

TANGAZA COLLEGE
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

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YOUTHS AND CONTEMPORARY SEXUAL ISSUES
Premarital Sex as a Pastoral Challenge for
Mission Today

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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Ecclesiastical Degree of Baccalaureate in Theology

NAIROBI 2005

DEDICATION

To my beloved sister Desiade, our last born
And to all the youth in the world
I dedicate this work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the entire Society of African Missions (S.M.A) for having supported and encouraged me throughout my initial missionary formation.

I am also grateful to all the youths who inspired me to write this paper and to Fr. Paul Chummar, CMI for accompanying me in the process of writing this work. I do appreciate his helpful suggestions and constructive remarks.

My special word of thanks goes to my formators namely: Fr. Hugh Lagan, SMA, Fr. Con Murphy, SMA, Fr. Fabian Gbortsu, SMA and Fr. Alois Kituba, SMA for awakening in me the sense of responsibility, and interest for mission.

I do not forget my beloved parents and sisters for their inspiring Christian life of faith and for their ceaseless support and prayers. I am grateful to them all.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Mr.&Mrs. Mensah, Mr. Avognon, Mrs. Mc West Christiane, Mr.&Mrs. Lacle, Mr.&Mrs. Deh for making me not to feel home sick in Nairobi as they always warmly welcome me in their homes.

I cannot forget thanking my classmates: Jakilolo, Paulio, Aniceti, Ben, Cyril and Amal for their brotherly support. I thank Sr. Silvina, Sr. Cecile, Sr. Stella and all my friends in Kenya for their friendship, counsel and encouragement. To my “disciples”: Remi, Sylvere, Paco, Aline, Joe, Owouduh, Shola and the entire student body I say a big thanks for enriching my life with your gifts and friendship.

May God bless all those who played a significant and effective role in my physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual upbringing.

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this essay is the result of my personal reflection, reading, scientific research, and critical analysis of sources. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Ecclesiastical Degree of Baccalaureate in Theology. This work has never before been submitted for academic credit to any other college or university. All sources have been quoted in full and acknowledged.

Signed: 

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This essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

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PREFACE

Nowadays, premarital sex in its forms of intimate kissing, casual and uncommitted sexual intercourse seems to be taken for granted by many young people in our society. This is certainly the assumption of many media presentations of the contemporary lifestyle of youths across the globe. In fact, these young people presume that there is nothing wrong with them enjoying each other sexually, especially when they take contraceptive precautions to avoid unwanted pregnancy and some Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs).

Today, it is also difficult to think of cross sex friendship among young people that does not end up with sexual intercourse. Some young men and women may be well self-disciplined but under the influences of their peers, economic difficulties and the effects of alcohol, they find themselves experiencing sex. What could be other factors that account for such a sexual behaviour among youths including Christians youths today? Since it is happening and continues to be on the rise, the unavoidable question to be posed is: is it morally right for youths to indulge in premarital sex? These and some other questions constitute the subject matter I would like to discuss in this present work.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. Motivation

Part of my missionary training took me to the Archdiocese of Lagos in Nigeria where I had a year of pastoral experience at St. Joseph parish situated in Gowon Estate, Ipaja in Lagos. There, I had the opportunity to work with youth groups of the parish namely: the Catholic Youth Organization, the Altar Servers, Block Rosary Crusade, Boys Brigade, the Vocation Guild, St. Mary's Choir, Junior Presidia of the Legion of Mary and Christ Ambassadors. It was an exiting pastoral work for me considering the fact that though a seminarian, I was also a youth among these young people. As they see me for being one of them they became very close to me and were able to share openly with me their personal problems and issues concerning their interpersonal relationships. Apart from what these young men and women shared with me my own observation and interaction with them confirm the following: as these youths interact on daily basis during choir practice, prayer meetings, liturgical rehearsals and games they quickly build among themselves cross sex friendships. But unfortunately their friendships often proved to be genital relationships. I often observed that this sometimes results into fights between two young men over a young woman or a breaking out of fight of two young women over a young man. From this observation, I understood that this issue is beyond a simple friendship. It must have something especial that needs more attention and investigation.

Hence, I took my time to interrogate some of the youths and this is what one of them told me:

Brother, I believe that you can understand me better than those old priests. May be you do not know that I have a girlfriend in St. Mary's choir. We have been

together now for two years; we started well and we have been getting on well but of late, I became suspicious of her and unfortunately for her it has come to my notice that she has been *going out* with another man in the same choir. Upon hearing this, I was so annoyed to the point of fighting with his so-called boyfriend. I find it necessary to fight this man so that he may leave the girl alone for me because I was the first to befriend her and she is mine.¹

Another youth confessed to me that she had three boyfriends and she loved them all. She shamelessly said that she was able to manage them without their knowledge; each of them has a day when they meet and hang out. Another one told me that in order to prove your manhood, you need to have more than one girlfriend.

Putting together all that I observed and all that I heard from the youths themselves, I can pinpoint an ever-growing pastoral problem among youths. They indulge themselves in premarital sex in all its forms from petting to kissing up to sexual intercourse. They themselves acknowledge it as one of them put it: "If you don't do it [i.e. if you don't have sexual intercourse] your friends will say you are not a full human being."² The sad reality is that youths take it for granted that there is no wrong in making love with one another. I find this situation lamentable; but just to lament will never change anything. Only strong pastoral measures can pave the way for correct and dignified sexual life of our Christian youths.

2. Aim and Objective

An identified malaise with a person or within a society needs a cure or a remedy; if not at least a preventive measure is necessary. In this work I have no pretension of saying something new under the sun. But I would only like to say old things in a new perspective. So in order to put across my opinions, I will be drawing my insights from books, pastoral experiences and interviews with some of the youths we

¹ Interview with a youth of 20 years old, active member of Catholic Youth Organisation. The expression *going out* means: to have a frequent sexual intercourse with some body you do not marry.

² Interview with a youth of 18 years old, member of Legion of Mary.

worked with. With these three main sources I hope to achieve the goal of contributing in my modest way to the Youth Ministry pastoral of the Church as I promote a culture of virginity among our Christian youths.

3. Organization of the Work

As I treat the moral issue of premarital sex as a pastoral challenge for mission, I would like to start with the general presentation of the reality of human sexuality before reaching the practice of premarital sex among youths and then its root causes and consequences on them. That is the first part of my investigation.

Since I first of all identified this problem among African youths – even though youths of the other parts of the world do not make any exception – I shall in the second part seek the understanding of human sexuality according to African tradition. In the third section, I shall have recourse to the sources of theology namely the Bible, the Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church. Finally, after showing the importance of keeping one's virginity until marriage in both the Christian and African tradition, I shall come up with practical suggestions for our youth so that they may adhere and embrace a culture of virginity in a world torn apart by sexual immorality.

Chapter I

Human Sexuality and Sexual Behaviour among Youths

Every human being is a sexual being. Thus, it follows that many of our human relationships and behaviours are sexually oriented. But to what extent can these be tolerated or even accepted by both our own human codes of morality and the code of God's precepts?

The ideal expression of our sexuality does not cause any harm to us. However, when it is prematurely and excessively made use of – as we shall see among the youth today, in its forms of casual and random sex – it becomes not only immoral by also detrimental to the physical, emotional and spiritual health of the perpetrators.

1.1 The Reality of Human Sexuality

Sexuality is part and parcel of human personality. As such it is a divine and relational gift within humans that needs to be approached with a deep sense of appreciation, respect, and wonder. In this regard, one can recall the definition of Gerald Coleman, which states: "Sexuality refers to a fundamental component of human personality in and through which we as male and female, experience our relatedness to self, others, the world and even God".³ Sexuality is like a power that prompts every normal human being from within, calling him or her to personal as well as spiritual growth and drawing him or her out from self to interpersonal relationship and serious commitment with others. It is an inclusive and relational human force that embraces all the qualities that are peculiar to any genuine human relationship, namely: sensitivity, mutual understanding, intimacy, openness to one another, compassion, sympathy and

³ G. Coleman, *Human Sexuality, An all-embracing Gift*, 10.

mutual support. The Congregation for Catholic Education rightly perceives this relational dimension of human sexuality and says:

“Sexuality is a fundamental component of personality, one of its modes of being, of manifestation, of communicating with others, of feeling, of expressing and of living human love. Therefore it is an integral part of the development of the personality and its educative process”.⁴

Every human person has the natural ability to love and to be loved. Thus, through their sexuality, humans are pushed from within towards a particular person of they like or love. Behind this movement towards the other resides a driving force, which is nothing else than love. It is important to note that sexuality is not merely a bodily function for performing specific sexual acts but rather a relational power that leads to the establishment of an interpersonal communion between people. Hence, at the stem of sexuality, love must and should always blossom to make it, therefore, be: “A dimension of one’s restless heart, which continually yearns for interpersonal communion, glimpsed and experienced to varying degrees in this life, ultimately finding full oneness only in God”.⁵ The gift of sexuality in the fullest and richest sense is to be found in both the physical, psychological and spiritual basis for the human persons’ capacity to love and to be open to one another regardless of their race and status in life. The driving force that characterises human sexuality is not for irresponsible acts. It is a force designed by God for the good of humans, for their maturation towards a profound communion and to bring to completion the project of God.

