



Credible Catholic

CREDIBLE CATHOLIC

Big Book - Volume 17

**PERSONAL ETHICS
AND SOCIAL ETHICS**



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Credible Catholic Big Book

Volume Seventeen

The Principles of Personal and Social Ethics

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As dictated to Joan Jacoby

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Editor's Note:

The content of this volume is limited to a very small portion of the total document, because much of the material will be published by Ignatius Press at the end of 2018 in a new trilogy on moral theology and the struggle between spiritual good and evil entitled *Called Out of Darkness: Contending with Evil through Virtue and Prayer* (Volume 1). Interested readers can purchase this text from Ignatius Press when it is available at the end of 2018. In December 2019, the full text of the document will be made available on www.crediblecatholic.com. Readers interested in a summary of this document can click on the Credible Catholic Little Book (Volume 17) to read an abridged version.

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**This Volume supports The Catechism of the Catholic Church,
Part Three – Life in Christ**

NOTE: All teachings in the **Credible Catholic** materials conform to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** and help to explain the information found therein. **Father Spitzer** has also included materials intended to counter the viral secular myths that are leading religious people of all faiths, especially millennials, to infer that God is no longer a credible belief. You will find credible documented evidence for God, our soul, the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Catholic Church, as well as spiritual and moral conversion.

Part One from the CCC is titled, ***THE PROFESSION OF FAITH***. The first 5 Volumes in the *Credible Catholic Big Book* and *Credible Catholic Little Book* fall into Part One. **Part Two** of the CCC is titled, ***THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY***. This is covered in Volumes 6 through 12. **Part Three** of the CCC is ***LIFE IN CHRIST*** and information related to this topic will be found in Volumes 13 through 17. Credible Catholic Big and Little Book Volumes 18 through 20 will cover **Part Four** of the CCC, **Christian Prayer**.

The Big Book can also be divided into two major movements – the rational justification for God, the soul, Jesus, and the Catholic Church (Volumes 1 through 6), and life in Christ through the Catholic Church (Volumes 9 through 20). If you would like a preview of this dynamic, please go to Volume 6 (Chapter 7) at the following link – [Chapter 7 – Where Have We Come From and Where are We Going?](#)

We all need to be Credible Catholics. St. Augustine said in his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*,

"Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens and other elements... Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; ...If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven..."

If we don't respond to these secular myths, who will?

Purpose of this Volume

In Volume 14, we examined the empirical and rational evidence for spiritual good and evil and in Volume 15 we showed how spiritual evil (Satan and his evil spirits) work through temptation, deceit, and despair to incite us to choose his way of darkness, egocentricity, domination, hatred, and self-worship over the way of the unconditionally loving God revealed by Jesus Christ – the way of light, compassion, virtue, love, other-centeredness, humility, community, and worship of the true God. In Volume 16, we explained several techniques to engage in the discipline of resisting temptation (built upon a spiritual life of sacraments and personal contemplative prayer and devotion). If we pursue these techniques within the framework of St. Ignatius of Loyola’s *General Examen*, we will bring the full power of the Lord’s grace into our process of transformation into “the new man” (the higher self united with the Lord).

One final piece of the rich moral tradition of the Catholic Church remains to be explicated—the principles of personal and social ethics. The foundation of the Church’s teaching on *personal* ethics is grounded in the six commandments of the *Decalogue* explicitly mentioned by Jesus—the prohibition of adultery, killing (and avoidable harm), stealing, bearing false witness (lying), and cheating as well as honoring father and mother.

The core of universally accepted *social* ethics was developed within the Catholic Church—starting with Jesus and St. Paul through St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Francisco Suarez, and Bartolome de las Casas, among others. The six principles of social ethics are the fundamental grounds of justice and democracy in the civilized world—the principle of non-maleficence, no unjust law, the principle of universal personhood, the principle of inalienable rights, the hierarchy of inalienable rights and the intrinsic limits of human freedom. The Catholic Church did not stop there—she continued developing her social ethics into a comprehensive guide for the conduct of the international socio-political order through a series of papal documents called “the Social Encyclicals.” Beginning with Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* (1891), subsequent popes have written over thirty documents concerned with most socio-political issues from the conduct of business and labor to international relations and war and peace. The teaching is so extensive that it is almost impossible to appropriate fully without being an expert. Nevertheless, reflection on its contents will convey the spirit with which these documents were written—the Spirit of truth, justice, and love animating our individual and collective souls.

If we appropriate this spirit along with the norms of personal ethics and use them as guideposts through our spiritual and moral conversion, we will draw ever closer to the light of Christ, enabling Him to draw us ultimately into His eternal kingdom of love.

As noted above, if readers want more than the section given below, they can click on the Credible Catholic Little Book, Volume 17 for an abridged version of the whole text.

Please note: The following Table of Contents gives only the sample sections used in this document.

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Please note: The following lengthy sample from Chapter 2 on the prohibition of adultery and sexual impropriety is given here because it has been requested by several Catholic leaders and teachers who believe it is the most urgent and pressing moral problem within contemporary culture, threatening the family, children, the spiritual lives of countless individuals, and even the future of marital commitment. Therefore I decided to publish Chapter 2 in its entirety. Evidently, there are other very pressing issues in socio-political ethics that are quite urgent. Readers interested in summaries of this area of the Church's ethical teaching will want to consult three free articles on magiscenter.com:

1. Six Principles of Individual Dignity and Rights-- <https://www.magiscenter.com/six-principles-of-individual-dignity-and-rights/>
2. A Summary of Catholic Social Teaching-- <https://www.magiscenter.com/a-summary-of-catholic-social-teaching/>
3. Six Categories of Cultural Discourse: How to Understand, Communicate, and Gain Consensus in Social Ethics-- <https://www.magiscenter.com/six-categories-of-cultural-discourse-how-to-understand-communicate-and-gain-consensus-in-social-ethics/>

Readers seeking an abridged edition of the other chapters can click on Credible Catholic Little Book (Volume 17).

First Sample From Chapter Two (All Sections)

Chapter Two Principles of Christian Personal Ethics: Biblical Context and the Prohibition of Adultery

Introduction

The six universal principles of personal ethics are based on the Ten Commandments. For Catholics and most Christians, the Ten Commandments are the foundation of moral teaching, and present the minimum standards to be observed by everyone. Jesus formally accepted these commandments as foundational for his ethical teaching when he told the rich young man they were needed for eternal life:

You know the commandments: 'Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother (Mk. 10:19).

Jesus identifies six commandments in this passage, five of which are from the latter part of the Decalogue, that He implies are needed for salvation. The texts of the Decalogue in the Old Testament (Exodus 20: 1-17 and Dt. 5: 6-21) do not include defrauding (cheating). It is difficult to know why Jesus includes this additional commandment beyond the obvious fact that He thought it needed to be covered for the sake of salvation. The Greek term used to describe it is *aposterēsēs* which means to unjustly deprive, to defraud, or to cheat.¹

Jesus goes beyond these six commandments, directing His disciples to pursue a high standard of love defined in the Parable of the Good Samaritan and in the Beatitudes (see Volume 4, Chapter Two). Notice that the six commandments addressed by Jesus in the above passage are external behaviors while the beatitudes concern interior attitudes that become the framework for the virtues opposed to the eight deadly sins. As noted in Volume 15, Chapter Three, the eight deadly sins are also interior attitudes that lead to sin. Thus Jesus was interested not only in external behaviors (the emphasis of the Old Testament law), but also in the interior attitudes that lead to violations of the commandments and unloving behaviors as well as the interior attitudes that counter them (the virtues).

Given Jesus' implication that these six commandments are necessary for salvation, we will want to examine each of them. Yet there is another reason for doing this – namely, that most of these six commandments are mentioned in the ethical codes of most religions as well as in philosophical codes and pagan tractates. Thus they are a universal code of ethics espoused not only by most religions, but also known within the heart or conscience of every human being.² They are a cross-cultural, or perhaps better, a transcultural language of ethical conduct that form the basis of our conscience as well as objective principles that enable individuals and societies to strive for justice instead of sinking to depths of depravity.

The order of the precepts in the Greek text of Mark 10:19 is:

1. Do not commit adultery (this chapter)
2. Do not kill (Chapter Three, Section I)
3. Do not steal (Chapter Three, Section II)
4. Do not bear false witness (Chapter Three, Section III)
5. Do not defraud (Chapter Three, Section IV)
6. Honor your father and mother (Chapter Three, Section V)

We will examine each precept in the order given by Jesus.

¹ Strong's 650.

² See the explanation of C.S. Lewis' view of the Tao as the universal content of individual human conscience in Section II.B above. Lewis articulates the theory in his remarkable essay *The Abolition of Man*.

I.

Do Not Commit Adultery or Sexual Impropriety

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There is no more misunderstood commandment than the prohibition of adultery and sexual impropriety. Regrettably, the culture has taken a completely divergent perspective on sexuality from that of Jesus and the Church, leading many Christians to disobey these teachings and to feel considerable resentment and hostility to both the Church and Jesus. A good number of people have cast aside Christ and His path to salvation merely because they felt that Jesus' and the Church's teachings on sexuality are out of date and out of touch with contemporary culture. But are they? Can sexuality be treated as a mere instrument of human passion and fulfillment – a neutral, inconsequential, or collateral dimension to add excitement and adventure to life -- or rather is sexuality a deeply mysterious psychic power intertwined with virtually every dimension of our subconscious mind, our biological desires, and our conscious interpretation of relationships with others – a mysterious power meant to solidify commitments and build familial loyalties to support the creation of children with transcendental souls destined for eternal life – or something in-between? The answer we give to this question will determine whether we are likely to accept Jesus' and the Church's teaching on sexuality, and how we will implement it in our lives. In view of the importance of sexual propriety, and the culture's severe undermining of it, it will be necessary to dedicate a large part of this chapter to sorting out the confusion, and proposing a way back to the light and love of Jesus Christ.

II.

Spiritual Versus Mechanistic Views of Sexuality

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Evidently, the Church (following Jesus) views sexuality from a spiritual perspective because it is not instrumentalist or mechanist,³ but rather motivated by charity, high purpose, and faith. The culture has moved decidedly to an instrumentalist view of sexuality which, as will be explained, is a tremendous loss to individuals, marriages, family life, and the culture itself. To explain the nature and effects of this loss, we will first explore the underlying Christian philosophy of marital love in the context of C.S. Lewis' four loves (Section II.A) and then explain how the Christian idea of *eros* has been reduced to mere instrumentalism and biology within the current culture (Section II.B).

II.A

The Christian Ideal of “*Eros*” – Romantic-Sexual Love

For the sake of convenience I represent some material from Volume 11 on the Christian view of *eros* and marriage.

³ This school of thought holds that reality is analyzable into discrete parts whose individual functions and interactions with other parts explain any given system – such as the human psyche or the sexual drive. Most mechanists are physicalists and deterministic in orientation.

C.S. Lewis distinguishes four kinds of love in his classic work *The Four Loves*.⁴ In brief, the four kinds of love are:

1. *Storgē* – a *feeling* of affection
2. *Philia* – friendships based on mutual care and commitment
3. *Eros* – which in the narrow sense refers to romantic or sexual love, but in the broader sense to the exclusive, complete, reciprocal commitment of a man and woman to one another through conjugal union for the sake of mutual support and the generation of children and family.
4. *Agapē* – the unselfish and self-sacrificial love oriented solely toward the good of the other which stands at the foundation of forgiveness, compassion for the marginalized, and complete gift of self for the other. This love describes the essence of Jesus and His Father and is the ideal we are called to by Jesus.

Though *storgē* (affection), *philia* (reciprocally committed friends), and *agapē* (self-sacrificial love for the good of the other) are integral and even essential to marriage, marriage has the unique feature of including *eros* which is not a part of any other vocation within Christianity. For the Christian Church (and C.S. Lewis) romantic and sexual love goes far beyond romance and sexuality, because they are not ends in themselves. They support and solidify a higher end of love, personhood, and family. As Lewis implies, romantic and sexual love are at the service of the highest level of “human to human” commitment – that brings the highest level of “human to human” love to its earthly fulfillment. When entered into appropriately, it necessarily includes self-sacrificial love aimed solely at the good of the spouse, the children, and the family unit.

Lewis understood well that the ideal of *eros* must be more than *storgē* – feelings of affection – and more than the feelings of romance – even intense romance. It must be built upon the foundation of friendship – that is upon an ever-deepening reciprocal commitment of two people to each other which brings trust, care, support, happiness, dignity, and fulfillment that would not otherwise be possible without this commitment. Friendships can grow, but they must do so reciprocally. Thus, if one person commits more of his time, energy, future, and self to another, but that other does not reciprocate, then the friendship will not grow in trust, care, support, happiness, dignity, and fulfillment. However, if the increased commitment is reciprocated, the friendship will grow in these ways.

