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Ronda Chervin

*Tell Me Why
I Should Be a
Catholic When...*

The Moral Teachings
of the Church seem so
Strict — Can't we be
Good Christians by
Following our own
Consciences?



by

Ronda Chervin, Ph.D.



his is a question asked not only by non-Catholics but by many within the Catholic Church. Among these some would disagree completely with Church teachings about such matters as sex outside of marriage, avoidance of luxury, or the sacredness of life from womb to tomb to eternity. Others accept our basic morality but want to see specific ethical concepts more as guidelines than as norms.

Is it not the right of a mature Christian to make free moral decisions in his or her own case? Such choice should reflect Scripture and tradition but ultimately manifest the believer's own personal standards — a matter not of tight legal injunctions but of inner conscience.

There is much to be found in Catholic teaching that would appear to allow for approaching moral decisions on an individual basis. In Vatican Council II we find these words: "It is through his conscience that man sees and recognizes the demands of the divine law. He is bound to follow this conscience faithfully in all his activity so that he may come to God, who is his last end. Therefore he must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience" ("Declaration on Religious Liberty," No. 3).

The council also explains: "Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and do what is good and to avoid evil, tells him inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. His dignity lies in observing this law, and by it he will be judged. His conscience is man's most secret core, and his sanctuary" ("Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," No. 16).

Faced with hard choices in areas such as mercy killing, remarriage after divorce involving a valid marriage, contraception, homosexual activity, or engaging as a combatant in a war the justice of which is questionable, many people — whatever their philosophy or religion — will want to avoid fixed structures in favor of their own judgment of personal conscience.



Catholics caught in such dilemmas may consider "bending the rules" to "resolve" the dilemmas and make them acceptable on the basis of the apparent changes in Church teaching over the years on questions such as slavery, usury, or the meaning of sex in marriage.

Noticing from reading the newspapers and magazines that even some Catholic theologians disagree about certain moral issues may also suggest the necessity of making up one's mind oneself. Behavior that seems contradictory to Scripture or tradition will often be debated by other Christians with questions such as: "The Bible condemns premarital sex as fornication, so how can you justify it?" or "How can you go to Holy Communion each week when you are living with someone you are not married to?"

Such rebukes will sometimes receive a response such as this: "Jesus was merciful to sinners — where do you get off being so legalistic and self-righteous?"

And yet the whole idea of individual morality is contrary to a broader view of Scripture and tradition. Absolutizing personal conscience presupposes that all people are innocent and well-intended, eager to sacrifice their own individual needs in obedience to God for the good of others. While it is true that God made us to be good, very soon our first parents chose to disobey without concern for the consequences.

After the fall of Adam and Eve, we all have a tendency to self-deception or what the moral

philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand called "value-blindness." We know with what false reasoning slave traders rationalized their evil deeds. To justify their greed, slave traders convinced themselves that slaves were not real persons or that they were such children they could not live without masters.

We find similar forms of value-blindness in our times whereby abortionists persuade themselves that a baby in the womb is not a real person.

In the Book of Proverbs (16:25) it is written, "Sometimes there is a way that seems to be right, but in the end it is the way to death."



Dramatic examples of value-blindness undermining conscience to be found in Scripture are David's adultery with Bathsheba and his plot to kill her husband. In the New Testament, does not

Caiphas argue that the death of Jesus is justified for "the good of the people"? The status of the Jewish political leaders as friends of the Romans was not to be displaced by a Messiah-King.

A thoughtful reading of the Bible bears out the necessity of moral authority for less-than-perfect human creatures. As one speaker put it: it's not the ten suggestions; it's the Ten Commandments!

Does that mean that there is no room for personal conscience? No. When we make choices between two good possibilities such as serving the community as a fire fighter or a doctor, we ought to decide on the basis of personal talents and circumstances.

However, Catholic tradition based on a scriptural understanding of human nature

insists on the need for moral norms when it comes to the business of avoiding moral evils. In The Documents of Vatican II ("Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World"), this clarification is given: "... when there is a question of harmonizing conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life, the moral aspect of any procedure does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives. It must be determined by objective standards" (No. 51).

Respectful dissent from Church moral teaching is not even an accepted category for theologians, according to the "Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian" [Origins, May 14, 1990, IV-B, Nos. 32-41].



