

B. Natural Law Theory

The idea that certain actions or practices are “natural” while others are “unnatural” is commonly offered as a reason why certain “unnatural” actions are wrong and that we ought to do what is natural. Think of popular arguments against homosexuality. This idea of morality being natural is associated with the **natural law theory**.¹²

This type of moral theory is often traced to the thirteenth-century philosopher and theologian St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). It gets its name from the guiding idea that there are objectively true moral principles that are grounded in human nature.¹³ Because there are objective facts about human nature that determine what our good consists in, and because moral requirements have to do with maintaining and promoting the human goods, these requirements, unlike the rules of some club or made-up game, are part of the natural order. Because the natural law theory bases right action on considerations of intrinsic value, it is a value-based theory of right conduct, as is consequentialism. However, as we shall see in setting out this theory, natural law theory is opposed to consequentialism—it denies that the *only* considerations that matter when it comes to right action are consequences. So, to understand this theory let us proceed by first presenting its theory of intrinsic value and then presenting its theory of right conduct in two parts: (a) first, the “core” of theory and then (b) the doctrine of double effect.

*Theory of Intrinsic Value*¹⁴

According to Aquinas’s version of natural law theory, there are four basic intrinsic goods:

- Human life
- Human procreation (which includes raising children)
- Human knowledge
- Human sociability (this value has to do with associations and bonds with others, including friendship, social organizations, and political organizations)

Each of these items, then, has intrinsic value and their destruction is intrinsically bad or evil. These four values are the basis for the core of natural law theory.

The Core

We can state the basic principle of natural law theory roughly as follows:

NLT An action is right if and only if (and because) in performing the action one does not directly violate any of the basic values.

Thus, killing a human being (with some exceptions explained later) is morally wrong. If we suppose, as many natural law theorists do, that the use of contraceptives thwarts human procreation, then their use is morally wrong. Interfering with the good of knowledge by distorting information or by lying is morally wrong. Destroying legitimate social bonds through the advocacy of anarchy is morally wrong.

But what about hard cases in which no matter what one does, one will violate at least one of the basic values and thus bring about evil through whichever action one chooses? Let us consider a much discussed case involving abortion. Suppose that a pregnant woman has cancer of the uterus and must have a hysterectomy (removal of her uterus) to save her life.

Human life is one of the intrinsic goods, so having the operation will have at least one good effect. But suppose (just for the sake of the example) that from conception the fetus counts as a human life and so having the hysterectomy would bring about the death of the unborn human life. This effect, because it involves the destruction of something having intrinsic value—human life—is an evil. And let us suppose that this moral dilemma is unavoidable in this case because there is no other way to save the woman's life while also preserving the life of her fetus. How does the natural law theory deal with this kind of case? After all, the core of the theory seems to say that any action that violates one or more of the basic goods is wrong, period. But if it really does say this, then we have to conclude that her having the operation is wrong, but also her not having the operation is wrong (because she will fail to preserve her own life). How can natural law theory deal with this moral dilemma?

If we go back and inspect the basic principle of natural law theory, NLT, we notice that what it prohibits are actions that *directly* violate one or more of the basic goods, thereby bringing about evil. But what counts as a direct violation? Can there be morally permissible “indirect” violations? These questions bring us to the next major component of natural law ethics—the doctrine of double effect.

The Doctrine of Double Effect

In addition to the core principle (NLT), the natural law theory also embraces the following set of provisions that compose the **doctrine of double effect**—so named because it concerns cases in which performing an action would have at least one good effect and one bad effect (where good and bad have to do with the theory's list of intrinsic goods). So this doctrine is meant to address the question of whether it is ever morally permissible to knowingly bring about bad or evil consequences where one's aim in action is to bring about or preserve one or more of the basic human goods. Here, then, is a statement of the various provisions making up the doctrine:

DDE An action that would bring about at least one evil effect and at least one good effect is morally permissible if (and only if) the following conditions are satisfied:

Intrinsic permissibility: The action in question, apart from its effects, is morally permissible;

Necessity: It is not possible to bring about the good effect except by performing an action that will bring about the evil effect in question;

Nonintentionality: The evil effect is not intended—it is neither one's end nor a chosen means for bringing about some intended end;

Proportionality: The evil that will be brought about by the action is not out of proportion to the good being aimed at.

What this principle does is help define the idea of a direct violation of a human good which is the central idea in the core principle, NLT. We shall return to this point in a moment. For the time being, let us explain DDE by showing how it would apply to the case just described.

