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Education in Wholesome Chastity

National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds' Position Paper on Sex Education

AS THEY GROW OLDER, (CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE) SHOULD RECEIVE A POSITIVE AND PRUDENT EDUCATION IN MATTERS RELATING TO SEX. [1]

Around these few words swirls a growing controversy. On one side are those who seek to incorporate programs of classroom sex education (CSE) into the curricula of Catholic schools. On the other side is a loose coalition of parents, pastors and professionals who consider CSE neither a positive nor a prudent form of "education in matters relating to sex."

The proponents of CSE have received considerable support in their efforts. The Catholic bishops of some states have mandated CSE in all their parochial schools, and the United States Catholic Conference has published a syllabus, *Education in Human Sexuality for Christians*, which admonishes,

> However, if parents do not want their children to attend a prudently planned program based on these "Guidelines," they should remember that they have the responsibility to seek alternative forms of *formal instruction in human sexuality* for their children. [2]

The National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds, whose members daily counsel families and individuals troubled by problems in marriage, sexuality and family life, addresses this position paper on sex education to bishops, pastors, parents, teachers, and the entire Catholic community. Our understanding of sex education springs from our collected experience and from recent as well as ancient insights into the human character: on the one hand, from the psychology of the child and the adult; on the other, from our Catholic faith and the teachings of the Church.

Position of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds

It is the position of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds that sex resides as much in the affective as in the cognitive domain; that adult sexuality is a personal response, not merely an intellectual function; that a child learns about sex primarily by responding affectively to his parents' affective behavior; and therefore that healthy sexuality cannot be taught in the classroom, it cannot be taught by strangers, it cannot be taught apart from the family. When parents fail in their responsibility to their children, it is they who must be educated for, for better or for worse, it is they who will educate their children in these matters.

The formation which the child receives from the family is, of course, reinforced, tested, altered, refined, or undermined by a myriad of influences in the child's environment. At school, on television and radio, and inevitably "in the gutter," the child is besieged by sexual stimuli, innuendoes, and ideas. For all their good and bad effects, however, these influences remain secondary to those of the home.

Every child in every family in every culture receives some kind of education in matters relating to sex. This education may be good or bad; that is, it may prepare him for maturity as a good man or woman or it may hinder his maturation and bog him down in a perpetual immaturity. But maturity (in all spheres, not just sex) is directly proportional to generosity. The mature person has developed a capacity for selfless giving. Such maturity is easily recognized as fundamental to happy marriage and family life. To the extent that a child's education fosters or impedes such maturity, it can be judged adequate or lacking.

From infancy the child normally learns about sex from his parents' actions, attitudes and example. By the age of two he or she knows his or her own gender. He learns to identify with the parent of his own sex, and to anticipate his own growth into manhood or womanhood. He sees and internalizes how his parents treat each other, not only in the bedroom, but also in the living room and in the shopping center. As he grows he forms relationships with peers of his own and the opposite sex. As he is educated he reads the great literature and learns the great themes of romantic love, and in his imagination he lives the emotional and moral conflicts of the great heroes. He learns the principles of science and biology. If his education is Catholic, he learns the natural and the moral law. If he attends a good Catholic high school or college today, he studies the powerful and profound weekly addresses of Pope John II on the nuptial meaning of the body.

Thus the child who grows up in a home with loving parents, who is taught by good Catholic teachers, and who interacts normally with his peers will be well-educated in sexuality without ever having been exposed to CSE.

Does such a scenario exist? Did it ever? Can it? These questions underlie current controversy. Those who promote CSE hold that such informal education in sexuality is so inadequate that it must be replaced by formal CSE. Those who oppose CSE hold that *only* the scenario described above is "positive and prudent" and that CSE is *inherently* negative and imprudent. The National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds holds the latter position.

