

Fr Andrea Gasparino

# Sexuality & Love

Questions and  
answers about  
sexuality



**Catholic Truth Society Publications**  
**Distributed by Ignatius Press**

Catholic Truth Society and Ignatius Press have joined forces to make CTS's outstanding booklets available in North America. CTS booklets explain the faith, teaching, and life of the Catholic Church. They are based on Sacred Scripture, the Second Vatican Council documents, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. These booklets provide authentic Catholic teaching; they address issues of life and truth which are relevant to all. They aim to inform and educate readers on the many issues that people have to deal with today.

Translated by Pierpaolo Finaldi.

[www.ignatius-cts.com](http://www.ignatius-cts.com)

*All rights reserved. Copyright © 2005, The Incorporated Catholic Truth Society of London. Distributed in North America by Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA.*

*ISBN 978 1 86082 296 4*

Front Cover Image: ©Anne Domdey/CORBIS.

# Sexuality and Love

by Fr Andrea Gasparino

*All booklets are published thanks to the  
generous support of the members of the  
Catholic Truth Society*



CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY  
PUBLISHERS TO THE HOLY SEE

## Contents

1.	Sexuality, why is it a problem? . . . . .	3
2.	Five levels of development in Sexual understanding . . . . .	8
3.	Questions and Answers . . . . .	24
4.	To the Engaged . . . . .	34
5.	The Grandeur of Marriage . . . . .	38
6.	Chastity is... . . . .	40
7.	The Beatitudes of Chastity . . . . .	42

# 1. Sexuality, why is it a problem?

## Living carelessly on the brink of disaster

We cannot trust anything anymore, not the water we drink, the bread that we eat and even less the meat we consume...

What is happening in the world? Is humanity losing touch? Is rampant consumerism driving us to destroy everything?

In the area of morality things seem to have gone even more tragically wrong. The television and film industry and the news media have turned violence and depravity into big business, as though there were nothing else to sell to mass audiences.

If one tries to count how many of this year's films have been truly edifying and educational, the fingers of one hand would suffice.

A visit to the local newsagent is enough to get a taste of today's moral malaise. There is a magazine for every bizarre taste, and newspapers and magazines that are vehicles for serious news have become a rarity.

How then, will the young be educated to defend life? Whenever a voice is raised in defence of life (the strongest has been that of Pope John Paul II) it is shouted down and ridiculed as old-fashioned. It is

almost as if the lifeboat is sent away by those whom it has come to save.

Society stands on the edge of a precipice and seems to want to plunge down without a second thought. What shall we do? Let it fall?

### There is Hope!

We have a hope that is as solid as a rock, the plan of God for our salvation: “for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may never die but have life eternal” (*Jn 3:16*). Jesus Christ gave his life for our salvation.

In the depths of our heart we do see the need for a light; we yearn for a purer world. The good news is that we have been given all that we need to make it come about. Having met many young people of today, I can truly say that despite the suffocating moral confusion that exists in our time, there has never been such an abundance of holiness and purity as there is now. All around us are:

- Christians who refuse to give in to the lies that surround us.
- Married and engaged couples who strive heroically to protect their fidelity to each other.

- Teachers who give their life for their mission.
- Men and women who expend their life in helping others.

Today as never before the battle rages for the defence of the deepest human values. We must not, therefore, lose hope.

### An Undervalued Gift

Before we begin, it is worth noting something that we often lose sight of. Never before has sex been held in such contempt, been so undervalued and constantly rode over rough shod, as it is today.

We should begin by making it clear that sexuality is not a human invention: it was invented by God, and everything that comes from the mind of God is perfect but...

Let us draw a comparison. A young father dreams of buying a beautiful present for his child with his Christmas bonus. He buys him a shiny new bicycle. What would we think of the child if, while the father was at work and no one else was around, he took his father's hammer and together with a friend took the bike out to the yard and trashed it completely. What would we think of such an act?

We would say that the child was worse than naughty, that he was plain bad and that he needed to be punished in such a way that he would see the seriousness of his misdeeds.

