

Sexuality Education in Schools?

**Yes . . .
. . . but . . ."human and moral values
should be fundamental to such
a curriculum."**

**A STATEMENT OF THE
LOUISIANA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
MARCH 1981**

Introduction

Sexuality education in the Louisiana Public School Systems has been debated for many years. Just last year, a bill was passed which allowed local option for school boards in this subject area. We, the Catholic Bishops of Louisiana, recommend and encourage efforts to develop a sound sexuality education program for all school systems and exhort our people to become active participants in this endeavor.

According to the Second Vatican Council, "As they (children and young people) advance in years, they would be given positive and prudent sexual education. Education in sexuality includes all dimensions of the topic: moral, spiritual, psychological, emotional, and physical."

The Problem

There are indeed serious reasons for better education of the young in sexuality. Though the interpretation of statistics differs, they all point to a massive problem.

Church's Teaching Concerning Education in Sexuality

Sexuality is an important element of the human personality, an integral part of one's overall consciousness. It is both a central aspect of one's self-understanding (i.e., as male or female) and a crucial factor in one's relationships with others.

Education in sexuality which is a lifelong process helps people understand and accept their sexuality beginning in infancy and continuing through adulthood. The best education in sexuality for children comes from the wholesome example of their parents and other adults.

Many parents need assistance in teaching their children on this subject. Their church and/or school can be of great help in this matter. Parents, teachers and religious representatives need to face the problem and set down in constructive fashion the norms and guidelines needed in any school curriculum for family life and sexuality education. (Summary of *National Catechetical Directory, Article 191*)

Rationale

To the attention of Legislators and School Board members, we recall that the Catholic Church has long supported prudent, timely and moral sex education of young people. By moral sexual education we mean not merely the teaching of sexual information but also the presentation of moral values, so that the young know that, even in this pluralistic society, some people hold that certain things are right and that other things are wrong.

Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical *On the Christian Education of Youth*, warned against “naturalism” in sex education – that is, education in sexuality without moral values. The Pope condemned purely natural and indiscriminate instruction in such matters. Pope Pius XII, in his *Statement to Women of Catholic Action*, called for an education in sexuality that expressed hygiene and morality, that called for self-control, that included modesty of dress and behavior, and that would be given by parents.

Later the Second Vatican Council called for positive and prudent sexual education of the young. In its *Declaration on Christian Education*, the Council stated:

...children and young people should be assisted in the harmonious development of their physical, moral and intellectual endowments...
...they should be helped to acquire gradually a more mature sense of responsibility through ennobling their own lives by constant effort, and toward pursuing authentic freedom. As they advance in years, they should be given positive and prudent sexual education.

In these documents of the Church, priority is given to the rights and responsibilities of parents in sex education, as indeed in all education.

The decline of the nuclear family in American society means that many responsibilities formerly exercised by parents, including sex education, are being thrust upon the schools. It is to be hoped that the home, the school and the churches will cooperate in developing a model curriculum for sex education that will respond to the needs of our times.

Some Dangers

Over 50 years ago, Pope Pius XI warned against any form of sex education that is purely natural and empty of moral values. That same warning we give to all who plan or who present sexual education programs. To give sex education without morality fails to meet youth according to their dignity as

responsible persons, and in effect teaches a contraceptive approach to sexuality and life that deceives and betrays youth. There is, in fact, mounting evidence that a materialistic and mechanistic approach to sex education not only does not solve the problems of teenage promiscuity and pregnancies, but actually increases those problems. Thus any such program must emphasize, in actuality, the dignity of the human person, whose sexuality is intimately expressive of the person's powers of loving.

A program limited to contraceptive sex education inculcates a materialistic, mechanistic value system that makes sex both casual and trite. Such a program lessens the love and respect young people should have for others. Such a program effectively drives a wedge between parents who have moral values and their own children. Such a program, in fact, actually promotes the values of secularism. What is more, there is as yet no evidence that contraceptive sex education in public schools has reduced teenage pregnancies, the incidence of venereal disease, the birth of illegitimate children, or the number of abortions.

Moral Education

The current sexual revolution avoids genuine human commitment, does not develop the virtue of love, and fails to consider God's moral law. Therefore, as we see around us, the current sexual revolution sows the seeds of human misery. Teenage pregnancy, with all its tragic consequences, is just part of the price we are paying for a sexually permissive society.

Now is the time in our society for education in chastity. What is chastity? Even the word is not heard often in popular conversation. But chastity should be the cornerstone of any education in family life.

Chastity is a personal quality by which a man or woman shows total respect for self and for others in matters of sex. The chaste person looks upon sex as sacred. This is the means which God has planned for the transmission of human life, which itself is sacred. Therefore life must be considered sacred as well. The chaste person, in humility and maturity, knows that she or he is responsible to God for life and actions, including sexual life and actions. Thus the chaste single person does not, on principle, engage in premarital sex. Thus the chaste married person does not, on principle, engage in extra-marital sex. Chastity reflects complete respect for God, for all other persons, for oneself.

