

[This chapter is from the book, *Premarital Sex and Love: In the Light of Human Experience and Following Jesus* by Paul Flaman. Copyright 1999 by Paul J. P. Flaman, St. Joseph's College, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada T6G 0B3. Any feedback you have can be emailed to: pflaman@ualberta.ca **Note:** Section D of this chapter has been published as an article with some minor modifications as: "Is Living Together Really a Good Way to Test or Prepare for Marriage?" *Journal of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars / Amicale de Savants Catholiques Canada*, Autumn 2000, 12-19.]

CHAPTER 7: SOME CONTEMPORARY ARGUMENTS FOR PREMARITAL SEXUAL INTERCOURSE AND RESPONSES

As noted in the beginning of the last chapter, that chapter and this chapter respectively treat a number of arguments that are commonly raised today against and for premarital sex. These include arguments that have been typically raised by contemporary university students in my Christian theology classes on human sexuality and marriage at the University of Alberta, as well as in various media, including theological literature.¹ This chapter presents some arguments (or "reasons") for premarital sex raised by others, and provides some responses or analyses of these arguments in the light of human experience and the Christian vision and vocation (see Ch. 5). In this chapter, as in the last, the discussion focuses mainly on voluntary premarital sexual intercourse. The issues of masturbation, premarital sexual petting and sexual abuse will be treated in Ch. 8.A-C.

1. The University of Alberta is located in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. One of the most comprehensive treatments of "Reasons Youth Have Premarital Sex" and "Reasons to Wait" is found in *Why Wait? What You Need to Know About the Teen Sexuality Crisis* by Josh McDowell and Dick Day (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1987), Parts 2 and 3 respectively. Their book makes interesting and informative reading. Incorporated in their treatment are comments from many young people, as well as references to many other sources, and the authors' own reflections which are rooted in the Christian vision. André Guindon in *The Sexual Language: An Essay in Moral Theology* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1976), Ch. 9 "Premarital Sex", also treats a number of the arguments commonly raised for and against premarital sex.

In introducing this chapter, it should be noted that many people today who favor voluntary premarital sexual intercourse only think that it is "all right" or acceptable in certain circumstances, for example, if the individuals "love" each other. Many young and not so young people who engage in premarital sex, or who endorse this behavior, do not find all the arguments or "reasons" of other people acceptable. Also, someone who engages in premarital sexual intercourse may have more than one "reason" or motive for their behavior, or they may not have thought much about what their real motives are. In several parts of this chapter some reported statistics are provided with respect to the prevalence of some related attitudes and behaviors. It is my hope that this chapter and the last chapter, which discuss some contemporary arguments for and against premarital sexual intercourse, will contribute to a better understanding of human experience in this area. Having a good understanding of the relevant issues can help one to fulfill better one's respective responsibilities, whether one is (or was or will be) in a premarital man-woman (or boy-girl) relationship, a parent or friend of someone who is, or a professional or minister who works in this area.

A. Some Claim it is Natural or Healthy

In this section several views that basically see sex, including premarital sexual intercourse, as natural or healthy, are presented, before I respond to them. First of all, in the words of several young people:

The main force driving people my age to premarital sex is the view of society that sex is only natural. In this kind of atmosphere, people don't see the need to hold out until they are married.

To most kids sex is really nothing, so they go ahead and have it just because they like it.

.... A recent popular song has the enchanting words, "It can't be wrong when it feels so right." I fell for that argument....

One of the reasons [for having sex] most overlooked is that of pressure.... The problem is that some teens find themselves not performing up to everyone else's standards and this reflects on them - they feel like they're not capable of doing a certain thing. As this vicious cycle progresses, the one thing a teen can do is have sex, whether it be to release tension or to have a sense of doing something right or succeeding at something.

The reason I see as the most common for sex before marriage is the overwhelming need to be close to another human being, to make emotional contact, to gain a sense of self-worth, to keep from being lonely and to feel cared for.

Many young people, even though they are still in school, view themselves as fully mature. Because of this feeling, they want to engage in so-called "adult activities," such as smoking, drinking and having sex. It would be tough to explain to them why they shouldn't be involved in sex if they see themselves as adults and then look around and see what other adults are doing. Still others may have sex to become mature. They think if they have sex they will somehow magically become adults.

The belief that sex is a passage from childhood to adulthood makes it difficult to resist: Boys want to become men; girls want to become women.²

With regard to the above comments of several young people, consider also the following views discussed in some recent literature. Sociologist Eshleman thinks that most people can be classified as adhering predominantly to one of four different premarital sexual standards. With respect to the standard of "permissiveness without affection", he says:

2. From McDowell and Day (see note 1), 79, 80, 81, 85, 125, 146, and 147, respectively.

Premarital intercourse is right for both women and men regardless of the amount of affection or stability present, providing there is physical attraction The adherents of this standard place a very high value on physical pleasure. If either men or women desire sexual intercourse, there is no reason why it should not occur; it is viewed as natural and necessary, akin to eating and breathing. Permissiveness without affection is considered to be a body-centered relationship in that the accent is placed on the physical aspects of the act. This standard has never been widespread in the United States or Canada.³

Kosnik and others discuss five approaches or positions, with respect to premarital sexuality, that are found in some recent literature, including the view that:

...maintains that sexual expression is an important and healthy human experience because it provides enjoyment, enrichment, and a release of tension. Even apart from any expression of intimacy or intent to procreate, physical pleasure is an important part of human experience.... Some would maintain that intercourse is the healthiest and most beneficial expression of human existence and "the individual should seek to have healthy orgasms in accord with his needs."⁴

Along these lines, consider also the following views:

.... The sexual impulses of adolescence are intense and demand some outlet. Adolescents are physically mature and yet, in the structure of our society, they are certainly not psychologically mature. They are not able to support themselves. They cannot marry if that would be their wish. As

3. J. Ross Eshleman, *The Family: An Introduction* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 4th ed. 1985), 355-6 (cf. 355-8). The other three premarital sexual standards that he treats are: "abstinence" (cf. Ch. 6 above and Ch. 8.B-C below), "permissiveness with affection" (this is widely held in countries such as the United States and Canada - cf. section F of this chapter), and the "double standard" (which is thought to have been weakened by the feminist movement, the development of contraception, and greater economic opportunities for women).

4. Anthony Kosnik et al., *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 163, quoting Eugene BJOROWICZ, *Choosing a Sex Ethic* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 54. Kosnik et al. do not personally hold this position. Cf., e.g., also Linda Murray, "Why Sex is Good for You", *The Globe and Mail*, Mar. 3, 1995.

a matter of fact, for most adolescents "being grown up" seems a hundred years away. The prolongation of the period before they are viewed as socially able to function on an adult level increases the pressure felt by many adolescents. For some, sex becomes a temporary palliative. It serves to make them feel more grown up. For many others, sex remains an isolated function in which they are technically proficient but without the accompanying sense of emotional involvement. Others find it difficult, in spite of the recent modification of some of society's attitudes, to function without a sense of guilt. This is a real problem facing many adolescents because the sense of pressure and the need for some discharge is quite real.⁵

Among the different reasons given by those who advocate premarital intercourse - usually without much elaboration - [one form] calls on data from psychopathology and psychotherapy to argue that the sexual repressions and inhibitions bred by premarital continence are psychologically harmful....

[Hugh Hefner has popularized the argument] that the "coital drive" is natural in the sense that it is compulsive, part of a normal individual's functioning like digesting or breathing in *The Playboy Philosophy*, [he] compares sex to a physical hunger.⁶

...our obvious cultural obsession with sex takes the form of a clinical therapeutic that states: personal self-fulfilment is impossible without an active sex life.⁷

Many young people are physically capable of sexual relations, but are not yet ready to meet all

5. Richard C. Simons, M.D., ed., *Understanding Human Behavior in Health and Illness* (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 3rd ed. 1985), Ch. 26 "Puberty and the Adolescent" by Melvin A. Scharfman, M.D., 265.

6. Guindon (see note 1), 385. Guindon does not hold these views himself.

7. Richard McCormick, "Premarital Sexual Relations", in his *Notes on Moral Theology: 1965 Through 1980* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1981), 449. He does not hold this view himself.

the responsibilities of marriage. In our modern culture many people do not marry until ten, fifteen or more years after puberty, or do not marry at all, for various reasons. Some would argue that sex is natural and healthy, whether one is married or not. The situation of those mentally disabled people who are capable of genital sexual relations but are not capable of meeting all the responsibilities of marriage is in some ways analogous to the situation of many young people. With regard to sexuality and mentally handicapped people, Jean Vanier says in part:

I know of staff members of institutions who, on the grounds of furthering the well-being and liberation of handicapped people, believe without question that it is right to encourage indiscriminate sexual relations, regularly handing out contraceptives and advocating abortion in the case of an 'accident'. Physical union comes to be considered as the normal expression of a relationship. There are even theories advanced which advocate the utilization of genital sexuality as a 'therapy'.⁸

A Response

Although the views presented above in this section are not all exactly the same, they are all basically along the lines that premarital sex is natural or healthy. Sexual relations including premarital intercourse are seen as a natural human body function and as a 'need', as necessary or important for self-fulfillment. As such, some people argue that premarital sexual intercourse is good or healthy, whether or not affection and/or love are present between the parties (see F below regarding the argument that premarital sex is all right if the couple love each other). I will now respond to the general argument that premarital sexual intercourse is natural or healthy.

With regard to whether or not premarital sexual intercourse is natural or healthy, we can first of all consider whether or not it is a 'need' or necessary for human survival, health or fulfillment.

8. Jean Vanier, *Man and Woman He Made Them* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 151. He does not hold this position himself.

In discussing what it means to be a human person and healthy, Ashley and O'Rourke distinguish various interrelated dimensions of human beings and corresponding levels of human needs. These include our biological, psychological, social, spiritual and creative dimensions and needs.⁹

With regard to our biological dimension, it is not necessary that all men and women have sexual relations for our species, a sexually differentiated species, to survive. Since there are more than enough married people having sexual relations and children, it is not necessary for the survival of our species that unmarried people, including those in premarital relationships, have sexual relations and children. Moreover, as we considered in Ch. 6.F, loving committed marriages are best suited to meeting the needs of children. Sexual relations are also not a biological need of the individual human being like food and oxygen. It is not necessary that a person have sexual relations to survive or be biologically healthy. Many celibate people are healthy and live a long life. Consider also the following by Hanna Klaus, M.D.:

Sexual revolution or not, most women, far from being able to live without men, act as if all that is needed to pacify males is to be sexually available. There seems to be an unquestioned assumption that whenever a man has an urge for sexual intercourse - really for sexual release - he has to be able to satisfy that urge within the context of sexual intercourse. This is nonsense. While it is true that the seminal reservoir begins to signal for release when the volume reaches 3 ml., nature has other ways of accommodating the need: apart from sexual intercourse and masturbation, nocturnal emission relieves the pressure, as does retrograde emptying of the reservoir which drains semen off with the morning urine without the man's being aware of it. And yet, our whole society has bought into the

9. Benedict Ashley and Kevin O'Rourke, *Ethics of Health Care: An Introductory Textbook* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2nd ed. 1994), Chs. 1 and 2.

notion that sexual release via sexual intercourse or masturbation is mandatory.¹⁰

(Masturbation is treated in Ch. 8.A below)

It is also not necessary that a person have sexual relations to meet his or her other genuine needs (psychological, social, spiritual and creative), or to be healthy and fulfilled as a person. Many celibate people of both sexes and various ages are healthy and fulfilled in a holistic sense. Indeed, many celibate people are healthier (biologically, psychologically, socially and spiritually) and happier than many people who engage in sexual relations regularly (e.g., many promiscuous people, prostitutes and johns, and even many married people¹¹). Along these lines, Fr. Ron Rolheiser, a celibate priest, correctly notes that, "We can live with sex [genital sexual relations] or without it, but we cannot live without community, family, friendship, and creativity."¹² Moreover, as we considered in Ch. 6, premarital sexual abstinence has many advantages, whereas premarital sexual relations have many actual and possible harmful consequences in terms of health, and relationships with others including God. Premarital sexual relations violate the dignity and integrity of those involved and are counterproductive with respect to integral human fulfillment.

With regard to the claim of some that premarital continence is unhealthy, Guindon, who surveys much of the relevant literature, says, "I would like to see the evidence", and "the evidence is that the

10. Hanna Klaus, M.D., "The Existential Isolation of Contraception", *Linacre Quarterly*, Nov. 1993, 29-30.

11. Jeanette Lauer and Robert Lauer, "Marriages Made to Last", *Psychology Today*, June 1985, 22-26, surveyed 300 couples with successful marriages and found that the three most frequent reasons respondents gave were, "My spouse is my best friend", "I like my spouse as a person", and "Marriage is a long-term commitment", whereas "We agree about our sex life" was way down on the list for both men and women.

12. Ron Rolheiser, omi, "Sexuality is More Than Just Sex", *Western Catholic Reporter* (Edmonton, Canada), May 6, 1985, 5.

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."¹³

Concerning those who approach genital sex as a means to intimacy, feeling close to another, emotional contact, overcoming loneliness and/or self-worth, I would like to first of all share the following experience of a young graduate student, as reported by Ferder and Heagle:

I had been dating someone new, and I was telling a coworker about it. She listened with interest as I described the things my date and I had been doing. But she grew impatient as I spoke of hiking, fireside conversations, and long walks by the lake. After a few minutes, she burst out asking, "Have you been intimate yet?" I knew she wasn't asking about the depth of our sharing. She wanted to know if we had been to bed.¹⁴

Ferder and Heagle see the above experience as an example of the common tendency to confuse genital activity and genuine intimacy. They say that having sex and being physically naked with someone does not require self-disclosure, honesty, trust, caring, mutuality, or fidelity. If intimacy is synonymous with genital experience, then when sex is over, so is 'intimacy'. They understand genuine intimacy as something that is experienced gradually and deepens as mutual self-disclosure increases in friendship, mutual honesty, respect, trust, caring, forgiveness and fidelity.

With regard to the common confusion concerning sex and our real needs, consider also the following by Rolheiser:

Our irrepressible longing is for community, family, friendship, and creativity. Sexuality is the hunger

13. Guindon (see note 1), 386 and 389 respectively. Cf., e.g., also Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright, *How to Unlock the Secrets of Love, Sex and Marriage* (Westwood, New Jersey: Barbour Books, 1981), 54-5.

14. Fran Ferder and John Heagle, *Your Sexual Self: Pathway to Authentic Intimacy* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1992), 158 (see all of Ch. 10).

and energy for them.

Having sex must always be understood within this context. It can help or harm. It helps when it fosters community, family, friendship, and creativity. It harms when it blocks them. Given the contours of our personalities and our social lives, it appears impossible that, outside of a relationship of love, permanent commitment, and marriage, having sex can foster community, family, and friendship.

Experience tends to bear this out. Severing the tie between sex and marriage has not translated into more friendship, more community, more family, and more love. We are lonelier than ever.¹⁵

McDowell and Day also note that many insecure young people mistakenly use premarital sex to try to increase their sense of self-worth. This is counterproductive. The breakdown of the family tends to compound this problem. With respect to this they say in part:

Apart from marriage, there is no security [in a sexual relationship]. There may be a spoken commitment, but if one partner refuses to make the commitment final through marriage, words are just words. Sex without commitment automatically bypasses the stages of acceptance, security and significance, and goes straight to putting someone on a performance basis. That person is not accepted as being a unique person who is loved no matter what, but instead has value only as he or she performs and puts out. It is degrading and dehumanizing....¹⁶

With regard to whether or not premarital sexual relations are 'natural' or not, we should consider not only human physical capacities such as to have genital sexual relations, but also the human capacity to be aware of and respond to morally relevant personal goods (or values). Morally relevant goods that pertain to human sexuality include the dignity of persons, justice, friendship,

15. Rolheiser (see note 12 above).

16. McDowell and Day (see note 1), 124. See also Ch. 6.E above under "Some Other Problems Commonly Experienced by the Parties to Premarital Sex".

self-giving love, truth, fidelity, marriage, the sacredness of human life, human health, procreation, responsible parenthood, and God. As personal subjects (contrast non-personal beings) we are called to live as responsible moral agents, to respect and promote such goods, according to the requirements of a properly ordered love.(cf. Chs. 1-6 above)

Therefore, views that attempt to justify premarital sexual relations as merely a "natural instinct", or as "really nothing" or "no big deal", trivialize human sexuality. Such views fail to take into account the important personal goods or values that are always involved with human sexuality.

With regard to such views, consider, for example, the following by von Hildebrand:

To approach sex as a mere instinct like hunger and thirst destroys the possibility of the great and deep experience of the bodily union as the fulfillment of an ultimate spousal love and a full self-donation. If I say "it destroys it," I do not mean that a person who has this approach may not convert himself later on through a great love and radically change his approach to sex, then understanding its deep significance as the ultimate expression of spousal love....¹⁷

With regard to the view that sees even casual sexual relations as a natural human function and healthy experience that provides enjoyment and release of tension, Kosnik and others say in part:

[This reduces] human sexuality to a purely biological function and the human person to a physical pleasure machine. This radical separation of sexuality from its deeper intrapersonal and interpersonal meaning is ... dehumanizing and depersonalizing both for the individual and for society.¹⁸

There exist many healthy and moral means of relieving tension such as appropriate exercise, recreation and prayer. Using immoral means such as premarital sexual intercourse (cf. Ch. 6.B)

17. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Man and Woman* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1966), 23. Cf. Ronald Lawler, Joseph Boyle and William May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics* (Huntington, Illinois: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1985), 184.

18. Kosnik et al. (see note 4), 164.

"can generate a psychological tension that many people cannot cope with."¹⁹ McDowell and Day note that young people today live under many kinds of stress. Premarital sex may supply a temporary escape (cf. heavy drinking), but it can neither resolve stressful situations nor help one deal with stress in a mature way. They say we often feel so much stress because "we make ourselves responsible for things beyond our control." They suggest that one focus instead on what one can control such as one's actions and the quality of one's character.²⁰

Those who see sexual relations as a way of becoming mature or a passage into adulthood have a serious misunderstanding of what real human maturity and being a responsible adult mean. The measure of being a mature man or woman is not whether one has had sexual relations (many immature people and animals have had sexual relations), but whether one is a well-integrated person who acts and loves responsibly.²¹ Among other things, human maturity involves healthy self-control and waiting for the appropriate time and place for things, including having sexual relations. A premarital relationship is neither the appropriate place nor time for sexual relations. One who has premarital sexual relations voluntarily fails to love responsibly, both oneself and others in a number of significant ways.(see Ch. 6)

With regard to those who consider premarital sexual relations 'natural' because they "feel good" or make one feel that one is succeeding at something, we can note that temporary feelings do not give us the whole picture. Whether our choices and actions are really good or one is accomplishing something worthwhile needs to be considered in the long run. One also needs to consider whether

19. Wright (see note 13), 55.

20. McDowell and Day (see note 1), 85-87.

21. Cf. Paul Flaman, *Family Unity: A Christian Perspective* (Muenster, Sask.: St. Peter's Press, 2nd ed. 1986), Ch. I.7.

one's choices and actions properly respect and promote all the morally relevant values involved.(cf. Ch. 1) Voluntary premarital sexual relations are not good, truly loving, moral or responsible.(cf. Ch. 6 and 8.A-C) It is according to our true 'nature' as personal subjects to choose, act and love responsibly.²²

The above can also be applied to those people, including many young people and some mentally disabled adults, who are capable of having sexual relations but who are not yet able and perhaps will not be able for several years or never will be able to meet the responsibilities of marriage. Consider also the conclusion of Jean Vanier, who has lived and worked with mentally handicapped adults for more than twenty years, that sexually permissive attitudes, "...instead of considering and developing the capacities for love and relationship in those with a handicap ... risk imprisoning them in the search for pleasure for themselves, which finally isolates them more than ever."²³ He concludes that their engaging in genital sex without the covenant of love of marriage isolates them more from others and does not foster growth of the heart and true love. He thinks that some mildly mentally handicapped people are able to marry, but concludes that celibacy is the best option for those unable to marry. (Celibacy is treated in Ch. 8.G below.) I think that the above conclusions of Vanier can be applied in an analogous way to young people who are not ready to marry. Nonmarital sexual abstinence and waiting until marriage to have sexual relations are the 'natural' requirements of a properly ordered love of oneself and others (see Ch. 6.A-H). They also have many advantages for oneself and others (see Ch. 6.I).

22. Cf. e.g., also McDowell and Day (see note 1), 80-84.

23. Vanier (see note 8), 151. In Chs. 5-8 he gives excellent treatments of sexual integration, celibacy, both by choice and not by choice, marriage, and fecundity, with special but not exclusive interest in the mentally handicapped.

From a Christian faith perspective, the question of whether or not something is 'natural' or 'healthy', including premarital sexual intercourse, can and should be considered in the light of a holistic Christian anthropology (cf. Ch. 5). God created us as sexual beings and so heterosexual attraction is natural. In the light of human experience and God's plan, however, human sexual relations can only properly correspond to their inherent 'nuptial' and 'procreative' meanings within a loving marriage. It is 'natural' and 'healthy' for men and women to marry and have sexual relations within marriage.(cf. Ch. 5.A.2) Because of sin, however, human beings can also experience disordered desires and feelings. Nonmarital sexual relations, including premarital sexual intercourse, only seem 'natural' to some people because of the negative effects of sin, including its addictive power.(cf. Ch. 5.A.3)²⁴ Voluntary premarital sexual relations are objectively sinful. They involve a failure to love oneself and others properly in a number of significant ways as we considered in Ch. 6. If we open ourselves to God's wonderful plan of redemption, God will forgive our sins, free us from sin and all its harmful consequences, share his life and love with us, and empower us to grow in understanding and living according to his plan, including his plan for human sexuality and marriage. This includes God enabling us to grow in loving in a properly ordered way and the healing of all human relationships including premarital relationships.(cf. Ch. 5.A.5)

From a Christian faith perspective, we can learn especially from Jesus Christ, who is truly God and truly human, what it means to be fully human and mature.(cf. Ch. 5.A.4 and B) With regard to this consider the following by Quay:

If ... we wish to know the fullness of human good and not merely to inquire about those extreme

24. Cf. e.g., also John and Paula Sandford, *The Transformation of the Inner Man* (Tulsa, OK: Victory House, Inc., 1982), 274-5, who conclude, in the light of their counseling experience and Christian faith, that behind every sexual aberration or sin, including fornication, is "a flawed nature".

moral evils that would destroy our nature, it is at Jesus and, in her measure, at Mary [Jesus' mother, who was fittingly kept free from all sin by God, according to Catholic teaching] that we must look. He is the new Adam; she is the new Eve. In these two alone God's will for the human nature that He created can be seen whole and integral. If we look at human nature anywhere else, we are looking at a fallen nature. We can get a right picture of human sexuality - or anything else in our nature - only insofar as it is contained in Christ...

