



TOWARD A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF SEXUALITY

COUNCIL OF THE BAPTIZED

SERVING CATHOLICS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. PAUL/MINNEAPOLIS



The Council of the Baptized

The Council of the Baptized is a twenty-one member panel of Catholics, chartered in January, 2012, to be a collegial voice for a growing community of Catholics in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis in honoring their baptismal responsibility for their local church.

Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (CCCR), initiator of the Council charter, having listened to Catholics since its incorporation in 2009, recognized a need for a representative body to hear the people's concerns of conscience. The Council's role is to deliberate on concerns brought to them, and to speak to those concerns, fully grounded in the tradition of the Church and in its official teaching in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

The Council of the Baptized is not an officially designated or recognized council of the Archdiocese.

For further history, to read the charter and job descriptions of the Council of the Baptized, and to find the current membership, go to www.councilofthebaptized.org.

Anyone may submit a proposal to the Council of the Baptized. Please submit your proposal in writing to info@cccrmn.org. See the back page for details.

The Proposal for a Healthy Christian Theology of Sexuality

Following Pope Francis' call for input from all the People of God prior to the Extraordinary Synod on the Family 2014, a team of local Catholics approached the Council of the Baptized in March 2014 to propose a position paper on a healthy theology of sexuality. As part of the research for this paper, the team facilitated a Listening Session in May 2014 sponsored by the Council of the Baptized. A summary of these findings is included with the position paper, which was approved for publication by the Council of the Baptized on August 12, 2014.

Authors of the position paper: Mary Ellen Jordan, Diane Sineps, Mary Beth Stein, and Patty Thorsen. For questions or more information, contact us at info@councilofthebaptized.org.

Introduction

The Council of the Baptized of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis is concerned about developing a healthy Christian theology of sexuality. We know that sexuality is with us from conception to death, and that any knowledge and understandings we can gain about it will be self-enhancing and result in improved personal and interpersonal relationships. Unfortunately, the Church's rich theology of sexuality often comes across to many people as basically negative—a series of no's and prohibitions. We believe a more positive and nourishing theological approach to human sexuality would better serve as a basis for addressing contemporary questions and for dialoguing with other Catholics, other Christians, our Jewish sisters and brothers, and all who are genuinely interested in dialogue.

As faithful Catholics, we have heeded the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and informed our consciences on Church teachings. The proposal will show that the Church teachings on sexual ethics are reformable. We ask that the entire People of God—hierarchy, theologians, and laity—be consulted and their voices respected on sexual topics. We urge the Church to take into account the findings of contemporary biological research and the policies of professional health associations and world organizations dedicated to improving health. We also ask that men who have taken vows of celibacy no longer be the sole arbiters of official teaching on Christian sexual morality. Only when the voices and lived experience of the whole "People of God," especially those of women and all those who are sexually active, are taken into account will a sexual ethic be credible to the faithful.

We offer this paper as a basis for dialogue and discernment. We do not pretend to have all the answers to complicated questions of theology and human sexuality. However, in order to have a dialogue, we must set out our position as clearly as we can. We welcome comments and criticism, even negative criticism, as a way to move closer to truth. What follows is offered in that spirit.

We offer this paper as part of the international conversation prompted by the Synod of Bishops on the Family held in Rome, in Oc-

tober 2014. For this reason, we have focused on the important issues addressed by the Synod of Bishops on the Family: artificial contraception, divorce and remarriage, and homosexuality.

We call for the Bishops' Synod to establish a commission that includes men and women representing all of the faithful to study and address the people's concerns on the sexual issues addressed in this paper.

Finally, we offer this paper to promote dialogue among Catholics in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. We petition archdiocesan leadership to engage in this dialogue and to contribute to a reformulation of Christian sexual ethics.

TOWARD A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF SEXUALITY

There is today, within and outside the church, no common understanding of marriage, family, and sexuality. In order to arrive at one, we presently need much exchange, openness, and patience. Each must listen to others. Every life experience must be taken seriously. It is important in this that we not reject or judge others. Only God can rightly evaluate a person. And also the church can never say of someone that God condemns them, or certainly not that they are going to hell.

Martin Gächter, auxiliary bishop of Basel, Switzerland (2014)

The People's Concerns

We believe along with Pope Francis that a more compassionate Church is the order of the day. We are concerned that the traditional stringency of Catholic sexual ethics has alienated many Catholics and pained many more. The advent of the birth control pill in the early 1960s coincided with the burgeoning Civil Rights movement and a major push for Church modernization among many theologians. This led to a widespread hope among Catholics that the reform-minded Pope John XXIII would lift the Church's ban on artificial contraception. In time, the Second Vatican Council explicitly called for greater integration of scientific knowledge into Church teaching, and it affirmed religious freedom and the necessity of acting in accordance with an informed conscience. After the death of Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI appointed a commission that included scientists, theologians, along with laymen and women to advise him on the contraception question. When he issued *Humanae Vitae* and overruled the commission's recommendation to approve contraception, the outcome was a growing disillusionment with papal authority and the opening of a gulf between hierarchy and laity on topics regarding sexuality. As a result, many Catholics continue to voice opposition to the Church's ban on artificial contraception and have felt let down by their Church.

