

CHAPTER 36

Sexual Integrity

Searching for love

Adolescence is a period when young people want to assert their independence, start work or advanced study and, with particular reference to their sexuality, become familiar with themselves as a man or woman and begin discovering the world of the opposite sex. However, it also characterizes a time when we are confused about our identity. This is because a young person is concluding the childhood years and beginning life as an adult. One moment we feel grown up and independent and the next we feel a great need to depend on our parents.

Because adolescence is a time when our physical bodies reach full maturity and a time of great psychological change, there is a growing and intense awareness of the opposite sex. In the area of sexuality it is the period of discovering our sexual identity.

Until relatively recently in human history, many people throughout the world did not date before they married and rarely spent time alone with their intended spouse until their wedding day. Courtship often proceeded under the guide of a chaperone. A suitor might formally kiss the hand of his beloved upon their engagement, but greater physical passion was reserved for after the wedding.

What would you do if your ten-year-old brother asked you to let him drive your father's car while you were driving through the center of a big city? He has a strong desire to do so and he has all of the physical requirements to carry it out. He has eyes, hands, feet and ears, and he's tall for his age. Very confidently he tells you not to worry, assuring you that he can handle it. But you know very well that

this is not the best way to help him to develop his driving abilities. He may kill himself and someone else too.

If you really love your brother and care about the well-being of others, it is inconceivable to let him drive on his own through the center of town, and if you did agree to teach him to drive, you would definitely choose a suitable environment for his safety and the safety of others under your direct supervision.



Don't you think this example relates to the themes we are discussing? How often do we resemble this boy, thinking we are mature enough to make decisions on our own, including the areas of sex and love? Doesn't this kind of thinking sometimes lead us into relationships for which we are not ready?

Chastity is not a popular virtue these days. With hearts pounding and pulses racing, adolescents approach sexuality as though it were a mysterious deity. It is new, it is exciting, it is completely overshadowing.

However, we need to be aware that what people seek *through* sex is something *other* than sex—something deeper, more permanent. Sex and love are not the same. But what is the difference?

It is true that sex is a natural desire, but the role it plays in our lives and the importance we attribute to it are a matter of choice. No one can live without love, but no one has ever died from a lack of sex. Unlike animals, human beings have the freedom to choose whether to be sexually active or not. There are many people who have chosen a life of celibacy, often for religious reasons.

Love is as essential to life as food. Research on infant needs has demonstrated that without love, expressed in physical tenderness and cuddling, infant mortality rates increase significantly. For adults, the lack or loss of love can drive people to despair and even suicide. Everyone needs to experience love. When love is lost, people desperately look for a substitute.

Sex alone cannot substitute for love. If we have sex, hoping to find love, we certainly will be hurt. Love has to come first, accompanied by trust, responsibility and commitment.



Sex and intimacy

Human sexuality involves the whole person and thus the whole of life. Sexual relations are like the summit. The base for the summit is daily life together, a life in common. This requires an environment of the home. The home is the place of an intimacy of heart that naturally extends into the sexual life of a couple. Therefore, sexuality concerns the innermost being of a person.

Through the act of love, married couples give themselves to one another in body and mind. For married couples, sex is a sign of love and an exclusive right they share. Each values the other as the most important person in his life, for the rest of his life. At the heart of sexual intercourse is the expression of love arising from a continuous, committed relationship.

Cut off from marriage, a sexual relationship is torn from its roots. Often the motivation for entering this kind of relationship is “what can this person give me” rather than “what can I give to make this relationship lasting and beautiful.” It is not the expression of complete trust and security between two people linked in a profound and permanent way.

Outside marriage, the sexual act awakens that which is most intimate, most sacred, most vulnerable in the human heart—without being able to fulfill the deep need to love and to be loved with a *complete* love. The need to relate permanently to another human being in total love and raise a family is as much a social need as a personal one.

In many relationships the partners feel committed temporarily but have not sealed their love with a permanent pledge to a shared destiny for life. They have not taken the step to confirm their commitment by saying to their family, friends, and community: “We are in this together—for life. We are ready to be parents if children come our way. We’re a family.”

Without a recognized and permanent commitment, sexual relations remain terribly fragile. They are subject to the moods, fears and passions of one or the other and under constant doubt: “You love me because I please you today, but what about tomorrow? Do you truly love me for who I am?”