If, then, we are to understand that part of the universe that is ourselves, and that aspect of ourselves that is our sexuality, we can do so only if we go to Christ. For, any truly human sexual behavior is essentially an element, aspect, or component of Christian chastity.²⁵

25. Paul M. Quay, S.J., *The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality* (Evanston, IL: Credo House Books, 1985), 10-11. For an overview of Catholic teaching on Jesus and Mary, also with respect to the people of God, see CCC, nn. 422-975. With regard to why, in God's providence, young men and women are physically capable of sexual relations and why they often have strong sexual desires and emotions long before they are mature enough for marriage, Quay says in part: "A young person has to learn complete continence and to gain mastery of his sexual drives and desires before he is ready to give himself totally in marriage. Sexual intercourse is a symbol of loving self-gift of one spouse to the other. But a person who does not already possess himself, cannot give himself. If a husband is not capable of perfect self-control, he is incapable of giving himself perfectly to his wife. So, also, a wife must be mistress of her emotions and feelings if she is to yield herself in true freedom as a gift to her husband. There is many a time, moreover, when husband and wife are obliged to self-control, continence, abstinence in the strictest sense - for example, if one's spouse is ill; immediately before and after childbirth; when they are separated from each other by business... Certainly their love can be no less then; yet love must show itself at these times precisely in total abstinence from sexual activity."(88) Quay also speaks of Christian chastity as the Christian "rite of passage", saying in part: "The basic insight ... found in the rites of passage of so many different cultures ... shows itself most perfectly and finds its fulfillment in Christian chastity. The boy, through manly effort and self-sacrifice, claims his manhood by control and mastery of his sexual passion, becoming a man like Christ, the sole example of perfect manhood. The girl moves into womanhood through her control of her emotions and her still merely instinctive desires for a love whose true nature she does not yet understand, subjecting these emotions and desires to the demands of a freely chosen love for Christ in chastity. ...total continence ... is not only the sole form of chastity for the unmarried but the most perfect possible preparation of both man and woman for marriage."(89-91) With regard to the difficulty of "prolonged adolescence", the Pontifical Council for the Family also points out that "young people today tend to put off the commitment to get married for too long" (n. 33 of *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, released 27 May 1996, <http://www.ewtn.com/prepmarr.htm> and *Origins*, 4 July 1996, 99-109). The proper response to the

In Ch. 6 we considered in some detail why the virtue of chastity requires nonmarital, including premarital, sexual abstinence.

B. Some Claim it is a Right

Some people claim that individuals have a right to engage in sexual relations, as long as the individuals involved consent, whether or not they are married. With regard to this and university classroom discussions of premarital sex,²⁶ a number of my students have raised and/or held views along the following lines: premarital sex is not wrong if the people involved consent; two people have a right to share sexually and enjoy premarital sex if they both want to and consent; those who do not want to have premarital sex do not have to have it; if people want to have premarital sex and consent, even if they are not in love, it is their choice and not necessarily bad; premarital sex is a private affair that is up to the couple involved; no one else should judge them.

Consider, for example, also the view of Albert Ellis:

Every human being, just because he exists, should have the right to as much (or as little), as varied (or as monotonous), as intense (or as mild), as enduring (or as brief) sex enjoyments as he prefers - as long as, in the process of acquiring these preferred satisfactions, he does not needlessly, forcefully, or unfairly interfere with the sexual (or non-sexual) rights and satisfactions of others.²⁷

difficulty of "prolonged adolescence" is, therefore, not premature sexual activity, but good preparation for marriage (see Ch. 8.F) and education in chastity (see Ch. 9.D), which ideally begin in appropriate ways even before the period of adolescence (see also Ch. 9.B).

26. In Christian theology courses on human sexuality and marriage, which I have taught regularly at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, since 1983.

27. Albert Ellis, *Sex Without Guilt* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1958), 189-90. Cf. Lester Kirkendall, "A New Bill of Sexual Rights and Responsibilities", *The Humanist*, Jan./Feb. 1976, 5, "The satisfaction of intimate body responsiveness is the right of everyone throughout life.", as cited

The above views with regard to sexual relations, including premarital sex, are in some ways similar to the abortion on demand position or the pro-choice position with regard to a woman having an abortion.²⁸ (My position on abortion is presented in Ch. 6.E above under "Premarital Pregnancy".) They basically hold that one has a right to whatever one wants or chooses as long as it does not harm anyone else or interfere with another's rights. Compare also:

The ethic of radical individualism [which] is summed up in the principle, "I have a right to live my own life as long as I don't hurt anybody else"; "hurt" meaning direct harm by bodily injury or damage or theft of private property... According to this ethic, society exists only as a means to protect one individual from another, so as to leave each to pursue his or her private purposes. Moreover, any claim of one human being on another that is not contractual goes beyond the right to be let alone and is therefore unethical. Ethical behavior becomes the consistent pursuit of self-interest within a minimal code of law and contract enforcement....²⁹

A Response

It is beyond the purposes of this section to give a comprehensive treatment of the complex issue of human rights. Here only a number of points will be made to respond to the above claims that hold that anyone who wants to have premarital sexual relations has a right to these, provided that those involved consent and no one is hurt. With regard to basic human rights Leah Curtin says in part:

in Kosnik et al. (see note 4), 163.

28. Cf., e.g., Wendell W. Watters, "Abortion and Morality", in John E. Thomas, *Matters of Life and Death* (Toronto: Samuel-Stevens, 1978), 22-36; and Lawrence H. Tribe, *Abortion: The Clash of Absolutes* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991).

29. Benedict Ashley and Kevin O'Rourke, *Healthcare Ethics: A Theological Analysis* (St. Louis.: The Catholic Health Association of the United States, 3rd ed. 1989), 14.

A human right is a person's just due.... What is a person's just due? How is it determined.

....we have certain needs that must be met if we are to continue to be. On the physiological level, we must have food, water, rest, shelter and protection from those elements (animate and inanimate) that could harm us. On the emotional, social, and intellectual levels we need to love and be loved, to learn and teach, to understand and be understood....

These fundamental, shared needs form a foundation for a concept of universal human rights. That is, human rights belong to all human beings because fundamental human needs are found in all human beings.... The ability to perceive the needs of others is, perhaps, the surest measure of our own maturity - our coming of age as *humane* beings....

....there seem to be no limits to human wants. Part of the problem is that we confuse what human beings need with what they want. So it is with human rights. Understandably, human beings want their desires fulfilled too. Thus, it has become quite popular to dress human wants in rights rhetoric and to claim them as fundamental human needs. The result is that the concept of human rights has been cheapened and subsequently too little respected....

For at least three reasons, the concept of human rights must be limited to fundamental human needs only:

1. It is impossible to fulfill the unlimited desires of human beings.
2. It is inappropriate to predicate a *duty* to do the impossible.
3. The dilution of fundamental human needs with mere wants poses a threat to the most basic rights of all humans by expanding them beyond the limits of what reasonably can be provided....

...human need exists whether or not others recognize this need....

It is only because human rights exist independently of either law or public opinion that blacks *justly* can claim equal rights with whites, that women *justly* can claim equal rights with men, and that the weak *justly* can claim equal rights with the strong....

.... Respecting rights means that we assume certain obligations toward other human beings....

Each fundamental right carries with it corollary duties that impinge on one's self as well as on others....³⁰

The distinguished Twentieth Century philosopher Jacques Maritain also speaks of rights being related to responsibilities. He says that one has a right to the means necessary to fulfill one's responsibilities.³¹ Anyone capable of responsibility has certain responsibilities to oneself and others. For example, parents have a responsibility to respect the rights of their children and to do their best to meet their own needs and those of their young children. Parents and others have a right to whatever they need to fulfill their responsibilities to themselves and others.

In the light of the above, no person has or can claim a legitimate right to have premarital sexual relations. Premarital sexual relations are not necessary to meet any real biological or other needs of human beings (see A above). No person has a responsibility to have premarital sexual relations. Rather, choosing to have premarital sexual relations always involves acting irresponsibly in serious ways with respect to oneself and others. Premarital sexual relations involve various actual and possible harmful consequences for oneself and others. They are not conducive but counterproductive to integral human fulfillment.(see Ch. 6 above).

With regard to our topics, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations Organization is pertinent, in particular:

Article 16. 1) Men and women of full age, without an[y] limitation due to race, nationality or

30. Leah Curtin, M.S., M.A., R.N., FAAN, and M. Josephine Flaherty, Ph.D., R.N., *Nursing Ethics: Theories and Pragmatics* (Bowie, MA: Brady Communications Co., Inc., 1982), 4-7, 14-15, and 17. Cf. Ashley and O'Rourke (see note 29), Chs. 1-6.

31. See Jacques Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1944). See, e.g., also H. Johnston, "Right and Rights", NCE, vol. 12, 496-8, for a good overview of rights, including an historical survey and certain distinctions such as between natural rights and civil rights.

religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. 2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. 3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state.

Article 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion...

Article 25. 1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability ... or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. 2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same protection.

Article 26. 1) Everyone has the right to education.... 2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups....

Article 29. 1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. 2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society....³²

The above Declaration in no place speaks of a "right" to have premarital sex, but of "the right

32. From Ashley and O'Rourke (see note 9), 256-9. An "ecumenical search for ethical consensus in regard to needs and rights has its solid legal and political foundations in the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), signed by most of the countries of the world and supported by all the major religions as well as by humanists and Marxists... Catholics have been urged by all the recent popes to support this declaration as a sound basis for social justice...."(9) Cf. the *Charter of the Rights of the Family* by the Holy See (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1983).

to marry and to found a family". Premarital sexual relations are not conducive, whereas marriage is conducive, to responding properly to the real needs of men, women and children (see A above, Ch. 6 and 8.A-C).

The "right to freedom of conscience" does not mean that one is free to "do" whatever one wants. No one has a "right" to act irresponsibly. Everyone capable of moral responsibility has a basic human responsibility to seek the truth, to try to form his or her conscience correctly, and to act responsibly.(see Ch. 1) The United Nations' Declaration (see above) also speaks of everyone having "duties to the community" and his or her freedom being subject to "...meeting the just requirements of morality ... and the general welfare in a democratic society."(Article 29) Since choosing to have premarital sexual relations is objectively immoral and involves acting irresponsibly in a number of serious ways with respect to oneself and others (see Ch. 6), no one has a "right" to choose to have premarital sexual relations, even if those involved consent.

Discerning and communicating the truth about the objective irresponsibility of choosing to have premarital sexual relations does not in itself involve intolerance or unfair judging of people. As we have considered above, whether or not people who behave irresponsibly are subjectively culpable depends on whether or not they are aware the behavior is irresponsible and they freely choose it. This applies not only to premarital sexual relations, but to all irresponsible behaviors including direct abortion. (See Ch. 5.A.3, 4th and 3rd last paragraphs; Ch. 6.B, last paragraph; the treatment of abortion in Ch. 6.E under "Premarital Pregnancy"; and Ch. 6.K regarding forgiveness and hope.)

From a faith perspective, a Christian can also consider oneself including one's body as a member of the body of Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit, and belonging to God. Because of this and God's plan concerning human sexuality and marriage, only a man and a woman who are married

to each other have a "right" to have sexual relations with each other.(cf. 1 Cor 6:12-7:9; and Chs. 2.B.2 and 6.H) Even spouses, however, do not have unlimited freedom in the sexual area. They are called to respect their respective rights, including conjugal rights, their great dignity as persons, and the inherent unitive and procreative meanings of human sexuality. All people capable of responsibility, whether married or unmarried, have a responsibility to live according to the requirements of a properly ordered love, in the sexual and other areas of their lives.(cf. Ch. 5 and Ch. 6.A)³³

C. Some "Reasons" not Related to a Mutually Caring Relationship

With regard to the above two general arguments that sexual relations, including premarital sexual intercourse, are "natural" or a "right", some people seek to justify sexual relations without a mutually caring relationship. Some people argue for and/or engage in casual sex or sex merely for "fun" or "recreation".³⁴ Researchers Bibby and Posterski surveyed a sample of 3,600 Canadian teenagers (15-19 years old) in 1984 and found that:

Eleven percent [19% males and 3% females] of the teenage population endorse having *sexual relations* on the first date. Another 42% [51% males and 33% females], for a total of *half of Canada's teenagers*, feel that intercourse is appropriate after a few dates.[if the two people like each other]³⁵

33. See Lawler, Boyle and May (see note 17), Chs. 7 and 8, for a good treatment of the requirements of chastity, both within and outside marriage.

34. Regarding recreational sex compare Alex Comfort, *More Joy: A Lovemaking Companion to the Joy of Sex* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1974), 157.

35. Reginald W. Bibby and Donald C. Posterski, *The Emerging Generation* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1985), 75-77. They also found that 80% of the Canadian young people surveyed (84% males and 77% females) hold that, "Sex before marriage is all right when people love each other".(82) We will consider this latter view in section F of this chapter.

They did a similar survey in 1992 and found that "there had been virtually no change in attitudes [about sex] over the past decade *for either males or females.*"³⁶

With regard to some "reasons" for having premarital sexual relations not related to a mutually caring relationship, consider the following by several young people in their own words:

Sex is a cheap thrill. Having sex is one date that costs very little money and can be done almost anywhere. Life is empty anyway, so "go for it!"

An insecure person is afraid of losing the person of his (or her) affections and may see sex as a way to hold on to him. Using sex for manipulation and control is also typical of insecure people.

Many people try to escape their problems - problems they may be having with friends, or, more likely, with their families - by having sex.

There were no feelings at all, not for each other and not for ourselves. We were basically doing it because it was cool...

Curiosity is one of the reasons teenagers become sexually active. They want to know what it is like. They hear about it in songs, read about it in books and magazines, and watch it on TV and in the movies. With their curiosity aroused, they go out to try it for themselves.³⁷

With respect to ulterior motives or "reasons" for having premarital sexual relations, some girls or women deliberately have nonmarital sexual relations with the goal of getting pregnant and having a baby. The Alan Guttmacher Institute reports some eighty-five percent of American teenage pregnancies as unintended. This implies that some fifteen percent are intended. The Institute notes

36. Reginald W. Bibby and Donald C. Posterski, *Teen Trends: A Nation in Motion* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, 1992), 28.

37. From McDowell and Day (see note 1), 84, 117-118, 127, 128, and 153, respectively.

that "60% of intended pregnancies among women under age 20 occur among unmarried women."³⁸

With regard to this consider also the following:

....[One 17 year old American girl] says, "My life was getting boring. I wanted a baby."

For young girls trapped in poverty, life offers few opportunities apart from getting pregnant. High school may seem pointless. Even graduation is little guarantee of a job.... Pregnancy becomes one of the few accessible means of fulfillment. "Nobody gets more attention than a little girl who's pregnant," observes Bishop Earl Paulk of ... a Protestant church in Atlanta that sponsors a program for pregnant teens....³⁹

Some unmarried women past the teenage years, including educated women with good careers, also deliberately intend to get pregnant and raise a child.⁴⁰ Although some single women choose to become mothers by being artificially inseminated, others choose to be inseminated the "natural" way, sometimes by a man for whom they care very little. If these women marry in the future, then these sexual relations would be "premarital". Some people "use" sexual relations for various other purposes such as for pleasure or to make money (e.g. johns or pimps and prostitutes). Such sex is not necessarily "premarital", but might be, for example, if the john or prostitute later gets married.

A Response

The responses given in A and B above also provide a basis to show why human sexual relations for any "reason" without a mutually caring relationship are unjustified and irresponsible. Such

38. The Alan Guttmacher Institute, *Sex and America's Teenagers* (New York: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994), 43.

39. Claudia Wallis, "Children Having Children: Teen Pregnancy in America" (Cover Story), *Time*, Dec. 9, 1985, 84.

40. Cf., e.g., Lynn Smith, "More women choosing motherhood - without men", *The Press Democrat*, Oct. 8, 1992, A14.

sexual activity is exploitive. It involves a selfish or disordered love since it fails to love oneself and others properly (see Ch. 6). Such sexual activity involves a serious lack of appreciation or a serious disregard of our great dignity as human persons, including the great personal dignity of our bodies and sexuality.

Our bodies and sexuality are an integral part of who we are as male or female persons. Human heterosexual genital relations including intercourse involve a total physical giving and receiving. They are, therefore, a "lie" if the man and woman have not totally given themselves to each other by means of a reciprocal commitment without reservations. As we have considered above (Chs. 5 and 6.B and E), human sexual relations have inherent total reciprocal giving and receiving / unitive / 'nuptial' and procreative meanings. Trying to justify casual sex merely for "fun" or "recreation", like a game of racquetball, reflects a very superficial view of human sexuality. This view which trivializes and devalues the beautiful mystery of human sexuality "is totally at odds with common human experience."⁴¹ Sexual relations within a mutually caring, loving and committed marriage can certainly be "fun", but they can also respect the personal dignity of the spouses and the inherent 'nuptial' and procreative meanings of human sexuality.

Guindon notes that one of the principal factors fostering sexual promiscuity "is a family background marked by the absence of bonds of mutual understanding, reciprocal affection, and confidence." He speaks of some young people "who are not affectively committed to each other and who are not ready to be, [and who] use the ultimate expression of the body to say things they really do not and cannot mean." Ironically, they often practice such deceit after praising honesty and denouncing deceit in other areas of life such as in politics. He says, too, that:

41. Lawler, Boyle and May (see note 17), 184.

Serious studies tend to establish that the pretence of a strong sex drive among teenagers is just another myth. Promiscuous behavior is rather the result of emotional troubles, of feelings of inadequacy and of other similar personality problems. School drop-outs, those who cannot stick to a job, those addicted to tobacco, alcohol, drugs, profanity, and wishful thinking alike - these are the very prototype of those who indulge in premarital, promiscuous sex. The people least likely to involve themselves in promiscuous sex are persons who feel most secure in their sexual identity....⁴²

With regard to using sexual relations to try to escape from one's personal or relational problems, or as a "cheap thrill", McDowell and Day say in part:

Rather than try to blot problems out of our minds through sex or any other means, we need to deal with them. The first step is to acknowledge that problems exist and are having an effect on us. Next, we should try to understand why the problems exist. Then we need to seek counsel from someone who can help us through them.

God gives Christians three resources for bringing about change in our lives: the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit and the body of Christ. We need to utilize those resources as much as we can. They are free and come in unlimited supplies. They will help us resolve problems so we don't have to run from them or seek some other escape such as premarital or extramarital sex.

....the true pleasure of sex cannot be enjoyed unless each can be completely open with the other. There must be complete trust, complete commitment, complete acceptance. Such attitudes are possible only in marriage. It is worth waiting for.⁴³

They say, too, that a young unmarried woman who wants "a baby to fill her need for someone

42. Guindon (see note 1), 413-15. Cf. Eshleman (see note 3), 370, for a "Summary of major factors apparently associated with nonmarital intercourse among adolescents". Among these, for both males and females, are "Low education goals and poor educational achievement", "Deviant attitudes", and "Strained parent-child relationships and little parent-child communication".

43. McDowell and Day (see note 1), 127 and 85, respectively.

to love and to demand love from is far too immature to be a proper mother. She expects a child to solve her self-image problem, which puts unrealistic expectations on the baby even before it is born."⁴⁴ Even if the woman is educated and has a good career, if she deliberately tries to get pregnant and have a child outside a loving committed marriage, she fails to love the child properly (see Ch. 6.F).

With regard to engaging in sexual activity, including premarital sexual intercourse, or any other activity to satisfy one's curiosity, to see what it is like or to have the experience, one should ask whether or not the action is moral or immoral. It is good to experience acting morally, but it is not good to experience acting immorally. Consider, for example, the experiences of deliberately killing an innocent person who is not an unjust aggressor, shooting a gun at a target and skiing. To intentionally kill an innocent person to have the experience or to see what it feels like is definitely immoral and can never be approved.⁴⁵ Shooting a gun at a target or skiing are not immoral kinds of acts in themselves and can be moral activities provided that one does them for good motives and there are no extenuating circumstances which would make them immoral (e.g., you stole the bullets or the skis). Since voluntary premarital sexual intercourse is always immoral, and fails to love oneself and others properly (see Ch. 6.B-H), it, as well as any other immoral activity, can not be justified to satisfy curiosity.

Premarital sexual relations also can not be justified as a means to try to manipulate or control someone, or to try to be popular or cool, or as a means to pleasure or money, etc. Nor can they be

44. Ibid., 87-8.

45. This example is not merely a hypothetical one. Compare the case of Ronald A. Smith, a man from Red Deer, Canada, who killed two young men of Browning, Montana, in 1982 to see what it felt like. See, e.g., the related news stories from the Canadian Press News Service, the national General News on February 24, 1983, 20:34 EST.

justified if the parties merely like each other. Choosing to have premarital sexual relations, as we considered in Ch. 6, involves a failure to love oneself and others in a number of significant ways. This is even more evident when such sexual relations are outside a mutually caring relationship such as when they are engaged in merely for pleasure, or as a means to money, or to manipulate and control someone.⁴⁶ Premarital sexual relations are irresponsible and involve various actual and possible harmful consequences for oneself and others. (see Ch. 6.D-H) They certainly are not "cool".