One cannot separate a person from his or her sexuality. It constitutes an integral part of a human person because it involves his or her entire being enabling him or her to be relational. In this regard, the exercise of the human sexual faculties is ordered to

⁴ *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, 4.

⁵ G. Coleman, *Human Sexuality, An all-embracing Gift*, 10.

interpersonal communication rather than being a mere satisfaction of drives and compulsions as it is among animals. At the profound level, it involves the human spiritual dimension whereby the *profound I* reaches the deep level of spiritual relationship with God. This exercise conveys also the possibility of the transmission of life, thus ruling out any kind of selfish interest and self-satisfying pleasure. The sexual act goes beyond any self-centeredness so as to see in another person a potential being worthy of true and real communion. Thus, human sexuality is so related to personal relationships, that it eventually impregnates every single gesture of love and communication which is so beautifully underlined by Dave Daddy:

Attached to a person's sexuality is the capacity to feel affection, to delight in someone else, to get emotionally close to another person, to be passionately committed to him or her, to be in love, to be struck by the beauty of another and drawn out of yourself, to become attached to another human being so powerfully that you easily begin measuring your life in terms of what is good for someone else as well as for yourself.⁶

Sexuality should always find its expression in self-giving love. But when it take the form of using persons as object instead of respecting them as subject then it eventually leads humans to the road of egoism, which impoverishes, frustrates and at times brutalises them.

1.2 Premarital Sexual Activity among Youths

The year 1968 witnessed in the northern hemisphere a revolution by some students who rejected traditional values that seemed to be incompatible with their new ways of thinking and behaving. This social uprising was coupled with a sexual revolution, which brought sexuality out of its hidden ghetto and into the open. In fact, the traditional conception of sexuality, whether in the North or the South, was negative and considered sex to be a dirty and a shameful reality. However, with this sexual

⁶D. Daddy, *What is Human Sexuality and What is Normal?*.
<<http://catholiceducation.org/articles/sexuality/se0002.html>>15 /10/ 2004, 8.

revolution, which resulted in a change of mentality about sex, people, especially youth, have gained the freedom and the courage to indulge themselves in sexual intercourse without having any sense of remorse and guilt.

The sex revolution however went to the opposite extreme. Because of contraceptives, sexual activity could now be enjoyed without incurring the responsibility of parenthood. And sex was now 'out in the open.' Sex could be enjoyed without guilt, as well as without responsibility. Sexual freedom was reckoned to be a part of human freedom, which should not be restricted.⁷

The general observation nowadays is that many young people even though not yet physically, psychologically and emotionally matured involve themselves in sexual practices simply as a way of enjoying themselves and seeking pleasure⁸. Occasions such as weekend camps and end of academic year parties provide good opportunities for these young men and women to meet and experience sex. Thus, some of the sexual experiences of the youth can be casual, that is having sexual intercourse just for curiosity sake with a partner one is not committed to. It can also be random sex, which is sometimes the result of being taken over by the effects of alcohol. Another form of premarital sex is the regular sexual intercourse with different partners without any commitment or intention of marriage. These chaotic practices which youths embrace with joy and without questioning are said to be alarming as Janet Smith observes, she names some of the factors that account for them:

Premarital sexual activity is common in many parts of the world and is reported to be on the rise in all regions. In many countries, young women and men are under strong social and peer-group pressure to engage in premarital sex. Moreover, some features of modern life may increase both the desire and opportunity for sexual activity: the mass media, the breakdown of traditional families and mores, and increased migration, urbanisation and materialism.⁹

⁷ A. Shorter, *Celibacy and African Culture*, 29.

⁸ On this note, a study for example on the Sexual Behaviour of Kenyan youths carried out by Ukweli: Population Communication Africa in 1999 shows that 80% of youths had had sexual intercourse before the age of 19. This means half of the six millions of Kenyan adolescents are sexually active. Cf. The Diagram of Research Briefing Notes of Ukweli, (May 1999) 1.

⁹ J. Smith, *Premarital Sex*, <<http://catholiceducation.org/articles/sexuality/se0002.html>> 20 /10/ 2004, 23.

Any normal sexual activity is open to the possibility of procreation. This is the natural consequence of sexual intercourse. But premarital sex in all its forms does not give consideration for this. It is just done for fun and pleasure. In this sexual activity, young people believe that it is the most widely available source of happiness one can get and proves the existence of mutual love. In reality, premarital sex is against sexual integrity and the unitive dimension of sexuality seen as the source of life.

Hence, in order to avoid violating the integrity of the expression of human sexuality, which is only permissible within the matrimonial engagement, it is imperative that young man and woman who choose to indulge in sex, question themselves on the following basis as suggested by G. Coleman:

Before engaging in premarital expression of genital intercourse, then every person should raise certain questions about his or her prospective sexual partner: e.g.; 'Can I honestly say that if I ever have a child it will be with you? Or, "Are you the one I want to be the mother or father of my child?" or 'Are you the one I want to be with, to care for, and to be cared for, for the rest of my life?' In human persons, sexuality cannot be reduced to mere biological or physical realities. All sexual activity, in other words, has a moral consent. Persons who are contemplating premarital intercourse should always truthfully remember that circumstances change, engagements are broken, and promises are not vows. Words of love do need the strengthening that comes from the willing support of the community of faith and the sacramental grace of marriage.¹⁰

1.3 Some Causes of Premarital Sexual Practices among Youths

It is certain that nowadays a good number of young people are sexually active. How can this be since such activity is forbidden unless they are officially authorised by law or by sacrament? There must be some factors that definitively account for such behaviour among the youth. Among many others, we can maintain that modern age discoveries, sociological, economic, cultural and physiologic factors condition the premarital sexual practices and its constant rise among youths of our time.

¹⁰ G. Coleman, *Human Sexuality, An all-embracing Gift*, 278.

Already in 1960 Leo Koch, basing his argument on the availability of contraceptives at all corners of our neighbourhood, states: "With modern contraceptives and medical advice readily available at the nearest drug store or at least a family physician, there is no valid reason why sexual intercourse should not be condoned among those sufficiently mature to engage in it without social consequences."¹¹ Such an affirmation is just the reflection of the real thoughts that flood the mind of many people especially the youth today. According to them, the availability of different sorts of contraceptives provides them with the opportunity to engage themselves in sexual activities in a safe manner. The practice of contraceptive sex has therefore allowed many to think that the act of having sex and the acts of having children and the process of becoming truly bonded with another person are separate acts. It becomes obvious that youngsters who frequently experience sexual intercourse need not and do not discuss what happens if a pregnancy occurs. Because of the use of contraceptives they do not expect a pregnancy to happen and if one should occur, they are aware that abortion is another commonly practiced option. Thus, with this somehow casual attitude towards contraceptives, many youths are led to sexual activity at a premature age.

Another factor that needs to be mentioned is the growing free sex culture among the youth. In fact, many of them, as Gerald Coleman puts it, "live in an anonymous social setting and have *de facto* adopted an attitude that says, my sexual conduct is none of your business."¹² Sometimes even their parents have no control over their sexual behaviour. In such situations, they become easily vulnerable to peers pressure, which exerts an external force on them to experience what sexual activity is like. These youths

¹¹ Leo Koch, *Time*, April 18, 1960, 48.

¹² G. Coleman, *Human Sexuality, An all-embracing Gift*, 271.

go as far as convincing one another to test sex just like one will test a car before buying one.