Back to Lewis – *eros* (in the broader sense of highest, exclusive, reciprocal love) builds on *philia* (friendship). When a man and woman become attracted romantically to each other, the natural course for this romance is not to jump immediately to sexual expression, but to grow in friendship – reciprocal commitment and love – which in the context of romance finds its expression first in deep care, intimacy, tenderness, generativity, and understanding which awakens the desire to support the other in their need (instead of being disappointed or angered by weakness) and to seek out ways of contributing to the other (level 3 happiness) and helping the

⁴ C.S. Lewis 2017 *The Four Loves* (New York: Harper One; Reissue edition).

other toward salvation (level 4 happiness). Within this high level of commitment and friendship, romance seeks its proper end – the highest level of human commitment, intimacy, and mutual care that will be necessary for raising children and maintaining a high level of familial care and bondedness – that is, a caring home.

So what is wrong with leaping from romance to sexual expression without developing this commitment and bondedness of friendship? It short-circuits the development of the friendship. It gives the mistaken impression that the libidinal and erotic feelings of union are the true end of romance and the union to which it calls us. Instead of focusing on developing friendship – developing our level of care, support, intimacy, understanding, forgiveness, and common cause through mutual commitment – the premature leap to sexuality focuses us on the continuance of libidinal and erotic passions as ends in themselves. Though this short circuiting can be more pronounced in some couples than in others, it tends to affect all romantic relationships to a significant degree.

This does not mean that romantic courtships getting off to a false start – a premature foray into sexual expression – cannot be redirected toward developing the commitment or friendship. But if this is to happen, then sexual expression cannot be the primary focus of the relationship – with the “other stuff” falling to a secondary or tertiary place – which it will frequently do because of the intensity of passion intrinsic to sexual expression. At some juncture, a courting couple who wants to grow in commitment, friendship, intimacy, understanding, and common cause, has to refrain from sexual expression until the other more important (but sometimes less exciting) dimensions of highest friendship and commitment can be developed according to their natural progression. The idea that living together before marriage will be helpful is, in most cases, quite deceptive. The couple should be hyperaware of what is *not* being developed while the focus is on sexual passion. The intensity of passion frequently obscures the subtlety of intimacy, generativity, understanding, and affectionate care that will be required to sustain an exclusive, high reciprocal commitment, raise children, and create a loving home when, as they say, “passions inevitably die down.”

The wisdom of Jesus Christ and the Christian Church – founded on the above ideals of love – advise strongly to reserve the high manifestation of passion in sexual expression for the time when the commitment has developed adequately and the intention to declare it the highest and exclusive commitment has been made public. In so doing, the couple makes certain that all of the subtly exciting work of developing a relationship is not short circuited by the intense passion of sexual expression, and also allows the intense expression of sexual passion to reinforce and support their well-developed commitment in intimacy, generativity, understanding, and common cause. Though contemporary pop culture can ridicule such traditional wisdom about romantic love, it has no real grounds for so doing, because that traditional wisdom, properly carried out in courtship and marriage, results in high-level, long-lasting, generative families that have interior strength, self-sacrificial contribution, and the salvation of all parties as their objective.

Christian wisdom does not reject premature sexual expression for reasons of prudishness or an insensitive imposition of rules on couples who are “in love.” It does not do so for motives of repression of sexual desire or a feigned moral high ground (“I am so shocked you could think

of that,” or “I would never...”). Christian wisdom is built upon the solid foundation of Christian love which at its highest level is expressed as *agapē* (self-sacrificial love for the good of the other) and sees in *eros* the needed passionate support to make the highest level of “human to human” commitment come alive for the sake of the couple, their family, and ultimately, their salvation. Every other mean motive attributed to the Christian theology of marriage is an oversimplified caricature of a wisdom which deserves far more respect.

We move to another related question. Why must romantic love be within an exclusive relationship – with one person only? Once again, we return to the end or objective of sexual love. Can it be an end in itself? Or is its proper end to support and ground the highest level of friendship and “human to human” commitment? It is clear what happens when sexual “love” becomes an end in itself. The more separated it is from the high level of commitment which it is called to reinforce, the more it results in an “objectification” or “thingification” of the other – the other as mere “physical body” or “mere cause of physical arousal” or mere “instrument of physical pleasure.” Divorcing sexuality from genuine commitment to the good of others, de-humanizes and de-spiritualizes them. It implicitly says that we care more about the arousal, pleasure, and ego-satisfaction they bring to us than about them.

All human beings are remarkably sensitive – we know when we are really cared about and cared for – and know when we are really being used for the pleasure and ego-gratification of others. Some might object that level 1 and level 2 people are content with being mere instruments of pleasure and ego-gratification because that brings *them* ego-gratification and pleasure. This is only partially true. Though part of their psychic framework is content with being sought after as an object of arousal, pleasure, and ego-gratification, there are higher levels of psyche (arising out of empathy, conscience, and spiritual–numinous awareness) that are not content with this reduction of self to an “it” and reduction of the relationship to “I-it.” These higher levels of psyche are actually hurt and demoralized by such degradation.

Even the most popular individuals realize implicitly that it is one thing to be “hot” (sought after as desirable or beautiful) but another thing to be a “uniquely good, lovable, and a transcendental mystery worthy of the highest levels of care and commitment from human beings and God.” Though some may protest that they have no such higher levels of psyche, it may do well for them to look at themselves over the course of time – are they developing callouses toward real intimacy – a hardness of heart and soul? Do they have increasing feelings of interior emptiness and loneliness both on a human and cosmic level? Are they beginning to question whether they lived up to their fullest potential, dignity, meaning, and fulfillment – both now and into the future – even an eternal future? These are but a few signs of their emerging – though repressed – higher levels of psyche that are trying to make themselves known before it’s too late.

In sum, when sexual love is viewed as an end in itself, it short-circuits the proper development of intimacy, generativity, and committed friendship necessary for long-lasting relationship and family – instead of helping it. Moreover, it dehumanizes and despiritualizes the person who is reduced from the recipient of committed care and support to a mere object of arousal, pleasure, and ego-gratification. No matter how much one might like being sought after as such an object, it is not enough – not nearly enough to fulfill our higher levels of psyche.

Indeed, we receive the hurtful message that we are not worthy of our highest dignity and fulfillment – but only the instrument of another’s pleasure.

We now return to the question about why *eros* must be exclusive – with one person only. If the natural end of *eros* is to support the highest level of friendship – the highest level of commitment, of self and future to the care, support, and salvation of another for the purpose of raising children destined for eternal salvation, than *eros* (romantic and sexual expression) is meant to support that highest level of committed love in which children deserve to be raised – the kind of commitment that will give rise to a truly loving home destined for our eternal home. Evidently, sexual expression gives rise to children – and given the above articulation of Christian wisdom -- sexual expression is meant to support the highest level of committed human love which leads naturally to a loving home for those children. In this context alone, *eros* reaches its functional fulfillment (procreation) and its ideal fulfillment (a loving home through the *highest* form of committed love) which is, so to speak, a perfect marriage.

At this juncture, the answer to our question is mere logic. If *eros* is meant to support the highest level of commitment giving rise to a loving home, then it must be exclusive – with one person only. After all, how many “highest level of commitments” can you have? How many “first priority” commitments can you have? If the marital commitment is the first priority of human commitments, there can be no other priority of equal importance – logically. Every other commitment must be second or third when compared with the first priority.

When *eros* supports this highest level of commitment, and is not separated from it, it attains the true purpose for which the Creator intended it – to support and bond the highest expression of human freedom, leading to the highest manifestation of “human to human” love. When it is separated from this dignity, when it becomes an end in itself, it can become aggressive, demeaning to human personhood, damaging to human intimacy and generativity, and even destructive of our relationship with the Lord.

II.B

The Instrumentalization of *Eros* in Contemporary Culture

How did our culture lose the bond between *eros* and the fullest expression of freedom and “human to human” love? Since the publication of Alfred Kinsey’s surveys on sexuality (1948) and more notably, the extension of it -- Masters & Johnson’s *Human Sexual Response* in 1966, the interpretation of sexuality has become progressively more empirical, mechanistic, physicalistic, and deterministic in orientation.⁵ This “clinicalization” of sexuality combined with the introduction of the birth control pill into accessible consumer markets (by Searle) in 1960 had a series of harmful effects on individuals’ and the culture’s interpretation of sexuality:

1. It undermined Level 3 (contributive) and Level 4 (spiritual) interpretations of sexuality and placed the focus of meaning squarely on Level 1 (physical/pleasure) and Level 2

⁵ Sigmund Freud originally developed mechanistic models of the psyche that were applied to sexuality in several works, but Masters and Johnsons 4-step model solidified the physicalist-mechanistic-empirical viewpoint.

(ego-comparative) interpretations of sexuality. This disconnected sexuality from intimacy, generativity, common cause, and familial and transcendent purpose – and put the emphasis on achieving enhanced physical pleasure and ego-satisfaction within the sexual act.

2. The Level 1-2 interpretation of sexuality as well as the popularization of birth control (allowing for sexuality outside of marriage without fear of pregnancy) led those without contrary religious or philosophical convictions to treat sexuality as an end in itself. This separated sexuality from its original significance of solidifying exclusive commitments in marriage. Commitment was no longer an integral part to the purpose and nature of sexuality.
3. The isolation of sexuality from marital commitment and its transformation into an end in itself weakened many of the pre-1960's sexual "taboos" (and the guilt and shame they induced). This allowed authors, movie producers, and marketers to become increasingly more explicit about sexual content, which led to a superficialization of movies and literature. The creative arts were now less concerned with conveying deeper meaning and values through profound dialogue and more concerned with providing additional libidinal stimulus and audience arousal. This trend also led to an exponential rise in pornography which was further enhanced by the internet.
4. The flood of explicit sexually stimulating material in almost every media form led to a need for even more explicit and aggressive portrayals of sexuality in order to maintain and increase libidinal fulfillment. This hyper sexualization of media is superficializing sexuality to an even greater extent, leading to a loss of the need for intimacy, generativity, and familial love. This has the further consequence of making sexuality more aggressive and callous, allowing *Fifty Shades of Grey* to be a tolerable, acceptable, and even normal form of sexual expression.

In view of the above, it should come as no surprise that the Christian view of sexuality and the culture's view of sexuality are not only distant, but also opposed. What is more troubling is the large percentage of our young people who are unreflectively and unthinkingly appropriating the culture's view of sexuality without consulting other points of view. It is easy to see how, as it were, they can be seduced by a sexual philosophy that is explicit and arousing, and how they can be brought under the spell of literally millions of free pornographic images and movies. However, it is difficult to understand why faith-based parents and children are not reflectively considering the following questions:

1. How is pornography affecting my purpose in life – is it moving me away from Level 3 & Level 4 purpose toward a dominant Level 1-2 purpose?
2. How is uninhibited (or promiscuous) sexuality affecting my purpose in life – toward Levels 1&2 (and away from Levels 3&4)?

3. How is pornography doing affecting my (or my child's) capacity for intimacy, generativity, exclusive commitment, and self-sacrificial love (all of which are integral to a healthy family)?
4. How is uninhibited (or even promiscuous) sexuality affecting these same capabilities – intimacy, generativity, exclusive commitment, and self-sacrificial love?
5. How are pornography and uninhibited sexuality affecting my (or my child's) practice of ethics, practice of religion, and character?
6. Are my attitudes and practice of sexuality leading me to think about it more often, to seek higher levels of libidinal satisfaction, and to become addicted?⁶
7. If I recognize changes in the characteristics covered in questions 1-6, am I at peace with these changes and my overall direction in life?

These questions should be answered by anyone who has accepted as valid the popular culture's view of sexuality, because there is a strong likelihood that the longer an individual lives according to the culture's viewpoint, the more entrenched he will become in Level 1-2 purpose in life, lose his sense of intimacy, generativity, exclusive commitment, and familial orientation, and become detached from ethical and religious practice. If this downward trend produces feelings of emptiness, self-alienation, and guilt, it indicates an inner awareness of losing one's true self, deeper relationships, higher purpose in life, and connection to God. Spiritual writers would call this, "a plunge into darkness," which requires a reversal of trend by making significant attitude adjustments and above all, calling upon God's healing and reconciling grace. Without this, the downward trend will likely continue until one is firmly situated in a dominant Level 1 purpose in life, a complete loss of intimacy, generativity, and exclusive commitment accompanied by addictive behaviors and self-loathing. Counterintuitive as it may seem, our view of sexuality can produce all of these negative consequences, alienating us not only from God, but also from others, and from ourselves.

III.

