

Religious Formation and the Integral Psychosexual Development of Candidates

Human development and integration have a special peculiarity: no one ever reaches a point of being able to say “I have arrived!” The same can be said of human psychosexual development and integration; it is an ongoing human endeavor.

Human sexuality is fluid and dynamic, unconditioned by seasons, not totally subject to instinct. More than an instinct, it “cuts through a person’s body and penetrates every dimension of his or her life: the psychic and the spiritual.”¹ Therefore, adequate psychological functioning demands that sexuality be brought into harmonious co-existence with the rest of one’s life. One goal of religious formation is to assist individuals to develop their full human potential, a task involving a holistic integration that includes the psychosexual dimension.

Chinyeaka C. Ezeani MSHR is on the leadership team of the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary, based in Dublin, Ireland. <chyezeani@yahoo.com>

Our Focus

In psychological assessments of candidates for the religious life and the priesthood, and in workshops with celibate persons in Nigeria, the author has found that a great deal remains to be done for affective and emotional development and psychosexual integration. For growth into the fullness of life for which Christ came into the world (Jn 10:10), we need to reflect on and integrate all aspects of our lives, including the psychosexual—which has been described as “another phrase for our pathway to love.”² Hence, this article aims first to encourage the reader to learn to be at home with and appreciate his or her sexuality. We will, however, be able to touch only on certain dimensions of human sexuality and its integration, such as how to embrace the call to the religious and celibate vocation and how to live that life more fully and joyfully so that sexuality is accepted as a precious gift rather than a burden.

Specifically, we will clarify the distinction between sex and sexuality, indicate some sexual issues found among young persons in formation, and explore some means toward healthy sexual integration and ways to assist others toward that goal so they may live a meaningful, loving, and happy celibate religious life.

Making Sense of Sex and Sexuality

While often used interchangeably, “sex” and “sexuality” are not exactly the same thing. “Sex” can refer to gender, intercourse, genital/physical pleasure, “making love,” copulation, or coitus. In this article, the word “sex” will refer to sexual intercourse unless otherwise stated.

The sexual drive is strong but not like the drive for food or drink. One will not die without sexual intercourse as one would if deprived of food or water.



“Sexuality,” on the other hand, denotes our way of being in the world as man or woman; it refers to the physical, spiritual, emotional, psychological, social, and cultural aspects of relating to one another as embodied male and female persons. Broader than “sex,” it is better understood as something we *are*, rather than as something we *do*. This gift from God embraces all the dimensions of human life. It is that aspect of personhood that makes us capable of entering into loving and life-giving relationships with others. Right from birth when we are ejected from the security of our mother’s womb, we feel incomplete and lonely. As a result, we tend to long for some kind of union. Long before the genital sexual awakening at puberty, we reach out to others in friendship, or at least long for it. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* refers to our incompleteness in its teaching that each person (male and female) expresses different aspects of God’s completeness (2331-2400).

Our Legacy of Negative Attitudes

Many human societies have not viewed human sexuality positively, and the same sorry view is prevalent in the church. Before Vatican II, sexuality was seldom spoken of in religious settings. Catechism classes often forged a connection between sex and sin rather than a bond between sex, love, service, and spiritual integration. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* still teaches that every sexual thought, word, desire, or action outside of marriage is mortally sinful (e.g., 2357, 2370); in this area, there is no parity of matter,³ no venial sin. The same attitude is found in some families and in many traditional societies. In such societies it is rare to find individuals whose mother or father has ever engaged them in a loving conversation about menstruation, nocturnal

emissions, the wonder of sexual excitement and arousal, or the realities of sex and marital love. The classic admonition for girls has been “Beware of boys” or, in Nigeria, “Don’t ever let any man ‘cross you’ or you will become pregnant at once!” (“Crossing” is a euphemistic way of

Catechism classes often forged a connection between sex and sin rather than a bond between sex, love, service, and spiritual integration.

describing sexual intercourse. It is said that one young girl, having received such instruction, became hysterical and hit a male classmate who crossed over her legs as he dashed to catch a mango his friend had thrown

to him. The girl was terrified that as a result of the classmate’s action, a baby was already growing inside!)

