

Southdown

Living Celibacy With Integrity

Richard J. Gilmartin, PhD



*Issues of
Loneliness and
Sexuality*

Emmanuel Convalescent Foundation

LIVING CELIBACY WITH INTEGRITY

ISSUES OF LONELINESS AND SEXUALITY

by
Richard J. Gilmartin, PhD

Emmanuel Convalescent Foundation
Aurora, Ontario

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FOREWORD

Few topics seem to provide for such enduring and diverse conversations as do those connected with sexuality. Particularly within religious frameworks, there is a long history of reflection, debate, and even argument. The invitation to voluntarily chosen celibacy has sparked its own fair share of discussion over the years and has again come into sharp focus in recent times.

Over the years, various commentators from evangelists to social scientists have examined, explained, exhorted, confirmed or condemned celibacy's role as a gospel value. In recent years, it has become fashionable again to detail exactly how celibacy is lived by those who profess it — often with embarrassingly blunt conclusions. And so many in the Church find themselves returning in puzzlement to a very primitive question: what exactly are we talking about? What does a celibate commitment undertaken for religious or spiritual motives really mean?

It is to this question that the present reflection turns. Members of the Southdown staff were invited to help celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Ministry to Priests Programme in Canada. At the Montreal conference, Doctor Gilmartin was asked to consider this specific question in one of the major presentations. The text here represents an adaptation and reworking of that talk. While originally addressed to priests in Canada, I am confident that all women and men in ministry will find some stimulating and enlightening food for thought.

Doctor Gilmartin brings a unique wealth of personal and professional experience to his task. For over 25 years, he has journeyed with clergy and Religious as a therapist and educator. Before coming to the Southdown staff several years ago, he served for many years as a Director of the House of Affirmation in the United States and has lectured throughout the world on topics of preventive care for ministers. Much of his clinical training was completed in the New York City area and his doctoral degree in psychology was awarded from Kennsington University in California.

It is a pleasure to re-introduce him to our readers and to provide another in our series of educational booklets designed to stimulate questions and provoke reaction on topics of concern to today's ministers of the gospel.

John Allan Loftus, S.J., Ph. D.
Executive Director

LIVING CELIBACY WITH INTEGRITY ISSUES OF LONELINESS AND SEXUALITY

INTRODUCTION

As I was sitting down to pull together some thoughts on this topic, the thought came to me that we missed including *shame* in the title. The more I talk to clergy and religious on the issues of celibacy, loneliness, and sexuality as each relates to integrity, the more I realize that shame is the central theme. In fact, shame is a central theme whenever we talk about the issues around being a clergy-person today. Shame . . . the shame from all the accusations in the news concerning abuse by clergy . . . how this may relate to the declining numbers of younger people being attracted by the nobility of this profession . . . a personal response that may be touched in each of us when another of us faces an accusation of abusive behaviour that, "There but for the grace of God go I" . . . perhaps there are events in my own history that I desperately fear may surface sometime . . . perhaps feelings around representing a Church which is seen by many to have institutionalized its abuse of people. Although *shame* is not within the scope of this booklet, it is important that we recognize that it lurks in the background; it is also important that each of us get in touch with his/her own shame and, hopefully, gain some freedom from it.

“Celibacy . . . sexuality . . . loneliness . . . integrity”: these are a lot to address in a single booklet; each of them could be a booklet by itself. But let us put them all together and see what the mix becomes.

The first task is to free our minds from preconceptions. Recognizing that the greatest barrier to truth is the illusion of knowledge, let us give up the illusion that “we already know”, and hunt for truth in a newer way of understanding.

I heard a story of an upper-middle class couple who had one child, a girl, who was the centre of their life. As she grew through childhood and adolescence she never gave them a reason not to be proud of her; she was popular with her age-mates, participated in all those activities that you like children to be active in, and did superbly well in school. In her senior year at a private parochial secondary school, she was both class president and first in her class academically. She was accepted into the Pre-Med program at a prestigious Ivy League college. Halfway through her second semester of college, she sent a letter home to her parents and it went like this:

“Dear Mom and Dad,

After my visit with you at Christmas time, I decided that I had to do something about myself, so I enrolled in a drug-treatment program. In that program I met the nicest boy and we plan to be married, hopefully before the baby arrives. But, don’t worry, he has a cousin who is living in a commune out in the desert and we have been invited to go and live with him.”

