"You shall not commit adultery."-Ex. 20:14

"Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife."-Deuteronomy 5:21

1. In the Beginning

Mankind is the only being created in the "image and likeness" of God (Gen. 1:26), and thus the only creature on earth with a *vocation*, a calling. Man's calling is to imitate his Creator, Who is love (1 John 4:8). Man is thus called to love as God loves, endlessly and selflessly. To the degree he does this, he conforms himself to the image and likeness of God.

Mankind was created male and female. This twofold nature of mankind is that of *sexuality*, which affects the entire human person in the unity of body and soul. "It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others" (CCC 2332).

Sexual identity is an essential part of the human person, and is not accidental to them; that is to say, it is willed directly by God and is part of who He creates us to be. The *differences* and the *complementarities* among the sexes are meant to contribute towards the harmonious union of man and woman in marriage and the flourishing of family life.

In creating both male and female in His image, God endows each with the same personal dignity, though this dignity is expressed in different ways. The equal dignity of man and woman means that the uniqueness of each proceeds from the goodness and wisdom of the same God and are equally ordered towards the same ends, but it does not mean that man and woman have no differences or traits unique to each sex.

Nevertheless, it is in the union of these two sexes that the life-giving love and creative power of their Creator are most perfectly imitated. All human life proceeds from this union of man and woman. The Church sees the distinctions between the sexes not as antagonistic differences, but as complimentary differences: man and woman were created for each other by God: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

The sixth commandment, together with the ninth, encompass the whole of human sexuality, both in its external manifestation and in its interior dispositions. Jesus reminds us of this in the Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart…What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matt. 5:27-28, 19:6).

2. The Call to Chastity

All persons are called to chastity. Chastity is the right use of the sexual appetite, its successful integration within the person and as such is a form of the virtue of temperance. It brings about an

inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. This is true of both persons in the married state and those called to a life of consecrated virginity.

The chaste person maintains integrity of the powers of life and love within him: the procreative process is wedded to the unitive. Chastity includes training in *self-mastery*, which is training in human freedom. Either man governs his passions, or finds himself governed by them. He who is serious about practicing chastity and attaining self-mastery must also will the means to this end: self-knowledge, asceticism, obedience to God's commands, exercise of the moral virtues, and fidelity to prayer. This self-mastery is never complete and must be renewed at every stage of life.

Besides being a moral virtue, chastity is a grace of God, and a fruit of spiritual effort. It ought to be prayed for fervently as a gift from the Father Who wills all His children to walk in purity. People ought to cultivate the form of chastity proper to their state in life. Married persons are called to live in conjugal chastity, while consecrated celibates live a life of chaste continence.

3. Sins Against Chastity

Lust is a disordered desire for physical sexual pleasure. Seeking sexual pleasure in itself apart from its unitive and procreative aspects is morally disordered.

Masturbation, the deliberate stimulation of the sexual organs for sexual pleasure, is a gravely disordered action. "One must take into account the affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety, or other social and psychological factors" when determining culpability (CCC 2352).

Fornication is the sexual union of an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. It is especially grave when there is a scandal to the young.

Pornography, the removing of real or simulated sex acts from the intimacy of the partners in order to intentionally display them to a third party. "It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense. Civil authorities should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials" (CCC 2354).

Prostitution reduces the person to an instrument of sexual pleasure. Both the ones who sell themselves and the ones who pay gravely violate chastity. It is a social scourge and always a serious sin.

Rape is the forcible violation of the sexual intimacy of another. It is always a grave sin, even more so if committed against children by parents (incest) or those to whom they are entrusted for education.

4. Homosexuality

Homosexuality refers to relations people who experience an exclusive or predominant attraction to people of the same sex. The Church does not make any claim about what causes this attraction. The inclination itself is objectively disordered (CCC 2358) whether or not it is acted upon, but the culpability of the person can vary depending on the degree to which the attraction is voluntary or involuntary.

Homosexual acts are always wrong and are intrinsically disordered. Scripture presents them as acts of grave depravity (Gen. 19:1-29, Rom. 1:24-27, 1. Cor. 6:10):

"*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God"* (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Homosexual acts are contrary to the natural law, close the sexual act to the gift of life and do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. They cannot be approved under any circumstances (CCC 2357).

Homosexual persons are called to chastity, just like all people.

By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection. -CCC 2359

Homosexuals ought not to be unjustly discriminated against and ought to be given the dignity and respect due to all persons. They are called to unite to the sacrifice of the cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

5. The Bond of Man and Wife

Sexuality is ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman. In marriage, the physical intimacy of the partners becomes a sign and pledge of their spiritual communion. Marriage bonds between the baptized are sanctified by the sacrament.

Sexuality is not simply biological, but concerns the whole person, body and soul. It is only fully realized when it is used within the context of the marital commitment, when a man and a woman commit themselves to each other totally until death.

The sexual acts of marriage are honorable and noble. They signify the self-giving, joy and gratitude of the spouses in their commitment to one another.

Marriage has a twofold end: the good of the spouses themselves, and the transmission of life. These two ends cannot be separated without compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family. Thus, all married persons have two obligations: *fidelity* and *fecundity*.

Marital Fidelity

Fidelity pertains to the good of the spouses themselves. The covenant they contract is unique and indissoluble. “What God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:9). Fidelity expresses constancy in keeping one’s word. The sacrament of Matrimony enables man and woman to enter into the fidelity of Christ to His Church. Marital fidelity is thus an expression of the love of Christ for His Church. St. Paul calls this a “great mystery” (Eph. 5:32).

