



Catholics in Scouting and Cherishing Human Sexuality

Introduction

In October 2008 the Scout Association issued FS950000 *Promoting good sexual health within Scouting*. This sought to bring the Scout Association into line with government policies aimed at promoting safe and responsible relationships.

In summary it asks leaders to:

- Think about how they would respond to requests from young people for advice and information in regards to “sexual health”;
- Consider whether the programme they offer should include opportunities for thinking about safe and responsible relationships;

It underlines the responsibilities that leaders have to refer matters of concern under child protection procedures.

It does not require leaders to

- Discuss issues they are not comfortable with;
- Provide advice on contraception or make it available to young people in their care;
- Usurp the role of parents.

These notes seek to

- Explain the basis of a Catholic understanding of human sexuality
- Provide supplementary guidance for Catholics in Scouting further to that already given by the Scout Association.

A Catholic Understanding of Human Sexuality

The Church draws its teaching on the meaning of the human body from Scripture where the creation of embodied human beings is seen as the peak of the goodness of material creation (*Genesis* 1:26-31). Belief in the goodness of the body, present everywhere in the Jewish Scriptures, was confirmed by the coming of Jesus when ‘the Word was made flesh’ (*John* 1:14). [...]

It is because the human body has value and significance that there can be a positive meaning discerned in the bodily ways we relate to one another. [...] Sexual attraction is an important aspect of human life that therefore needs to be expressed and integrated in a fully human way.

What is implied by the fully human expression of sexuality? Popular culture, films, novels and songs [...] commonly see the meaning of sexual encounter in terms of love. Indeed, in ordinary speech people talk of the ‘act of love’ or of ‘making love’. It is true that this sentiment is contradicted by the equally common tendency to see sexual intercourse as meaning as much or as little as someone wants it to mean. However, to think of the human sexual act as though it could be merely a recreational activity undermines what is most human and most significant about sexual intimacy. Because sexual intercourse has a human meaning, it can be thought of as ‘saying something’. There is a language of the body.¹

The Catholic Church teaches that ‘sexuality is realised in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and woman commit themselves totally to one another until death.’² The Church’s teaching that sexual intercourse is morally right only within the context of marriage is profoundly counter-cultural.

¹ *Cherishing Life*. 100-103.

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2361



A couple who are committed to one another in marriage express their love for one another in many ways: in their shared life through actions, words and deeds. When they express their love through sexual intercourse the couple are effectively saying to one another that they love their husband or wife, are committed to that person, have eyes for him or her alone. They are also saying that it is with this other person that they, together, can welcome a child as the fruit and object of their love. [...]

The context for sexual intercourse should be one of genuine, exclusive and committed love. Indeed, the love implied in making love is nothing less than the love that is expressed in marriage. Young people are rightly wary of committing themselves too hastily to the serious reality of marriage. This is the reality entailed by love that is exclusive and unconditional. It is also the context within which the couple can best welcome a child, if one should result from their love. Clearly, it is difficult for many people in our society to take seriously the idea that sexual intercourse should take place only within marriage, but the language of love still points to this as its true context.

In order to be able to integrate our sexual desires with the rest of our personality and with what is important in our lives we need to develop the right disposition. Christians call this disposition the virtue of chastity. This virtue includes sensitivity to a person's situation and to the circumstances in which people find themselves. Where a relationship is possible and appropriate, it is right for a couple to express affection and mutual attraction, and for married couples to express their love through sexual intercourse. On the other hand, if a particular relationship is inappropriate, it is wrong to foster sexual desires towards the person concerned. For married couples, showing sexual affection is a positive virtue and an aspect of their mutual communication. Chastity is a virtue both for those who are married and for those who are single. It means thinking and acting appropriately with friends or with colleagues and, within a relationship, being honest and sensitive without selfishness or thoughtlessness hindering the communication of love. Self-restraint will always be at the service of genuine love and sensitivity.³

In the context of high rates of sexually transmitted diseases and of teenage pregnancies government - sponsored sex education has tended to emphasise the importance of 'safe' or 'safer sex' and has encouraged the use of condoms as the best solution to unwanted pregnancy and the health risks of casual sexual liaisons. However, this approach has been both morally corrosive and practically ineffective - from 1996 to 2002 incidents of the major bacterial sexually transmitted infections more than doubled (*Renewing the focus : HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections in the United Kingdom in 2002*, Health Protection Agency). This strategy suffers from the assumption that social and moral problems can be solved in a technical way without addressing questions of behaviour. Sex education should stress the importance of the virtue of chastity, and should promote the value of virginity before marriage and of constancy within marriage. To give instruction on the biology of human reproduction without a principled moral context ignores and obscures what is most specifically human in human sexuality.⁴

The Church's often publicised opposition to contraception is based on the way in which contraception undermines and distorts the meaning of human sexuality.

Cherishing Sexuality and Supporting Young People

³ *Cherishing Life* 103-105.

⁴ *Cherishing Life* 122.



4th January 2010

It should be clear that this vision of human sexuality requires a distinctive approach from Catholics in Scouting.

The advice and guidance which Catholics in Scouting offer to young people who seek advice should stress the virtue of chastity and seek to explain that human sexuality is such an important expression of our human selves that it can only properly belong in marriage. It should be remembered that some young people will value virginity and they deserve the support of their leaders in maintaining a culture in which this is cherished.

The strategies employed by most agencies in the UK are so far removed from this vision that it is unlikely to be appropriate for Catholics in Scouting to advise young people to seek support and advice from these sources.⁵ It is wholly appropriate that young people seek the support and advice of their parents or their pastors.

Catholics in Scouting are also encouraged to value the witness that their own way of life gives to this distinctive vision of human sexuality.

Working in a Complex Context

Most Catholics in Scouting will be in open groups and working with colleagues who do not or cannot embrace this vision. Many young people too are likely to find the Catholic vision of human sexuality highly counter-cultural. Polemics and condemnations are unlikely to commend us or enhance the credibility of the Gospel in Scouting. Catholics in scouting are encouraged to articulate the truth with humility and conviction.

Human Sexuality and the Scout Programme

The Scout Programme aims to help young people to develop a range of virtues. All that is done to enable scouts to think of others before themselves, to have courage, respect and self-respect will help them in developing an authentic human sexuality. Activities that support their physical development will help them to appreciate the bodies that God has given them. The coeducational programme will also enable scouts to “learn through doing” appropriate ways of understanding and expressing the sexual attractions that are often part of adolescence.

A Note on Emergency Contraception and Abortion

While public policy will often discuss these in the context of “sexual health”, both of these deliberately end the life of an unborn child and are very seriously wrong. This is not to minimise the difficulties faced by those who find themselves considering such courses of action, but should highlight the degree of support that they might need to give their unborn child a chance of life.

Further Reading

Catholic Bishop’s Conference of England and Wales, *Cherishing Life* (2004)
www.catholic-ew.org.uk/ccb/content/download/956/9550/file/Cherishing_Life_2004.pdf