In applying DDE to our moral dilemma, we must ask whether all four of the doctrine's provisions are satisfied. Let us take them in order. (1) First, since having a hysterectomy is not an intrinsically wrong action, the first requirement is satisfied. (2) Furthermore, given my description of the case, the second requirement of DDE is met because having a hysterectomy

is the *only* way to save her life. Were there some other operation or some medication that would both save the woman's life and preserve the life of the fetus, then the necessity condition would not be met and the hysterectomy would be wrong. But we are supposing that there are no such options in this case.

(3) The third requirement rests on the distinction between effects that one intends in action and effects that may be foreseen but are unintended. One intends some consequence or effect when either it is something one is aiming to bring about (an end) or it is one's chosen means for bringing about some desired end. Here is a simple, everyday example. I fire a rifle in order to hit the paper target, but in so doing I know that the noise from the rifle will frighten nearby wildlife. But even though I can foresee that my act of pulling the trigger will frighten those animals, this effect is not intended: it is not my purpose—my purpose is to hit the target, and their being frightened is not a means for achieving my end—the means is taking aim and firing. So the effect of my act of firing—frightening those animals—is not something I intend, rather it is a foreseen but unintended side effect of what I do.

Returning now to our example, we find that this third provision is satisfied because although the death of the unborn child is a foreseen effect of the hysterectomy, its death is not her chief aim or end (saving her own life), and it is not a means by which her life will be saved. After all, were she not pregnant, she would still have the operation to save her life, and so the death of the unborn is a mere unintended and unfortunate side effect of the operation. Removing the cancer is what will save her life.

(4) Finally, the evil that will result from the operation (loss of one innocent human life) is not grossly out of proportion to the good that will result (saving an innocent human life). (When DDE is applied to the morality of war activities, considerations of proportionality of evil to good become especially relevant. See the introduction to chapter 12 and the articles in that chapter by Haig Khatchadourian and James P. Sterba.)

Having explained the DDE, we can now return to the core principle, NLT, and explain how these two elements are related in natural law ethics. The idea is that, according to NLT, we are not to *directly* violate any of the basic human goods. The DDE helps define what counts as a direct violation: direct violations are those that cannot be justified by the doctrine of double effect.

Before going on, it will be useful to pause for a moment to compare the natural law theory with consequentialism. In response to our moral dilemma involving the hysterectomy, an act consequentialist will say that we should consider the value of the consequences of the alternative actions (having a hysterectomy or refraining from this operation) and choose the action with the best consequences. In short, for the act consequentialist good results justify the means. But not for the natural law theorist, because on her theory one may not act in direct violation of the basic goods even if by doing so one would produce better consequences. Good ends do not always justify an action that is a means to those ends. For instance, I am not permitted to intentionally kill one innocent human being (do evil) even if by doing so I can save five others (bring about good). To see how consequentialism and natural law theory yield different verdicts about a difficult moral case, consider the case of a woman who is pregnant, but this time she is suffering from a "tubal" pregnancy, which means that her fetus is lodged in her fallopian tube and thus has not implanted itself into the uterine wall. If nothing is done, both fetus and woman will die. The only thing that can be done to save the woman is to remove the fetus, which will bring about its death. Exercise: apply act consequentialism and the natural law theory to this case to see whether they differ in their moral implications.

Applying Natural Law Theory

In applying the natural law theory to some case in order to determine whether a particular course of action is morally right, one begins with the core principle, NLT, and asks whether the action in question would violate any of the basic goods. If not, then the action is not wrong. But if it would violate one or more of the basic goods, then one has to determine whether the action would constitute a *direct* violation. And to do that, one makes use of the DDE. If the action satisfies all four provisions of DDE, then the violation is not direct and the action is morally permissible. If the action does not pass DDE, then the action involves a direct violation of one or more of the intrinsic goods and is, therefore, wrong.

Of course, as with all moral theories, applying the natural law theory is not a mechanical process. For one thing, one must address questions about the proper interpretation of the four basic human goods. Surely coming to have knowledge of the basic laws that govern the physical universe is intrinsically valuable, if any knowledge is. But what if, for example, I spend my time counting the number of needles on a cactus plant for no particular reason; is the knowledge I acquire about the number of needles really of any intrinsic value? One can raise similar questions about the other three basic human goods. Furthermore, applying the doctrine of double effect raises questions of interpretation. For instance, the proportionality provision requires that the evil caused by an action not be "out of proportion" to the good effects of that action. But, of course, determining when things are out of proportion requires sensitivity to particular cases and the use of good judgment.