From a Christian perspective, it is obvious that voluntary premarital sexual relations outside a mutually caring relationship are contrary to following Jesus, including trying to live his commandment to "...love one another as I have loved you..." (Jn 15:12-13; cf. 13:34-5) Jesus always cared for the true good of people and respected them as persons. Not caring for people is not conducive to our transformation in Christ and union with God. (see Ch. 5.B)

D. Some Say Living Together is a Good Way

to Test or Prepare for Marriage

Many unmarried couples who live together see cohabitation "as a test of marital compatibility" or as "preparation for marriage".⁴⁷ Although some people who cohabit see it as a relationship alternative or a substitute for marriage (see H below regarding those who reject marriage), many,

46. Cf. Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 2, *Living A Christian Life* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993), 651-3.

47. Alfred DeMaris and Gerald R. Leslie, "Cohabitation with the Future Spouse: Its Influence upon Marital Satisfaction and Communication", *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Feb. 1984, 77.

including most young people, think “it is a good idea to live with a person before marrying”.⁴⁸

In recent years, in countries such as the United States and Canada, there has been a dramatic increase in unmarried couples living together. For example, in the United States, there were more than four million couples living together by 1997, compared to less than half a million in 1960. More than “half of all first marriages are now preceded by cohabitation, compared to virtually none earlier in the century.”⁴⁹ Besides cohabitation defined in terms of “sharing the same residence”, many couples engage in “quasi-cohabitation”: they continue to maintain separate residences, but spend most of their free time and nights together. This kind of arrangement is especially prevalent among college students.⁵⁰ There exist different kinds of nonmarital cohabitation arrangements:

The arrangement, among the young or the old, may or may not be marriage-oriented, may be the beginning of a long-range life-style or be for short-term convenience, may or may not involve intimate, unrestricted sexual union, and may or may not include the knowledge of parents among youths or perhaps the knowledge of the children among older people.

48. David Popenoe, Ph.D., and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, Ph.D., *Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know About Cohabitation Before Marriage: A Comprehensive Review of Recent Research* (The National Marriage Project on-line publication <<http://marriage.rutgers.edu/SWLT.htm>>, Jan. 1999). Cf. Susannah J. Wilson, “Alternatives to Traditional Marriage”, in Maureen Baker, ed., *Families: Changing Trends in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 2nd ed. 1990), 100-3; and Sharon S. Brehm, *Intimate Relationships* (McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1985), 14-17.

49. Popenoe and Whitehead (see note 48), referring to the U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998 report, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1997* [Return]. Wilson (see note 48), 100, speaks of similar increases in Canada. Based on Statistics Canada reports, Bibby and Posterski (see note 36), 35, say 12 percent of all couples in Canada were living common-law by 1990. According to the 1996 Canadian Census, 920,640 couples or about 14 percent of all couples were living common-law: see Statistics Canada website <<http://www.statcan.ca>>. With regard to the reporting of statistics in my book, see the comments in note 25 of Ch. 6.

50. Brehm (see note 48), 15.

Nearly 30 percent of all households with two unrelated adults [in the U.S.] were under age twenty-five, about 40 percent were age twenty-five to thirty-four, about 23 percent were from thirty-five to sixty-four, and about 7 percent were age sixty-five and over.⁵¹

Because cohabitation is not usually [permanent]..., the number of couples who have *ever* cohabited is far greater than the number currently living together....

.... In Canada, first unions [i.e. of unmarried cohabitation] at the time of the Family History Survey [1984] had lasted an average of 4.3 years. Among couples who had previously cohabited, 63 percent married after an average of 2.3 years together; 35 percent separated after an average of 3 years. The remaining 2 percent of unions ended with the death of one of the partners...⁵²

More recently (1998) in the United States it is reported that the "Median duration of cohabition is 1.3 years." Moreover, "Forty percent of cohabiting households include children, either the children of the relationship or the children that one or both partners bring to the relationship."⁵³

Although men and women of various ages cohabit nonmaritally with sexual relations for various reasons, in the light of our general topics of "premarital sex and love", the main concern here is with those who will marry in the future, whether or not they hope or plan to marry. With regard to the many people who cohabit before they marry, Larsen, a sociologist, says, "They are trying it out to

51. Eshleman (see note 3), 336 and 338.

52. Wilson (see note 48), 100 and 102; cf. Bibby and Posterski (see note 36), 35, who, referring to Statistics Canada, say that, "... in 1990, despite the fact that almost 30 per cent of adults said they had lived in at least one common-law relationship during their lives (almost 10 per cent had lived in two or more), only eight per cent currently were."

53. NCCB (National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States) Marriage and Family Committee, "Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples: Information Report", *Origens*, 16 Sept. 1999, 216. It is beyond the scope of this book to give a comprehensive treatment of all the phenomena regarding unmarried cohabitation. Nevertheless, some information from other sources and some points that are relevant to our topics will be provided here.

see if they want to turn the relationship into marriage. They expect cohabiting will prepare them for it. Women particularly view living together as a chance to isolate any problems." Along these lines, some people today are saying things such as: "I wouldn't dream of marrying someone I hadn't lived with... That's like buying shoes you haven't tried on."; and "For now we're not sure about marriage. With the high divorce rate, it makes you wonder if it's worth it. Anyway, we figure that living together will help us decide if marriage would ever be for us." According to Burtchaell, "The popular theory is that they [a man and woman who move in together] are wise to try out marriage before taking any irrevocable decisions. What better test of marriage?"⁵⁴

A Response

The "findings" of research with regard to the consequences of unmarried cohabitation on future marital satisfaction and divorce rates in general suggest that living together before marriage either has no effect or a negative effect, often a significant negative effect, but not a positive effect. In fact, "...no positive contribution of cohabitation to marriage has ...ever been found."⁵⁵ This counters the contention that living together is a good way to test or prepare for marriage.

For example, DeMaris and Leslie found that:

[Those who had cohabited before marriage, as compared to those who had not] ...scored significantly lower in both perceived quality of marital communication and marital satisfaction. These differences were significant for wives in the area of communication and for both spouses in the area of marital

54. The quotes are from Lyle Larsen, as reported in "Living together is no guarantee of marital bliss, experts say", by Lesley Francis, *Edmonton Journal*, Nov. 14, 1993, A1; Joyce Brothers, "When Unmarried Couples Live Together: Is Cohabitation a True Testing Ground for Marriage?", *Reader's Digest* (Westmount, Quebec), April 1986, 41; Wright (see note 13), 67; and James Tunstead Burtchaell, *For Better, For Worse: Sober Thoughts on Passionate Promises* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 63; respectively.

55. Popenoe and Whitehead (see note 48).

satisfaction....

While other sociologists have suggested that cohabitation can serve as an effective training period for marriage ... or that cohabitation will result in improved mate selection ... these contentions are not supported by the data. The evidence accumulated to date would indicate that, while living together before marriage is increasingly becoming a common phase of courtship, cohabitation has no particular advantage over more traditional practices in assuring couple compatibility in marriage.⁵⁶

Dr. Nancy Moore Clatworthy, a sociologist, once viewed living together as a useful step in courtship. She changed her mind, however, after talking with hundreds of young people, in and around Ohio State University, in Columbus, who lived together, as well as married couples who did not live together first. Her studies in this area for more than ten years included conducting comprehensive questionnaires and studying test results. With regard to this, in an extensive interview, she says in part:

.... When I talked with couples living together, they usually reported how glad they were to be involved in the arrangement and how wonderful it was. I believed them, initially....

...in many cases, the surface answers in favor of living together were not supported by underlying feelings.... There were specific questions designed to gauge those feelings. For instance, people were asked to check off the degree of respect they felt for their partner. Those who had not lived together before marriage showed a much higher degree of respect than those who had. The same was true for individuals' own evaluation of their degree of happiness and adjustment....

56. DeMaris and Leslie (see note 47), 83. They say their study exercised more rigorous control over sample selection and "employed a somewhat more sensitive measure of marital quality than has been used previously. This was Spanier's Dyadic adjustment scale, an instrument that has been demonstrated to possess both strong reliability and validity in past research..."(78) Some more recent studies (1995 and 1998) also found that, "Cohabitors generally report lower satisfaction with marriage after they marry than do noncohabiters.": NCCB Marriage and Family Committee (see note 53), 219.

We asked questions about finances, household matters, recreation, demonstration of affection, and friends. In *every* area, the couples who had lived together before marriage disagreed more often than the couples who had not. Invariably, the couples who had married first indicated a higher degree of unity on these day-to-day matters in their marriages. But the finding that surprised me most concerned sex. Couples who had lived together before marriage disagreed about it more often. You'd assume that this would be an area that could be satisfactorily resolved in a living-together period. Apparently it isn't...

Commitment is what makes marriage, living together, or any human relationship work. Without commitment, one or the other party simply splits as soon as a problem arises. With commitment, you stay and try to work it out. The problem most often encountered in living-together situations is a difference in commitment. One partner is more committed to the relationship than the other. Since that partner is frequently the girl, she runs more of a risk of being badly hurt....

...statistically, you're much better off marrying than living together. The rate of breakup of living-together arrangements is much higher....

.... In our study we found that living-together relationships break up for the same reasons marriages do. We found, too, that the emotional impact of the breakup is similar to that of divorce....

.... For people who are in love, anything less than a full commitment is a cop-out....

When I began doing research on the subject of living together, I was predisposed toward it. I'd been listening to young people who were living together tell me how wonderful it was. They still tell me that. People can always justify what they have done. But the test results showed something different from what they were saying. If it's so wonderful, I asked myself, why are all these things wrong with it?⁵⁷

57. Dr. Nancy Moore Clatworthy, as cited in: "The Case Against Living Together" by Charles and Bonnie Remsberg, *Seventeen*, Nov. 1977, 132-3 and 162-3. Dr. Clatworthy's findings and conclusions continue to be supported by more recent studies. See, e.g., the many studies referred to by Popenoe and Whitehead (see note 48); NCCB Marriage and Family Committee (see note 53);

A number of reports indicate that the rate of divorce and breakup is significantly higher for those who have lived together before marriage as compared to those who did not live together before marriage. For example, DeMaris and Leslie found in a study of 13,000 people that "those who lived together before marriage were twice as likely to get divorced within the first ten years of marriage as those who had not"; "In the United States the risk of divorce is 50 percent higher for cohabitators than noncohabitators. In some Western European countries, it is estimated to be 80 percent higher"; and "...academic and government studies of large samplings of common-law couples consistently find that 80 to 85 per cent of couples who start out by living together fail to make it through life together. Among couples who never lived together before wedding one another, the failure rate is under 20 per cent."⁵⁸

With regard to the high rates of separation for couples who have cohabited before or without marriage, we can also note that according to Macklin, research suggests that:

...living together, married or unmarried, has a significant influence on one's daily living patterns, and hence, a separation will inevitably involve important changes even if the couple is not married and has tried to avoid large monetary investments in the relationship. Separating if married is difficult, but one should not assume that separating after cohabiting will be easy.

and the All About Cohabiting Before Marriage web site <<http://members.aol.com/cohabiting>>.

58. The quotes are from Alfred DeMaris and Gerald R. Leslie, *Religion Report*, 6/10/88, as reported by Dinah Richard, Ph.D., *Has Sex Education Failed Our Teenagers? A Research Report* (Pomona, CA: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1990), 28; NCCB Marriage and Family Committee (see note 53), 217-18; and Lorne Gunter, "Cohabitation Costly for the Taxpayer", *Edmonton Journal*, 28 June 1998, F8; respectively. Also, among those who cohabit before marriage, in general, those who cohabit for a longer period of time, and those who cohabit more than once, have higher rates of divorce. Cf. e.g., also Popenoe and Whitehead (see note 48); Lyle E. Larson, J. Walter Goltz and Charles W. Hobart, *Families in Canada: Social Context, Continuities, and Changes* (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Canada Inc., 1994), 228-31; and Bill Dodds, "Playing House: University Research Now Backs the Catholic Church's Stand Against Living Together Before Marriage", *Columbia*, June 1999, 12-15.

Ending a common-law union can also be more complex than a legal divorce of a marriage. According to Bob Glossop, executive director of the Vanier Institute of the Family, young people generally enter a living together arrangement quite naively. After a breakup they “can be quite surprised by either their legal obligations or their lack of protection.”⁵⁹

With regard to possible reasons why living together does not provide a good preparation for marriage or a test of what marriage is really like, consider the following:

There is no binding connection in living together so, when they get married, they've never lived together in the sense of being married... What persists in cohabiting is impression management because he doesn't want her to walk out and vice versa.⁶⁰

Gershenfeld [a psychologist and president of the Couples Learning Center near Philadelphia] surveyed 100 couples who had lived together at least six months, had married each other and then divorced within five years. She learned that - before marriage - they had never discussed finances, careers, leisure activities, or children, except in the most general terms. "They had been reluctant to explore these areas," Gershenfeld said, "because they were afraid differences might mar the relationship."

Living together, the couples spoke and behaved cautiously, avoided criticism, repressed anger. But after marriage, all the hostile feelings come out. Each tries to redo the other into a more acceptable partner.

Another reason why a trial period of living together is irrelevant to the marriage experience is that

59. The quotes are from Eleanor D. Macklin, "Review of Research on Nonmarital Cohabitation in the United States", in *Exploring Intimate Lifestyles* (New York: Springer, 1978), ed. by B.I. Murstein, 216; and Glossop as cited in Sharon Adams, "A Common Breakdown: When Common-Law Relationships End, Lives Have to be Disentangled and the Fallout Can be Nasty", *Edmonton Journal*, 12 Jan. 1999, C5.

60. Larsen (see note 54).

both people *know* it's a trial period. Either can walk out.... Both may tend to be on their best behavior....

Then there's the matter of money. In a live-together arrangement, money tends to be "his" or "hers." Expenses may be shared, but the future isn't jeopardized if she spends more than she can afford on clothes or he loses continually on the horses. It's different when they're married and saving for a house and children. Then each can resent the other's extravagances.⁶¹

Cohabitors in general who marry are “less effective at conflict resolution than those who did not cohabit. Either a fear of upsetting an uncommitted relationship or the lack of need to protect a temporary relationship can be factors that lead cohabiting couples into poor patterns of conflict resolution which they then carry into marriage.” Among other things, some research has also found that domestic violence, including physical and sexual abuse of partners and children, is at least twice as common among cohabitators as it is among married partners. This pattern tends to carry over to a subsequent marriage relationship.⁶²

Rev. Burtchaell, who has counseled many young couples considering marriage, also says:

.... A cohabitating couple is, if anything, left to guess what marriage might be like, for commitment is what makes marriage, and commitment is what they have purposely avoided.

.... Today when a couple decide to move in together they are clearly deciding not to marry. They purposefully hesitate to commit themselves. They enter a relationship that is deliberately non-binding.

They dwell together, say, for five years. Then, those who have not left one another often decide to

61. Matti Gershenfeld, as reported by Brothers (see note 54), 41-2. Cf. also McDowell and Day (see note 1), 131, who say, "Living-together situations also allow a couple to avoid dealing with some of the joint decisions that married couples have to make", e.g., regarding money, property, in-laws, and usually regarding children.

62. NCCB Marriage and Family Committee (see note 53), 218-19; cf. Popenoe and Whitehead (see note 48).

have a wedding. It may be brought on by pregnancy, or by a desire to relieve the discomfort of their families, or to give some acceptable public status to their union. But after years of being together it is awkward for them to say that they are going to get married. That would repudiate what they had built together, or at least it would cast their experience into a tentative light....

.... And their problem is that they end up "officially" married without there having been an explicit and unambiguous commitment openly made. They have sidestepped into marriage. Their wedding is intended to reaffirm something, but that thing is what they have purposely avoided affirming beforehand. Every cohabiting couple I have known has had to face this handicap.... Only those who are truly free can commit themselves, and this freedom is a wrench to the sensibilities of men and women who have been going through the motions of belonging while never quite handing their selves over.⁶³

Paradoxically, living together can sometimes be a factor in a couple getting married for the wrong reasons. With regard to this, consider the following comments of Dillon, a family consultant:

.... After they've lived together six months or a year, many couples feel compelled to marry because they "feel" married, or they feel guilty for what they've put their parents through, or they need to prove their decision to live together was the right one. While they've made no public commitment, they feel that marrying is the "honorable" thing.

Sometimes, one individual may have a strong desire to marry, and the other feels he or she "owes" their partner that much. The pressure and guilt can be very strong.

Couples in any of these circumstances are basically unfree to break up, even if one or both know it's for the best. And so, unless someone helps them to see the wisdom of breaking off, they marry without real commitment to each other or their vows.... And studies indicate that cohabitating couples

63. Burtchaell (see note 54), 63-4. Cf. Wright (see note 13), 69, who say that ironically "many cohabitators seem more willing to make commitments to possessions and assigned duties than to each other."

are more likely than others to be sexually unfaithful after marriage.⁶⁴

With regard to couples who live together without marriage, various experts also say other things, that are relevant to our topics of "premarital sex and love", such as: the vast majority of unmarried cohabiting couples do not see it as equivalent to marriage; the vast majority of unmarried cohabitants and noncohabitants would like to get married at some time; up to half or more of individuals who cohabit, whether or not they hoped to get married at the time, later get married, however, they often do not marry each other; and

.... Those who actively practice their religion, whatever it is, are much less likely to cohabit than those who do not....

... **Not all couples who choose to cohabit do so specifically for sex.**

They may hope to economize by sharing living costs or see it as an escape from loneliness or to get away from an unpleasant or destructive home environment. Whatever the original motive, living together almost always eventually involves sexual intimacy. So, if a couple decides to move in together for non-sexual reasons, they should know that their physical closeness and feelings for each other almost invariably will lead to sexual intimacy.⁶⁵

Pope John Paul II has also noted that many people today would like to justify "trial marriages" and attribute "a certain value to them". He says, however, that they are "unacceptable" for human reasons, including that carrying out such an "experiment" with human beings violates their dignity, and for further reasons of Christian faith, including that

...marriage between two baptized persons is a real symbol of the union of Christ and the Church,

64. Valerie Vance Dillon, "Some Facts of Life on Cohabitation", *Columbia*, Mar. 1988, 6; cf. NCCB Marriage and Family Committee (see note 53), 218-19.

65. Dillon (see note 64), 6. Cf. Larsen (see note 53), A2; Brothers (see note 54), 44; Eshleman (see note 3), 343; Bibby and Posterski (see note 36), 30-7; Guttmacher (see note 38), 9; and NCCB Marriage and Family Committee (see note 53), 217.

which is not a temporary or 'trial' union but one which is eternally faithful. Therefore between two baptized persons there can exist only an indissoluble marriage."(FC, n. 80 - this section is quoted more fully in Ch. 4.E above)

Pope John Paul II also offers some Christian pastoral directions with regard to "trial marriages". He says, "It will be very useful to investigate the causes of this phenomenon, including its psychological and sociological aspect, in order to find the proper remedy." He speaks, too, of the need for "a true education in genuine love and in the right use of sexuality", which introduces all aspects of the person, including the bodily, "into the fullness of the mystery of Christ", and training persons from childhood to control their desires and "to establish relationships of genuine love with other people", "with the help of Christ's grace and without fear".(FC, n. 80) The great Twentieth Century Christian philosopher, Dietrich von Hildebrand also notes that since the "deepest meaning of marriage" is to be "the most perfect and intimate union of love", "Anyone who even considers trial marriage has never experienced conjugal love."⁶⁶ For a fuller treatment of loving relationships, conjugal love, marriage, and the mystery of Christ, see Ch. 5 above.

Unmarried couples who live together with sexual relations are by definition having nonmarital sexual relations. These sexual relations are often premarital, since many of the individuals involved get married to the partner or someone else. Voluntary premarital sexual relations, as we considered in Ch. 6 above, are irresponsible because they involve a failure to love oneself and others in a number of significant ways. Even if an unmarried couple *intends* to avoid all nonmarital sexual relations, however, if they live together they are, in general, acting irresponsibly by unnecessarily placing themselves in danger to commit sexual sins and by setting a bad example for others.(cf. Ch.

66. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Marriage: The Mystery of Faithful Love* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 1984), 51.

6.D regarding risks and Ch. 6.G regarding bad example) With regard to this, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops say in part:

While cohabitation, by definition, does not necessarily involve genital sexual intimacy, it does establish a situation in which avoidance of nonmarital sex becomes exceptionally difficult, particularly for those couples bound by affection or even contemplating marriage. When two people move in together without exchanging formal wedding vows and live "externally as husband and wife," they can create more difficulties for themselves and cause a potential scandal for others by weakening the sanctity and respect society has for marriage itself. In addition, empirical data raises doubts about cohabitation as a healthy or helpful preparation for married life. For these reasons, we do not believe that cohabitation that simulates marriage is appropriate behavior for Catholics or others seeking to live a Christian way of life.⁶⁷

Since many people today have acted irresponsibly with regard to nonmarital cohabitation and sexual relations, it is appropriate to again refer to Ch. 6.K above that treats forgiveness, healing and hope.

In closing this section, in the light of the above, we can conclude that living together with sexual relations is not a good way for an unmarried couple to test or prepare for marriage. Nevertheless, it is very important to prepare well for marriage and to choose a marriage partner

67. United States Catholic Conference, *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1991), 53. Cf. Grisez (see note 46), 221-4 and 232-9, regarding the love of God, oneself and others requiring one to avoid or modify occasions of sin and leading others into sin. Cf. also Pope John Paul II, FC, nn. 79-84, regarding pastoral action in certain irregular situations including "free unions", "Catholics in civil marriages", and situations that involve persons who have divorced and remarried outside the Church. See also the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Pastoral Research and Practices, *Faithful to Each Other Forever: A Catholic Handbook of Pastoral Help For Marriage Preparation* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1989), 71-7, and NCCB Marriage and Family Committee (see note 53), Part 2, for a number of very good points regarding pastoral issues with cohabiting couples in marriage preparation.

wisely. With regard to these valid concerns, as well as the many advantages of nonmarital sexual abstinence and waiting until marriage, see Ch. 8.F and G below, and Ch. 6.I above.