Other sexual topics call for further development of Church teaching. The expansion of rights for lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender people [referred to by the acronym LGBT], including gay marriage and adoption, presents the Church with new issues to address. In addition, a large number of Catholics are living together before marriage or without getting married. Divorce and remarriage are common despite Church teaching that sex outside a Church-sanctioned marriage is sinful. Increasingly, many Catholics, especially young people, see the Church as unrealistic, too legalistic and judgmental, and inattentive to their concerns. The numerous inconsistencies between the idealized sexuality promoted by the Church and the lived experience of the faithful, paired with priest sexual abuse and frequent bishop cover-up, lead many well-intentioned people to grow distant from the sacraments and the support offered in a Christian community.

Church Teachings Are Reformable

Church teachings have developed over time in the light of new historical understandings and conditions. John Henry Cardinal Newman, writing in the mid-19th century in the essay entitled "Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine," made the point that "from the nature of the human mind, time is necessary for the full comprehension and perfection of great ideas" (Introduction, sec. 21). Vatican II, often referred to as Newman's Council, understood the importance of revisiting theological views in light of new information. According to *Gaudium et Spes*, one of the important documents to come out of Vatican II, the Church has "always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (sec. 4).

We agree, along with theologian Paul Lakeland, that "incompleteness is an inescapable facet of history," and "what is not open to change is something that is already dead" (xiv). We know that modern Biblical exegesis continually provides new insights into Scripture, that tradition is a living, changing phenomenon, and that our apprehension of natural law evolves along with new information and understandings. While we understand that Scripture, tradition,

and natural law provide an authoritative basis for the Church's sexual teachings, we know that the official teaching authority of the Church is not always infallible. In fact, it is rarely infallible. Teachings develop over the course of time, and that means they are reformable.

In an article entitled "Authority and Conscience," Cardinal Avery Robert Dulles clarified the importance of understanding how and why it is that Church teachings have always developed in the light of new information, new understanding, and new historical circumstances.

We must recognize, therefore, that there can be such a thing in the church as mutable or reformable teaching. The element of mutability comes from the fact that such teaching seeks to mediate between the abiding truth of the gospel and the socio-cultural situation at a given time and place. For example, the condemnations of usury in the Middle Ages were based upon valid moral principles, but were linked, more than was recognized at the time, to a pre-capitalist economy. Once the shift to capitalism had been made, the moral teaching had to be modified. Other changes in doctrine were linked to new astronomical discoveries (such as the overthrow of the Ptolemaic system), new biological theories (such as the theory of evolution), new methods in historical criticism, and new developments in politics.

Changes such as those just mentioned have led to important shifts in Catholic doctrine, even within recent memory. Vatican II approved of new attitudes toward biblical studies, religious freedom, and ecumenism.

We believe that now is the time to reassess the Church's position on all matters sexual. In accord with Vatican II, we acknowledge and accept the obligation to contribute our informed decision-making and lived experience to this assessment.

Christ . . . continually fulfills His prophetic office until the complete manifestation of glory. He does this not only

through the hierarchy who teach in His name and with His authority, but also through the laity whom He made His witnesses and to whom He gave understanding of the faith (*sensus fidei*) and an attractiveness in speech so that the power of the Gospel shines forth in their daily social and family life (*Lumen Gentium* 35).

Thus, as we hold, along with Avery Dulles, that Church teachings are reformable, we have studied and here summarize our understanding of the historical background of the Church's sexual teachings on artificial contraception, homosexuality, and divorce and remarriage as they relate to the ongoing development of Scripture, tradition, and natural law.

Background: Scripture and the Church Teaching on Sexuality

Since the 19th century, Scripture scholars have studied the historical and cultural context of the various Scripture texts and have acknowledged how different the context of our lives is from those of the authors of the Biblical texts. For example, as the Israelites sought to increase their number according to the Divine command, they placed the greatest importance on procreation and the familial/social systems to support it. We, however, live in a time of overpopulation and of climate change. We are threatened by food shortages and loss of habitable land. Women and smaller families may be needed to provide economic growth and stability to areas of the world otherwise wracked by war and political instability. Another striking difference between our time and that of the Old Testament writers is that patriarchy shapes the sexual teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures as is evident in the general assignment of powerful positions to men and submissive roles to women. In contrast, feminism—the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities—is the acknowledged challenge of today.

On a more positive note, the Hebrew Scriptures speak with multiple voices on sexuality. The most vivid example is the poetic language in the Song of Songs that celebrates love and erotic attraction rather than

procreation. Also, the stories of Judith, Ruth, and Naomi depict powerful women despite the patriarchal expected norm of submissiveness.

While the Christian New Testament continues in the patriarchal Judeo perspective, it offers little direct guidance for teachings on sexuality. What is clear is the overall focus, throughout the Gospels, of Jesus' teachings on a God of justice, compassion, and forgiveness. Jesus challenges the religious leaders' judgmentalism and rigid adherence to rules of behavior in favor of the greater goods of love and right relationship. In this regard, we remember the woman caught in adultery found in the Gospel of John. Although she was accused of violating sexual laws, Jesus offered compassion rather than condemnation. He did, however, critique those who would condemn her: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). This attitude of Jesus can guide us in developing a more compassionate theology of sexuality, one that takes into account levels of psychological maturity, personal identity, and individual happiness. A healthy sexuality should also acknowledge human frailty and an individual's growth over time.

