

ANTHROPOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF SEXUAL ETHICS

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by
Prof. Dr. Karl Heinz Auer

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I. INTRODUCTION

At the invitation of Dr. Galvin, I am very pleased to be able to talk with you here at the Catholic University of America. The title I have chosen for this talk is: Anthropological Underpinnings of Sexual Ethics. In the first part of the presentation, I will offer an overview of these underpinnings and discuss the still much neglected communicative aspect of sexuality. In the final part, I would like to offer some conclusions pertinent to our understanding of sexual ethics which take into account both the Catholic theological tradition of the past and the requirements of the present.

Before beginning, I would like to mention that for the anthropological ideas contained in this presentation I am deeply indebted to Dr. Kurt Loewit for his research and studies in the field of human sexuality.

To help you more easily follow my train of thought, I will mention the individual chapter headings of my presentation before going into the various aspects in detail.

Part I: ANTHROPOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Section 1: Acceptance as a Basic Human Need

It is amazing that in our day, which is so often looked upon as sex-crazed, there are still families in which the subject of sexuality, and thus sexuality itself, is still taboo. Taboo or not, sexuality is one of the basic aspects of human existence. It goes far beyond simple procreation and plays a decisive role in the area of human relationships and communication. This is also the area in which the misery of today's materialistically orientated society

is most evident, namely the poverty and misery of interpersonal relationships. This modern crisis in relationships has become the primary reason for many of the psychosomatic disorders and sicknesses confronting our society today. In looking for ways and means to conquer these problems through encouraging the development of wholesome surroundings and approaches to life, our approach to sexuality too will have to be re-examined. We are being called upon in moral theology to develop an understanding of sexuality which sees and utilizes it as a positive aspect of human existence rather than as something at odds with higher nature.

There are of course those who think that far too much emphasis is already being placed upon human sexuality. „Sexuality is not everything,“ they say. And yet, how many aspects of life are there in which sexuality does not play some sort of role? As soon as we take a look at our environment, we find ourselves confronted on all sides with a language, culture, and lifestyle brimming over with sexual content and symbols. We need only think of the mass media, advertising, fashions, the arts, literature, and even architecture and religion as examples of its all-pervading presence in everyday life.

If sexuality plays such an important role in human existence, then why do we experience such difficulties when it comes to talking about it? One of the obvious reasons is that a suitable vocabulary of sexual intimacy is often lacking, with the result that a widespread speechlessness prevails in this area, even between those who are sexually intimate with one another. The only words which many know and use to verbalize their sexuality are often rude, violent, aggressive, and demanding. Such words disfigure and deform the inherent beauty of human sexuality and make meaningful discussion about it impossible.

As an example of meaningful discussion in this area, let us begin with an examination of a basic need common to all persons, namely that of acceptance. This need to both accept others and be accepted by them is a process which already has its beginning in the prenatal stages of human

existence. No healthy physical or psychological development in our existence can take place without our being accepted by some other individual. In day to day existence, it is imperative for our well-being that we experience a sufficient amount of acceptance on the part of those we come into contact with. Much of this vitally necessary acceptance is experienced by us in the form of closeness, acceptance, affection, togetherness, warmth, body contact, support, and security. If we examine human basic needs and desires, we will find that many of them stem from the necessity of man's living, both actively and passively, in a relationship with other persons. The human being feels both a need and desire to be accepted by others, and to accept them in turn. He wants to feel their support, and experience a sense of belonging. He desires recognition, and when it is given this leads to a healthy sense of self-worth and security. High on the list of man's needs and values are those which give his life personal meaning and content, such as openness, honesty, trust, dependence, faithfulness, tolerance, freedom, communication, and a willingness to set aside time for others. These needs are present in all our relationships beginning with that of the mother and her child and progressing through the various relationships within the family, among friends, within the areas of our occupation and religious affiliation right up to the relationship between man and his God.

All effort on our part to achieve not only a better understanding of the type and order of importance of our own basic needs but also to better understand where they come from and how they have developed will necessarily lead us to a better understanding of our own sexuality too. These efforts will lead us beyond an approach to life in which sexuality has primarily to do with procreation and intercourse to a new understanding of our sexual existence which finds greater and more intense expression as togetherness, love and intimacy both within and also independent of the framework of the sexual act itself.