The second paragraph began:

“None of the above is true, but I am getting a D in Chemistry . . .”

The point of the story is something about perspective . . . seeing things from a broader scene. So too with the topics that we will be considering; let us keep perspective by holding onto a broader context.

Let us begin by seeing if we can reach a common understanding about what each of our terms mean. What does celibacy mean? What do integrity and loneliness mean? What is sexuality all about? First of all, celibacy.

I have been working with Roman Catholic clergy/religious since 1968. This is not a few years trying to understand committed celibates; that is a lot of priests, sisters, brothers, bishops with whom I have discussed issues around celibacy, including what celibacy means. I find little common agreement about what that meaning is. Much of this comes from a confusion between chastity and celibacy. Chastity binds all of us regardless of the life-style we have undertaken. Whether married or unmarried, committed to another or celibate, the same Commandments bind. I could go on about "celibate chastity" versus "married chastity", but this "distinction" may create more problems than it resolves. So to with the concept of "perfect continence" as expressed in "celibate chastity" and "unmarried chastity". Linking celibacy to chastity makes it more difficult to find a life-enhancing value in celibacy. Your vow or promise of celibacy is not about observing the Sixth and Ninth Commandments; you already have an obligation to do that long before you took the vow. Why should you vow to do something that you already have an obligation to do? You do not take a vow not to break any of the other Commandments. What is so special about the Sixth and Ninth that necessitate a vow? I suggest to you that one does not vow chastity, but rather celibacy, which has little to do with being chaste.

What then does it mean to be celibate? A definition of celibacy upon which there is agreement is that celibacy means to remain unmarried, or better, to remain uncommitted to that basic societal unit that is called "A Couple." Celibacy has much more to do with the Gospel message of being unworthy of The Kingdom if we put anything "before" the Lord; nothing must come between you and God. By vowing to remain unmarried you radically express your total loyalty and commitment to God/Jesus. Not only does this fierce loyalty reject any interference, it even tries to eliminate all distraction from the totality of your commitment to the Lord. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his *Letter From Prison* suggests something of this when he says that the ultimate motivator for the moral person is "exclusive allegiance to God", i.e. the fully moral person is one "who tries to make his whole life an answer to the question and call of God".

Additionally, when one makes the commitment to celibacy he or she enters into a way of spirituality that differs from the spirituality of the non-celibate, be that non-celibate married or unmarried. A celibate is not simply a bachelor or spinster. Nor is celibacy connected to a state of virginity; nor can it be a way of avoiding love. It must be a way of loving, a loving that embraces both God and people. Celibacy must facilitate this loving, that is, become a spirituality, or else it is nothing more than a condition of employment or an institutional convenience.

I find it unhelpful to equate celibacy with chastity; it not only hinders us from understanding what is the value of a celibate commitment, (a value that has led to a celibate commitment being part of every major world religion, except post-dispersal Judaism which places a greater moral significance on being a spouse and parent,) but it also elevates chastity to a central position in a Christian moral tradition, far eclipsing love.

I want to avoid the romantic in trying to capture the meaning of celibacy. Also, I do not want to confuse the value of celibacy with the value of making it a requirement for priesthood. At this point, I leave it to the theologians and those expert in the spiritual life to take us further into the understanding of celibacy as a way of spirituality. Let us turn our attention to living it with integrity.

Defining Integrity

“Integrity” is an even more difficult word to define. In my practice of psychotherapy I have worked with many who live their life in ways that I could not live mine, and some who live in ways that the common consensus would declare reprehensible, yet almost to a person they would claim that they lived with integrity. Most, if not all, of us want to be persons of integrity. This may be related to an observation that the late Bishop Fulton Sheen made when he said that if people did not live the way they think they should, they soon began thinking the way they were living. It is very difficult to own a lack of integrity in ourselves. This is what gives “denial” such a power as a psychic defense. Feeling that we possess integrity is basic to a sense of well-being.

What does “integrity” mean? It is a concept that is value-laden and subjective; each of us would define it differently. I can think of three different levels of meaning to “integrity” and it is helpful to look at each of these because they contain clues to how celibacy is lived with integrity.