Background: Tradition, Natural Law, and Church Teaching on Sexuality

Scholars agree that the Apostles and early converts, most of whom were Jews, were married. The historical context of Christianity changed when the Church moved into the Greek world and came under the influence of Plato, the Stoics, and the Gnostics. To summarize, these ancient Greek philosophers believed in a higher spiritual world and a lesser material world. They held that sexual activity was incompatible with spiritual and/or intellectual perfection because, they contended, the image of God lies in the soul and not in the body. They saw women, the bearers of children, as grounded in the material world while men were oriented to a spiritual/intellectual dimension. The influence of Stoicism and Gnosticism can be seen in the Church's long tradition of pitting the spiritual against the material, in privileging celibacy over sexual activity, and in not granting full equality to women. St. Augustine, who was influenced by Gnosticism and Platonism, went further and tied sexuality to the concept of original sin.

The Church's position on sexual morality further developed in the 12th and 13th centuries with the elaboration of natural law. The Church teaches that natural law, grounded in human reason, is accessible to everyone. Some of the difficulty involved in understanding what is "natural" is already evident in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, the 13th-century scholastic. Aquinas based his philosophy not on Plato but on Aristotle, who had a scientific understanding and understood the importance of the senses and the material world. Aquinas accepted the idea that homosexuality was "an unnatural vice," but we can see the influence of Aristotle when he wrote, "all those things to which a man has a natural inclination are naturally apprehended by reason as good" (*Summa Theologicae* Part II, I, Q. 94, Article 2). This appears to correspond with the revised position of the American Psychological Association that homosexuality is not unnatural and is not a mental disorder; rather it is "a normal and natural variant of the human condition" (1973). The understanding that homosexuality is not a disorder is becoming widespread, and it accords with the lived experience of many Christians who recognize the normality of the LGBT men and women they know and love.

Many moralists already agree that natural law is in need of redefinition. Ours is a living tradition. For this reason, the Church, out of humility, should be open to reformulating natural law, taking into account the contemporary historical context, diverse traditions, new scientific research and philosophical understandings, along with the right and obligation of all individuals, after informing their conscience as best they can, to determine right from wrong for themselves.

Future Direction: Healthy Sexuality and the Nature of God

The theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, which has pride of place in the Christian tradition, continues to have much to offer those who would reformulate Church teaching on sexuality. Aquinas never accepted the dualism that would separate body and soul. "[F]or Thomas, the human soul is the life of the body; it is how this body's life is human" (Turner 72). In 1991, the American bishops also rejected separating body from soul: "We are created not as angels or pure spirits but as human beings,

embodied and sexual. We make incarnate God's own goodness, love, and vitality" (USCCB 8). We believe that this Christian tradition, one that postulates the unity of the person, is more in keeping with the doctrine of the Incarnation, and with contemporary science and our lived experience of sexuality.

Our intention is not to discount the fact that sexuality, like any other aspect of our human selves, can become distorted or be misused. We think, however, that sexuality should not be disparaged. For a new theology of healthy sexuality, let us begin with the mindset that creation is inherently good, as *Genesis* proclaims, and that sexuality in some way reveals the Creator.

With this in mind, we hold that a multitude of sexual expressions and relationships can be blessings and can lead to a greater understanding of the nature of God. Healthy sexuality reveals the nature of God in at least three ways: (1) the life-giving nature of the Creator, (2) the Trinitarian aspect of intimate relationships and friendships, and (3) the immense depths of God's love for creation.

The Life-Giving Nature of the Creator and Human Sexuality

Genesis tells us that "God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (1:27). We are created as gendered beings that reflect God's life-giving nature. As the Church has long taught, God's life-giving nature can be reflected in procreation: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). The revelation of God's creative love does not end there, however. In the words of St. Irenaeus, "The glory of God is the human being fully alive." Healthy sexual relationships elicit happiness and a sense of wellbeing which empower us to live all of life fully and creatively.

Sexual intimacy can also sustain women and men as they practice patience through life's struggles and offer acceptance of the beloved despite shortcomings. In this way healthy sexual relationships enhance self-esteem and draw us into other life-giving dynamics, shaping our relationships and interactions with the world. Thus, we must move from "an emphasis on biological procreation to the more inclusive understanding of *generativity* as the goal of giving life" (Ferder 232). A new

theology of healthy sexuality should consider how sexual passion and creativity can bring more life to individuals, couples, and the world.

The Trinitarian Relationship and Human Sexuality

Human sexuality also parallels the relationship, union, and completeness of the Trinity. The Second Vatican Council recognized this in *Gaudium et Spes*, its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*: “There is a certain parallel between the union existing among the divine persons and the union of the sons [and daughters] of God in truth and love” (GS24). The Persons of the Trinity enjoy relationship and complete union by giving of themselves freely and receiving each other in full measure. Similarly, human beings long for intimacy and desire to share their life with others. The intimacy of human sexuality mirrors the divine capacity and desire for intimate relationship and union. “Sexuality is the Creator’s ingenious way of calling people constantly out of themselves into relationship with others” (Kosnik 8). Through healthy sexuality, the unconditional gift of self is both given and received, much like the shared love of the Trinity.

The Immense Depths of God’s Love and Human Sexuality

Human sexuality reveals the immense love that is God’s nature. Scripture overflows with examples of God’s great love for each of us: “I have summoned you by name; you are mine” (Is 43:1b), and again, “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jer 31:3). Christian writers have long interpreted the Song of Songs, a poetic celebration of sexual love, as an allegory signifying God’s joyful and deeply intimate love for his people. Rather than remaining disinterested and distant from humanity, God seeks out loving relationship with us.