Section 2: Toward an Understanding of Human Sexuality

In the following, I will be using the word "sexuality" in a twofold sense. In the first sense, sexuality refers to everything that has to do with our existing either as a woman or a man. Sexuality is not something which one has or owns; on the basis of our identity as a male or female, our existence takes on an inseparable sexual character. There is nothing in the bodily and psychological facets of our existence which is not either totally dependent upon our sexuality, or at least somehow influenced by it. Who we are, what we are, is also determined by our sexuality. In a narrower sense, the word "sexuality" is used to denote everything which has to do with our sexual organs and sexual body functions, such as instinct, pleasure, and procreation: in other words, the term "sexuality," is used here to describe our existence as genital beings. This meaning of the word "sexuality" is the sense in which it is commonly understood. To exclusively understand sexuality in this way, however, leads to a diminished and incomplete understanding of what human sexuality actually is. As a result of such an exclusively genital approach to sexuality, sexuality itself gradually becomes looked upon and treated as an isolated aspect of human existence. Such an approach not only overlooks the manifold varieties of sexual behavior and experiences which take place beyond the framework of specifically genital sexuality but also leads to the shortsightedness of overlooking the psychosomatic nature of man, namely man as an inseparably intertwined unity of body and mind. The fact is, this intertwining has become so inseparable that it is the human brain, and not the genital organs, that must be considered the basic human sexual organ. It is here, in the brain, that the major part of human sexual life takes place. Human fantasy is filled with sexual daydreams, thoughts, and desires, and many of the dreams which fill the hours of sleep also exhibit an explicitly sexual content. In its function as the point at which body and mind meet, the brain also serves as irrefutable living proof that human life and experience

takes place on two levels, a physical and also a psychological one. Just as these two aspects of the brain cannot be separated, so too, do these two levels belong together in everyday life. If body and mind are separated, man is torn asunder and no longer exists as human being. Such a tendency to divide the human inseparable existence into two separate parts, especially in the area of sexuality, was, however, present in antiquity and was later taken over by Christianity as a dualism which underestimated the importance of human existence as a physical being and overestimated the importance of his existence as intellect, spirit, and soul.

If we are interested in understanding man as he actually is, if we are interested in understanding his actions and feelings and the motivation behind them, then we have no choice but to make a concerted effort to leave behind us the artificial separation of the human being into two opposing levels of existence, namely that of the body and mind, and return once again to an understanding of man as a unified whole, as an entity which exists not as an embodied spirit, but rather as both body and spirit in an inseparable union which is man

Section 3: The Nature of Our Sexuality

More and more people are becoming aware that procreation is neither the primary nor the exclusive purpose of our sexuality. And yet, when questions arise as to the meaning and purpose of human sexuality, the most spontaneous and frequently occurring answer is still that this aspect of human existence has to do with procreation. One of the reasons for this response is that both our own experience of our sexuality, as well as our emotional stance toward it, is to a great extent determined by the opinions and information being propagated by the sciences of our day, and especially by the

representatives of the natural sciences. These opinions play a major role in our understanding of what is right or wrong, and what we can or cannot accept in good conscience. In no other area, is nature considered so sacred and sacrosanct, or scrutinized so closely, to detect God's will for us and to discover what is morally right and wrong. On the other hand, in no other area of human nature is our understanding of this nature as superficial and incomplete as in this area. In no other area of human existence are our convictions based upon so many false presumptions and explanations as in connection with the presumed nature of human sexuality.

In referring here to nature and human existence, it is important to keep in mind a two-fold understanding of the concept of „nature,“ namely biological nature and also human nature in its fullest sense. Man has for the most part lost the instinctual guidance inherent to the animal kingdom; as a result, he has increased freedom and is also forced to fend for himself through choosing and selecting among the options life offers him. During this process of selection, mistakes are necessarily going to be made, although even here he still gains in his ability to make decisions and in an increased understanding of his freedom of choice.

