

PASTORAL LETTER

**H.E. MARIO GRECH
BISHOP OF GOZO**

On the Occasion of the Feast of the Assumption

Beautiful Love

(The Gospel of Sexuality)

1. Within the depths of each person's heart is a longing for contentment. There is no person who does not wish for such happiness, so much so that Pascal notes that even an individual who chooses to take his own life does so with the conviction that he would be better off¹. But, in fact, although the desire to be well and happy is common to everyone, not everyone seeks contentment in the same way. The ways we choose to be happy are varied, and sometimes they are also contrary to each other. This explains why in the world some are happy and others are not.

2. Among persons who are not happy there are those who had some bad experience related to sexuality. It is a fact that human sexuality, such a beautiful reality that can lead one to achieve bliss, many times is the cause for delusion, hurt, frustration and abuse. For those who have found the true meaning of sexuality, this is a resource of happiness; but for those who are trapped in a culture that trivialises sexuality, rendering sexuality as an object for consumption or merely as a means of obtaining pleasure, sexuality has become a source of bitterness.

3. I felt that I should say something about this subject not because, as some say, the Church is preoccupied by sex related matters; on the contrary the Church has what I call 'The Gospel of Sexuality', that is very useful for modern man who, perhaps unknowingly, is risking the loss of something so profound and sacred as sexuality. I am saddened when I see that this teaching is unknown and is possibly not presented properly. I confess that what provoked me to write this Pastoral Letter were some of the results of the questionnaire in preparation for the Bishops' Synod due to be celebrated next October in Rome, and also after I perused a small national study recently carried out through 'Dar Ġuzeppa Debono'², which study sheds some light on how the young generation is living "the romantic and sexual relationships".

THE HUMAN CRY

4. I am aware of the complaint of a number of adolescents and youths who, despite their belief that in their search for happiness they have a license to experiment in their personal relationship, are experiencing a sense of emptiness. I also hear the groan of several married couples, of various ages, who were led to believe that through marriage one would solve

sexuality issues but who, just because they, too, are influenced by the liberal and hedonistic culture of our times, found that, instead of enhancing their intimacy, their sexual relations were the cause of their mutual alienation and estrangement. I am also conscious of the fact that sexuality bothers also the unmarried, not excluding those who have chosen celibacy for the sake of God's Kingdom.

THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE

5. It is a well-known fact that man cannot live without love. "If one does not know love, if one does not discover love within one's life, if one does not feel love, if one does not include love in one's life, if one does not participate intimately in it, one remains a being incapable of understanding oneself and life would have no meaning".³ Because a person cannot live without love, he requires a language that expresses this love. Sexuality is one of these languages. Although love does not necessarily express itself through sexual activity, no sexual behaviour would be genuine unless it is driven by love. In fact, there is no trace of love in rape, prostitution and paedophilia. Even the pornography business, such as the services sold through electronic sites, makes a parody of love. Irregular sexual relationships and perverse sexual acts are both wrong precisely because they are devoid of true love. Therefore, a man and a woman do not love each other just because there is sexual intimacy between them, but rather their sexual intimacy occurs because they are in love.

6. By its own nature, a sexual relationship should be one of the aspects of the dialogue of love that would have been going on between a couple. Within this framework, the marriage act is the intimate moment that expresses the most profound union of what is within the hearts and mind of the married couple. The Man and the woman who love one other would be in a continuous dialogue between them and reach a moment when, using a different type of language (sexuality), they declare to each other: I give myself completely to you, or I accept you unconditionally within my life!

7. But, as we say for all the words we use in our communications, even this language of love can reflect truth or falsehood. This language becomes a fraudulent and untrue when the sentiments it communicates are not genuine. We all remember Judas giving Jesus "a kiss" to betray him. Jesus did not scold Judas because he "sold" him but because, in order to betray him, Judas used the language of love (the kiss) bereft of its proper meaning, and so a deceptive language. A couple that seeks to unite physically without the context of love would be trivialising sexuality and depriving it of its genuine significance. Therefore, the gestures of the sexual relationship, which acts represent the best expression of physical intimacy between the man and the woman, cannot but be the language through which the two are mutually committed.