Also, the fact that young people are so prone to engage in premarital sex may be imputable to the publicity given to sex in the varieties of media at the disposal of modern youths.

It is uncontroversial to note that our entertainment and media bombard our young people with the message that everyone should be sexually active; that sexual activity is essential to happiness. It also bombards them with sexual stimuli; an enormous number of products are marketed with ads featuring scantily clad seductive women or with men and women in romantic, not to say, explicitly sexual poses.¹³

Another motive that contributes substantially to premarital sex among youths is the rural exodus. It is a very common phenomenon that pushes many young people from villages to go to urban settings in the hope of finding greener pastures. But unfortunately, sometimes "while the youth exodus towards urban centres increases, the job opportunities there get less. This process creates a vicious cycle of unemployment. Then idleness induces some of these young people to indulge in sexual immorality."¹⁴ Sometimes young people think that they are strong enough to deal with enormous amount of proximity and emotional dependency and yet avoid physical intimacy, even when they have drunk some strong drinks. However it is sadly noticed that sometimes even the most committed Christian youth under the influence of alcohol cannot control themselves and consequently instinct takes control of them and then they indulge in random sex. In many other cases, some youth, having lost their parents for one reason or another find themselves in the situation whereby nobody takes care of them. In such

¹³ J. Smith. "Premarital Sex," <<http://catholiceducation.org/articles/sexuality/se0002.html>> 20 /10/ 2004, 4.

¹⁴ J. Lebulu, "The youth on the Threshold of the Year 2000. The Church's and the World's Hope in the Youth." *African Ecclesial Review*, (February 1989), 214.

circumstances, many young people especially women, find an easy way out through the immoral practice of commercial sexual activity, commonly called prostitution.

A physiological factor is not left out in the long list of incentives to premarital sex among the youth of today. The reality is that in many parts of the world, the onset of puberty is earlier and the age of marriage is rising due to long years of educational programs. Thus young people are facing a long period of time during which they are sexually mature and thus may be sexually active before marriage. This phenomenon is also noticed by Gerald Coleman as he said: "The premarital period (time between puberty and marriage) is a rather recent phenomenon in history and creates an atmosphere that produces an acceptable and conducive environment for sexual expression, especially when people are getting married at a latter age."¹⁵

This issue of premarital sex among the youth can be said to be the result of the transition from the traditional culture under the influence of modern culture, globalisation and the consequences of urbanisation.

1.4 Some Consequences of Premarital Sexual Activity among Youths

Premarital sexual activity is said to be a form of self-destructive behaviour in which many youth indulge in ignorantly¹⁶. Among the many risks associated with this immoral behaviour, pregnancy must be put in first place. In reality, pregnancy in itself is not wrong. But it becomes a problem for young women who are neither physiologically nor psychologically prepared for it. The fact is that after sexual intercourse many young girls find themselves unexpectedly pregnant and then are

¹⁵ G. Coleman, *Human Sexuality, An all-embracing Gift*, 272.

¹⁶ Cf. J. Kiura, R. - Gitau, - A. Kiura, *On Life and Love: Guidelines for Parents and Educators*, 95. According to these authors premarital sex is detrimental to the physical and emotional health of young girls because they carry against their wish an unwanted pregnancy and also run the risk of cervical cancer.

forced to carry on their pregnancy against their wishes. Thus, because of the shame of carrying an unwanted pregnancy, the existence becomes traumatic both for them, their child and their families. Consequently it leads to many complications for them as young mothers and for the babies. Sometimes, foreseeing eventual complications, many of these young women drop school or opt for the termination of the pregnancy by means of abortion, which is known to be the cause of many deaths among teen-mothers today.

Another negative consequence of premarital sex is in the realm of emotions. Since the majority of the youth know that the sexual intercourse they are responsible for is wrong, they eventually feel a sense of remorse and guilt, which sometimes leads to deep frustration and self-hatred. In this case, the more youth indulge themselves in premarital sex, the more guilt they feel and consequently the fear and even the loss of self esteem and self respect which results from it can endanger their psychological health. Considering the fact that most of premarital sexual activities that young people indulge in occurs in places that are not always secure or private, has a negative influence on their sexual behaviour later on in life: “Unfavourable conditions plus the fear of discovery can initiate a chain reaction of poor habits and attitudes towards sex which can linger on into marriage with frustrating effects on marital sexual relationships.”¹⁷

Fidelity is the golden rule in married life; but premarital sex can make it difficult to live and therefore increases the possibility of extramarital sex. If there is no long life commitment in a marriage it becomes an unhappy one and may eventually end up in divorce. What accounts for this is often that past sexual experiences may bring one of the partners to feel dissatisfied as he or she compares his or her spouse with the past

¹⁷ J. Kiura. R. - Gitau, A - Kiura, *On Life and Love: Guidelines for Parents and Educators*, 97.

sexual partners. Such situations always rule out the possibility of matrimonial harmony and then divorce becomes inevitable.

Another serious consequence of premarital sexual activity is the increasing risk of contracting cervical cancer among young women. This becomes clear when one gets acquainted with the report of the American journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology of 15th July 1978.

In early adolescence the uterus, the fallopian tubes, the ovaries and the cervix are still developing. The cervix is extremely vulnerable during this time. If exposed to semen it can set the stage for carcinoma of cervix later on in life. Semen contains 'antigens' that sensitize that cervix and may cause abnormal development when a girl is exposed to it too early, too often, and by multiple sexual partners. Research shows that the younger a girl becomes sexually active the more partners she has, and the more frequent the exposure during those years, the higher her chances of contracting cervical cancer between the ages of 40-50.¹⁸

Premarital sexual activity exposes also the young women and men to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as gonorrhoea, syphilis herpes, Chlamydia and HIV/AIDS, which can result in sterility and even in death.

At the spiritual level, premarital sex makes the youth feel a sense of guilt and remorse in offending God. Thus, young people sexually active may find themselves alienated from God and perhaps feel a kind of boredom with life. "The evidence is that the habit of premarital intercourse can serve to enslave rather than liberate, can gradually reduce enjoyment rather than augment it, and produce neurotic rather than zestful men and women"¹⁹ who are called to experience and enjoy the freedom of the children of God.

¹⁸ J. Kiura, R - Gitau, A - Kiura, *On Life and Love: Guidelines for Parents and Educators*, 97.

¹⁹ J. Mohler, *Love, Marriage and the Family: Yesterday and Today*, 131.

Premarital sexual activity therefore, is a violation of the divine gift of human sexuality because it occurs outside the marital consent between the partners. As such, not only is it a mere violation but also a transgression of a divine law that restricts sexual intercourse to married couples. To suggest a solution to the problem of premarital sex among youth, one should take into consideration the vital contributions of religion, morality and tradition for the promotion of a realistic and holistic approach to sexuality. Let us now see what the African traditional heritage holds for us.

Chapter II

The Understanding of Human Sexuality in African Tradition

Modern societies increasingly view sexual activity solely in terms of biological gratification and in the context of licence and irresponsibility. This is contrary to the view of African society where sexual activity is not only biological but also a religious and social matter of concern. It is a solemn seal in which sex is used as a sacred action signifying therefore, an inward spiritual value for life. Thus, sexuality in African perspective has a threefold dimension namely: communitarian, religious and symbolic. In order to have a broader view of it, we shall be drawing examples from different cultures of traditional Africa.

2.1 Sexual Life in the Context of the Community

Communitarian life is a very important value in traditional Africa. The sorrow or the joy of a member is shared by all the members of the community. Similarly, the attitude of sexuality is neither a matter of individual possession nor a private affair; but a community matter of concern, which attains its full dignity only in the traditional community.