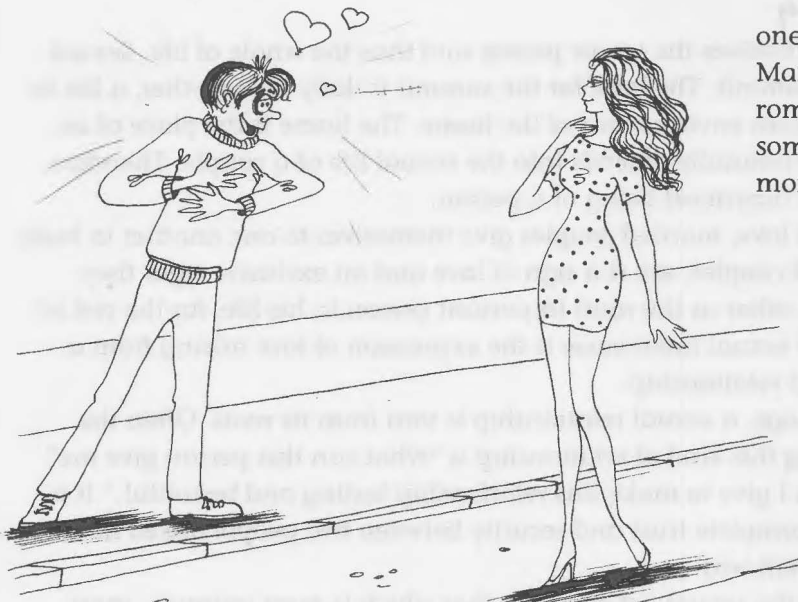
One of the partners may be more committed than the other and, when the relationship breaks up, may feel very distressed and used. In fact, some relationships resemble exploitation in which two people agree to use one another for sexual relief and

serve each other’s emotional needs temporarily before they are ready for permanent relationships. Sex is too precious and powerful a force to be used in this way.

Set your limits

Sexual integrity allows us the freedom to develop and strengthen our character so that we can experience the fullness of love. Integrity means completeness or wholeness. Wholeness is unity between our mind and body, the balancing of all the parts of the self to create a dynamic and harmonious order. Wholeness focuses on building the full beauty and strength of the self, which makes happiness possible.





Sexual integrity creates order and beauty in one's character and happiness in one's life. Marriage requires much more friendship than romance, and one who intends to marry someday needs to cultivate the art of friendship more than skillful sex.

In comparison with sexual integrity, sexual impulsiveness and permissiveness can deform one's character, leading a person to become extremely self-absorbed. Sexually permissive people are like starving people, scrounging wherever they can for food. It is as if within themselves there is an inner emptiness, a bottomless pit crying out to be filled but which can never be completely filled. They never feel "full-filled" or have a sense of completeness. They always feel

"a part of me is missing."

Union: The goal of love

The goal of all love is said to be growth to the point of total union—living in unity with another person, with all humanity and with all things in the universe. This view of union is one based on spiritual love.

The concept of union or merging with the divine is found in most religions. God is thought to be omnipresent. Therefore, it is possible to merge with the divine as long as one is realizing one's own true self. This desire for oneness or union is what propels the continuing growth of love. It is the impetus to merge with someone you love on a much deeper level than mere physical connection. It is the impetus to seek harmony within oneself and with all of life.

Hatred is repelling, love is unity.

— Father Alexander Men,
Russian Orthodox priest

For Your Journal



Make three columns with the headings *Falling in love*; *Committed, life-long love*; and *Using the other, not love*. Beneath each heading write as many behaviors, feelings, and thoughts as possible that are associated with that kind of experience.

Sexual Integrity

There are those who say there is no connection between intercourse and a personal relationship. Sex is for pleasure only. This argument is favored more by men than women. But the contention is simply not true. From the first year of life, instincts are integrated in the whole personality. They do not live as separate entities and they have been shaped and controlled in an interaction with parents who relate in love. Thus to separate sex from the rest of the personality and to isolate it from feelings is a distortion of authentic human encounters. When coitus takes place, there is a meeting of persons with the integrity of feelings and emotions involved.

Another facile argument is that sexual compatibility is of paramount importance in permanent relationships and as such should be tested before marriage. When the relationship is good, sex is often good; furthermore, when the relationship is stable and satisfactory, it can compensate for poor or even absent sex. In other words, the key to satisfactory sex is a satisfactory relationship. Premarital sex, however good, is rarely an indication of how the relationship will turn out. The establishment of a sound personal relationship is the best guarantee for marital stability and successful intercourse. Coitus is not a research tool for personal compatibility but rather should seal the relationship when an apt choice has been made.

Even when these considerations are conceded, it is still held that it is impossible to remain chaste before marriage. For myself and millions of my own generation who observed the rule of premarital chastity, the idea that instincts are so overwhelming that they cannot be contained is novel. There is no doubt that the relevant factor here is the attitude of society and of the individual. If society takes the view that restraint is not possible and indeed bombards the young person with sexual titillation and condoms, then clearly society is of no assistance whatsoever in sexual control. There is no doubt that men and women are perfectly capable of making a whole range of sacrifices when these are needed and seen clearly to be appropriate. Sex is precious when used in the right way, but when it is misused it loses its worth and value.

— Jack Dominian, Catholic theologian and psychologist