And of course this is exactly the experience that many young people go through with their sexuality. An amazing gift from God is reduced to a pile of rubble in a moment of madness. And for many it is impossible to rebuild that gift, they remain without the strength to pull themselves up and take flight, like birds whose wings have been clipped.

Sex education has become an arena for fiercely polarized disputes between those who argue that it should be taught and those who argue that it shouldn't. The whole issue has generated far more heat than light.

Naturally as Christians we believe that sexual and moral formation is necessary, that sexuality is an issue we must confront. However, we believe that the primary responsibility for sex education lies with the family. If the family cannot, for any reason, take on that responsibility then it should be helped, and if the family cannot be helped, as a last resort the school can step in.

Sex education within the school is always prone to the risk that the teaching is undertaken by people whose expertise lies in other areas. Sex education

should not be taught like geography or science. Somebody who has unresolved issues with their own sexuality should not be put to teach others. It is not enough to be intelligent; the teachers' understanding of their own sexuality must be mature. The teacher's own development should have reached a point where they can speak to their students with honesty and experience about a balanced and adult understanding of sex. We only need ask ourselves: how many teachers like this can be found in our schools?

Thus as Christians we believe in moral formation and we believe that the education in sexuality for young people, should be a broad one.

## 2. Five levels of development in sexual understanding

For young people there are five steps which must be climbed

1. Broaden your perspectives on sexuality
2. Teach yourself purity
3. Teach yourself love
4. Teach yourself what is sacred
5. Understand that God calls us all to holiness

### 1. Broaden your perspectives on sexuality

The first thing we need to get into our heads and our hearts is the greatness and beauty of sexuality. We need to see it as a marvelous creation of God, and to remember that everything God makes is Holy.

Sexuality is a gift that God, in his wisdom has placed at the mercy of man's carelessness, and many have divested this great gift of its dignity.

For many narrow-minded people, sexuality is something dirty, and this is a very great pity! God does not give soiled gifts to his children. Whatever there is that is dirty within our sexuality comes from us and not from God.

Our sexuality is a gift from God, which is intended to lift us up. It is meant to create poetry in our lives; it is through this very gift that humanity grows, survives and enriches itself.

From this gift comes the family: which is the most beautiful setting for the formation and defence of new human beings. Today, in devaluing and demoting sex we have also devalued and demoted the family. In fact as the value of sex is lost so the family unit begins to crumble. Look carefully at a family where the parents abuse their sexuality and you will notice that the effects are enormous. The children are unhappy and the family unit will find it difficult to stay together.

Our sins damage the whole person, including our sexuality. Therefore, our sexuality needs formation and redemption.

## 2. Teach yourself purity

If we haven't learnt the value of purity then we cannot understand our sexuality. We need pure speech, pure vision, pure thoughts and pure acts.

1. *Pure speech*: We must learn to fear salacious speech, and to be on guard against foul-mouthed talk. What we say and hear always leaves something

within us, something which leaves us stained. If you mix with people who have a certain language, then sooner or later you will also pick it up.

Today swearing and cursing has become absolutely acceptable, even people who seem educated and cultured have no problem in cursing to their heart's content.

I have noticed that people who are quick to take up dirty talk, or tell dirty jokes are almost certainly involved in some sort of disordered sexual activity. Whoever gets lost in base talk will not be able to think high thoughts.

2. *Pure vision*: If we let our eyes see everything they want to see, we cannot attain a true education in sexuality.

In the twenty-first century the battle is fierce and the enemy takes no prisoners. There are no limits on the pornography that is available. Advertisements are barely concealed vehicles for pornography, as though not even a packet of crisps can be sold without a picture of a naked woman on the front.

How can we defend ourselves from pornography? A truly difficult question to answer. We must react decisively when we encounter films, websites and TV programmes that tend towards the pornographic. It is

possible to defend oneself. When we succeed in limiting what our eyes see we will be well on the way to commanding what our minds think.

3. *Pure thoughts*: Often it seems impossible to control our own thoughts; it seems as pointless as trying to cage the wind. Nevertheless, we need the courage to admit that we can become what we think. If we do not control our own thoughts then we are not in control of ourselves.