African communities are interested in the sexual lives of all their members, since sexuality is not a private matter. The goal of sexuality is to keep together the community entrusted to us by our ancestors and to bestow ever new life on this community. It follows that the community must prepare young people for a responsible sexual life, psychologically and physically.²⁰

The community concern of the sexual life of its members aims at inculcating moral norms into the young people for their sexual behaviours. The rites of initiation for instance provide room for teaching young men and women the correct and right use of

²⁰ B. Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic. Beyond the Universal Claim of Western Morality*, 59.

their sexuality. These initiation rites involve the community because the assimilation of the knowledge imparted onto the young people, is oriented towards the future and the continuity of the whole community. Thus Bujo insists on the importance of the community in assuring the continuity of life by saying:

In this community, one of the paramount aspirations is procreation. Thus, a man who dies without progeny falls, in a way, into oblivion. In some traditions a piece of charcoal is put into his mouth to indicate that the fire of life had died out. Procreation is thus a question not only of individual survival, but also of community survival.²¹

The community interest in the sexual life of its members is ordered towards the regulation of the sexual activity of all the members especially the youth. In reality sexual activity is not permitted before the social and customary contract of marriage. But in many cases, before any traditional marriage takes place the community makes sure that the young men and women are initiated to this sexual life. Thus, some initiation rites include the proof of sexual maturity, which is extended to a sort of masturbation that in the African context is not meant to be an individual act but a meaningful act performed in the presence of at least two witnesses of the community. In this regard, the attitude of sexuality in traditional Africa is procreation oriented. It therefore rules out all forms of infertility as underlined in the following quotation:

Infertility and sterility block the channel through which the steam of life flows; they plunge the person concerned into misery, they sever him from personal immortality and threaten the perpetuation of the lineage. And because the generation of life was a matter of concern to the whole community, there were strong sanctions against people who indulged in sex for selfish reasons. Sexuality and its powers were understood as permeating every level of human existence: interpersonal relationships and matters of ritual. Sexuality was looked upon as mysterious and sacred.²²

²¹ B. Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation*, 108.

²² B. Kitembo, L - Magesa - A. Shorter, *African Christian Marriage*, 127.

The sexual activity viewed from the communitarian perspective aims at strengthening the bond between families and clans through interpersonal relationships, and communication among people and bringing happiness in the community.

The cohesion of the community is of great importance for Africans. Among many other means of community cohesion, sexuality plays a part in building up the community through the African value of hospitality. This idea is also shared by Bujo in the following lines:

Sexuality in the African tradition has succumbed neither to unbridled licence nor to the consumer mentality: it aims at building up the community. One must not lose sight of this background, when one encounters practices that are foreign to Western Christianity, for example, the idea that sexuality is a form of hospitality. The tradition in some cultures in Black Africa is that when a friend comes to visit, the husband gives the guest his wife for the night, as a sign of friendship. Among the Masai, the period of initiation plays an important role in the sexual community: companions in initiation are allowed to have sexual intercourse with the wives of other members of this group. Here too the basic idea is the cohesion and renewal of the community.²³

This form of hospitality is not advisable nowadays because of the STDs including HIV/AIDS that can be fatal to the continuity of the community. However, the African community perspective should not be overlooked.

One cannot conclude this section without mentioning one of the advantages of the sexual life in the context of the community. In fact, in traditional Africa all women are given the possibility of getting married and therefore having a legitimate sexual life. Whether they found themselves in a monogamous or a polygamous marriage, the final result is that they are prevented from all forms of prostitution and sexual promiscuity.

²³ B. Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic. Beyond the Universal Claim of Western Morality*, 59-60.

2.2 The Religious Dimension of Sexuality

Traditional Africans are essentially religious people. They carry their religion with them in all their activities such as farming, fishing, dancing, in festivals and art. It is believed that all their activities carry some religious connotation. Thus, "procreation is essentially a religious obligation, because transmitting life means sharing in the divine prerogative of creation itself."²⁴ If procreation is said to have a religious dimension, it follows that the cause of that effect which is the expression of sexuality is not left out of the religious realm. Hence, according to Kasenene, sexuality has got a very significant place in the African Traditional Religion. This is what he said:

In African religions, sex occupies an important place in social and religious lives of the people and it is associated with many beliefs, practices and taboos. Sex is respected as a channel for procreation, a means to regain the immortality which was lost in the remote past. So sex is of tremendous religious significance with taboos attached to it. It is believed among Nyakyusa of Tanzania, for example, that sexual fluid is so sacred that it is harmful to babies and a woman keeps away from her husband during the nursing period and when she gets involved in a sexual act, she must wash herself thoroughly before getting in touch with the baby. Among the Banyankore, it is believed that adultery committed when a person is in the process of building a house causes death for the partner when they enter the new house. A cleansing ritual is necessary before they occupy the house to avert the danger. Among the Bakiga of Uganda, a parent to intentionally show his or her genital organ to the child with the intention of cursing him or her is the most efficacious method.²⁵

The religious aspect of sexuality is also noted in the fact that sexual activity is sometimes dramatized through dance and art. This is a ritual sex which according to Shorter "symbolizes the fertility of plants and animals as well as humans, and it is a feature of the principle of 'cosmobiology' or the continuity of life and fertility between the different orders of being."²⁶ The religious dimension of sexuality is also the subject

²⁴ A. Shorter, *Celibacy and African Culture*, 17.

²⁵ P. Kasenene, *Religious Ethics in Africa*, 57.

Also, curse by genital organs is a strong belief among the Ewe people of Togo and Ghana. In fact, for these people showing intentionally one's private part under the influence of anger or rage to one's child, niece or nephew is the most powerful curse that exists in their culture and any threat that can lead to this practice is avoided by all means because its effects seem to have no remedy (My cultural heritage).

²⁶ A. Shorter, *Celibacy and African Culture*, 21.

of “dialogue with the future, a communication with the unborn. It made it possible for the unborn to be released into this world.”²⁷

Moreover, it is also interesting to note that even though African tradition holds dear sexuality for its procreative role, it does not stop there. Sexual intercourse sometimes stands as the expression of joy for spouses in celebrating some significant events that affect their families. Hence, Bujo acknowledges the existence of this practice by saying: “A further indication that sexuality aims at more than just procreation is the fact that in many regions particular events are to be sealed or celebrated by sexual intercourse between the spouses, for example, the marriage celebrations of one’s children, the appearance of a child’s first teeth and also funeral rites.”²⁸ It is also understood by Luo people of Kenya that sexual intercourse is a rite of fertility in some occasions such as before sowing and before one’s children consume their marriage.²⁹

Human sexuality in the African perspective is not just religious but also essentially sacred.

2.3 The Sacredness of Sexual Activity

The sacredness of sexual activity in traditional Africa does not contradict the community dimension of sexual life. In fact, sexuality in traditional Africa is surrounded by many taboos. In many African cultures, sexual matters have never been a subject of discussion between parent and their children not less among brothers and sisters of the same family. Anything that has to do with sexuality is held in secret and

²⁷ A. Shorter, *Celibacy and African Culture*, 21.

²⁸ B. Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic Beyond the Universal Claim of Western Morality*, 59.

²⁹ Cf. H. Okullu, *Church and Marriage in East Africa*, 16.

sacred. The sexual intercourse itself is essentially sacred because it has a mysterious characteristic of transmitting life that finds its origin in God.

In most of African societies such as Ewe community, it is a great offence (since it is a taboo) to show or expose the sexual parts at pleasure because sexual organs are honoured for being the gate of new life. Genital organs or buttocks are mostly covered³⁰ if not it constitutes nakedness, which is not tolerated. To ensure that sacredness of the sexual organs, people of opposite sex are not allowed to mix freely and to have physical contact except in sexual intercourse within legal marriages. In a strict sense, only married couples have right to sexual activity according to the customs. That is why in traditional Africa many sexual offences such as premarital sex or fornication, adultery, rape, homosexuality, incest and sexual intercourse with an animal are severely punished by both visible and the invisible community. In the case of the visible community punishment, it can be an excommunication from the village but in the case of the invisible one it is often a physical or a mental sickness.

2. 4 Guiding Norms of Sexual Activity

The general norms considered in judging what is appropriate or inappropriate sexual behaviour vary considerably from one community to the other. This myriad of norms found in different cultures can be grouped into two categories namely: the conventionalist and the liberals. For the conventionalist, sexual intercourse is only morally appropriate within the bonds of marriage. Thus, all forms of premarital or extra marital sex, be it oral, heterosexual or homosexual intercourse or masturbation are regarded as immoral.

³⁰ Even in the primitive societies whereby there were no cloths to cover the whole body, people made sure they at least covered their private parts with leaves or animal skins.

On the other hand, the liberals maintain that sexual intercourse is just one type among many others of human activities and therefore should be judged like the others. Thus, they see sex out of marriage as not being *per se* immoral if it does not violate a “pre-existent universally agreed general moral rules and principles.”³¹

The African ethical norms pertaining to sexual activity fall into the group of conventionalists. They state that sexual intercourse is only permissible within the customary marriage. Thus, all forms of premarital sex are not only discouraged and prohibited but also severely punished.