The Cultural Context

Before examining the arguments for and against CSE, it is necessary to understand the cultural context in which the controversy occurs. Two contradictory views of human sexuality currently prevail — the traditional view that sex is inextricably linked to marriage and family, love and children, personal union and procreation; and the neo-puritanical view that sex is fun, casual, "natural" (actually, divorced from nature), value-free, and oriented primarily toward the pleasure of the individual. The former viewpoint is held not only by traditional Judeo-Christian religions, but also by every traditional culture worldwide and even by the father of modern psychology, Sigmund Freud. Freud said:

> We actually describe a sexual activity as perverse if it has given up the aim of reproduction and pursues the attainment of pleasure as an aim independent of it.[3]

The neo-puritanical view is defended by such prominent individuals and groups as Masters and Johnson, *Playboy*, Planned Parenthood, and the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) — the most conspicuous and successful promoter of CSE. CSE is, in fact, inseparably linked to the "sexual revolution," that is, the conversion of Western society from the traditional to the neo-puritanical viewpoint on sexuality.

The sexual revolution is inherently *anti-sexual.* It is yet another permutation of Catharism, Albigensianism, Manicheanism, Jansenism and the other Hydra-heads of Gnosticism which the Church has battled for millenia.[4] It is an over-reaction to Victorianism and is a mechanism of denial of the Puritanism of those who promote it. Dr. Mary Calderone, the executive director of SIECUS, has said:

> What kind of sexual persons would we like our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren to become? . . . We would hope that they are *not* to be: furtive, leering, guilt-ridden, pathetic, compulsive, joyless. In other words, not like ourselves![5]

The new sexual license is puritanical because it attempts to separate sex from life and from love. Whereas the Victorians exalted romantic and frowned upon physical sexuality, the neo-Puritans exalt the physical and attempt to escape the emotional, moral and spiritual dimensions of sexuality. Whereas the old Puritans would make sex evil, the neo-Puritans would make it trivial. Whereas sex is, in fact, holy, the neo-Puritans would make it merely fun. Whereas the true joy of sex inheres in the intimate personal relationship of permanent, monogamous, life-giving marriage, the neo-Puritans seek only the "joy" of new and better orgasms. Neo-Puritanism strips sex of both its procreative dimension (through contraception, sterilization, homosexuality, and abortion) and its unitive dimension (through divorce, casual liaisons, masturbation, etc.). CSE is an integral strategy of the neo-puritanical revolution.

Is CSE the Solution?

The problems to which CSE is proposed as a solution fall into three general categories. First, the promoters of CSE point out that teenage pregnancy and venereal disease are rampant. Parents are led to believe that CSE will somehow forearm their children against these occurrences. Second, parents are made to feel as if they themselves are part of the problem, because they are ignorant of biology and "sexology" and because they feel emotional discomfort ("hang-ups") in discussing sex. Third, a new villain has recently been discovered: "sexism," i.e., the adherence of most families to the notion that male and female roles differ.

Regarding the first problem, it may be true that teenage pregnancy, venereal disease, abortion, and promiscuity (as well as suicide, delinquency, drug use, etc.) are increasing dramatically. But to assume that ignorance is the cause of and CSE the solution to these problems is not only unfounded, it is contrary to the available evidence. In fact, CSE has generally been accompanied by an increase in sexual activity, with all the effects of that activity.[6] Surveys of pregnant teenagers have repeatedly shown that contraceptive knowledge was not lacking, but that either consciously or unconsciously pregnancy was chosen.[7] Venereal disease is "an unbelivable problem. . . . We estimate that between 50,000 and 80,000 young girls and young women (in the United States) are made sterile by gonorrhea every year."[8] Rates of venereal disease are highest in communities with CSE. (Similarly, when children are given lectures on the dangers of illegal drugs, experimentation increases.)

> The results of (a) Planned Parenthood study show that over a five year period, increased exposure of teenagers to contraceptive counseling led to more promiscuity, more premarital pregnancy, more illegitimacy, more abortions, more venereal diseases and more cervical cancer.[9]

The usual retort to those who object to CSE is that they are trying to "hide the truth," the truth which "can't hurt." Cries of "censorship" and "book burning" are heard. Who can possibly object to "the facts of life," especially when "They're going to find out anyway," and we should all rather have them find out in the classroom than "in the gutter."