John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (or *The Splendor of Truth*), which came out in 1993, contains these words about how important it is that Christians not only be sincere but that they choose the good: "The rational ordering of the human act to the good in its

truth and the voluntary pursuit of that good, known by reason, constitute morality. Hence human activity cannot be judged as morally good merely because it is a means for attaining one or another of its goals, or simply because the subject's intention is good. Activity is morally good when it attests to and expresses the voluntary ordering of the person to his ultimate end and the conformity of a concrete action with the human good as it is acknowledged in its truth by reason. If the object of the concrete action is not in harmony with the true good of the person, the choice of that action makes our will and ourselves morally evil, thus putting us in conflict with our ultimate end, the supreme good, God himself (No. 72).

About false teaching, John Paul II writes: "No damage must be done to the harmony between

faith and life: the unity of the Church is damaged not only by Christians who reject or distort the truths of faith but also by those who disregard the moral obligations to which they are called by the Gospel (cf. 1 Cor 5:9-13). The Apostles decisively rejected any separation between the commitment of the heart and the actions which express or prove it (cf. 1 Jn 2:3-6). And ever since Apostolic times the Church's Pastors have unambiguously condemned the behavior of those who fostered division by their teaching or by their actions" (No. 26).

Does that mean that John Paul II has no sympathy for how hard the moral struggle is for Christians of our times? Not at all. He explains his teaching on weakness and mercy: "Only in the mystery of Christ's Redemption do we discover the 'concrete' possibilities of man. It would be a very serious error to conclude . . . that the Church's teaching is essentially only an 'ideal' which must then be adapted, proportioned, graduated to the so-called concrete possibilities of man, according to a 'balancing of the goods in question.' But what are the 'concrete possibilities of man'? And of which man are we speaking? Of man dominated by lust or of man redeemed by Christ? This is what is at stake:



the reality of Christ's redemption. Christ has redeemed us! This means that he has given us the possibility of realizing the entire truth of our being; he has set our freedom free from the domination of concupiscence. And if redeemed man still sins, this is not due to an imperfection of Christ's redemptive act, but to man's will not to avail himself of the grace which flows from that act. God's command is of course proportioned to man's capabilities; but to the capabilities of the man to whom the Holy Spirit has been given; of the man who, though he has fallen into sin, can always

obtain pardon and enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit" (No. 103).

"In this context, appropriate allowance is made both for God's mercy towards the sinner who converts and for the understanding of human weakness. Such understanding never means compromising and falsifying the standard of good and evil in order to adapt it to particular circumstances. It is quite human for the sinner to acknowledge his weakness and to ask mercy for his failings; what is unacceptable is the attitude of one who makes his own weakness



the criterion of the truth about the good, so that he can feel self-justified, without even the need to have recourse to God and his mercy. An attitude of this sort corrupts the morality of society as a whole, since it encourages doubt about the objectivity of the moral law in general and a rejection of the absoluteness of moral prohibitions regarding specific human acts, and it ends up by confusing all judgments about values" (No. 104).

But what about so-called changed moral teaching of the past? To respond to this question it is necessary to do some research concerning each moral issue.

Slavery was never considered a good thing by the Catholic Church. As in Scripture, it was tolerated as an alternative to the more cruel practice of killing those captured in war. Slave-trading in later times was condemned by the Church and slavery was outlawed by the Spanish at the urging of the Church in 1530, three hundred thirty-three years before our Emancipation Proclamation. Does that mean no Catholics had slaves? No. Slave-owning was tolerated, not approved, with a view toward

the benefits to a slave of being owned by a benevolent person rather than tortured by an evil one. For the slave on the block this seemed to be a better alternative, until liberation was a legal possibility.



Usury (loan-sharking today) was condemned and is still condemned.

Usury is basically charging exorbitant interest in order to exploit others. In early times of the Church the practice of giving loans was always exploitative. Later, legitimate banking practices proved that granting loans at small interest could be a benefit to the needy.

If in fact moral teachings in their essence have not changed, does this mean that every Catholic simply renounces his or her conscience and just asks the priest what to do in every aspect of life? Not really. Although obedience to legitimate authority, called by God to shepherd us, is always right and good, we are also called to ponder God's will in our hearts — to love his law. Jesus is merciful but also firm. "Your sins are forgiven...and from now on do not sin again" (Luke 7:48 and John 8:11).