The Power of Social Norming and the Breakdown of Sexual Mores

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The power of social norming was advanced by H. Wesley Perkins⁷ and Alan D Berkowitz in the mid-1980's. This theory holds that people norm themselves (form norms for their behavior) on the basis of their perceptions about what other people are doing. It seems that in our democratic and pluralistic culture, many people who do not have strong religious or philosophical views default to "fitting into the mainstream" as a means of establishing ethical norms for behavior. So for example, students in a collegiate environment who had the belief that the general population of students was drinking quite heavily would feel comfortable living according to their perception of the mainstream. However, if they subsequently discovered that they had an exaggerated view of how much the mainstream was drinking, they would regulate

⁶ "Addiction" here means that cutting back on the amount of sexual stimulation gives rise to classical withdrawal symptoms similar to those associated with alcohol or drugs.

⁷ See H.W. Perkins 2003 *The Social Norms Approach to Preventing School and College Age Substance Abuse: A Handbook for Educators, Counselors, and Clinicians* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass).

their behavior to accommodate their new perception. Apparently, students did not want to be in the category of “heavy drinkers” by comparison to their peers.

Though publishing accurate statistics about alcohol use, drug use, cheating, sexual behaviors, etc. can have a healthy effect on students who discover that the reality about these behaviors is lower than their previous perceptions, it can also have a very *unhealthy* effect, if they discover that their perceptions underestimated the reality of those behaviors. In other words, they could well believe that there was more room for them to engage in these negative behaviors.

The expression, “What becomes legal, eventually becomes normal, and what becomes normal, becomes accepted as moral” reflects the same reality. If individuals do not have a strong sense of morality from religion, parents, schooling, or philosophical training, they default to perceptions about mainstream behaviors as the basis for their norms of conduct. Unfortunately, the mainstream may not have a single legitimate ethical criterion on which its perceived norms are based. Furthermore, our perceptions of what the mainstream really believes and does, can be quite inaccurate.⁸ Additionally, social norming can become a “self-fulfilling prophesy.”⁹ For example, an exaggerated perception about a certain negative behavior in the mainstream could mislead people into believing that they can indulge in a heightened level of that negative behavior. If enough people heighten their level of this negative behavior to accommodate their misperception about the mainstream, they will ultimately move the reality of mainstream behavior to that heightened perception. Notice that no legitimate ethical criterion – religious, philosophical, conscience-based,¹⁰ or traditional – need be used to justify the acceptability of this heightened level of negative behavior. Our *perceptions alone* can create an individual and collective decline in morality.

What does this mean? Without a strong sense of morality based on legitimate criteria – religious, philosophical, conscience-based, and tradition – our cultural ethical standards will likely be determined by our perceptions – or misperceptions – of mainstream behavior. We can sink as low as we believe the mainstream to be. Regrettably, western culture seems to have abandoned the four major criteria of authentic ethics and so has reduced itself to the “perceived ethics of the mainstream” with all its inherent weaknesses and its self-fulfilling downward momentum.

There is one further problem with the “ethical mainstream culture.” It puts itself in the manipulative hands of marketers and ideologues who would encourage low norms, negative behaviors, and cultural decline for the sake of profits and power. One does not have to look far to find examples of how Madison Avenue made cigarette smoking “glamorous” for women, the 3-

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ This now-accepted principle of social influence – and its prediction of how false prophecies become socially accepted truths – was first proposed by Robert K. Merton in 1948. See *Robert K. Merton (1948), "The Self Fulfilling Prophecy", Antioch Review, 8 (2 (Summer)): pp. 193–210, doi:10.2307/4609267, JSTOR 4609267*. This principle has been validated several times in studies of social norming.

¹⁰ Robert George (Princeton University’s Chair of Public Law) addresses the breakdown of legitimate ethical criteria—conscience-based, religious, philosophical, and traditional—from both a legal and cultural perspective in his outstanding work *Conscious and Its Enemies: Confronting the Dogmas of Liberal Secularism* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2016). Of particular importance is George’s summary of the critiques of Richard John Neuhaus (Chapter 27) and GEM Anscombe (Chapter 28).

martini lunch acceptable for business executives, and onerous amounts of personal debt acceptable to the middle class. Once marketers had convinced the general public that “everyone in the mainstream is doing this,” people began to move toward what they perceived the mainstream to be. Slowly – and sometimes rapidly – they adjusted their perception of right and wrong, softened their conscience, relaxed their ethical hesitations, and eased themselves into the ethical mainstream. How could such mass manipulation occur through marketing and media? In my view it occurred through a gradual, but concerted, attempt on the part of marketers and media leaders to undermine the four major ethical criteria in favor of the ethical mainstream – a concept that could be easily manipulated for the sake of power and profit.¹¹

What does all this have to do with the sexual mores of western culture? Everything! We all know the expressions, “Sex sells,” and “Sex is power” – and so it is. Needless to say, sexuality has a powerful intrinsic desirability, and so vulnerable human beings are inclined toward it – even if it entails indiscretion, harassment, or even abuse. Now if we add three elements to the powerful intrinsic desirability of sex, we can see how virtually every cultural sexual more was compromised and ultimately abandoned between the 1960’s and the current day. We have already addressed these additional elements:

- The clinicalization of sexuality by Masters & Johnson (and their successors).
- The birth control pill.
- The undermining of authentic ethical criteria by the marketing and media establishment’s successful use of social norming.

The progressive compromise and abandonment of sexual mores can be seen and even measured by the weakening of censorship standards in television, radio, and print media between 1960 and today. Though this process is nearly complete throughout most countries in Europe, it is still taking place in the United States and Canada – though cable television has in many respects abandoned virtually all standards of sexual morality on its subscriber movie channels. The influence of social norming has played a significant role in this rapid decline of censorship standards regarding sexuality. Marketers and many in the media and film establishment created the perception that the sexual revolution was prevalent not only among young people, but among the middle aged as well. This led a significant percentage of viewers to believe that the mainstream view of sexuality was more liberal than it actually was. As noted above, those without strong religious, philosophical, conscience-based, and/or traditional views to the contrary moved toward the mainstream view, dropping previously held mores. What is most interesting in this process is how *unconsciously* this group lost this sense of sexual propriety and appropriate boundaries.

After 1980, non-religious and non-traditional individuals became progressively more confused about what appropriate standards and boundaries might be and many young people were bewildered by their parents’ “hang-ups” about premarital sex, co-habitation, and pornography. Today, many young people do not believe that there should be any sexual mores

¹¹ Gabriele Kuby brings yet another dimension of the sexual revolution to light—the idolization of freedom—in her excellent work *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*. We have partially addressed this in Section II above, with respect to the Level 1-2 view of freedom (“freedom from”).

beyond the prohibition of adultery (extramarital sex)—though cheating has become more accepted within “mainstream” culture.

We should not be surprised that the loss of sexual mores and appropriate personal boundaries would result in a dramatic increase in forcible rapes,¹² sexual assaults,¹³ and sexual harassment¹⁴ -- and so they have. With respect to forcible rapes, the statistics compiled by the FBI UCS (Uniform Crime Statistics) Annual Crime Reports, showed that forcible rape has increased from 17,190 (in 1960) to 37,990 (in 1970) to 82,990 (in 1980) to a high of 102,560 (in 1990). Since that time, the rate of forcible rapes decreased because of more vigilant police action, special sex crime units, and increased education in the media. As a result, the number of rapes was 90,178 (in 2000) and 85,593 (in 2010). Nevertheless, it increased precipitously again to 95,730 (in 2016). Thus, there has been a 557% (5.57 times) increase in forcible rapes between 1960 and today (56 years).¹⁵

Though many interpreters have attributed this incredible increase in forcible rapes, sexual assaults, and sexual harassment to increases in awareness and reporting, this cannot be the sole reason for such a huge increase – a factor of 5.57 times – because the rate of rape reporting has not increased nearly that much. According to the studies of Eric Baumer, the reporting of rapes between 1973 until today has only moved from 26% of women likely to have reported to 31% in 1990 and 36% in 2006.¹⁶ This 10% increase in the reporting of rape does not come close to explaining the 557% increase in rapes reported. Even if there had been twice the increase in rape reporting calculated by Baumer (20%) between 1960-2006 without a concomitant increase in

¹² See the statistics from the FBI-uniform crime statistics Annual Crime Reports listed below.

<http://www.disastercenter.com/crime/uscrime.htm>.

¹³ The category “sexual assaults” is much larger than “forcible rapes,” because it includes assaults that need not have an element of force. They would include forcible rapes, but also unwanted advances, attempts at groping, stalking, and other invasive actions falling short of forcible rape. We might infer from the 557% increase in forcible rapes that a parallel increase of sexual assaults without rape has also occurred. Though this trend has not been specifically measured, there are several indicators that point to it—e.g. a dramatic increase of 205% (between 2002 to 2017) in campus sexual assaults in the last 15 years. Though this statistic includes both forcible rapes and other forms of assault, but it is showing the trend among young people who will ultimately constitute the majority of the population in the next 20 years. See Lizzie Crocker “There’s Been a Huge Increase in Campus Sex Assaults. Why?” *The Daily Beast* <https://www.thedailybeast.com/theres-been-a-huge-increase-in-campus-sex-assaults-why>

The rate of sexual violence in the United States has reached an all-time high, and is at a point of “epidemic” according to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. NSVRC estimates that 1 in 5 women will be raped during their lifetime (including rapes by intimate partners—approximately 80%). 12.3% of women are victimized before the age of 10 and 30% of women were victimized between the ages of 11 and 17. See National Sexual Violence Resource Center. https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_factsheet_media_packet_statistics-about-sexual-violence_0.pdf

¹⁴ It is difficult to measure sexual harassment complaints in the workplace because of changing standards and increases in reporting. However, the recent rash of reports of outrageous behavior in the workplace by Harvey Weinstein, Matt Lauer, Charlie Rose, Kevin Spacey, Roy Moore, Al Franken and Dustin Hoffman—among others—seems to have occurred post 1985. This may indicate that the loss of sexual mores and appropriate boundaries since the mid 1960’s seems to have led not only to an increase in numbers of harassment complaints, but also to the egregiousness of offenses.

¹⁵ See the FBI-Uniform Crime Statistics Annual Crime Reports in <http://www.disastercenter.com/crime/uscrime.htm>

¹⁶ See Lauren Taylor 2006 “Has Rape Reporting Increased Over Time?” in *National Institute of Justice Journal* #254 https://www.nij.gov/journals/254/Pages/rape_reporting.aspx

rapes themselves, we would have expected the number of reported rapes to be approximately 20,600 in 2016 – which is far fewer than the actual number – 95,730.

In addition to these grave social problems, the sexual revolution—and its concomitant decline in sexual mores—has also fueled another major social problem—the breakdown of the family (through increased sexual infidelity, divorce rates, and marriage rates). This has deleterious effects beyond the breakdown of society’s primary social bonding unit (the family)—namely, the insecurity and destabilization of identity among many divorced children.

Marriage rates have decreased precipitously since the 1950’s. In 1950, there were sixteen new marriages for every 1,000 people, this dropped to eleven new marriages per 1,000 in 1970, then to nine new marriages in 1990, and then to seven new marriages per 1,000 population in 2010.¹⁷ Evidently, the rate of marriage has steadily declined since the beginning of the sexual revolution—*less than half* the number per 1,000 population since 1950.

We see a similar trend in the increased rate of divorce since the beginning of the sexual revolution (with a slight amelioration in the last decade). In 1960, there were 2.2 new divorces per year per 1,000 population, this increased to three new divorces in 1970, then to five new divorces per 1,000 in 1990 to 3.75 per 1,000 in 2010 (an improvement from 1990).¹⁸ Despite the improvement in later years, the years of the sexual revolution have seen about a doubling of the annual divorce rate.

When we correlate the decline in the marriage rate with the increase in the divorce rate, we can see the rate at which marriages are likely to end up in divorce per year—in 1950, we might estimate that 16% of new marriages would end in divorce (2.5/16), in 1970, this increased to 27% (3/11), in 1990, it increased to 56% (5/9), and this remained about the same (54%) in 2010 where slightly more than 50% of new marriages would end in a divorce.¹⁹ This represents a movement from a 16% divorce rate in 1950 to a 54% divorce rate among new marriages in 2010—more than triple the rate of divorce since 1950—the years of the sexual revolution.