E. Some Say it is Important to Test Sexual Compatibility

Some people say that a couple should test their sexual compatibility before making the definitive commitment of marriage, since a good sexual relationship is normally an important part of a good marriage. "You try on a pair of shoes before you buy them. We need to experiment to see if we're sexually compatible, especially since marriage is such a big step."⁶⁸ There are various types of sexual problems including premature ejaculation and erectile dysfunction (impotency, temporary or permanent) in men, and general sexual dysfunction (frigidity) and orgasmic dysfunction in women. Some couples have disagreements over such things as how often to have sexual relations or what kinds of sexual activity are acceptable. People who experience such sexual problems in marriage often also experience negative feelings such as anxiety, disappointment, frustration, anger, poor self-esteem and depression.⁶⁹

Some people say they should practice sexual relations before marriage, so they will not look bad or be disappointed on the wedding night, and/or so they will have better sexual relations during the honeymoon and early part of marriage. For example, "Many cite statistics showing that premaritally experienced women are more likely to have orgasms on the wedding night [or soon

68. From Wright (see note 13), 63. This line of argument has been raised by a number of my university students.

69. For informative treatments on sexual problems see, e.g.: Robert Dickes, M.D., et al., "The Psychosexual Dysfunctions and Their Treatment", Ch. 36 in *Understanding Human Behavior in Health and Illness*, ed. by Richard C. Simons, M.D. (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 3rd ed. 1985); and Joseph and Lois Bird, *Marriage is for Grownups: A Mature Approach to Problems in Marriage* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1971), Ch. 4, "Sex: The Intimate Battleground".

after] than are virgins."⁷⁰ It seems that some people are concerned about such things as the relative size of the genitals.⁷¹ Some people may want to "shop around" before marriage by having sexual experiences with a variety of partners and then only marrying someone with whom one can have very good sexual relations.

In some cultures and for many families and individuals having children is considered very important. With regard to this, "In some countries, traditional customs presume that the true and proper marriage will take place only after a period of cohabitation and the birth of the first child."⁷² Some people thus think that it is important to test sexual compatibility or suitability in the sense of testing fertility before the long-term partnership or commitment of marriage is made.

A Response

The line of argument that it is important for a couple to have or at least attempt to have sexual relations before marriage to test their sexual compatibility is invalid for several reasons. First of all, no one is required to stay in a "marriage" in which one or both of the parties was incapable of having sexual intercourse upon entering the "marriage" and this incapacity can not be cured. In such rare cases, the "marriage" could be declared null or invalid, both by legitimate civil and church authorities. For example, the Catholic Church's position, as succinctly expressed in the 1983 Code of Canon Law (CIC), canon 1084, is that:

1. Antecedent and perpetual impotence to have sexual intercourse, whether on the part of the man or on that of the woman ... by its very nature invalidates marriage.

70. Wright (see note 13), 62 (see 61-3). Cf. Guindon (see note 1), 390-3.

71. Robert Dickes, M.D., "Sexual Myths and Misinformation", Ch. 34 in Simons (see note 69), 338 and 343-5.

72. Pope John Paul II, FC, n. 81.

2.If the impediment [i.e. something that renders a person incapable of validly contracting a marriage] of impotence is doubtful ... the marriage is not to be prevented nor, while the doubt persists, is it to be declared null.⁷³

It would seem, however, that a man or woman, who is incapable of having sexual intercourse prior to marriage, would most likely know about this, or at least suspect this, even if he or she had not attempted to have sexual intercourse. In such a case, it would be advisable, both for the sake of oneself and a prospective spouse, to see a competent and sensitive physician about this. It is, therefore, not necessary to have sexual relations prior to marriage to test for the incapacity to have sexual intercourse.⁷⁴ With regard to the incapacity to have sexual intercourse that arises during marriage, due to such things as an accident or disease, having premarital sexual relations can neither predict nor test for this. We can also note here that there have been remarkable advances in overcoming sexual impotency in recent years, including the use of a penile prosthesis and pump to produce an erection and the construction of an artificial vagina.⁷⁵

Next, let us consider the more common sexual problems of premature ejaculation and temporary erectile dysfunction in men, and frigidity and orgasmic dysfunction in women. If these do occur, the best place for them to be discovered and overcome or healed is in a relationship of

73. See Ch. 6.F above for an overview of Roman Catholic canon law on marriage. For a generally very good and informative commentary see: James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, and Donald E. Heintschel, *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985). Regarding civil law, see, e.g., Malcolm C. Kronby, *Canadian Family Law* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, 4th ed. 1986), Ch. 8 "Annulment". Regarding the Anglican Church see: Graham Cotter, ed., *Marrying in the Church: A Pastoral Guide* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1983), 51 (see 49-52 regarding their conditions of valid marriage).

74. Cf. Wright (see note 13), 63.

75. See, e.g., Janet Shibley Hyde, *Understanding Human Sexuality* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 3rd ed. 1986), 552; and Dickes, "Sexual Myths and Misinformation", Ch. 34 in Simons (see note 71), 343.

mutual unconditional love and commitment, that is, in a true marriage relationship. The understanding, patience, unconditional acceptance and love of a true spouse can help the person with the problem overcome his or her anxieties, fears, insecurities, and so on, which are usually at the root of the problem. Married couples who experience such problems may find it helpful to read some good literature in the area and/or to seek the help of a competent and ethical therapist. Committed married couples who experience such problems can actually grow closer to each other by dealing with them together in a loving and responsible way.⁷⁶ On the other hand, if such problems are discovered in a premarital "testing" relationship, that is, where there is no reciprocal unconditional commitment, the person with the difficulty, who has not passed the "test", may well be "discarded" by the other and wounded more deeply rather than healed.

With regard to disagreements about the frequency of sexual relations within marriage, Joseph and Lois Bird, experienced marriage counselors, say that this "seldom has anything to do with differences in physical drive." They speak, for example, of the case of a self-centered spouse who unreasonably refuses to have sexual relations, as well as the overly sexually demanding husband

76. See, e.g., Dickes and Bird (see note 69). For a Christian approach to inner healing, in particular with respect to sexual difficulties and marriage, see: John and Paula Sandford, *The Transformation of the Inner Man* (Tulsa, OK: Victory House, Inc., 1982), Chs. 15-20. With regard to sex therapy and ethical norms, Ashley and O'Rourke (see note 9), 131, say in part, "Much of the need for sex therapy could be obviated by adequate preparation for marriage. From a Christian point of view this education ought to stress the intimate relation between the various inseparable meanings of sexuality. Above all it should show how permanent self-giving is the heart of the sexual relationship. When couples learn to communicate with each other honestly and lovingly, sexual adjustment is usually easy, since intercourse is itself a form of intimate communication.... The deep personal significance of sexual life requires ethical standards for sex therapy. First, sexual therapy should aim to strengthen family unity, not merely sexual pleasure. Second, strict confidential[ity] must be observed. Third, the couple should not be asked to perform actions that are immoral or contrary to their consciences. Hence, use of surrogate partners and activities directly intended to lead to orgasm in ways other than the normal marital act must be rejected. Fourth, therapists must never engage in sexual activity with patients. Disregard for these ethical standards victimizes the patients and destroys respect for the profession."

who is "attempting to cope with fears of sexual inadequacy" and the overly sexually demanding wife who is "seeking reassurance of her husband's love or her sexual attractiveness." They also say in part:

The fact that your mate may desire sexual relations more frequently than you do does not, however, justify your conclusion that he or she is neurotic. Both of you might find a solution to the problem if you did some ruthless soul searching: Are you trying to find ways in which to love each other or only to meet your own desires? If a sincere effort to work out the problem through such rational thinking and responsible, loving action should not prove sufficient to resolve the differences, you should not hesitate to seek professional help from a psychiatrist or psychologist....⁷⁷

With regard to the question of frequency of sexual relations within marriage, Ralph Martin also says in part:

[The Apostle] Paul's instructions on sexual relations in the first letter to the Corinthians speak clearly about the importance of regular intercourse in marriage: "Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control" (1 Cor. 7:5)... When a couple doesn't have intercourse regularly, one or the other partner, or both, will likely be more susceptible to sexual temptation. It is easier to live in complete celibacy than to be in a sexual relationship that is not reasonably regular.

A couple with any question about how often they should have intercourse should ask, "Do we have intercourse often enough to maintain a satisfying sexual relationship?....

....a husband and wife should talk together about their sexual life and agree on the frequency best for them. They can consider such factors as, What are my personal sexual needs? Is our sexual relationship growing? Is it meeting our needs? What other circumstances in our life affect my sexual

77. Bird (see note 69), 87-8.

desires - does work often leave me too exhausted to make love?

The goal here is not to set up weekly quota for their sexual life, but to determine, as a couple, what they need for a satisfying sexual relationship....⁷⁸

In the light of the above comments, we can again appreciate that the context of a committed loving marriage is the best place to deal with issues such as the frequency of sexual relations. In this context any problems can be opportunities for the couple to deepen their mutual love and unity. Without such a loving committed relationship, for example, in a premarital "testing" relationship, such problems are likely to result in one or both of the parties being hurt unnecessarily.

With regard to the question of which kinds of sexual activity are acceptable, it should first of all be said that some kinds of sexual activity, also within marriage, are depersonalizing and unacceptable such as coercive, sadistic and abusive sexual relations. Such behaviors are related to the personality and character of a person. One does not need to have sexual relations with a person to be able to assess properly his or her personality and character (see Ch. 8.F regarding choosing a marriage partner). Also, since premarital sexual relations are intrinsically dishonest (see Ch. 6.B), how can one expect them to reveal the other's true self?(cf. also D above) In any case, no one is required to continue living with "A spouse who occasions grave danger of soul or body to the other or to the children, or otherwise makes the common life unduly difficult..."(CIC, canon 1153) The Catholic Church also holds that:

The following are incapable of contracting marriage:

1. those who lack sufficient use of reason;
2. those who suffer from a grave lack of discretionary judgement concerning the essential matrimonial

78. Ralph Martin, *Husbands, Wives, Parents, Children: Foundations for the Christian Family* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1978), 72-3.

rights and obligations to be mutually given and accepted;

3. those who, because of causes of a psychological nature, are unable to assume the essential obligations of marriage.(CIC, canon 1095)

A person contracts invalidly who enters marriage inveigled by deceit, perpetrated in order to secure consent, concerning some quality of the other party, which of its very nature can seriously disrupt the partnership of conjugal life.(CIC, canon 1098)

A number of situations with regard to the annulment of marriage can be considered in the light of these canons such as the case of a party to "marriage" who is incapable of a normal heterosexual relationship, including, among others, the case of a compulsive sexual abuser. Such problems, however, can be exposed before the wedding by proper discretion regarding the choice of a marriage partner and good marriage preparation (see Ch. 8.F-G).

Besides kinds of sexual behavior that are clearly abusive, spouses should avoid any sexual behavior that violates their dignity as persons. Not only single people, but also married people are called to love responsibly in the whole area of sex. Among other things, this includes spouses not asking or pressuring each other to do something immoral and/or to act against one's conscience in the sexual area. Again, good marriage preparation, including good communication, can help avoid problems in this area.⁷⁹ Premarital sexual relations, which are dishonest per se (see Ch. 6.B), tend to be an obstacle to good communication (see D above, and Ch. 6.E, under "Some Other Problems...").

With regard to the concern about the relative size of the genitals, Dickes, a medical doctor, says in part:

79. Cf. Bird (see note 69), 103-10; Martin (see note 78), Chs. 4-8; and Lawler, Boyle and May (see note 17), Ch. 7 "The Requirements of Chastity Within Marriage".

Many people think that the size and shape of the clitoris are directly related to the effectiveness of a woman's performance in intercourse. This idea has no foundation in fact....

... penile and vaginal size is of little importance....

... the evidence does not support the concept that the larger penis increases more in size than does the smaller organ. In fact, the results demonstrate that the opposite is true.... Erection ... tends to equalize the size of the organ. I wish to stress again, though, that the actual size of the penis has no effect on the pleasure of both participants. Size has no relevance to performance....⁸⁰

With regard to the argument that one should practice sexual relations before marriage, Wright and Wright say in part:

... love, commitment, and communication - not just technique - are keys to dynamic sex. Why not learn with your own spouse, together, instead of with someone else's wife or sister or husband or brother? There are several good books on sexual techniques that you can read ... before the wedding.... If you fear that your potential spouse might ridicule you if you make a mistake, perhaps you need to concentrate more on developing your relationship before you agree to marry.

Good sexual adjustment takes time, love, and understanding....⁸¹

With regard to "statistics" that premaritally experienced women are more likely to experience orgasms on the wedding night and soon after, Wright and Wright respond in part:

People sometimes conclude from such results that premarital sex helps sexual fulfillment and adjustment in marriage. But such assumptions suffer from several deficiencies. ...the female orgasm is being used as a measure of sexual fulfillment. But not every female orgasm is fulfilling. Certainly many are, but other subjective factors (such as love, emotion, etc.) also affect how fulfilling the

80. Dickes (see note 71), 338, 339, and 345.

81. Wright (see note 13), 61. See Martin (see note 78), Chs. 4-5 and 7-8 regarding communication, obstacles to communication, establishing the sexual relationship and improving the sexual relationship within marriage.

orgasm will be. To base conclusions regarding sexual satisfaction only on an orgasmic count is unwise....⁸²

Moreover, they refer to several studies including one of approximately 2000 women by the American Institute of Family Relations that found that although more nonvirgins (39 percent) than virgins (28 percent) entering marriage experienced orgasm soon after the wedding, in less than a year of marriage more of the original virgins (68 percent) than original nonvirgins (61 percent) had experienced orgasm.⁸³

With regard to those who think they should test sexual compatibility before marriage, Dillon, a family consultant, says:

The problem is: sexual intercourse outside of marriage isn't the same as within marriage. ...non-marital sex simply doesn't provide the security and trust so necessary to real intimacy. Within marriage, you know that your partner will be there when you wake up, or when things are going badly. You know you don't have to be a perfect "10" or a sex symbol to hold your mate's interest. Married couples don't have to "prove" themselves with superlative sexual performance on every try. They can treat sex for what it is - just one facet, though an important one, of their total relationship.

A couple who hopes that ... [premarital sexual relations] will help them decide if they are sexually compatible unfortunately may decide to marry - or not marry - on the basis of a false reading!⁸⁴

The approach of "shopping around" before marriage by having sexual experiences with a

82. Wright (see note 13), 62.

83. Ibid., 61-3, referring to "Premarital Experience No Help in Sexual Adjustment After Marriage", in *Family Life*, May 1972, 1-2.

84. Dillon (see note 64), 6. Cf. McDowell and Day (see note 1), 131-2; and Wright and Wright (see note 13), 70-1, who say in part that anxiety "can hinder full response. The burden to perform is one of the greatest causes of sexual failure. A 'performance check' can be self-defeating. Commitment is essential to developing the best relationship."

variety of partners is contrary to the great dignity of human persons since it involves treating others and oneself as commodities. Such an approach also tends to take away from the specialness of sexual relations within marriage since it often results in such hang-ups as worrying about one's sexual performance, making comparisons, feeling guilty, and so forth (see Ch. 6.E under "Some Other Problems..."). This view fails to appreciate that the sexual relationship is related to the whole relationship of the couple and that it is not static, but can change in the future, for better or worse, with the rest of the relationship. The kind of relationship that is essential for a mutually satisfying and meaningful sexual relationship, which can not be measured in merely physical terms, is one in which both the man and the woman are gentle and sensitive with each other, share openly and listen to each other, and love each other unconditionally. Unconditional love, involving a total commitment to each other, is the foundation for a deep trust to grow between the couple and for them to have a really good sexual relationship. Since "shopping around" for a good sexual partner is not compatible with unconditional love and an unconditional commitment, it is counterproductive. A man and a woman do not need to have sexual relations to appreciate whether or not each other has such qualities as gentleness, sensitivity, the ability to communicate well, and fidelity.

Although good sexual adjustment in marriage takes time, love and understanding, this is not hindered by premarital sexual abstinence. Rather, waiting until marriage to begin sexual relations helps both the man and the woman (or boy and girl) to grow in self-control, respect and purity. These are qualities which will enhance their sexual relationship in any future marriage, whether with each other or someone else. On the other hand, since voluntary premarital sexual relations involve a failure to love properly oneself, one's partner, and others (see Ch. 6), they will foster attitudes and

habits which will take away from truly giving oneself and receiving the gift of the other in love in the sexual relationship within marriage.

Along these lines, consider also the following by Guindon:

What do ... people who have premarital intercourse [especially with a variety of partners] bring home with them, come the wedding day? What do they bring to bed with them: their experiential "sex kit" with its wells of loneliness and bruised spirits and its prospects of only more of the same? They have no more secrets to discover and no mystery to share. On the other hand, what about sex with love, the capacity for which is received from God like a seed and *is* God's own seed in them (1 Jn 3: 9) - a love which will create them anew as man and woman in God's image...?⁸⁵

Since many people have made mistakes, developed bad habits, and have been wounded in this area, we again note the possibility of forgiveness, healing, "restored virginity", and hope (see Ch. 6.K).

Testing fertility by having sexual relations before marriage is also degrading of human persons. A person is not to be rejected as a marriage partner only because she or he is unable to provide one with children. This would involve treating the other as a mere means, as a commodity, and not as a person whose dignity requires that she or he "be always and solely the term of a self-giving love without limitations of time or of any other circumstance."⁸⁶ The following teaching of the Second Vatican Council is also relevant to this issue:

Marriage to be sure is not instituted solely for procreation.... Therefore, marriage persists as a whole

85. Guindon (see note 1), 393 (cf. 390-3). Of relevance to our topic here, he also says, "... there is, in our culture, a taste for experimentation. However, 'experimenters' attain very limited results and never penetrate into people's real selves in all their intimacy and mystery.... Some younger (and older) people ... do not seem to appreciate the distinction between 'experimenting with' and 'committing oneself to' people. Coitus, it seems to me, is not a 'trial tool', something with which one experiments. If one arbitrarily wills it to be so, it will be destroyed as the privileged expression of fully committed love."(426)

86. Pope John Paul II, FC, n. 80.

manner and communion of life, and maintains its value and indissolubility, even when offspring are lacking - despite, rather often, the very intense desire of the couple.(From GS, n. 50)⁸⁷

In closing this section, in the light of the above, we can conclude that it is not necessary to test sexual compatibility before marriage. Such an approach is counterproductive to having good sexual relations within marriage. Moreover, choosing to have premarital sexual relations fails to love properly oneself and others in a number of serious ways.(see Ch. 6)

F. Many Say Premarital Sex is All Right if the Couple Love Each Other

Many people today say that premarital sex, including sexual intercourse, is all right if the couple love each other. With regard to this and university classroom discussions of premarital sex,⁸⁸ a number of my students have raised and/or held views along the following lines: promiscuous sex or sex just for the fun of it or for selfish reasons is wrong, but premarital sex is acceptable if the partners both love each other; they do not necessarily have to intend to get married but the relationship should be monogamous and long-term; being married does not necessarily make the sexual relationship more meaningful since there might be more love in some premarital relationships than in some marriages.

Some people thus think that "love" rather than "marriage" justifies sexual relations. Also, not everyone who thinks that "love" justifies premarital sex approves of casual sex or sex outside a

87. We can also note here that CIC, canon 1084, par. 3, says, "...sterility neither forbids nor invalidates a marriage."

88. In Christian theology courses on human sexuality and marriage, which I have taught regularly at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, since 1983. A number of my students have also shared that they consider that premarital sex is always wrong and that one should wait until marriage, giving reasons along the lines of one or more of the arguments presented in Ch. 6.

monogamous or long-term relationship. Another twist to the argument that "love" justifies sexual relations is expressed in the following by one young person:

People worry about offending their girlfriend or boyfriend.[*sic*] For example, the boy may believe that having sex is the only way to prove your love.[*sic*] If the girl doesn't have sex with him, it is the same as saying she doesn't love him....⁸⁹

Bibby and Posterski report that of the Canadian teenagers they surveyed in 1984, eighty percent agreed with the statement: "Sex before marriage is alright when people LOVE each other". In 1992 they found that eighty-seven percent agreed with this. They also report seventy-seven percent of adults agreeing with this statement in 1985 and eighty percent in 1990.⁹⁰

Eshleman, a sociologist, says that most people adhere predominantly to one of four premarital sexual standards. He says that one of these standards:

...permissiveness with affection, permits sexual intercourse under certain specified conditions. This standard is perceived to be person-centered in that the particular person with whom the act is being performed is highly emphasized. Accordingly, love and affection are prerequisites for intercourse for both women and men.⁹¹

A Response

With regard to the general argument that "love" justifies sexual relations, including premarital

89. From McDowell and Day (see note 1), 145.

90. Bibby and Posterski (see note 36), 37-40 and 42. As noted in C above, a smaller percent of the Canadian teenagers surveyed approve of premarital sex if the individuals merely *like* each other. The percent of teenagers who report actually having had sexual relations is also smaller (see section J of this chapter). Among other things, Bibby and Posterski say that, "...east Indian and Pakistani teenagers, followed by Orientals, are less inclined than others to approve of premarital sex."(39) They predict that "a durable core of some 10 per cent [of Canadians] will continue to be opposed" to premarital sex.(40)

91. Eshleman (see note 3), 355-6.

intercourse, it is important to ask what is meant by "love", since this word is used to mean various things. Guindon, for example, speaks of a common confusion and experience in this area:

... It is a common place, that in a youthful experience one may be infatuated to the point of blindness. This, young people themselves will freely admit, once an affair breaks up. But while the affair lasts, they think of it as love... They think they have reached a point where they can "share everything"; but they discover, soon after sharing that they have shared nothing much apart from sexual pleasure. Some learn from the experience. Others begin to "feel for" someone else and "share" with him. It is the beginning of promiscuity because after so many "sharings" there is nothing worthwhile left to share....