Our thoughts prepare the way for our desires, and our desires develop into actions, and we become what we think. If we think sensually we become sensual people and we open ourselves up to weakness.

Our thoughts are the air that our mind breathes: if we breathe polluted air our lungs become damaged.

4. *Pure actions*: Here we approach some delicate subjects. Let us consider, masturbation, for example. Masturbation is a selfish act that closes a person in on him/herself. It is a big problem for adolescents and remains with many people into adulthood. It becomes a heavy chain that some people end up being unable to break free of, and they become discouraged.

## Masturbation is a drug

We should remember that one cannot enter into marriage with this habit, and even engagement is impossible if we are slaves to masturbation. It deeply affects our relationship with our fiancé or spouse.

If masturbation is a habit then we carry a heavy burden of weakness which drags down our ideals. If we are enslaved to masturbation we become incapable of high ideals.

It is possible to be free of this slavery if we fight. We escape from masturbation with the strength given to us by Jesus, and through a disciplined struggle. It is a habit we can break if we want to. It is certainly easier than giving up smoking and far more important.

Christ commands us to banish all disorder from our lives: "if your eye causes you to sin, pull it out, and if your hand causes you to sin cut it off." This drastic language serves to underline the seriousness of sexual disorder in our lives.

Christ calls us to a harmonious life. Therefore if we fight, Christ is on our side and we cannot lose.

Here is some good advice born of many years of experience:

1. *Be frank*: We should speak openly with ourselves and with our confessor. Find a priest you can open up to, and give him an honest account of the seriousness of the problem. Confess to him on a regular basis and you will see that your honesty, and the power of the sacrament will work miracles.

Be honest and do not feed your temptations: protect yourself from perilous thoughts, shows, TV programmes, websites, fantasies, talk and reading materials.

If you give in to what your eyes want to see, or indulge your fantasies then it is understandable that your will becomes weaker and weaker. If a sick person exposes themselves to the elements then it will be no surprise when their condition worsens.

Do not waste time in self-pity, set yourself to rights quickly. At every feast day of Our Lady ask Mary for a healing miracle. Through your own willingness to fight on and Mary's intercession sooner or later miracles will happen.

2. *Make reparation*: Each time that you fall, do some good deed or make an act of generosity. Masturbation

is a sin of pure selfishness, so the best medicine is a selfless act. We can win through charity.

3. *Remember*: Masturbation makes of us infantile slaves, while God wants us to be free and adult.

### Teach yourself love

By this I mean that we need to nurture friendship, and we need to be discerning, because our friends should help us to grow, not encourage us to give in to our weaknesses.

Friendship is one of the greatest gifts that God has given to us, but it is a gift that should be looked after with care.

Friendship is given to us by God to prepare us for love.

Love! The most abused word that exists. The most beautiful word and yet the word that is treated worst. The simplest yet the least understood. Love is respect for the whole person, not using others as an outlet for our own selfish ends. When we hear the word love, so much has it been profaned that our reaction can sometimes be a negative rather than a positive one.

It is vital that we sort out in our own minds what our idea of love is. We must do this, because we were born to love.

When does a boy love a girl? When he seeks what is best for her, what is truly good for her. What is good for her lies not in what is pleasing to him, but in what is pleasing to God.

Is she fragile? Then he must help her to become strong.

Does she have a real need? Then he must help to her fulfill that need, not to take advantage of her for his own ends.

Is she beautiful? Then before choosing her beauty, he must choose to love her for what she really is, the deepest values that make up her person.

Physical attraction is not love, in fact it is barely related to love at all. If you choose your life's companion in real love, you will remain tied to him or her even when his or her beauty fades.

We choose to love a whole person. We do not only love their youth, or their beauty, or their charisma, even though these things all play their part in our choice. We must love the whole person. This begs the question: how can we be sure that we have chosen the whole person rather than their superficial qualities? The proof lies in the sacrifices that we are willing to make for that person. Love is to give yourself with joy to the other, but also to make sacrifices. If you are not willing to accept limitations then your love is not authentic.