As general principle, in African religions [cultures], sex before marriage is discouraged and severely punished. A girl for example, is expected to be chaste until marriage. For that reason, virginity is highly valued and rewarded. In most African societies, girls are taught to protect their virginity until marriage and never to allow a man to violate it.³²

Generally speaking, there is no problem with the young men if they are not virgin before their final engagement with a wife for life. But since it is a must for young women, it indirectly forces young men too, to keep themselves chaste until marriage. It is very important for young women to keep themselves virgin because a girl who took the risk of losing her virginity, consequently loses respect and dignity and also becomes a source of embarrassment to her parents as well as to her age mates. In some cultures like the Ewe culture, of which I am a veritable product, virginity is so valuable to the point that even if the engaged fiancés happen to share the same bed (as it is often the case before the official customarily marriage), they are not allowed to indulge in sexual intercourse. Though they can kiss and fondle but under no excuse are they supposed to

³¹ P. Kasenene, *Religious Ethics in Africa*, 56.

³² P. Kasenene, *Religious Ethics in Africa*, 59.

³² This form of accepted masturbation is also found among the Swazi people of Swaziland. Cf. P. Kasenene, *Religious Ethics in Africa*, 60.

know themselves sexually. But if the young man is totally overwhelmed by his libido, he can make love to his fiancé between her thighs.³³

It is also worth noting that in many African cultures, including my own, never a sexual intercourse is to occur at open places like on the beach or on the ground in a given plantation. If it occurs, it is believed among our people that the contact of the sperm and the vaginal fluid with the ground or nature can make the rich farming land unproductive and prevent the falling of rains and consequently causes drought and famine. Also, it is a taboo for our people to have sexual intercourse during the menstruation period of women. Because the flow of that blood is considered to be a sign of impurity, so getting in contact with it can be a terrible source of curse and everlasting misfortune.

The paramount role sexual intercourse plays in procreation makes some people such as the Yoruba of Nigeria to use all means ensuring that fiancés preparing for marriage are really fertile. Thus, it is commonly accepted that a prospective bride must get pregnant before the day of the traditional wedding ceremony.³⁴

Under normal circumstances, neither premarital nor extramarital sexual activity has a place in African traditional society; but some social conditions sometimes can force some communities like the Yoruba people to accept the possibility of an 'infertile man to arrange for someone to impregnate his wife'³⁵ so that they may also participate in the social role of the continuity of the community.

³³ This form of accepted masturbation is also found among the Swazi people of Swaziland. Cf. P. Kasenene, *Religious Ethics in Africa*, 60.

³⁴F. A. Oyekanmi, "Understanding Sexuality in Yoruba Culture", [http:// www.arsrc.org/en/resources/reports/alaba_comments.pdf](http://www.arsrc.org/en/resources/reports/alaba_comments.pdf), 29/9/04

³⁵F. A. Oyekanmi, "Understanding Sexuality in Yoruba Culture", [http:// www.arsrc.org/en/resources/reports/alaba_comments.pdf](http://www.arsrc.org/en/resources/reports/alaba_comments.pdf), 29/9/04

Over all, premarital sex for fun and pleasure is not accepted in the traditional African society. The proof of this prohibition is the following punishment it entails in some cultures. "Among the Bakobi of Uganda, the seducer [i.e. the young man who has a premarital sexual intercourse with a girl] has to pay a heavy fine to the girl's families and the king, and the girl is driven from home, retained for ever as an outcast."³⁶ In some other cases like among the Ewe people, a young man caught or reported by a victim to be the cause of her loss of virginity is automatically compelled to marry her. Also among the Swahili of East Africa, the Ewe of Togo and Ghana and the Egyptians in general, if a bride is found not being virgin at the first sexual intercourse with her husband in the very night of their wedding ceremony, she is automatically repudiated.³⁷ But when a groom found his wife to be a virgin, according to the Akan people of Ghana, he sends on the following morning to his father-in-law a full bottle of strong drink tied with a white cloth to symbolize the purity of his daughter.³⁸

Today the ideal of virginity at marriage is hardly taken seriously by both the young and the old people because of the apparent belief that everyone has suddenly acquired sexual needs.³⁹ However, African tradition still holds it dear and values it considerably. That is why it provides some morally acceptable norms concerning who, when and where sexual intercourse should occur. Also, it gives punitive directives pertaining to the correction of offenders of such norms. This is the way the African tradition regulates and tries to preserve the virginity of the young people especially women in order to respect the goal of sexuality and its expression as willed by God the creator of all things.

³⁶ I. D. Osabutey-Aguedze, *The African religion and Philosophy*, 160.

³⁷ Cf. I. D. Osabutey-Aguedze, *The African religion and Philosophy*, 161.

³⁸ R. Fisher, *West African Religious Traditions. Focus on the Akan of Ghana*, 80.

³⁹ Cf. M. Macgoye, *Moral Issues in Kenya*, 25.

Chapter III

Human Sexuality According to the Sources of Theology

For any theological reflection on a topic like human sexuality for instance to be complete, it must be submitted to the scrutiny of the three sources of theology. Far from making any methodological exception, we would like to investigate on the teachings of the Holy Scripture, as well as the tradition of the Church and the Magisterium with regard to human sexuality. Even though we are aware that these sources are in their chronological order from different epochs, it is however worth noting that the last two are dependent on the first one. Thus, they are all interconnected.

3.1 The Biblical View of Human Sexuality

3.1.1 The Old Testament View

The Old Testament does deal with human sexuality; but it approaches it in the general context of morality. In the mind of the people of the Old Testament, there is no separation between human sexuality and their religious belief and life.

“The Hebrews saw sexuality primarily in moral terms and they understood morality in the light of their faith in God. Morality thus understood was primarily a way of response to the love of God revealed to them in various covenants God offered them. Thus, the context of morality was religious, and moral requirements were aspects of worship”⁴⁰

The Old Testament sees human sexual and genital reality and activity as good in themselves. In fact, this message of the Old Testament concerning the goodness of human sexuality is to be found in the book of Genesis 1:31 where after creating all things, God looked at them all and said they are “very good”. In creating human beings in his image, “male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27), God placed therefore,

⁴⁰ B. Lawler - J. Boyle - W. May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 17.

sexuality at the centre of human reality. The fact that God created humans male and female explains that their sexuality is to be complementary and ordered to a faithful and intimate sharing of life. After creating male and female, God told them: “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28). This divine order, as The African Bible puts it, is “God’s blessing that empowers them [human beings i.e. male and female] to transmit the life they have received from God. In this way they participate in his work of creation”.⁴¹ If it is a divine plan that human beings continue his art of creation on earth then, it becomes evident that human sexuality carries with itself a procreative purpose making thus, man and woman co-creators with God.

The Old Testament provides us with another important insight of the meaning of human sexuality as it is found in the Song of Songs. This book portrays human sexuality and sensuality as good in themselves and maintains that sexual union is an occasion of joy and celebration (Cf. Songs 6:10-12; 7: 1ff; 8: 1ff). Sexuality has then an erotic function. However, one should not dwell only on the affective and the enjoyable aspect of sexual intercourse as an end in itself so as to seek it independently at all times. In the Old Testament, we find rules that regulate the expression of one’s sexuality. Adultery and fornication are forbidden and severely punished by a divine law. This prohibition and the punishment it entails are enclosed in the following passage:

If a man is discovered having relations with a woman who is married to another, both the man and the woman with whom he has had relations shall die. Thus shall you purge the evil from your midst. If within the city a man comes upon a maiden who is betrothed, and has relations with her, you shall bring them both out to the gate of the city and there stone them to death (Dt 22: 22-24).