These things also hold true when it comes to man's understanding of his sexuality. The ideas of past centuries regarding the process of human procreation are far different from those upheld today. And yet even today, especially in the area of human procreation, biologically false conceptions from the past continue to play a role in our culture within the framework of philosophical, ethical, and religious views and teachings. Up until modern times, credence was long given to the homunculus theory, the assumption that entirely formed individuals were already present in miniature form in the male semen. This view played a decisive role in the moral evaluation of male masturbation, coitus interruptus as a form of abortion, and the question of allowable forms of birth control. This false conception of male sexuality also lent weight to the conviction that human sexuality is intended exclusively for procreation and that even in marriage its primary purpose is that of

producing offspring. Having grown up in the scientific atmosphere of today's world, it is hard to believe that the existence of the human egg cell was first discovered in 1826, and that reliable data on the fertile and infertile periods within the menstrual cycle of women was not available until about 1930.

Another area in which the natural sciences have enriched our understanding of sexuality is found in the study of primitive life forms in which reproduction takes place solely through cell division without an necessity of two independent life forms interacting with one another, in other words reproduction which takes place independent of sexual process. Within the framework of human existence, the areas of sexuality and reproduction, have become so inseparably connected with one another that it becomes easy to assume that reproduction could never have taken place without a human sexuality, and that reproduction is therefore sexuality's primary purpose. And yet, in many areas of the flora and fauna on our planet, science has become aware of the fact that reproduction takes place in a non-sexual manner. Taking this into consideration, it would be presumptuous to all to quickly assume that the only purpose of such a complex phenomenon as human sexuality is that of reproduction.

That sexuality plays a greater role in our lives than merely that of reproduction is obvious from the fact that only during certain periods of our lives does sexuality serve as a means for actual reproduction: to a greater or lesser extent, however, it also functions as a means of communication with others during all periods of our lives. Here, in the area of communication, is where the fundamental difference between man and the remainder of the animal kingdom becomes most noticeable. The degree of consciousness, the ability to think on an abstract and conceptual level, his abilities in the area of speech and cultural development including that of ethics and religion separate him from all other known life forms. With his ability for developing symbols and words to facilitate self-expression, man has developed a unique ability to communicate with those around him. It is this communicational function too, which comprises the uniquely human aspect of his sexuality. This

understanding of human sexuality gradually beginning to play an ever greater role in our ethical and scientific ponderings as to the nature of this facet of man's existence. During the course of such speculation, it is important that we keep in mind that our so-called scientific „truths“ about the nature of man are generally of a relative and somewhat transitory nature. Both his and also the realization that even today we are still faced with a piecemeal understanding of human sexuality gives us good reason to assume that in the course of man's development he was often confronted with monetary views that were looked upon as unchangeable laws of nature and treated accordingly. Much of what is today considered true can sooner or later turn out to be incomplete or even wrong. This does not mean that what was said in the past and is being said in the present is to be considered arbitrary or unimportant, or that human nature is not governed by internal laws of any kind. What it does mean is that we must constantly make an effort to discover what is most true and most applicable for our lives and our time. Intellectually speaking, we must constantly be on the move. Such a situation may of course cause a certain deal of uncertainty, and perhaps even anxiety, especially on the part of those who yearn for the security of hard and fast rules and finalized statements of fact. Rigidity, however, is not to be equated with strength, just as flexibility is not equatable with weakness. A healthy sense of final unsureness can prevent rigidity and immovability, as well as encourage us to develop and move on to a more inclusive and thorough understanding of ourselves and our humanness. Such a stance on our part will help us to easier uncover false simplifications and discover new avenues upon which we can proceed when present approaches are no longer helpful.

Part II: ETHICAL ASPECTS OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

Section 1: A Historical Overview

Since sexual norms are to some extent culturally determined, they too are often strongly dependent upon specific historical situations. An ethics of sexuality must therefore always be seen within the framework of a social context: that is, it must be viewed within the framework of the political, economic, social, historical and cultural conditions under which it developed. The resulting relativity inherent within such historical conditioning gives us good reason to closer examine some of the more important ethical approaches taken toward human sexuality in the history of mankind.

Subsection a:

The Dualism of Zarathustra and the „Tri-Level“ Teaching of Aristotle

One approach which reoccurs again and again in history in various forms is the ethical dualism of the Persian prophet Zarathustra who lived in the 7th century B.C.. Zarathustra looked upon man as being divided into two independent realms, that of the material body and that of the spirit or psyche. This dualism of opposing elements, whereby the psychic or spiritual element is looked upon as being positive and the bodily element as negative, is so fundamental to Zarathustrian thought that the idea of a fundamental unity between body and psyche never occurs. This dualism later found its way

into both Hellenism and Christianity where for centuries it played an important role in shaping society's understanding of man.