Accepting for the moment the premise that CSE is concerned only with providing information, it is by no means demonstrated that all knowledge is good, or even that it is harmless. One does not try to teach first graders algebra, or require that they read Shakespeare's tragedies. Yet the United States Catholic Conference "guidelines" say about six to eight year old children: "The child will . . . gain a basic understanding of menstruation and sexual intercourse if called for at this age level." (If called for?) At ages nine to eleven, children "learn the proper terminology related to psychosexual functioning and discuss sexual intercourse with parents or someone entrusted by their parents...." Children aged twelve to fourteen are to be "introduced to the scientific data regarding all methods of family planning and the Church's teaching on this subject."[10]

Such a program not only ignores the individual needs and readiness of children, but it also introduces concepts long before even the most mature child in the class is ready for them. For such "facts" are merely confusing, as would be algebra to a first-grader; the teaching of sexuality inevitably involves the strongest emotions of both teacher and students.

Presenting explicit sexual concepts to a captive audience of preadolescents entails a reckless disregard for the latency period, that time in a child's psychosexual development when he sublimates his sexual drive in order to grow out of his infantile attachments to his parents and to prepare himself for the new awakening of puberty. If unencumbered by explicit sexual preoccupations during the latency period, the child will channel his energies into a fierce pursuit of intellectual, social, and emotional maturity. However, if he is prematurely forced into the turbulence of adolescence by CSE, he will have been deprived of an irreplaceable opportunity to develop the strength of character which would have allowed him to deal with his sexual feelings maturely. Those who promote CSE depend on a few recent criticisms of the latency concept, criticisms which have failed to demonstrate convincingly that it is invalid. No sophisticated understanding of psychological theory is needed to recognize that CSE, in treating an intimate personal matter with inappropriate public discussion, is an invasion of the child's privacy and an affront to his natural modesty. It desensitizes the child and increases the likelihood of sexual experimentation.

Educational planners are careful to avoid distressing parochial school children with frightening concepts of sin and guilt while intro-

ducing the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Are we to take less care with the teaching of sexuality, which involves the deepest levels of the emotions and the psyche? The failure to admit the emotional content of sex and the pretense that one should be (or can be) calm and objective about sex are fundamentally puritanical notions.

However, the notion that CSE is merely the communication of facts is generally trotted out only for the consumption of sceptical parents. Some promoters of CSE are willing to admit that the real purpose of CSE is to change attitudes and behavior.

> Sex education is very different from many other classes. . . . The purpose of sex education is not simply to fill the gaps in the knowledge of adolescents. . . . The goals of sex education are much more ambitious; they involve . . . the changing of attitudes and behaviors. [11]

Merely informing adolescents of the facts of the biology of reproduction should hardly require the efforts of myriad experts and the publication of extensive series of textbooks spanning "K through Medical School."[12] On the contrary, CSE represents an important weapon in the waging of the sexual revolution. It is not only *not* a remedy against venereal disease and teenage pregnancy, but by arousing sexual interests and, inevitably, sexual passions in the young, it also fosters the cause of both venereal disease and pregnancy: sexual activity.

Programs for Parents

The second "problem" to which CSE is a proposed solution, is that parents are hopelessly naive, wracked by emotional conflict, and incapable of teaching their children, and that their role must therefore be assumed by the schools.

This assertion again presumes that information devoid of emotion is preferable to attitudes conveyed by example. Yet through the ages men and women have been able to marry and raise happy, healthy children in spite of their ignorance not only of the products of modern "sexological" research (which is merely voyeurism *cum* electrodes) but also of the most basic facts of reproduction. Again, clearly, ignorance is not the problem and knowledge is not the solution.

What about parental attitudes? What about the old Puritanism presumably so rampant among parents? Americans, perhaps especially Anglo-Saxons and others of Northern European extraction, may indeed suffer from a background of Puritanism, although the parents of today's school children are perhaps more likely to be neo-Puritans than old Puritans. Is CSE the answer to this problem? Even if one makes the improbable assumption that teachers are somehow immune

to the prevailing Puritanism, can CSE overcome the failings of the home? In light of the experience rapidly accumulating in public schools, the answer must be negative. It is ironic that just when more and more public school educators are speaking out against CSE, it should be welcomed so enthusiastically into Catholic schools. The truth is that the school simply cannot compensate for the failures of the home. The child's attitude about sex (and about life) are fundamentally established before he enters kindergarten.