It is clear that in the Old Testament, adultery is the violation of the sixth commandment, “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex 20:14). And thus calls for death penalty on both partners (Cf. Lev 18: 20; 20:10; Dt 5:18; Ex 20: 14). Therefore, “the severity of the

⁴¹ African Bible, Footnote comment on Gen 1:28.

punishment suggests that adultery is viewed not just as a private violation of the spouses' right to exclusive sexual enjoyment of the partner, but also as a serious threat to the fabric of society"⁴². Not only adultery but also fornication or premarital sex is forbidden and punished. The concrete example is the death penalty that is to be inflicted on a maiden who is found not virgin at marriage. Virginity of young women is very much valued in Israel; that is why parents always make sure they have given in good faith i.e. in state of virginity their daughter in marriage. This is what the text says:

If a man, after marrying a woman and having relations with her, comes to dislike her, and makes monstrous charges against her and defames her by saying, 'I married this woman, but when I first had relations with her I did not find her a virgin,' the father and mother of the girl shall take the evidence of her virginity and bring it to the elders at the city gate. There the father of the girl shall say to the elders, 'I gave my daughter to this man in marriage, but he has come to dislike her, and now brings monstrous charges against her, saying: I did not find your daughter a virgin. But here is the evidence of my daughter's virginity!' And they shall spread out the cloth before the elders of the city. Then these city elders shall take the man and chastise him, besides fining him one hundred silver shekels, which they shall give to the girl's father, because the man defamed a virgin in Israel.....But if this charge is true, and evidence of the girl's virginity is not found, they shall bring the girl to the entrance of her father's house and there her townsmen shall stone her to death, because she committed a crime against Israel by her unchasteness in her father's house (Dt:22: 13-21).

Just like in many African cultures as we have showed in the previous chapter, virginity of young women at marriage is held with great esteem for it is the honour of both the girl and her parents, so it was also for the people of the Old Testament. Any failure to practice this virtue of virginity incurs severe punishment.

3.4. 1. 2 The New Testament View

The good news of the New Testament is not exclusive to what concerns human spirituality but it embraces all the aspects of human person including his or her sexuality. For this reason some moralists comment that:

The principal message of the New Testament is that the long-awaited good news heralded by the prophets, is now at hand. God himself, through Jesus, is establishing his kingdom of justice, peace and love, bringing his peoples and all mankind

⁴² P. Kasenene, *Religious Ethics in Africa*, 62.

redemption and salvation and, most wonderfully and unexpectedly, making possible a kind of intimate friendship with himself. This good news brings with it radical moral demands, and put everything in a new light including human sexuality.⁴³

In this perspective the general position found across the New Testament with regard to premarital sexual activity is that it is morally wrong because it is the misuse of one's body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (Cf. 1Cor 6: 12-20).

In some gospel passages, Jesus referred respectively to the Old Testament to show that the sexual differentiation of male and female is part of the plan of creation (cf. Mt 19: 4 and Gen 1: 27; Mk 10: 6 and Gen 2: 24). Therefore, the only proper context for genital activity is in marriage. If it is in marriage that people should indulge in sexual intercourse according to the gospel's teaching, then it follows that neither adultery nor premarital sexual activity is allowed or encouraged among unmarried people especially the youths (cf. Jn 8:3-11).

One cannot bypass St. Paul in dealing with sexual morality in the New Testament. One of his teachings concerning immorality is to be found in the following passage: "Avoid immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the immoral person sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body" (1Cor 6: 18-20). In fact, according to St. Paul, immorality is extended to all forms of sins that result from adultery, prostitution, sodomy, and fornication. For that matter he maintains that those who commit such sins and many others cannot inherit the kingdom of God. "Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters, nor adulterers nor boy prostitutes nor sodomites nor thieves nor greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers

⁴³ B. Lawler - J. Boyle - W. May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 24.

nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1Cor 6: 9-10; Gal 5:19-21). Among the many sexual vices to be avoided, fornication is the most frequently mentioned⁴⁴ and it is said for that matter to be the “work of the flesh” (Gal 5: 19) in opposition to the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5: 22).

Hence, both the gospels and Pauline letters clearly condemn premarital sex also called in biblical term fornication. According to the New Testament anyone who obstinately indulges in it fatally inflicts upon him or herself the most severe spiritual punishment that results to self-exclusion from the kingdom and the love of God. After all it is a sexual being who is called to be the disciple of Jesus; however, he or she must live out his or her sexual existence without spot and sin. Even though we are sexual beings God wants us anyways to be holy as Himself.

God wills you all to be holy. He wants you to keep away from sexual immorality, and each one of you to know how to control his body in a way that is holy and honourable, not giving way to selfish lust like the nations who do not acknowledge God. He wants nobody at all ever to sin by taking advantage of a brother in these matters (1Th 4:3-6).

3.2 Human Sexuality in the Catholic Tradition

The long catholic theological tradition that developed over the centuries started to emerge as a response to specific situations in which Christians of specific times found themselves. Thus, the early Christians for instance lived in an age of great sexual licentiousness whereby debauchery and disregard for human life prevailed. That was precisely in the Greco-Roman world. In addition, these Christians were challenged by the metaphysical dualistic teaching of Gnosticism that extended the “evilness” of matter to human sexuality and consequently despised the procreation of new life through marital sexual intercourse⁴⁵. It was precisely in this context of sexual immorality and

⁴⁴ Cf. R. Collins, *Sexual Ethics and the New Testament*, 80.

⁴⁵ Cf. B. Lawler - J. Boyle - W. May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 32.

Gnostic contempt for the generation of new life through sexual intercourse that the Fathers of the Church wrote in order to instruct the faithful Christians about the goodness of human sexuality and therefore stressed its procreative function. To account for this, Justin the Martyr said: "We Christians either marry with but one thought to beget children, or if we refuse to marry we are completely continent"⁴⁶.

It is interesting to note that some Fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom and Theodoret were suspicious of the sexual appetite, which they thought become only operative after the fall of our fore fathers Adam and Eve. However, this consideration does not render sexual activity bad or evil in itself. The realistic approach to the reality of human sexuality made the Fathers to realize that sexual desire can easily lead someone to fornication. That is why upon taking for granted that sexual intercourse is only morally right in marriage, Lactantius and John Chrysostom for instance were for the opinion that: "marital relations may rightly be chosen in order to alleviate sexual desire and avoid fornication"⁴⁷.

There is also a rather pessimistic view about sex found in some of the theological reflections of St. Augustine especially concerning concupiscence. According to him, concupiscence lies behind the original sin and becomes therefore, its principal source. Beyond all considerations, St. Augustine also recognized the goodness of human sexuality and maintained thus that it is only marriage that provides the standard for proper sexual activity. More than that, he also taught that any sexual intercourse that does not aim at procreation but just for satisfying concupiscence is a venial sin.

⁴⁶ Justin, Martyr, *Apology I*, 29.

⁴⁷ B. Lawler - J. Boyle - W. May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 35.

The medieval theologians went straight to the point by teaching that any premarital sexual activity is bad, sinful and immoral. For P. Lombard for instance, any premarital sexual intercourse is a grave and sinful violation of the sixth commandment⁴⁸.

The general position of the Catholic tradition with regard to premarital sexual activity is clear. In fact, it is considered to be the violation of both the natural moral law written in the heart of humankind and of the divine moral law revealed to us in the Scriptures. The tradition maintains therefore, that it is a sinful, immoral and irresponsible act that both Christians and non-Christians must avoid especially if it does not aim at procreation and the upbringing of children. This position of the Church tradition calls for responsible sexual intercourse as it portrays Thomas Aquinas' opinions on premarital sex:

Nonmarital sexual union is contrary to the demands of the natural law insofar as it acts against the good of offspring. 'The end of the exercise of the genital organs is the generation and education of children; therefore, every exercise of these powers which is not properly ordered to the generation of the children and the education to which they have a right is itself disordered'. Thus the sexual intercourse outside of marriage is excluded, for it is only in marriage that human life can properly be given, matured, and educated in the love and worship of God⁴⁹.

3.3 The Magisterial Teaching on Human Sexuality

4.3.1 The Functions of Human Sexuality

Human sexuality is numbered among the countless gifts God has given his people for their good. Thus, human sexuality assumes a threefold functions namely: relational, erotic (love) and procreative roles⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ Cf. P. Lombard, *Libri IV Sententiarum*, III, 37.

⁴⁹ B. Lawler, - J. Boyle - W. May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 45.

Also see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q 153, a 2.

⁵⁰ Cf. Xavier Thevenot, "New Developments in Sexual Morality", *Concilium*, (March 1984), 83-84.

