

A Christian Vision of Sexuality

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Our youth are buried... inundated with negative messages about the beauty of sexuality. It is trivialized in the media. Contemporary music brings angst and sexualized lyrics and behavior into the social conscience. The internet brings pornographic images into people's heart and minds. Boys become addicted before they are men and girls who see it say they can not get it out of their minds. Young girls are sexualized with clothing and make up, presented to little girls and young girls. One must dress provocatively to be noticed. The internet creates a pseudo-world through social media such as Facebook and Twitter. I am defined by what others post about me. I define myself in anyway that I want but without authenticity.

Fertility is a pathology to be treated and cured through birth control and abortion. Men are trivialized as sperm donors. Children have become possessions, with parents exerting expectation of beauty, performance in sport, music or academia or profession. The child conceived with a disability is not treasure but disappointment and may end up aborted. Children can be conceived through sperm donors or banks, purchased ovum, conceived in petri dishes and flash frozen in suspended animation until someone decides to call them forth... or decides to leave them frozen. Wombs are rented through surrogacy without any idea of the long term consequences to surrogate or offspring. Money often changes hands when a surrogate agrees to carry a child for someone. And the receiving parents may be two men, two women or a couple that divorces before the child arrives or who decide that the surrogate should have an abortion because of some disability. Who are the parents in these situations..those who contract for a child or those who deliver the child. It is possible to have 5 people who are part of the making of the baby. Child is not gift. Child is product! The sex of the child may condemn it to certain death in some countries where only boys have economic value and girls are seen as economic liability. In the last three years books have been written in the United States on the glories of childlessness, extolling the freedom of this experience.

The concept of a gender neutral world is extolled. If only women were more masculine and males were for feminine how wonderful it would all be. There is no celebration of maleness or of the feminine genius in most venues. Gender neutral toys are being offered. Children are being raised in gender neutrality and it is celebrated. Parents refuse to announce the sex of their child and give the child the benefit of exploring male and femaleness and then deciding. The concept of trasgenderness is exploding. Gender neutral bathrooms are being offered in grade schools and other places. It is acceptable to decide you want to be the other sex as a young child and the government will support that, but those who try to help those who are in need of counsel to sort gender and sexuality issues are forbidden by law to help! Gender neutral housing options are being offered to students on campuses. Sexuality is apparently a fluid concept that moves.

Co habitation is exploding. People are deathly afraid of commitment. Marriages are disintegrating, leaving many survivors who fear marriage and disbelieve in the possibility of life- long sacramental love. Multitudes of parents around the world fell victim to the sexual revolution carrying confusion and wounds from un vowed and promiscuous sexual activity that makes them feel incompetent to discuss sexual values with their children. It is rare to see Christian sexuality portrayed in literature or the media. Role models that used to be in our families, such as parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents or close friends who loved us and witnessed to us of committed love are no longer in our lives because of mobility and the breakdown of family. The sacramental covenant of Matrimony is being replaced by contractual agreements between two individuals. No longer is it until death do we part, but rather until you displease me and then we shall part. Serial monogamy reigns as does living together to see if it works... some times for many years and several children.

All of these social shifts make it difficult to see healthy sexuality! All of these shifts create confusion!

It is the role of the Church to speak the truth of sexuality as God intended it. The work I have done through Project Rachel in helping women and men heal after abortion made me long to help people from having to make the decision to abort a pregnancy. A life experience of having a baby due the same day as a friend of mine and the subsequent birth of our babies within 24 hours of each other lead me to early research on the science of attachment and bonding or the Biology of the Theology of the Body.

I have spoken to multitudes of young people in the past 9 years using a science based approach. These are high school students through college to young adults to the not so young adults. I find that people are most receptive to the information and that knowing how complexly we are made and how we are truly changed in every act of intimacy reconfigures some of the lies of the society. I find that men find this presentation to be fascinating and beneficial. Let me spend a few moments highlighting some of the information for you.

