to students such as homosexual, gay, or lesbian.
- During classroom discussions do not suggest that a youth should disclose their same-sex orientation to parents, family and friends. They need to do that at their own safe pace. Many students who reveal their same-sex orientation to their parents are forced to leave home. The decision to tell their parents must be their choice and they must be ready to live with the consequences.

APPENDIX 2

UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE

The Word of God

“The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.” This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.

“Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #85, 86)

Interpreting Scripture

How does the Catholic community go about interpreting God’s Word in the Scriptures? How can we understand what its teaching means for us today in terms of ethics and morality? To answer these questions we need to understand two very important tools of scriptural scholarship: exegesis and hermeneutics. These complicated-sounding terms describe two activities that we all engage in regularly: analysis and interpretation. In the case of scripture study, however, they are applied with a certain academic rigour and discipline.

Exegesis refers to the study of scripture texts in their original context. It looks at the language, the historical context in which these texts were originally written, the religious traditions and other existing writings that influenced the authors of the texts. To understand fully what the authors intended, we need to understand something about their world, their motivations, and so on. For example, imagine that Grade 12 students one hundred years from now were to do a research paper on the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre. To do so, they would have to know something about the political situation in the world as it was in 2001. They would have to know something about the different religious groups and movements. They would have to be aware of the biases of the different sources from which they were getting their information. For instance, newspapers from the United States, Israel, Canada, and Saudi Arabia would all cover the same event from very different perspectives. Students in the next century would have to distinguish these sources in order to understand the complexity of the situation. There would also be books written on the subject, documentary and news film and audio coverage, and even songs and poetry. There would be artefacts and memorials built of stone. How would each of these add to their understanding of the event? Why is it important to understand each source of information in its original context? That is the task of exegesis – analysing the text or event in question as much as possible within its original context.

Hermeneutics is essentially the task of interpretation. When we interpret something, we do so with reference to something else. For example, say those same high school students in the next century were doing a research paper on the evolution of airport security procedures since the dawn of air travel. They would completely miss the mark if they failed to recognise the importance of the September 11 terrorist attack as a key factor leading to changes in airport security. We can understand the sharp increase in security at airports early in the twenty-first century by seeing it in light of the terrorist attack that used passenger aircraft as weapons of terror. September 11 and the ongoing threat of terrorism becomes a hermeneutical lens through which we understand things like changes to airport security.¹

¹ Adapted from *In Search of the Good: A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living*, 2004, Publication Services, CCCB. **HOMOSEXUALITY AND SCRIPTURE 1. Homosexuality and Scripture**

The scripture passages on homosexuality found in the Jewish testaments can only be understood in light of the teachings of Jesus in the Christian Scriptures and the Creation stories of Genesis.

Jesus identified for us the two great commandments of love. It is always out of love that we interact with God and with each other; including ourselves.

The Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in their letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons, interprets the related passages in the Jewish Testaments in this way: #6. Providing a basic plan for understanding this entire discussion of homosexuality is the theology of creation we find in Genesis. God, by his infinite wisdom and love, brings into existence all of reality as a reflection of his goodness. He fashions mankind, male and female, in his own image and likeness. Human beings, therefore, are nothing less than the work of God himself; and in the complementarity of the sexes, they are called to reflect the inner unity of the Creator. They do this in a striking way in their cooperation with him in the transmission of life by a mutual donation of the self to the other.

In “Genesis” 3, we find that this truth about persons being an image of God has been obscured by original sin. There inevitably follows a loss of awareness of the covenantal character of the union these persons had with God and with each other. The human body retains its “spousal significance” but this is now clouded by sin. Thus, in “Genesis” 19:1-11, the deterioration due to sin continues in the story of the men of Sodom. There can be no doubt of the moral judgment made there against homosexual relations. In “Leviticus” 18:22 and 20:13, in the course of describing the conditions necessary for belonging to the Chosen People, the author excludes from the People of God those who behave in a homosexual fashion.

Against the background of this exposition of theocratic law, an eschatological perspective is developed by St. Paul when, in 1 “Cor.” 6:9, he proposes the same doctrine and lists those who behave in a homosexual fashion among those who shall not enter the Kingdom of God.