These points about interpretation are not meant as a criticism of natural law theory; rather they call attention to the fact that applying it to particular moral issues requires that we interpret its various elements. As we shall see, a similar point applies to Kantian moral theory.

C. Kantian Moral Theory

Most everyone has come across moral arguments that appeal to the **golden rule**: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This rule encapsulates a kind of test for thinking about the morality of actions: it asks the individual making a moral choice that will affect others to consider how one would like it were one on the receiving end of the action in question. In the case of Thomas Youk with which we began the chapter, the golden rule would have Kevorkian consider what he would want done to (or for) him were he in Youk's situation. Various objections have been made to the golden rule—for instance, it suggests that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends simply on what one does or would desire. But people can have crazy desires. A masochist who inflicts pain on others might cheerfully say that he would have others do unto him as he is doing to them. Do we want to conclude that his causing others pain is morally right? Perhaps there is some interpretation of the golden rule that does not yield the wrong result in the case of the masochist or other examples that have been used against it. Nevertheless, there is something about the *spirit* of the golden rule that seems right. The idea suggested by this rule is that morality requires that we not treat people unfairly, that we respect other persons by taking them into account in our moral deliberations. This suggestion is quite vague but finds one articulation in Kantian moral theory to which we now turn.

Kantian moral theory derives from the moral writings of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), which continue to have an enormous influence on contemporary ethics.¹⁵

Vatican Declaration on Some Questions of Sexual Ethics

This declaration affirms the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church on matters of sexual behavior. The basis of the church's teachings is the natural law approach to ethics, according to which there are objective standards of human behavior that are grounded in facts about human nature and are thus "perennial"—principles that can be known either through revelation or through the use of reason. The fundamental principles of sexual morality concern, then, the nature of the human being and the proper function of sexual behavior, which includes "mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love." This principle is then used as a basis for arguing that premarital sex, homosexuality, and masturbation are morally wrong.

Recommended Reading: natural law theory, chap. 1, sec. 2B.

INTRODUCTION

Importance of Sexuality

1. The human person, according to the scientific disciplines of our day, is so deeply influenced by his sexuality that this latter must be regarded as one of the basic factors shaping human life. The person's sex is the source of the biological, psychological and spiritual characteristics which make the person male or female, and thus are extremely important and influential in the maturation and socialization of the individual. It is easy to understand, therefore, why matters pertaining to sex are frequently and openly discussed in books, periodicals, newspapers and other communications media.

Meanwhile, moral corruption is on the increase. One of the most serious signs of this is the boundless exaltation of sex. In addition, with the help of the mass media and the various forms of entertainment,

sex has even invaded the field of education and infected the public mind.

In this situation, some educators, teachers and moralists have been able to contribute to a better understanding and vital integration of the special values and qualities proper to each sex. Others, however, have defended views and ways of acting which are in conflict with the true moral requirements of man, and have even opened the door to a licentious hedonism.

The result is that, within a few years' time, teachings, moral norms and habits of life hitherto faithfully preserved have been called into doubt, even by Christians. Many today are asking what they are to regard as true when so many current views are at odds with what they learned from the Church.

Occasion for This Declaration

2. In the face of this intellectual confusion and moral corruption the Church cannot stand by and do nothing.

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E PAUL VI

The issue here is too important in the life both of the individual and of contemporary society.¹

Bishops see each day the ever increasing difficulties of the faithful in acquiring sound moral teaching, especially in sexual matters, and of pastors in effectively explaining that teaching. The bishops know it is their pastoral duty to come to the aid of the faithful in such a serious matter. Indeed, some outstanding documents have been published on the subject by some bishops and some episcopal conferences. But, since erroneous views and the deviations they produce continue to be broadcast everywhere, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in accordance with its role in the universal Church² and by mandate of the Supreme Pontiff, has thought it necessary to issue this Declaration.

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Sources of Moral Knowledge

3. The men of our day are increasingly persuaded that their dignity and calling as human beings requires them to use their minds to discover the values and powers inherent in their nature, to develop these without ceasing and to translate them into action, so that they may make daily greater progress.