It is important to know that the brain rewires itself between the ages of 11 and 19 and that brain development is not complete until 25. We have been led to believe that adolescent brains are fully functional adult brains. Additional research has found that when an infant / child is stressed a great deal, that the brain becomes what is called a stress brain which means that when stress occurs or they feel frightened they very quickly move from the higher functioning part of the brain to the fear center. Reactions in this mode are different...not rational and informed, but survival driven. Additionally, research has found that those who are stressed young, have a brain change. The part of the brain where moral development sits does not activate when it should and so when we try to use moral language and concepts they may not be able to process it. If someone is fearful, they are operating out of self-preservation drive. I have found that in speaking to

the young, when using science and biology as the basis of a talk, that they can and do hear it. It empowers them to keep themselves safe and to make real decisions based on facts. They share with me when I encounter them later that they were also able to speak to their friends about making better choices. They say that their lives have been changed by the information they received. They make links that I had not thought about, for instance the two young men, who when they heard about the impact of hormonal contraceptives, said to me “you know, we were thinking, and we think that when a woman is interested in us, one of the first things we need to ask her, is if she is using hormonal contraceptives. No point in wasting time if she is and this is biologically the wrong match.

Helping them to make links to their lived experience and to things they may have heard about in Scripture and Church teaching, even if only in a cursory way, allows them to integrate what they have heard that is faith based with what they have heard that is science-based. It often seems to me that we avoid science because we are afraid it will challenge Church teaching or our faith. Nothing is further from the truth. In this society where everything is readily available through the internet, people who are doubtful about what they hear can check the facts for themselves. They recognize that the facts speak to their generation and they willingly take what they have learned and share it with others. When they are equipped to speak about science those they are speaking to can not accuse them of “just being Catholic” and asking what do those celibate clergy know about anything.

Let me briefly provide some of the science that I share. I begin by speaking about family connection across generations through the mitochondria which are the energy bodies in our cells. Everyone in the world carries the mitochondria of their mothers, back to seven lines of women with the scientific implication of an Eve figure. I point out that the Y chromosome of the male is his father’s, back through many generations. In Scripture we read about “who begat who”. In God’s world where we came from matters. Women will cycle together is they are in close proximity. In ancient times, if I died after having a baby it insured someone else could feed my baby. The Birth Control Pill interferes with this synchronicity. Women are gifted by God to perceive pheromones, scent molecules of affiliation, which signal on first meeting if a male is a possible biological match for her. If she is not contracepting she will be attracted to a mate who is a good biological match. If she is contracepting she is attracted to a male whose immune system is too much like hers. This will be a fertility challenge to them as a couple, it smoothers the sexual spark in the relationship and may lead to divorce. If children are conceived, they may predispose her to certain auto immune diseases later. A critical fact is that women carry cells from every child they have conceived the rest of their lives. They can be found in her body by four weeks after conception and more seem to be left in her body if an abortion or miscarriage occurs. These cells may be reparative in her body or predispose to autoimmune disease depending on the immune system of the male that she

picked. Mothers pass these cells to other children they conceive. The cells of the mother are contained in her children as well. Truly two have become one because the mother carries the DNA of every partner she has conceived a child with the rest of her life. Random pairings that result in pregnancy have changed her body in a significant way as does the hormonal absorption of seminal fluid with all of the hormones and other substances contained there. Chemical contraceptives are systemic steroidal hormones that change the way a woman's brain grows making it more like a male brain, lowers her libido, causes depression, causes nutritional deficiencies and may create a host of health issues, including cancer and blood clots. The World Health Organization says that The Pill is a Type 1 carcinogen.

Men are fascinated to hear about how they are hormonally changed by pregnancy. The changes are triggered by these pheromones and begin as early as a few weeks into the pregnancy. Most men experience *couvade*, symptoms of pregnancy with their wives. About 6 weeks before the baby comes, the father undergoes hormonal changes that prime him for care giving. When his hormones return to normal, one doesn't. His testosterone stays lower making him more bonded. Helping them to understand the wonders of their body, from different types of sperm to the fragility of it, and the need to be careful changes men's view of their own biology. Men are fascinated to learn that the ovum picks the sperm and that his sperm must be changed in her body for it to be able to enter the ovum at all.

Talking about the miracle of new life is powerful. The reminder that life is a miracle, that God always is the creator of new life, regardless of the circumstances needs to be spoken. Explaining the consequences of abortion decisions in both women and men gives a new perspective to the societal lie that abortion is a simple medical procedure without consequence. Acquainting people with methods of fertility awareness empowers both women and men to appreciate the gift of fertility and to stop seeing it as a pathology that needs treatment. Men speak of how fascinated they are with the fertility cycle they share with their wife. When we speak about the statistics on divorce amongst couples who use fertility awareness in their marriages, people are stunned to see that the statistics are so low. When couples understand the brief window of fertility and the biological changes and signals that occur, drawing them into a dance of intimacy, they come to appreciate in a new way how they are made by God, fearsomely and awesomely. True appreciation grows in the recognition of the complex and intricate gift of fertility. The Theology of the Body so carefully and beautifully spelled out by Blessed John Paul II makes sense now and leads them to an ever greater appreciation of the gift of sexuality and the powerful teaching of the Church .

