

# Vatican Declaration On Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics

General Pamphlet No.gen0013 (1975)

The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

1. According to contemporary scientific research, the human person is so profoundly affected by sexuality that it must be considered as one of the factors, which give to each individual's life the principal traits that distinguish it. In fact, it is from sex that the human person receives characteristics which, on the biological, psychological and spiritual levels, make that person a man or a woman, and thereby largely condition his or her progress towards maturity and insertion into society. Hence, sexual matters, as is obvious to everyone, today constitute a theme frequently and openly dealt with in books, reviews, magazines and other means of social communication. In the present period, the corruption of morals has increased and one of the most serious indications of this corruption is the unbridled exaltation of sex. Moreover, through the means of social communication through public entertainment, this corruption has reached the point of invading the field of education and infecting the general mentality.

In this context certain educators, teachers and moralists have been able to contribute to a better understanding and integration into life of the values proper to each of the sexes; on the other hand, there are those who have put forward concepts and modes of behavior which are contrary to the true moral exigencies of the human person. Some members of the latter group have even gone so far as to favor licentious hedonism.

As a result, in the course of a few years, teachings, moral criteria and modes of living hitherto faithfully preserved have been very much unsettled, even among Christians. There are many people today who, being confronted with so many widespread opinions opposed to the teaching, which they received from the Church, have come to wonder what they must still hold as true.

2. The Church cannot remain indifferent to this confusion of minds and relaxation of morals. It is a question, in fact, of a matter which is of the utmost importance both for the personal lives of Christians and the social life of our time. (Footnote 1. Consult: Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 47: AAS. 58 (1966), page 1067.)

The bishops are daily led to note the growing difficulties experienced by the faithful in obtaining knowledge of wholesome moral teaching, especially in sexual matters and of the growing difficulties experienced by pastors in expounding this teaching effectively. The bishops know that by their pastoral charge, they are called upon to meet the needs of their faithful in this very serious matter, and important documents dealing with it have already been published by some of them or by episcopal conferences. Nevertheless, since the erroneous opinions and resulting deviations are continuing to spread everywhere, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, by virtue of its function in the Universal Church (Footnote 2. Consult Apostolic constitution, *Regimini Ecclesiae*

Universae, 29, August 15, 1967): AAS. 59 (1967), page 897) and by a mandate of the Supreme Pontiff, has judged it necessary to publish the present Declaration.

3. The people of our time are more and more convinced that the human person's dignity and vocation demand that they should discover, by the light of their own intelligence, the values innate in their nature, that they should ceaselessly develop these values and realise them in their lives, in order to achieve an ever greater development. In moral matters, man cannot make value judgments according to his personal whim: "in the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose on himself, but which holds him to obedience... For man has in his heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged." (Footnote 3. *Gaudium et Spes*, 16: AAS. (1966), page 1037.)

Moreover, through his revelation God has made known to us Christians His plan of salvation and he has held up to us Christ, the Savior and sanctifier, in his teaching and example, as the supreme and immutable law of life: "I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark, he will have the light of life." (Footnote 4. John 8:12.) Therefore, there can be no true promotion of man's dignity unless the essential order of his nature is respected. Of course, in the history of civilisation many of the concrete conditions and needs of human life have changed and will continue to change. But all evolution of morals and every type of life must be kept within the limits imposed by the immutable principles based upon every human person's constitutive elements and essential relations – elements and relations which transcend historical contingency.

These fundamental principles, which can be grasped by reason, are contained in "the divine law – eternal, objective and universal – whereby God orders, directs and governs the entire universe and all the ways of the human community, by a plan conceived in wisdom and love. Man has been made by God to participate in this law, with the result that, under the gentle disposition of divine Providence, he can come to perceive ever increasingly the unchanging truth." (Footnote 5. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3: AAS. 58 (1966), page 931.) This divine law is accessible to our mind.

4. Hence, those many people are in error who today assert that one can find neither in human nature nor in the revealed law any absolute and immutable norm to serve for particular actions other than the one which expresses itself in the general law of charity and respect for human dignity. As a proof of their assertion, they put forward the view that so-called norms of the natural law or precepts of sacred scripture are to be regarded only as given expressions of a form of particular culture at a certain moment of history.