In the New Testament, Jesus consistently reveals God’s desire for loving relationship: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son” (John 3:16). God’s immense love became incarnate in Jesus who, as a human person, embodied the compassionate nature of God so beautifully conveyed in the stories of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), and Jesus visiting Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). In each of these stories, Jesus demonstrates God’s unconditional love and acceptance. A healthy sexual relationship mirrors

this unconditional love and acceptance as lovers affirm each other in mutual giving and receiving. Lovers who aspire to be faithful and forgiving are consciously, or even unconsciously, modeling their lives in accord with the loving God who created them.

Changing Society and Emerging Church Teaching

We recognize that Church teachings develop over time and are therefore reformable. For this reason, we here outline some of the Church teachings on sexuality that conflict with modern science and medicine, world opinion, and the lived experience of many faithful Catholics.

Conflict: Church Teaching on Contraception versus Lived Experience

Church Teaching

The Church's traditional position has been that sexual intercourse is to be reserved to marriage and that each and every conjugal act must be open to the transmission of life.

Any human genital act whatsoever may be placed only within the framework of marriage.

—*Persona Humana, Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1976), 64.

In 1930, due to the growing acceptance of birth control, Pope Pius XII issued the papal encyclical *Casti Connubii (Of Christian Marriage)*. The purpose of the encyclical was to condemn artificial birth control and to reaffirm the Church's position that the purpose of sexual relations was the procreation of children. The encyclical broke some new ground by acknowledging a second, "unitive" purpose in matrimony, by which is meant that sexual relations are also intended to strengthen the bond between husband and wife.

The Rhythm Method

In 1951, Pope Pius XII approved the rhythm method. He deemed it a natural, moral form of family planning. The rhythm method was tried by millions of couples, before and after the Pope's public approval,

but reports grew that many couples found it unrealistic, often frustrating, ineffective, and in many ways a threat to marital stability.

Oral Contraceptives

With the appearance of the first oral contraceptives in 1960, many Catholics, including many theologians, argued for a reconsideration of the Church's position. In 1963, Pope John XXIII established a commission of six European non-theologians to study questions of birth control and population. After John's death in 1963, Pope Paul VI expanded the commission to 72 members, including cardinals, bishops, theologians, physicians, and five women without medical credentials. In 1966, the commission produced a report, proposing that artificial birth control was not intrinsically evil and that Catholic couples should be allowed to decide for themselves about the methods to be employed. According to the majority report, the use of artificial contraception, namely, the pill, should be regarded as an extension of the already accepted rhythm method. Reports of mounting dissatisfaction with natural family planning among Catholics, including many theologians, bishops, and priests, were important to the deliberations of the commission.

Humanae Vitae and Theology of the Body

In 1968, Pope Paul VI overruled the majority opinion of the commission that favored approving contraception and issued *Humanae Vitae* (*Of Human Life*), prohibiting the use of all contraceptives. Millions of Catholics, responding in anger and sorrow, ignored the encyclical.

In a 1984 lecture, in part of the series later entitled *Theology of the Body*, Pope John Paul II reaffirmed the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* and repeated the censure against artificial birth control. He encouraged Catholics to practice the rhythm method, now referred to as "natural family planning." The Theology of the Body has been widely accepted among those who accept the Church's ban on artificial contraception, but it has had little impact on the majority of Catholic women and men.

Medicine and World Opinion

Increasingly, Catholics depend on medical opinion like that of the Institute of Medicine, which has concluded that birth control is medically necessary to “ensure women’s health and well-being” (2011).

A survey in 2008 by *The Tablet: The International Catholic News Weekly* found that 54.5% of surveyed Catholics in England and Wales used the contraceptive pill, and nearly 69% had used or would consider using condoms. A 2013 American survey indicated that some 68% of Catholics use artificial contraception (that is, sterilization, the pill or another hormonal method, or the IUD), and only 2% of Catholic women rely on the Church endorsed method of natural family planning (Guttmacher Institute).

In 2012, after a renewed consultation with health experts on the issue, a United Nations commission reiterated the need to provide women with access to both hormonal contraceptives and condoms to prevent unwanted pregnancies and HIV infection

In 2014, a United Nations commission censured the Vatican for its handling of child sexual abuse and for its ban on artificial contraception.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), “In developing countries, women continue to die because they lack access to contraception. Each pregnancy multiplies a woman’s chance of dying from complications of pregnancy or childbirth. Maternal mortality rates are particularly high for young and poor women, those who have least access to contraceptive services. It is estimated that one in three deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth could be avoided if all women had access to contraceptive services. However, in many countries, funding for family planning has been curtailed, and many low-income countries find themselves without adequate supplies of contraceptives.”

Bishops on the Conflict

German bishops acknowledge “very big differences between the faithful and the official doctrine of the church” on a range of issues including contraception, homosexuality and the communion ban on

those who remarried after divorce. The Swiss bishops found that while faith still remains important for Swiss Catholics, there is no longer an “unconditional acceptance” of much of church teaching on the family, marriage and sexuality (*Irish Times*, Feb. 10, 2014).