My experience is that the young are searching for the truth. They may be living a lifestyle that is counter to Church teaching, but they are open to the scientific facts. So often they share that they intuitively knew something was wrong, but could not put

words or action to it. The concept of sexual sin is often buried because sex has come to be viewed as a recreational activity that is without consequence unless I choose to give it meaning. I find young people to be sort of shocked to be reminded that they are embodied people, stone age bodies in a highly technological world. We are not in touch with our bodies in today's world. It is all about what is going on in my brain; what my intention is. My body is sort of an encumbrance that needs care, feeding and tending, but often people are quite disconnected from the fact that they are a unified whole... body, mind and soul!

My experience is that the males in particular appreciate learning how their body works; how they are changed by pregnancy; that they are the more fragile of the two sexes; the complexity of their bodies from seminal fluid to the different types of sperm, their purpose and fragility. Understanding that things like cell phones, lap tops, hot baths and marijuana pose serious threats to the health of the sperm changes things for them. Learning that they have biological knowledge of the pregnancy of their partner and that their body is also changed by the pregnancy opens their hearts to the marvel of creating new life. They are astonished to know that they are being hard wired to respond to ovulation as well as for fatherhood and it seems to give them a sense that the responsibility of fatherhood is not to be taken lightly. This changes the societal message that men are disposable and nothing more than sperm donors. Understanding the intimate bond between their wife and them, that she is biologically changed by each act of intimacy and so is he is a new awareness. When he understands that his wife carries the cells of the children they have conceived for the rest of her life, the meaning of two becoming one becomes a reality! Men need to be reminded that they are protectors and that a choice of sexual intimacy requires real decisions made by both parties. The knowledge that the consequences of random sexual behavior are long term and heart breaking, whether a pregnancy results, an abortion occurs or a sexually transmitted disease that may be untreatable is contracted.

Pornography needs to be challenged. It needs to be named as addiction, and not sex. It is a fantasy world that women should not tolerate for we can never match up to the women who are available and changeable upon whim! Pornography destroys true intimacy,

I believe that it is imperative that we communicate with our children when they are young about the awesome gift of their bodies, female and male! Small children will imitate their mothers in caring for infants and nursing! As women, we need to speak to the young women we know and tell them the positive experiences we have had of birth. So much of what they have heard is negative and they are terrified of the experience. Showing both women and men babies in utero and informing them about what babies are capable of in utero breaks the lie that the unborn child is nothing but a clump of inanimate cells that suddenly take on human form at birth but prior to that are disposable if inconvenient. The humanity of the unborn must be shown!

We need to make conscious choices to speak of children as gift and to open our own hearts and homes to children. We must reflect to the young people we are in contact with that marriage is sacred and a gift. They need to see marriages that work and to know that conflict can be worked out. We need to speak about intimacy and the bonding that occurs through sacrificial love of the other. In many countries, the phenomena of the only child has created many narcissists who are most concerned about themselves and their needs. I honestly do not know how to reach their hearts and help to reform it to a heart that is concerned first for others. I do know that we need to affirm married couples. I encourage you to reach out to young families and offer support in some way. I encourage you to approach young families and complement them on their families because so often they are verbally assaulted by strangers who tell them how stupid they are to have children. It is important to be those who reach out to the young and speak the truth to them while loving them. When we reach out in love, hearts are opened and it is possible to speak the truth of committed Christian love to them; to speak about the sacrament of matrimony and what that means in today's world... a counter cultural choice that is a sign of God's love and fidelity to His people just as children as a sign of God's blessing. We need to witness to the sanctity of marriage as sacrament and speak of the triune relationship of the couple with God! Building on the ability to speak about the science and to challenge the contemporary wisdom hormonal contraception is a wonderful thing that sets women free, invites people to conversation with us. Our goal is to empower young Christians to see their sexuality is a God given gift that is life giving, calling us to sacrificial love for our spouse and an openness to the gift of children.

It is the truth that sets us free! We must be willing to be informed and courageous enough to speak the truth with love, modeling a life where our sexuality is seen as gift from God and our fertility is seen as a blessing.