In “Romans” 1:18-32, still building on the moral traditions of his forebears, but in the new context of the confrontation between Christianity and the pagan society of his day, Paul uses homosexual behaviour as an example of the blindness which has overcome humankind. Instead of the original harmony between Creator and creatures, the acute distortion of idolatry has led to all kinds of moral excess. Paul is at a loss to find a clearer example of this disharmony than homosexual relations. Finally, 1 “Tim.” 1, in full continuity with the Biblical position, singles out those who spread wrong doctrine and in v. 10 explicitly names as sinners those who engage in homosexual acts.¹

2. Marriage and Scripture

In the summer of 2003, as the Canadian bishops formulated their message “Marriage in the Present Day,” they looked to Scripture to formulate a Catholic understanding of the human person. They wrote:

The Vatican Council II in “*Dei Verbum*” 10, said: “It is clear, therefore, that in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they will contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”

In that spirit, we look to the biblical text in the creation of the world in the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis to convey fundamental truths about humanity. The Canadian Catholic Bishops (CCCB) point out that “two major points can be taken from this text which offer a profound understanding of the conjugal state. First, God gives human beings freedom, fertility, power, and the stewardship of all the earth and everything that inhabits it. Secondly, human beings are created in God’s image: ‘God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them’ (Genesis 1.27). This is the wellspring of the dignity, meaning and life of the human being.”

“The image of God is manifested in both a personal and a conjugal way. In Genesis 1.31, this image of God is the pinnacle of creation which leads to its fullness: ‘God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.’ The image and likeness of God is not only in the very nature of the couple, but also in their power to give life through procreation.”²

3. The Sacrament Of Marriage

“In the eyes of the Catholic Church, marriage takes on a primary importance because Christ elevated it to the dignity of a sacrament. ‘Even if the love between a man and a woman is imperfect, it is always called to manifest in a tangible way what Jesus revealed in abundance: the irrevocable love of God that is forever linked to our humanity... Married couples take part in this mystery. They become living signs of it.’[5] The sacrament of

marriage is a sign of the union between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5.31-32). As the icon of God's love, the sacrament of marriage is also the icon of human dignity and greatness. The key image of creation is reflected in the richness of the masculine and feminine dimensions of the heterosexual couple. The fact that human beings are created female and male, in God's image, and that procreative power flows from their union are two fundamental aspects of marriage."

"This social and conjugal unit – by its binding love, by its inherent ability to bear children, and by the ensuing responsibility of father and mother to care for their children – not only enriches society but is its very cornerstone. For Christians, marriage marks a new page in the sacred story that began at baptism. It is a new moment in salvation history when the couple, forming a community of life and love, becomes a sign of Christ's love for his Church. The marriage bond is thus a covenant to be lived, an unconditional promise between two people that also involves the community."³

1 Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons. 1986, Section V .B.6.

2 Ref: Message of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Marriage In The Present Day, July 2003.

3 Rev. Message of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Marriage in the Present day, July 2003

APPENDIX 3

Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction

Episcopal Commission for Doctrine of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

Our Reasons for Writing

1. As Bishops, we wish to address the pastoral needs of adolescents and young adults who question their sexual identity or experience feelings of same-sex attraction. We are concerned for the spiritual good of all persons, and want to help them live out their call "to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity."¹ Convinced that "only what is true can ultimately be pastoral,"² we offer this guidance, by way of general principles and pastoral guidelines, to all Catholics, pastors, parents and educators, as well as to young adults themselves.

2. In this document the expression "person with same-sex attraction" refers to one who feels an erotic and emotional attraction, which is predominant and not merely episodic, towards persons of the same sex, whether with or without sexual relations. The terms "gay" and "lesbian" are not used to define people in the Church's official teachings and documents. Although these words are common terms in current speech, and many people use them to describe themselves, they do not describe persons with the fullness and richness that the Church recognizes and respects in every man or woman. Instead, "gay" and "lesbian" are often cultural definitions for people and movements that have accepted homosexual acts and behaviors as morally good.