Every human being has the capacity to be affectionate and therefore to enter into a friendly or intimate relationship with another person. We owe this self-transcendence ability to open up and relate with one another to the reality of sexuality that is a dynamic energy of our human person. In this perspective, it becomes clear that human sexuality is "an important ingredient of our being relational persons. Although it can be the source of great joy and pleasure for us, the fulfillment of that joy does not lie in self-pleasuring but in the mutual enjoyment of relational intimacy as human persons"⁵¹. Moreover it has a love dimension making it "a way of relating and being open to others; through a love that is donation and acceptance, love as giving and receiving"⁵².

The tradition of the Church before Vatican II Council has always taught that the primary function or end of sexual intercourse is procreation. Thus, it excludes all forms of premarital sexual activity. However, some people advocate for premarital sex arguing that it is an expression of love that exist between a young man and woman. If love has to be at the core of any sexual intercourse, for it to be morally right and justified, it has to be in the context of a long life commitment. Genovesi shared the same view and had this to say:

It is not simply any form of true love therefore, that provided the necessary context for genital sexuality [sexual intercourse] but rather only that true love which is strong and free and courageous enough to invest itself in a pledge or commitment. . . Sexual union should occur within the context of a life commitment because the body-giving involved in physical intercourse at the same time expresses the self-giving and spirit-sharing that are the essence of love⁵³.

More than the procreative function of sexual intercourse, the recent Magisterium of the Church emphasizes another end that is the love function also called the unitive function of sexual union. This purpose is not sought independently; but has to be

⁵¹ K. Kelly, *New Directions in Sexual Ethics. Moral Theology and the Challenge of AIDS*, 146.

⁵² Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, 11.

⁵³ V. Genovesi, *In Pursuit of Love. Catholic Morality and Human Sexuality*, 150-154.

always coupled with the procreative meaning of sexuality. This is how Pope Paul VI underlines the inseparability of these two functions:

That teaching, often set forth by the Magisterium, is founded upon the inseparable connection willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning. Indeed, by its intimate structure, the conjugal act, while most closely uniting husband and wife, capacitates them for the generation of new lives, according to laws inscribed in the very being of man and woman. By safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its ordination towards man's most high calling to parenthood.⁵⁴

Here again the inseparability of the procreative and the unitive functions of sexual intercourse finds its proper domain of exercise which is only within the social and divine covenant of marriage. Hence, there is no claim of premarital sex on the ground of its erotic function. Any sexual intercourse that separates the procreative and the unitive significance of sexuality is wrong.⁵⁵

3.3.2 The Immorality of Sexual Activities

There are many sexual activities such as adultery, fornication, prostitution, rape, incest, homosexuality and masturbation that can be judged from the moral point of view wrong, immoral and even evil. But I am much more interested in finding out the ground on which the teaching authority of the Church judges all forms of premarital sexual intercourse immoral. The following comment of some catholic moralists provides us with sufficient information as far as the magisterial position is concerned.

In proclaiming the norms of sexual behavior rooted in God's law, the Magisterium has always taught that it is seriously wrong to choose to engage in any sexual activity that is not authentically marital. From the first days of the Church, pastoral leaders taught, as Scripture had, that those who engage in 'fornication [or premarital sex] gross indecency and sexual irresponsibility.... will not inherit the kingdom of God'⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 12. Also see *Gardium et Spes* 48-50.

⁵⁵ Cf. Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 12-13 and *Familiaris Consortio*, 28-30.

⁵⁶ Cf. B. Lawler, - J. Boyle - W. May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 64.

The teaching of the Magisterium with regard to the morality of sexual activity aims at restricting sexual intimacy only to the long life commitment of marriage. In doing this and rightly so, the teaching authority of the Church wants to preserve the real meaning of sexual intercourse and therefore foster the human dignity in intimate personal relationships. Hence, Pope John Paul II made this position clear by saying:

The only *place* in which this self-giving in its whole truth is made possible is marriage, the covenant of conjugal love freely and consciously chosen, whereby man and woman accept the intimate community of life and love willed by God himself; which only in this light manifests its true meaning.⁵⁷

The main teaching of the three sources of theology pertaining to sexual activities has a common denominator. In fact, it indicates that sexual activities are properly reserved to marital relationships in which the shared love of a couple takes the form of a pledged commitment. Marriage is therefore, the only context in which the full richness of human sexual love can be achieved because “just as God’s love is creative and faithful, so also should human sexual love, when genitally expressed, be open to procreation and expressive of unity and permanent fidelity.”⁵⁸ In sum, premarital sexual activity is found, to have no sufficient ground to be permissible; because it is neither the genuine reflection of the love of God for humankind as creative and eternal nor the deliberate act that is willing to accept procreation.

⁵⁷ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 11.

⁵⁸ V. Genovesi, *In Pursuit of Love. Catholic Morality and Human Sexuality*, 180.

Chapter IV

Practical Suggestions for Pastoral Action to the Challenge of Premarital Sex among Youths

Nowadays, many people young and old alike continue to wrongly believe that virginity at marriage is not relevant. But I think that this virtue before marriage is far from being affected by any cultural, social or religious revolution and thus, remains an important virtue to be promoted in every culture and religion.

4.1 Reasons for Living the Virtue of Virginity

Putting together both the Catholic and the African understanding of human sexuality in general and their views on the premarital sex in particular, we come to the common conclusion that any sexual activity that is before marriage is out of place in the relational life of young people. It therefore, goes without saying that virginity of young people is mandatory before marriage. What could then be the reasons for both the Church and African tradition to maintain that virginity is still an important value for young men and women of our time?

According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, there is no compromise with regard to premarital sex. Just like any non-baptized person or a child under the age of reason is not allowed to receive the Holy Communion, so it is for young people not to enjoy the sexual privileges and rights that the sacrament of matrimony reserved only for couples who committed themselves for long life contract in marriage.

On the other hand, African culture and even the Christian tradition value virginity because it constitutes a good preparation for young people to fidelity in their future marriage life. Inevitable circumstances in marriage like moment of sickness of one of the spouses or the traveling abroad for months, and even years for professional

reasons call for discipline and faithfulness. But if one is not trained since his or her youthful age, he or she may not find it easy to remain chaste and faithful until his or her spouse recovers from sickness or comes back from his or her journey. Thus, in order to prevent divorce that can easily result from infidelity in marriage, both the Church and African traditions insist on the virginity of young people before marriage. Virginity cannot but only prepares young men and women for a very faithful and chaste life in their future marriage.

Another important reason that urges me to promote a culture of virginity among youths today is the tremendous damages that sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS are causing in many parts of the world especially in Africa. Despite the utilization of condoms, the percentage of death among youth across the globe is still significant. Both scientists and religious leaders recognized that the most effective way of preventing HIV/AIDS pandemic today is abstinence. In fact, advocating for abstinence is another way of telling youths to keep themselves virgin until they are ready to commit themselves to a long life partner in marriage.

Moreover, old and young people likewise have to consider life to be the most precious gift that needs to be lived with great care. The quality of life one lives tells a lot about who he or she is. Young people for instance must live a life worthy of praise and admiration. Few are those people full of admiration for young men and women who spend most of their time in pubs and bars dancing, drinking and sleeping with other women or men. The respect of oneself is a fundamental quality of human person. One of the surest ways young people can achieve this goal in their life as far as their sexual behavior is concerned is through the self-disciplinarian practice of the virtue of virginity.

Everybody wants to experience freedom in his or her life. No one wants to be slave to anybody or to anything. But unfortunately sometimes, some human behaviors such as the habitual practice of sexual activity among youths for instance can enslave them to the extent that they easily become addicted to it. In order to avoid any form of sexual addiction and slavery among young people, there is a need to train them in living the virtue of virginity.

Having outlined some main reasons that are in support of promoting a culture of virginity among Christian youth today, it is imperative that I suggest some practical steps to be followed in order to achieve that goal.

4.2 Sexual Education

Sexual education is not a new solution to the moral and pastoral issues of premarital sex. However, the same thing can be looked at in a completely new perspective. And that is what I intend to bring forward. Often the sexual education we are accustomed to in the educational curriculum of many of our African countries has never gone beyond the sphere of providing information related to human sexuality. As far as my memory can go back to my time in secondary school, I can still recall how we were told boys witness a change of voice and girls start their menses during puberty. Consequently we were told boys can now father a child and girls can easily conceive in case they have unsafe sexual intercourse. It was just an information; nothing was given to us as far as how to manage the sexual energy that can be troublesome sometimes in us.