Aristotle looked upon man as a being comprising three levels of existence, the vegetative, the animal, and the intellectual. On the vegetative level we find all the elements which man and plants have in common. On the animal level, we have the animalistic aspects of human nature. And on the mental level we find that which distinguishes man from all other living beings. Through designating human sexuality as part of the animal level, sexuality itself becomes looked upon as animalistic. As a result, human sexuality was seen as something merely present in man for the propagation of the species. Other than that, it was considered something which holds man back from the further development of his higher spiritual nature. This Aristotelian view of sexuality has decisively influenced Western history up until recent times.

Subsection b: The Sexual Ethics of the Bible

Contrary to the general assumption that the Bible and sexuality are irreconcilable opposites, biblical texts dealing with this topic accept the existence of man as a sexual being, namely as man and woman, as part of the creational order established by God. From a biblical point of view, the individual - in his existence as either man or woman - is incomplete and in need of being complemented by the opposite sex. As a result, sexuality and the man-woman relationship are looked upon as positive, God-given gifts to man. This creation of the human being as man or woman is the high point of the Old Testament creation story and, looking back on all he has created, God finds it to be very good (Gen 1, 31). God's desire in Gen 1, 28 that man may „increase and multiply,“ which is not to be looked upon as a command, implies that fertility and procreation are things which should be actively affirmed and utilized, rather than being seen simply as part of man's fate here

in this world. The special emphasis given to reproduction is explainable by the fact that in the Old Testament man was able to participate in the Messianic salvation through his progeny. The coming together of man and woman in sexual union is also seen, however, as a fundamental act inherent to the development of the individual as person.

In the second story of creation, which we find in chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis, the human being first experiences the fullness of his humanness in the presence of the opposite sex. Eros and physical acts of love are something which can be openly spoken of and valued for their own sake. In the Song of Songs, for instance, in chapter 1, verses 2 to 4, we hear the woman saying:

Your lips cover me with kisses;
 your love is better than wine.
 There is a fragrance about you:
 the sound of your name recalls it.
 No woman could help loving you.
 Take me with you, and we'll run away:
 be my king and take me to your room.
 We will be happy together, we will
 drink deep, and lose ourselves in love.

Further on in chapter 7, verses 10 through 12, she says:

I belong to my lover, and he desires me.
 Come, darling, let's go out to the countryside
 and spend the night in the villages.
 We will get up early and look at the vines
 to see whether they've started to grow,
 whether the blossoms are opening
 and the pomegranate trees are in bloom.
 There I will give you my love.

Exegesis tells us that the sole purpose of these texts is to describe the beauty of love. It is not a love which first looks for permission, but rather one which seeks its fulfillment and is the source of its own joy. The young man and woman are gripped by the force of their love for one another, and yet it is a love full of tenderness.

The openness toward human sexuality which we discover here in the Song of Songs is not always present in the Old Testament. Signs of a negative feeling toward sexuality and a fearfulness toward everything having to do with intercourse gradually began to develop as a reaction to the cultic prostitution and temple prostitutes which were rampant in the Baal cult and among the peoples neighboring on Israel. Laws of purification were developed by the Israelites to fend off the sexual aberrances and apostasy present in these cultures, and the initial openness of the Old Testament's approach to sexuality was gradually revised.

Moving on to the New Testament, we find a revolutionary change in the area of ethics. Jesus revokes the importance of the Old Testament purificational laws and replaces their innumerable commands and injunctions with a simple command to love God and neighbor. This call to love, which is central to the message of Jesus, sums up in a single norm what all the old laws had been trying to encourage and protect. What is now most important in our dealings with others is the state of mind, or perhaps we should say, the state of heart from which all our actions flow. It is in this setting that Jesus calls for the lastingness of marriage. At the time, his insistence upon the indissolubility of marriage was an emphatic insistence upon the equality of man and woman, which was in stark contrast to the inequality present in Israel's patriarchal society. Celibacy too was given new meaning by Jesus: Whereas in the Old Testament it was often looked upon as a God-sent punishment, the New Testament considers celibacy which is freely assumed for the sake of the Kingdom of God as something positive. It is important to keep in mind, however, that this freely chosen state of celibacy does not stem from an abhorrence of human sexuality or a contempt for marriage. It is only the nearness of the coming Kingdom of God that can relativize their importance.