When it comes to judgments on moral matters, however, man may not proceed simply as he thinks fit. "Deep within, man detects the law of conscience—a law which is not self-imposed but which holds him to obedience. . . . For man has in his heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged."³

To us Christians, moreover, God has revealed his plan of salvation and has given us Christ, the Savior and sanctifier, as the supreme and immutable norm of life through his teaching and example. Christ himself has said: "I am the light of the world. No follower of mine shall ever walk in darkness; no, he shall possess the light of life."⁴

The authentic dignity of man cannot be promoted, therefore, except through adherence to the order which

is essential to his nature. There is no denying, of course, that in the history of civilization many of the concrete conditions and relationships of human life have changed and will change again in the future but every moral evolution and every manner of life must respect the limits set by the immutable principles which are grounded in the constitutive elements and essential relations proper to the human person. These elements and relations are not subject to historical contingency.

The basic principles in question can be grasped by man's reason. They are contained in "the divine law—eternal, objective and universal—whereby God orders, directs and governs the entire universe and all the ways of the human community by a plan conceived in wisdom and love. God has made man a participant in this law, with the result that, under the gentle disposition of divine Providence, he can come to perceive ever more fully the truth that is unchanging."⁵ This divine law is something we can know.

The Principles of Morality Are Perennial

4. Wrongly, therefore, do many today deny that either human nature or revealed law furnishes any absolute and changeless norm for particular actions except the general law of love and respect for human dignity. To justify this position, they argue that both the so-called norms of the natural law and the precepts of Sacred Scripture are simply products of a particular human culture and its expressions at a certain point in history.

But divine revelation and, in its own order, natural human wisdom show us genuine exigencies of human nature and, as a direct and necessary consequence, immutable laws which are grounded in the constitutive elements of human nature and show themselves the same in all rational beings. . . .

The Fundamental Principles of Sexual Morality

5. Since sexual morality has to do with values which are basic to human and Christian life, the general doctrine we have been presenting applies to it. In this area there are principles and norms which the Church has always unhesitatingly transmitted as part

of her teaching, however opposed they might be to the mentality and ways of the world. These principles and norms have their origin, not in a particular culture, but in knowledge of the divine law and human nature. Consequently, it is impossible for them to lose their binding force or to be called into doubt on the grounds of cultural change.

These principles guided Vatican Council II when it provided advice and directives for the establishment of the kind of social life in which the equal dignity of man and woman will be respected, even while the differences between them also are preserved.⁶

In speaking of the sexual nature of the human being and of the human generative powers, the Council observes that these are "remarkably superior to those found in lower grades of life."⁷ Then it deals in detail with the principles and norms which apply to human sexuality in the married state and are based on the finality of the function proper to marriage.

In this context the Council asserts that the moral goodness of the actions proper to married life, when ordered as man's true dignity requires, "does not depend only on a sincere intention and the evaluating of motives, but must be judged by objective standards. These are drawn from the nature of the human person and of his acts, and have regard for the whole meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love."⁸

These last words are a brief summation of the Council's teaching (previously set forth at length in the same document⁹) on the finality of the sexual act and on the chief norm governing its morality. It is respect for this finality which guarantees the moral goodness of the act.

The same principle, which the Church derives from divine revelation and from her authentic interpretation of the natural law, is also the source of her traditional teaching that the exercise of the sexual function has its true meaning and is morally good only in legitimate marriage.¹⁰

Limits of This Declaration

6. It is not the intention of this declaration to treat all abuses of the sexual powers nor to deal with all that

is involved in the practice of chastity but rather to recall the Church's norms on certain specific points, since there is a crying need of opposing certain serious errors and deviant forms of behavior.

II. SPECIFIC APPLICATIONS

Premarital Relations

7. Many individuals at the present time are claiming the right to sexual union before marriage, at least when there is a firm intention of marrying and when a love which both partners think of as already conjugal demands this further step which seems to them connatural. They consider this further step justified especially when external circumstances prevent the formal entry into marriage or when intimate union seems necessary if love is to be kept alive.

This view is opposed to the Christian teaching that any human genital act whatsoever may be placed only within the framework of marriage. For, however firm the intention of those who pledge themselves to each other in such premature unions, these unions cannot guarantee the sincerity and fidelity of the relationship between man and woman, and, above all, cannot protect the relationship against the changeableness of desire and determination.

Yet, Christ the Lord willed that the union be a stable one and he restored it to its original condition as founded in the difference between the sexes. "Have you not read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female and declared, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and the two shall become as one'?" Thus they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, let no man separate what God has joined."¹¹ . . .

Such has always been the Church's understanding of and teaching on the exercise of the sexual function.¹² She finds, moreover, that natural human wisdom and the lessons of history are in profound agreement with her.