But in fact, divine revelation and, in its own proper order, philosophical wisdom, emphasise the authentic exigencies of human nature. They thereby necessarily manifest the existence of immutable laws inscribed in the constitutive elements of human nature and which are revealed to be identical in all beings endowed with reason.

Furthermore, Christ instituted his Church as "the pillar and bulwark of truth." (Footnote 6. 1 Timothy 3:15.) With the Holy Spirit's assistance, she ceaselessly preserves and transmits without error the truths of the moral order and she authentically interprets not only the revealed positive law but – "also... those principles of the moral order which have their origin in human nature itself" (Footnote 7. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 14: AAS. 58 (1966), page 940; consult Pius XI, Encyclical letter *Casti Connubii*, December 31, 1930, AAS. 22 (1930), pages 579-580; Pius XII, Allocution of November 2, 1954: AAS. 56 (1954), pages 671-672; John XXIII, encyclical letter *Mater et*

Magistra, May 15, 1961: AAS. (1961), page 457; Paul VI, encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae* 4, July 25, 1968: AAS. 60 (1968), page 483) and which concern man's full development and sanctification. Now, in fact, the Church throughout her history has always considered a certain number of precepts of the natural law as having an absolute and immutable value and in their transgression, she has seen a contradiction of the teaching and spirit of the Gospel.

5. Since sexual ethics concern fundamental values of human and Christian life, this general teaching equally applies to sexual ethics. In this domain there exist principles and norms which the Church has always unhesitatingly transmitted as part of her teaching, however much the opinions and morals of the world may have been opposed to them. These principles and norms in no way owe their origin to a certain type of culture, but rather to knowledge of the divine law and of human nature. They, therefore, cannot be considered as having become out of date or doubtful under the pretext that a new cultural situation has arisen.

It is these principles, which inspired the exhortations and directives given by the Second Vatican Council for an education and an organisation of social life taking account of the equal dignity of man and woman while respecting their difference. (Footnote 8. Consult Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, declaration *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1, 8: AAS. 58 (1966), pages 729-730; 734-736: *Gaudium et Spes*, 29, 60, 67: AAS. 58 (1966) pages 1048-1049, 1080-1081, 1088-1089.)

Speaking of "the sexual nature of man and the human faculty of procreation," the Council noted that they "wonderfully exceed the dispositions of lower forms of life." (Footnote 9. *Gaudium et Spes*, 51: AAS. 58 (1966), page 1072). It then took particular care to expound the principles and criteria which concern human sexuality in marriage, and which are based upon the finality of the specific function of sexuality. In this regard, the Council declares that the moral goodness of the acts proper to conjugal life, acts which are ordered according to true human dignity, "does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives. It must be determined by objective standards. These, based on the nature of the human person and his acts, preserve the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love." (Footnote 10. *Gaudium et Spes*, 51: AAS. 58 (1966), page 1072; consult also 49: *Gaudium et Spes*, pages 1069-1070.)

These final words briefly sum up the Council's teaching – more fully expounded in an earlier part of the same constitution (Footnote 11. *Gaudium et Spes*, 49, 50: AAS. 58 (1966), pages 1069-1072) – on the finality of the sexual act and on the principal criterion of its morality: it is respect for its finality that ensures the moral goodness of this act. This same principle, which the Church holds from divine revelation and from her authentic interpretation of the natural law, is also the basis of her traditional doctrine, which states that the use of the sexual function has its true meaning and moral rectitude only in true marriage. (Footnote 12. The present Declaration does not go into further detail regarding the norms of sexual life within marriage; these norms have been clearly taught in the encyclical letters *Casti Connubii* and *Humanae Vitae*.)

6. It is not the purpose of the present Declaration to deal with all the abuses of the sexual faculty, nor with all elements involved in the practice of chastity. Its object is rather to repeat the Church's doctrine on certain particular points, in view of the urgent need to oppose serious errors and widespread aberrant modes of behavior.