In addition to the decline in new marriages and the increased rate in divorce, the years of the sexual revolution also saw an increased rate in infidelity (cheating among married couples). According to a survey done by YouGov (a polling company), 21% of men are unfaithful to their wives and 19% of women unfaithful to their husbands (as of 2015).²⁰ The percentage may well be greater, because 7% of those polled said “they preferred not to answer the question” and it is likely that a significant percentage did not want to admit even anonymously their indiscretions out of both fear and shame. What is most alarming about this statistic is the rate of increase in

¹⁷ See the comprehensive study from the Center for Disease Control’s National Center for Health Statistics published in *The Washington Post* 2015 in Ana Swanson “144 years of marriage and divorce in the United States, in one chart” (June 23, 2015) https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/06/23/144-years-of-marriage-and-divorce-in-the-united-states-in-one-chart/?utm_term=.54c2dd176ca0.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ See Peter Moore “1 in 5 Americans say they’ve been unfaithful” in YouGov survey. <https://today.yougov.com/news/2015/06/02/men-more-likely-think-cheating/>.

infidelity among wives—a 40% increase over twenty years ago.²¹ Additionally, women have now overtaken men in repeated infidelity—with 36% of women reporting cheating one to five times (compared with 33% of men) and 47% of women indicating that they had more than six incidents of infidelity (by comparison with 44% of men).²² Though some commentators “herald” this as a closing of the gender gap, the prospects for marriage and family appear to be quite bleak—since women have been the mainstay of families amidst infidelity by their husbands.

These increased rates of infidelity are likely to rise in the future, because young married couples under 30 have significantly higher rates of marital infidelity than their counterparts twenty years earlier by a factor of 45% (for men) and 20% (for women).²³ Furthermore, enrollment in cheating websites such as Ashley Madison is on the rise. Currently, this website supposedly hosts thirty-seven million men and women — though this figure is unofficial and seems exaggerated.²⁴ If true, then 11% of the U.S. population (325 million) is intent on cheating. Inasmuch as 37% of the U.S. population is married (120 million), then 31% of married individuals are supposedly enrolled in Ashley Madison’s website—with the apparent desire and intention to cheat. Even if the indicated number of people on the website has been exaggerated, the prospect of increased infidelity and divorce is almost inevitable – even within a 50% margin of error.

There is a definite correlation between admitted infidelity and divorce, but it is difficult to determine whether infidelity is the primary reason for divorce, a secondary reason, or one among many reasons. According to surveys compiled by infidelityfacts.com, only 31% of marriages last after an affair has been admitted or discovered (implying that 69% of marriages in which there is infidelity end up in divorce).²⁵ Furthermore, researchers David Atkins and Elizabeth Allen refined this conclusion by calculating the probability of divorce *after* an admitted extramarital affair at about 50%.²⁶ This calculation shows more clearly the causal relation between the affair and the eventual divorce.

The breakdown of marriage is also the breakdown of family—the primary and essential bonding unit for children, producing lasting effects to the end of adulthood. Divorce undermines

²¹ See the poll by the National Opinion Research Center’s General Social Survey (2013) cited in Zach Schonfeld “Wives Are Cheating 40% More than they used to, but Still 70% as Much as Men” in *The Atlantic* (July 2, 2013) <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/07/wives-cheating-vs-men/313704/>.

²² see the surveys by the National Opinion Research Center reported by Rebecca Lake 2016 “Infidelity Statistics: 23 Eye-Opening Truths” <https://www.creditdonkey.com/infidelity-statistics.html>

²³ These statistics were compiled by David Atkins at the University of Washington and were reported by Naomi Schaefer Riley, 2008 “The Young and the Restless: Why Infidelity is Rising Among 20-Somethings” in *The Wall Street Journal* November 28, 2008. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122782458360062499>.

²⁴ Rachel Martin 2015 “Sorting Through the Numbers on Infidelity” in National Public Radio website <https://www.npr.org/2015/07/26/426434619/sorting-through-the-numbers-on-infidelity>.

²⁵ Anonymous 2006 “Infidelity Facts and Information” in infidelityfacts.com <http://www.infidelityfacts.com/index.html>

²⁶ See David Atkins and Elizabeth Allen 2012 “The Association of Divorce and Extramarital Sex in a Representative U.S. Sample” in *Journal of Family Issues* (November 2012) www.researchgate.net/publication/258151224_The_Association_of_Divorce_and_Extramarital_Sex_in_a_Representative_US_Sample

See also Robert Hughes, Jr. 2012 “Does Extramarital Sex Cause Divorce?” in Huffington Post August 8, 2012, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-hughes/does-extramarital-sex-cause-divorce_b_1567507.html

the self-identity of children which challenges their emotional stability and security as well as their sense of lovability. These effects last into adulthood—though they can be hidden from and managed for the outside world. Elizabeth Marquardt’s outstanding study *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce*²⁷ (which includes both surveys and case studies) demonstrates and illustrates these points in considerable detail. Marquardt restricts her analysis and case studies only to best-case-scenario divorces-amicable separations in which the children maintained contact with both parents into adulthood. Her conclusion is clear, there is no such thing as a “best-case –scenario divorce.” All of them—no matter how well intended—have significant negative effects upon all the children throughout their adulthood. Her objective in this study is to stop the process of social norming that implies and explicitly affirms the possibility of a positive and happy divorce for children who find themselves forced into early adulthood and divided identity when caught between two worlds. Inasmuch as the sexual revolution has fueled the doubling of divorce rates (as well as the rate of infidelity) then it must also be held accountable for the undermining of the inner life of its childhood victims throughout their adulthood—a problem that is likely to repeat itself in future generations.²⁸

What might we conclude about the breakdown of sexual mores (and appropriate boundaries) during the sexual revolution? The picture should not be characterized as “progress,” for what we see is a systemic breakdown of marriage and family—as well as an undermining of cultural stability (marked by an increase in rapes, sexual assaults, and sexual harassment). Though we cannot definitively conclude that the breakdown of sexual mores in the sexual revolution caused these exceedingly negative familial, social, and cultural conditions merely from their coincidence in time – 1966-2010 (for that would be a “post-hoc” argument²⁹), we can infer such causation from the intrinsic interrelatedness between the weakening of sexual mores and the above-mentioned individual and social behaviors – increased infidelity, decreased marriages, increased divorce, and more aggressive public sexual conduct (rapes, sexual assaults, and sexual harassment). There is significant sociological and social psychological data showing how strong social norms and mores (in the area of sexuality and other areas of ethics) can prevent these negative behaviors on the part of both individuals and culture.³⁰

²⁷ Elizabeth Marquardt 2005 *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* (New York, Crown Publishers)

²⁸ <https://www.thespruce.com/children-of-divorce-in-america-statistics-1270390>

²⁹ A *post-hoc* argument – literally “post-hoc ergo propter hoc” – “after this, therefore because of this” refers to an argument that infers causation from *mere* coincidence in time. Other causal factors need to be established beyond mere temporal coincidence.

³⁰ A seminal article on the influence of social mores on individual and group behavior was written in 1955 by Morton Deutsch and Harold B. Gerard. These principles can be applied to the influence of sexual mores on sexual attitudes and behaviors. See M. Deutsch and H.B. Gerard, H. B. (1955). “A Study of normative and informational social influences upon individual judgment” (PDF). *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. **51** (3): 629–636. [doi:10.1037/h0046408](https://doi.org/10.1037/h0046408). PMID 13286010.

The original typology of how social mores influence behavior – not only sexually, but in other areas – was set out by Herbert Kelman in 1958. See H. Kelman, 1958. “Compliance, identification, and internalization: three processes of attitude change” in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. **2** (1): 51–60. [doi:10.1177/002200275800200106](https://doi.org/10.1177/002200275800200106). With respect to how sexual mores influence sexual behavior (based on the above principles), see Donn Byrne 1976 ‘Social psychology and the Study of sexual Behavior’ in *SAGE journals*, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/014616727600300102>

We have reached a point where we cannot allow the above trends to continue. Further breakdown of the family, increased sexual aggressiveness, and the continued deterioration of intimacy, generativity, and committed exclusive love will not only negatively affect future generations of children, but also destabilize the internal cultural fabric holding society together through trust, charity, and hope. In the last 20 years, we have tried to bandage up symptoms of the above problems by increased counseling, support groups, antidepressants, and diversions (alcohol & drugs, social media, computer games, edgy entertainment – e.g. pornography -- shopping, etc.). Though some of these bandages are positive, others are quite negative, furthering the destabilization of individual identity and culture. If we are to restabilize individual and cultural identity, we will have to move beyond treating the symptoms, and address the major cause of these problems itself – namely the decline of sexual mores. This will mean taking a fresh look at the importance of sexual mores and norms, and affirming the importance for society. But where can we begin this process, for it seems as if we are trying to ship 100 times bigger than the Titanic. An obvious starting point is the originative core of most societal mores and norms – religion – that is, the leadership of the major church denominations within our culture.³¹ Inasmuch as Christian churches constitute about 74% of the U.S. population,³² there must be a united and concerted effort to make a credible and inspirational case for sexual mores. Though Jesus' and the Church's teaching on these subjects is a clear starting point, it needs to be reinforced by contemporary philosophical teaching and social analysis to redress the above-mentioned process of social norming which has undermined the credibility of these teachings in the popular mind. This should include the following:

1. Movement of young people from dominant Level 1-2 purpose to dominant Level 3-4 purpose.
2. An apologetic for the goodness and desirability of family and children (using some of the sources mentioned above).
3. Giving a sobering presentation of the destructiveness of the sexual revolution (and the concomitant breakdown of social mores) on marriage, sexual fidelity, children, exclusive commitment, and intimacy/generativity, as well as the increase in sexual assaults, etc.
4. Making the case for three specific sexual mores on the basis not only of Christian revelation, but also for the permanency of marriage and the serenity of family life:
 - a. Jesus' teaching on extramarital sex (adultery),
 - b. Jesus' teaching on premarital sex,
 - c. Jesus' teaching on homosexual lifestyle.

We have already discussed points 1, 2, & 3 above in this Volume, Chapter One. It now remains to discuss the fourth point below (Section IV).

The objective of this heightened teaching is not to make people feel guilty or judged by the Lord, but rather to truthfully portray the consequences of these lifestyle choices on individual

³¹ According to recent data from Gallup, Inc., 73.7% of the U.S. is Christian (48.9 % protestant, 23% Catholic, and 1.8% Mormon), unaffiliated (none, atheist, and agnostic) is 18.2%, Jewish 2.1%, Muslim is .8%, and other non-Christian religions (Buddhist, Hindu, Shinto, etc.) is 2.5%

³² See previous note.

lives, relationships, families, and culture. Hopefully, the argument and statistics will allow the truth of Jesus' teaching to reemerge so that the truth can set us free – free of the constraints of past social norming and free to reestablish sexual mores within our culture.

IV. Jesus' Teaching on Extramarital Sex, Premarital Sex, and Homosexual Lifestyle [Back to top](#)

In this section we will examine three issues concerned with sexual mores -- extramarital sex, premarital sex, and homosexual lifestyle. As we examine each, we will first explain Jesus' and the Church's teaching and then examine some important statistical facts indicating individual and social problems arising out of each behavior.

IV.A. Jesus' Teaching on Extramarital Sex

Jesus' teaching on extramarital sex (adultery) is more explicit than most of His other moral teachings. There are two specific mentions of it in the Gospels. The first comes from Mark-Luke which extends the prohibition in the Old Testament to men and women alike. In the Old Testament, adultery was understood solely as an illicit relationship between a *woman* and someone other than her husband.³³ The Deuteronomic code provided the possibility of divorce only for husbands who could actualize the divorce merely by certifying it in writing.³⁴ Jesus extended the definition of adultery to include *husbands* who divorce their wives:

And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (Mk. 10: 11-12).

Therefore, for Christians, adultery is the sin of a married *man* having sexual relations with anyone other than his wife or a married *woman* having sexual relations with anyone other than her husband.

The second mention of adultery comes from Matthew's Sermon on the Mount:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Mt. 5: 27).

Jesus taught that adultery is a serious sin not only because it undermines chastity, but more importantly, undermines justice. Inasmuch as fidelity is promised to spouses to obtain their fidelity and loyalty in return, and to form a bond upon which to build a future family, infidelity (extramarital sex) is a sin against justice. It not only breaks a solemn promise, but betrays the spouse who has pledged his or her whole life to the adulterer on the basis of that promise. Thus,

³³ John McKenzie 1965 *Dictionary of the Bible* p. 201.

³⁴ Ibid.

adultery “steals” the life of the spouse and undermines the security of the family grounded in his broken promise.

Jesus goes beyond the Sixth Commandment to admonish against “looking lustfully” at another. This expression has a very specific meaning – namely, having the intention to commit adultery with another in one’s heart.³⁵ It does not refer to looking at pornography or looking unchastely at members of the opposite sex. It is focused on forming the intention to commit adultery – an intention meant to lead to the act of adultery itself.³⁶

Though Jesus approaches adultery from the vantage point of sins against justice and chastity – offenses toward the spouse and God – we should not preclude the possibility that there is an underlying *positive* rationale for fidelity as well. Though Jesus does not explicitly develop this positive rationale, we can infer it from His teaching on love (charity/*agape*) – principally from the beatitudes and the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. Though these rich teachings provide the foundation for a theology of love that can be applied to the covenant relationship of marriage (see Volume 16, Chapter One), this project goes beyond our present objective which is to show that infidelity is not only a betrayal of one’s spouse and the covenant love of marriage, but also a sure way to undermine family, children, and the happiness of marriage.