One way of defining integrity sees it as a strict adherence to a code of behaviour. This way, celibacy becomes a very simple thing. All one has to do to live celibacy with integrity is to obey the law, be it the law of the Church, the law of the Chancery Office, the law that a Chapter or Council comes out with, or what the Rule or Constitution says to do. This is clear and neat. Deficiencies in this exercise of celibate integrity are what are getting such play in the news, and what the civil government is so concerned about. There are laws that define what constitutes sexually abusive or assaultive behaviour and if we choose to disregard or disobey these laws we will be forced to face the consequences.

This does not just concern sexual relationships with children, or where physical or psychological coercion is used to obtain sex, but increasingly, the civil government is holding the Religious Professional to a standard of conduct that binds most other professionals. Some civil jurisdictions regard sexual relationships between a clergy person and anyone for whom he/she has a pastoral responsibility as essentially a violation of professional responsibility and, therefore, de-facto sexual abuse. A person who breaks the law lacks integrity in the eyes of civil authorities; he/she violates a standard required to sustain justice and prevent victimization.

Religiously, is this all there is to celibacy? Is all you have to do is to follow the rules of Church and State? Is this all you vowed, or promised, to do? I hope not! This too easily can be an escape from the responsibility of an adult sexual relationship, a sanctification of arrested or retarded sexual development, or seen as a condition of employment, i.e. you wanted to be priest/brother/sister and they made you take this as part of the package. How is this life-giving? How does this make one a more loving person, an exemplar for others to follow, or even a better Christian? It does not.

A second definition of integrity is “a state of being unimpaired”, that is, to be outwardly what one is inwardly, to be what one is supposed to be, to live without hidden agendas

that deceive, to live honestly. This level of integrity says that what you see is what you get, I am what I am supposed to be.

As a cleric, or vowed religious, you assume a role of a public advocate of Gospel values, and the expectation is that you strive to live these values in your own life. This is especially important in an institution, such as the Roman Catholic Church, which lacks a system of accountability to the people whom you serve. With all due regard to human frailty, you are expected to live your life within the moral framework of the Church. But, again, is this all that celibacy means?

A third definition is one that I think is the more significant and, perhaps, more relevant to our topic. Here “integrity” is defined as completeness . . . unity . . . the condition of having no parts or elements wanting . . . being entire . . . being whole. This is the level that involves the challenge of celibacy: that is to live celibacy so that it completes your personhood, so that *through* your celibacy you become a whole person, not *in spite of* celibacy. It is in this sense that celibacy can become life-giving.

Who then is not living celibacy with integrity? Is it the priest who is having an on-going heterosexual/homosexual relationship with another? He certainly fails in the first definition, and probably in the second, but how about the third? Take the person who, not only is not engaging in any erotic activity, but has achieved a state where he/she does not even have an erotic thought, feeling, or desire. In fact this person has succeeded in eradicating all passion from their life and, as a result, has become an emotional isolate, bereft of all affective life. Has he or she lived celibacy with integrity? Such a person seems to be okay with our first definition, and possibly the second, but certainly is in violation of the third. Granted that both show some lack of integrity, but which is guilty of the greater lack? Should not we be just as concerned with those who violate integrity in the third sense as we are the first two? I hope all of us see celibacy as a way of loving, rather than a way of avoiding love. Anything less than this would be inconsistent with our commitment as Christians, or to living-out Gospel values.

Striving for Wholeness

What then constitutes “celibacy with integrity”? How do we

strive for wholeness within the context of celibacy?

Celibacy must be understood as distinct from chastity. That is not to minimize the importance of the latter, but it is a hindrance toward understanding the life-giving potential of celibacy to equate it with chastity. Also, to see celibacy in terms of availability in ministry, completely misrepresents the reality of a marital commitment and how this can enhance a ministerial commitment. There is some value in seeing celibacy as related to spirituality, solitude, community, and self-donation. It may be helpful to reflect on why so few of world leaders are unmarried (equating marriage, for the sake of argument, with being coupled with another) and why so few of the highly creative in the modern era (e.g., philosophers, artists, composers) have been married (again, for the sake of argument, equating this with being solitary). Does this give us a hint as to the value in celibacy, its connection to solitude, and the need for solitude for creativity and for a type of spirituality. There has been no significant, broad-based, religious movement that did not recognize a place for the committed celibate within it.