Why this deplorable evolution? The reason is that heterosexual, genital practice which develops outside the framework of a decisive, mutual commitment frees eroticism to follow its inherent tendency: satisfying itself only for the moment in short-term pleasures....⁹²

Along similar lines, Wright and Wright say:

Couples who think that ... "If we're in love it's okay to have sex" or "We'll use sex to determine if we are in love" may be sorely disappointed. They may discover too late that what they thought were feelings of love were really only charged-up sex sensations.⁹³

Concerning the approach to premarital sexual expression that would seek to justify "full sexual intimacy in terms of developing a caring relationship", Kosnik and others say in part:

This approach in our judgment, does not show sufficient concern for the vagaries of human interrelationships, nor does it value sufficiently the importance of fidelity as an indispensable quality

92. Guindon (see note 1), 424-5. He also raises pertinent questions with regard to those who later get married: if someone "cannot demonstrate his or her love by forgoing its ultimate genital expression *now*, will he or she *ever* be able to do so later on in marriage? Will he or she ever be able to develop real friendships with persons of the other sex without always ... ending up in bed with them?"(428)

93. Wright (see note 13), 64.

for a caring relationship. The consequences for society would also discourage our acceptance of such a general norm.⁹⁴

In the following von Hildebrand explains why not only "love" but also "marriage" is necessary to justify sexual relations:

The justification of this physical union since it involves the express and solemn surrender by which one enters into so ultimate and intimate a union with the other person ... presupposes not only the mere existence of conjugal love but also the solemn conclusion of marriage in which one gives oneself freely and irrevocably to the beloved for the entire lifetime.

As the communion of love represents the deepest meaning of marriage, love is not only a previous condition of marriage but also a sentiment that both partners must make an object of their will, something that has to be protected and cherished. Love is also a task and a duty for both partners. If marriage is the unique projection of this special conjugal love, then marriage, once established, demands love from both partners - not only neighborly love but also conjugal love. Each spouse has a right to the love of the other. To maintain conjugal love in its entire grandeur and purity, in its glow, its depth and its vital plenitude is a task that arises for both partners with the conclusion of their marriage....⁹⁵

Thus neither "love" alone nor "marriage" alone, but both together are required for sexual relations to respect properly their inherent language and the personal dignity of the partners (see Ch. 6.B and E). Those who think their sexual relations can express a true giving of themselves to each other without having irrevocably given themselves to each other in marriage are mistaken. As Grisez correctly observes, unmarried people who "choose the bodily union and experience of

94. Kosnik et al. (see note 4), 165.

95. von Hildebrand, *Marriage: The Mystery of Faithful Love* (see note 66), 25-26. This whole book by von Hildebrand presents an excellent understanding of conjugal love and marriage.

intimacy pertaining to the good of marriage" cannot really participate in that good since marital consent is necessary to bring about marriage. They thus "ensure that whatever experience of communion they achieve is only illusory, not an experience of the reality in which they are interested."⁹⁶ Lawler, Boyle and May also point out that premarital sexual relations chosen to promote and express "love" abound in "self-deception":

The affection between fornicators [unmarried people who have sexual intercourse] can, no doubt, be deeply felt; but it is deeply flawed.... Marital love is in part constituted by an unconditional pledge of fidelity. Those who are not married have not made this commitment. Consequently, their love simply cannot be the intimate love of those who have joined their lives into one life together... They have not given themselves to each other by an act of irrevocable, unconditional consent. It is profound self-deception for affectionate fornicators to think that their love is like that of married persons for each other.

Thus, the "love" of fornicators just cannot be the love of spouses. ...since it is not marital, it can be no more than a conditional or partial sharing of life. Their act of intercourse does not unite two persons who have made themselves irreplaceable in each other's life, and united in a common life in the pursuit of all the goods of marriage. Yet this union, this common life, this complete love, is what sexual intercourse is meant to symbolize; it is also what many romantic fornicators wish it to symbolize, even though they know at some level that their refusal to make the commitment of marriage makes this impossible....

... Willingness to choose the appearances of marital love - the friendship, sexual intimacy, and sharing of life - while rejecting the substance of common commitment to common goals clearly indicates an unwillingness [that] is incompatible with the character traits needed to be a faithful partner, responsible parent, and follower of Christ. Thus, the truth as well as deep insight of the

96. Grisez (see note 46), 652. See Ch. 6.C for a fuller quotation of Grisez on this theme.

Church's teaching that sexual intercourse is a moral and human good only within marriage is based on a realistic appreciation of the meaning of sexual union and the irreplaceable value of human persons.⁹⁷

See Ch. 4 above for an overview of Catholic teaching on sex, marriage and love.

McDowell and Day have some helpful things to say as well from a Christian perspective on "love" and premarital sex, including the following:

Each person has an innate desire for love, a desire given by God. But love is something that must be learned....

Since love is learned from role models, the family is the most important influence on how a child perceives love (followed by peers and society in general). When parents are to an appreciable degree acting out the imagery of God, displaying to a perceptible extent the attributes of Christian love, children will grow up learning that love....

This is why the destruction of the family is so devastating. Children grow up learning from their parents that love means "Get what you can from the other person, and when that person doesn't perform properly, get out of the relationship." Such is the feeling of "love" that many kids today are confusing with sex.

.... Often in order to get the love of their parents they put themselves on a performance basis....

These kids then enter their teenage years equating love and performance. When they say, "If you love me, you'll have sex with me," they are only keeping in line with their own distorted definition of performance/love.

The biblical picture of love is one of giving without expecting anything in return, accepting another person without conditions and experiencing a security in the relationship that is not dependent on performance. This is a far cry from the shallow and self-centered type on the market today....

97. Lawler, Boyle and May (see note 17), 182-3.

Sex without marriage can never demonstrate the love of God; people who fall for "proving their love" with sex are buying into a lie with their bodies and emotions. They are squandering something priceless on a cheap product.

.... Love is an attitude we have, resulting in action, that makes the security, happiness and welfare of another as important to us as our own....

Unfortunately, since we as a society have lost sight of God we have lost the understanding of His love. As a general rule, we have reduced love to one of two things: (1) a warm feeling or emotional reaction; or (2) a positive response to a relationship that makes us feel good....

The pressure on young adolescents today is intensified by confusion. Teens look at love and sex as being synonymous. Much of this confusion is encouraged by television, videos and movies....

The *pressure line*.... "If you love me you'll have sex with me," should be considered in the light of the following replies by teens: "Having sex doesn't prove you're in love. I have too much self-respect to get sexually involved before it's right. I've decided to wait." "OK, prove how much you love me by understanding and respecting my feelings."

Many young people today are so desperately crying out for love that they will *believe anything and fall for anyone*. The truth is often ignored in the heat of the moment.

The Scriptures tell us that we are made in the image of God. The Scriptures also tell us that, among other things, God is love. As finite images of the infinite Creator, we therefore have a part in each of us that seeks love....

Teenagers will not sit idly by and feel unloved. They will look for love wherever they think they can find it, even in the back seat of a car with someone whose name they don't remember.

Experiences like that are a poor substitute for the love that God desires for our lives. They lead to false understandings of what love is....⁹⁸

98. McDowell and Day (see note 1), 97-8, 145, 160-1 and 163-5.

Consider as well Lawler, Boyle and May's response to the view regarding premarital sexual relations that sexual intercourse requires "a measure of concern and care for the other but does not require the marital covenant":

There is, of course, a difference between really exploitative, promiscuous, and commercial sex on the one hand, and, on the other hand, intercourse between unmarried persons who have some feeling and concern for each other. Still, those who ... [hold this view] fail to note that extramarital intercourse is always seriously flawed. It always includes some lack of love, some inability or unwillingness to give oneself away in love, some refusal to commit oneself irrevocably to another. This lack of love makes it impossible for their genital embrace to have the meaning that it is meant to have. By enjoying the expression of full love without giving full love itself, they wound each other as well as any child who might come into being as a result of their act. To say that uncommitted love can rightly be expressed by sexual intercourse is to fail to take sexual responsibility seriously enough.⁹⁹

This response by Lawler, Boyle and May corresponds to the conclusions of Ch. 6 above that choosing to have premarital sexual relations including intercourse fails to love properly oneself, one's partner, a possible child, others and God. If the couple do indeed love each other enough to get married, then a properly ordered love will lead them to prepare for and enter marriage, unless there is a just impediment to their marrying each other such as that one of them is already married to someone else or one or both of them is called to something else such as celibacy. A properly ordered love will respect any "just" impediment to marriage, since true love never contradicts justice nor leads one to act unjustly. (See G below regarding some obstacles to getting married and Ch. 8.G regarding celibacy.) A properly ordered love requires sexual abstinence for the unmarried and waiting until marriage to have sexual relations.(see Ch. 6.A and I; see Ch. 8.C regarding the proper

99. Lawler, Boyle and May (see note 17), 184.

expression of love and affection in premarital relationships)

For a fuller treatment of Christian perspectives, including biblical, traditional and contemporary perspectives, on sex, marriage and love, see Chs. 2-5 above.

In closing this section, I would like to state clearly that this section, like all the other parts of this book, has not been written to "condemn" anyone.(cf. Jn 8:1-11) It is written, however, with the realization that all of us have made mistakes and failed to be as loving and responsible as we should in many and various ways in our lives. It is also written with the realization that wherever we are now, God, who is all-loving and powerful, calls us to grow in love and responsibility, and he offers us the help to do so. For the many people who have been deceived by the argument that "love" justifies premarital sex, I again refer to Ch. 6.K on forgiveness, healing and hope.

G. Many Say Premarital Sex is All Right For the Couple

Who is Committed and/or Engaged

Many people say that premarital sex, including intercourse, is all right for the couple who is already committed to each other and/or engaged or planning to get married. With regard to this and university classroom discussions on premarital sex, a number of my students have raised and/or held views along the following lines: since sex should be an expression of love and commitment, premarital sex is all right if the couple love and are committed to each other; premarital sex is only all right if the couple love each other and are planning to get married; premarital sex is all right if the couple are engaged and saving money for the wedding. Consider also the following by one young person: "Many people feel that if they are engaged they can go ahead and have sex. If they're

going to be married, why not just get started a little earlier?"¹⁰⁰

Some theologians argue that restricting sexual relations to marriage is an ideal, but that sometimes premarital or "preceremonial" (i.e. before a formal wedding ceremony) sexual relations, including intercourse, can be justified. With regard to this, consider the following by Keane, Kosnik and others, and Cahill, respectively:

...the only cases where premarital intercourse seems morally justifiable are the cases where there is a real maturity and commitment including the intention to marry when and if the interfering social obstacles are removed....¹⁰¹

[There are several current approaches to the morality of premarital sexual expression including the approach that holds that premarital intercourse is wrong but preceremonial intercourse may be moral.]

This approach attempts to draw a sharper distinction between the inner mutual consent that constitutes the existential bond of marriage and the external manifestation of this commitment before society. It contends that these two moments for various reasons do not always coincide and may result in a situation where the expression of sexual intimacy can be more properly termed preceremonial rather than premarital. Others carry this line of reasoning a bit further suggesting that since marriage is a process, there may be a point at which sexual intercourse becomes an appropriate commitment of the partners' intent, even prior to the formal exchange of vows.... This would be especially true regarding couples engaged to be married or those who, although mature enough to marry and desiring to do so, are prevented from marrying because of external reasons, such as prolonged courses of study, need to care for one's family, or financial considerations.

Advocates of this position would certainly uphold the restriction of intercourse to marriage as the

100. From McDowell and Day (see note 1), 139. Regarding my university students see note 26.

101. Philip S. Keane, S.S., *Sexual Morality: A Catholic Perspective* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 108. Regarding Keane's approach see also section I of this chapter regarding proportionalism.

ideal. They would regard a norm to this effect as describing the ideal toward which every engaged couple should strive....¹⁰²

Building on and interpreting these meanings of sexuality [i.e. its unitive and procreative meanings], the essential criteria of Christian sexual responsibility in practice might be formulated as (1) an intentionally permanent commitment of partnership and love; and (2) the willingness of the couple to welcome and nurture as a couple any children that result from their union.... Examples of application of the central criteria of sexual conduct to situations that fall outside the usual marital standard are ... committed but premarital ("preceremonial") sex....¹⁰³

Along somewhat similar lines Curran also says:

.... A more personalist approach realizes that there is quite a difference between sexual relations with a prostitute and sexual relations between an engaged couple. The gravity is inversely proportionate to the degree of personal commitment involved. The gambit of personal relationship can run all the way from prostitutional to playboy, to casual, to friendly, to committed. The same generic degree of wrongness cannot apply to all these different sexual relationships short of the commitment of marriage....

Catholic theologians generally uphold the teaching that sexuality outside marriage is wrong....

However, some contemporary Catholic theologians are aware of the difficulty of stating that sexual relationships outside marriage are always and everywhere wrong.... I personally do see occasions where sexual intercourse outside marriage would not be wrong, but the exceptions are quite limited.

Others have argued that sometimes sexual relations for the engaged couple would not be wrong, but

102. Kosnik et al. (see note 4), 160-1. Among the five approaches that they consider, they say this approach "seems to be most consistent with the vision of human sexuality expressed in this study [i.e. their book]."(165) Regarding restricting intercourse to marriage as an ideal see, e.g., also Guindon (see note 1), 438.

103. Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 149.

it seems to me that such people may already have made the total commitment to one another even though they have not publicly expressed this commitment in the marriage ceremony.

Ordinarily, the couple should be willing to witness to the permanent covenant of their love by a public and societal proclamation to others of their love. However, at times there might be some even legitimate reasons why the ceremony is impeded. If there is a true covenant of marital love, there does not seem to be much of a problem from a moral viewpoint, although ordinarily such a covenant of love should be publicly witnessed and proclaimed.¹⁰⁴

Although the views presented above in this section are not all exactly the same, they all hold that premarital or preceremonial sexual relations can sometimes be justified. Some hold that the couple must be already committed to each other and/or engaged or planning to marry each other for their sexual relations to be acceptable. Some add the condition that some serious obstacle is impeding the couple from getting married.

A Response

First of all, there is a major difference between a man and a woman who intend or plan to get married and a man and a woman who are actually married to each other. A married couple have already irrevocably given themselves to each other by their mutual consent to marry. As May points out, however:

A person who intends to marry another is not yet married. He or she has not, as yet, irrevocably given himself or herself to the other and been irrevocably received by the other. He or she is free to live as a single person and to choose another as *the* one with whom and for whom he or she *wills* to live until

104. Charles E. Curran, *Contemporary Problems in Moral Theology* (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, Inc., 1970), 177 and 179; and *Issues in Sexual and Medical Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 46; respectively.

death.¹⁰⁵

McCormick also correctly observes that "the intention to marry, however sincere and intense, is not constitutive of the existential bond of marriage. ...this intention, as experience has often shown, can be, often is, and not infrequently should be revoked."¹⁰⁶ With regard to this one could compare, for example, the difference between planning to buy a house or planning to jump off a high diving board and actually doing these things. Many plans do not materialize. Many people get "cold feet" before actually getting married or buying a house or jumping off a high diving board!

Since a couple intending to get married is not yet married, any sexual relations they have are still nonmarital. Although their sexual relations may not involve all the evils that nonmarital sexual relations in other situations involve, it is, nevertheless, always wrong to choose to have nonmarital sexual relations including before marriage.(see Ch. 6.B) Curran and others (see above, this section) are mistaken who see sexual relations outside marriage as sometimes not wrong. Choosing to have nonmarital sexual relations always involves a failure to love properly oneself, one's partner, others and God in a number of significant ways. A number of important personal goods or values including the integrity and dignity of the persons involved are violated by nonmarital sexual relations, including premarital sexual intercourse. Choosing to have nonmarital sexual relations involves an objective impediment to integral human fulfillment, a true communion of persons, and union with God.(see Ch. 6 above) Therefore, to see nonmarital sexual relations as never justified corresponds to an authentic "personalism".

105. William E. May, *Sex, Marriage, and Chastity: Reflections of a Catholic Layman, Spouse and Parent* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1981), 154.

106. McCormick (see note 7), 458.

A couple who are "engaged to be married", in the modern sense of the expression¹⁰⁷, have made known their mutual intention to marry, to each other and often to others, in particular their families and close friends. Such an intention or promise to marry which concerns a "future" marriage, that is, one that does not yet exist, however, is not equivalent to already being married.

Of interest, Burtchaell says he dissents from the common view that "it is less deplorable for an engaged couple to be sleeping together than for people to be sleeping around promiscuously." He thinks that the former is more "liable to illusions". With regard to this, he says in part:

When a man and woman do not belong to one another but are joined in a union as powerful as sex, they become two in one flesh without being two in one life. If they are involved in a continuing relationship, it is almost impossible for them not to become convinced that they belong to one another. You can hardly go through the motions of belonging to another over a period of time without that experience summoning up the feeling that the two of you are at one. For two persons approaching marriage seriously this illusion is disastrous. At the very time when they most need the freedom it takes to give up one's entire life, they are undermining that freedom by artificially arousing the illusion that they already belong to each other....¹⁰⁸

Grisez provides additional reasons why an engaged couple should avoid sexual relations (cf. also Ch. 6.I):

...the engaged couple [who have sexual relations] would violate the faithfulness each owes the other in virtue of their engagement promises. With their engagement, the couple should begin the

107. See George Hayward Joyce, S.J., *Christian Marriage: An Historical and Doctrinal Study* (London: Sheed and Ward, 2nd ed. 1948), 84-102, for some details on the history of "Betrothal and its effects" in the Christian Church. Regarding "engagement" present Roman Catholic canon law (CIC), canon 1062, says in part: "No right of action to request the celebration of marriage arises from a promise of marriage, but there does arise an action for such reparation of damages as may be due."

108. Burtchaell (see note 55), 60-1.

lifelong faithfulness they will pledge to each other on their wedding day.

Moreover, if the couple have sinned together against chastity before their engagement, they should repent and commit themselves to perfect continence until married.... Indeed, the engaged have an additional reason to avoid intentional sexual acts: sinning with someone cannot express love toward that person, and to commit sins against chastity with the person one is about to marry raises the question whether one wishes to marry that person, or only desires to have and make use of him or her. By abstaining from intentional sexual acts, the engaged couple practice an important element of marital sexuality, which often requires abstinence; and by helping each other abstain, they manifest their love - their will to be truly married - in an unmistakable way. In fact, perfect continence is the only way for them to manifest their love adequately, since by it they integrate their erotic affection with their future marriage....¹⁰⁹

With regard to "preceremonial" sexual relations, basic questions include: "Is it ever possible for a man and woman to be actually or validly married to each other before or without going through a wedding ceremony or rite?"; and, "Is a wedding ceremony or rite important, and if so, why?"

Since marriage involves a partnership for the whole of life between a man and a woman, they can actually be married to each other only if they both freely and irrevocably consent or agree to give themselves to each other and accept the other without reservations. The reciprocal marital consent of the parties is an essential condition to establish a particular marriage.

Since sexual relations naturally express a total unconditional giving and receiving between a man and a woman, they can only be "honest" if the man and woman have in reality totally given themselves to each other without reservations, that is, they have married each other, as we considered above (see especially Ch. 6.B and E). Since marital consent, which involves an act of

109. Grisez (see note 46), 749.

the will, must be reciprocal to be valid, it is very important that it is expressed clearly by words or equivalent signs (e.g. by someone who can not speak - cf. CIC, canons 1057 and 1104) that are understood first of all by both parties. This mutual understanding that they have irrevocably committed or covenanted themselves to each other for life (i.e. that they are really married) is necessary for them to respect properly the 'nuptial' meaning of their bodies in sexual relations. Therefore, at a minimum, some rite, form, or "ceremony", by means of which the man and woman can know that they have mutually and irrevocably given themselves to each other for life, is always needed for their sexual relations to be honest and moral. With regard to this consider the following by Wojtyla (now Pope John Paul II):

.... Even if there were no other people around them they would need the institution of marriage (or at any rate some 'form' or rite, which would mean in effect that the parties concerned had created the institution).... An actual sexual relationship between a man and a woman demands the institution of marriage as its natural setting, for the institution legitimates the actuality above all in the minds of the partners to the sexual relationship themselves....

[In the light of the requirements of justice and mature interpersonal love].... Marriage as an institution is essential to justify the existence of 'conjugal' relations between a man and a woman - in their own eyes above all, but also in the eyes of society....

[Since we depend on God the Creator for our existence, justice also requires that God] ... give the man to the woman, and the woman to the man, or at any rate approve the reciprocal gift of self implicit in the institution of marriage....¹¹⁰

There have been various forms of wedding ceremonies or rites, in various societies of the past and present, to celebrate the event of a man and woman getting married. Marriage is widely

110. Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1981), 220, 222 and 224. See also FC, n. 11.

regarded not only as a personal agreement or covenant between the parties, but also as a socially sanctioned agreement. In many societies marriage involves a legal agreement or contract recognized by the state. The reason for this is that marriage is important not only for the couple, but also for any children they may have as well as for other people including their respective families, friends and acquaintances.(see Ch. 6.E-G) Marriage is also widely regarded as something sacred, and its celebration often involves a religious rite including the involvement of a religious minister.¹¹¹

According to a Christian perspective, marriage involves not only a personal and social agreement or an existential bond, but is also instituted by God as part of his plan regarding human sexuality. A man and woman who are truly married to each other are joined by God.(cf. Mt 19:3-9; and par.) The Catholic Church holds that a valid marriage between baptized Christians is a sacrament of Christ and the Church, and that such a marriage, once consummated, is indissoluble until death.(see parts of Chs. 2-5) Since marriage involves a very serious commitment that affects not only the couple but also other people, it is important that both the couple and others who know the couple can know that they are married. Although there is a certain truth to marriage being a "process", since a certain development or maturation in the individuals getting married is necessary for them to be able to give true marital consent and their love and commitment are meant to grow and develop after the wedding ceremony, it is very important that the clear demarcation between not being married or not yet being married and being married is not blurred. Marital consent involves a definitive act of the will on the part of both the man and the woman who marry each other and a proper marriage involves a definitive state of life within the wider human community.(cf. PH, n.

111. Cf. Eshleman (see note 3), 420; and "Marriage", *Microsoft Encarta 95: Interactive Multimedia Encyclopedia* (Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 1994).