7. (Concerning PRE-MARITAL SEX) Today there are many who vindicate the right to sexual union before marriage, at least in those cases where a firm intention to marry and an affection, which is

already in some way conjugal in the psychology of the subjects, require this completion, which they judge to be connatural. This is especially the case when the celebration of the marriage is impeded by circumstances or when this intimate relationship seems necessary in order for love to be preserved.

This opinion is contrary to Christian doctrine, which states that every genital act must be within the framework of marriage. However firm the intention of those who practise such premature sexual relations may be, the fact remains that these relations cannot ensure, in sincerity and fidelity, the interpersonal relationship between a man and a woman, nor especially can they protect this relationship from whims and caprices.

Now it is a stable union that Jesus willed and he restored its original requirement, beginning with the sexual difference. "Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: This is why a man must leave father and mother and cling to his wife and the two become one body? They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide." (Footnote 13. Consult Matthew 19: 4-6.)

(Concerning EXTRA MARITAL SEX.) Saint Paul will be even more explicit when he shows that if unmarried people or widows cannot live chastely they have no other alternative than the stable union of marriage: "...it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion." (Footnote 14. 1 Corinthians 7:9.) Through marriage, in fact, the love of married people is taken up into that love which Christ irrevocably has for the Church, (Footnote 15. Consult Ephesians 5:25-32) while dissolute sexual union defiles the temple of the Holy Spirit which the Christian has become. (Footnote 16. Sexual intercourse outside marriage is formally condemned: 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:9; 7:2; 10:8; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 13:4: and with explicit reasons: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.)

Sexual union, therefore, is only legitimate if a definitive community of life has been established between the man and the woman. This is what the Church has always understood and taught and she finds a profound agreement with her doctrine in men's reflection and in the lessons of history. (Footnote 17. Consult Innocent IV, Letter Sub catholica professione, March 6, 1254, DS (Denzinger) 835; Pius II, Propos. damn. in Ep. Cum sicut accepimus, November 14, 1459, DS 1367; Decrees of Holy Office, September 24, 1665, DS 2045; March 2, 1679, DS 2148. Pius XI, encyclical letter Casti Connubii, December 31, 1930: AAS. 22 (1930), pages 558-559.)

Experience teaches us that love must find its safeguard in stability of marriage if sexual intercourse is truly to respond to requirements of its own finality and to those of human dignity. These requirements call for a conjugal contract sanctioned and guaranteed by society – a contract which establishes a state of life of capital importance both for the exclusive union of the man and the woman and for the good of their family and of the human community. Most often, in fact, premarital relations exclude the possibility of children. What is represented to be conjugal love is not able, as it absolutely should be, to develop into paternal and maternal love. Or, if it does happen to do so, this will be to the detriment of the children, who will be deprived of the stable environment in which they ought to develop in order to find in it the way and the means of their insertion into society a whole.

The consent given by people who wish to be united in marriage must therefore be manifested externally and in a manner which makes it valid in the eyes of society. As far as the faithful are concerned, their consent to the setting up of a community of conjugal life must be expressed

according to the laws of the Church. It is a consent, which makes their marriage a sacrament of Christ.

8. (Concerning HOMOSEXUALITY.) At the present time there are those who, basing themselves on observations in the psychological order, have begun to judge indulgently and even to excuse completely homosexual relations between certain people. This they do in opposition to the constant teaching of the Magisterium and to the moral sense of the Christian people. A distinction is drawn – and it seems with some reason – between homosexuals whose tendency comes from a false education, from a lack of normal sexual development, from habit, from bad example or from other similar causes and is transitory or at least not incurable, and homosexuals who are definitively such because of some kind of innate instinct or a pathological constitution judged to be incurable. In regard to this second category of subjects, some people conclude that their tendency is so natural that it justifies in their case homosexual relations within a sincere communion of life and love analogous to marriage, in so far as such homosexuals feel incapable of enduring a solitary life.

In the pastoral field, these homosexuals must certainly be treated with understanding and sustained in the hope of overcoming their personal difficulties and their inability to fit into society. Their culpability will be judged with prudence. But no pastoral method can be employed which would give moral justification to these acts on the grounds that they would be consonant with the condition of such people. For according to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality. In sacred Scripture, they are condemned as a serious depravity and even presented as the sad consequence of rejecting God. (Footnote 18. Romans 1:24-27: "That is why God left them to their filthy enjoyments and the practices with which they dishonored their own bodies, since they have given up divine truth for a lie and have worshipped and served creatures instead of the creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen!