In an unusually blunt report to the Vatican, Bishop Robert Lynch of St. Petersburg, Florida, said, “On the matter of artificial contraception, the responses might be characterized by saying, ‘That train left the station long ago.’ Catholics have made up their minds and the *sensus fidelium* [the sense of the faithful] suggests the rejection of church teaching on this subject” (*National Catholic Reporter*, Feb. 24, 2014).

In 2014, the American bishops continue to oppose the contraception provision (for our purposes, we are speaking primarily of artificial contraception, not abortifacients) of the Affordable Care Act, while the National Coalition of American Nuns and the Catholic Health Association support the contraception access provision. Organizations supporting contraception do so primarily as a women’s health issue.

Future Direction: Contraception

The 2014 Synod on the Family, called by Pope Francis, appears to be a response to the widespread dissent to Catholic sexual teachings, most notably the teaching on contraception. In a recent Vatican directive, bishops were told to listen “as widely as possible” to Catholics’ views on issues like contraception, same-sex marriage and divorce. “Nobody at the Vatican will be surprised to learn the vast numbers of Catholics disobey its ban on premarital sex and birth control, or that some are in gay partnerships. Setting down those realities irrefutably on paper, however, could strengthen a bid by Francis to soften the church’s official line and put pressures on bishops inclined to resist, including some in the United States and many in Asia and Africa, conservative areas where the church has been growing” (Henry Chu, *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 2014).

Conflict: Church Teaching on Homosexuality versus Lived Experience

Church Teaching

The Church teaches, “the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Oct. 1, 1986). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered” because they do not lead to procreation.

Opposition from Health Organizations

The idea that homosexuality is a mental disorder or that the emergence of same-sex attraction and orientation among some adolescents is in any way abnormal or mentally unhealthy has no support among mainstream health or mental health professional organizations.

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder. The American Psychological Association Council of Representatives followed in 1975. Other major mental health organizations followed, and it was finally declassified by the World Health Organization in 1990.

The revised thinking is that homosexuality is not a disorder but “simply a normal variant of the human condition” (American Psychological Association, Dec. 13, 2007).

In 1993, the American Academy of Pediatrics held that “therapy directed specifically at changing sexual orientation is contraindicated, since it can provoke guilt and anxiety while having no potential for achieving changes in orientation.”

In 2004, the American Academy of Pediatrics reiterated the majority medical opinion that “the mechanisms for the development of a particular sexual orientation remain unclear, but the current literature and most scholars in the field state that one’s sexual orientation is not a choice; that is, individuals do not choose to be homosexual or heterosexual.”

In 2008, the American Academy of Pediatrics warned that gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth who are “surrounded by a multitude of negative messages about homosexuality coming from their families, schools, churches, and communities” often become depressed. “A significant percentage of [such] youth consider suicide to be their only option” (*American Academy of Pediatrics Textbook of Pediatric Care*, chapter 157).

Catholic Supporters of LGBT Men and Women and Gay Marriage

In a recent survey, 64% of Catholics in the United States said that homosexuality should be accepted by society, similar to the 59% of the non-Catholic population who agree. In many Latin American countries—Chile, Venezuela, Brazil and Bolivia—Catholics are *more* likely than non-Catholics to accept homosexuality (Pew Research Center, July 30, 2013). At this point in time, attitudes are very different among Catholics in some parts of the developing world, for example, Africa.

Many reformist Catholic organizations, including the Catholic Coalition for Church Reform, Catholic Church Reform, American Catholic Council, Call to Action USA, and Future Church, support complete equality for LGBT people.

Future Direction: LGBT Men and Women and Gay Marriage

The Church’s traditional position that homosexual persons, by virtue of their sexual orientation, have a relatively strong tendency toward an intrinsic moral evil seems to put the Church at odds with a basic tenet of Christianity: “All persons are created in the image and likeness of God and thus possess an innate human dignity that must be acknowledged and respected” (From *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination*, 2006).

The populace increasingly takes issue with the Church’s traditional understanding of natural law: “The Catholic Church’s position is based on centuries’ worth of reckoning with natural law . . . However, our knowledge of biology has changed over time, and if homosexuality is increasingly understood as ‘natural’ for a segment of the population, then this could, in theory, change the Church’s reading of natural law” (Ruth Graham, *Boston Globe*, Jan. 10, 2014).

Conflict: Church Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage versus Lived Experience

Church Teaching

In 1980, a Vatican synod restated the view that sacramental marriage is “permanent and indissoluble,” and Catholics who divorce and re-marry can’t receive Communion.

In 2013, the Vatican reaffirmed Church teaching barring those divorced and remarried from the sacraments without an annulment of their first, sacramental marriage.

Other Voices

“Nobody is deterred from getting divorced and remarried by our annulment process. But many people are deterred from coming into or back to the Church by our annulment process. It is spiritually counter-productive” (Fr. Peter Daly, *National Catholic Reporter*, Jan. 13, 2014).

Pope Francis, speaking in July 2013, said that the 2014 Synod of Bishops would explore a “somewhat deeper pastoral care of marriage,” including the question of the eligibility of divorced and remarried Catholics to receive Communion. He spoke of a general need for forgiveness in the Church today.

The number of divorced and civilly remarried Catholics today is huge, and there is the question of how best to facilitate their reconciliation with the Church (*National Catholic Register*, Oct. 22, 2013).

