



Love & Responsibility

Putting the Norms of Catholic Sexual Morality on a Firm Basis

An introduction to Karol Wojtyla's *Love and Responsibility*, whose effort is "to put the norms of Catholic sexual morality on a firm basis, a basis as definitive as possible, relying on the most elementary and incontrovertible moral truths and the most fundamental values or goods" p. 16

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Part III: Chastity, Shame, & Justice Towards the Creator

I. The Rehabilitation of Chastity

- A. Chastity needs to be rehabilitated because it is so misunderstood and attacked in our society. Why do we need it? "Since sensations and actions springing from sexual reactions and the emotions connected with them tend to deprive love of its crystal clarity, - *a special virtue is necessary to protect its true character and objective profile*. The special virtue is chastity..." (146 emphasis added)
- B. Wojtyla holds that there are two aspects to chastity. First there is the aspect of understanding and raising the value of the person. Secondly, there is the virtue of continence, a type of temperance that gives us self-control.

Elements of Chastity

Respecting the true value of the person	Continence
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1. *Respect of the Person*

- a) It is false to view chastity as merely a pushing down of sexual desires, we get the impression of an increasing build up of pressure ready to explode. *This is false. Chastity is not one long "no" but it is above all*

a “yes” of which certain “no’s” are a consequence. The essence of chastity is to raise the value of the person in every situation.

- b) *Chastity is transparent, in that it sees the whole person.* True chastity does not suppress the value of the body; it raises these up to the level of the value of the person. The body is good! Lust then is like looking through a really dirty window – chastity is looking through a clean one. Chastity sees clearly what lust cannot.
- c) *Thus it follows that only the chaste man and the chaste woman are capable of true love.* If you’re not chaste, if your not transparent to the full value of the person, you can’t love! If you want love, if you want to love – be chaste.
- d) Chastity does not lead to a disdain for the body but it does lead to *humility of the body. Humility is the proper attitude of pure greatness.* “The human body must be ‘humble’ in the face of the greatness represented by the person” (172)

2. ***The Importance of Continence***

- a) This is the capacity for self-control. To be chaste is to be in control of yourself. Continence is a “containing” it is a curbing of the lust of the body by the exercise of the will.
- b) Freedom is an essential property of being human. There is a sense in which when one is addicted or cannot control themselves in some way *they become less human, a slave to their passions.*
- c) “If the person does not exercise such control it jeopardizes its natural perfectibility, allows an inferior and dependent part of itself to enjoy freedom of action, and indeed subjects itself to its lesser self.” (194)
- d) Continence is not blind! Mere continence is not an end in itself. “So that the mere fact of cutting oneself off from certain values, for instance from those to which sensuality and sentiment are naturally responsive, does nothing to develop the person unless it results from acknowledgement of the objective order based on experience of the truth about those values.” (197). In other words, a blind restraint is not enough. “There is no valid continence without recognition of the objective order of values: the value of the person is higher than the values of sex” (197). The value of the person must take command.

C. Both of these elements are *necessary conditions* for true chastity. When the value of the person is respected, continence is no longer blind. One must know *why* they are containing carnal desire. Neither can merely recognizing the value of the

person without practicing continence be virtuous either. That would be all theory and no practice.

II. What “Shame” Tells Us About Human Sexuality

- A. Shame – a tendency to conceal something, not because it’s bad, but because you wanted it to remain private. *“the phenomenon of shame arises when something of which its very nature or in view of its purpose ought to be private passes the bounds of a person’s privacy and somehow becomes public.”* (174)
- B. It is not always a desire to conceal sexual *parts*, but sexual *values*. “What is an essential feature is the tendency to conceal the sexual values themselves, particularly in so far as they constitute in the mind of a particular person ‘ a potential object of enjoyment’ for persons of the other sex. For this reason we do not encounter sexual shame in children at an age when the sexual values do not exist for them because their minds are not yet receptive to those values.” (176)
- C. Shame is not prudery. Prudery devalues sexuality, and this is a false position. Shame is a healthy reaction that secures a person’s sexual value.
- D. **Shame protects and reveals:** *“The experience of shame is a natural reflection of the essential nature of the person.”* (178) One must not be regarded as a sexual object even in thoughts. Sexual shame is a revelation of the value of the person, rising above utilitarianism. “...the feeling of shame goes with the realization that one’s person must not be an object for use on account of the sexual values connected with it, whether in fact or only in intention.” (*Ibid*)
- E. Shame is not a flight from love but the opening of a way towards it! *“The spontaneous need to conceal mere sexual values bound up with the person is the natural way to the discovery of the value of the person as such”* (179)
- F. “Sexual modesty is as it were a defensive reflex, which protects that status and so protects the value of the person. But there is more to it than that. It is a matter not just of protecting but of revealing the value of the person...” (179) The parts (sexual in this context) must not obscure the whole!
- G. Sexual shame is a “proper shame, since there are profound reasons for concealing manifestations of love between man and woman, and particularly marital intercourse, from the eyes of other people.” (180)
- H. **The Law of Absorption of Shame by Love:** True love absorbs shame. There is no reason for shame when the value of the person is not in danger of being obscured. *“shame is a natural form of self defense for the person against the danger of descending or being pushed into the position of an object for sexual use.”* (182) *True marital love is an act in conformity with the demands of shame.* In true love the sexual values are subordinate to the person. With true married love there is no reason for shame since there is no danger that the person will be