That is why God has abandoned them to degrading passions: why their women have turned from natural intercourse to unnatural practices and why their men-folk have given up natural intercourse to be consumed with passion for each other, men doing shameless things with men and getting an appropriate reward for their perversion." See also what Saint Paul says of masculorum concubitores in 1 Corinthians 6: 10, 1 Timothy 1: 10.) This judgment of Scripture does not, of course, permit us to conclude that all those who suffer from this anomaly are personally responsible for it, but it does attest to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of.

9. (Concerning MASTURBATION.) The traditional Catholic doctrine that masturbation constitutes a grave moral disorder is often called into doubt or expressly denied today. It is said that psychology and sociology show that it is a normal phenomenon of sexual development, especially among the young. It is stated that there is real and serious fault only in the measure that the subject deliberately indulges in solitary pleasure closed in on self ("ipsation"), because in this case the act would indeed be radically opposed to the loving communion between persons of different sex, which some hold is what is principally sought in the use of the sexual faculty.

This opinion is contradictory to the teaching and pastoral practice of the Catholic Church. Whatever the force of certain arguments of a biological and philosophical nature, which have sometimes been used by theologians, in fact both the Magisterium of the Church – in the course of a constant tradition – and the moral sense of the faithful have declared without hesitation that masturbation is an intrinsically and seriously disordered, act. (Footnote 19. Consult. Leo IX, letter Ad splendidum nitentis, in the year 1054: DS 687-688, Decree of the Holy Office, March 2, 1679: DS 2149; Pius

XII, Allocutio, October 8, 1953: AAS. 45 (1953), pages 677-678; May 19, 1956: AAS. 48 (1956), pages 472-473.)

The main reason is that, whatever the motive for acting in this way, the deliberate use of the sexual faculty outside normal conjugal relations essentially contradicts the finality of the faculty. For it lacks the sexual relationship called for by the moral order, namely the relationship which realises "the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love." (Footnote 20. *Gaudium et Spes*, 51: AAS. 58 (1966), page 1072.)

All deliberate exercise of sexuality must be reserved to this regular relationship. Even if it cannot be proved that Scripture condemns this sin by name, the tradition of the Church has rightly understood it to be condemned in the New Testament, when the latter speaks of "impurity," "unchasteness" and other vices contrary to chastity and continence. 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. (Footnote 21. "...if sociological surveys are useful for better discovering the thought patterns of the people of a particular place, the anxieties and needs of those to whom we proclaim the word of God and also the opposition made to it by modern reasoning through the widespread notion that outside science there exists no legitimate form of knowledge, still the conclusions drawn from such surveys could not of themselves constitute a determining criterion of truth," Paul VI, apostolic exhortation *Quinque iam anni*, December 8 1970, AAS. 63 (197 1), page 102.)

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 commercialisation 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.

On the subject of masturbation, modern psychology provides much valid and useful information for formulating a more equitable judgment on moral responsibility and for orienting pastoral action. Psychology helps one to see how the immaturity of adolescence (which can sometimes persist after that age), psychological imbalance or habit can influence behavior, diminishing the deliberate character of the act and bringing about a situation whereby subjectively there may not always be serious fault. But, in general, the absence of serious responsibility must not be presumed; this would be to misunderstand people's moral capacity.

In the pastoral ministry, in order to form an adequate judgment in concrete cases, the habitual behavior of people will be considered in its totality, not only with regard to the individual's practice of charity and of justice but also with regard to the individual's care in observing the particular precepts of chastity. In particular, one will have to examine whether the individual is using the necessary means, both natural and supernatural, which Christian asceticism from its long experience recommends for overcoming the passions and progressing in virtue.