Respondents [to the Vatican survey sent out in 2013] felt “very strongly” that the Church needs to do something more to reconcile divorced-and-remarried Catholics and that its current annulment process is inadequate, according to Bishop Robert Lynch of St. Petersburg, Florida (*National Catholic Reporter*, Feb. 24, 2014).

Lynch summarized respondents’ views on the issue of cohabitation before marriage in this way: “The Church needs ‘to wake up and smell the coffee.’” He added that, not only is cohabitation without marriage “commonplace,” but “there are some reasons for it that cannot be summarily dismissed, such as economic realities” (*National Catholic Reporter*, Feb. 24, 2014).

Practice among Catholics regarding cohabitation appears to be not dissimilar to that in the community at large, where it is common and growing more so (*The Tablet*, Mar. 13, 2014).

Future Direction: Divorce and Remarriage

According to theologian Charles E. Curran, "There will soon be a change in the pastoral practice of the Catholic Church concerning the participation of divorced and remarried Catholics in the sacramental life of the Church. Even without any hierarchical sanction, today many Catholics in this situation are participating in the sacramental life of the Church. It seems that this will become the regular practice whether it is officially sanctioned by the hierarchical Church or not" (*Kelly* 100).

In July 2013, Pope Francis signaled openness to some flexibility on access to the sacraments for divorced and remarried Catholics.

Pope Francis has also announced that the issue of divorce and remarriage will be on the agenda for the 2014 Synod of Bishops on the Family.

A More Just Sexual Ethic

A more just sexual ethic, one that heals wounds already inflicted and brings hope that sexuality can be a blessing for all, is now the challenge that the Church must address. There is much to build on.

One serious undertaking followed the widespread disaffection following *Humanae Vitae*. In 1972, the Catholic Theological Society of America commissioned a group of Catholic scholars to undertake a study of Catholic sexual teachings with the aim of developing new approaches. The Catholic Theological Society of America endorsed the book that resulted, *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought*, in 1976. The book was essentially pastoral in nature. It was the consensus of the authors that theologians had long recognized that "conditions under which sexual pleasure is 'permitted' as 'legitimate' in Catholic teaching are still restricted to a degree found in few other cultures ethical systems, or religions" (1). They were concerned that sexuality engendered guilt, confusion, and/or ambivalence among the Catholic faithful. The book was used in major American seminaries and Catholic colleges throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Recently, in 2006, Margaret Farley, an American theologian who has served as president of both the Catholic Theological Society of America and the Society of Christian Ethics, offered a new look at sexual ethics. In *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, she developed a new framework for a Christian sexuality that both respects the tradition and responds to the ongoing concerns and questions of Catholics and the wider society.

We here offer a list of seven norms for what Farley terms “just love/just sex.” Our list is based on Farley’s list but includes elements of the list offered in the earlier text, *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought*. These seven norms are derived from traditional Christian morality but recognize that human beings develop in light of history, both individual history and that of God’s whole creation.

Norms for Just Love/Just Sex

1. Free Consent. Sexuality rises naturally from within humans. It allows a deep expression of ourselves. Each person’s autonomy regarding his or her own actions and relationships in the sexual sphere is sacred and should be respected. This means that rape, violence, seduction, manipulation of dependents, deception, and betrayal violate free consent and that individual privacy should not be violated.

2. Do No Unjust Harm. Sexual relations are unjust if they do harm—physical, psychological, spiritual or relational—to another. All persons are ends in themselves and should not be objectified and/or used as a tool to enhance another’s pleasure or power. “Precisely because sexuality is so intimate to persons, vulnerability exists in our embodiment and in the depths of our spirits. Desires for pleasure and for power can become bludgeons in sexual relations” (Farley 217). Furthermore, to initiate sexual relations with another knowing that over the course of time such a relationship would damage the other’s personal health or development would be unjust.

3. Mutuality. Sexual activity should be mutual. In heterosexual sex, the man is not the active participant and the woman the passive partner. Sexual desire, union, and response should be, in some degree and over

the course of time, mutual. "Part of each person's ethical task, or the shared task in each relationship, is to determine the threshold at which this norm must be respected, and below which it is violated" (Farley 223).

4. Equality. "A condition for real freedom and a necessary qualification of mutuality is equality" (Farley 223). Major inequalities in social and economic status, age and maturity, professional identity, and interpretation of gender roles (such as sex with spiritual advisers, employers/bosses, counselors, teachers, coaches, etc.) can lead to often-unacknowledged domination and subordination.

5. Commitment. Some form of commitment is essential. In the past, this commitment was identified as heterosexual marriage. It was valued more for the sake of the family than for the individuals themselves, and it was often consistent with inequality between husband and wife. For example, men were thought to be the sole decision makers. A committed love seeks not to harm a partner; it does not seek to demean or overpower the other in any way; it loves, supports, forgives, and understands the other. This calls for the stable relationships that fidelity can provide.

6. Fruitfulness. If sex is procreative, it must be within a context of responsible parenting. There are, however, many kinds of fruitfulness: "The new life within [a sexual] relationship . . . may [also] move beyond itself in countless ways: nourishing other relationships, providing goods, services, beauty for others; informing the fruitful work lives of the partners in relation; helping to raise other people's children, and on and on" (Farley 228).