Many approach marriage without a second thought, and approach the priest to get married as though they were going to a concert. My heart sinks when I see this and I wonder what will become of their relationship and of any children they may or may not have.

For many approach the sacrament of marriage never having known what real love is. Never having understood that to love means sacrificing oneself for the other. No one has ever told them that love is:

- Sacrificing oneself, denying oneself, respecting the preferences of the other person.
- Saying nothing when we would rather speak.
- Giving up all our whims.
- Responding to the needs of the other, foreseeing the needs of the other.
- Having always in mind the true good of the other, and giving up our own choices and advantages.
- Making of ourselves a gift for the other.
- And to live all of this not for one day but for an entire lifetime. This is what love is.

Before entering into marriage we need to look at whether our character has been shaped in such a way that we will be capable of love. If your temper lights like a match as soon as somebody contradicts you, how will you be able to deal with serious disagreements within your marriage? Training your temperament for love is itself a service of love for your future husband or wife. The rough edges of our personality need to be sanded down before we can live with somebody who will often have a different point of view.

Learning to love cannot be crammed into the last few months before marriage. Your training should begin immediately. Learn to love in your own home and workplace, make sacrifices, learn to serve others and do it without thinking yourself a hero.

The home in which we live is the perfect gym where we can train for love, and hone our personality. The more we train the better we will love in our marriage.

## Teach yourself what is sacred

This is the highest level of sex education, and yet if we do not reach the realization that sex is sacred we have learnt nothing. A sublime truth must make its home in

our hearts: sex is marked by sacredness, and the proof that this is true comes from the fact that God has tied sexuality to the mystery of life itself.

Sexual intercourse between a husband and wife is a sacred act, and there are many Christian couples who live it as such. For them each conjugal act is prepared by prayer and a conscious purification from all selfish ends. Their gift of themselves to each other is a moment of grace which enriches their relationship.

Preparation for the sacred, begins from our earliest youth. It is vital that we have an intense respect for everything that pertains to the mystery of sex and of life. This is a mindset that should be encouraged from adolescence.

A practical example could be that when a young person meets a pregnant woman, they can say a prayer for the child that is growing in the mother's womb and say another prayer for the mother, that God may give her the strength to make the sacrifices necessary to give life to her child.

Meeting an expectant mother should always be a moment of great significance for all of us and especially for the young. When this sense of the sacred has developed it is a sure sign of a mature sexuality.

It is important to face the thorny issue of pre-marital sex. It has become for many the issue on which Catholic teaching on sex stands out, and the measure by which many gauge their commitment to the faith. What happens or doesn't happen before marriage can lay strong or shaky foundations for the future.

I have always been impressed by the fact that in my experience, the marriages that have sadly failed, all began with flawed pre-marital relationships. Neither have I encountered happy and fulfilling marriages that were rooted in a sinful engagement.

Engagement and marriage are two states that are linked but that are different. Engagement is made up of preparation and expectation, while marriage is the fulfillment of the preparation and the expectation.

### Why does the Church say no to premarital sex?

Here are some reasons:

- 1.** Pre-marital relations are in some sense a pretence, an injustice. They do not do what they signify. For the Church, the marital act is a sign of an irrevocable commitment made by one person to another. Pre-marital sex is a symbol without a reality, and this is why it is so serious.

A young man once asked me: “Why, despite what everyone thinks, does the Church hold firmly to its uncompromising position on this issue?”

My answer was: “It is not the Church that is uncompromising; it is Christ who obliges the Church to open people’s eyes. It would make life easier for the Church to go with the flow and be as tolerant as the rest of society, but she cannot. Jesus spoke clearly about the sanctity of marriage and of its seriousness: “You have heard it said: do not commit adultery, but I say to you that whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Mt 5:27)

The bond of matrimony is so sacred that one need only look with lust to spoil it. Listening to Jesus’ own words we can evaluate the seriousness of playing with the sacredness of the marriage act.

If we are honest with ourselves we will find that our conscience confirms that Jesus is right: you cannot give your body to another without giving yourself.

**2.** Another reason why the Church treats this issue so seriously is that sexual activity before marriage is an impediment to the couple truly getting to know each other, and it prevents them from making a serious assessment of their love.