If Catholic parents are failing to educate their children "positively and prudently," then it is they who need help, for only they can form their children. And it is the formation, not the information, that counts. The school cannot replace the parents, even if it wants to. If it attempts to do so, it will fail not only at the parents' job but also at its own.

> To accept new monies for sex education programs under the prevailing situation borders on educational fraud. We would be accepting money under false pretenses: the expectation by the public that teenage sexual activity will diminish. . . . In the meantime educational funds are better spent where schools can make a real impact on students — in English, and math, and science, and the arts, and vocational education. [13]

Several programs designed to assist parents in the positive and prudent education of their children have been developed. Such programs should be encouraged in every diocese.

Sex Education and Feminism

The third "problem" which the more recent programs of CSE are supposed to solve is that of "sexism." The popular *Benziger Family Life Series*, for example, is an egregious attempt to foist the feminist ideology on Catholic school children. The traditional roles of father as breadwinner and head of the home and mother as homemaker and heart of the home are neglected, while examples of alternate lifestyles (Dad fixes breakfast while Mom gets ready for work) occur repeatedly.

Feminism reduces sexuality to genitality, assuming that gender is no more than a variation of pubic anatomy. In denying that sexuality penetrates to the core of personhood and defines human roles and relationships, the feminist-unisex mentality is *anti-sexual*, an eddy in the stream of Puritanism. The enemies of "sexism" are, in fact, enemies of sex.

A corollary of this mind-set is the redefinition (explicitly taught by Benziger) of "family" to apply to any group of individuals who share living quarters. One of the techniques used to promote this ideology is "values clarification," a process by which children are taught to doubt the moral values of the home and to replace them with individually

determined standards. It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss these issues in depth. Suffice it to say that most Catholic families are not aware that their children are being recast in the image of secular humanism and radical feminism, and they would be unlikely to approve if they knew.

CSE in Catholic Schools

It may be objected that programs of CSE developed for use in Catholic schools incorporate explicitly Christian, not secular humanist values. It is true that an attempt has been made to graft some elements of Christianity onto SIECUS-style CSE. However, the similarities remain profound and the differences are superficial. CSE remains inherently puritanical. Like the new Puritanism of *Playboy*, Masters and Johnson, Planned Parenthood, and SIECUS, CSE in parochial schools is puritanical because it separates sex from life. By its very nature as a separate course, CSE separates sex from literature, from science, from religion — from the contexts which give it meaning. Instead, it focuses a garish spotlight whose brightness obscures rather than clarifies the complexity and the richness of sexuality in human life. Just as chivalry in some sense degraded women by placing them on a pedestal, so does CSE degrade sex. It attempts to prepare children to handle their sexuality, which is deeply rooted in the strongest passions, by pretending that sex is merely rational. Giving lip service to the emotional dimensions of sex, but assuming that ignorance is the cause of and knowledge is the cure for sexual problems, it stimulates the child's passions before he has developed the strength of character to control them. Encouraging preoccupation with the child's own feelings, desires, and "needs" rather than with the responsibilities of serious human relationships, it impedes the growth of self-giving maturity and fails the test of good education.[14]

Although the sex educators neglect the connections between sex and passion and between sex and life, their victims, the "sexually active" teenagers, do not. Interviews with pregnant teenagers reveal that sexual activity inevitably leads to a longing for a deeper intimacy than occurs in casual liaisons and that pregnancy is an attempt to fulfill this longing (by eliciting love for the teenage girl from the baby's father, from her own parents, or from the baby himself). Thus, promiscuous teenagers eventually discover the truths that the sex educators never told them: Sex means love. Sex means babies. Unfortunately, this discovery often comes after their lives are wrecked.