Here are some scriptural and traditional perspectives on some of the moral teachings of the Church that are deemed most controversial, taken from my book called *Living in Love: About Christian Ethics* (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media).

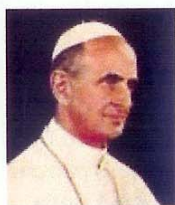
Social Justice

Central Problem: Minimalism — the idea that Christians can pursue their own individual needs with a minimum of concern for others.

Scripture and Tradition: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry...?" (Isaiah 58:6-7).

In one particular biblical concordance, there are more than two hundred entries under "just" and "justice" and thousands of others explaining how important it is to care deeply about the needs of the suffering.

Although many disobedient, selfish Catholics have chosen to cling to luxurious lifestyles rather than give generously to the needy or donate time to creating more just societal patterns and laws, Church teaching is clear as to principle: "God destined the earth and all it contains for all men and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity" (Vatican Council II, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," No. 69).



In his encyclical *On the Development of Peoples* Pope Paul VI summarized and applies the constant teaching of the Church in this regard: "If someone who has the riches of this world sees his brother in need and closes his heart

to him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1 Jn. 3:17) It is well known how strong were the words used by the Fathers of the Church to describe the proper attitude of persons who possess anything toward persons in need. To quote St. Ambrose: "You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what is given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich." That is, private property does not constitute for anyone an absolute unconditioned right. No one is justified in keeping for his exclusive use what he does not need, when others lack necessities. In a word, according to the traditional doctrine as found in the Fathers of the Church and the great theologians, the right to property must never be exercised to the detriment of the common good."

This teaching has been confirmed many times in encyclicals about social justice by John Paul II. Each individual Catholic can exercise his or her conscience to determine how to apply such norms to specific responsibilities in the community.

Ethics of War

Main Problem: Because of nationalism and other causes, many Christians fail to see that most wars are unjust and therefore anti-Christian. We should not automatically support any war our country decides to engage in.

Scripture and Tradition: Proclamations about peace are innumerable in the Bible and in Catholic teaching. Jesus continually greets others with the words "Peace be to you." He proclaims that the peacemakers shall be blessed (Matthew 5:9) and he is called the Prince of Peace. On the other hand, the role of being a soldier was not looked down upon, in itself, as evil (see Luke 3.10-14).

In the 1973 U.S. bishops' pastoral letter "The Challenge of Peace," there is a summary of our long tradition of condemning deliberate killing of the innocent. An update, "The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace" (1993), stresses how, now that the threat of nuclear war had diminished, there is special need to underline the traditional teaching that war must be the last resort, not the first; how we must try to eliminate causes of violence and apply sanctions before killing people.

Our tradition also insists that self-defense can be justified under certain conditions.

Here are some of the main points of the tradition called the just-war ethic:

1. Everything should be done to avoid wars.



2. If this is impossible and if our country is not the aggressor, our defense of ourselves or other innocent countries should never involve the use of such improper means as deliberately targeting the innocent. "Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation" (The Documents of Vatican II, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," No. 80).

3. Wars should not be engaged in or prolonged when there is little hope of victory.

Abortion

Main Problem: Although everyone realizes that abortion is tragic, some think it could be the lesser of two evils in cases of mothers who are too young, too poor, unmarried, or incapable of dealing with a handicapped child or with rape or incest.

Scripture and Tradition. Exodus 23:7 tells us, ". . . do not kill the innocent and those in the right."

"Behold, children are a precious gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward" (paraphrase of Psalm 127:3).

Psalm 139:13-16 describes the awesomeness surrounding conception: "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. . . . My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed."

The Documents of Vatican II warn us: ". . . whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the

integrity of the human person ... all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator" ("Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," No. 27).

Compassion and real help for the mother pregnant against her own wishes should be extended generously as well as forgiveness for those who live in great pain repenting an abortion. Such loving attitudes and acts do not invalidate showing love to the baby through adoption, and through efforts to stop abortion by legal means and by nonviolent protest.

Euthanasia

Main Problem: Many people wonder whether the sustaining of life by extraordinary means even in cases involving great suffering or expense is required. In the case of someone in excruciating pain or born with extreme defects, could not a positive act of ending the life of such a person be more charitable than letting that individual live on?

Scripture and Tradition: "Thou shalt not kill" (see, for example, Exodus 20:13 and Luke 18:20). The biblical injunction against killing is supported by the very progressive Greek Hippocratic oath taken by all doctors, "I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody who asks for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect."