7. Social Justice/Social Responsibility. Sexual behavior has societal implications. Sexual partners have always to be concerned that they do not harm "third parties" (for instance, other lovers/spouses, and the children involved). Social justice requires sexual partners to "take responsibility for the consequences of their love and their sexual activity—whether the consequences are pregnancy and children, violation of the claims that others may have on each of them, public health concerns, and so forth" (Farley 229). The obverse is also true. "Whether persons are single or married, gay or straight, bisexual or ambiguously gendered, old or young, abled or challenged in the ordinary forms of sexual expression, they have claims to respect from the Christian community as well as the

wider society" (Farley 228). The myths and doctrines of religious and cultural traditions that reinforce gender bias, racial sexual stereotypes, homophobia, and AIDS discrimination are examples of social injustice.

Conclusion

A new theology of healthy sexuality must build on Scripture, tradition, and Church teachings, but it must also take into account modern medicine and contemporary science, along with new theological approaches. Most importantly, it must reflect the lived experiences of the Catholic faithful and not just those of men who have taken the vow of celibacy. Vatican Council II recognized human experience as a solid way to know God. The *Decree Apostolate of Lay People* declares, "All that goes to make up the temporal order: personal and family values, culture, economic interests . . . possesses a value of their own, placed in them by God" (sec. 7). In fact, Vatican II calls the laity to action: "By reason of the knowledge, competence or pre-eminence which they have, the laity are empowered—indeed sometimes obliged—to manifest their opinion on those things which pertain to the good of the Church" (*Lumen Gentium* 37). Lay people have the knowledge and competence to speak about sexuality because of our lived experience.

We accept the invitation—the challenge—that Vatican II presents to us. The participants in a recent "listening session" on sexuality and Church teachings have accepted this invitation (see Appendix). As the Council of the Baptized of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, we feel obliged to ask that our voices be heard and a new theology of healthy sexuality be embraced.

Listening Session

A complement to this paper was a listening session held at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, St. Paul, Minnesota on May 28, 2014. Individuals were asked to speak about their lived experience of sexuality. The discussion questions and the responses they generated are included in the attached Appendix A. A report of all the responses from the listening session can be found in Appendix B online at www.councilofthebaptized.org.

WORKS CITED

- Curran, Charles E., James J. Walter, Timothy E. O'Connell, and Thomas Anthony Shannon, Eds. *A Call to Fidelity: On the Moral Theology of Charles E. Curran*. Baltimore, MD: Georgetown UP, 2002.
- Dulles, Avery Cardinal, S.J. "Authority and Conscience," www.vatican2voice.org/8conscience/dulles.htm
- Farley, Margaret. *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*. New York: Continuum Books, 2006.
- Ferder, Fran and John Heagle. *Tender Fires: The Spiritual Promise of Sexuality*. New York: Crossroads, 2002.
- Kelly, Kevin T. "Divorce and Remarriage." *On the Moral Theology of Charles E. Curran*. Charles E. Curran, Ed. Baltimore, MD: Georgetown UP, 2002, 97-112.
- Kosnik, Anthony, William Carroll, Agnes Cunningham, Ronald Modras, and James Schulte. *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Thought*. New York: Paulist P, 1977.
- Lakeland, Paul. *A Council That Will Never End: Lumen Gentium and the Church Today*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical P, 2013.
- Newman, John Henry Cardinal. *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. <https://archive.org/details/a599872600newmuoft>
- Turner, Denys. *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait*. New Haven: Yale U P, 2013.
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*. Washington, D.C.: author, 1991.
- Walter, James J., Timothy E. O'Connell and Thomas A. Shannon. *A Call to Fidelity: On the Moral Theology of Charles E. Curran*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 2002.

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF LISTENING SESSION MAY 28, 2014

WHAT SHOULD THE CHURCH'S RELATIONSHIP BE TOWARD DIVORCED AND REMARRIED CATHOLICS OR THOSE ENGAGING IN SEX OUTSIDE OF SACRAMENTAL MARRIAGE?

The Church's response to divorced and remarried Catholics should be open, welcoming, supportive, forgiving, reconciling and reconnecting with full sacramental inclusion. Mistakes happen, and Jesus Christ was forgiving. The process of annulment should be seriously revisited as it invalidates marriages with children by pretending that they never happened.

- "I'm sorry about getting an annulment. My first marriage existed and produced three children. Getting an annulment made me lie about my marriage – to say it never existed."
- "It is time to move away from shame and move toward understanding and acceptance."
- "Support everyone in finding their own way and discerning what is best for them, their family, and community."
- "Completely accepting!! Welcome and accept divorced men and women. Accept sex outside marriage or a loving relationship between consenting adults."

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON BIRTH CONTROL AND THE USE OF CONTRACEPTION?

In light of overpopulation, AIDS, and the physical and mental health of women, couples, and families, contraception should not be banned. The format used should be a personal choice based on an informed decision and personal conscience.

- "In one way or another, I have used contraception for 25 years or so. I think that birth control is a good thing. I am not cut out to be a parent and appreciate the choice not to have children."
- "Because of post-partum depression, I was not able to parent my kids after number three. Women and men need to be able to safely and effectively limit pregnancies for the 'sake of family health.'"
- "The Bible say, 'increase and multiply.' JOB DONE. We have enough people. Responsible care of God's creation means curtailing the number of children. Yes to birth control."

- “Catholic women have already decided this. The few in power need to accept their decision to use contraception.”

HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH VIEW AND MINISTER TO LESBIAN, GAY, BI-SEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PERSONS?

All human beings are created by God, and all that God creates is good. The overwhelming consensus is that the Church non-judgmentally welcome, with full sacramental inclusion, persons who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and/or transgendered.

- “I believe that all love between persons is a reflection of God’s love. ... I would like to see all committed relationships validated by the Church.”
- “They too ... have full membership in the body of Christ. The Church needs to drop the ‘intrinsically disordered’ language. It is shaming and manifests an ignorance of current knowledge.”
- “It should view them as God’s people and minister to them exactly the same as it ministers to heterosexual human beings. We know already that is what Jesus would have done. We know over 50% of US Catholics already believe this and feel strongly about it.”
- A self-described lesbian said, “Jesus loved and did not condemn. I still love the Church.”

WHAT OTHER CONCERNS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT THE CHURCH’S STANCE ON SEXUAL ISSUES?

Many concerns were raised as problems in the Church including mandatory clerical celibacy, lack of women in Church leadership, clerical sex abuse and cover-up, gender inequality, and the focus on sexual sins rather than emphasizing healthy sexuality.

- “Let’s move away from ‘act-centered’ morality and see sexuality as a blessing, not a problem. To legislate on sexuality is to attempt to control a person.”
- “I am deeply concerned about the secrecy that has been revealed about our Archdiocesan approach to dealing with sexually unhealthy priests.”
- “As long as women are not allowed in leadership roles, our church will be sexually misguided and even irrelevant.”
- The Church is “antiquated and not moving with science or information.”

WHAT SHOULD BE THE ROLE OF CONSCIENCE WHEN MAKING SEXUAL DECISIONS?

Catholics desire guidance from Church teachings in forming conscience. Church leaders need to do a better job of helping people in this process. In the end, however, primacy of individual conscience must be honored.

- "A person has responsibility to develop an informed conscience and we all need assistance with this."
- "Primacy of conscience has been ignored as a teaching by Church leadership the last 20+ years.... Let's do a better job of educating our young priests, so they can educate their 'people' and offer more adult instruction in churches on this matter."
- "I think there are good things in our tradition, and we can be guided by them. But, bottom line—I must decide."
- "Entering into a sexual relationship is about respect and commitment, sharing of oneself, regardless of marital status. That is the point of conscience and discernment."

WHAT STRUCTURES WOULD HELP US COMMUNICATE OUR LIVED EXPERIENCE TO CHURCH OFFICIALS, AND WHAT FEEDBACK MECHANISMS DO WE NEED SO WE CAN BE ASSURED THEY ARE LISTENING?

The Church is not a democracy; however, participative inclusion of the *sensus fidelium* is imperative if we do not wish more Catholics to abandon the sacramental support of the Church. Seminarians and Church leaders should be educated to listen to and learn from the laity. Avenues for communication and feedback to the hierarchy include re-establishing the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, dialog with lay organizations such as the Council of the Baptized and Catholic Coalition for Church Reform, listening circles with Church officials, deanery forums, and peaceful means of protest as warranted.

- "I don't know what structure specifically. But, I hate knowing that what I think and believe counts for nothing!"
- "An Archdiocesan Pastoral Council would be a very good start. The key purpose of an APC should be to provide 'practical wisdom' from the Church (the People) to the Church (the Institution)."
- We need "transparency related to church problems such as finances or the abuse scandal."

- “Laity must be on every committee with power to join in on decisions and vision.”
- “We need regular opportunities for dialog and communication with one another as well as with our pastors, bishops and community councils.... Everyone’s voice needs to be heard sincerely and respectfully—we are all part of our beautiful Church.”

WHAT MESSAGE DO YOU WANT TO SEND TO OUR LOCAL BISHOP? TO POPE FRANCIS?

Many people expressed frustration with Archbishop Neinstedt’s leadership and called for his resignation. Pope Francis was encouraged to continue listening and to open his attitude toward women.

- “To our local bishop: Resign. To Pope Francis: Listen broadly and deeply and sincerely to as many people as possible. Be especially attentive to voices of women, who are not represented now in ecclesial structures.”
- “Bishop: Time to be more welcoming, less alienating. The Amendment push alienated many people!! Closing churches alienated people, etc. Pope: Time for more respect for women! Stop the Inquisition of our Religious Sisters! They are doing God’s work!”
- “Plan a new future by listening to reform-minded laity!”
- “All voices should be represented at table and all lived experience should be valued. Remember all baptized /confirmed persons are called to priesthood.”



Proposals to the Council

To honor our baptismal responsibility in the local church, we must act on our concerns of conscience. We can address our concerns through the Council of the Baptized either with programs we implement ourselves or with programs we recommend to the Archdiocese to implement. We can also research and draft position statements or papers that ground the community's thinking in the Gospel, the tradition of the Church, and in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

Anyone may submit a proposal to the Council of the Baptized. Please submit your proposal in writing with your name and telephone number to **info@councilofthebaptized.org**. You may also mail them to Council of the Baptized, c/o Mary Beth Stein, 5596 Royal Oaks Dr, Shoreview, MN 55126. Upon acceptance by the Council, a research and drafting team will be assigned to help develop the proposal for final approval by the Council of the Baptized.



Council of the Baptized
2080 Edgcombe Road
St. Paul, MN 55116