10. (Concerning MORTAL SIN.) The observance of the moral law in the field of sexuality and the practice of chastity have been considerably endangered, especially among less fervent Christians, by the current tendency to minimise as far as possible, when not denying outright, the reality of grave sin, at least in people's actual lives. There are those who go as far as to affirm that mortal sin, which causes separation from God, only exists in the formal refusal directly opposed to God's call or in that selfishness which completely and deliberately closes itself to the love of neighbor. They

say that it is only then that there comes into play the fundamental option, that is to say the decision which totally commits the person and which is necessary if mortal sin is to exist; by this option the person, from the depths of the personality, takes up or ratifies a fundamental attitude towards God or people. On the contrary, so-called "peripheral" actions (which, it is said, usually do not involve decisive choice) do not go so far as to change the fundamental option, the less so since they often come, as is observed, from habit. Thus such actions can weaken the fundamental option, but not to such a degree as to change it completely.

Now, according to these authors, a change of the fundamental option towards God less easily comes about in the field of sexual activity where a person generally does not transgress the moral order in a deliberate and responsible manner but rather under the influence of passion, weakness, immaturity, sometimes even through the illusion of thus showing love for someone else. To these causes there is often added the pressure of the social environment. In reality, it is precisely the fundamental option, which in the last resort defines a person's moral disposition. But it can be completely changed by particular acts, especially when, as often happens, these have been prepared for by previous more superficial acts. Whatever the case, it is wrong to say that particular acts are not enough to constitute mortal sin.

According to the Church's teaching, mortal sin, which is opposed to God, does not consist only in formal and direct resistance to the commandment of charity. It is equally to be found in this opposition to authentic love, which is included in every deliberate transgression in serious matter, of each of the moral laws. Christ himself has indicated the double commandment of love as basis of the moral life. But on this commandment depends "the whole law, and the prophets also." (Footnote 22. Matthew 22:38, 40.) It, therefore, includes the other particular precepts. In fact, to the young man who asked, " ...what good deed must I do possess eternal life?" Jesus replied: "...If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments... You must not kill. You must commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not bring false witness Honor your father and mother, and: you must love your neighbor as yourself." (Footnote 23. Matthew 19:16-19.)

A person, therefore, sins mortally not only when his action comes from direct contempt for love of God and neighbor, but also when he consciously and freely, for whatever reason, chooses something, which seriously disordered. For in this choice, as has been said above, there already included contempt for the divine commandment: the person turns himself away from God and loses charity. Now, according to Christian tradition and the Church's teaching and as right reason also recognises, the moral order of sexuality involves such high values of human life that every direct violation of this order is objectively serious. (Footnote 24. Consult footnotes 17 and 19 above: and Decree of the Holy Office, March 18, 1666, DS 2060; Paul VI, encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, 13, 14: AAS. 60 (1968), pages 489-496)

It is true that in sins of the sexual order, in view of their kind and their causes, it more easily happens that free consent is not fully given; this is a fact which calls for caution in all judgment as to the subject's responsibility. In this matter it is particularly opportune to recall the following words of Scripture: "Man looks at appearances but God looks at the heart." (Footnote 25. 1 Samuel 16:7.) However, although prudence is recommended in judging the subjective seriousness of a particular sinful act, it in no way follows that one can hold the view that in the sexual field mortal sins are not committed. Pastors of souls must, therefore, exercise patience and goodness; but they are not allowed to render God's commandments null, nor reduce unreasonably people's responsibility. "To diminish in no way the saving teaching of Christ constitutes an eminent form of charity for souls.

But this must ever be accompanied by patience and goodness such as the Lord himself gave example of in dealing with people. Having come not to condemn but to save, he was indeed intransigent with evil, but merciful towards individuals." (Footnote 26. Paul VI, encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, 29: AAS. 60 (1968), page 501.)

11. (CHASTITY is a POSITIVE VIRTUE.) As has been said above, the purpose of this Declaration is to draw the attention of the faithful in present-day circumstances to certain errors and modes of behavior, which they must guard against. The virtue of chastity, however, is in no way confined solely to avoiding the faults already listed. It is aimed at attaining higher and more positive goals. It is a virtue, which concerns the whole personality, as regards both interior and outward behavior.