We have already seen above that infidelity has a deleterious effect on marriage. As the research of Allen and Atkins shows, the probability of a divorce *after* an admitted affair is about 50%, implying that the affair is causally connected with the divorce (though not necessarily the exclusive cause of the divorce). We also saw that 69% of marriages in which infidelity occurred end up in divorce (though this statistic does not show as strong a causal connection between the affair and the divorce). Thus we can conclude minimally that adultery is not only a betrayal and injustice to the spouse, but also a likely path to divorce and the fallout from it – for both the spouse and the children.

Yet we can probe more deeply into the dark nature of adultery beyond looking at its evident destructive consequences on marriage, spouses, and children. Using spiritual terminology, there is something quite evil about infidelity, for it manifests a high degree of disrespect and disregard for the spouse as well as a willingness to undermine both family and children for purely indulgent and egocentric motives. This wanton, destructive, narcissistic act has all the “fingerprints” of evil – particularly its wholesale capacity to destroy the beloved (beloveds in the case of children) and covenant love itself. If we truly believe as Christians that God is unconditional love, then this act is completely contrary to the will and nature of God – and so it should be considered evil.

Given the serious darkness and depravity of this offense against one’s spouse, children, and God, we must ask ourselves the question of why there has been such a large increase in infidelity over the last 20 years – a 40% increase in infidelity among women, and a 45% increase among men who are under 30 years of age (see the NORC and Atkins’ studies above). The

³⁵ See Benedict Viviano 1990 “The Gospel According to Matthew” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 642.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

question becomes even more intriguing in light of the increasing popularity of cheating websites, such as Ashley Madison. We as Catholics and Christians must ask ourselves how we have arrived at a state where so many people are willing to enter into the dark, destructive, and evil reality of infidelity so readily – and in the case of Ashley Madison subscribers, so eagerly. Can it be that they do not recognize the depravity and destructive power of their actions? Can it be that they do not recognize the evil of their betrayal? We must face up to the reality that many who embark on this dark course do not recognize the interpersonal, moral, and transcendent implications of their actions. Many will likely later discover it – when the world around them is tottering if not crumbling – but at the moment of their betrayal, their sense of love, decency, and connection to God seems to be dulled or even arrested – and they leap into the darkness with reckless abandon.

I cannot help but think that if these individuals had a stronger sense of God and a more acute awareness of the promptings of conscience as well as the help of strong social mores, they would have hesitated before the darkness – recognizing it to be a betrayal not only of the family and God, but also themselves. Unfortunately, these vital interior powers and societal norms have been severely undermined, and popular culture has deliberately filled the vacuum with every kind of rationalization and “new social norms” that shout out, “There is nothing really wrong with it – it’s minor – and besides, it’ll be a fun adventure.”

What can we do as Christians to turn back the rising tide of infidelity and to restore some sanity and integrity to the damaged state of covenant love, marriage, and family? The first step is to attend to our own “personal households.” We have to take every precaution in our personal lives to affirm the truth not only of Jesus’ teaching on adultery, but also His teaching on love (*agapē* – see Volume 16, Chapter One). At the same time, we must reject both privately and publicly the promptings of new social norming within the culture – particularly the continued suggestions in the media that sex is merely a physical and morally neutral (rather than an intensely generative, moral, and transphysical) reality. No one is exempt from the pervasive influence of new cultural norming – not even mature married couples or clergy. If we let our guard down, lapse into Level 1 and Level 2 purpose, indulge in the culture’s Level 1 and Level 2 suggestions, and marginalize the teaching of Jesus and the Church, we will soon be at the doorstep of darkness – being pulled into a seemingly harmless moment of self-indulgence, which in reality is the height of destructiveness, betrayal, and evil. For me, there is only one way to avoid these temptations – stay close to the Lord in prayer, sacraments, and Church teaching – and to vigilantly pursue moral conversion (see Volume 12 for spiritual conversion, and Volume 16, Chapter Two for moral conversion).

Catholics and Christians are called beyond their own spiritual destiny to help others toward theirs. This call to evangelize and to witness to the truth of Jesus Christ places us squarely in His mission to confront the powers of darkness and to bring our neighbor ever closer to the fullness of His light. Confronting the powers of darkness is never easy, for as we saw in Volumes 14&15, evil is intransigent, frequently ingenious, deceptive, and above all, persistent. Yet Jesus tells us that if we remain faithful to His teaching and rely on the Holy Spirit to inspire us, we will be given what we need to say (Mt. 10: 19-20). This has certainly been the case for me throughout my life. Notwithstanding this incredible guiding force in our lives, we should be prepared to confront popular culture’s new social norms – and so I would ask the reader to study

and commit to memory some of the facts mentioned above about the effects of the sexual revolution on the decrease of marriages, increase of divorces, increase in infidelity, increase in rapes, sexual assaults, and sexual harassment so that you can expose the new cultural myths, reveal the truth of Jesus Christ, and allow His truth to set our community and culture free. The truth is that sex is not a playground or a game, but a dynamic, interpersonal, generative, moral, and transphysical power capable of bonding families and creating new transcendental life destined for eternity. It is one of the most remarkable gifts of the Creator, meant to strengthen and solidify covenant love at its highest level of commitment, intimacy, and self-sacrifice. When we use it properly, it brings forth life, goodness, and love, but when we use it improperly, it destroys, undermines, and ushers in the darkness. As Christians, we must expose the trivialization of this remarkable creative power, and restore it to the place to which Jesus intended it.

IV.B. Jesus' Teaching on Premarital Sex

What did Jesus say about premarital sex? Though the words “premarital sex” are not used *per se* in the New Testament, this conduct is included in the meaning of the Greek term, “*porneia*” (Hebrew, “*zanah*”), which includes, “a *selling off* (surrendering) of sexual purity; *promiscuity* of any (every) type.”³⁷ The Old Testament meaning includes conduct explicitly prohibited by the Deuteronomic and Levitical codes – “Illicit sexual intercourse -- adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals [see Lev. 22:20-28]; sexual intercourse with close relatives; Lev. 18; sexual intercourse with a divorced man or woman; Mk. 10:11.”³⁸ Premarital sex is included in the idea of “illicit sexual conduct,” because loss of virginity before marriage is explicitly condemned in the Deuteronomic code. In Deuteronomy 22:20, women who lose their virginity before betrothal are subject to stoning – “...if the tokens of virginity are not found in the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has wrought folly in Israel by playing the harlot in her father’s house; so you shall purge the evil from the midst of you.” As was customary in the Old Testament, men were not as roundly condemned for taking the virginity of a woman (or lying with a prostitute), but they were held responsible to the family for their crime. In Exodus 22: 16-17, provision is made to compensate the father for the theft of a daughter’s virginity by a man before betrothal – “When a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to be married, and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife. But if her father refuses to give her to him, he shall pay an amount equal to the bride-price for virgins.”

As noted above, Jesus “equalizes” the status of wives and husbands with respect to adultery – declaring that if a husband has a union outside of his marriage, he is guilty of adultery and sins against his wife. By implication, then we might infer that Jesus sees the sin of illicit sexual union before marriage as not only applicable to women, but also to men. Therefore it is not unreasonable to infer that Jesus views “*porneia*” (*zanah* in Hebrew) as extending to premarital sexual union. This is borne out by Jesus’ use of *porneia* in Mark 7:20--22, in which He puts “*porneia*” at the head of the list of sins that defile a person:

³⁷ See Strong’s New Testament Lexicon 4202 – “*porneia*.” <http://biblehub.com/greek/4202.htm>.

³⁸ Bible Study Tools – “*porneia*” -- <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/porneia.html>.

And he said, “What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication [*porneiai*], theft, murder, adultery [*moicheiai*], coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness [*aselgeia*], envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

The term “defile” refers to “being spiritually unclean” which, in turn, connotes “the presence of sin and evil within the heart.” It is not insignificant that “porneia” appears at the head of the list, indicating its seriousness in corrupting the heart. “Porneia” is listed along with two other sins against sexuality – “adultery” (*moicheiai*) and “licentiousness” (*aselgeia*). This implies that fornication is something other than adultery (extramarital sex – after betrothal). Inasmuch as *porneia* is used alongside *moicheiai* (adultery), it likely refers to sexual misconduct other than sexual sins *within* marriage (adultery) implying that *porneia* refers to *unmarried* sex. We see the same use of *porneia* alongside *moicheiai* (adultery) in St. Paul (1 Corinthians 6:9) and the Letter to the Hebrews 13:4, which has the same implication. The use of pornos (fornicator) in 1 Corinthians 6:9 suggests strongly that it is distinct from adultery because Paul is giving a list of the different individuals whose salvation is in jeopardy:

Do not be deceived: Neither fornicators [*pornos*] nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Furthermore, the root of *porneia* (*porne*) is associated with prostitution – the sin of an *unmarried* woman. In view of this, there is a strong likelihood that “porneia” refers to unmarried sex – prostitution and premarital sex.

The same passage from Mark 7:20-22 makes a distinction between *porneia* and *aselgeia* (licentiousness), but this seems to be a distinction of intensity rather than a distinction in kind. “Porneia” seems to refer to unmarried sex in general while “aselgeia” refers to uncontrolled or unbridled lust.³⁹

In view of the usage in the gospels as well as in Paul and Hebrews, it would be unreasonable to preclude premarital sex from the meaning of “porneia.” If these inferences are correct, then Jesus was quite concerned about premarital sex – along with other sexual sins precisely because it defiles (introduces evil) into the heart. Though Jesus does not explicitly explain what He means by “defiling the heart,” we can infer from other passages about the consequences of sin that it has two harmful effects:

1. Fornication (like all forms of defilement) causes us to sin against another human being. Just as adultery is a sin of injustice against the betrayed spouse, so also fornication (including premarital sex) is a sin against the person with whom one has relations without an exclusive, publicly declared commitment. These sexual acts undermine the dignity of the partner who deserves such a commitment in exchange for their sexual intimacy. Thus

³⁹ Strong’s #766 in Bible Study Tools <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/aselgeia.html>.

there is a real harm of treating a person as a mere object or thing – using them for personal gratification – instead of bestowing on them the commitment they deserve for the pledging of their body, mind, and spirit (as the sexual act connotes).

2. Fornication (like all forms of defilement) leaves us vulnerable to the evil spirit. This may be difficult to understand in our culture where premarital sex is seen to be a victimless activity practiced by many (see Section I.B above on the negative effects of social norming). Nevertheless, Jesus sees any form of defilement as opening the door to the evil spirit through both disobedience to God and callous disregard for another human being (See 1 Jn. 3:10).⁴⁰

Though Jesus does not elucidate the harmful effects of premarital sex on marriages or future covenant love, we can infer it from his belief that it (like all forms of defilement) weakens our spirit and makes us more vulnerable to the temptations and deceits of the devil. The more we allow ourselves to come under the spell of the devil in disobedience to God and disregard for our neighbor, the more we believe his lies and deceits (see John 8: 44-47) which will ultimately undermine our ability to see the goodness of exclusive commitment, covenant love, and even the person with whom we are having illicit relations. We may think that continuous engagement in uncommitted sexual activity is a mere “tryst,” but there is a dark rationalization embedded in this judgment – a rationalization which forces us to devalue the dignity and goodness of the person with whom we are having illicit sexual relations and the goodness of proper marital commitment. The more we believe the dark rationalization, the more our capacity to commit ourselves permanently and exclusively and to remain faithful to that commitment becomes weakened, which leads either to the inability to make a commitment or to violate the commitment in which we are involved.

In view of this, it should not be surprising to learn that the more premarital sexual partners we have, the more we will be unhappy in our marriage, and the more likely our marriage will end up in divorce. This is precisely what is revealed in several surveys done by the National Survey of Family Growth (a part of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Health Statistics). These surveys correlated the number of women’s premarital sexual partners with the divorce rate of their marriages within five years. After the year 2000, those with zero premarital partners had only a *5% divorce rate within 5 years* – the lowest rate by far.

Women having 1 premarital partner had a 22% divorce rate, those with 2-9 partners had a 26% to 33% divorce rate, and those with more than 10 had a 35%+ divorce rate.⁴¹ Furthermore, according to surveys done by the National Marriage Project, individuals having premarital sexual relationships experienced less marital satisfaction than those who did not. The more premarital

⁴⁰ “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister” (1 Jn. 3:10). The author here implies that anyone who acts unrighteously or acts unlovingly towards his brother or sister makes himself vulnerable to becoming a child of the devil (as opposed to a child of God). The more a person remains in this state, the more deep his kinship with the devil becomes – and as a consequence, he does his “father’s” works instead of the works of God.