Generally speaking, talking about sex is not easy in any country or culture. Treating sex as a taboo subject impedes wholesome integration and creates difficulties in learning how to live with joy and gratitude the gift that it is. These difficulties in turn fuel fantasy and temptation that may lead to illicit sexual behavior. On the other hand, what is recognized and accepted gains heightened capacity to influence lives positively.

Sexuality and Candidates

Entering religious life does not divorce candidates from their sexuality. It is important to explore with them, in addition to other aspects of their lives, their sexual history, their understanding of and attitude toward sexuality, and their hopes or fears in embracing the celibate consecrated life. Congregations and dio-



ceses can no longer be complacent about these issues, especially in view of the many cases in Europe and North America of pedophilia and the sexual exploitation of vulnerable persons that have left the victims wounded for life. If there was ignorance in the past about the seriousness and damaging effects of sexual abuse, today's knowledge leaves formators with no excuse for failing to help candidates grow in healthy sexual integration and to find help for those who may be living with a serious inclination toward sexual deviations. It will not do to wait until an abuse crisis, or to dismiss the issue as a problem of the Western world.

Reverently addressing these issues early in the vocation discernment and formation process is crucial. Awareness of their own sexuality, and a willingness to explore it honestly, enables formators to better prepare others to face the realities of celibacy and to live it out in a healthier, more integrated commitment. Their openness will encourage openness in those with whom they work and can therefore help the formator uncover subconscious motivations in a candidate's choice of religious life.

Some Sexual Issues Relating To Candidates

Past Sexual Experience. We cannot assume that young people who enter religious life today are sexually inexperienced or ignorant. For those who enter at an older age, it becomes even more important to explore with them the sexual dimension of life. Formators or vocation directors who think that they are being respectful by avoiding any discussion of sexuality in the assessment and formation of candidates for the religious life are in fact not being helpful or discerning. For an aspirant who had been sexually active, at least three years

of abstinence is recommended before he or she enters into formation. It will be equally good to explore with the person how disposed he or she is to embracing a celibate lifestyle permanently.

In some societies and cultures, *homosexuality* is still shrouded in denial or silence. A pretense that homosexuality is a “foreign” problem, not “native” to one’s own culture or situation, does not make the issue disappear. The way forward is to face homosexuality realistically and with openness. Some argue that those whose ori-

entation is homosexual should be discouraged from entering religious life because of the constant difficulties from being in a same-sex environment. Others argue that heterosexuals have to struggle to live a celibate

It is important to recognize that regardless of sexual orientation, every person is a child of God and deserves love and understanding.

life, and the homosexually oriented person is equally capable of engaging in the same process. Recent studies have indicated that sexual orientation is not the determinative factor in a person’s ability to live the vow of chastity. It is important to recognize that regardless of sexual orientation, every person is a child of God and deserves love and understanding. Nevertheless, exploring homosexual tendencies with candidates and assisting them to respond appropriately is necessary. A clique or “culture” of a particular orientation can constitute a real danger to healthy integrated community living. If pursuing a religious vocation does not enhance a person’s



life and growth in Christ, then a serious and honest discernment and decision have to be made.

Masturbation or autoeroticism tends to be treated with silence in religious circles. Unfortunately, some people carry a burden of guilt and self-hatred as a result of their experience of masturbation. Such a person might think, “I am the only one around who cannot control his sexual urges.” Some masturbatory acts have very little to do with sexual gratification. Compulsive masturbation (several times in a day) could indicate a pathology—for example, an obsessive-compulsive disorder driven by anxiety; in that case, masturbation may be an anxiety-reduction mechanism rather than an attempt to satisfy sexual desire. The obsessive thought and compulsive behavior reduce anxiety and distress but can create a repetitive and uncontrollable cycle, immersing a person in self-preoccupation to the point of being limited in or incapable of self-sacrificing love and service. Occasional masturbation is often a developmental issue (interest in satisfying and gratifying self and not another). In adults, masturbation can point to unfinished aspects of sexual integration. In accompanying people in formation, therefore, “it is important to focus not so much on the action but on what the action is signifying and revealing”⁴ It is simplistic to jump to a hasty conclusion that every masturbatory act shows a weak will and a search for erotic gratification. For many, masturbation may indicate other life issues that may have little or nothing to do with sexual gratification. For example, it could be a compensation for an experience of rejection (“I am self-sufficient”), a self-centered outlet (“I will not give in to anyone”), or a sign of a search for positive identity rendered precarious by some failure (“I am capable of . . .”).⁵ For

younger people, masturbation could be a way of bodily exploration or an expression of sexual curiosity, while for others it could be used for anxiety management, sexual gratification, or the release of tension. For all these reasons, it is worth giving attention to the real issue behind each act rather than simply generalizing or making assumptions.