This Letter does not address the debate about the origins or causes of homosexuality or same-sex attraction. The Catechism of the Catholic Church recognizes that "its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained."³

Human Dignity of All Persons

3. In the eyes of the Church, every human person is a unique and irreplaceable gift created by our loving God and called to be his son or daughter. Created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by the blood of Christ, every person possesses an intrinsic dignity which must always be respected. The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms that persons with homosexual inclinations “must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God’s will in their lives.”⁴

Footnotes

1 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, n. 40.

2 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (1986), n. 15. This important document of the Magisterium contains guidelines on the Catholic Church’s teaching on the issue.

3 Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2357.

4 Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2358.

We exhort all those exercising a ministry in the Church or working in the pastoral care of young people to be especially careful not to perpetuate injustice, hatred or malice in speech or action – unfortunately still too common among us – against persons with homosexual inclinations.

We wish to stress that, although sexual identity helps situate the person as a unique individual, the human person “can hardly be described by a reductionist reference to his or her sexual orientation.”⁵ Those with same-sex attraction are first and foremost human beings, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Because of their inherent dignity, they always deserve our respect. By fostering this profound esteem we imitate the Good Shepherd’s love for his flock.

Human Sexuality in God’s Plan

4. While always insisting on respect and compassion for young people with same-sex attraction, the Church also reaffirms God’s plan for human sexuality. Our sexuality is a gift which God saw as “very good” when he created human persons in his image and likeness, “male and female he created them” (Gen 1.27). The complementarity of man and woman is inherent in the design of creation.

Human sexuality belongs to God’s creative plan as a powerful sign of his self-giving love, as the Servant of God, Blessed John Paul II, wrote:

God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. ... Consequently, sexuality ... is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such.⁶

Human beings, then, in their sexual difference and complementarity, express what Blessed John Paul II calls “the spousal meaning of the body.” This means that the complementarity of masculinity and femininity, which encompasses both body and spirit, reveals the call of every human being to become a gift for another person. This fundamental truth is the foundation of the Church’s understanding of sexuality.

5. Sexual relations belong within the marriage covenant between a man and a woman, for it is only within this covenant that the two inseparable ends of marriage can be achieved: the deepening of love between spouses and the procreation and education of children.⁷ Any genital act outside the covenant of marriage cannot fulfill this twofold purpose intended by the Creator and thus is morally wrong.

Scripture and Tradition teach that sexual relations between persons of the same sex are not in accord with God’s original intention expressed in the plan of creation.⁸

For this reason, the Church has consistently taught that homosexual acts can never be approved.⁹

Footnotes

5 Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (1986), n. 16.

6 John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), n. 11.

7 Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2363; Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family* (1995), n. 14

8 Some scriptural examples include Gn 18.20-19.25; Lv 18.22, 20.13; Rm 1.24-28; 1 Cor 6.9-10.

9 Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2357; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona Humana* (1975), n. 8.

Distinguishing Inclinations from Actions

6. In her teaching, however, the Church never condemns persons with same-sex attraction. She carefully distinguishes between an individual's inclinations or feelings – some of which are transitory and/or situational and others which are deep-seated or permanent – and one's actions. While homosexual acts are always objectively wrong, same-sex inclinations are not in themselves sinful or a moral failing. To the extent that a same-sex attraction is not freely chosen, there is no personal culpability in having such an inclination. Nonetheless, when oriented toward genital activity, this inclination is “objectively disordered.”¹⁰ This does not mean that the person as a whole is somehow defective or “badly made,” or that he or she has in some way been rejected by God. Inclinations to homosexual acts in no way diminish the full human dignity or intrinsic worth of the person. For many people, same-sex attraction constitutes a trial. They therefore deserve to be approached by pastors with charity and prudence.

Fostering Chastity

7. Since chastity is a way of loving, it entails far more than the avoidance of sin. Like love, it can grow indefinitely. Becoming a chaste person follows the laws of growth and development and therefore requires not only self-control but also perseverance. The Triune God's presence in the soul of the baptized person, through the Holy Spirit, is the foundation of Christian life. That same Spirit assures us that living chastely is possible for everyone and can become a source of great joy.¹¹

Adolescents and young adults need to be taught by word and example that the virtue of chastity means “the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being.”¹² Through a Christ centered love Christians can be fulfilled in all aspects of life, including the gradual integration of their sexuality. On this challenging journey, only a greater love can heal a lesser love.