⁴¹ See Nicholas Wolfinger, 2016 “Counterintuitive Trends in the Link Between Premarital Sex and Marital Stability” in *Institute for Family Studies* - <https://ifstudies.org/blog/counterintuitive-trends-in-the-link-between-premarital-sex-and-marital-stability>.

partners they had, the less marital satisfaction they are likely to experience.⁴² Additionally, couples who had cohabitated before marriage experienced less marital satisfaction and had a higher divorce rate than those who did not.⁴³ This finding was originally “explained away” by researchers who conjectured that couples who cohabitated were more open to divorce even before cohabitation. Though this is partially true, it is only the tip of the iceberg. There are more deep-seated intrapersonal problems with cohabitation that lie at the root of the increased rate of marital dissatisfaction and divorce. These are worth noting, because the huge increase in rates of cohabitation (from 450,000 to 7.5 million between 1960 and today)⁴⁴ are rooted in a widely held cultural myth – that cohabitation before marriage helps the couple to know if they “really get along” and therefore to avoid a bad marriage.⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, recent research has revealed that this myth, despite its persuasiveness, is quite wrong for several reasons. First, cohabitation promotes couples “sliding” into marriage rather than making a deliberate commitment to become engaged and then married for a lifetime (the so-called “sliding” effect). Couples start with “sleeping over” at each other’s places, and then sliding into cohabitating. Thus, they bypass explicit conversations about living together in a committed way, starting a family, and preparing for a future of intimate and generative self-giving love. Since cohabitation offers an easy exit, the couple concentrates on finding a suitable place to live, decorating it, combining their bills, and adjusting to a comfortable level of mutual support. Then, at some point, it seems that marriage is the right thing to do, and so without much discussion about the differences between cohabitation and marriage (public permanent commitment, the starting of a family, and the integration of two families of origin), the couple simply slides into it. As it turns out, the lack of deliberation in the sliding effect causes lower levels of commitment, dashed expectations, and a lack of preparation for the challenges that families must almost always face. The result is marital dissatisfaction and increased divorce.⁴⁶

Secondly, there is a problem of “gender asymmetry” in the reasons why men and women cohabitate. Women frequently interpret cohabitation as a step toward marriage (some feel pressured to cohabitate in order to move toward engagement and marriage). Alternatively, men believe that cohabitation is a way to test the relationship and postpone commitment (precisely the opposite of women).⁴⁷ This generally results in women pushing men toward engagement and marriage and men trying to postpone it. When the engagement occurs, many men have mental reservations about the permanent public commitment, but accede to the pressure and the seeming practicality of continuing the combination of bills and mutual support (the “consumer lock in” effect). Once again, the marriage is grounded less in a deliberate mutual commitment to start a new life and family together – and more in an accession to pressure and practical convenience – evidently less than a solid foundation. Thirdly, the “consumer lock-in effect” puts additional pressure on couples to enter into marriage as a mere extension of the practical advantages of cohabitation. Meg Jay describes it as follows:

⁴² Scott Stanley and Galena Rhoads 2014 “What Do Premarital Experiences Have to Do with Marital Quality among Today’s Young Adults?” in National Marriage Project (University of Virginia) -- <http://before-i-do.org/>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “In 1960, about 450,000 unmarried couples lived together. Now the number is more than 7.5 million.” Meg Jay 2012 “The Downside of Cohabiting Before Marriage” in the *New York Times*, April 14, 2012.

⁴⁵ See Ibid.

⁴⁶ See Ibid.

⁴⁷ See Ibid.

Sliding into cohabitation wouldn't be a problem if sliding out were as easy. But it isn't. Too often, young adults enter into what they imagine will be low-cost, low-risk living situations only to find themselves unable to get out months, even years, later. It's like signing up for a credit card with 0 percent interest. At the end of 12 months when the interest goes up to 23 percent you feel stuck because your balance is too high to pay off. In fact, cohabitation can be exactly like that. In behavioral economics, it's called consumer lock-in. Lock-in is the decreased likelihood to search for, or change to, another option once an investment in something has been made. The greater the setup costs, the less likely we are to move to another, even better, situation, especially when faced with switching costs, or the time, money and effort it requires to make a change.⁴⁸

What are the “take-aways” from this new research?

- The cultural myth about cohabitation is false – instead of increasing our freedom to commit in marriage, it deceives us and locks us in – it makes us unfree. Furthermore, it does not increase marital satisfaction and longevity. It decreases it considerably (for the reasons mentioned above).
- If couples are interested in a long-lasting satisfying marriage, they should not only seriously consider the major problems of cohabitation (and its effects on marriage and family), but also the effects of “sleeping over” at each other's places that so easily leads to a slide into cohabitation and then to a non-deliberative and non-purposeful marriage.
- Women who feel pressured to cohabitate as a condition of moving toward engagement and marriage should present the above data to their partners, and tell them straightforwardly that they are not interested in sliding into a non-purposeful marriage, but would prefer mutual deliberation toward engagement and marriage without the pressures and consumer lock-in of cohabitation.

We might ask if there are other reasons why marital dissatisfaction and divorce increase so significantly with the increase in premarital sexual relationships beyond the consequences mentioned above (non-purposeful marriage, disappointed expectations, and consumer lock-in). There are several reasons that are not measured by the above surveys related to the nature of committed sexuality as well as spiritual life. The most fundamental reason is that extended premarital sexual relationships weakens a couple's association of sexuality with exclusive permanently committed familial love. The longer premarital sexual relationships last, the more sexuality tends to become an end in itself – disconnected from the permanent familial unifying love of marriage. As a result, sexuality within the marriage is less significant as an agency of intimate, generative, familial love. This deeper meaning and agency of sexuality gives it deep, long-lasting, intimate loving joy as relationships last longer. Without this meaning, sexuality can become less significant and even somewhat boring after the luster of romance begins to fade. The opposite is the case when sexuality is embedded with the deeper intimacy and generativity of exclusive permanent commitment toward children, common cause, and religious fulfilment. Its bonding power no longer has to rest on romantic luster, but on the power of their committed

⁴⁸ Ibid.

love, strong family, and religious conviction. If this deeper meaning, agency, and love is significantly weakened by a lengthy premarital sexual relationship, then it will naturally lead to less marital satisfaction and increased rates of divorce.

The negative consequences of premarital sex on marriage longevity and marital satisfaction, as well as Jesus' teaching about the negative consequences of it for spiritual life, present a huge challenge to young people and the future of marriage in our culture, because 95% of Americans have unmarried sex before the age of 44.⁴⁹ What can Catholics and Christians do to mitigate the harm that has been and will be caused by this social reality? First, we cannot afford to be judgmental toward these individuals who obviously are swept up in an immensely successful social norming campaign combined with a weakened sense of religion and moral principles. Most of them have followed their peers and educators somewhat unreflectively into this new social reality. In view of this, it is questionable that they engaged in these activities with sufficient reflection and full consent of the will – the two conditions necessary for mortal sin. Nevertheless, their actions – irrespective of whether they were reflective or free – are harming them spiritually, and undermining their capacity for marital satisfaction and longevity.

Since many young people initiate premarital sex in college and move toward cohabitation thereafter, they are in many respects free of parental constraint and guidance, and can ignore the advice given by parents who are frequently marginalized by their “20-something” children. Parents who become aggressive (or even passive-aggressive) rarely succeed in changing their children's attitudes. A better strategy is to inform them about the above data indicating the drawbacks of cohabitation, and encouraging them to reconnect with the Lord in prayer and at Mass. I would recommend the following to the parents of college students who see their children moving into the pattern of increased premarital sex, “sleeping over,” and cohabitation:

1. Parents of college students should present the above data on premarital sex, cohabitation, and marital stability and longevity to their children *before* college and encourage them to attend church services at their university Catholic center (sometimes called Newman Centers⁵⁰) where they will find peer support.
2. If possible, encourage your children to participate in a group like FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students⁵¹) or in the absence of a campus FOCUS group, participate in the university Catholic center's retreats and education programs. The more students participate, the more they are likely to retain their Christian values. These ministries give peer support for living a Christian life on campus – and if students depart from Christ's teaching, they encourage and provide opportunities for confession.
3. If your children have already graduated from college, are still open to the Church, and are not cohabitating, you will want to encourage them to find a parish community that engages them with outstanding adult education and young adult community support.

⁴⁹ Jennifer Warner 2006, “Premarital Sex Research Shows by Age 44, 95% of Americans Have Had Unmarried Sex” in *WebMD* <https://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/news/20061220/premarital-sex-the-norm-in-america>.

⁵⁰ The following website has a directory of Newman Centers and the programs offered at most of them. <http://www.newmanconnection.com/locations/>.

⁵¹ More information can be obtained at their official website <http://www.focus.org/>.

There are several organizations – such as Cursillo’s that give encouragement to adults trying to live according to Christian teaching.⁵² There are also several men’s and women’s groups who also provide support to live Christian values through weekly reunions or other less formal gatherings.⁵³ If parents are rebuffed by children who have lost interest or are skeptical about church attendance, it is helpful to enlist the support of some of their peers who are faithful about church commitment. Frequently young adults will join peers in church participation.

4. If your children have already separated from the Church during or after college, it will be more difficult to help them resist the current trends in premarital sex and cohabitation. It is always worth the effort to help young people find an engaging parish with an active, educated young adult group, and to encourage them to attend that parish. If parents and peers are resisted (or treated with apathy), and the couple has already moved into cohabitation, then family and friends will have to wait until the prospect of marriage and the anticipated birth of the first child. The first child generally opens a couple to renewed interest in the religion of their childhood – so that their child can have everything they had.

IV.C.

Jesus’ Teaching on Homosexual Lifestyle

Jesus’ and the Church’s teaching on homosexual lifestyle is perhaps the most controversial of their doctrinal positions – at least in the United States and Western Europe. At the outset, an important distinction must be made between homosexuality (same-sex attraction - orientation) versus homosexual lifestyle (the choice to actively engage in homosexual activity⁵⁴). Neither Jesus nor the Church teaches that homosexuality is morally problematic – but only engaging in homosexual activity. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes the following:

[Homosexuals] must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.⁵⁵

⁵² Cursillo has a weekly group reunion (after its 3-day retreat weekend) that gives encouragement to live Christian values and obtain accelerated spiritual development. See the following website to learn how to participate in the weekly group reunions. http://www.diojeffcity.org/wp-content/uploads/Cursillo_Tifold_Brochure-1.pdf

⁵³ The USCCB has a list of Catholic lay organizations for both men and women having various functions and meeting times. See <http://www.usccb.org/about/public-affairs/backgrounders/catholic-lay-organizations.cfm>. See also <http://www.usccb.org/about/laity-marriage-family-life-and-youth/laity/index.cfm>.

For international Catholic lay movements and groups (many of whom have large groups in the United States), see <http://www.laityfamilylife.va/content/laityfamilylife/en/sezione-laici/repertorio.html>.

⁵⁴ There are many terms used to refer to homosexual orientation, such as, “gay” or “LGBTQI,” but I have chosen to use, “homosexuality,” throughout this section, because it is the preferred usage in psychological, psychoanalytic and biological studies, as well as the Christian scriptures. The Church is not opposed to using these other terms—indeed, Pope Francis has publicly used the term “gay,” on various occasions. See, for example, Rachel Donadio July 29, 2013 “On Gay Priests, Pope Francis Asks, ‘Who Am I to Judge?’” in *New York Times* July 29, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/30/world/europe/pope-francis-gay-priests.html>.

⁵⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* Sect. 2358.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a6.htm.

As we shall see, homosexuality (same –sex attraction and orientation) is not caused by personal choice, but is likely caused by a combination of genetic and epigenetic factors in fetal brain development as well as environmental factors (both psychological and sociological). However engaging in homosexual activity and lifestyle is a personal choice which is in conflict with Jesus' teaching and may well have significant personal and interpersonal drawbacks. In view of the fact that homosexual orientation is not chosen and that we live in a hypersexualized environment condoning and even encouraging sexual expression outside of marriage (see above), we should not judge homosexuals engaging in sexual activity as sinners any more than judging the sinfulness of heterosexuals engaging in premarital sex. As noted above, the hypersexualized environment in which we live makes sufficient reflection and full consent of the will (the two conditions necessary for mortal sin) questionable. This is probably the reason why Pope Francis responded to a reporter's question about homosexual priests with the retort:

If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?⁵⁶

So what is the probable origin of homosexuality? The American Psychological Association states:

Sexual orientation is not a choice that can be changed at will, and sexual orientation is most likely the result of a complex interaction of environmental, cognitive and biological factors...and is shaped at an early age.⁵⁷

Though a specific gene for homosexual orientation has not been discovered, there is evidence of a genetic disposition toward homosexuality linked to Chromosome 8 and with the Xq28 gene on the X chromosome.⁵⁸ There is also evidence of epigenetic causation. In five regions of the genome the methylation pattern appears very closely linked to sexual orientation. The methylation pattern predicted the sexual orientation of a control group with almost 70% accuracy.⁵⁹ Though these biological factors correlate well with homosexual orientation, the puzzle is by no means solved. There may well be additional genetic and epigenetic factors.