In my perspective, without ruling out the usefulness of the information dimension of sexual education, I would like to go further by inviting young men and women to translate whatever information they received pertaining to sexuality into

concrete action that will certainly help them to brave the temptation of engaging in sex.

For this reason youths must be personally and voluntarily resolved to:

- Cultivate friendships that do not push to experience sex
- Avoid wearing clothes that are sexually provocative
- Avoid being in a private place with the opposite sex for no reason
- Avoid reading romantic and pornographic books and novels
- Avoid watching all forms of pornographic films
- Seek the advice of people who respect their bodies and live chaste life
- Pray for the grace of virginity until marriage.

After making such a personal decision, youths can afterward begin to look for role models to emulate among the people who are directly involved in their human, intellectual and religious education and formation.

4.3 Role Models

Our youths need more than ever role models in order to shape their future life. This responsibility certainly falls on significant others namely: parents, teachers, priests and religious. They are expected and rightly so to give good examples of moral life as far as their relationships and marital lives are concerned.

Parents are the first teachers of their children. So it is their duty to instill in their children right from their childhood Christian virtues of chastity and respect for one's body since it is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit in every human being (cf. 1Cor 6:18-20). Considering the fact that actions speak louder than words, parents are expected to live a life of fidelity in their homes so that upon seeing them day after day their children are convinced about the necessity of keeping themselves virgin until marriage as they are often told by the same parents. As parents cannot succeed

convincing their children not to steal while they do the same thing often in their presence, so it will certainly be a failure if they are not able to reconcile their educative words about the importance of virginity with their practical life of fidelity in marriage. If children are made aware of the importance of virginity until marriage right from childhood, then the work becomes easier for teachers who do nothing else than continuing from where parents have left off in this process of sexual education.

Teachers are not left out in the sexual education of young people. If children grow up with the idea that they must remain virgin until marriage and as they go to school and find the same message translated into action in the life of their teachers, then they take the matter serious and will strive to live according to it. If both parents and teachers fail in providing a model for the youth to emulate, their only hope is to be found in religious leaders.

It is a constant expectation of both young and old people to find in priests as well as religious heroic, pious and chaste lifestyle that encourage them to live well their Christian life. If this is the case then all religious leaders regardless of their denomination have a great task to undertake. It is mandatory that priests and pastors especially those involved in youth ministry preach about the virtue of virginity in season and out of season (cf. 2Thim 4:2). However, their preaching should not be only in words but much more in actions because people and most especially youth may not always believe in what they say but will always remember all that they do.

Hence, in this proposed order: parents, educators and religious leaders have to play a significant role in the sexual education of our youths. If right from their tender age children begin to appreciate the respect of human body in the life of their parents, and as they grow up and see the same thing in the exemplary life of their teachers, their

parish priests or chaplains and religious sisters and brothers, it becomes evident that they will try their best to do the same. For any sexual education to be effective, the combined role models of parents, educators and religious shepherds need to be in place. It is only in this atmosphere that young people can find support and encouragement to brave the common belief that maintain virginity at marriage makes spouses unfulfilled in their conjugal union. Apart from outside supports, it is equally important that the youth who are willing to embrace a culture of virginity come together as a group to support and encourage themselves.

4.4 Virgins Self-supportive Group

Many of young people experienced sex as a result of peer pressure. Sometimes a good number of them feel uncomfortable among their friends for the simple reason that they have no experience of sexual intercourse. So in order to make young people feel at home with their virginal status and a sense of belonging wherever they find themselves, starting such a group will be of great help for both those who are virgin and those who for one reason or the other lost their virginity but are now resolved to keep themselves chaste until marriage. A group like this in a parish setting or in any learning institution put the responsibility on the youth minister to promote the virtue of virginity among youths through their training of self-mastery. This group we are suggesting is like a school whereby youth are trained in the virtue of chastity in continence through their daily personal effort, a committed life of prayer and the help of God's grace. It takes a learning process for a person to be able to live the virtue of virginity. And this is so beautifully put by the Catechism of the Catholic Church as follow:

Chastity [virginity] includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery, which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes

unhappy. Man's dignity therefore requires him to act out of conscious and free choice, a moved and drawn in personal way from within, and not by blind impulses in himself or by mere external constraint. Man gains such dignity when, ridding himself of all slavery to the passions, he presses forward to his goal by freely choosing what is good and, by his diligence and skill, effectively secures for himself the means suited to this end.⁵⁹

The virtue of virginity demands long life training of self-mastery; as such "one can never consider it acquired once and for all. It presupposes renewed effort at all stages of life. The effort required can be more intense in certain periods, such as when the personality is being formed during childhood and adolescence."⁶⁰

Apart from the constant personal effort of self-discipline, the youth are to be made not to lose sight of the ever-present divine grace with them in their life. Without this grace they may not be able to keep themselves virgin until marriage. More than being a moral virtue, youth should be made to consider virginity as a divine gift that can be granted freely to them through some spiritual exercises and Christian prayers in general. Therefore, members of this group can be meeting on weekly basis to share the Bible and to pray collectively for the grace of virginity until marriage. This group will be a forum whereby young people can cultivate and develop mature friendship among themselves and also with Jesus Christ. Since sexuality is at the service of love as a dynamic of total self-giving, youths of this group can be made to enter into this dynamic of love through an intimate and personal friendship with Jesus Christ. After a period of reasonable time like three months of membership for instance, any youth who is interested can freely apply to their chaplain requesting to take a yearly oath of virginity in the presence of all members of the group, parents and the youth minister. The oath can take different formats but it should always leave room for mentioning the

⁵⁹ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2339.

⁶⁰ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2342.

youth's name, his or her free decision to take the oath and the help of God to remain faithful to it. Here is the format I suggest:

Lord God, nothing is impossible for you. And whoever has faith in you is never deceived. With faith and confidence, I __ (name) __ swear by my free will to keep myself virgin and chaste for a period of one year as a preparation until I receive the sacrament of matrimony in the Church. May God be witness to this commitment and through the help of his grace may I live according to it.

After this commitment to virginity youths are expected to share among themselves the challenges they encounter in practicing this virtue of chastity in continence and to encourage one another to be faithful to their commitment.

After all to remain virgin until marriage, in this modern world highly influenced by media advertisements on free sex and the lost of moral integrity, can only be the result of the combined effects of God's grace and human discipline of self-control and will-power.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The observation is clear: many young people are sexually active. But almost nobody seems to hold this reality as a matter of concern. Youths themselves both Christians and non-Christians seem to have never heard the words of the book of Ecclesiastes, which says: "There is an appointed time for everything and a time for every affair under the heavens" (Eccl 3: 1). They therefore, take for granted that it is good and even advisable to experience sex before marriage. Petting, kissing and intimate hugging have become their normal behavior. In fact, these behaviors seem to raise no questions and almost nobody dares to prove the opposite.

However, I have felt the need of making an exception as I dare to bring this issue around the table of discussion. It was not so easy to brave the culture of taboo that surrounds anything to do with sexuality and sex in our African culture. But I have found out that it is the only way forward to save the Christian young generation that is losing the sense of moral dignity and integrity with regard to human sexuality. As I have explored the African and the Christian heritages of human sexuality, I have discovered very inspiring teachings that promote healthy, constructive and mature relationships between people of the opposite sex. On the other hand, I have also discovered some traditional practices that I would like to suggest their discontinuity in our society. In fact, the idea of sexual activity as a form of hospitality and the practice of group marriage are to be discouraged nowadays because not only are they incompatible to the Christian doctrine of monogamy but also they expose the spouses to the merciless dangers of contracting STDs including HIV/AIDS. More than that, the death penalty that accompanies the sins of adultery and fornication is to be revised for the simple reason that God does not wish the death of a sinner but his or her conversion. However,

on the ground of the positive teachings I have discovered, I felt the urgent need of drawing the attention of young people to the goodness and the necessity of cultivating the virtue of virginity and respect of human body in their life.

Thus, to the problem of premarital sex among youths, my suggestion focuses on sexual education in its concrete forms of personal self-discipline, the counsels and examples of significant others, the intimate and personal friendship with Jesus Christ, the ultimate model of Chastity and the spiritual help of prayer and divine grace. Even though this proposed solution is neither the exhaustive nor the absolute one, it is my fervent hope that this work will be a helpful material for young men and women who strongly want to make a difference as Christians among their peers in keeping themselves virgin and chaste until marriage.

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