Through his life of self-giving and chaste love, Christ has left all of us an example to follow for living our sexuality, whether as single or married persons. For everyone, chastity means integrating one's thoughts, feelings and actions in the area of human sexuality so that they reflect the moral order. Chastity teaches the way of self-mastery and is “the spiritual power which frees love from selfishness and aggression.”¹³ It makes self-giving possible and is the prerequisite for generous love and true fulfillment.

Footnotes

10 Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2358.

11 Cf. the CCCB Episcopal Commission for Doctrine's Pastoral Letter to Young People on Chastity (2011). It is available for download at cccb.ca. Printed copies can be ordered from cccbpublications.ca.

12 Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2337.

13 Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family* (1995), n. 16.

8. All young people, whether or not they experience an inclination to same-sex attraction, strive to understand and appropriate their sexual identity. The progressive maturing of a person's freedom is a long-term process that can be encumbered by numerous obstacles. These include pressures from the media (particularly on the internet), a widespread moral relativism, and the hedonism propagated by secular society itself.

For young people who experience a same-sex attraction and for whom marriage is not an option, choosing chastity as a positive value is even more of an ongoing challenge. We must encourage them to live their single lives chastely as disciples of Jesus, who followed the path of sacrifice to the glory of eternal life. Responding generously to the call to chastity involves suffering and difficulty, but Christ invites us to place our burdens on him: "Come to me, all you who are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ... For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt 11.28, 30). Countless Christians through the ages have found that Jesus' friendship and care bring inner healing and peace, and enable them to bear fruit for the life of Christ's Body, the Church (cf. Col 1.24).

A person with homosexual inclinations is not called to a "loveless" life, but to live in the love and grace of Christ Jesus. He alone fulfills our human personalities and lifts them up to the Father. Such a life entails both self-giving and self-sacrifice, the marks of true love for God and one's brothers and sisters.

II. Personalities

9. The whole Christian community has a call to guide its young members who experience same-sex attraction in their journey toward human maturity. We offer these reflections and guidelines for all Catholics, but especially for the priests, pastoral workers, parents and educators who wish to help adolescents and young adults facing difficulties in this regard.

To the Catholic Community

10. We wish to acknowledge in our midst the generous men and women with same-sex attraction who bear witness to the Gospel through their generosity and service to charity in the truth. At the same time, while recognizing the experience of persons with same-sex attraction and the turmoil it often causes in their lives, the Catholic community also has the responsibility of witnessing to the full truth of human sexuality. We must counteract false ideas of freedom promoted by secular society, ideas which can disorient and harm our youth. More than

ever, the beauty of the Church's teaching on human sexuality, which leads to authentic freedom, needs to be lived and convincingly preached by everyone.

The moral and spiritual relativism of our society can make the Church's teaching on sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular appear bizarre, out of touch, and even intolerant. Yet when people cease to base their moral judgments on objective truth, confusion results. All too often they fall victim to lies about the meaning of true freedom and authentic self-expression. True Christian freedom is not first of all an acceptance of one's own desire to do what one wants, but an acceptance of the truth which sets us free (cf. Jn 8.32).

11. To assist young persons with same-sex attraction it is necessary to understand the enormous pressures to which they are frequently subjected: unjust discrimination, the sense of invisibility and isolation, and ignorance of their particular situation. We deplore all such attitudes and actions.

Hedonism and an obsession with the pursuit of pleasure, combined with an excessive consumerism for "as much as possible as soon as possible," typify the mentality of contemporary Western society. Young people in particular are often the targets of solicitations, often through the media, which encourage them to consider sexual relations as simply another product of consumption, "a commodity, a mere 'thing' to be bought and sold."¹⁴ To help them overcome this confusion, we ourselves must be mature in our faith and profoundly rooted in friendship with Christ (cf. Jn 15.15), a friendship that enables us to discern between truth and deceit.

Catholics ought to be exemplary in treating persons with homosexual inclinations first and foremost as human beings created by God and worthy of respect. The Church's teaching emphasizes this attitude: "It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs. It reveals a kind of disregard for others which endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law."¹⁵

To Priests and Pastoral Workers

12. Catholic parents testify that a welcoming, respectful and sensitive attitude by their parish community is especially important when they are dealing with a child's disclosure of same-sex attraction. Offer your patient assistance to parents who are grappling with the challenges of supporting a son or daughter who is coming to terms with same-sex attraction and may experience isolation or repressing silence. Ostracism or the fear of being rejected or even hated, frequently contributes to the despair that all too often is felt by these young persons. We urge you to be attentive to their parents, reducing their isolation and worry by your counsel.