RESPONSIBLE LOVE

8. As a language of love, sexuality can be expressed in different ways – in fact, the eyes, the lips, the gestures, and the rest speak. It is this language that is spoken by engaged couples preparing themselves to seal their mutual giving in marriage. The more authentic the love is between the man and the woman, the more genuine is the language of sexuality. The couple that unites intellectually, emotively, spiritually, as well as socially and ecclesially through marriage (civil and sacramental) is that couple that has arrived at the truth and genuineness of the language of sexuality. Considering that genital sexual expression is not only a way to express love, but has also the potential of the creation of a new life, this language should be expressed responsibly. This is the reason why when such a language is expressed in

relationships before or outside marriage, it does not always demonstrate true respect toward the other person and responsibility. When exploited in such contexts, the language that is endowed with such extraordinary beauty is greatly impoverished.

THE BEAUTY OF RELATIONSHIPS

9. It is normal that a man and a woman search around for the right partner. The sexual energy within each human being leads one to project oneself to enter into a relationship of reciprocity so that he does not remain alone. The Creation narrative discloses God's wish for man not to suffer the pains of solitude. In the story of Creation, God did not accept that the man should live in solitude. God said: "It is not good for the man to remain alone" (*Genesis* 2:18). So God offers him a person equal to him in everything yet different: the woman. They complement each other so much so that "a man leaves his father and his mother and is joined to his wife and they become one" (*Genesis* 2:24). Hence, the two would have found reciprocal support, so that their love does not remain egoistic seeking only pleasure (erotic love), but progresses to become a love that offers itself to the other person (*agape*). Such love (*agape*) wins over egoistic nature, where the focus rests on gains and eye catching motives, and it becomes a thought and heartfelt desire for the good of others. This love will not seek the self, will not get lost in a drunken search for pleasure, but seeks the good of the loved person, and thus prepares for and seeks sacrifice. The love is purified and achieves a higher grade in these two ways: with the determination to exclude other persons – "only this is the select person I love" (faithfulness), and with the commitment that it is forever.⁴

10. Such personalised love could become impoverished and impersonal when in this relationship with another person there is a feeling of being "with" somebody rather than "for" somebody; and when sexuality is lived on schemes alien to the life of the couple or on models proposed by culture. It is a fact that in the liquid culture of today there is the risk that both love and relationships would be liquid.

11. Love and sexuality are noble and beautiful dimensions of humanity, as they portray the expression of who we are. Maybe we need to ascertain the link between "beautiful love" and sexuality. Man is truly happy when in the company of the person he honestly loves, particularly in the relationship that sprouts between man and woman.

12. According to a national study conducted by *Dar Gużèppa Debono*, it appears that, in general, disordered sexual behaviour among our adolescents is a symptom of lack of love they experience. The lack of love in the family, in the school environment and in society, in a general sense, is resulting in some adolescents feeling aimless in life, with their hearts yearning for love⁵. In a society that, instead of offering them sincere help, takes advantage of their suffering by offering them apparently facile solutions, they end up indulging in sexual activity which not only puts their health at risk, but is of psychological and emotional harm to themselves and to others.⁵

THE COMMITMENT OF EVERY CHRISTIAN

13. Through Christ's message, the Church looks at the greatness of man, and has the mission to help adolescents and youths to believe more in themselves and in their capacity for true love endowed by God as, above all, they are the beloved children of our Father. As mature adults we ought to participate in our adolescents' dreams: we should condemn less and listen more! The study mentioned above shows that the majority of our sons and daughters

associate important values with sexual activity. For most of them – contrary to what the consumerist culture often attempts to convince them through separating love from sexual pleasure and the interpersonal relationship from sexual activity – sex is not all there is in the relationship between a woman and a man. The study reveals that the majority of our teenagers consider that there is no need for sexual contact in order to have a companion, and they would not indulge in sexual activity before they meet that person they wish to live with or marry. It is on these values that the good news of the Gospel must be spread to show the beauty of human sexuality, that man is called to live it as an expression of lasting love based on full mutual self-giving between man and woman within marriage.⁶