7)¹¹²

With regard to the above, consider also the following by Hogan and LeVoir:

.... The union of a man and a woman in marriage is ... a total self-surrender of each spouse to the other.... No one may risk such a total donation without knowing with as much certainty as is possible that the other is truly making the same self-donation.

.... Private promises are hardly sufficient for each to be sure of the other's self-donation. Even in the lesser self-gift which constitutes employment agreements, most would not trust a private ... agreement. How much more, then, when it is one's total self which is being surrendered, is it necessary to know with certainty that the other is truly giving himself/herself?

The public act makes the community the witness and the guarantor of the mutual agreement. Society is willing to secure the marital union because without such an assurance for the spouses, the dignity of its members who enter marriage is at great risk. Further, society is necessarily concerned about its future members, i.e., the children of marital unions who are also put at great risk if the marriage is not surrounded with safeguards. With the public as witness, both spouses are quite aware of the seriousness of the commitment. With that knowledge, each may be reasonably certain of the intention of the other. Each will have given his/her decision more careful consideration than they would a non-binding private act.¹¹³

With regard to the marriage of Christians, Genovesi also highlights the social value of the

112. Cf. McCormick (see note 7), 458, "...the contemporary trend is an individualistic neglect of the important social and ecclesial dimension of marriage. Treating the ceremony as if it were *merely* a ceremony - a thing that is easy to do when the emphasis falls so heavily on marriage-as-process - is an unhealthy symptom of an eventually destructive individualism."; and Grisez (see note 46), 652 (his note 191), who says that, "Marital consent ... does not grow; it is a definite cooperative performance. Until it is given, the couple are free to change their minds about marrying."

113. Richard M. Hogan and John M. LeVoir, *Covenant of Love: Pope John Paul II on Sexuality, Marriage, and Family in the Modern World* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1985), 49. Cf., e.g., also Wright (see note 13), 65, "...public profession strengthens personal commitment, and this is why a public wedding is important...."

sacrament of matrimony:

...in the sacramental view of marriage a couple is seen as coming to share in the strength and richness of Christ's love for his people because marriage is a sacrament, and because a husband and wife themselves become sacraments, marriage is inherently a sign-event or sign-reality. It testifies to the presence of God's love but it must also reflect that love outwardly, for a sign not only gives witness; it must itself be witnessed. There is, therefore, and there must be, a social dimension to marriage as a sacrament. This is why the marriage ceremony is so significant. To be sure, the essence of marriage lies in the exchange of vows and the mutual consent of the couple; but in order for the full richness of marriage as a sacrament or sign of God's creative and faithful love to be exposed and appreciated, it is necessary for a man and a woman to proclaim their love in a social context so that the sign may be seen and heard, and so that through this new promise of love, people may be reminded of the greatness of God and of his love and therein rejoice....¹¹⁴

With regard to the interpersonal and social aspects of marriage, for a couple to actually and validly get married, it is necessary not only that they give their reciprocal marital consent, but that they express it according to the form required for them. The form of celebration that is required for a couple to marry validly can vary according to certain circumstances, including the religion of the parties.¹¹⁵ For example, for a Roman Catholic to marry validly today, normally the reciprocal consent to marry needs to be expressed in the presence of "the local Ordinary or parish priest or of

114. Vincent J. Genovesi, *In Pursuit of Love: Catholic Morality and Human Sexuality* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987), 174-5. Cf. CCC, nn. 1630-1, regarding the reasons why the Catholic Church normally requires Catholics to marry according to the "ecclesiastical form".

115. Cf., e.g., Kronby (see note 73), Ch. 2 regarding marriage in Canadian law; Cotter (see note 73), 32-42, regarding "Prerequisites for Marriage" and "The solemnization of Matrimony" for the Anglican Church of Canada; and CIC, canons 1108-33 regarding "The Form of the Celebration of Marriage" required for a Roman Catholic person. Regarding the form of the celebration of marriage for Catholics of Oriental rites see CCEC, canons 828-42.

the priest or deacon delegated by either of them" and "two witnesses".(CIC, canon 1108)¹¹⁶

This form is normally required if at least one of the parties to a marriage was baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it and has not by a formal act defected from it. The 1983 Code of Canon Law (CIC) itself mentions several exceptions to this form. For example, in places where there are "no priests and deacons, the diocesan Bishop can delegate lay persons to assist at marriages...." and a Catholic can validly marry in the presence of witnesses only if someone competent to assist cannot be present or approached without grave inconvenience in danger of death or for at least a month.(CIC, canons 1117, 1112 and 1116) Also,

[In the case of a marriage of a Catholic and a non-Catholic] If there are grave difficulties in the way of observing the canonical form, the local Ordinary of the catholic party has the right to dispense from it in individual cases ... for validity, however, some public form of celebration is required....(CIC, canon 1127)

For a grave and urgent reason, the local Ordinary may permit that a marriage be celebrated in secret....

The obligation of observing the secret ... ceases for the local Ordinary if from its observance a threat arises of grave scandal or of grave harm to the sanctity of marriage. This fact is to be made known

116. Although there have been some refinements since then, this "form" for the validity of the marriages of Roman Catholics was first promulgated by the Council of Trent in 1563, in response to the many serious problems related to "clandestine" marriages, where couples expressed their vows privately without witnesses.(see Ch. 4.A) Michael Sheehan says that this solution "provided a model for similar regulations among non-Catholics as well", in "Christian Marriage: An Historical Perspective", *Christian Marriage Today: Growth or Breakdown?* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edward Mellen Press, 1985), 24, ed. by Joseph A. Buijs. For some detail regarding the problems related to clandestine marriages, and the decree of the Council of Trent and subsequent law of the Church concerning them see Joyce (see note 107), Ch. III. Cf. also Aquinas "On Marital Consent" (Ch. 3.C.3 above); and Lawler, Boyle and May (see note 17), who, in their discussion of preceremonial sex (185-7), say that there is no reason to think that the great evils related to clandestine marriages "will not occur today if such unions are recognized as marriages."(186)

to the parties before the celebration of the marriage.(CIC, canons 1130 and 1132)

Regarding the secret celebration of marriage, Coriden, Green and Heintschel say in part:

[Although marriage] ... is a public event at which the parties begin a state of life recognized as such by both civil and religious societies the Church permits the secret celebration of marriages when the greater spiritual good of the parties demands it....

A marriage celebrated in secret must be celebrated according to canonical form, that is, before a duly authorized sacred minister or lay officiant and two witnesses....

Some examples of serious reasons ... are marriages ... contrary to civil law if the prohibition is contrary to natural or ecclesiastical law such as interracial marriages, and marriages in countries where the Church is persecuted and religious marriages are forbidden.¹¹⁷

Some detail is given here regarding the normal form required for a Roman Catholic to marry validly, and a number of the exceptions to this form specified by canon law, to show how minimal these requirements are and how flexible the Catholic Church is with regard to certain obstacles to marriage. Catholic practice in this area can no doubt serve as a model for non-Catholics as well.

If a man and a woman, whether Catholic or not, want to get married but face one or more obstacles, they should consider their options in the light of the relevant values and norms (cf. Ch. 1). Consultation with others such as parents and a knowledgeable and moral counselor or pastor can be very helpful. Choosing to have nonmarital sexual relations is never a moral option (see Ch. 6.B). In every case, there will be at least one moral option for them to choose. If it is immoral per se for them to attempt to marry each other (e.g. one of them is validly and indissolubly married to someone else), then they should break off any plans to get married. If, however, it would be truly good or moral for them to get married and they are impeded by an unjust obstacle(s), they should

117. Coriden, Green and Heintschel (see note 73), 806-7.

consider, perhaps with the help of others, how best to overcome the unjust obstacle. With regard to this, we can note that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations speaks of "the right to marry" (see B above for some relevant citations and discussion concerning this "right"). The Catholic Church also holds that:

All persons have the right to the free choice of their state of life and thus to marry and establish a family or to remain single.

a) Every man and every woman, having reached marriageable age and having the necessary capacity, has the right to marry and establish a family without any discrimination whatsoever; legal restrictions to the exercise of this right, whether they be of a permanent or temporary nature, can be introduced only when they are required by grave and objective demands of the institution of marriage itself and its social and public significance; they must respect in all cases the dignity and the fundamental rights of the person.

b) Those who wish to marry and establish a family have the right to expect from society the moral, educational, social and economic conditions which will enable them to exercise their right to marry in all maturity and responsibility.

c) The institutional value of marriage should be upheld by the public authorities; the situation of non-married couples must not be placed on the same level as marriage duly contracted.¹¹⁸

Although it would be impossible to consider here all the unjust obstacles to marrying properly, a few will be treated to illustrate some moral solutions. In this section, we have already referred to the possibility of the secret celebration of marriage for a grave and urgent reason such as that the marriage is prohibited by civil law contrary to natural law. We can also report here that in some cases, when a couple is free to get married in their religious community but there is a serious and

118. *Charter of the Rights of the Family* by the Holy See (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1983), Article 1.

unjust obstacle for them to get married civilly (e.g. they would suffer significant financial hardship that they would not experience if they had sexual relations or cohabited nonmaritally), the couple has a religious wedding ceremony with invited guests, witnesses and the pastor's blessing, but the pastor does not register the marriage with the civil authorities. In countries such as Canada this would not be illegal, but simply regarded as a religious rite (cf. many other religious rites) by the civil authorities.¹¹⁹ In countries such as Germany where the civil and religious wedding ceremonies are always separate, the couple could go through the religious but not the civil ceremony. Such cases where the couple would be married in their own eyes, and in the eyes of their religious community, families, friends and God, but not "officially" in the eyes of the State would not be ideal solutions since marriage is also important for civil society. Nevertheless, they could be moral solutions in cases where an unjust civil law or policy, that is not easily corrected, would prevent them from getting married civilly as well. People of good will should do their part to have such unjust laws or policies corrected.

In spite of the fact that there are many very good pastors, it seems that some pastors sometimes unfairly refuse to admit a couple to the celebration of marriage. For example, the couple's level of faith does not meet the pastor's personal standards. With regard to this issue Pope John Paul II speaks of the not infrequent difficulty pastors face in our secularized society when "non-believing" baptized persons ask the Church for marriage. He says in part:

....the faith of the person asking ... can exist in different degrees, and it is the primary duty of pastors to bring about a rediscovery of this faith and to nourish it and bring it to maturity. But pastors must

119. Fr. Francis Patsula, a canon lawyer of the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton, Canada, explained to me in personal conversation this option used in some rare and difficult cases by Catholic priests. One of my former students also reported in class that her husband, a United Church pastor, has used this solution.

also understand the reasons that lead the Church also to admit to the celebration of marriage those who are imperfectly disposed.

...the decision of a man and a woman to marry ... to commit by their irrevocable conjugal consent their whole lives in indissoluble love and unconditional fidelity, really involves, even if not in a fully conscious way, an attitude of profound obedience to the will of God, an attitude which cannot exist without God's grace. They have thus already begun what is in a true and proper sense a journey towards salvation, a journey which the celebration of the sacrament and the immediate preparation for it can complement and bring to completion, given the uprightness of their intention....

As for wishing to lay down further criteria for admission to the ecclesial celebration of marriage, criteria that would concern the level of faith of those to be married, this would above all involve grave risks. In the first place, the risk of making unfounded and discriminatory judgments; secondly, the risk of causing doubts about the validity of marriages already celebrated with grave harm to Christian communities, and new and unjustified anxieties to the consciences of married couples....

However, when in spite of all efforts engaged couples show that they reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor ... cannot admit them to the celebration of marriage. In spite of his reluctance to do so, he has the duty ... to make it clear to those concerned that, in these circumstances, it is not the Church that is placing an obstacle in the way of the celebration that they are asking for, but themselves.

Once more there appears in all its urgency the need for evangelization and catechesis before and after marriage, effected by the whole Christian community, so that every man and woman that gets married celebrates the sacrament of Matrimony not only validly but also fruitfully.(FC, n. 68)

If a couple thinks their pastor is unfairly refusing to admit them to the celebration of their marriage, they should first of all communicate openly and respectfully with their pastor, perhaps with the assistance of other community members. If this does not lead to a satisfactory solution, they can

have recourse to a higher authority such as their bishop.

In this section we noted above the flexibility of the Church with regard to the "form" required for a Catholic to marry validly, including the possibility of contracting a valid marriage "in the presence of witnesses only" in certain exceptional cases (CIC, canon 1116). Is it ever possible today, however, for a couple to validly get married without human witnesses, by expressing to each other before God their consent to marry? One very unlikely case I can think of is an unmarried man and woman stranded on an island by themselves with no means of communicating with others and unlikely to be found soon. They sincerely want to marry each other and would prefer to express their marital consent before others, but no human witnesses are available.(cf. Wojtyla above, this section)¹²⁰

It seems to me that some arguments for "preceremonial" or premarital but "committed" sexual relations, if there are "obstacles" to getting married, are really related to a mistaken priority of values, including a failure to appreciate the value of giving witness to God's plan concerning marriage. Consider, for example, the arguments that the couple and their families are not able to afford the wedding (i.e. "expensive") which they want, or that one has to care for one's family, or that the couple "has" to wait until one or both of them are finished courses of study or well established in their careers, etc. One does not need to have an expensive wedding to marry validly

120. Cf. also Paul Ramsey (Methodist), *One Flesh: A Christian View of Sex Within, Outside and Before Marriage* (Brancote Notts.: Grove Books, 1975), 18, who says in part regarding the couple who really intends to get married, "It is hard to imagine why in this case they should not proclaim to all the world ... what they mean to mean from now on to one another; or why they do not ... 'get married' according to ceremony, the legalities, and in accord with the respectabilities. As difficult as it may be for us to think of a case justifying marriage apart from the ceremony of the legalities, it is important to maintain this as a possibility if only in order to keep clear the meaning of marriage as it has always been understood in the Christian tradition."; and the Canadian Bishops, *Statement on the Formation of Conscience* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1974), nn. 52-54, regarding the misuse and proper use of exceptions to human laws.

and fruitfully. I personally have attended a number of beautiful weddings that involved very little additional expenses. The bride and groom wore clothes they wore on other occasions, the meal was potluck, pictures were taken by friends, and so forth.(cf. also Chrysostom, Ch. 3.A.2 under "On Marrying Well", regarding avoiding excessively expensive weddings) If the man and woman are otherwise ready to marry each other (i.e. they and their love are mature enough, etc.), but they have family obligations or are not yet financially secure "for life" or able to afford to buy a house, they can get married. For instance, many married people live with an infirm parent when other arrangements can not be made. Also, following their marriage my parents lived in the same home as my father's parents for five years until they were able to move into their own home. Consider also the reality today of many people married for years who lose their "secure" jobs or businesses, and sometimes their houses, and need to start over again, often needing to retrain for a new career.

With regard to certain obstacles to getting married, including situations of "extreme poverty", we can also note here that Pope John Paul II, in FC, n. 81, says in part,

....society and the public authorities should favour legitimate marriage by means of a series of social and political actions which will guarantee a family wage, by issuing directives ensuring housing fitting for family life and by creating opportunities for work and life.

When a couple wants to marry each other and they face one or more obstacles, whether along the lines of those that have been briefly addressed here or not, they should consider their options in the light of a proper perspective of values.(cf. Chs. 1 and 5) Although it is not feasible to consider all possible options here regarding all obstacles to getting married, we have considered here briefly some moral options with the hope of throwing some light on this issue. In any case, the choice to have nonmarital sexual relations including premarital sexual intercourse can never be justified. As

we considered above (Ch. 6 and this chapter), such a choice always violates important personal goods or values and involves a failure to love oneself and others properly. It is always better for people not married to each other to abstain from sexual relations, and for engaged couples who later get married to wait until they are actually married. Since many couples have made mistakes in this area, I again refer to Ch. 6.K on forgiveness, healing and hope.

H. Some Reject Marriage as an Institution or Say it is Only a Piece of Paper

Some people reject marriage as an institution for various reasons, often saying that marriage is only a human invention or social convention. For example, Reich argues against "advocates of the marriage ideology". With regard to marriage he speaks of the degradation of love life, the prevailing marital misery, the sexual misery of adolescents, sexual perversions and sexual crimes.¹²¹ Those who argue along these lines argue in favor of nonmarital sexual relations, but not "premarital" sex in the sense of preceding marriage. For example, one university student said, "If I have sexual intercourse, you couldn't call it premarital sex. I guess you'd have to call it 'pre-death' sex, or something, because I'll never marry!"¹²² Some people who engage in such nonmarital sex, however, change their minds and later marry or their partners later marry someone else. In such cases the nonmarital sex would have in fact been "premarital".

Some people speak of marriage merely as a "piece of paper" and ask, "What difference does

121. Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution* (New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1945), 129-49; Cf. also, e.g., Ruth Dickson, *Marriage is a Bad Habit* (Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, Inc., 1968). The fact that some people reject marriage as an institution is not something new. E.g., certain Gnostics and Pythagoreans, as well as certain sects such as the Manicheans and the Cathari, condemned marriage: Philippe Delhaye, "Human and Christian Values of Sexuality," *L'Osservatore Romano*, English weekly ed., Feb. 12, 1976, 9.

122. From Wright (see note 13), 60.

the wedding ceremony make?" With regard to this, some argue in favor of sex before or outside marriage saying that there is more love (affection, care and responsibility) in some unmarried unions that involve sex, including some premarital relationships, than in some marriages.¹²³

Consider also the following by two young people:

Another reason for sex before marriage would be a personal choice not to be married due to a distrust of marriage, inability to make a commitment, or being the child of a divorce. Such a person might choose to become involved in short-term relationships, or even a long-term one which does not include marriage but does include sex....

People are very skeptical about committing themselves to another person for the rest of their lives. They won't risk giving up the freedom of being their own person.¹²⁴

Some people reject monogamous unconditional lifetime marriage as the only relationship in which sexual relations are permitted. For example, Casler advocates people being free to choose from a number of options including marital arrangements that involve sexual sharing with others. He says transitory pairings are to be expected. Concerning these options he says in part:

Many readers may feel repugnance at the very idea of mate-sharing. Possessiveness and jealousy are part of an especially vicious cycle: marriage and family life have been largely responsible, I suggest, for today's prevailing neurotic climate, with its pervasive insecurity, and it is precisely this climate that makes so difficult the acceptance of a different, healthier way of life....

Would people be happier under such a system? They would certainly have a greater chance for sexual happiness, no longer restricted in their choice of bedmates by a set of artificial and outmoded

123. This line of argument has been raised by several of my university students (see note 1).

124. From McDowell and Day (see note 1), 154. Cf. Pope John Paul II who in FC, n. 81, says that some people enter into "free unions" due to "extreme ignorance" or "a certain psychological immaturity that makes them uncertain or afraid to enter into a stable and definitive union."

social prohibitions....

.... Individuals get tired of the same food, the same weather, the same television programs, day after day and week after week. And yet, the desire for sexual variety remains largely unacknowledged....

....if (as seems likely) large numbers of men and women decide upon relationships - such as child-free monogamy or temporary liaisons - that do not include child-care responsibilities, then additional institutions would have to be erected operated in keeping with the best available knowledge concerning the needs of infants....¹²⁵

A Response

Although some people reject marriage or are skeptical about making such a commitment, it seems that the vast majority of young and old people today are not disillusioned with monogamous marriage. For instance, Guttmacher, and Bibby and Posterski, respectively report:

More than eight in 10 teenagers [in the United States] expect to marry, and more than seven in 10 would like to have children.

The overwhelming majority of young people say their most important goals include having a good marriage and family life, giving their children better opportunities than they had, and finding purpose and meaning in life.

.... Some 85 per cent [of Canadian youth, aged 15 to 19, surveyed in 1992] say they expect to get married.... Obviously, many of the remaining 15 per cent will change their minds, probably pushing the figure to more than 90 per cent. The proportion who plan to marry is essentially unchanged from 1984.

125. Lawrence Casler, "Permissive Matrimony: Proposals for the Future", in Jerald Savells and Lawrence J. Cross, eds., *The Changing Family: Making Way for Tomorrow* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), 415-27 (quotations from 418, 419, 421, and 423). Regarding nontraditional marital and family life styles, agreements and contracts, see, e.g., also Eshleman (see note 3), 151-93 and 421-2; and Wilson (see note 48), 93-114.

.... Some 86 per cent of those who plan to marry say they expect to stay with the same person for life....

They also feel strongly about marital fidelity.... Only 10 per cent approve of [extramarital sex]...

Teens who have experienced happy homes are inclined to want to have the same experience for themselves in adult life. Those whose home lives have not been as positive seem determined to have better home lives. ...84 per cent ... anticipate having children....

.... The percentage of Canadians [including adults] now [1992] maintaining that extramarital sex is "not wrong" and only "sometimes wrong" has dropped slightly to 17 per cent [from 21 per cent in 1975].... Presumably many people found that such behavior simply didn't work all that well.

.... asked in early 1992 how important certain features are for a "successful marriage," the trait cited by more men and women (94 per cent) than any other was "faithfulness."

Young people, in disapproving of extramarital sex, are reflecting adult attitudes, and in some instances, their negative experiences.¹²⁶

Nevertheless, the "minority" views here still represent many people. Since the type of arguments or reasons presented in this section above seem to be factors in not a few people having or attempting to justify premarital sexual relations, I will respond to them briefly.

Although various customs and laws concerning marriage and family life have existed in various cultures and societies, marriage is not just a social convention or human invention. Of all possible human relationships involving sexual relations, monogamous marriage best corresponds to the needs of the couple and children. According to Ashley and O'Rourke:

126. From Guttmacher (see note 38), 9; and Bibby and Posterski (see note 36), 30-32, and 45-6; respectively. We can also note here that although there has been a significant increase in unmarried cohabitation in recent years (see Ch. 7.D above), the majority, seventy percent or more, still plan to get married: see, e.g., Popenoe and Whitehead (see note 48); and NCCB Marriage and Family Committee (see note 53), 217.