Bishops, as well as priests, deacons and pastoral workers, should commit themselves anew to being attentive to the needs of adolescents and young adults with same-sex attraction, who are found in our families, parishes and communities. Make them feel welcome in our churches. Listen to them and offer them the love of Christ.

13. Take the time to examine your own interior dispositions towards people with same-sex attraction. With the help of God's grace, work hard to remove whatever may prevent you from welcoming them warmly. Be aware that your language and attitudes can inadvertently communicate a message that has nothing to do with the Church's authentic teaching.

Above all, welcome these young adults and, if they are honestly striving to live in accordance with the teaching of Christ, encourage their full and active role in parish life. Such participation provides a source of support that allows them to make progress in living a chaste life.

We ask that you promote support groups that foster chaste living, such as "Courage" for individuals with same-sex attraction and "Encourage" for families interested in learning more about how to help their children. Where support groups already exist, give them your backing. Where they do not yet exist, make every effort to establish them at both the parish and diocesan levels.

Footnotes

14 Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 5.

15 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (1986), n. 10.

To Parents

14. We wish to express our spiritual closeness to you, parents of children discovering a same-sex attraction. This can be a time of questioning for you as well. It will require from you patience, self-control, prudence and understanding. Remember that your child needs you and the family now more than ever. Children always remain a gift – God’s gift to you. At all times strive to respond lovingly and with trust in divine Providence. Continue to welcome your child into your home and family life in imitation of Christ, encouraging him or her to be faithful to the spiritual life and, if helpful, to seek the guidance of a priest or the assistance of a counsellor.

15. Counseling can be a valuable tool for struggling youth, who may experience a crisis as they grow increasingly aware of homosexual feelings. Young people, particularly adolescents and young men, may be tempted to commit suicide once they can no longer deny or ignore their deep-seated same-sex inclinations. Everyone must be alert to offer hope and assistance to these young people lest despair obscure their judgment.

Ensure that professional counsellors or psychologists who see young people are distinguished by their sound human and spiritual maturity. They must be committed to the Christian vision of the human person and sexuality, as well as the Church’s teaching on homosexuality and chastity. Their interventions can help your child discern the meaning of a same-sex attraction in a way that leads to greater clarity about sexual identity and the inherent dignity of all children of God.

To Educators

16. Parents have the principal moral responsibility of educating their sons and daughters in matters of human sexuality. As teachers, catechists and other educators, you play a role insofar as you carry out your responsibilities in the name of the parents and with their consent.

In the catechesis of young adults, it is imperative to present in a firm but charitable way the true nature and purpose of human sexuality in all its dimensions. Encourage them in the practice of chastity, especially since society often misunderstands and scorns this virtue. Avoidance of difficult questions or watering down the Church’s teaching is always a disservice. Such attitudes could lead young people into grave moral danger. “Moral conscience requires that, in every occasion, Christians give witness to the whole moral truth, which is contradicted both by approval of homosexual acts and unjust discrimination against homosexual persons.”¹⁶

We ask you to pay particular attention to guiding adolescents and young adults with same-sex attraction away from two specific dangers. First, help them see themselves as persons with a God-given dignity and not merely as individuals with sexual inclinations and desires. Second, help them avoid involvement in a “gay culture” opposed to the Church’s teaching, with its often aggressive and immoral lifestyle.

17. Dear friends in Christ: we want you to know that we are close to those of you who are struggling with same-sex attraction or homosexual inclinations. We do not cease “praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col 1.9). We offer you the following practical advice grounded in the teaching of Christ and wisdom of the Church. Above all, hold close to your heart that being a Christian is about a relationship with Jesus Christ, who gives your life meaning and a decisive direction.

16 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Considerations regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons (2003), n. 5

Accept that God loves you

18. Even if you have doubts or are troubled by feelings of self-rejection, remember that you are a child of God, embraced by his tender love. Even before the world was created, you were chosen “to be holy and blameless before him in love” and you were destined “for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1.4-5).