⁵⁶ Rachel Donadio July 29, 2013 "On Gay Priests, Pope Francis Asks, 'Who Am I to Judge?'" in *New York Times* July 29, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/30/world/europe/pope-francis-gay-priests.html>.

⁵⁷ Mary Ann Lamanna; Agnes Riedmann; Susan D Stewart (2014), "Marriages, Families, and Relationships: Making Choices in a Diverse Society, *Cengage Learning*. p. 82.

American Psychological Association: "Resolution on Appropriate Affirmative Responses to Sexual Orientation Distress and Change Efforts. <http://www.apa.org/about/policy/sexual-orientation.aspx>.

⁵⁸ Tuck Ngun, Eric Vilain, (2014). "The biological basis of human sexual orientation: Is there a role for epigenetics?" *Advances in Genetics*. Vol. **86**: pp. 167–84.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780128002223000085?via%3Dihub>.

⁵⁹ Michael Balter, (2015). "BEHAVIORAL GENETICS. Can epigenetics explain homosexuality puzzle?" *Science*, October 9, 2015; Vol. **350** (6257): p. 148. <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/350/6257/>.

A 2006 massive study in Denmark by Morten Frisch and Anders Hviid⁶⁰ also shows a significant correlation between three environmental factors and homosexual orientation:

1. Short duration of in-tact marriage of parents. The shorter the duration of the marriage, the stronger the likelihood of homosexual orientation.
2. The absence of the father and loss of the memory of the father increases homosexual orientation in men. The absence of the mother and loss of the memory of the mother increases homosexual orientation in women.
3. Growing up in an urban environment increases the likelihood of homosexual orientation.

Scientists and sociologists are not in agreement on either the combination or prioritization of biological and environmental causes. There may well be different variations of causes in different homosexual men and women. Nevertheless, the strong correlation between the genetic, epigenetic, sociological, and psychological factors and the occurrence of a disposition toward homosexual orientation in childhood and its emergence in adolescence shows the likelihood that homosexual orientation is not chosen, and in most cases, cannot be changed at will.

Though sexual orientation itself seems strongly engrained and possibly fixed, the American Psychological Association has cited several studies showing that sexual orientation *identity* can be changed in some cases. Sexual orientation concerns feelings of attraction to same-sex or other-sex individuals while sexual orientation *identity* refers to one's self-labeling, group association, and chosen marital status. The multiple studies reviewed by the American Psychological Association showed that sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) can be effective in changing sexual orientation identity *in some cases*:

The available evidence of both early and recent studies suggests that although sexual orientation is unlikely to change, some individuals modified their sexual orientation *identity* (e.g., individual or group membership and affiliation, self-labeling) and other aspects of sexuality (e.g., values and behavior). They did so in a variety of ways and with varied and unpredictable outcomes, some of which were temporary. For instance, in some research, individuals, through participating in SOCE [Sexual Orientation Change Efforts], became skilled in ignoring or tolerating their same-sex attractions. Some individuals reported that they went on to lead outwardly heterosexual lives, developing a sexual relationship with an other-sex partner, and adopting a heterosexual identity.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Morton Frisch and Anders Hviid 2006, "Childhood Family Correlates of Heterosexual and Homosexual Marriages: A National Cohort Study of Two Million Danes" in *Archives of Sexual Behavior* October 2006. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-006-9062-2>

⁶¹ Judith M. Glassgold, PsyD, Chair Lee Beckstead, PhD Jack Drescher, MD Beverly Greene, PhD Robin Lin Miller, PhD Roger L. Worthington, Ph, 2009, *Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on*

These studies indicate that some homosexuals who are strongly motivated may be able to choose reconfiguration of their sexual orientation identity, allowing for either heterosexual marriage or a celibate lifestyle. Can such individuals be truly happy and fulfilled? Some can, according to their self-reporting but they indicate varying degrees of satisfaction and perceptions of success.⁶² There are several support groups, such as CourageRC, to help homosexuals find community and sustain their choice of celibacy or reconfiguration of sexual orientation identity.⁶³

There are some significant difficulties with homosexual lifestyle (not homosexuality) that could present personal, relational, and religious challenges. Though these difficulties may not arise in many homosexual relationships, they may adversely affect a large number of individuals in those relationships. Hence, they are worth discussing for purposes of proper disclosure. We will present some survey data on these difficulties after a brief explanation of homosexual lifestyle in the Old and New Testaments.

The Old Testament is quite clear on the subject which includes homosexual activity in the list of sexual offenses precluded by the Levitical code—Lev 18:22, 29; 20:13. The New Testament also prohibits homosexual lifestyle in its general lists of sins endangering salvation—Mk. 7:20-22, Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9, and 1 Tim. 1:10. We will begin with the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark, re-examining a passage explained above with respect to premarital sex (see Section IV.B):

What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication [*porneiai*], theft, murder, adultery [*moicheiai*], coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness [*aselgeia*], envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

Recall from above that “*porneia*” very likely refers to sexual activity outside of marriage and includes the offenses prohibited by the Levitical code (see the references

Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation (publication of the American Psychological Association) pp. 3-4; <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf>.

⁶² According to the task force of the American Psychological Association on appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation, “Finally, most individuals in studies of SOCE [Sexual Orientation Change Efforts] have tried multiple ways to change their sexual orientation, ranging from individual psychotherapy to religiously oriented groups, over long periods of time and with varying degrees of satisfaction and varying perceptions of success (Beckstead & Morrow, 2004; Comstock, 1996; Horlacher, 2006; S. L. Jones & Yarhouse, 2007; Mark, 2008; Nicolosi et al., 2000; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002).” Judith M. Glassgold, PsyD, Chair Lee Beckstead, PhD Jack Drescher, MD, Beverly Greene, PhD Robin Lin Miller, PhD Roger L. Worthington, Ph, 2009, *Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation* (publication of the American Psychological Association) p. 45; <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf>.

⁶³ See for example, CourageRC that helps people with same-sex attraction to find support, a deep spiritual life, and if desired, a refocusing of their sexual orientation identity. <https://courage.org/>. There are several other Catholic homosexual support groups that can be accessed by a simple Google search “Catholic Homosexual Support Groups”.

in Section IV.B above). As such, it very probably refers to homosexual activity which qualifies as sexual activity outside marriage and is prohibited by the Levitical code. Furthermore, “licentiousness” (“*aselgeia*”) refers to the excessive pursuit of sensual pleasures (lack of “self-restraint”) and can refer to excesses of sexual activity (promiscuity) as well as drunkenness, gluttony, or other forms of sensual indulgence. Thus it can refer to promiscuity in any sexual relationship, both heterosexual and homosexual.

Jesus’ rationale for prohibiting homosexuality arises out of His proclamation that marriage is a permanent, exclusive, sacred bond between a man and a woman. The Gospels of Mark (10:6) and Matthew (19:4) report this teaching quite clearly noting that Jesus refers back to the book of Genesis (1:26-27, 5:2) to justify it:

From the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.

When this teaching is combined with Jesus’ absolute prohibition of adultery, we can infer His view that sexuality is reserved for the sacred bond of marriage (“that God has joined”) alone. This would explain why He includes “*porneia*” (unmarried sex) in His list of sins alongside adultery (sexual infidelity in marriage). Inasmuch as homosexual relationships fall outside of the sacred bond of marriage (reserved for a man and a woman), He sees sex within those relationships as a violation of the Creator’s (His Father’s) intention.

St. Paul is more explicit in his prohibition of homosexual activity—going beyond its generic inclusion in “*porneia*” and “*aselgeia*.” In Rom 1:26-27, he speaks about the unrighteousness of gentiles who do not heed the law of God within their hearts (consciences):

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

Evidently, St. Paul believed that homosexual activity is not only an offense against Judaism and Christianity (revealed religions), but also the natural law.⁶⁴

Paul expresses a similar view about the sinfulness of homosexual activity in 1 Cor 6:9-10: Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral [*pornoĩ*], nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men lying with men [*arsenokoitai* and *malakoi*], nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.

⁶⁴ See Joseph Fitzmyer 1990 “The Letter to the Romans” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* p.836.

“*Pornoï*” comes from the same stem as “*porneia*—*porne*.” As noted above, it refers to any form of sexual activity outside of marriage as well as sexual activity prohibited by the Levitical code, including homosexual activity. Paul continues the list of sins by making specific reference to “*arsenokoitai*,” which means literally male/man (“*arsên*”) plus “bedding with” (“*koitai*”) men. This word is used in the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to sins of homosexual activity prohibited in the Levitical code (Lev 18:22, 20:13, Deut. 23:17). Thus, it almost certainly refers to homosexual activity. Paul also uses the word “*malakoi*” in his list of sins. In Paul’s time, this word was used to refer to male prostitutes or “call-boys,” but Paul probably does not mean it in this restrictive way, and it probably refers to the passive partner in a homosexual relationship.⁶⁵ Paul’s prohibition of these sins is serious, and he warns that practicing them (without attempting to stop) could jeopardize salvation.

The Pauline author of First Timothy also shares St. Paul’s view of the danger of homosexual lifestyle to one’s salvation:

This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators [*pornois*], men lying with men [*arsenokoitais*], slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

We have already discussed the meaning of “*pornois*” and “*arsenokoitais*” above, and it is clear that the Pauline author of the pastoral letter agrees with his mentor, St. Paul, about the danger of homosexual activity.

An objective reading of the texts presented above shows considerable unanimity among the Levitical code, and the teaching of Jesus, St. Paul, and the author of 1 Timothy about the danger posed by homosexual activity to our spiritual life.

Is this teaching by Jesus and particularly by St. Paul anachronistic (outdated--not applicable in today’s culture and society in the same way as in the 1st century Middle East)? Though there may be some anachronistic elements, such as ignorance of the non-chosen, naturally caused, dimension of homosexuality (same-sex attraction), the above prohibitions are not focused on sexual attraction or orientation, but on homosexual activity itself. The reason for the prohibition of homosexual activity is rooted in Jesus’ and St. Paul’s view that this conduct is contrary to the will of the Creator (the Father). The Father does not issue a prohibition arbitrarily--without a good reason. For Jesus, this reason is always linked to justice and agape love--the intention and action to give one’s self for the good of another, and in the case of marital love, to give one’s self permanently, exclusively, and self-sacrificially for the good of one’s spouse and children. If this rationale underlies the Father’s (and Jesus’) prohibition of homosexual activity, then the prohibition is not merely anachronistic,

⁶⁵ See Robin Scroggs 1983 *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Fortress Press) p.42

for it applies in the same way today as it did in the 1st century Middle East. Are there any indications that homosexual lifestyle is inconsistent with the intention and action to give one's self for the good of one's spouse and children permanently, exclusively, and self-sacrificially? If so, do these inconsistencies pose challenges to spiritual life as well as permanent exclusive commitment and family life?

Recent studies indicate several such challenges which are generally similar to the challenges posed by premarital sex in heterosexual relationships. The basic challenge is that unmarried sexual activity is in tension with exclusive permanent commitment, of marriage, and family. As noted in the studies of premarital sexual activity and cohabitation cited above (Section IV.B), frequency of unmarried sexual activity is linked to decreased marital satisfaction, decreased interest in the permanence of marital commitment, and increases in divorce. This tension is further manifest in the rise of marital infidelity, and aggressive sexual behavior within the culture (rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment).

Homosexual lifestyle appears to have more significant negative effects in three major areas: (1) Number of Sexual Partners, (2) The Duration of Relationships, and (3) Monogamy within Committed Relationships. There are evident exceptions to these negative dimensions of homosexual lifestyle, but their high frequencies and percentages of occurrence indicate a real possibility of significant challenges to anyone considering this lifestyle.

