

## COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 45

### Love and the formation of a community of persons 2

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Today we continue the second of the three-part discussion on “Love and the formation of a community of persons”.

“The human being is made for love and cannot live without love. When it is manifested as the total gift of two persons in their complementarities, love cannot be reduced to emotions or feelings, much less to mere sexual expression.

In a society that tends more and more to relativise and trivialise the very experience of love and sexuality, exalting its fleeting aspects and obscuring its fundamental values, it is more urgent than ever to proclaim and bear witness that the truth of conjugal love and sexuality exist where there is a full and total gift of persons, with the characteristics of unity and fidelity (*Gaudium et Spes*). The truth, a source of joy, hope and life, remains impenetrable and unattainable as long as people close themselves off in relativism and skepticism.”

In today's society, the issue of sexual expression is topical. While there are Abstinence programmes in our schools, where young people have vowed not to have sex before marriage, existing alongside these programmes are the messages from the media, music, television programmes and advertisements and even from adults in the society, that sex is enjoyable and something to engage in once you reach a particular age, and can handle the “responsibility”.

Sex, too often is not discussed in the context of conjugal love. In fact, many young people are encouraged by peers and older persons to commence sexual activity; some are told not to enter into marriage without any sexual experience, it will be to their detriment and that of their marriage. The idea of saving sexual activity for marriage is by and large no longer valued by many in the society, and in fact puts pressure on many who may actually prefer to wait, and makes them feel like misfits and even outcasts in today's society.

“Faced with theories that consider gender identity as merely the cultural and social product of the interaction between the community and the individual, independent of personal sexual identity without any reference to the true meaning of sexuality, the Church does not tire of repeating her teaching: ‘Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity.

Physical, moral and spiritual difference and complementarities are oriented towards the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarities, needs and mutual support between the sexes are lived out (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).’

According to this perspective, it is obligatory that positive law be conformed to the natural law, according to which sexual identity is indispensable, because it is the objective condition for forming a couple in marriage.”

“The nature of conjugal love requires the stability of the married relationship and its indissolubility. The absence of these characteristics compromises the relationship of exclusive and total love that is proper to the marriage bond, bringing great pain to the children and damaging repercussions also on the fabric of society.”

“The stability and indissolubility of the marriage union must not be entrusted solely to the intention and effort of the individual persons involved. The responsibility for protecting and promoting the family as a fundamental natural institution, precisely in consideration of its vital and essential aspects, falls to the whole of society. The need to confer an institutional character on marriage, basing this on a public act that is socially and legally recognised, arises from the basic requirements of social nature.”

“The introduction of divorce into civil legislation has fuelled a relativistic vision of the marriage bond and is broadly manifested as it becomes ‘truly a plague on society’ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

Couples who preserve and develop the value of indissolubility “in a humble and courageous manner ... perform the role of being in the world a ‘sign’ – small and precious sign, sometimes also subjected to temptation, but always renewed – of the unfailing fidelity with which God and Jesus Christ love each and every human being (*Familiaris Consortio*).

“The Church does not abandon those who have remarried after a divorce. She prays for them and encourages them in the difficulties that they encounter in the spiritual life, sustaining them in faith and in hope.

For their part, these persons, insofar as they are baptised, can and indeed must participate in the life of the Church. They are exhorted to listen to the Word of God, to attend the sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to perform acts of charity and take part in community projects for justice and peace, to raise their children in faith, and to nurture a spirit of penance and works of penance in order to beseech, day after day, the grace of God.”

“Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance – which opens the way to the sacrament of the Eucharist – can only be given to those, who after repenting, are sincerely disposed to a new form of life that is no longer in contradiction with the indissolubility of marriage” (*Familiaris Consortio*).

“Acting in this fashion, the Church professes her fidelity to Christ and to his truth; at the same time she shows a maternal spirit to her children, especially those who, through no fault of their own, have been abandoned by their legitimate spouse. With steadfast trust she believes that even those who have turned away from the Lord’s commandment, and continue to live in that state, can obtain from God the grace of conversion and salvation, if they persevere in prayer, penance and charity” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

The marriage relationship, one that is loving and respects the differences between man and woman, again features this week as a key ingredient to successful family life. The teaching of the Church is clear on what is required. Our challenge is to make this teaching a part of our daily lives thus enriching our own families while offering encouragement to others through a model of true family community living.

The discussion on love and the formation of a community of persons will conclude in next week's article with a focus on "*De facto* unions".