“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thes 5.17)

19. Develop your personal relationship with God through persevering prayer. He speaks, hears and replies. Through his prayer, Jesus listened to God and was comforted by him. The Gospel teaches us that when Jesus was put to the test, he withdrew by himself to pray (cf. Mt 4.1ff; Mt 17.1ff). It was there, in dialogue with his Father, that he received the grace to accomplish God’s will.

By praying, you turn towards God and through him to your neighbor. Prayer becomes hope in action. Keep Christ as your constant Companion, with whom you can converse at every step of your journey. Leave yourself the space to hear his whisper, calling you to follow him. Let his word shape your journey as an unfolding of holiness.

Prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is “our life, our sweetness and our hope,” is particularly helpful for those who struggle with same-sex attraction and earnestly desire the grace to live chastely. Mary teaches us that chastity is not “love-less,” but love fulfilled, love made fruitful.

“Be Vigilant” (1 Pet 5.8)

20. Because chastity is not only a journey but also a battle, be on guard against temptations that will continually arise. Realistically assess your weaknesses, and avoid circumstances that might lead you to fall. When using the internet, be on guard against pornography, as well as certain chat rooms and social networking sites that promote immoral lifestyles. Chastity is a challenge, but God’s grace will give you the strength to overcome temptation.

Celebrate the sacraments frequently

21. As visible signs of God’s grace active in your lives, the sacraments are gifts to make you holy. A life centered on the Eucharist sustains and increases your closeness to Jesus, helps to separate you from sin and commits you to a life of service of your brothers and sisters.

When you stumble on your way, the Lord is with you. Never give in to discouragement, but return frequently to the Lord for forgiveness. Growth in holiness is a long and arduous journey.

Because we are all sinners, God continuously calls us to conversion when we give in to weakness and sin. God always offers you his grace, especially in the hardest moments of your lives. Confess your sins with contrite hearts, resolved not to repeat them again. Try to find a stable confessor or spiritual director with whom you can discuss your difficulties honestly and so receive help in overcoming them.

Through the sacrament of Reconciliation, the Lord tells every Christian: “Go your way and from now on do not sin again.” (Jn 8.11). With forgiveness you will experience the joy that comes from the God “who is rich in mercy” (Eph 2.5).

Cultivate virtuous friendships

22. Friendship is a precious gift from God, a way of loving necessary for every person. “Whether it develops between persons of the same or opposite sex, friendship represents a good for all. It leads to spiritual commu-

nion.”¹⁷ To equate friendship with genital expression, however, distorts its meaning. We recommend therefore that you nurture virtuous and chaste friendships, though not exclusively with others of the same sex. True friendship enhances your ability to live chastely, while living in isolation, fear or bitterness undermines a healthy and holy life.

23. As pastors, we have the mandate from Christ to help each and every person receive the Gospel’s message of hope and accompany them toward the “fullness of life” (Jn 10.10) that Jesus promised. That fullness of life cannot avoid the path taken by the Lord himself, namely, we must be united to the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection.

All those who seek to follow the Lord “are called to enact the will of God in their life by joining whatever sufferings and difficulties they experience in virtue of their condition to the sacrifice of the Lord’s Cross. That Cross, for the believer, is a fruitful sacrifice since from that death comes life and redemption.”¹⁸

As a final word, we express our profound gratitude to all those who wisely and lovingly guide young people with a same-sex attraction: priests and pastoral associates, parents and educators. May the Lord grant all of us wisdom and strength in understanding, educating and loving all youth entrusted to our care. The future of the Church and society depends on them and on our efforts to help them on their journey to “live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (Eph 5.2).

Footnotes

17 Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2347.

18 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (1986), n. 12.

Some Church documents on Same-Sex Attraction

- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (1986).
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Some Considerations Concerning the Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons, 1992.
- The Pontifical Council for the Family, The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family, 1995.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 2357-2359.

All of these documents are available at the Vatican website, www.vatican.va

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APPENDIX 4

CONSCIENCE

“...our conscience is our most secret core and our sanctuary. There we are alone with God, whose voice echoes in our hearts.” (Gaudium et Spes #16)

What is Conscience?