Individuals should be endowed with this virtue according to their state in life: for some it will mean virginity or celibacy consecrated to God which is an eminent way of giving oneself more easily to God alone with an undivided heart. (Footnote 27. Consult 1 Corinthians 7:7, 34; Council of Trent, Session XXIV, canon 10: DS 1810; Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 42, 43, 44: AAS. 57 (1965), pages 47-51; Synod of Bishops, *De Sacerdotio Ministeriali*, part II, 4, b: AAS. 63 (1971), pages 915-916.

For others it will take the form determined by the moral law, according to whether they are married or single. But whatever the state of life, chastity is not simply an external state; it must make a person's heart pure in accordance with Christ's words: "You have learned how it was said: You must not commit adultery. But I say this to you: if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Footnote 28. Matthew 5:28.)

Chastity is included in that continence which Saint Paul numbers among the gifts of the Holy Spirit, while he condemns sensuality as a vice particularly unworthy of the Christian and one which precludes entry into the kingdom of heaven. (Footnote 29. Consult Galatians 5:19-23; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.) "What God wants is for all to be holy. He wants you to keep away from fornication and each one of you to know how to use the body that belongs to him in a way that is holy and honorable, not giving way to selfish lust like the pagans who do not know God. He wants nobody at all ever to sin by taking advantage of a brother in these matters... We have been called by God to be holy, not to be immoral. In other words anyone who objects is not objecting to a human authority, but to God who gives you his Holy Spirit." (Footnote 30. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; consult Colossians 3:5-7; 1 Timothy 1:10.)

"Among you, there must not be even a mention of fornication or impurity in any of its forms, or promiscuity: this would hardly become the saints! For you can be quite certain that nobody who actually indulges in fornication or impurity or promiscuity – which is worshipping a false god – can inherit anything of the kingdom of God. Do not let anyone deceive you with empty arguments: it is for this loose living that God's anger comes down on those who rebel against him. Make sure that you are not included with them. You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord; be like children of light, for the effects of the light are seen in complete goodness and right living and truth." (Footnote 31. Ephesians 5:3-8 and see 4:18-19)

In addition, the Apostle points out the specifically Christian motive for practising chastity when he condemns the sin of fornication, not only in the measure that this action is injurious to one's neighbor or to the social order, but because the fornicator offends against Christ who has redeemed him with his blood and of whom he is a member and against the Holy Spirit of whom he is the temple.

"You know, surely, that your bodies are members making up the body of Christ... All the other sins are committed outside the body; but to fornicate is to sin against your own body. Your body, you know, is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you since you received him from God. You are not your own property; you have been bought and paid for. That is why you should use your body for the glory of God." (Footnote 32. 1 Corinthians 6:15, 18-20.) The more the faithful appreciate the value of chastity and its necessary role in their lives as men and women, the better they will understand, by a kind of spiritual instinct, its moral requirements and counsels. In the same way, they will know better how to accept and carry out, in a spirit of docility to the Church's teaching, what an upright conscience dictates in concrete cases.

12. The Apostle Saint Paul describes in vivid terms the painful interior conflict of the person enslaved to sin: the conflict between – “the law of his mind” – and the "law of sin which dwells in his members" and which holds him captive. (Footnote 33. Consult Romans 7:23.) But man can achieve liberation from his "body doomed to death" through the grace of Jesus Christ. (Footnote 34. Consult Romans 7:24.) This grace is enjoyed by those who have been justified by it and whom "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set free from the law of sin and death." (Footnote 35. Consult Romans 8: 2.) It is for this reason that the apostle adjures them: "That is why you must not let sin reign in your mortal bodies or command your obedience to bodily passions." (Footnote 36. Romans 6:12.)

This liberation, which fits one to serve God in newness of life, does not however suppress the concupiscence deriving from Original Sin, nor the promptings to evil in this world, which is "in the power of the evil one." (Footnote 37. 1 John 5:19.) That is why the Apostle exhorts the faithful to overcome temptations by the power of God (Footnote 38. Consult 1 Corinthians 10: 13) and to "stand against the wiles of the devil" (Footnote 39. Ephesians 6:11) by faith, watchful prayer (Footnote 40. Consult Ephesians 6:16, 18) and an austerity of life that brings the body into subjection to the Spirit. (Footnote 41. Consult 1 Corinthians 9:27.) Living the Christian life by following in himself the footsteps of Christ requires that everyone should “deny himself and take up his cross daily," (Footnote 42. Luke 9:23) sustained by the hope of reward, for "if we have died with him, we shall also reign with him." (Footnote 43. 2 Timothy 2:11-12.)