Since it is "people" who are celibate, let me make a few comments about the concept of person. To understand what a person is in a holistic sense there are two perspectives that we must hold onto continuously; to lose sight of one or the other can lead us into prejudice, of which we are all too often guilty. First, any understanding of "person" must be rooted in biology/physiology. That is not to say that psychology, sociology, philosophy, theology, etc., are not important, but we need to ground our concept of personhood in a biological base. Nature gave us two basic physiologically based instincts: the first is to keep yourself alive (thus hunger, thirst, warmth, etc.) and the second is to send your genes into the future (thus sex). Moreover, these instincts were not designed to function in the relatively benign environment of North America, but in the jungles of South-East Asia, the deserts of Africa, the swamps of South America. We are animals that were designed by our Creator to give priority to survival, be it individual or species. This is what we are, albeit not totally, but certainly foundationally.

Without losing sight of this, we also need to look at what we are called to be in order to understand our personhood.

If we do lose sight of this, then our view of person is only partial and misleading. Here we rely on philosophy, theology, revelation, or whatever it is that informs us on this. I choose to stand in the knowledge of psychology, grounded in a biological understanding, and with my eyes on the expanded horizon of what our religion, our gospel, our church is telling us about what we can be. Hopefully, this will give me a wisdom from which to speak of person, and those things that affect us as person.

Persons experience loneliness. We probably all know what it is to feel lonely, but what is loneliness? In all the survey-type studies done on Roman Catholic clergy / religious and issues affecting their lives, loneliness comes up over and over again as a significant factor influencing their happiness. Our experience tells us that it is not only a clerical issue; it affects the life of most North Americans. One need only examine themes in advertising to notice how often what is really being sold in the proffered product is relief from loneliness; if we drive this car, use that deodorant, wear these designer jeans, we will be loved, admired, respected by others who will then fill the void in our life and thereby give us relief from loneliness.

But, the question remains: what is loneliness? Is it a disease or illness? Is there something wrong with us because we feel lonely? It is not a disease/illness, neither psychological nor physical, nor does it indicate any defect in us; it is not even an enemy to be avoided at all costs. Loneliness is actually a friend in the sense that physical pain is a friend. It is a signal, a warning sign that something is awry and we must pay attention and take action before greater harm is done. It is the capacity to feel physical pain that keeps us from destroying ourselves, and enables us to survive into adulthood; so too it is the capacity to feel psychic pain that enables us to live psychologically healthy lives. Loneliness is a psychic pain. As physical pain is a warning that something is wrong in our body, and we ignore the warning to our peril, so loneliness is a warning that something is wrong in how we are living our life and, too, we ignore it to our peril. In this sense, loneliness is a valued and trustworthy friend. I may choose to endure the pain, either the physical or the psychic kind, for the sake of some higher value, but the pain always says "Pay Attention . . .

Something is Wrong . . . Take Action!”

When we feel loneliness, we are experiencing a disconnection in our life at a point where we should be connected. This is what the warning is all about. The message is to get connected again lest we do some serious harm to ourself. We must recognize the loneliness and where the disconnection is occurring before we can choose how to address it.

Dimensions of Loneliness

Loneliness is not simply not having another person around us, not being connected to another. It is more complex than that. We all have basic needs around belonging, being a part of something, being connected, but this is multidimensional.

There is a transcendent dimension to this belonging wherein we need to feel connected to something larger/greater than ourselves. Whether we label this something God, Being in General, the Force, matters little; even a cause that helps us transcend the narrow bonds of our personal existence can give us this transcendental connectedness. It can be anything which makes us feel connected to something greater than ourselves, contributes to the meaning and purpose of our existence, *and* that we are living in harmony with. When we lack this connectedness, we feel a loneliness. We also experience loneliness when we break this bond by behaving in a way that is inconsistent or conflicting with this connectedness, even though we may give this loneliness another name, such as alienation or guilt. Why we find it so difficult to experience a lack of integrity inside ourselves is because it makes us feel disconnected. This is loneliness.

Secondly, there is a cultural dimension to loneliness. We are all part of a culture that provides a fundamental orientation to our lives. This is a system of values, beliefs, customs, manners, ways of doing things that becomes so basic to us that we take it for granted and tend to see it as the right-way, or the only way, to be and to do. When we are away from our own culture and in one that is radically different, we experience a type of dislocation that is actually a loneliness. When we become disconnected culturally, we feel lonely. This is why immigrants will tend to seek each other out and band together in neighbourhoods or clubs where they feel “more at home”, i.e. less lonely.