To go back, however, to Jesus' view of the purificational laws of the Jews and his own call for an approach of love in their stead, we can definitely state that the New Testament rejects all legalistic approaches and calls instead for the primacy of love in our dealings with others. What you do, do it out of love and consideration for others. This being the case, it is impossible to look when proposing an ethical system which has laws and legalistic approaches as its basis.

Subsection c: The Sexual Pessimism of the Western World

The Stoic ideal of indifference toward pain and pleasure in an attempt to achieve independence from both of these opposites of human existence, led both the Stoics and the Pythagoreans to take a drastic approach to sexual love even within marriage. The motive of pleasure as an intrinsic part of sexual love is rejected entirely. In order to be taken seriously in its confrontation with the Hellenistic world, early Christianity felt itself obliged to adopt these moral views of Stoicism, St. Jerome upheld Stoic strands of thought, for example, when he suggested that someone who loves his own wife too much is in danger of committing adultery with her. Clement of Alexandria called for celibacy in marriage as soon as the marriage partners have brought a sufficient number of offspring into the world. The sexual pessimism inherent in such approaches is especially evident by St. Augustine. In his confrontations with the Manicheans and the Pelagians, Augustine developed his famous doctrine on the goods of marriage, a doctrine which, at least in Catholic circles, is still considered valid today. The three goods proposed by Augustine were *proles* (progeny) , *fides* (faithfulness) , and *sacramentum* (sacramentality) . When incorporating these ideas into our ethics of marriage and sexuality, we must keep in mind that the sexually inimical approach, which is to some extent inherent in this view, stems not from the Christianity of the New Testament, but rather from the historical

cultural views of Stoicism and Platonism. As the Swiss moral theologian Franz Furger says: what we actually find by Augustine „are vestiges of a Neo-Platonic, Manichean philosophy which are so intertwined with the Christian teaching of original sin. And which falsify the Semitic, biblical view to such an extent that, despite his great respect for tradition and the theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas felt himself forced to grapple with and overcome the Platonic dualism contained therein.“

During the centuries which followed, this pessimistic approach to sexuality continued to hold the upper hand, and even during the Renaissance and Reformation little change took place. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Puritanism and Jansenism brought about a further increase in the repression of sexuality, which was treated as a threat to man's so-called higher nature. This was the time in which the doctrine of the „materia gravis in sexto“ arose, Sexually sinful acts were distinguished according to the categories of „secundum naturam“ (those in accordance with nature) and „contra naturam“ (those opposed to nature) . To the former belonged such acts as incest, rape, and adultery, and in the latter category were sins of masturbation, homosexuality, and birth control. This twofold distinction on the basis of nature led to a situation where the sins in accordance with nature (incest, rape, and adultery) were considered less grievous since they did not by their very nature exclude the possibility of procreation, whereas the sins of the latter category (masturbation, homosexuality, and birth control) were considered the worse of the two since these excluded any possibility of procreation. Such an approach naturally led to a highly negative, juridical, act-centered morality which had little interest in the person and personal values. The rediscovery and re-emphasis of a morality and approach to sexuality which takes into consideration the entire person as person, and views sexuality as an intrinsic part of that personhood, is the task facing the moral theologians of our time.

Section 2:

The Change Brought About by the Second Vatican Council

With the Second Vatican Council, a new era dawned in the Church's understanding of sexuality. In the documents of this Council we find numerous statements on marital and sexual ethics. The designation of the purposes of sexuality in terms of primary and secondary ones was firmly rejected in the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World („Gaudium et spes“) , which also introduced both a new appreciation of the personal dimension of human sexuality and new approaches for integrating the procreative and unitive aspects of sexuality within marriage. The narrow and one-sided approach of a morality based exclusively on concrete actions was replaced by a far more encompassing approach to marriage and marital love. In section 50, the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World stated that parents „should realize that they are ... cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love. Thus they will fulfill their task with human and Christian responsibility. With docile reverence toward God, they will come to the right decision by common counsel and effort. They will thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which may be foreseen. For this accounting they will reckon with both the marital and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they will consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society, and of the Church herself. The parents themselves should ultimately make this judgment, in the sight of God.“ (GS, 50)