Realistic inquiry, in the light of the behavioral sciences as to what sexual needs of human beings have been manifested in all viable societies throughout history, reveals first that the basic pattern is monogamous marriage. This fact is intelligible in view of human biology, which is unique in two important respects:

1. The time of gestation and child care is remarkably long because of the time required to develop the complex human brain and to teach basic behavioral patterns to a child who, because of his or her excellent brain, is highly teachable.

2. Sexual intercourse is not confined, as in most mammals, to a mating season but ties the man and woman together in a lasting bond. This guarantees the woman and her child the concern of the male, who is no longer merely an impregnator but a father who shares in the burden of prolonged child care. The need for this continuous companionship of the father with his wife and children has necessitated the social institution of the family, which varies from culture to culture. (The chief variant has been polygyny, one father with many wives - a variant that is impractical for most men...)¹²⁷

Monogamous marriage, as a sexually exclusive partnership between a man and a woman for the whole of life, also corresponds to the inherent total reciprocal giving and receiving / unitive /

127. Ashley and O'Rourke (see note 29), 250. Cf., e.g., William J. Goode, a sociologist, who speaks of certain human biological traits as being relevant to family behavior in all cultures. Although various tasks of the family such as reproduction, the physical maintenance of family members, and the socialization and social placement of the child, are theoretically separable from one another, they are, in fact, not separated in almost all known family systems. When revolutionary societies (cf. the Israeli kibbutzim, the Russian kolkhoz, Chinese communes, and communes in the U.S. in the sixties and seventies) attempt to entrust one or more of these tasks to another agency, this change can be made only with much ideological fervor and political pressure. Also, there is a gradual return to the more traditional type of family. With regard to this, Goode concludes that the family is a rather stable institution: *The Family* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2nd ed. 1982), 6-8 and Ch. 2. Cf. also Wojtyla (see note 110), 216-24, for some philosophical reflections on human experience regarding the value of the institution of marriage; and the Second Vatican Council, GS, 47, "...the power and strength of the institution of marriage and family can also be seen in the fact that time and again, despite the difficulties produced, the profound changes in modern society reveal the true character of this institution in one way or another."

'nuptial'/ marital and generative /procreative meanings of human heterosexual genital relations, and the requirements of conjugal love. People in other arrangements such as polygamy, spouses sharing sexually with others, and nonmarital sexual relationships encounter objective impediments to their integral human fulfillment since they can not properly respect a number of personal goods or values such as truth, including the "language of the body", justice, unconditional love, marital friendship, fidelity, and their great and equal dignity as persons. They face greater risks of harm including getting AIDS and other STDs. Monogamous marriage, rooted in the unconditional conjugal love of a man and woman for each other, corresponds to the needs of children including their needs for unconditional love and that their father and mother be deeply united. Such marriages benefit other people, too, and are of great benefit to society. (Since these issues have already been treated more fully and in greater detail in Chs. 5-7 above, only a few additional points will be made here.)

In the light of the above, marriage is not merely a "piece of paper". Marriage is a partnership for the whole of life between a man and woman that is for their good and the good of others including any children they may have. A marriage certificate is meant to be a sign that the man and woman have personally consented or agreed to marry each other according to the form required for them and that this was witnessed by others.(see G above regarding the importance of this) Compare how we often use other pieces of paper or suitable substitutes (e.g. a mortgage or employment agreement signed by both parties and witnessed by others) as signs, and sometimes as evidence or proof, of other important agreements between persons. Some of our monetary currency is in the form of paper. For example, a \$100.00 bill and a valid million dollar cheque (cf. winning a lottery) are pieces of paper with particular value because they express certain binding agreements.

With regard to Casler's proposals to allow people to have various sexual partners to give them

a greater chance for sexual happiness and variety (see this section above), we can say that such views reflect a very superficial and fragmentary understanding of human sexuality and happiness. Since sexuality is an integral part of the whole person, one's body and sex are not commodities like food or impersonal like the weather. The quality, depth and meaning of a sexual relationship is related to the quality, depth and meaning of the whole relationship. At best, superficial and transitory relationships can only provide the parties with superficial and transitory sexual satisfaction. Of all possible sexual arrangements, a loving committed monogamous marriage provides a couple with the opportunity for the most intimate, meaningful and satisfying sexual relationship possible.(cf. parts of A-F above)¹²⁸ Human genital sexual relationships outside a loving committed monogamous marriage are also counterproductive to human fulfillment and happiness in an integral sense, since they violate a number of important and fundamental personal goods or values.(see above, especially Ch. 6.B and E-H)

With regard to conjugal love requiring exclusive fidelity until death, Pope Paul VI correctly observes that:

[Such fidelity] ... can sometimes be difficult, but is always possible, always noble and meritorious, as no one can deny. The example of so many married persons down through the centuries shows, not only that fidelity is according to the nature of marriage, but also that it is a source of profound and lasting happiness...(HV, n. 9)¹²⁹

128. Cf., e.g., also Bob Levin, "In Praise of Monogamy", *Macleans*, Jan. 6, 1986, 44-5; and Andrew M. Greeley, *Faithful Attraction: Discovering Intimacy, Love, and Fidelity in American Marriage* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, Inc., 1991), which presents and analyses the findings of a number of recent surveys on American marriage, including that more than 60% say that their marriage is "very happy" and that 91% of the women and 89% of the men say they have had only one sexual partner since they were married (26-7).

129. Cf. the excellent article by John Gallagher, "Fidelity, Permanence, and Growth in Marriage: Theological Reflections", in Buijs (see note 116), 111-25. Among other things, he says

A Christian faith perspective affirms that marriage is not only an important human institution, but that it has been instituted by God the Creator (see parts of Chs. 2-4 and Ch. 5.A.2; cf. also some other religious perspectives including some Jewish perspectives). It, like other good institutions, however, has not been immune from the negative effects of human sin.(see parts of Chs. 2-4 and Ch. 5.A.3) Marriage does not in itself degrade love or cause misery or crime, or foster undesirable character traits such as possessiveness, jealousy and insecurity. It also does not harm genuine freedom or personal identity. Such negative things are rather the result of sin. Since loving committed marriage is according to God's plan and nonmarital sexual relations are sinful per se, in general, such negative things are found more in relationships that involve sex outside proper marriages. We can also note here that some "married" people were never truly or validly married in the first place. There are various reasons, for example, why one or both parties entering an apparent marriage did not truly consent to marry each other.(cf. parts of Ch. 4.F) Their failing to love each other now may be a sign that they never loved each other unconditionally before and never really committed themselves to each other in marriage. The fact that some people fail in marriage does not justify devaluing or doing away with the institution of marriage. Analogously, the fact that

that the virtue of fidelity is rooted in agape, love of a person for his or her own sake, and God. Regarding this virtue, "...we are not faithful merely to things or to rules or to obligations. We are faithful to people."(113) Fidelity has positive effects on the one who is faithful and others. Spousal fidelity is the source of growth and permanence in marriage. "Without God's grace, *agape* and fidelity are not possible. With God's grace they are not only possible but normal.... This means that the way a marriage will last and grow is by being based on faith and prayer..."(124-25) Cf., e.g., also *Horizons* (a publication of Engaged Encounter), Jul./Aug. 1992, 10, based on 1980 United States census figures, reporting that there is only 1 divorce in 1,105 couples married "in the Church" and both "regularly attend services and have a home prayer for life"; and Eshleman (see note 3), 340-1, who reports the findings of two studies that compared unmarried cohabitants and married couples. In general, the cohabiting couples were not only less church-oriented, but also more anti-establishment, more pessimistic, more fearful of close ties, more withdrawn, more likely to experience internal conflicts, more restless, more impulsive, more discouraged, more violent, and less well-adjusted than the married couples.

some students fail does not justify rejecting schools and universities per se, or the fact that not all people are made healthy by health care institutions does not justify doing away with them.

A Christian faith perspective also affirms that God, who is infinitely loving and powerful, wants to liberate us from sin and all the negative effects of sin, and that he is capable of doing this if we cooperate. God's plan of salvation (cf. the "Good News" of Jesus Christ) includes the healing of people and relationships, both marital and nonmarital, and empowering us to grow in loving more and more as he loves. No one need despair of being able to change and become a more loving and committed person, with the help of God.(see parts of Chs. 2-4 and Ch. 5.A.4-B.2)

With regard to people who have given up on the committed relationship of marriage, McDowell and Day point out:

.... It usually means they haven't encountered a positive, successful marriage that has affected their lives in a constructive way....

.... These ... people need models. They could read a library full of books on the joys of commitment and marriage, but until they see it, it will remain a theory without credibility.

Responsibility for showing young people the results of solid relationships lies in part with the church. Kids from broken homes need to spend time with other families where committed relationships are visible. They need to see people give to one another in love without wanting anything in return. They need to see unselfish love in action....¹³⁰

With regard to "free unions", Pope John Paul II says in part:

The pastors and the ecclesial community should take care to become acquainted with such situations and their actual causes, case by case. They should make tactful and respectful contact with the couples concerned, and enlighten them patiently, correct them charitably and show them the witness of

130. McDowell and Day (see note 1), 154-5.

Christian family life, in such a way as to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation. But above all there must be a campaign of prevention, by fostering the sense of fidelity in the whole moral and religious training of the young, instructing them concerning the conditions and structures that favour such fidelity, without which there is no true freedom; they must be helped to reach spiritual maturity and enabled to understand the rich human and supernatural reality of marriage as a sacrament.

The People of God should ... try to ensure that public opinion is not led to undervalue the institutional importance of marriage and the family....(FC, n. 81)

The above pastoral comments by Pope John Paul II, as well as his comments below on the institution of marriage, seem to be a fitting conclusion to this section:

.... The institution of marriage is not an undue interference by society or authority, nor the extrinsic imposition of a form. Rather it is an interior requirement of the covenant of conjugal love which is publicly affirmed as unique and exclusive, in order to live in complete fidelity to the plan of God, the Creator. A person's freedom, far from being restricted by this fidelity, is secured against every form of subjectivism or relativism and is made a sharer in creative Wisdom.(FC, n. 11)

I. Relativism, Hedonism, Situation Ethics and Proportionalism

Some people, including a number of ethicists and moral theologians, take a variety of approaches to premarital sexual intercourse that would deny that choosing this behavior is always objectively wrong in every situation (contrast Ch. 6.B). With regard to this we will consider here briefly relativism, hedonism, situation ethics and proportionalism.

Although various kinds of relativism exist, moral or ethical relativists, in general, hold the view that moral values and norms, including any regarding premarital sex, are relative to a particular

culture or religion, or to the individual's beliefs, opinions, feelings or tastes, etc. They hold that there is no universal, transcultural standard of right and wrong. In general, they would hold that people have the right to choose their own moral values and lifestyles (cf. B above). A number of university students in my courses have expressed relativist views, such as that whether or not premarital sex is right or wrong depends upon the persons and their value systems: those who believe or think premarital sex is wrong should abstain, but those who think it is all right are free to act as they choose.¹³¹

Although various kinds of hedonism exist, hedonists, in general, see pleasure as determining the ethical value of an action. They seek to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. Premarital sex would be seen as good if it realized this for those concerned. Compare the following by two young people:

Where I live, many of my girl friends and guy friends are involved in sex because they just want to do it. When I ask them why, they usually say it makes them feel good...

.... Not only is sex a pleasurable experience, but with the proper care, two people can be reasonably sure that children will not result and also that disease will be avoided. So, if nobody is hurt, why wait for marriage?¹³²

131. See note 26. Regarding moral relativism see, e.g., David B. Wong, *Moral Relativity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); and Ashley and O'Rourke (see note 29), 152.

132. From McDowell and Day (see note 1), 81 and 137, respectively. For a few discussions of hedonism see, e.g., J.C.B. Gosling, *Pleasure and Desire: The Case for Hedonism Reviewed* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); Johannes Schuster, "Hedonism" and "Pleasure" in *Philosophical Dictionary* (Spokane: Gonzaga University Press, 1972), ed. by Walter Brugger and Kenneth Baker; and Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), who says in part, "This chapter [5] proposes that accepting mutual sexual pleasure as the primary purpose of sexual activity requires respect and care for the partner and responsibility for avoiding pain and maximizing pleasure for all affected by that activity, and examines existing obstacles to the acceptance of mutual sexual pleasure as the primary

With regard to situation ethics, one of its leading advocates, Joseph Fletcher, says in part:

The situationist enters into every decision-making situation fully armed with the ethical maxims of his community and its heritage, and he treats them with respect as illuminators of his problems. Just the same he is prepared in any situation to compromise them or set them aside *in the situation* if love seems better served by doing so.

The ruling norm of "Christian situation ethics" is nothing else but agape love, "*goodwill at work in partnership with reason*", which "seeks the neighbor's best interest with a careful eye to all the factors in the situation." With regard to the issue of premarital sex, Fletcher says:

A young unmarried couple might decide, if they make their decisions Christianly, to have intercourse (e.g., by getting pregnant to force a selfish parent to relent his over-bearing resistance to their marriage). But as Christians they would never merely say, "It's all right if we *like* each other!" Loving concern can make it all right, but mere liking cannot.¹³³

Although various kinds of proportionalism exist, in general, proportionalists hold that an action is morally good if the premoral (or ontic...) values (goods) involved outweigh the premoral (or ontic...) disvalues (evils) involved. One ought to prefer the greater good, avoid the greater evil, and choose the alternative course of action with the greater proportion of good over evil. A number of revisionist Christian ethicists today advocate some form of proportionalism. In general, while they see many traditional Christian moral norms (e.g. not to kill and commit adultery) as highlighting important values (e.g. life and fidelity), they hold that it is theoretically impossible to demonstrate that concrete behavioral or material norms are absolute without exception. Nevertheless, some speak of certain material norms (e.g. the prohibition of the cruel treatment of a child that is of no norm governing sexual activity).(139)

133. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 26, 69, and 104, respectively.

benefit to the child and rape) as virtually exceptionless or as practical absolutes, and that the burden of proof rests with those who would want to make an exception. Some would consider the norm against premarital intercourse as significantly closed to exceptions. For example, in discussing committed premarital intercourse Keane says in part (see also G above):

....even in this case the Church's basic norm that genital sexual activity is best protected and expressed in marriage remains clearly in place there is no case of premarital intercourse, even in the best of circumstances, that does not contain a morally significant level of ontic evil or lack of due fullness of being....

...many of these cases of committed premarital sexual intercourse are not as good as they look at first glance. A lot of the rhetoric about love and commitment in these cases is simply rhetoric and it can cover a fair degree of selfishness and immaturity....

...our society has established a socioeconomic structure for marriage and family life that may unreasonably restrict some persons' fundamental freedom to marry. Because of this situation, the present author's position is that, in a limited number of cases, the circumstances surrounding the intercourse of a couple who are deeply committed to each other and who fully intend to marry may render their premarital intercourse an ontic evil but not a moral evil....

.... The case in which we would offer a moral justification for premarital intercourse (ontic evil but not moral evil) is very rare....¹³⁴

A Response

Approaches which deny that it is always objectively wrong to choose to have premarital sexual intercourse, such as those briefly presented in this section above, are mistaken. Much has been

134. Keane (see note 101), 105-8. Regarding proportionalism see, e.g., Bernard Hoose, *Proportionalism: The American Debate and its European Roots* (Georgetown University Press, 1987); and Richard M. Gula, *What are They Saying About Moral Norms?* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), 61-81, on "Mixed Consequentialism - The Revisionist Theologians".

written about ethical methods including those of relativism, hedonism, situation ethics and proportionalism (see, e.g., the sources referred to in this section's notes). While it is beyond the scope of this book to discuss comprehensively such approaches, I will give some response here to reinforce the conclusion that it is always objectively wrong to choose to have premarital sexual intercourse.(see Ch. 6.B)

The approach of moral relativism fails to appreciate that, while there are indeed important social and subjective dimensions to morality (cf. socialization, the formation of conscience, personal responsibility...), there is also an objective basis for moral values and norms, reality, especially the reality of human persons and God considered integrally.(see Chs. 1 and 5) It is objectively necessary that a number of basic human needs (biological, psychological, social, moral and spiritual) be met for human beings to survive in our world and to experience integral fulfillment. Basic human needs provide an objective basis for formulating certain universal human rights and corresponding responsibilities, and thus also for saying that there are some universal moral values and norms.(see B above) The fact that there are many different human points of view that are not always complementary but sometimes contradictory with regard to moral values and norms does not undermine this basis. It simply means that human knowledge is limited and that individuals and cultures can be mistaken.

If we consider the whole range of human experience including relationships with other persons and God, we can say that human beings can experience certain morally relevant values such as the goodness of life, the dignity of persons, justice, friendship, truth, and self-giving and faithful love, as givens to open unprejudiced human experience. Such values are inherently good, transcend our limited understanding of them and are rooted in the goodness of God. We can also experience that

it is important for us to respect properly such values to experience fulfillment and happiness in a deeper sense. Moreover, human beings can appreciate that human sexual relations have inherent nuptial and generative meanings. Failing to respect properly the inherent meanings of human sexual relations, as well as the dignity of the persons and other relevant values, involves an objective impediment to true communion with other persons and God. The norm that it is always wrong to choose to have premarital sexual intercourse is not arbitrary but is objectively grounded in this (see Ch. 6.B). The truth of this is not negated by the fact that some people do not appreciate properly such values or the inherent meanings of human sexual relations, or fail to respect them properly even if they are aware of them. These can be due to defective education, bad or impoverished experiences, deliberate choice, etc. In any case, one can grow in appreciating and respecting such values and the true meaning of human sexuality by good education, experiences, choices and relationships with God and others.

Moral relativism can not be accepted from a Christian faith perspective for additional reasons. Jesus, as fully divine and human, provides an objective reference for evaluating all moral values, norms and theories. Catholic teaching, rooted in Scripture and Tradition, rejects moral relativism and affirms that the Good News of Jesus Christ, including God's infinite love for each of us and its moral requirements, is universal and meant for everyone.(see Chs. 2-5)¹³⁵

Hedonism in its various forms is mistaken in seeing and/or acting as if pleasure, including mutual pleasure, is the main or only criterion for morality, including sexual morality. Although

135. See, e.g., also Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* On Evangelization in the Modern World (Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1975). Regarding moral relativism, besides the sources referred to in note 131, see, e.g., John Gallagher, *The Basis for Christian Ethics* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), Ch. 2; Josef Santeler, "Relativism", in *Philosophical Dictionary* (see note 132); Flaman (see note 21), Ch. I.4.a; and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today," *Origens*, 31 Oct. 1996, 309-17.

pleasure is subjectively satisfying and desirable, pleasure is not the greatest good. Human persons in their totality are much more valuable than the pleasures they experience. God, the source of all goodness, is infinitely good. An authentic personalism requires subordinating seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, for oneself and others, to a properly ordered love of human persons and God. Among other things, this includes subordinating desires to real human needs and the seeking of pleasure to what a proper love and respect for personal goods or values such as truth, the life and dignity of persons, justice, and self-giving and faithful love, requires. It is necessary to respect properly such personal goods to experience true communion and unity with other human persons and God. All of this corresponds not only to human experience properly understood but also to the Christian vision and vocation.(see Ch. 5, as well as Chs. 2-4)¹³⁶

Choosing to have premarital sexual intercourse, as we considered in Ch. 6, involves a failure to love properly oneself and one's partner, as well as other human persons and God, in a number of serious ways. Although such a choice may result in some temporary pleasures for oneself and/or

136. Cf. Wojtyla (see note 110), who in an in-depth analysis of pleasure and love, says in part: "...if the only or the main good, the only or the main aim, of man is pleasure, if it is also the whole basis of moral norms in human behavior, then everything we do must perforce be looked at as a means towards this one good, this single end. Hence the human person - my own or any other, every person - must figure in this role: as a means to an end."(37) This is incompatible with the New Testament commandment of love (for persons and God, the most perfect personal Being) which is based on the personalistic norm according to which "the person is the kind of good which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end" and "the person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love."(41) Regarding the man-woman relationship he says in part: "The fixation on pleasure as their purpose restricts each of them to the confines of his or her 'I'. There can therefore be no reciprocity, but only 'bilateralism'... Egoism excludes love, but permits calculation and compromise - even though there is no love there can be a bilateral accommodation between egoisms.... [Pleasure] is a purely subjective good, not trans-subjective, nor even inter-subjective.the fixation on pleasure for its own sake, as the exclusive end of the association and cohabitation of man and woman, is necessarily egoistic. This results from the very nature of pleasure. But this does not at all mean that we must see pleasure itself as evil - pleasure in itself is a specific good - but only points to the moral evil involved in fixing the will on pleasure alone...."(156-7)

one's partner, it violates a number of personal goods including the dignity and integrity of the participants as persons. It involves an objective impediment to a true union and communion with one's partner, other human persons and God, and thus also to true happiness and joy. Moreover, it involves a number of other serious actual and possible harmful consequences, some of which are not short-term.(see Ch. 6.D-H for details) Premarital sex, in general, results in a lot of unnecessary human suffering and pain. Anyone who sincerely thinks that "nobody will get hurt" is suffering from a serious illusion.

With regard to situation ethics, Ashley and O'Rourke ask, "But what is loving action?", and point out that:

...[Fletcher] asserts without proving (1) that the rule of love is a universal rule ... and (2) that no other rules are universal. Fletcher's only argument for this second assumption is that, with sufficient ingenuity, a hardship case can always be imagined in which it seems difficult to apply the usual rule. However, this argument only proves that ethical decisions can be difficult. The same objection can be brought against the rule of love, which is certainly very difficult to apply in many cases.¹³⁷

With regard to ethics, Fletcher is correct in affirming the importance of loving concern, good will, and considering the best interests of people in a situation (cf. Chs. 1-5 above). He is, however, mistaken in holding that all maxims, rules or principles, other than the norm of agape love, can be set aside in some situations. Human beings have a number of common biological, psychological, social, ethical and spiritual needs. Although every human situation is unique in some respects, a number of morally relevant values such as justice, the dignity of persons, the sacredness of human life, friendship, truth, fidelity, and self-giving love are involved in many or all human situations. These values are rooted in God who is invisibly present in all human situations. The

137. Ashley and O'Rourke (see note 29), 157.

commandments of God and good moral norms or principles do not only illuminate our problems. They also provide concrete guidance to us so that we can better meet human needs, including our deeper spiritual needs, and respect and promote properly morally relevant values, in a way that is conducive to integral human fulfillment and pleasing to God. Some concrete norms such as those prohibiting murder and sexual assault, for example, are universally valid. A properly ordered love of God and people and a proper appreciation and respect for morally relevant values such as the sacredness of human life and the great dignity of human persons will never lead one to murder or sexually assault someone in any situation.