There is also a social dimension to loneliness. We all need to feel that we are socially acceptable, i.e. that we have a place in society, that we are valued by the social group, and that we "belong". When the social group, be it society-at-large or some smaller social group like family, diocese, school, Order, finds you unacceptable, be it because of your sex, race, nationality, behaviour, thoughts, sexual orientation, age, or whatever, you experience loneliness. Discrimination produces loneliness, since it labels people as unacceptable, inferior, not belonging. We need to feel socially connected; a disconnection comes when that social group fringes or marginalizes us. This is a loneliness.

Lastly, there is an interpersonal dimension to loneliness. This is the loneliness that we feel when we are not part of another person's life in a significant way, and that person is not a significant part of our life. When you ask yourself the question, "Who would really care if I did not wake-up tomorrow morning?" what answer would you get? I am sure the person who would have to cover your work-load would care, as would anyone else who was inconvenienced by your demise, but who would really care in the sense that your absence was deeply and painfully felt? A popular and successful pastor of a large parish once said to me: "On any Sunday there are 40 families I could go to for dinner and every one of them would be happy to have me. But, you know, none of them would miss me if I didn't come". Who would miss you if you didn't come?

We have a basic human need to be connected to another person; to, in a sense, belong to someone. Each of us has the responsibility to live his/her life in a way that sustains and nurtures this connection to others. This has nothing to do with chastity or celibacy; it has to do with intimacy. The majority of the clerical sex-abusers that I have dealt with were not hungry for sex; they were hungry for intimacy. The same was also true of those celibates who behaved in ways that compromised the integrity of their religious commitment; they jumped into doing intimate *things* with another, when what they were really searching for was intimacy *with* another. This has very little to do with sex. As Tolstoy has said, we search for intimacy not because it is necessary for happiness, but simply because it is necessary.

Permit me to make two points about intimacy. First, it is my belief that each of us needs intimacy in order to maintain emotional health. This is not to say that we do not also need solitude, but this is not a problem for most celibates; forming and sustaining intimate relationships often is. It is a given in mental health lore that good interpersonal relationships are the best prophylactic against mental illness. Karen Horney, one of the pioneers in non-orthodox psychanalytic theory, saw all neuroses as, not the result of blocks in impulse expression, but as "the ultimate out-come of disturbances in interpersonal relationships . . . sexual or nonsexual".

Let me take this one step further. We need to be in intimate relationships with people of both sexes if we are to fully grow and develop as persons. This now touches more directly on the third definition of "integrity". I, as a man, need to be in intimate relationships with men as well as women, and women need the same. This has nothing to do with whether you are married or celibate, gay or straight.

There can easily be a tension between the biologically based drive for genital expression to insure the survival of the species, and the psychologically based need for intimacy, but you can have one without the other. Much of the present issue that we are experiencing around celibacy is much more an issue of intimacy than an issue of genital expression. If, in the process of insuring the integrity of a celibate commitment you disavow physical closeness and emotional intimacy with another, you are in for trouble. But, the trouble is not with celibacy, rather it is with overburdening celibacy. Celibacy is always a way of loving, never a way of avoiding love, otherwise it is unchristian. If it is seen as demanding avoidance of loving involvement, then most will find it burdensome, if not intolerably difficult. Probably the only ones who will be happy with an avoidant celibacy are those for whom celibacy is a necessity because of their own disability around being able to form and sustain intimate relationships.

A second opinion that is basic to our discussion: not to be loved by someone is a very painful thing; if no one cares whether or not you awake tomorrow, if no one misses you when you are not there, it is sad. As painful as this is, however, it is not the worst; it is tragic if you fail to love someone else. We have no control over whether or not we are loved, but

being a person who loves is within our control. We hear so much bemoaning, especially from children, around not being loved, but the more vital question is whom do I love, to whom am I a friend, to whom do I give priority in my life that arises out of my love for that person. When we talk about loving another, of being intimate with another, what we are talking about is being (and having) a friend. Friendship is the model, not marriage, and the important question is not who are my friends, but rather to whom am I a friend. To paraphrase Mark Twain, the best way to have a friend is to be a friend.

What does it mean to be a friend, to love someone, to be intimate? "Intimacy" is really a rather simple thing. It is perhaps where we express in a most unadulterated way Immanuel Kant's categorical moral imperative of making another person always an end in him/herself, never a means. In friendship, love, intimacy, we can make the other person an almost exclusive end. The other is cared for in a non-exploitive way. If the friendship is reciprocated, then you experience the other's caring as non-exploitive, and thus the safety so necessary to intimacy is established.