This statement, says Bernhard Häring, is a clear rejection of all who hold that „trust in divine providence means a blind or unreflected dependence upon chance or the functionings of biological laws.“ (Häring, Commentary. LThk. EIII, 437) . According to Häring, the Council clearly rejected the minority which held that all acts of marital intercourse which exclude the possibility of procreation are sinful by stating that not every physical act of love in marriage has procreation as its purpose. It is simply noted that, seen as a whole, marriage is intrinsically connected with God's work of creation, and that the procreative aspect of sexuality must be seen in harmony and integration with sexuality's unitive aspect. To quote the book, *Human Sexuality*, the council document „rightfully suggests the human person as the integrating center of these distinctive values ... (and gives) explicit recognition to the personal and interpersonal values at the core of human sexuality.“ (*Human Sexuality*, 49) When examined against the background of the historical development of sexual morality, the Council statements suggest a definite step in a new direction, and a withdrawal from the sexual pessimism of the past. Instead of the traditional juridical, legalistic approach to sexuality, emphasis is once again placed upon love. Taking love as the ultimate purpose of human sexuality and as the ultimate criterium in sexual morality, we can say that where sexual behavior contradicts the spirit of love, it is wrong. On the other hand, moral norms which make the norm itself more important than the persons to whom they are applied forfeit their inner validity. This new direction in moral theology, which was both upheld and promoted by Vatican II, should encourage both the Church and its theologians to further pursue a moral theology based upon the principle of love. We must take into consideration the changed social and historical conditions of the present and make efforts to develop a Christian ethic which is less concerned with imposing limitations upon man and more concern increased fullness of a life lived in the spirit of Christian love. A criterium for the genuineness of Christian ethics, and this includes sexual ethics, is that they should not decrease but rather increase the joy and fullness of everyday life.

Within the area of sexual morality, such an ethic calls for the dismantling of limitations on sexuality which stem either from moral rigidity, the rejection of man's inherent sexual nature, or the tendency to dictate behavioral norms for others without entering into genuine dialogue with those affected by them.

Section 3: From Law to Conscience

In contrast to a legalistic ethic, an ethic based on personal responsibility proceeds from the conviction that what is God's will is not necessarily best discovered through an examination of legalistic formulations. Whereas the moral theology of the pre-Council era was either traditional and casuistic in its approach, when it comes to discovering and upholding genuine moral values an ethics of personal responsibility is also interested in drawing upon the lessons gained from personal experience. Such an ethics of personal responsibility is deeply biblical. Jesus too made a clear distinction between Moses and the genuine law of God. For Jesus, it is the deeper meaning of the law, and not the specific legal rules, which is important. In an ethics of personal responsibility, the ethical value of a concrete action of an individual is seen within the context of his life history rather than as an isolated incident which can be judged independently of what has preceded it. Vatican II offers support for this approach by suggesting that in his attempt to discover the truth man's conscience should be his ultimate guide in life. In its document on religious freedom, „*Dignitatis humanae*,“ in section 3 the Council states that „man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully.... It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience.“

The importance of conscience over law, and conscience as both the highest moral instance, and as equatable with the voice of God, is clearly referred to in the Constitution of Pastoral Care, *Gaudium et spes*, in section 16: "For man has in his heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of man.... Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man."

In his commentary on this statement of the Council fathers regarding the importance of moral conscience, Cardinal Ratzinger quoted John Henry Newmann: „When it comes to a question of the binding authority of the Church, ones own conscience has a higher authority than that of the Pope. It is ones conscience that must above all be followed, even when it is at odds with the authority of the Church,“ (Ratzinger, *LThK.EIII*, 328) .

Ratzinger then went on to observe that, „in view of the emphasis which the Council (GS 16) places on conscience within the framework of its anthropology, it follows the line of thought proposed by Newmann,... that ones conscience is (man's) highest moral instance. This takes place out of the conviction that, in paying careful attention to its dictates, the common values of human existence will be revealed.“ (Ratzinger, *ibid.* 329) .

According to the German theologian, Johannes Gründel, this means that the legalistic approach of the past which ignored the importance of conscience and concentrated instead upon specific, concrete actions has become inadequate. A judgment as to the ethical value of an action can no longer be made simply on the basis of law and obligation. In the opinion of Bernhard Häring and other important theologians, primary emphasis must be placed upon the historical, dynamic aspect of ethical actions. Responsibility, conscience, and the relationship of ones actions to the rest of ones life must be taken into consideration when discussing ethical values.