The period of engagement which is a privileged moment for testing their love for each other, simply becomes a time of fulfillment of sensual desires. Thus the couple reach marriage without ever really having tested their love.

Love without gratification is what really counts: a couple who have let themselves go, come to marriage blindfolded, not knowing for sure whether they will be capable of fidelity to each other.

**3.** One of the most attractively disguised traps is the oft-repeated assertion that couples must discover whether they are made for one another, whether they are sexually compatible.

This is a complete falsity. Marriage is not a sexual game, and enjoying oneself beforehand certainly doesn't help in our discernment. True harmony or compatibility comes not from learning how to gain maximum pleasure, but from mutual respect. Reducing a sacred act to the pleasure that can be gleaned from it simply increases our selfishness; it does not increase harmony but rather threatens it.

I once heard a priest draw this comparison: "I am called to the priesthood, but until the day I am ordained I can neither celebrate mass nor give absolution. If I were to do these things I would be

committing an offence. And yet three months before my first Mass I already knew all the words of the Mass off by heart and had finished my studies.”

Only when he receives the sacrament of Holy Orders does the newly ordained priest receive the sacred mission of priesthood from Christ.

In the same way, two fiancés receive Christ’s assent to their marriage and they can pass that assent on to each other, an assent that lasts their whole life. From that moment on, the sublime mission of the transmission of life is given to them.

**4.** The ever-increasing trend of our time is for people to shun commitment and simply say: “we’ll get together and see how things go”, the implication being that if things don’t go well, each partner goes his or her own way.

It is exactly this type of reasoning that has led to the destruction of the family, and the heaviest price has been paid by children. We have also sown the seeds of problems for families of the future.

A family that is built upon the ruins of a previous marriage begins with a huge disadvantage.

God has created us to be holy. We are made in the image of the Holy One and he has made us the living temple of the Holy Spirit. God's holiness dwells within us, and our fulfillment comes from aspiring to holiness.

St Paul had the courage to speak in very clear terms to the early Christians:

"The Father has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Thus he chose us in Christ before the world was made to be holy and faultless." (*Ep* 1:3-4)

"It is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me." (*Ga* 2:20)

Yes it is true that the world around us is in need of healing, wounded by so much pride, violence and sensuality "but Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever." (*Heb* 13:8)

It is for this reason that the Church dares to challenge all people to be holy, young people and adults, engaged and married, consecrated virgins and priests.

This is what was said by the Synod of Bishops: "The Council proclaimed that all are called to holiness... Holiness is the fulfillment of man's deepest desires but it is also much more."

But why does the Church in modern times still say that all the desires of modern man should be

concentrated there, in being holy. Why holiness? Because despite appearances to the contrary, it is there that a person will find his deepest desires fulfilled. We will only find ourselves, find interior peace if we strive with all our strength to be holy.

Is this impossible? Well, landing someone on the moon was once an impossible dream but it has become reality.

### Anonymous Saints

If you look around you, you will discover the saints that the Holy Spirit has raised up in the world around us. I am not talking about celebrity saints like Mother Teresa, Pope John XXIII, Abbé Pierre, Chiara Lubich or Helder Camara. I am talking about the anonymous saints that we meet every day, in our schools, in our workplaces, in the football stadium or in the pub.

I am speaking about the saints that we find everywhere, married saints, engaged saints, saintly mothers who sacrifice themselves for their families, saintly fathers, elderly saints, young saints, workers, doctors, students, nurses, even saintly priests and nuns!

Every day if we have eyes to see them we can meet a saint.

It is incorrect to say that we search for a utopia. The world has never seen so many people of all ages and classes striving for sanctity.

So I say, especially to the young. Awake! We cannot live a watered down Christianity in the modern world; the time for perfunctory Christianity has passed.

### 3. Questions and Answers

#### Some oft-repeated clichés...

*“Everybody does it so how can it be wrong?”*

How many times do we say everybody's doing it and, as society changes, this assertion becomes ever more true. However the morality of the majority has never been true morality.