Experience teaches that if sexual union is truly to satisfy the requirements of its own finality and of

human dignity, love must be safeguarded by the stability marriage gives. These requirements necessitate a contract which is sanctioned and protected by society: the contract gives rise to a new state of life and is of exceptional importance for the exclusive union of man and woman as well as for the good of their family and the whole of human society. Premarital relations, on the other hand, most often exclude any prospect of children. Such love claims in vain to be conjugal since it cannot, as it certainly should, grow into a maternal and paternal love; or, if the pair do become parents, it will be to the detriment of the children, who are deprived of a stable environment in which they can grow up in a proper fashion and find the way and means of entering into the larger society of men.

Therefore, the consent of those entering into marriage must be externally manifested, and this in such a way as to render it binding in the eyes of society. The faithful, for their part, must follow the laws of the Church in declaring their marital consent: it is this consent that makes their marriage a sacrament of Christ.

Homosexuality

8. Contrary to the perennial teaching of the Church and the moral sense of the Christian people, some individuals today have, on psychological grounds, begun to judge indulgently or even simply to excuse homosexual relations for certain people.

They make a distinction which has indeed some foundation: between homosexuals whose bent derives from improper education or a failure of sexual maturation or habit or bad example or some similar cause and is only temporary or at least is not incurable; and homosexuals who are permanently such because of some innate drive or a pathological condition which is considered incurable.

The propensity of those in the latter class is—it is argued—so natural that it should be regarded as justifying homosexual relations within a sincere and loving communion of life which is comparable to marriage inasmuch as those involved in it deem it impossible for them to live a solitary life.

Objective Evil of Such Acts

As far as pastoral care is concerned, such homosexuals are certainly to be treated with understanding and encouraged to hope that they can some day overcome their difficulties and their inability to fit into society in a normal fashion. Prudence, too, must be exercised in judging their guilt. However, no pastoral approach may be taken which would consider these individuals morally justified on the grounds that such acts are in accordance with their nature. For, according to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts deprived of the essential ordination they ought to have.

In Sacred Scripture such acts are condemned as serious deviations and are even considered to be the lamentable effect of rejecting God.¹³ This judgment on the part of the divinely inspired Scriptures does not justify us in saying that all who suffer from this anomaly are guilty of personal sin but it does show that homosexual acts are disordered by their very nature and can never be approved.

Masturbation

9. Frequently today we find doubt or open rejection of the traditional Catholic teaching that masturbation is a serious moral disorder. Psychology and sociology (it is claimed) show that masturbation, especially in adolescents, is a normal phase in the process of sexual maturation and is, therefore, not gravely sinful unless the individual deliberately cultivates a solitary pleasure that is turned in upon itself ("ipsation"). In this last case, the act would be radically opposed to that loving communion between persons of different sexes which (according to some) is the principal goal to be sought in the use of the sexual powers.

This opinion is contrary to the teaching and pastoral practice of the Catholic Church. Whatever be the validity of certain arguments of a biological and philosophical kind which theologians sometimes use, both the magisterium of the Church (following a constant tradition) and the moral sense of the faithful have unhesitatingly asserted

that masturbation is an intrinsically and seriously disordered act.¹⁴ The chief reason for this stand is that, whatever the motive, the deliberate use of the sexual faculty outside of normal conjugal relations essentially contradicts its finality. In such an act there is lacking the sexual relationship which the moral order requires, the kind of relationship in which "the whole meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation" is made concretely real "in the context of true love."¹⁵ Only within such a relationship may the sexual powers be deliberately exercised.

Even if it cannot be established that Sacred Scripture condemns this sin under a specific name, the Church's tradition rightly understands it to be condemned in the New Testament when the latter speaks of "uncleanness" or "unchasteness" or the other vices contrary to chastity and continence.

Sociological research can show the relative frequency of this disorder according to places, types of people and various circumstances which may be taken into account. It thus provides an array of facts. But facts provide no norm for judging the morality of human acts.¹⁶ The frequency of the act here in question is connected with innate human weakness deriving from original sin, but also with the loss of the sense of God, with the moral corruption fostered by the commercialization of vice, with the unbridled license to be found in so many books and forms of public entertainment and with the forgetfulness of modesty, which is the safeguard of chastity.

In dealing with masturbation, modern psychology provides a number of valid and useful insights which enable us to judge more equitably of moral responsibility. They can also help us understand how adolescent immaturity (sometimes prolonged beyond the adolescent years) or a lack of psychological balance or habits can affect behavior, since they may make an action less deliberate and not always a subjectively serious sin. But the lack of serious responsibility should not be generally presumed; if it is, there is simply a failure to recognize man's ability to act in a moral way.

