

Prosperity Through Timeless Values

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LET THE SEXUAL COUNTER-REVOLUTION BEGIN

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The scandals of priests not living their vows of celibacy provide an opportunity to revisit some of the long-held assumptions of the sexual revolution. The intellectual chaos surrounding the scandals indicates that many people are not thinking clearly. So, let's take a moment to unpack some of the favorite sayings that have come to us from the Sixties.

"Sex is just a natural bodily function." How many times have you heard that? It is a favorite starting point for many a sex educator who stand in front of a room full of adolescents, and talk about sex as if it were all about biology. Let's examine this statement.

Which natural bodily function does sex resemble? Is it like sneezing? The urge just comes over the body, and it does what it has to do. Or is it more like breathing? Everybody has to breathe, all the time. You'd die if you didn't breathe. Or, is it more like going to the bathroom? People have to relieve themselves. They have no control over the fact that they have to relieve themselves somehow, somewhere.

Notice what all these images have in common. Each one of these "natural bodily functions" is

necessary. Many of them are completely involuntary. And none of them has any moral significance. Describing sex as "a natural bodily function," removes the moral significance of the act, and minimizes the element of choice involved in virtually every sexual act. We create an image of something that just comes over us, that we have no control over, and that we can't be denied.

So what do we make of a person who makes a vow of celibacy? He or she is signing up for something that is obviously unnatural and possibly dangerously unhealthy. The person is probably some kind of nutcase, who has "conflicts about his sexuality."

The image of a bodily function also reduces sex to something that involves only a single individual. We don't cough as a group. I can easily blow my nose all by myself. Eating or urinating can be completely private, individual activities.

This brings up another myth: sex is purely private. Who I have sex with, when, where and how, is nobody's business but mine. In spite of our modern pretensions, no sex act is completely private. I don't mean to suggest the usual opposite, that sex is a public activity. We are used to thinking of "public" and "private" as contrasting sets. Sex isn't public is either of its two usual meanings: we don't do it out in the street and it is not a governmental undertaking. I mean to say that sex is by its nature a social activity.

The natural, organic functions of sex are spousal unity and procreation. These both build community. Sexual activity inside marriage builds up the community of the family, both because it strengthens the bonds of love between the spouses, and because it creates a new little person for them to

love.

Sex outside of marriage almost inevitably involves third parties, whether we admit it or not, (and we usually don't.) If I have sex with someone I am not married to, our respective spouses and children probably won't appreciate it. If two unmarried people have sex, they take the risk of creating a child they are not really prepared for. They also are ignoring the impact of any union of theirs on their extended family members, all of whom have an interest in the question. My parents are not indifferent about who I marry; they can't be indifferent to the identity of guys I fool around with. My parents have a definite interest in any children of mine; those are their grandkids. It matters to them whether I get involved with someone without really thinking through the question of their long-term suitability.

We think that we can contracept our way out of this issue. But this is itself a myth. We imagine that we are outsmarting Mother Nature by separating conception from sexual activity. But quite often, Mother Nature imposes consequences of her own, consequences that are more subtle than a new born baby.

For instance, it is not unusual for a woman to become emotionally attached to a man she has sex with. If she just hops into bed with a guy, she hasn't really considered the man's character. She can easily end up emotionally attached to a guy who is in one way or another, unsuitable. She can find it difficult to unhook from him when the evidence begins to present itself.

You don't believe me? Shelters for battered women are full of women who can't detach themselves from abusive men. These are usually not women "trapped in abusive marriages," but women who moved in with a boyfriend, thinking it was no big deal.

So sex isn't strictly a private matter. The sexual urge is one of the few "natural bodily functions" that draws us out of our natural self-centeredness,

and compels us to really notice another person. We can, if we choose, direct that sexual urge toward the good of building up the family, both through spousal love, and making new babies.

Unfortunately, we all too often allow that sexual urge to drive us toward self-gratification. If sex is nothing more than a purely private matter, we are in danger of reducing sex to a recreational activity. We can reduce our partner to a consumer good, who is just there to provide satisfaction.

This is one of the truths about modern sexual mores. We have created a profoundly exploitive sexual culture. We have lost the inspiring vision of human sexuality as an engine of building communities of life and love. If the crisis in the priesthood helps people to rethink our sexual mores, something good and wholesome may yet come from it.

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