



In 1976 the Catholic Theological Society of America endorsed the publication of a book on Catholic sexual ethics, entitled HUMAN SEXUALITY: New Directions in American Catholic Thought. It was authored by Fr. Anthony Kosnik and several others. Many seminaries used this as a text for sexual ethics during the 1980s and 1990s. You still find copies of it in rectory libraries. Notice that it received the endorsement of the CTSA, and that was taken as sufficient justification for using it in major seminaries. It helps us understand why there is such a reluctance among many of the clergy today to preach on God's plan for marriage and spousal love. Its way of explaining Catholic sexual ethics is at great variance with what the Church teaches in her major documents. Kosnik finds the norms given in Casti Connubii, Humanae Vitae and the Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics to be too rigid and oppressive. He thinks that the Magisterium places too much emphasis upon concrete individual human acts, instead of upon the overall intentions indicated by a whole spectrum of choices and acts. Instead of using HV's norm for the spousal act (unitive and procreative), he replaces this with a more squishy and elastic norm (creative growth and integrative).

By using the greater elasticity provided by his new norms, Kosnik is able to justify instances of deviations from just about all of the norms of the traditional Catholic sexual ethic. This includes acts of contraception, sterilization, adultery, fornication, homosexual acts, and even bestiality!

Pope John Paul II addressed the sources of morality (object of choice, intention, and circumstances) in his encyclical Veritatis Splendor and the Catechism. "But the consideration of these consequences, and also of intentions, is not sufficient for judging the moral quality of a concrete choice..."

The morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the 'object' rationally chosen by the deliberate will... Consequently, as the Catechism teaches, there are certain specific kinds of behavior that are always wrong to choose, because choosing them involves a disorder of the will, that is, a moral evil" (CCC 1761) (VS 77-8). "There exist acts which per se and in themselves, independently of circumstances, are always seriously wrong by reason of their object. The Second Vatican Council itself, in discussing the respect due to the human person, gives a

number of examples of such acts (GS 27)” (VS 79).

Kosnik faults Pope Paul VI in HV 17 for predicting serious harmful results from the widespread use of contraception: a general lowering of morality, conjugal infidelity, loss of respect for the woman, and using one’s marriage partner as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment. Kosnik opines: “Many sincere, respected, and experienced people, however, find it difficult to accept these effects as inevitable consequences. Quite the contrary, they contend that the use of such means can at times serve to preserve marital fidelity, deepened the mutual love and respect of the spouses, bring peace and healing, and raise the whole level of moral responsibility of the marriage partners. The overwhelming number and authority of those who have expressed such conviction as well as the intrinsic reasons that they offer to support their position are more than sufficient to render this divergent opinion as theologically solidly probably” (p. 122-3).

Kosnik and his team are typical of the many Catholic moralists who promised us that the use of contraception would usher in a new age of marital bliss and happy families. After forty years of widespread contraception since HV, we now find these statistics in the USA: a 50% divorce rate, 80% cohabitation rate, 35% of all babies are born out of wedlock, 1 out of four unborn babies are surgically aborted (and many more by early on chemical abortion), 85% of Catholic couples are contracepting, and sterilization is the most popular form of birth control among Catholics. With the exception of abortion, most of these issues are not discussed from the pulpits.

Is it not appropriate for Kosnik, and the other dissenters, to publicly acknowledge that Pope Paul VI’s prediction was accurate, and that theirs was only wishful thinking? None of the statistics cited above indicate a healthy state of marriage and family life. Think only of what a 50% divorce rate indicates. Couples experiencing growing pains and maturing pains do not think that going through necessary adjustments to a good marriage is the proper solution. Instead, they adopt the secular attitude that “things just didn’t work out,” “nobody was really at fault,” and “it would be best for everyone, including the kids, if we broke it off.”

They are unable to see the connection between their choices to contracept and their inability to make the total gift of self-sacrificial love, which has now led to a divorce. Their children carry emotional scars from their parents’ divorce. The divorcees bring their unresolved problems to their second and third marriages. Many young couples, victims themselves of a divorce, do not think that a permanent commitment is possible, so they don’t bother to marry.

If the moral reasoning of Human Sexuality has shaped the minds of many clergy, then we can understand their reticence at the pulpit. The solution to this is that they keep searching for the good reasons and the rationale that support the Church’s sexual ethic, and understand why her teaching of moral truth is so superior to dissenting theological opinion.