14. We are faced with a delicate mission requiring commitment – a beautiful mission – to help our adolescents maintain the high ideals that they already cherish. In fact when, in the aforementioned study, they were asked to describe an ideal relationship, teenagers replied that an ideal relationship had to be endowed with respect, love, trust, open dialogue, honesty, mutual care and problem sharing, being there for each other through thick and thin, not taking one another for granted, being true partners, and maintaining loyalty, stability and agreement.⁷

15. It is our onerous duty to help our sons and daughters to render their wishes a reality in their lives. We have to help them by telling them: “Yes! True love is possible since Christ assumed a human body, took on human sexuality and redeemed it. With his help – through what we call Grace – we can truly love one another, and a woman and a man could love each other forever. It is possible that through our bodies we express the greatness of love in a responsible way and in the way of someone who is not a slave to his passions, but of a free son, a free daughter, who through sexuality emerges from his/her own self to love the other person.

16. In a society that no longer dreams about the ideals engraved in our adolescents I am asking all persons of good will to be *prophets* and share the beauty of human sexuality, of sincere and responsible love, of sexual love where the man and the woman give themselves to each other and through their love new life is begotten. What I explained above is not some moral or confessional imposition, but a few principles derived from a reflection about our human nature –they are proposals of benefit to everyone.

SEXUAL EDUCATION

17. To carry out this mission we need to be protagonists in the *sexual education of our children*. From the above-mentioned study, the value of the efforts of the educators in our schools is evident. However, it is a fact that our adolescents acquire a lot of information about sex from friends and the communication media, including the internet.⁸ One can understand the difficulty of parents to live up to their calling as the main educators of their offspring.⁹

18. In the words of Saint John Paul II, “it is unrealistic to think of re-building a new culture for humanity, if adolescents do not have help to discover and live sexuality, love and their whole human existence according to their true meaning and in the intimate relation that exists between them. Sexuality, which is the essence of the whole person, «reveals its innate meaning when it leads the person to give himself/herself in love».”¹⁰ One of the main factors leading to the devaluation of nascent human life is the fact that sexuality has become something without value: only true love can protect life. So we cannot but offer, particularly to the young and adolescent, *proper education in sexuality and in love*, an education based on

formation in chastity as a virtue, to enable the person to reach full development and be capable of respecting the genuine meaning of 'engagement' of the body.¹¹

19. Although nowadays chastity is not a subject for discussion in the town square, I know of some youths and engaged or married couples that practice it. In this virtue they found a requisite that helped them respect the essence of sexuality. Chastity does not mean that one abstains from having a sexual relationship, or that one abhors sexual love, but that one “controls one’s passions and enjoy peace”¹². Through self-control and self-mastery, a person protects himself from those inner or external forces that would eradicate the love that gladdens his heart.¹³ It is through this spiritual strength that the person can live his sexuality as an expression of true love that is willing to be committed to the beloved.¹⁴ Chastity is the virtue of equilibrium that helps us retain a balance in life. It is true that chastity demands sacrifice, but such sacrifice is a way leading to happiness.

20. In the commitment for our children to receive valid education regarding sexuality and love, I cannot omit to praise the initiatives that *Dar Ġużepa Debono*, together with the schools in our island, are taking in this regard. However it is necessary that such initiatives become a clear conviction and commitment for every one of Christ’s disciples. Our children expect us to educate them about true and responsible love. Educators speak of the right of adolescents to have access to honest and impartial information regarding sexual and reproductive health.⁵ Enriched with the “Gospel of Sexuality”, we Christians should be committed to ensure that sexual education, enlightened by human and evangelical values, would be not merely information, but *formation*: formation for responsible love, for relationships that render a person more true to himself. It is essential that when dealing with such a delicate and important subject, the “pedagogical lie”, that occurs when an educational proposal does not include the whole truth, is avoided.