Timothy O'Connell in *Principles for a Catholic Morality* identifies three related senses of the word 'conscience':

1) Conscience as a capacity to recognize right and wrong. Here conscience is a capacity of the human person. All people in all cultures have a general awareness that some things are right and others are wrong. The fact that individuals and societies may disagree about what is right only helps to show that all people have this capacity to know the good. This capacity refers to our basic orientation toward the good. Conscience as a capacity defines the essential identity of the human.

2) Conscience as a process of moral reasoning. It is not enough to have a conscience or ability to choose the right and avoid evil. We need to search out in each situation what is the right thing to do. To act according to our conscience, we must seek to learn the facts, to learn what moral values are, to reason correctly in moral matters. We must seek to be educated about moral issues. Conscience, in other words, must be formed and informed. This is a lifelong process of learning "correct seeing and right thinking". It means relying on the community for instruction rather than relying solely on oneself.

3) Conscience as a judgment. Conscience is incomplete until we act on it.

After examining all the factors, we still need to make a judgment and a decision and commitment to do what is right. This is conscience in the narrow sense of the term (particular concrete situations of daily living). This is the heart of conscience: we commit ourselves to do what we believe to be right and avoid what we believe to be wrong.¹

Conscience is a profound aspect of humanity touching on the very core of who we are and in fact, "...our conscience is our most secret core and our sanctuary. There we are alone with God, whose voice echoes in our hearts", (*Gaudium et Spes* #16). The exercise of conscience then, is where we enact and live out our relationship with God.

The perception of conscience has evolved into a lived response of being loved by God, as we come to understand who we are and who we are becoming in relationship with other people. Moral knowledge is social and conscience has a social dimension. With conscience, we can say that the judgment of conscience is always something I must do for myself, but is never something that we form by ourselves. No one ever comes to moral truth on one's own. We must always consult established sources of wisdom and the Church teaches that there are many sources of moral wisdom to help us: Church teaching itself, scripture, our families, rules of our society and culture, general human knowledge and experience, all help us to form our conscience. By considering all of these sources of wisdom, we grow in freedom and truth of

¹ *In Search of the Good: A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living*, CCCB Publication Services, 2004. following the path which leads to wholeness and holiness. In so doing, conscience is seen as an activity of the whole person – a knowing of the heart as well as of the mind as perceived in all relationships. The Church presumes that we have formed our conscience by sincerely trying to discover God's will in our own circumstances and situations. In other words, conscience is simply our best self, in union with God, affecting our life and well-being within community.

How do we make a moral judgment with an informed Conscience?

In the making of a moral judgment using the traditional legal model, some of the questions tend to be: What is my obligation? What am I doing? What is the right thing to do? What values are at stake? What are my options? What consequences may follow? Keeping in mind the social dimension of conscience and the development of virtue and character, we now need to ask ourselves some new questions: Who am I? What am I becoming? What should I do because of who I am? From what inner place am I doing it? To whom or what am I committed? How will my decisions affect them? What will lead me towards full communion with God?

The good news in the renewal of Catholic moral theology proclaims the need for both sets of questions. To be complete, to become the persons God has called us to be in all of our relationships, we need to have a disposition of receptivity to all the sources of moral truth. When it comes to informing our conscience, we embrace all realities and possibilities. This disposition of receptivity will certainly impact who we are as persons and who we are becoming. This will help to develop within us a 'moral instinct' to move us along the right path to wholeness and holiness.

An Erroneous Conscience

Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-informed conscience is upright and truthful. In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path. It can happen that moral conscience remains in ignorance and makes erroneous judgments about acts to be performed or already committed. In our human capacity to make judgments about right and wrong, in our attempt to grow in a basic orientation towards goodness, we may make a judgment conscientiously that is nonetheless wrong. It is without sin. It does not interfere in our relationship with God.

A person may have heard the church's teaching, but be unable to allow it to convince his or her mind and heart, even when the teaching has been well presented. This can be true for young people who are bombarded daily with the counter messages of the culture. Invincible ignorance may be difficult to overcome. This does not imply, of course, that everyone has to be allowed to follow out his or her conscience when this would negatively affect the common good or the good of individuals.