But surely one cannot blame the schools for attitudes which pervade all of society. What about magazines, television, radio, movies? What about broken homes? That is precisely the point: schools are not solely to be blamed, but it would be equally simplistic to assume that

schools can singlehandedly overcome the deficiencies of families and societies through CSE. Let us merely ask that the schools assume their own share of the burden of "education in matters relating to sex" in a positive and prudent manner, not in the neo-Puritan mode. Let the Catholic schools teach the Ten Commandments, neither excluding nor isolating the sixth and ninth. Let them teach biology as biology, with neither a prudish neglect nor a neo-Puritan preoccupation with the reproductive system. Let them teach children to read and to love reading, so they may enjoy and benefit from the great literature, experiencing vicariously and safely the conflicts and emotions of life. Let the schools respect the personal privacy of their students. Let them maintain the same delicacy and respect for the students' personal problems as for those of the teacher. (Do teachers come to their classes for a general discussion of their families' intimate problems? CSE techniques call upon children to do so.) Let the schools help children, through study habits, sports, fair codes of discipline, and ample opportunities to interact with their peers, to develop strong characters which will ensure that the passions which unfold as they get older will not overcome them. Let them counsel troubled students discreetly and with Christian love, without imposing their difficulties on the rest of the class. Let them provide access to and encourage frequent use of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion.

Magisterial Teaching

Let Catholics remember that all magisterial teaching is consistent. Therefore, other magisterial statements will help to clarify the meaning of "positive and prudent."

Let us heed the teachings of Pope Pius XI in his encyclical on *Christian Education of Youth:*

> Far too common is the error of those who with dangerous assurance and under an ugly term propagate a so-called sex education, falsely imagining they can forearm youth against the dangers of sensuality by means purely natural, such as foolhardy initiation and precautionary instruction for all indiscriminately even in public; and, worse still, by exposing them at an early age to the occasions, in order to accustom them, so it is argued, and as it were to harden them, against such dangers. Such persons grievously err in refusing to recognize the inborn weakness of human nature, and the law of which the Apostle speaks, fighting against the law of the mind, and also in ignoring the experience of facts, from which it is clear that, particularly in young people, evil practices are the effect not so much of ignorance of intellect as of weakness of a will exposed to dangerous occasions, and unsupported by the means of grace.[15]

Let us recall the condemnations of explicit sex education by Pope Pius XII and Pope Paul VI.[16]

Let us recall the primacy of the family in all education: "The family holds directly from the Creator the mission and hence the right

to educate the offspring, a right anterior to any right whatever of civil society and the State and therefore inviolable on the part of any power on earth. This mission cannot be wrested from parents without grave violation of their rights." [17]

This teaching has been reaffirmed by Pope John Paul II: "The delicate responsibility for sex education belongs principally to families, where an atmosphere of loving reverence will be conducive to a fully human Christian understanding of life and love." [18]

Let us recall that the opening citation of this paper was not the only mention by Vatican Council II of "matters relating to sex." For example: "It is imperative to give suitable and timely instruction to young people, *above all in the heart of their own families*, about the dignity of married love, its role and its exercise." [19]

Conclusion

The National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds supports sex education for parents. We oppose all distinct formal programs of classroom sex education for children and adolescents as inherently puritanical, as a damaging invasion of the privacy of children, and as a usurpation of the rights of parents.

We stand ready to participate in the development of programs to help parents fulfill their role in the education of their children in matters relating to sex. Such programs might be taught by pastors, by physicians, or by others who recognize that the child's emotional and moral formation is far more important to his development than his knowledge of psychology, "sexology," or biology. These teachers must also recognize that the traditional moral teachings of the Catholic Church are not matters of sectarian discipline, but are rooted in the laws of nature. Indeed, Catholic moral teaching frees the Christian, who thereby lives in harmony with his created nature, from the slavery of his fallen nature.

Sex education for parents should be designed to counter Puritanism in the home by fostering the wholesome chastity of marriage. Teachers must understand and embrace the constant teaching of the Magisterium that genital sexuality is wholesome only in the context of permanent, monogamous, life-giving marriage. They must be fully versed in the many errors prevalent in society (even among Catholics) and they must know why these views are false. They must recognize that those parents who live according to the laws of nature and the laws of the Church will be able to educate their children positively and prudently in matters relating to sex.

This is a great challenge. Puritanism is deeply entrenched in the modern world. No one can escape its effects completely. Let all Catholic bishops, clergy, educators, physicians, and parents work and pray together to restore families to lives of wholesome chastity.

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