21. This educational proposal has a primary focus: which chosen anthropology we should be promoting, in other words, what is our definition of the human person. Education is a determining activity and therefore assumes what concept we have of mankind. Should we derail in such a fundamental theme of philosophical anthropology, we also deviate in our discourse on sexuality. In the choices pertaining to sexual education, it is important to avoid concepts that devalue the human person.

When sexual education offers only scientific and technical knowledge about sex, genital and physiological mechanisms, one would be ignoring the psychological, affective, social and spiritual aspects of the person and teaching is incomplete. Serious scientific information is necessary, but I understand that it has to be integrated with other important aspects so that all information fits in the comprehensive framework of the complex dynamics of sexuality.

Should the education process focus on nurturing egoistic, sexual pleasures and towards prevention of sexually related diseases, then in this case, sex is not there for the person to reach his noble goals, but rather the person becomes sacrificed to the gratification of the instinctive attraction of sex.

SEXUAL ETHICS

22. A lay philosopher of our time, Charles Taylor, observes that nowadays, in seeking happiness, man believes that he has not only to be free from restrictive principles of sexual ethics and from disciplines that regulate pleasure, but actually thinks that to feel fulfilled, he should break these rules.¹⁶ Now, since sexuality is the language of love, as in any other

language, this has its own grammar. These are not grammatical rules imposed from above or the outside, but are dictated through the very nature of human sexuality. In fact, sexual behaviour is good or bad according to how much it helps the person to feel fulfilled, not at the cost of everything in the name of liberty, but in the sense that it is an activity through which the person would be responding to his human vocation.

LOVE AND MERCY FOR ALL PERSONS

23. It is a fact that every person is a unique and unrepeatable system in the sense that we cannot place any person in one scheme or judge a person according to our own scheme. Therefore, while the grammatical rules of sexuality (moral principles) exist, these have to be communicated with much love and sensitivity. Above all, we have to be prudent and cautious when we speak about the moral responsibilities of the person because, although no one can disregard the moral principles that help us live through the dimension of sexuality in an authentic way, every person must answer morally according to that person's sense of ownership of the grammar of sexuality. Since every person requires time to learn, a person also needs time to gradually recognise and accept these principles.

Therefore, for those who, for some reason or other, have not embraced this grammar – while one remains hopeful that eventually they will convince themselves and apply these rules – it is desirable that, at the same time, there will be personalised accompaniment so that the gravity of the mistakes they make is minimised.

24. As Pope Francis says: "Today more than ever we need men and women who, on the basis of their experience of accompanying others, are familiar with processes which call for prudence, understanding, patience and docility to the Spirit We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur. ... Only through such respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of true growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal: the desire to respond fully to God's love and to bring to fruition what he has sown in our lives. But this always demands the patience of one who knows full well what Saint Thomas Aquinas tells us: that anyone can have grace and charity, and yet falter in the exercise of the virtues because of persistent «contrary inclinations»... Hence the need for «a pedagogy which will introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery». Reaching a level of maturity where individuals can make truly free and responsible decisions calls for much time and patience. As Blessed Peter Faber used to say: «Time is God's messenger»."¹⁷

25. It is important that parents understand that their example and discourse can do a lot of good to their children. It is important that parents are helped through meetings and seminars to speak to their children about the beauty of human sexuality enlightened by the Gospel. It is equally important that parents use these aids to make sure that their children are not merely handed *instruments* that impoverish the beauty of human sexuality, but rather *motivations* that help them live their calling as humans enriched with sexuality.

26. I appeal to the People of God within our Diocese, whatever their choice in life – priests, consecrated persons, married individuals, teachers, youth leaders, and others – to feel the pressure of the responsibility we have to organise ourselves more to spread the Gospel of Sexuality to man of our time. I feel the need for a new culture regarding sexuality, in our society and in the Church. At a time when an educational emergency is being felt and our

children are suffering from a dearth of *models* to emulate and base their lives on, we are called to propose to our children the word of Christ regarding love and human sexuality: words that do not suffocate a person's liberty, but rather helps to make him freer. Our proposal should not be negative, but the fruit of theological reflection that answers legitimate questions that are being raised in this context. Sexual education must be offered, not so much in moral terminology but rather through a method that exposes the beauty of authentic love. Sexual education is a sanctifying process in that it reveals the mystery of life.