It is our conscience that inspires our actions. And for Christians the conscience is illuminated and guided by the teachings of Christ.

God expects that love will help us to grow, not bring us to our ruin. Unbridled sensuality does not strengthen love, it weakens it. It is for this reason that God asks us to say no to what would be the easiest course of action.

So often the marriages that break up are those that started off on the wrong foot, where love was not truly experienced due to indulgence in unbridled sensuality. When we seek out our partners only to satisfy our own selfishness, both our love and theirs is polluted. If sexual satisfaction is what we seek in love then our love will not withstand the difficulties of life.

Christ does not want an easy love. He asks for a love that resists the urges of the moment. Christ asks us for a love that helps us grow and that purifies us.

*“Chastity is impossible”*

Chastity is absolutely possible. After all chastity within marriage only requires an ordered sex life. It is vital however, that selfishness becomes no longer the driving force in our lives

In order to show us that chastity is possible, and to strengthen us in our weakness, Jesus ordained that his Church should give witness to this through an army of consecrated people who show that perfect, lifelong chastity is possible. There are 1 million women consecrated to God who have made a vow of lifelong chastity. There are almost as many men (priests and religious) who have vowed with the help of Christ to take this road.

In all religions (perhaps with the exception of Islam) chastity leads to perfection. It is a life chosen by many across the globe.

This shows that perfect chastity is possible, even the chastity that the Church requires until marriage.

*“Masturbation harms no one;  
why does the Church condemn it?”*

It is not the Church that condemns it, but Christ himself. Why? Because masturbation is the grave where we lay our freedom to rest. It is selfishness in its purest form.

The worst thing about masturbation is that it affects our personality. It is difficult for love to grow in a person who is addicted to masturbation. It is like a virus that attacks our will. It is disordered and Christ himself condemns it.

This particular sin always risks becoming a habit, and it is the habit of selfishness that affects our personality. If this habit goes unchallenged in a young person, the habit of selfishness that develops can be so serious that it will affect him or her forever.

As I have already said, the struggle against masturbation should be taken up calmly but with seriousness. It is a battle which can be won if we really want to, and remember we have Christ on our side.

*“Psychologists say that pre-marital sex is beneficial to the relationship”*

Perhaps dishonest psychologists do. Honest psychologists don't. A Christian psychologist will

tell you that you are simply remaining in an immature state.

A famous psychologist, Eric Fromm, wrote that “the primary quality of love is freedom. Freedom in the sense that we are free of impediments, that we are not tied down and tripped up by our own ego.”

Ask yourself, are two young people who engage in premarital sex truly free? Are they not “tied down and tripped up by their own ego”?

Often an individual’s freedom of action is severely compromised by their engagement in sexual activity. In some relationships sex becomes a trap that becomes ever more difficult to escape from.

Why is the Church of Christ so intractable in its opposition to pre-marital sex? Because sex outside marriage can become a snare that strangles one’s freedom. We reach a point where we are no longer masters of our own fate, and our freedom is so tied that it is impossible to break out of the closed circle of our passions.

The Church expects our love to be brought to the altar as a gift to God. Therefore our love should be responsible. Why do we think we will be able to resist future temptations that put our fidelity to our spouse to the test, if we cannot limit ourselves in the first flush of love? How can we know that our love is true

if it is obscured by so much passionate activity? How can we prove it is true?

The greatest proof has been lost. Many of the marriages that fail in the first months are those where pre-marital sex took place. The couple marries without ever having really proved that their love was serious. They have made promises of a lifelong love but have made those promises irresponsibly. Engagement is a time to totally demolish our selfishness, and they had not even scratched its surface. Their love was based on desire and their selfishness was still intact.

Some serious questions and difficult wherefores?

*Why marry in Church?*

There is one simple and important reason. We are weak people, and we need something stronger than us in a marriage: Jesus Christ.

Christian marriage is this:

- Jesus unites the spouses and gives them the strength to love each other until death, holding nothing back. Rising together to meet all the challenges life presents them with, the highs and

End of booklet sample. Find more and order online:

**<http://www.ignatius-cts.com/>**