Direct killing of innocent persons for any reason has always been ruled out in Judeo-Christian morality. (In the case of war it is usually maintained that a person who unjustly kills others forfeits his or her right to life and is certainly not innocent.) Killing an innocent, including oneself, is a way of usurping God's power over creation and death. This doctrine was reiterated by Pope Pius XII during the Nazi

times in response to questions of eugenics and genocide.

This doctrine also reflects the religious conviction that every human being is infinitely precious regardless of any consideration of development.

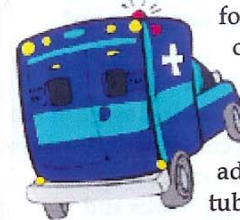
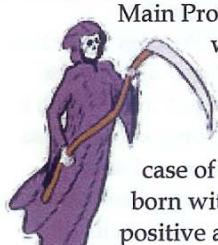
We are creatures who owe our existence to God. We belong to him and we must accept the problems of suffering in our lives that remain even when we try to alleviate them by every pain-killing means available.

On the other hand, the Church teaches that we do not have to use extraordinary means to keep a person alive who is in great pain or causing tremendous burdens. What are extraordinary and what are ordinary means vary from age to age and culture to culture. This makes it difficult to apply some neat, exact measure. However, moral theologians normally say that ordinary means are those commonly accepted, readily available, without extreme difficulty in terms of pain and expense. Heroic measures that offer no reasonable hope of benefit do not have to be used; however,

food and water are considered to be not medicine but an ordinary means to keep someone alive even if administered by a feeding tube that does not cause pain.

Divorce

Main Problem: As divorce and remarriage has become more and more acceptable in the society around us, many Christians question whether in some cases it might not be the most loving thing to humbly accept the fact that some marriages cause more pain than joy and some couples seem to be unable to be reconciled with each other. In such cases should not each be free to try to make a better life with



someone else? Especially, should the innocent party who has been deserted or maltreated have to live singly for the rest of his or her life?

Scripture and Tradition: "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that anyone



who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity [interpreted as referring to a woman found not to be a virgin before marriage during engagement — breaking the engagement was considered under

divorce], causes her to commit adultery and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Matthew 5:31-32).

Later on in the gospel of Matthew (19:3-9) we are told: "Some Pharisees came to him [Jesus] and to test him they asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?' He answered, 'Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning "made them male and female" and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? . . . Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.' They said to him, 'Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?' He said to them, 'It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife [or her husband], except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.'"

The emphasis in Catholic tradition is on the importance of fidelity to the valid bond of love undertaken in marriage. Marriages can only be annulled if such a valid bond can be proven never to have existed, as in the case of those forced to marry, those who do not consummate their

marriages in sexual intercourse due to sexual impotence, or, in recent times, those who purposely and consciously exclude the notion of marriage as a bond "till death do us part."

Of late, due to a greater knowledge of the effect of certain mental disorders on the freedom of the person, more marriages are being annulled on the basis of extreme immaturity making a free-will decision of self-donation impossible.

A very beautiful summary of Church teaching on divorce is included in the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter of 1976 "To Live in Christ Jesus," from which I now quote:

Every human being has a need and right to be loved, to have a home where he or she can put down roots and grow. The family is the first and



indispensable community in which this need is met. Today, when productivity, prestige or even physical attractiveness are regarded as the gauge of personal worth, the family has a special vocation to be a place where people are loved not for what they do or what they have but

simply because they are.

A family begins when a man and woman publicly proclaim before the community their mutual commitment so that it is possible to speak of them as one body. Christ teaches that God wills the union of man and woman in marriage to be lifelong, a sharing of life for the length of life itself.

The Old Testament takes the love between husband and wife as one of the most powerful symbols of God's love for His people: "I will espouse you to Me forever: I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy: I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord." So husband and wife espouse themselves, joined in a holy and loving covenant.

The New Testament continues this imagery: only now the union between husband and wife rises to the likeness of the union between Christ and His Church. Jesus teaches that in marriage men and women are to pledge steadfast unconditional faithfulness which mirrors the faithfulness of the Son of God. Their marriages make this fidelity and love visible to the world. Christ raised marriage in the Lord to the level of a sacrament, whereby this union symbolizes and affects God's special love for the couple in their total domestic and social situation.