28. It is necessary that the word of Truth is accompanied by a word of Mercy - that is another attribute of God - so that the teachings of the Church about human sexuality is delivered truly as *Good News*, rather than a string of prohibitions and condemnations that discourage man who struggles daily with his weakness. This calls for us to be strengthened by the gaze of Christ, so that we may influence the fallen or whoever is restrained by the chains of vice or by the poor environment of his breeding, in order for them to have that courage *to stand and walk* towards the freedom offered by the Gospel, we bring to him words to encourage him to *get up and walk* closer to the freedom of the Gospel, through a gradual journey that helps him to live his sexuality with more freedom and sincerity.

29. During the solemnity of Saint Mary, our eyes rest on the Virgin Mary Assumed body and soul into Heaven, on Her who is the *Mother of Beautiful Love* (Sir 24: 18). This Beautiful Love is not some abstract idea but the person of Jesus Christ, who is the visible beauty of God who is not seen, who through the fruit of his love became a man like us. We beseech the intercession of the Assumed so that, enchanted by this *Beautiful Love*, as a Church we confront the challenges of our time and spread, with Christian optimism, the love of God for every person, that Love which makes him capable of living the beauty of Human Sexuality.

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✠ Mario Grech

REFERENCES

¹ BLAISE PASCAL, *Pensieri*, 425.

² *A National Research Study to enable policy makers to develop a preventive policy for teenage pregnancy in Malta and Gozo*, 2014.

⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Deus caritas est* (25th December 2005), 6-7.

⁵ “Oftentimes, teenage pregnancy is the result of *an absence of choices* or circumstances. Teenage pregnancies may be related to **loneliness, powerlessness, poverty and pressure from a variety of entities**. In a large number of instances, early pregnancy is the result of **sexual abuse**” (*A National Research Study to enable policy makers to develop a preventive policy for teenage pregnancy in Malta and Gozo*, 15). “Causes of teenage pregnancies (according to stakeholders: guidance teachers, counsellors...): **promiscuity, experimentation, low self-esteem, no objectives or goals in life, failure in school, family background** (or too spoilt, socioeconomic background, separation)” (see *ibid.*, 66-67). “Other causes: a number of teenage mothers interviewed **experienced bullying** at school that made them experience feelings of **sadness, low self esteem and desperation**” (*ibid.*, 55); “influence of **friends**” (*ibid.*, 55); “**high-risk behaviour** – smoking, drinking...” (*ibid.*,

17; 55). “In certain cases, where teenager feels ‘**useless**’ or has **no clear objectives for the future**, a baby is perceived as the *natural next step in their life*. In other cases, which are generally linked to other **family and psychological issues**, the teenager becomes pregnant *to fulfil a need to love somebody*. Furthermore, girls who had **low self-esteem** were more likely to stay in a *dominant and dependant relationship*” (*ibid*, 67). Bold and italics of the Author.

⁶ *Ibid*, 29, Fig. 11.

⁷ *Ibid*, 56.

⁸ *Ibid*, 18, 37, Fig. 22.

⁹ *Ibid*, 68-69.

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio* (22nd November 1981), 37.

¹¹ ID., *Evangelium vitae* (25th March 1995), 97.

¹² CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 2339.

¹³ YOUCAT, 404-406.

¹⁴ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality. Guidelines for Education within the family* (8th December 1995), 16-25; CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 2337-2350.

¹⁵ *A National Research Study to enable policy makers to develop a preventive policy for teenage pregnancy in Malta and Gozo*, 27.

¹⁶ CHARLES TAYLOR, *A secular age*, Cambridge (MA) – London 2007, 493.

¹⁷ FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* (24th November 2013), 171.