1. *Number of Sexual Partners.* The 1997 Van de Ven Study of 2,583 older homosexuals (reported in the *Journal of Sex Research*) found the following: The modal range of sexual partners in homosexual relationships was between 101-500. Additionally, 10.2% of those studied had between 501 to 1,000 sexual partners. A further 10.2% to 15.7% indicated that they had had more than 1,000 lifetime sexual partners.⁶⁶ The Van de Ven Study showed a decrease in the average number of sexual partners than that indicated by an earlier Bell and Weinberg (1978) study prior to the AIDs epidemic that reported the following statistics for white male homosexuals: 43% had more than 500 sexual partners and 28% had more than 1,000 sexual partners.⁶⁷ In contrast to this, the National Center for Health Statistics found in 2007 that the median number of lifetime sexual partners (before and after marriage) for heterosexual men is 7 and the median for women is 4.⁶⁸ We might surmise that the reason for this significantly reduced rate of male sex partners is men's concern for

⁶⁶ Paul Van de Ven et al., "A Comparative Demographic and Sexual Profile of Older Homosexually Active Men," *Journal of Sex Research* 34 (1997).

⁶⁷ A. P. Bell and M. S. Weinberg, *Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), pp. 308, 309; See also A. P. Bell, M. S. Weinberg, and S. K. Hammersmith, *Sexual Preference* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).

⁶⁸ Center for Disease Control's Center for Health Statistics 2007 "Drug Use and Sexual Behaviors Reported by Adults: United States, 1999-2002" in *Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics* <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/ad/ad384.pdf>.

their wives and children within marriage relationships, and women's attachment of emotional and child-bearing qualities to their view of satisfying sexual relationships. Without this feminine, familial, and heterosexual marital component, the number of sexual partners seems to exponentially increase.

2. *Duration of Relationships.* In a 2004 Gay-Lesbian study, 71% of homosexual men reported that their "long-term relationships" lasted fewer than seven years. Of the 29% who reported having a relationship lasting more than seven years, only 31% (9% of the total) had a relationship lasting more than 15 years.⁶⁹ In contrast to this, more than 50% of heterosexual marriages lasted more than 20 years.⁷⁰ The short duration of homosexual "long-term relationships" indicates that same-sex male bonding is much weaker than heterosexual bonding, because it does not accommodate the emotional needs of women and the needs of children. The male need for variety, unmitigated by the needs of women and children, seems to make these relationships more unstable, less committed, and less capable of sustaining long-term intimacy and generativity.

3. *Monogamy within Committed Relationships.* A 2003 Canadian study reported that only 25% of homosexual relationships lasting more than one year were monogamous—75% had multiple partners.⁷¹ An earlier study of 150 homosexuals reported by David McWhirter, M.D. and Andrew Mattison Ph.D showed that only 9% of homosexual couples having a relationship less than five years were monogamous and *no* homosexual relationships lasting longer than five years were monogamous.⁷² The authors concluded that monogamy is a homophobic stage that gay couples pass through and out of. In contrast to this, the monogamy rate in "committed heterosexual relationships" is much higher. Recall from above (Section III), that 21% of heterosexual men and 19% of heterosexual women are unfaithful to their marital partners,⁷³ (and therefore 79% of heterosexual men and 81% of heterosexual women are faithful and monogamous within marriage). Though this represents a significant increase in heterosexual infidelity over the 40 years of the sexual revolution, it is considerably lower than the rate of non-monogamy reported by homosexuals in committed relationships.

⁶⁹ "Largest Gay Study Examines 2004 Relationships," *Gay Wire Latest Breaking Releases*, www.glcensus.org.

⁷⁰ Matthew D. Bramlett and William D. Mosher, "First Marriage Dissolution, Divorce and Remarriage: United States," *Advance Data, National Center for Health Statistics* (May 31, 2001).

⁷¹ Ryan Lee, "Gay Couples Likely to Try Non-monogamy, Study Shows," *Washington Blade* (August 22, 2003).

⁷² David P. McWhirter and Andrew M. Mattison, *The Male Couple: How Relationships Develop* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984), pp. 252, 253.

⁷³ See Peter Moore "1 in 5 Americans say they've been unfaithful" in YouGov survey. <https://today.yougov.com/news/2015/06/02/men-more-likely-think-cheating/>

These statistics indicate that a homosexual lifestyle can lead to deviation from Jesus' and the Christian church's ideal for marriage and family—permanent, exclusive, committed relationships for the sake of spouse and children. If this is a value to individuals who are trying to follow Christ in their lives, the above data should call forth caution and even avoidance of this lifestyle. If the lifestyle moves to multiple partners, then it is likely that it will lead to spiritual darkness which may be marked by the cosmic emptiness, loneliness, and alienation described in Volume 13 (Chapter Five). Those experiencing this interior condition will want to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart. I would recommend going to the sacrament of reconciliation with the intention of trying to engage in the process of breaking with the lifestyle. This may be quite challenging and require considerable time, but the Lord will support you with the grace of the sacraments through His unconditional mercy and your attempts to stay on the road with Him toward the light.

It is important to understand that the Lord is not asking those with same-sex attraction to give up love within the context of deep, close, friendships (*philia*), though He is asking them to give up the sexual expression of these deep friendships. This is explained in the next subsection.

IV.D A Note on Love

In Section II.A above, we explained the Christian philosophy of *eros* (romantic-sexual love), which is intended to be the bonding support for the highest level of commitment and “human to human” love oriented toward family and a Christian home. We examined what happens when *eros* is removed from this highest level of commitment, particularly with respect to aggressivity, the depersonalization of sexuality, the “thingification” of the individual, the undermining of intimacy and generativity within relationships, and the spiritual darkness resulting from this. It is fair to say that recent statistics showing increased infidelity, divorce rates, and sexual aggression (from rape to harassment) over the last 40 years, at least partially validate this perspective (see the eight studies cited in Sections III, IV.A, and IV.B). The rush to move from feelings of affection and romance to sexual expression has also undermined the development of deep friendships, intimacy, and generativity which support this highest level of commitment.

If we are to reclaim the profound goodness of deep friendship, intimacy, generativity, exclusive commitment, and the marital-familial bond supported by them, we will want to seriously reconsider Jesus' teaching about sexuality being reserved to exclusive, public commitments. This will require self-restraint to allow the development of deep friendships, intimacy, self-sacrificial generativity, and familial anticipation *before* moving to sexual expression. This is borne out by the statistics showing the increased longevity of marriages for those who reserved sexual expression for a single partner willing to commit publicly and exclusively to them (see Section IV.B⁷⁴).

⁷⁴ Women having no premarital partners had a 5% divorce rate. Women having 1 premarital partner had a 22% divorce rate, those with 2-9 partners had a 26% to 33% divorce rate, and those with more than 10 had a 35%+ divorce rate. See Nicholas Wolfinger, 2016 “Counterintuitive Trends in the Link Between Premarital Sex and Marital Stability” in *Institute for Family Studies* - <https://ifstudies.org/blog/counterintuitive-trends-in-the-link-between-premarital-sex-and-marital-stability>.

The rush to move from feelings of affection to sexual expression has also produced confusion in the psyche of young and middle-aged individuals who believe that their feelings of attraction and affection for another person (and the reciprocation of those feelings by that other person) indicate the need for immediate sexual expression without having developed genuine care for and intimacy with the other. The truncation of care, generativity, and intimacy within the dating process is not only causing superficiality and depersonalization in dating and courtship, but also a stimulus-response association of feelings of attraction and affection with sexual expression. The idea and ideal of “love” within relationships is progressively becoming reduced to affection, convenient friendship, and sexual expression, leaving out profound intimate generative friendship moving toward exclusive commitment. This explains a host of contemporary challenges – the reticence to have children, to sacrifice personal gains for the sake of spouse and children, and to delay marriage.

If this inference is correct, then it would not be surprising to see a trend within society where the absence of sexual expression strongly implies, both intellectually and affectively, the absence of love. This would mean that waiting for sexual expression means waiting for love – or in the case of same sex attraction, “sacrificing sexual expression for the Lord” means sacrificing love, which would be virtually unbearable.

Clearly the Lord is not asking us to sacrifice relational love – in the sense of profound friendship (*philia*). Indeed, the term “*philia*” is used of Jesus’ friendship with the twelve – indicating a profound concern for, affection, and commitment to the other. The term almost never connotes sexual love.⁷⁵ As noted in Section II.A *above*, *philia* is quite capable of producing the closest of friendships through commitment and reciprocity, which produces the deepest forms of mutual care, support, generativity, and common cause. It is quite capable of fulfilling our needs for profound friendship (love) which brings with it happiness on both level three and level four. Sexual expression is not needed to have the deepest kind of “brotherly love.” No doubt, refraining from sexual expression throughout life is a huge sacrifice, but it is not a sacrifice of love and friendship, care and concern, mutual support and common cause, and reciprocal commitment. When these friendships are combined with an abiding relationship with the Lord, it can lead to the highest levels of fulfillment, identity, and purpose in life.

Jesus assures us that: “...no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life” (Lk 18:29-30). This evidently includes those who sacrifice sexual relationships for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel. If we put our faith in this promise, the Lord will bless us for our fidelity and will enable us to help others move closer to the Lord in faith and in love which will be a rich blessing both now and throughout eternity.

⁷⁵ See William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) -- “*philia*.”

IV.E Conclusion

The above discussion of extramarital relationships and multiple non-marital partners in heterosexual and homosexual lifestyles indicate significant deviations from the ideal of permanent, exclusive, committed love taught by Jesus and the Catholic Church. These deviations have had several negative effects on divorce rates, aggressive sexual behavior, and the stability of family life as well as on children involved in highly unstable familial situations. There is also another “downside” – such lifestyles can become habitual and even addictive which opens upon spiritual darkness that can progressively disconnect us from our relationship with the Lord of authentic love, leading us into an environment marked by cosmic emptiness, loneliness, and alienation. As noted above, if individuals are experiencing this kind of “affective and spiritual desolation,” it is imperative to try to reconnect with the Lord through prayer, the Church, and through the sacrament of reconciliation. Participating in a church community and even a church support group can be invaluable in escaping the darkness and returning to the light of Christ.

Catholic ethical teaching is very nuanced about the idea of “mortal sin,” which requires sufficient reflection and full consent of the will (no impediments to the free use of our will). This criterion is difficult to meet in ordinary circumstances, and in the current environment of hyper-sexuality, even more difficult. The Lord sees the extreme conditions we face in this culture and His judgment is always like that of the father of the Prodigal Son – unconditionally loving and merciful.

We may return to the words of St. Paul who so eloquently stated his own struggles with “carnal life” in the Letter to the Romans:

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7:14-24).

Clearly, St. Paul struggled considerably to achieve mastery over “the flesh.” No doubt he experienced many failures but he kept struggling through the grace of Jesus Christ to attain the ideal that the Lord asked of him. He presumes that the Lord will be patient and forgiving, but he maintained the struggle that would allow grace to ultimately bring him to victory and to salvation.

The struggle for virtue makes all the difference to life, identity, purpose, and salvation. Indeed, it is probably the most important dimension of our life – the supreme dignity. For if we embrace the struggle to move beyond what St. Paul calls “the flesh” toward “the spirit” in our inmost being, we purify ourselves and gradually take on not only new habits and a new identity, but a whole new being which St. Paul calls “the new man.”

No one wants the struggle or the crosses that occasion the opportunity to struggle toward virtue, but when we have seized on that occasion, and used it to come a little closer to the purification of ourselves in virtue, we know that it is worth it, and can see the hand of the Lord guiding us through it. For “the new person” is the difference between a merely sensual-egotistical self and a virtuous-transcendent self; the difference between a base self and a noble self, between a shadow self and a radiant self, between an empty self and one filled with the light of Christ. When we look back on the struggles which transformed us in virtue and faith, we know that they were the most important (albeit painful) times of our lives – not only because they prove our mettle, but also because they left an enduring effect on our identity and being – if we seized the opportunity to let the Lord transform us through them. This has certainly been my own experience – not only with progressive blindness, but also with some of the most painful and challenging moments of life.

Jesus compares this struggle to the pains of childbirth that give rise to a whole new human being – the prize that makes the pain worthwhile:

Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world (Jn. 16: 20-21).

If we can keep our eyes focused on the prize, even as we are being purified through our voluntary and involuntary struggles, we will be able to bear them and benefit from them much better, and in the end we will be led steadily by the Lord not only to the “new person,” but also to eternal salvation. As this purification in virtue takes place, it will transform the quality of all our actions, and we will find ourselves leading others by word and example into the kingdom of God by helping them to benefit from their crosses and struggles. This is why St. Paul says that he rejoices in his weaknesses and hardships:

because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor 12:7-10).

Given the supreme efficacy of the struggle for virtue and faith, those involved in the above three lifestyles may want to consider pursuing a process of disengaging from them, particularly if they sense cosmic emptiness, alienation, and loneliness indicating a spiritual void or even spiritual darkness. The process could be long and challenging, but it will be worth the effort, for as we move toward the light of Christ, He will support us with the grace of the Holy Spirit not only to be saved, but to be an invaluable disciple and teacher.