But, how do we know that we have chosen wrong? It must be said that in conscience formation, two very important components need to be included – discernment and dialogue. Once we have reflected upon choosing the right path, this lifelong process of educating our conscience continues in prayer and dialogue. Discovering our call to respond to God's presence in and through the multiple relations of life is the significant exercise of conscience. It is through

APPENDIX 5

Chastity As Purity Of Heart And Intention Rev. Ron Rolheiser omi

2012-01-15

To live a chaste life is not easy, not just for celibates, but for everyone. Even when our actions are all in line, it is still hard to live with a chaste heart, a chaste attitude, and chaste fantasies. Purity of heart and intention is very difficult.

Why? Chastity is difficult because we are so incurably sexual in every pore of our being. And that is not a bad thing. It's God's gift. Far from being something dirty and antithetical to our spiritual lives, sexuality is God's great gift, God's holy fire, inside us. And so the longing for consummation is a conscious or inchoate colouring underlying most every action in our lives.

And so it is hard to pray for chastity because to pray for it, seemingly, is to pray that sexual yearning and sexual energy should lessen within us or disappear altogether. And who wants to live an asexual and neutered life? No healthy person wants this. Thus, if you are healthy, it is hard to put your heart into praying for chastity because, deep down, nobody wants to be asexual.

But the problem is not with chastity but with our understanding of it. To be chaste does not mean that we become asexual (though spirituality has forever struggled to not make that equation). Chastity is not about denying our sexuality but about properly channeling it. To be chaste is to be pure of heart. That's the biblical notion of chastity. Jesus does not ask us to pray for chastity, he asks us to pray for "purity of heart": Blessed are the pure of heart, they shall see God. They also channel their sexuality properly.

What is purity of heart? To be pure of heart is to relate to others and the world in a way that respects and honors the full dignity, value, and destiny of every person and everything. To be pure of heart is to see others as God sees them. Purity of heart would have us loving others with their good (and not our own) in mind. Karl Rahner suggests that we are pure of heart when we see others against an infinite horizon, namely, inside of a vision that sees the other's dignity, individuality, life, dreams, and sexuality within the biggest ambiance of all, God's eternal plan. Purity of heart is purity of intention and full respect in love.

When we understand chastity in this way we can more easily pray for it. In this understanding we are not praying to have our sexual energies deadened, we are praying instead to remain fully red-blooded but with our sexual energies, intentions, and daydreams properly channeled. We are praying too for the kind of maturity, human and sexual, that fully respects others. In essence, we are praying for a deeper respect, a deeper maturity, and a more life-giving love.

And this is a much-needed prayer in our lives because sexuality is so powerful that even inside of a marriage relationship sexuality can still have an intentionality that is not wide enough. Charles Taylor, in his book, *A Secular Age*, argues the point that sex too-easily loses the big picture and becomes narrow in its focus, a point that is often missed in our understanding of it: "I am not trying to be condescending about our ancestors, because I think that there is a real tension involved in trying to combine in one life sexual fulfilment and piety. This is only in fact one of the points at which a more general tension, between human flourishing in general and dedication to God, makes itself felt. That this tension should be particularly evident in the sexual domain is readily understandable. Intense and profound sexual fulfilment focuses us powerfully on the exchange within the couple; it strongly attaches us possessively to what is privately shared. ... It is not for nothing that the early monks and hermits saw sexual renunciation as opening the way to the wider love of God ... [And] that there is a tension between fulfilment and piety should not surprise us in a world distorted by sin, that is separated from God. But we have to avoid turning this into a constitutive incompatibility." Unfortunately that is forever what both the secular world and Christian spirituality (without a proper understanding of chastity) struggle not to do.

Given the power of sexuality inside us, and given the power of our human drives and yearnings in general, it is not easy to live a chaste life. It is even more difficult, and rare, to have a chaste spirit, a chaste heart, chaste daydreams, and chaste intentions. Our hearts want what they want and pressure us to ignore the consequences. We can easily feel a certain repugnance to praying for chastity. But that is largely because we do not understand chastity properly: It is not a deadening of the heart, a stripping away of our sexuality, but a deeper maturity that lets our sexual energies flow out in a more life-giving way.