The norm or principle that premarital sexual intercourse is a kind of behavior that is always wrong to choose is a valid concrete universal rule since voluntarily engaging in this behavior, whatever one's situation, violates the dignity and integrity of the persons involved. Voluntary premarital sexual relations in any situation without exception also fail to respect properly the inherent 'nuptial' and 'procreative' meanings or God-given purposes of human sexual relations.(see Ch. 6.B for a fuller development of this) Choosing to have premarital sex can never be an expression of agape love. It rather always involves a failure to love oneself, one's partner, other human persons and God in a number of significant ways.(see all of Ch. 6)

Fletcher's example of a young couple having premarital sexual intercourse to get pregnant to force a selfish parent to relent in his resistance to their marriage is certainly not an example of "loving concern" or a properly ordered love. Besides this couple not respecting properly the inherent meanings of human sexual intercourse, and their own dignity and integrity as persons, they are also failing to show proper love in several other ways. Attempting to "force" the parent to change his mind is not respecting properly his right to "freedom of thought". Deliberately conceiving a child

out of wedlock and "using" the child to manipulate another is hardly showing proper love for the child. In any case, the parent may not change his mind. Moreover, if they are of legal age to get married and there are no just impediments to their getting married, they can get married without the parent's consent.(see G above regarding moral alternatives to unjust obstacles to getting married)¹³⁸

Concerning proportionalism, Pope John Paul II says in part:

The morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the "object" rationally chosen by the deliberate will, as is borne out by the insightful analysis, still valid today, made by Saint Thomas.[ST, I-II, q.18, a.6] The object of the act of willing is in fact a freely chosen kind of behavior that object is the proximate end of a deliberate decision which determines the act of willing on the part of the acting person....

The reason why a good intention is not itself sufficient, but a correct choice of actions is also needed, is that the human act depends on its object, whether that object is *capable or not of being ordered* to God, to the One who "alone is good"[Mt 19:16], and thus brings about the perfection of the person. An act is therefore good if its object is in conformity with the good of the person with respect for the goods morally relevant for him. Christian ethics, which pays particular attention to the moral object, does not refuse to consider the inner "teleology" of acting, inasmuch as it is directed to promoting the true good of the person; but it recognizes that it is really pursued only when the essential elements of human nature are respected. The human act, good according to its object attains its ultimate and decisive perfection when the will *actually does order* it to God through charity [i.e. for the purpose of pleasing God]....

One must therefore reject the thesis, characteristic of teleological and proportionalist theories, which holds that it is impossible to qualify as morally evil according to its species - its "object" - the

138. For other good criticisms of situation ethics see, e.g., Gallagher (see note 135), Ch. 16; and Dietrich and Alice von Hildebrand, *Morality and Situation Ethics* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1966).

deliberate choice of certain kinds of behavior or specific acts...

...the object of the human act ... establishes whether it is *capable of being ordered to the good and to the ultimate end, which is God*. This capability is grasped by reason in the very being of man, considered in his integral truth, and therefore in his natural inclination, his motivations and his finalities, which always have a spiritual dimension. It is precisely these which are the contents of the natural law and hence that ordered complex of "personal goods" which serve the "good of the person": the good which is the person himself and his perfection. These are the goods safeguarded by the commandments...

Reason attests that there are objects of the human act which are by their nature "incapable of being ordered" to God, because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image. These are the acts which, in the Church's moral tradition, have been termed "intrinsically evil" without in the least denying the influence on morality exercised by circumstances and especially by intentions, the Church teaches that "there exist acts which *per se* and in themselves, independently of circumstances, are always seriously wrong by reason of their object"....

With regard to intrinsically evil acts ... Pope Paul VI teaches: "Though it is true that sometimes it is lawful to tolerate a lesser moral evil in order to avoid a greater evil or in order to promote a greater good, it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it (cf. *Rom* 3:8) - in other words, to intend directly something which of its very nature contradicts the moral order, and which must therefore be judged unworthy of man, even though the intention is to protect or promote the welfare of an individual, of a family or of society in general".[HV, n. 14]

In teaching the existence of intrinsically evil acts, the Church accepts the teaching of Sacred Scripture....

The doctrine of the object as a source of morality represents an authentic explicitation of the Biblical morality of the Covenant and of the commandments, of charity and of the virtues....

.... By acknowledging and teaching the existence of intrinsic evil in given human acts, the Church remains faithful to the integral truth about man; she thus respects and promotes man in his dignity and vocation....

[Speaking to bishops, he continues] ...we must not be content merely to warn the faithful about the errors and dangers of certain ethical theories. We must first of all show the inviting splendour of that truth which is Jesus Christ himself. In him, who is the Truth (cf. *Jn* 14:6), man can understand fully and live perfectly, through his good actions, his vocation to freedom in obedience to the divine law summarized in the commandment of love of God and neighbour. And this is what takes place through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, of freedom and of love...(VS, nn. 78-83)¹³⁹

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], n. 1755 (see also VS, n. 81), gives "fornication", that is, sexual intercourse of a man and a woman not married to each other (which includes premarital sexual intercourse by definition), as an example of a kind of concrete act that "is always wrong to choose", because choosing such an act "entails a disorder of the will, that is, a moral evil." Our conclusion in Ch. 6.B is in complete agreement with this.

Besides the fundamental error characteristic of proportionalist theories explained by Pope John Paul II above, a number of Christian ethicists today have noted some other serious problems with proportionalism. For example, Lawler, Boyle and May say that in denying certain moral absolutes taught by the Church, proportionalists attempt to weigh incommensurable goods of persons against each other. Since this can not be done rationally and objectively,

....one *decides* how one will weigh alternatives; then one chooses in the light of the subjective evaluation that one has given. What this means is that one does not discover what is morally good; one decides what one shall call good by an arbitrary assessment.

139. See all of VS, nn. 71-83 regarding "The Moral Act". This whole encyclical letter is excellent in explaining "Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching".

.... However, this is evidently not a serious moral argument; it is a patent act of rationalization....

.... [Pastoral experience confirms that proportionalist thinking tends] to be demoralizing in a number of ways.... When the faithful are told that acts like those of adultery or fornication are not absolutely and always wrong but could be upright acts when proportionate reasons are really present, the faithful are deprived of bracing supports ordinarily necessary to strengthen them in the emotional and intellectual turmoil they experience at the time of temptation....

.... Instead of fidelity to the limited but real commitments we all have and to the moral absolutes which mark the boundaries for proper human participation in God's providence, proportionalism tells us to look farther - to consider all the effects, to put on a scale things that reflect in irreducible ways God's infinite goodness. This may seem noble to some, but it overreaches, taking as our own what we must trust to God's loving concern. Our moral thinking must not suppose that we can extricate ourselves from the tragedies and evils of human life; only God's healing re-creation can do that. But we can be faithful, can have hearts and wills completely faithful to the goodness which God so loves and, in the end, will restore. Proportionalism, sadly, corrupts that fidelity.¹⁴⁰

With regard to "proportionalists" using arbitrary subjective evaluations to deny the Church's teaching that premarital sexual relations are always wrong (see Ch. 4.D and 6.B above), we can compare Genovesi and Keane's discussions of committed premarital sexual intercourse. Genovesi basically agrees with Keane that "sexual intercourse outside of marriage might sometimes be only a premoral or ontic wrong" in the case of an elderly couple "who are committed to each other, but for whom marriage would mean economic and human insecurity...." He, however, takes issue with

140. Lawler, Boyle and May (see note 17), 85-88. See their whole Ch. 4 regarding "Patterns of Thinking in Moral Theology". For other serious scholarly criticisms of proportionalism see, e.g., Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, Vol. 1, *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), Ch. 6; and Ashley and O'Rourke (see note 29), 158-72, who also present the Principles of Moral Discrimination and Double Effect (179-88) as better ways that are consistent with Catholic teaching to deal with conflict situations.

Keane concerning the young couple facing social and economic obstacles to marriage, saying that it is hard to see how they could "have a proportionate reason for their genital activity."¹⁴¹ If "proportionalism" really is an objective, non-arbitrary method, why do these two "proportionalists" come to different conclusions on the same case?

My own position, which has been developed above (see especially Ch. 6.B), is that premarital sexual intercourse is a kind of behavior that is always objectively immoral or wrong to choose. This conclusion is grounded in human experience, biblical teaching, some of the best insights of Christian writers, Catholic teaching, and a holistic Christian anthropology (see Chs. 1-5 above). With regard to the above two cases discussed by Keane and Genovesi, I think my response in G above to the arguments favoring committed premarital sexual intercourse, including some proposed moral options to certain unjust obstacles to marriage, provides an adequate response to these two cases.

As noted above, my purpose here has not been to present a comprehensive treatment of ethical methods such as relativism, hedonism, situation ethics and proportionalism. The notes to this section provide some references for those who are interested in further reading about these methods. The purpose here has been limited to giving some response to certain arguments that deny one of the conclusions of this book that premarital sexual intercourse is a kind of behavior that is always wrong to choose (see Ch. 6.B).

J. Some say "Everyone is Doing It"

Some people say, "Everyone is doing it", that is, having premarital sex. The implication is that

141. Genovesi (see note 114), 182-4. Cf. Keane (see note 101), 105-9.

engaging in premarital sex can not be wrong or must be all right. This attitude can put enormous pressure on those who have not yet done it, to do it. It can even confuse or sway some who thought premarital sex is wrong into thinking it must be okay. With regard to this, consider the following by several young people:

Why wait? It's the number-one teen question. My parents are always telling me what to do and what not to do. I hate their nagging. Besides, everyone has done it. Nobody's a virgin.

Not only is there direct pressure, but there is also indirect pressure to have sex. After learning the truth that she is the only one who is still a virgin, the "last remaining" girl gives in to worrying and feeling abandoned. She feels awkward and wonders if she should have "done it," too.

.... We feel inadequate if we don't live up to our friends' standards where sex is concerned.

The peer pressure by friends is probably the hardest to face as a virgin, because people will tease. "It's fun, you're missing out. Are you chicken or something? It's great. You won't get pregnant."

Another reason some people have premarital sex is that they get confused. They get in the wrong crowd and are brainwashed by the group until they believe things are right that they know are wrong.

Pretty soon they don't know any better.¹⁴²

Those who are better informed know that not everyone has had or is having premarital sexual relations. Various studies, however, do report that many young people including teenagers have had premarital sexual relations including intercourse and that some engage in premarital sex often. In some parts of the world most people do not wait until marriage to have sexual relations. For

142. From McDowell and Day (see note 1), 98, 101-2 and 156. Cf. Walls (see note 39), 81; and Dr. Donald DeMarco, *Sex and the Illusion of Freedom* (Toronto: Mission Press, 1981), Ch. 12 "Is Pre-Marital Sex a Cultural Obligation?"

example, *The New Internationalist*, April 1986, p. 16, reports the percentages of teenagers who had sex before marriage as: United Kingdom, sixty-nine percent males and fifty-five percent females; Nigeria, sixty-eight percent males and forty-three percent females; Australia, fifty-eight percent males and forty-seven percent females; Israel, forty-two percent males and eleven percent females; and Japan, fifteen percent males and seven percent females. Bibby and Posterski (1992) report that "approximately 55 per cent of 15- to 19-year-olds [Canadians] are sexually active" premaritally (62% males and 49% females).¹⁴³ With regard to statistics on premarital intercourse, Eshleman notes that the incidence rate (number who have had the experience, perhaps only once) differs considerably from the prevalence rate (frequency - it may occur infrequently or on a regular basis).¹⁴⁴ Concerning this the Allan Guttmacher Institute, for example, reports the frequency of intercourse of unmarried sexually experienced women in the United States "aged 15-19" in 1988 as: "Once a month or less (23%)", "2-3 times a month (33%)", "Once a week (19%)", and "Several times a week (25%)". This report refers to several sources and among other things notes that in the United States: sex in the teenage years has become increasingly common since the mid-1960s for both men and women, sex is rare among very young teenagers but common in the later teenage years (73% men and 56% women have had intercourse by age 18 in 1988); to some degree the differences regarding young men and young women reporting having had sex "may reflect that men tend to overreport sexual behaviors out of a sense that they are expected to have sex, and women tend to underreport them"; in 1992 eight percent of nineteen-year-olds (12% women and 3% men) were

143. Bibby and Posterski (see note 36), 37-40.

144. Eshleman (see note 3), 367. He presents some statistics concerning the frequency of premarital intercourse prior to the mid-1960s, and in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, as well as a summary of major factors apparently associated with nonmarital intercourse among adolescents such as sexually active friends and permissive attitudes of parents (365-77).

married; "The more involved 14-15-year-olds are in drinking or smoking, the more likely they are to have had intercourse" in 1990; and "Some 74% of women who had intercourse before age 14 and 60% of those who had sex before age 15 report having had sex involuntarily".¹⁴⁵

With regard to the many people including many teenagers in various parts of the world engaging in premarital sexual relations including intercourse, many seem to conclude that this behavior is "normal", that not all these people, or the majority in some places, can be wrong.

A Response

Many people, even a majority, can be mistaken or wrong. For example, the mistaken view of the earth as the motionless center of the universe was almost universally accepted for much of human history.¹⁴⁶ Public opinion can and often does swing very much as public opinion polls show. Neither public opinion nor what many or most people report concerning their behaviors is a reliable basis for moral norms. With regard to this and premarital sexual relations consider the following:

Sociological surveys are able to show the frequency of this disorder according to the places, populations or circumstances studied. In this way facts are discovered, but facts do not constitute a criterion for judging the moral value of human acts. The frequency of the phenomenon in question is certainly to be linked with man's innate weakness following original sin; but it is also to be linked with the loss of a sense of God, with the corruption of morals engendered by the commercialization of vice, with the unrestrained licentiousness of so many public entertainments and publications, as well as with the neglect of modesty, which is the guardian of chastity.¹⁴⁷

145. The quotes are from Guttmacher (see note 38), 29, 21, 27 and 28. See all of 19-29 regarding various statistics and sources concerning sex among teenagers in the United States.

146. Cf. J.J. Langford, "Galilei, Galileo", NCE, Vol. 6, 251.

147. PH, n. 9. Although the statement quoted here refers directly to the disorder of masturbation (see Ch. 8.A in this book), it can certainly be applied to premarital sexual relations as well. This

According to a Christian perspective, everyone of us has failed to love as we should or sinned in one way or another (cf. Rm 5:12; 1 Jn 1:8-10; and Ch. 5.A.3) This, however, hardly justifies condoning sin or immoral behavior. In Ch. 6 we considered a number of reasons why premarital sexual relations are objectively immoral, as well as the very real possibility of forgiveness, healing and hope for the many people who have made mistakes in this area.

With regard to peer pressure and premarital sex, McDowell and Day present some good points including the following:

[Even with all the outside pressures and influences] ... much of how a teenager perceives the world depends on his or her own family. [For example, a teenager who can look to older abstaining siblings can more easily] ... make intelligent choices....

Friends are also of great importance in helping teens make decisions. So peer influences such as church groups provide opportunities to interact with people who may not be sexually active....

Teenagers who are not sexually active and feel left out need to view themselves in a new light. Rather than feeling out of touch with their society, they need to realize that their society is out of touch with God....

Conformity is a familiar part of human nature. Few of us want to be noticeably different from our peers. Whether teen or adult, we hate to pay the price of being singled out for ridicule because of our individuality. In most cases conformity may be harmless enough - except when it becomes the determinant of our ethics and behavior....

... today's teens spend much more time with people their own age than they do with their parents ... because of factors ... such as two-income families and the breakdown of the family....

Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics by the Vatican, in an earlier section (7) also considers sexual union before marriage to be disordered and contrary to Christian teaching which holds that "every genital act must be within the framework of marriage."(see also Ch. 4.D above)

...it is not surprising that the teens [whose parents are seldom available to them] are influenced most by the permissive culture of their peers. Rather than being an integral part of a family and a community [they] have their own subculture. They talk to each other. They grow dependent on each other. Since their friends provide their main source of identity, teens cannot risk their alienation. So when the peer group moves in a particular direction, the individual teens within the group go along....

As parents and as youth leaders we must take the power of negative peer pressure seriously. It is a devastating force for sexual permissiveness....

Churches need to find ways to provide our young people with *positive* peer pressure. Christian teens need to function as support groups, helping each other stand up against the enormous sexual pressures they face....

One of the most effective deterrents to peer pressure is a *good self-image*. The secure teen is usually the only one who can withstand peer pressure. We who are pastors and teachers must teach young people to see themselves as God sees them - with infinite worth and value because of God's creative/redemptive plan. Young people who find their acceptance in a loving/accepting relationship with God and with His people are well protected against moral blackmail from their peers.

As parents, we need to spend more time with our children....

...it is time we parents began giving high priority to our relationships with our children.¹⁴⁸

With regard to positive peer pressure, there are a number of various movements and groups such as "True Love Waits", "Y Wait", and "Teenager And Chastity [TAC Force]" that involve tens of thousands of young people. They openly promote premarital chastity, waiting until marriage to have sex, virginity including "secondary" or "restored virginity"(see Ch. 6.A and K), and learning skills such as creative dating, how to be assertive and set limits beforehand, better communication

148. McDowell and Day (see note 1), 100, 102, 104, and 105.

with parents, how to say no, how to get out of unhappy relationships, and so forth. Concerning this we can also note the value of Christian youth events such as the international World Youth Days that attract hundreds of thousands of people, and Christian Youth Movements such as the New Generation (Gen) Movement. This Movement involves hundreds of thousands of young people in many countries who have chosen to try to live the Christian Gospel, in all areas of their lives including the area of sexual purity, and to go against any opposing currents in society.¹⁴⁹

With regard to the various pressures on many young people (and some not so young people) to have premarital sexual relations and the confusion that exists on this subject, this Chapter including the responses is meant to provide some understanding of some common arguments for premarital sex and why they are all invalid. Chapter 6 is also meant to provide some relevant information and solid reasons for premarital sexual abstinence and waiting until marriage to have sexual relations. (Chs. 1 to 5 provide a broader vision and foundation for Chs. 6 and 7). The next and last two chapters treat "Some Issues Related to Premarital Sex and Love" and "Counseling, Pastoral Action, Sex Education and Spirituality". They, too, are meant to be helpful for single people, as well as others involved with them (parents, teachers, counselors, pastors, theologians...), to meet the challenges that they face concerning "premarital sex and love".

K. The Above Arguments in the Light of Human Experience and Christian Faith

149. See, e.g., Jim Walker, "Teens for chastity: Selling the virtues of virginity", *The Edmonton Journal*, 13 June 1992, A11; Tom Arnold, "The Chastity Challenge: Teens Serious About the Waiting Game...", *The Edmonton Journal*, 18 Dec. 1993, B6; Sharry Silvi and others, "World Youth Day '93, Denver: we were there....", *Living City* (Bronx, NY), October 93, 4-19; and Sharry Silvi and others, "GenFest '95", *Living City*, August/September 1995, 5-13.

In this Chapter we have considered a number of the most common contemporary arguments that have been raised which attempt to justify premarital sex, in particular premarital sexual intercourse. As Guindon notes, "those who advocate premarital intercourse" usually give arguments "without much elaboration".¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, I have attempted to present these arguments fairly. Some of these arguments are developed more fully in sources referred to in the notes. In this chapter I have also provided some response to each of the arguments presented. Since these responses have already provided some detailed analysis of these arguments in the light of human experience and Christian faith, I will only offer some concluding reflections here.

The arguments for premarital sex are not all the same. Some are advocated by more people than others. While some of the arguments are based at least partially on myths or misinformation, some of the arguments reflect an appreciation of some real values concerning human sexuality, for example, that human sexuality is basically good (cf. A), that human sexual relations should be an expression of reciprocal love (cf. F), and that a couple who has sexual relations should be mutually committed to each other (cf. G). None of the arguments for premarital sex, however, show enough appreciation for other very important personal goods, values or meanings that are relevant to human sexuality such as the dignity and integrity of persons, the inherent total giving and receiving / nuptial / marital and generative / procreative meanings of human sexual relations, and the truth associated with the inherent meanings or language of human sexual relations. Violating these values, as premarital sex always does, involves an objective impediment to integral human fulfillment and union with God. It is, therefore, always wrong to choose to have premarital sex.(see Ch. 6.B) This conclusion is supported by the whole range of human experience properly understood. The

150. Guindon (see note 1), 384.

Christian vision and vocation, including specific teachings on human sexuality and marriage, provide additional reasons why choosing to have premarital sex involves a failure to love oneself, one's partner, others and God in a number of serious ways.(see Chs. 1-6) None of the arguments treated in this chapter or any others that someone may raise for premarital sex, therefore, is valid.

Rusty and Linda Wright say that one of the reasons they waited to have sexual relations until they were married was because:

...none of the arguments other people were giving for premarital sexual intercourse were strong enough.... We found that none of them were convincing. Of course, it's always easy to rationalize in the heat of passion and say it's right. That is why it is important to decide *beforehand* - to think with your brain instead of your glands.¹⁵¹

Richard McCormick, in an article on "Premarital Sexual Relations", concludes that "the problem is above all pastoral", to learn how to explore "with young adults the meaning of marriage and human sexuality" so that "the values underlying the Christian tradition" have a "chance to attract them". Among other things, he notes the importance of "lived example".¹⁵² I agree with these conclusions of McCormick. This book, of which the last chapter treats "Counseling, Pastoral Action, Sex Education, and Spirituality", is meant to provide some material, reflections and analysis to assist such exploration.

151. Wright (see note 13), 51-2.

152. McCormick (see note 7), 460-2.