Because of the introspection required in religious formation programs, memories of *sexual abuse* (another “silent” and inadequately addressed psychosexual issue) may surface for candidates, especially during initial formation. Those who have been sexually abused usually find it difficult to talk about the experience, fearing they may be blamed or be seen as unsuitable for religious life. If they are unable to talk about the experience, they will carry their burden alone, which could have huge detrimental consequences—overwhelming shame, difficulty in forming healthy adult relationships, trust issues, erratic behavior, and explosive anger and aggression which baffle others. Child sexual abuse especially can have such effects.

The other side of this phenomenon is that a candidate may become a perpetrator of sex abuse. If a candidate has a sexual attraction to little children and minors, the issue is serious and calls for careful assessment and discernment because of the vulnerability of children and the human and moral obligation to love, nurture, and care for them. If a candidate constitutes a high risk to children, it may be advisable to encourage withdrawal from the religious life because of the possibility of working with children in the future. However, the individual should be assisted to get professional help because, whether religious or not, he or she is a potential danger to children in any setting.



A new form of addiction to sex, *cybersex*, has emerged with the expansion of technology. It manifests itself in excessive amounts of time spent accessing, viewing, sometimes transmitting pornography. Long hours spent viewing pornography—whether in print media or on the Internet—takes its toll. An active addict is most likely to experience difficulties concentrating on the process of religious formation. Prayer life and other human functioning will be adversely affected or hampered. A person's life can become cluttered with images that do not enhance integral growth. Although this form of addiction is more common among men, who are usually more affected by visual stimuli, women are not immune to cybersex addiction.

Asexuality is the condition of not experiencing sexual attraction and sometimes of not experiencing arousal. The celibate religious life is about loving and channeling one's energies, including the affective energies, in loving service, and in channeling sexuality in creative, loving, and relational ways. The question therefore arises whether an asexual person is capable of celibate self-giving. Asexual persons seem to be less capable of feeling and empathizing deeply with others, which makes celibate self-giving difficult.

Reasons for Engaging in Sexual Intercourse

Because sex permeates all aspects of life, it can serve many needs and can be motivated by issues that have little or nothing to do with sex. For example, repressed sexual instincts may appear as excessive anger, or a person with low self-esteem may pursue a sexual relationship to gain a sense of security and acceptance. M.A. Friederich⁶ proposes reasons people engage in sexual intercourse. Let me illustrate their relevance for the consecrated celibate vocation and for religious life/formation.

The use of sex as a release from anxiety, stress, or tension is probably one of the most widespread non-sexual uses of sex. Orgasm leads to a general physical relaxation, and engaging in intercourse at a time of emotional turmoil is similar to “drowning one’s sorrows in alcohol” or “tripping out” on drugs. Those following this path have little if any concern for anyone but themselves and can treat others as mere objects for sexual gratification. Unless the underlying causes of the problem are dealt with, the behavior will continue compulsively in an attempt to gain a temporary sense of well-being. In religious or priestly life, such behavior can become a manipulative use of people, which jeopardizes a celibate’s integrity and authenticity as a religious minister.

Some men and women need to prove that they are competent to become biological parents, though they may not even want a child. A woman may use pregnancy to manipulate the man in her life who is hesitant about marriage. Although unlikely, it is not at all impossible that a female religious, feeling her biological clock ticking away, could give in to an unconscious longing to bear a child of her own. For the celibate religious man, the temptation could be to fulfill a desire to show that he, too, has the capacity for fatherhood.