- devaluated. “The need for shame has been absorbed by mature love for the person” (184)
- I. **The Problem of Shamelessness:** Shamelessness is a privation or a lack of shame that ought to be present. Shamelessness describes any mode of being or behavior on the part of a particular person “in which the values of sex as such are given such prominence that that they obscure the essential values of the person. The consequence is that the person is put in the position of an object for use.” (188)
- J. We see shamelessness in immodest dress. “What is truly immodest in dress is that which frankly contributes to the deliberate displacement of the true value of the person by sexual values, that which is bound to elicit a reaction to the person as a ‘possible means of obtaining sexual enjoyment’ and not ‘a possible object of love by reason of his or her personal value’. (190)
- K. **Context is important:** The principle is obvious but its application depends upon the individual and society. Dress is always a social question. Nakedness is not always immodest and the human body itself is not shameful. If you are at the doctor, and your doctor takes advantage of your nakedness as an opportunity for lustful thoughts, he is the one who is shameless not you. Wojtyla argues along the lines that what may be appropriate attire at the beach is not appropriate at the mall.
- L. Shamelessness or immodesty involves the *intent to arouse* – it comes from the will. *The intent must be included in the moral evaluation.* This is the difference between art and pornography. If I were to hold up a painting from a museum that contained a nude figure – no one would think anything about it. If I were to hold up a piece of pornography - I think some might be a little upset with me. Why? “Immodesty is present only when nakedness plays a negative role with regard to the value of the person, when its aim is to arouse concupiscence, as a result of which the person is put in the position of an object for enjoyment. What happens then may be called *depersonalization by sexualization.*” (191)
- M. *Shamelessness* is one of the problems with pornography. The evil lies in the incompleteness, the lack of showing the loving aspect of the act. The sexual act is by its nature an intimate act between two persons. “Pornography is a marked tendency to accentuate the sexual element when reproducing the human body or human love in a work of art, with the object of inducing the reader or viewer to believe that sexual values are the only real values of the person, and that love is nothing more than the experience, individual or shared, of those values alone. The tendency is harmful, for it destroys the integral image of that important fragment of human reality which is love between man and woman... A work of art must get at this truth, no matter how deeply it has to go into sexual matters...But pornography is not just a lapse or an error. It is a deliberate trend.” (192-193)

- N. Shame is a prime example of Wojtyla's philosophical style blending the objective with the subjective. Taste and see!

III. Justice Towards the Creator: Why We Are Obligated

- A. **The Concept of Justice Towards the Creator:** So far we have been talking about horizontal justice. Vertical justice also must be included. "When we speak of justice towards God we are saying that he too is a Personal Being with whom man must have some sort of relationship. Obviously this presupposes a knowledge and understanding of the rights of God on the one hand and the duties of man on the other... *Thus the personalistic norm may be said to have its fullest justification and its ultimate origin in the relationship between God and man.*" (245 emphasis added)
- B. The personalistic norm is grounded also in justice towards God. How do we be just towards God? "Man is just towards God the Creator *when he recognizes the objective order of nature and conforms to it in his actions*" (246 emphasis added.)
- C. ***Particeps Creatoris*:** a partner of the Creator, working in accord with the thoughts and laws of God. When man does this he *participates* in the thought of God! This participation is an end in itself. If I make something for you, say build you a chair, and you either use it to sit (my intention for it) or you use it for firewood. In the first instance you participate (work with) in my thought, the second you act against my thought. How would you feel if one were to act against the intentions of your gift like that? How would a Creator feel when his creation is used contrary to the purpose he had in mind?
- D. The opposite of this view is *autonomism* – I'm the source of law and can do what I want. This is false and unjust. We owe our existence to the Creator. He gives us our nature, and hence is the director of the purpose behind it.
- E. "Since man is a creature, since his existence depends on God, to whom in the last analysis he also owes his nature, as do all other created things, *his reason must assist him to read aright the laws of the Creator, which finds expression in the objective order of nature, and so to make human laws conform to the order of nature.* But before and above all else man's conscience, his immediate guide in all his doings, must be in harmony with the law of nature. When it is, man is just towards the Creator." 247
- F. "Man can only be just to God the Creator if he loves his fellows" (247). You can't mistreat God's creation (persons) and then be just to God at the same time! Inherent in that mistreatment is injustice to God. A Creator's due is respect for the purpose of His creation. A Creator is owed that much.