In the pastoral ministry, in order to reach a balanced judgment in individual cases account must

be taken of the overall habitual manner in which the person acts, not only in regard to charity and justice, but also in regard to the care with which he observes the precept of chastity in particular. Special heed must be paid to whether he uses the necessary natural and supernatural helps which Christian asceticism recommends, in the light of long experience, for mastering the passions and attaining virtue. . . .

NOTES

1. See Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today*, no. 47: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 1067 [*The Pope Speaks* XI, 289-290].
2. See the Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae universae* (August 15, 1967), no. 29: *AAS* 59 (1967) 897 [*TPS* XII, 401-402].
3. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today*, no. 16: *AAS* 58 (1966) 1037 [*TPS* XI, 268].
4. *Jn* 8, 12.
5. *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, no. 3: *AAS* 58 (1966) 931 [*TPS* XI, 86].
6. See Vatican II, *Declaration on Christian Education*, nos. 1 and 8: *AAS* 58 (1966) 729-730, 734-736 [*TPS* XI, 201-202, 206-207]; *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today*, nos. 29, 60, 67: *AAS* 58 (1966) 1048-1049, 1080-1081, 1088-1089 [*TPS* XI, 276-277, 299-300, 304-305].
7. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today*, no. 51: *AAS* 58 (1966) 1072 [*TPS* XI, 293].
8. *Loc. cit.*: see also no. 49: *AAS* 58 (1966) 1069-1070 [*TPS* XI, 291-292].
9. See *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today*, nos. 49-50: *AAS* 58 (1966) 1069-1072 [*TPS* XI, 291-293].
10. The present Declaration does not review all the moral norms for the use of sex, since they have already been set forth in the encyclicals *Casti Connubii* and *Humanae Vitae*.
11. *Mt* 19, 4-6.
12. See Innocent IV, Letter *Sub Catholicae professione* (March 6, 1254) (*DS* 835); Pius II, Letter *Cum sicut accepimus* (November 14, 1459) (*DS* 1367); Decrees of the Holy Office on September 24, 1665 (*DS* 2045) and March 2, 1679 (*DS* 2148); Pius XI, Encyclical *Casti Connubii* (December 31, 1930): *AAS* 22 (1930) 538-539.
13. *Rom* 1:24-27: "In consequence, God delivered them up in their lusts to unclean practices; they engaged

in the mutual degradation of their bodies, these men who exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator—blessed be he forever, amen! God therefore delivered them to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and the men gave up natural intercourse with women and burned with lust for one another. Men did shameful things with men, and thus received in their own persons the penalty for their perversity.” See also what St. Paul says of sodomy in *1 Cor* 6, 9; *1 Tm* 1, 10.

14. See Leo IX, Letter *Ad splendidum nitentes* (1054) (*DS* 687–688); Decree of the Holy Office on March 2, 1679 (*DS* 2149); Pius XII, Addresses of October 8, 1953: AAS

45 (1953) 677–678, and May 19, 1956: AAS 48 (1956) 472–473.

15. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today*, no. 51: AAS 58 (1966) 1072 [*TPS* XI, 293].

16. See Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Quinque iam anni* (December 8, 1970): AAS 63 (1971) 102 [*TPS* XV, 329]: “If sociological surveys are useful for better discovering the thought patterns of the people of a particular place, the anxieties and needs of those to whom we proclaim the word of God, and also the oppositions made to it by modern reasoning through the widespread notion that outside science there exists no legitimate form of knowledge, still the conclusions drawn from such surveys could not of themselves constitute a determining criterion of truth.”

READING QUESTIONS

1. Explain the sources of moral knowledge according to the Vatican.
2. How does the Vatican characterize morally good sexual activity?
3. Why does the Vatican object to premarital sexual relations? How is marriage intended to stabilize the relationship between two individuals?
4. What is the distinction recognized by the Vatican regarding the cause of homosexual behavior?
5. Why does the Vatican believe that homosexuality is objectively evil? How should pastors address specific cases of individual engagement in homosexual behavior according to the Vatican?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Vatican claims that the institution of marriage is designed to encourage stable relationships. Consider whether marriages generally succeed or fail in this regard. Can individuals that engage in sexual relations outside of the bonds of marriage maintain stable and lasting commitments to one another?
2. How might persons in the secular and scientific communities respond to the Vatican's objections to homosexuality and masturbation?