Love presupposes knowing, and being known by, another. The word "intimacy" itself comes from the Latin verb "intimare" which means, literally, "to bring, or put, inside". Fundamental to being intimate with another is permitting the other to enter inside you, i.e. to know you as you are, warts and all. Without this knowing, no intimacy is possible. Without it, the other's "I love you!" cannot penetrate because your response is likely to be "Yes, but, if you really knew me . . ." It is only when the other really knows you that his/her love has value. Thus permitting ourselves to be known is fundamental to intimacy, and if there is to be reciprocity, then you must know the other.

So often we pursue admiration when what we really want is love. We can get others to admire us by getting them to see us as virtuous, beautiful, intelligent, capable, witty, or whatever it is that we feel others will admire us for. But admiration is not love. You can admire a statue, but you can only love another person and this presupposes that I see them as they really are, without deception or misrepresentation.

All we really need for intimacy is to permit ourselves to be

known *and* to have that received by the other in a non-judgmental way. If we feel the other evaluating us, then we pull-back and withhold ourselves, thereby blocking the formation of intimacy. In permitting ourselves to be known we risk rejection, ridicule, or otherwise negative reactions, thus placing ourselves in a vulnerable position. Encountering the other's non-judgmental acceptance permits the intimacy to flower. This is the ground for real friendship.

When you have allowed this friendship to conceive and develop, you have a commitment to each other; this brings with it expectations for and from each other. You give a piece of yourself away as a hostage to the other and he/she has a claim on you, as you do on him/her. Does this mean life-long? No, but that does not diminish the depth of the commitment. In the movie "Missing" there is a scene where one of those who volunteered to go to Chile to aid in the fight for justice was confronted by one of the Chilean revolutionaries for their lack of commitment to the Chilean people. He told the American: "As long as you walk around with your return airline ticket in your back pocket, you are not really committed to the welfare of our people". Not that he had to vow to stay in Chile for the rest of his life, but the fact that he refused to give up the security of the ticket in his pocket, negated the completeness of his commitment. Perhaps the completeness of all our commitments has more to do with openendedness than life-longness; where we "tear-up" the securities we keep in case this commitment does not work. It is in this sense of commitment that we enter into friendship. We do not know where the pursuit of that fundamental commitment that was made at the time of our baptism is going to take us tomorrow, but that does not make us any the less committed to the persons and values of our life today.

The sense of God given to us in the revelation of the Judeo-Christian tradition is of a God Who invites us into intimacy. The imagery used to describe God's relationship with humans is that of intimacy, e.g., a mother with her child, a lover with his beloved, a father with children he protects, a vine toward its branches, etc. God and I are Intimate Friends, and I give expression to that in my intimate friendships with others.

The Experience of Sexuality

Where does our sexuality/genitality fit in? If living celibacy with integrity demands that we have intimate relationships in our lives, possibly with both sexes, how do we cope with these erotic impulses? Most of us want to live our lives in honesty; as "ordained" people you are viewed by the larger community as advocates of Gospel values. No one wants to live the dishonesty of advocating a standard of sexual morality that is not lived-out in their own lives. Not to do so is hypocrisy, and we are living in a time that has little patience with hypocrisy.

Let us first acknowledge that sex is not the only way that you can make a hypocrisy of your public commitment to Gospel values. It is probably not even the most significant one. Certainly in the pursuit of affluence we mock the Gospel advocacy of poverty; the unnecessary use, or abuse, of power mocks the following of One who renounced all use of power. Would that we were as concerned with "sins of affluence" and "sins of abusing others with power" as we are with "sexual sins", for then we would truly be a revolutionary force in the world.

With that as a given, we still want to live our sexuality with integrity. It needs to be understood that there is a natural tension between biological drives and psychological needs, which arises as soon as you attempt to curtail biological expression. Freud made us all too well aware of this. Much of our present difficulties arose because we tried to keep sexual integrity by distancing ourselves from "occasions of sin" (remote as well as proximate) without regard to the psychological needs that were being sacrificed. Is there a better way?