Young people deserve to be told that chastity is the answer, rather than contraceptive techniques. Young people need to be told that chaste self-discipline in sexuality is actually liberating.

We do not see teaching chastity as teaching religion. A virtue is not something exclusively religious. Chastity is no more the sole possession of religion than is the virtue of honesty or justice or patriotism.

Recommendation to Boards of Education

The development of a family life curriculum for public schools is a major challenge for any member of a Board of Education. Sex education in the family is difficult. Sex education in a non-public school setting, in which religious teaching can be presented, is more difficult. Sex education in a public school setting, where no sectarian religious doctrine can be taught, is most difficult.

The current challenge is for the development of a family life curriculum for public schools that respects the consciences and convictions of parents, that teaches moral values in balanced fashion, and that does not proselytize.

For the guidance of those developing family life curricula, we urge that any sex education program for public schools must contain three characteristics: (1) It must show sensitive respect for the consciences of all students and of their parents; (2) It must express the ethical and personal dimensions of human sexuality; (3) It must not advocate or teach any one sectarian doctrine or any amoral or naturalist doctrine.

The first requirement is that the public school sex education program show a sensitive respect for the consciences of all students and of their parents. Parents are the primary educators of their children, and this should be recognized by the school. The primacy of the parents in education obviously extends to their children's formation in sexuality. Parents are presumed to know and understand their children better than anyone else.

Therefore parents—especially those concerned about this feature of their children's education—should be invited to participate in planning, presenting and evaluating family life education programs. Parents should be involved in developing and evaluating the philosophy and objectives of such courses, and should have full opportunity to examine proposed curricula and materials before they are introduced into the classrooms. It is helpful for parents to become acquainted with the teachers who will instruct their children in family life. Also, when possible, parents themselves should ideally participate in the instruction, either regularly or occasionally.

It is essential that no parent find personal beliefs contradicted by what is being taught his or her own children. Parents, in fact, have both a right and a duty to protest sex education programs which violate their moral or religious convictions. If protests based on accurate information are unsuccessful, parents have the right to remove their children from the classes—taking care to cause minimal embarrassment to the children.

Members of Boards of Education and teachers must therefore be acutely sensitive to those rights and duties of parents, even if the individual board member or individual teacher does not agree with the parental viewpoint. It is not the right of the public school to inculcate any particular value system or to inculcate any system devoid of moral values.

Even after their reasonable requirements and specifications have been satisfied, however, some parents may remain anxious about sex education in public schools. Their anxiety is understandable. But they should not let their anxieties lead to indiscriminate opposition to all classroom instruction in sexuality. Such indiscriminate opposition, if it were to disrupt or impede responsible efforts toward balanced sex education in public schools, could violate the rights of other, no less conscientious, parents who desire such instruction for their own children.

The second requirement is that any public school family life curriculum express the ethical and personal dimension of human sexuality. Human sexuality inescapably involves the entire person and that person's moral code. To impart sex education without human and moral values is equivalent to teaching that human beings are simply animals, without a code of right and wrong. Therefore education in sexuality must be presented in a balanced, integral manner.

The third requirement is that the public school program not advocate or teach any one sectarian viewpoint or any amoral or naturalist doctrine. Our nation and its public schools hold to a separation of church and state. The public school should then not teach any one religion or one morality, including secular religion and secular morality.

We note that some public school programs, with marked success, have invited into the classroom qualified representatives of major religions to present their moral teaching on sexuality to those students who wish to hear.

The special contribution of religious traditions in developing family life curricula is in the area of human values and moral education. We believe that these human and moral values should be fundamental to such a curriculum. We believe that this can be done without teaching any beliefs of any one religious group.

The curriculum guidelines which we recommend are the following:

- 1. The individual student should develop a profound appreciation that she or he is a unique, irreplaceable human being, and therefore a person of inestimable value.**
- 2. The individual student should understand the physical and psychological aspects of his or her being and appreciate them as fundamentally good.**
- 3. The student should be open to respecting and to loving others in accord with his or her level of maturation.**
- 4. The student will be open to the growth which takes place through interpersonal relationships, and as a sexual person should participate in relating to others according to his or her own state of life.**
- 5. The student should appreciate the responsibilities demanded in moving in chastity from immature self-centeredness to mature generosity, altruism and love of others.**
- 6. The student should appreciate the need for establishing relationships of commitment and fidelity in life, and the role played by sexuality in relationships of commitment and fidelity.**
- 7. The student should appreciate the fundamental purposes of marriage as expressing the faithful, life-enriching love of husband and wife which is also directed toward the procreation of new life.**
- 8. The student should know the importance for society of the nuclear family in which both parents by love, example and teaching give their children a helpful preparation for the challenges of life.**

These eight general goals, we believe, can be applied to each of the age levels in any family life education curriculum.



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