6. Fruitfulness of Marriage

Fecundity refers to the fruitfulness of marriage expressed in terms of children. It is a gift, an *end of marriage*, because marital love tends naturally to be fruitful. The child does not come from outside the marriage, but springs forth from the very heart of the self-giving of the spouses, as its fruit and its fulfillment. The Church teaches that “each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life” (*Humanae Vitae,* 11). This establishes a connection between the unitive aspect of marriage and the procreative, a connection that is ordained by God and cannot be divided.

Through procreation (Latin: *to create with*), spouses share in the creative power and fatherhood of God. A particular aspect of this conjugal responsibility is the regulation of births. The Catechism says the following (important points in bold):

For just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood. Moreover, they should conform their behavior to the objective criteria of morality: When it is a question of harmonizing married love with the responsible transmission of life, the morality of the behavior does not depend on sincere intention and evaluation of motives alone; but it must be determined by objective criteria, criteria drawn from the nature of the person and his acts criteria that respect the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love; this is possible only if the virtue of married chastity is practiced with sincerity of heart. -CCC 2368

Licit regulation of births can be brought about by periodic continence based on the use of natural infertile periods. These methods respect the bodies of the spouses and encourage tenderness between them. In contrast: “Every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible is intrinsically evil” (HV 14).

Scripture and Tradition have viewed large families as a sign of God’s blessing and the parent’s generosity. Sterile couples who desire children suffer greatly, and research aimed at reducing human sterility is to be encouraged. Nevertheless, techniques that cause the disassociation of husband and wife (by the intrusion of another person’s sperm or ovum) are gravely immoral and infringe upon the child’s right to be born to a father and mother bound together by marriage. Techniques involving only the married couple, while less reprehensible, are nevertheless not acceptable insofar as they disassociate the sexual act from the procreative act.

We must remember that a child is not something "owed" to someone; nobody has a "right" to a child. A child is a gift that proceeds from the love of the spouses. Furthermore, sterility is not an absolute evil. Sterile persons can give expression to their generosity by adopting abandoned children or performing other acts of charity (see CCC 2377-2379).

7. Offenses Against the Dignity of Marriage

Adultery refers to marital infidelity. The sixth commandment condemns adultery absolutely and the ninth commandment forbids even the desire for it. Adultery is a type of idolatry (see Hosea 2:7) and an injustice to the spouse offended against. It is never permissible, *even if the spouses grant each other consent* to be unfaithful.

Divorce is the claim to break the marriage contract. It does injury to the covenant of salvation, of which marriage is a sign. It is not only impermissible, but also impossible, since "a ratified and consummated marriage cannot be dissolved by any human power for any reason other than death" (*Code of Canon Law*, 1141). It is also immoral because of the disorder it introduces into family life and society at large.

Separation of spouses while maintaining the marriage bond can be legitimate in certain cases. A spouse who finds themselves the victim of a civil divorce against their will is not guilty of a moral offense, but they are still to remember that a civil divorce does not and cannot dissolve the marriage bond and that they are not, therefore, free to remarry.

Other offenses are *polygamy*, *incest*, so-called *free union* (whereby a man and a woman live together in sexual intimacy but refuse to give juridical and public form to the liaison), and the so called right to a *trial marriage*. Sexual union is only legitimate within the context of marriage, which is one man and one woman united for life.

8. The Ninth Commandment

The ninth commandment completes and parallels the sixth. Jesus said that adultery consisted not only in the act but also in the intent or the desire:

Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
-Matt. 5:28

The ninth commandment addresses what the Catholic Tradition calls "concupiscence:" the list of the flesh, the lust of the eyes (addressed more fully by the tenth commandment) and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Concupiscence is the movement of the sensitive appetite contrary to the operations of human reason (CCC 2515).

9. Purification of the Heart

"The heart is the seat of the moral personality, and the struggle against sin is nothing less than the struggle to purify the heart. All evil deeds begin as evil desires that flow from a heart not sufficiently detached from the things of this world. Jesus said, "Out of the heart come evil

thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication…" (Matt. 15:19). This is why Jesus enjoins us to become like little children, for the hearts of children are pure and know no evil desires. The sixth beatitude teaches that those who have pure hearts will see God (Matt. 5:8). Purification is a continuous struggle fought by prayer, chastity, purity of intention and purity of vision. There are several aspects of purity of heart, all of them graces and virtues:

- *Chastity* lets us love with upright hearts.
- *Purity of intention* consists in seeking to fulfill God's will in everything (versus doing good for selfish reasons).
- *Purity of vision* disciplines feelings and imagination and refuses to partake in impure thoughts.
- *Modesty* protects the inner core of a person and refuses to unveil what should remain hidden. It is ordered to chastity and guides how we look at others. Modesty is decency.

Christian purity requires the purity of the social climate as well. "It requires of the communications media that their presentations show concern for respect and restraint. Purity of heart brings freedom from widespread eroticism and avoids entertainment inclined to voyeurism and illusion" (CCC 2525).

10. In Conclusion

The Good News of Christ continually renews the life and culture of fallen man; it combats and removes the error and evil which flow from the ever-present attraction of sin. It never ceases to purify and elevate the morality of peoples. It takes the spiritual qualities and endowments of every age and nation, and with supernatural riches it causes them to blossom, as it were, from within; it fortifies, completes, and restores them in Christ (CCC 2527).

For Further Reading:

Gen. 1:26, 2:18-24, 19:1-29
Ex. 20:14
Matt. 5:19-28
Mark 10:9
Rom.1:24-27
Eph. 5:25-33
St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, II-II, 151, 1-4
Catechism of the Catholic Church § 2331-2391, 2514-2533
Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* (1930)
Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* (1967)