Jesus tells us that the Father can and will grant people the greatness of heart to keep such pledges of loving faithfulness. The Church has always believed that in making and keeping noble promises of this sort people can, through the grace of God, grow beyond themselves — grow to the point of being able to love beyond their merely human capacity. Yet contemporary culture makes it difficult for many people to accept this view of marriage. Even some who admire it as an ideal doubt whether it is possible and consider it too risky to attempt. They believe it is better to promise less at the start and so be able to escape from marital tragedy in order to promise once again. But this outlook itself has increased marital tragedy. Only men and women bold enough to make promises for life, believing



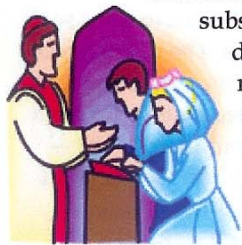
that with God's help they can be true to their word as He is to His, have the love and strength to surmount

the inevitable challenges of marriage. Such unselfish love, rooted in faith, is ready to forgive when the need arises and to make the sacrifices demanded if something as precious and holy as marriage is to be preserved. For the family to be a place where human beings can

grow with security, the love pledged by husband and wife must have as its model the selfless and enduring love of Christ for the Church.

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church. He gave himself up for her."

Some say even valid sacramental marriages can deteriorate to such an extent that the marital union dies and the spouses are no longer obliged to keep their promise of lifelong fidelity. Some even urge the Church to acknowledge such dissolution and allow the parties to enter new, more promising unions. We reject this view. In reality it amounts to a proposal to forego



Christian marriage at the outset and substitute something entirely different. It would weaken marriage further, by paying too little heed to Jesus' call to identify ourselves with His redeeming love, which endures all things. Its fundamental difficulty is that it cannot be reconciled with the Church's mission to be faithful to the word entrusted to it. The covenant between a man and woman joined in Christian marriage is as indissoluble and irrevocable as God's love for His people and Christ's love for His Church.

We must seek ways by which the Church can mediate Christ's compassion to those who have suffered marital tragedy, but at the same time we may do nothing to undermine His teaching concerning the beauty and meaning of marriage and in particular His prophetic demands concerning the indissolubility of the unions of those who marry in the Lord. The Church must ever be faithful to the command to serve the truth in love.

[The practice of some couples in second marriages to receive Communion without an annulment is not allowable except with

permission in some cases where evidence of the nullity of the previous marriages is unobtainable as, for instance, in the case of documents destroyed in wartime.]

Premarital and Extramarital Sex

Main Problem: Given the tremendous emphasis on pleasure in contemporary society, it is very difficult for people to impose restraints on themselves. Also, since many think



that marriages should not be entered into before the age of twenty-one or even later, it is thought to be too difficult to restrain sexual needs until that time.

Although most Christians reject free love, some think that in the case of an engaged couple who have to wait a long time for marriage, premarital intercourse could be permitted. Others think that in the case of marriages involving great difficulties, extramarital sex might be licit.

Scripture and Tradition: The scriptural word for premarital sex is "fornication," and for extramarital sex "adultery." Some claim that these matters are not emphasized in Scripture because they do not realize what these terms refer to. There are many references in Scripture to the forbidding of any form of fornication or adultery — see especially the commandment "Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife" (Deuteronomy 5:21); refer also, for example, to Matthew 5:27-30, Hebrews 13:4, and 1 Corinthians 6:9, 18.

Tradition has been very strong on these two temptations. Contrary to some opinions, these teachings have in no way been changed in recent years. They are reaffirmed in authoritative documents to the present.

Using another person for sexual pleasure violates that individual's dignity. Those who engage in recreational sex are value-blind to the deep

meaning of this sphere, destined as it is to express the total self-donation of marriage and to be open to the procreation of a new human person — the baby.

But what if the motive is not lust but real love? Real love seeks commitment, not an open-ended affair. Great intimacy without the marriage bond leads to the devastating wound of rejection and also the tragic desire to get rid of any children whose conception occurs in spite of ineffective contraception.

Church history is full of examples of happy, holy, chaste people who did not think having sexual intimacy was a necessity, beginning with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

Contraception

Main Problem: Due to the great difficulty of raising families in cities, the problem of poverty, and many other obstacles, many couples think it unwise to have large families.