In accordance with these pressing exhortations, the faithful of the present time – and indeed today more than ever – must use the means which have always been recommended by the Church for living a chaste life. These means are: discipline of the senses and the mind, watchfulness and prudence in avoiding occasions of sin, the observance of modesty, moderation in recreation, wholesome pursuits, assiduous prayer and frequent reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Young people especially should earnestly foster devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God and take as examples the lives of the saints and other faithful people, especially young ones, who excelled in the practice of chastity.

It is important in particular that everyone should have a high esteem for the virtue of chastity, its beauty and its power of attraction. This virtue increases the human person's dignity and enables him to love truly, disinterestedly, unselfishly and with respect for others.

13. It is up to the bishops to instruct the faithful in the moral teaching concerning sexual morality, however great may be the difficulties in carrying out this work in the face of ideas and practices generally prevailing today. This traditional doctrine must be studied more deeply. It must be handed on in a way capable of properly enlightening the consciences of those confronted with new

situations and it must be enriched with a discernment of all the elements that can truthfully and usefully be brought forward about the meaning and value of human sexuality.

But the principles and norms of moral living reaffirmed in this Declaration must be faithfully held and taught. It will especially be necessary to bring the faithful to understand that the Church holds these principles not as old and inviolable superstitions, nor out of some Manichaeian prejudice, as is often alleged, but rather because she knows with certainty that they are in complete harmony with the divine order of creation and with the spirit of Christ and, therefore, also with human dignity.

It is likewise the bishops' mission to see that a sound doctrine enlightened by faith and directed by the Magisterium of the Church is taught in faculties of theology and in seminaries. Bishops must also ensure that confessors enlighten people's consciences and that catechetical instruction is given in perfect fidelity to Catholic doctrine. It rests with the bishops, the priests and their collaborators to alert the faithful against the erroneous opinions often expressed in books, reviews and public meetings.

Parent, in the first place, and also teachers of the young must endeavor to lead their children and their pupils, by way of a complete education, to the psychological, emotional and moral maturity befitting their age. They will, therefore, prudently give them information suited to their age and they will assiduously form their wills in accordance with Christian morals, not only by advice but above all the example of their own lives, relying on God's help, which they will obtain in prayer. They will likewise protect the young from many dangers of which they are quite unaware.

Artists, writers and all those who use the means of social communication should exercise their profession in accordance with the Christian faith and with a clear awareness of the enormous influence, which they can have. They should remember, that "the primacy of objective moral order must be regarded as absolute by all." (Footnote 44. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, decree *Inter Mirifica*, 6: AAS. 56 (1964), page 147) and that is wrong for them to give priority above it to any so-called aesthetic purpose or to material advantage or to success.

Whether it be a question of artistic or literary works, public entertainment or providing information, each individual in his or her own domain must show tact, discretion, moderation and a true sense of values. In this way, far from adding to the growing permissiveness of behavior, each individual will contribute towards controlling it even towards making the moral climate of society more wholesome.

All lay people, for their part, by virtue of their rights and duties in the work of the apostolate, should endeavor to act in the same way. Finally, it is necessary to remind everyone of the words of the Second Vatican Council: "This Holy Synod likewise affirms that children and young people have a right to be encouraged to weigh moral values with an upright conscience and to embrace them by personal choice, to know and love God more adequately. Hence, it earnestly entreats all who exercise government over people or preside over the work of education to see that Youth is never deprived of this sacred right." (Footnote 45. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1: AAS. 58 (1966), page 730.) At the audience granted on November 7, 1975, to the undersigned prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Sovereign Pontiff by divine providence Pope Paul VI approved this declaration "On Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics," confirmed it and ordered its publication.

Given in Rome, at the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on December 29, 1975.

FR. JEROME HAMER, O.P. Prefect.

FRANJO CARDINAL SEPER Titular Archbishop of Lorium, Secretary.

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