As a psychotherapist I find a major portion of my work is in helping people to own themselves, or better, to stop disowning pieces of themselves. Each of us is unique and idiosyncratic; it is imperative that you be *that* self and stop trying to be something other than what you are. If you disown a piece of yourself this piece is apt to come back to haunt you and the weapon it has to use against you is depression. The selves that are most likely to be disowned are those aspects of you that do not meet the criteria of good, strong, healthy, masculine or feminine, loveable, and similarly imposed expectations of oughtness or shouldness that arise within our culture.

Frequently it is our self that is angry, or our self that is sexual, that is denied and disowned. What makes self-ownership difficult is a concept of "normalcy" which does not consider the idiosyncratic nature of each person.

In the area of human sexuality we need to get rid of the notion of "normal", not only because it is unhelpful, but because it is basically unknown. We know very little about what is "normal" when it comes to human sexuality; we know what is illegal, unethical, possibly even immoral, but we do not know what is "abnormal". (Any sexual act that is compulsive, or idea that is obsessional, is regarded as pathological, but more because of the compulsivity or obsession, rather than the act itself). Our understanding of human sexuality is so interwoven with social, cultural, religious, and historical values that we are unable to abstract an understanding separate from these values; the only "normal" that we can guess at is a relative one. What we do know is that each person's sexuality is unique and idiosyncratic. Also, there is not a lot we can do about changing it since our "sexual maps" are pretty well set for us very early in life. What we can do is to own our own sexuality and bring our behaviour in line with our society, our morality, and our life-commitment expectations. But, this begins with our self-owning.

If we disown our sexuality in the attempt to "be normal" or, more likely, "appear normal" then there is going to be trouble. There is probably no area of human behaviour that is so surrounded with "shoulds" and "oughts" as is human sexual expression, and the attempt to live up to these shoulds and oughts, not just in behaviour but in thoughts and desires as well, is frequently the source of much human difficulty or suffering. Trying to be or appear "normal" is one of the most pernicious tyrannies that our society imposes on us.

Each of us is unique in our sexuality, and different from anyone else. Also, our sexuality is not a rigid category, but rather a blend of many different feelings and desires. Some of the pieces in this blend are probably labeled "perversions" by someone(s). Probably, each of us carries within him/herself the pieces (or potentialities) for the full array of the way people have of achieving an orgasm. Each of us has the potential to do anything. All this is blended together to make up our unique sexual "map" or "plan".

Most of us live in conformity to what we are expected to be in our sexual expression, and each of us also has a "dark side". None of us can look at our brothers and sisters who are being accused of sexually abusive behaviour and not say: "There but for the grace of God . . ." Within each of our own "sexual stews" are the potentialities for the behaviours that others are being punished for. Be thankful for the grace that your behaviour does conform.

If you feel your sexuality to be problematical or if it is a source of anxiety, worry, wonder, or if you feel yourself in conflict with legal/moral/ethical principles, then you should seek help about it. Talk to somebody about it; if professional help is needed, get it. Remember, there are very few sexual problems, but there are many human problems that express themselves through our sexuality. That "sexual map" we discussed is probably unchangeable, but you can do something to lessen compulsivities, to better deal with obsessions, to cope with the destructive power that sexuality can exercise. Most likely this involves confronting other, non-sexual issues in your life that are being expressed in sexual behaviour, such as angers, hurts, feelings of insignificance, needs for power and dominance, fears of relationships, the effects of your own victimizations. Any of these can be at the root of what is behaviourally expressed as sexual.

Perhaps of greatest significance in problematical sexual behaviour are feelings of loneliness and affective isolation arising out of the way you are trying to live your life. But the good news is something can be done about it; you do not have to be at the mercy of your injurious or destructive behaviours. Help is available towards achieving a better integration.

I want to close this paper with a prayer. It is not my prayer, but that of Paul Tillich, given on the occasion of his 60th birthday celebration at Columbia University. I am sure many of you are familiar with the work of Tillich, who is regarded by many as one of the finest theological thinkers of the 20th century. I am not sure how familiar you are with the tragic dimension of his personal life, his nervous breakdowns, his divorce, his struggle with his own sexual behaviours, and his obsessive fear of his own damnation. It is perhaps in reflection on his own personal struggles at this significant milestone

in his life that he spoke/prayed on the role of grace in our lives. It is a message that I would like to leave with you.

“Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual, because we feel we have violated another life, a life which we have loved, or from which we were estranged. It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us. It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: ‘You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know.’ Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later. Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!”

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