Of these many are unacquainted with the natural rhythms of the woman's fertile cycle, which when properly understood requires only a minimum of abstinence from sexual intercourse to avoid an untimely pregnancy. This state of affairs has made artificial contraception more and more attractive as an alternative for many Christian couples.

Scripture and Tradition: Throughout history many different methods of preventing birth have been used, including the use of drugs and magic, or sorcery (see, for instance, Galatians 5:20 and Revelation 21:8, 22:15). Throughout history the Church has condemned such practices over and over again, culminating in Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968. Since then, attention has also been paid to



the added grave immorality of those pills, IUD's (intrauterine devices), and the like that really abort the already fertilized egg. It is Catholic teaching that human life begins when the sperm meets the egg. Not too long ago all Christian churches agreed with the Catholic position on contraceptives. It was understood that fertility was a gift of God, even if a burden, just as is all of life on earth. In Catholic teaching through the centuries the emphasis has been on our call to use the gifts God has given us in ways that do not violate their God-given nature. I should use my voice to tell truth, not abuse its communicative nature by telling lies. I should use my reproductive organs in a life-giving way, not



abuse them by sterilization, or by blocking the sperm and egg from reaching each other, or by distorting a woman's entire system with contraceptive pills. One can think of the fertile time of a woman's cycle as a sacred time. A woman should be proud that she has this gift rather than violating that time. Natural family planning sets the gift aside by not using it, whereas contraceptives use that time while abusing it. Does that mean couples should have one baby after another no matter what their circumstances? No. Not any more than a person need talk incessantly. We can remain silent when speech would be hurtful — as do those who refuse to reveal the whereabouts of persons searched for by criminals or by tyrants who intend to kill them. In a similar way we can decide not to use the fertile time in a woman's cycle — only a few days — during times when serious reasons make it better to postpone the coming of a new baby. The new methods of natural family planning are easy and when used carefully have a much higher rate of effectiveness than most unnatural methods.

Many Catholic theologians who originally dissented from magisterial teaching on this subject have come to see how dreadful are the effects of the contraceptive culture on young people as well as on married ones. It is clear that the use of contraceptives gives people a false sense of security in pursuing sex outside of marriage and adulterous sex. A contraceptive failure often leads to the aborting of the child.

For more information on this subject see *The Art of Natural Family Planning* by John and Sheila Kippley (Cincinnati: The Couple to Couple League, 1989).

Homosexuality

Main Problem: In recent years due to causes psychological, sociological, and moral, there has been an enormous increase in open homosexuality. Moreover, there is agitation among homosexuals who consider themselves to be Christians that their lifestyle be accepted as an alternative to legal marriage rather than condemned as intrinsically evil.



Scripture and Tradition: Scripture refers to homosexuality, masturbation, and fornication with animals, etc., as unnatural and unclean acts. Passages can be found condemning them in Genesis 19:5 (note that in Scripture "to know" in a sexual context means intercourse); Leviticus 18 and 20:13; Judges 19:22; Wisdom 14:22-29; Ephesians 4:19. And the most oft-quoted — Romans 1:26-28, 32 — tells us: For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. . . . They know God's

decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die [that is, a spiritual death] — yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them."

The wrongness of homosexual practices has been reaffirmed over and over again through the present day in the Catholic tradition. For a refutation of arguments given to justify it see



John Harvey's *Homosexuality: A Pastoral Approach* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press). This book also discusses psychological causes as well as successful pastoral group

support encouraging a holy, chaste lifestyle. For a psychologist's approach see Joseph Nicolosi's *Reparative Therapy for the Homosexual* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc.). Having a homosexual orientation as opposed to practice is not in itself blame-worthy, since many times it is rooted in psychological disorders. Growth in Christian maturity makes it possible to control such desires, and intense counseling may lead to healing of psychological problems, especially if the person involved wants to change.

As Pope Paul VI states: "The Master, who speaks with great severity in this matter [of chastity] (Mt. 5:28), does not propose an impossible thing. We Christians, regenerated in baptism, though we are not freed from this kind of weakness, are given the grace to overcome it" ("To Live the Paschal Mystery," May 1971). Many are the men and women who once thought the Church's teachings on morality were too strict but who later went on to embrace them, finally viewing them not as a prison but as liberation. Some famous ones are: Augustine, St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Francis of Assisi, Blessed Angela of Foligno, St. Margaret of Cortona, Charles de Foucauld, Malcolm Muggeridge, and Dorothy Day.