Many changes have taken place within moral theology and within the Church at large since the close of Vatican II. There are those in the Church who have tried to adhere to the teachings of the Council and carry out its mandate. There are others who have gone beyond that which council called

for, and there are still others who have made efforts to return to the pre-Council era.

In many areas of morality, the post-conciliar documents of the Church's teaching office deviate from the guidelines suggested by Vatican II. There are areas, such as the approach to family and marriage, in which the Council teachings have been carried out and deepened. Other aspects of morality have been allowed to slip back into pre-conciliar approaches, which is one of the reasons that large numbers of faithful have begun to reject the role of the Church's teaching office in the field of morality, as can be seen on the basis of statistical surveys. As a result, Church moral doctrine, on the one hand, and the ethic lived by the faithful, on the other, are at odds in everyday life, and the force and guiding power of the Church as a beacon of ethical values in today's world is rapidly diminishing. This need not be the case.

Section 4: The Call for a New Ethic

We are confronted at present with insistent demands for a new approach to personal and social morality. Within the area of personal relationships, the modern world is far different from that of the past. People are being faced with new dilemmas and are looking for guidelines, answers, and solutions. A look in most bookstores will show us that a flood of books on love, partnership, sexuality, and marriage have appeared in recent years,

and that innumerable questions are being asked about family life, family planning, premarital and extra-marital sex, masturbation, homosexuality, and the like. The Church too is being turned to in the search for an ethic which is livable in today's world.

Many of those who have turned to the Church's ethical approach for guidance in life have later again turned away in disappointment, and with a feeling that the Church has failed to grasp and relevantly deal with the changed personal and social life of our modern world. As a result, within the Church too demands for a new approach to morality have become ever louder. The Decree on Priestly Formation, „*Optatum totius*,“ of Vatican II, called for an approach to theology in which moral theology, and all theological disciplines, should be seen and carried on as part of God's history of salvation for the world. The reason behind the Council's call for a new approach to moral theology is that up to that time too much emphasis had been placed upon canonical norms and principles of natural law, and too little upon genuine theological and biblical considerations. As stated by Hans Kramer, „Moral theologians will stand accused of undermining the Council and the Council fathers who, according to the tenets of our faith, were acting under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit if the obligation so emphatically expressed by the Council to become learned in the areas of philosophy, and the natural and liberal sciences, and to offer a new approach to moral theology remains unapplied.“

An important result of this Council mandate was a noticeable change in theological methods. In the matter of family planning, for example, *Gaudium et spes* takes into account the changes which time has brought and refuses to give 17th century answers to 20th century questions. A doctrinaire approach is rejected in favor of an approach based on dialogue. As the German theologian, Dietmar Mieth, pointed out, what we have here is the realization that „truth is no longer equatable with a system of knowledge that simply needs to be emphatically preached, but is instead in the process of gradually revealing itself, and behind this process of gradual revelation we

find God (too) in the process of gradually revealing himself. What we are aiming at, therefore, is not simply to apply truths which have been definitively revealed once and for all, but rather to discover and understand truth as it reveals itself to us in the communicative process taking place among the various forces within the Church itself, such as the teaching office of the Church, theology, and the 'sensus fidelium.'" Moral theology's dialogue with both sacred scripture and the sciences, as called for by Vatican II, has resulted in a new dynamics within moral theology and enriched ethical discussion through the expansion of the basis upon which such discussion can now take place. As we delve ever deeper and more honestly into man himself, and into this area of his life in particular, we will begin to feel more at home with our human sexuality and value it more highly. We will see that it is our human sexuality which makes possible the things we value so much in life, such as tenderness, intimacy, security, and love. We will experience it as something which creates a very special form of community with others, as something which creates new life and life anew, and above all as something which God himself created and found to be good. In the light of this realization, we must make every effort to create a sexual ethic concerned with discovering the way God is present to us within this aspect of our humanity. Most important is that it must be a sexual ethic in which love is the guiding force. And last of all, we must present this ethic in a language and form that takes into consideration the situation and problems of modern man. There is much in both the theology of the present and the past which can help and guide us in this undertaking. For all of us, it is our duty as Christians to make every effort possible to come to this deeper and more loving understanding of ourselves, one another, and our common human sexuality.

Thank you.