Adolescents learn about their bodies by having them touched by another. The young may use sexual intercourse as an attempt to prove gender identity. Religious who have not successfully negotiated the psychosocial task of Erikson’s stage of “identity versus identity confusion” may act like adolescents still struggling to form a clear personal identity. Their interpersonal relationships are superficial, immature, and stereotyped. Adult religious who have not outgrown this stage of develop-



ment—or “underdevelopment”—may spend years moving from one relationship to another and engaging in sexual activity to find out who they are.

Personal identity is tied to self-worth. Those with very little feeling of self-worth may be convinced that getting somebody to sleep with them proves their desirability, and thus may go to bed with anyone who comes along. If they have not internalized the fact that they are lovable and loved by God, they may feel inadequate and worthless, may compare themselves with married siblings or friends, and may fall prey to pressures, including sexual pressure, to prove their worth.

Homosexual feelings seem to be present in everyone, though they may be more obvious in early adolescence. Some adolescents (and even adults) engage in heterosexual intercourse as a means of denying homosexual urges. Lay friends or colleagues may taunt young religious in formation about being “homo” because of their virginity, and those religious may use sexual intercourse to prove they are heterosexual.

Celibates who have no family of their own may feel vulnerable during times of grief, especially at the loss of a parent, when the need for affection and assurance is heightened. Those who are alone in a foreign country or are away from a familiar environment for the first time are especially vulnerable to a sense of loss and loneliness. Some, out of touch with how deeply these feelings affect them, may engage in sexual intercourse to assuage the feelings of loneliness or grief. Sex then becomes a defense against their pain.

Sex can also be used to demonstrate power. We see this in the man who boasts of “conquests” or the woman who feels the need to prove herself attractive by seducing as many men as possible. Promiscuity in the middle-

aged individual is frequently an attempt to deal with feelings of inadequacy or of waning physical attractiveness. In such cases, sex can be a powerful force to ward off the distressing reality that they are getting older. The situation is compounded for celibate religious who have not worked through and accepted the reality of not having anyone to whom they are special in an exclusive relationship.

Sex can be an expression of anger and destructiveness and can be used as a weapon to punish or control others. A man may pursue extramarital affairs to punish his wife, or young religious may engage in sex to rebel against superiors and show that superiors cannot control their lives. Rape can also be an expression of anger and destructiveness.

While sexual intercourse can be a means of sharing love in a mature and secure committed adult relationship, infantile love is not based on such a relationship. A young woman may find herself attracted to a much older man whom she sees as a kind, concerned father. A young religious who may have had a conflicted relationship with a parent of the opposite sex (an emotionally absent father or a nagging mother) may fall into a relationship with an older person of the same gender as the parent with whom there are unresolved issues. That relationship becomes an attempt to obtain the love denied to the young person by a parent.

Of course, sexual behavior is not used solely for physiological purposes. This has implications for the formation of celibate religious life.

Formation and Psychosexual Integration

The task of formation is to help candidates respond to the divine action in their lives. That response includes



working toward a healthy integration of all they are, including their sexuality. The onus lies on formators to work diligently in creating an atmosphere in which candidates can engage fully and fearlessly in the formation process. Apart from one-on-one interaction with the candidates in this regard, classes, workshops, and other activities treating human sexuality can provide sound formation in affective development. The area of feelings also needs a great deal of consideration. It is worth noting that sexual integration embraces, and is inclusive of, spiritual integration. We cannot talk about a psychosexual integration apart from psychospiritual integration.

A healthy sexuality is the single most powerful vehicle for fostering selflessness and joy.

A spirituality that neglects the body as if it were of no importance in a life of love with God and others fosters a dualistic attitude that undermines spiritual growth. A healthy sexuality will embrace sexuality within the context of a healthy spirituality. A healthy sexuality is the single most powerful vehicle for fostering selflessness and joy, just as an unhealthy sexuality creates selfishness and unhappiness. It is important to integrate these two drives of spirituality and sexuality.

Means toward Sexual Integration

A principal goal of sexual integration is to enable persons to embrace human life fully and to live it meaningfully and joyfully. In this section, let me propose some elements that can foster healthy sexual integration.

Central to the celibate vocation is an undivided

heart. The fire of love that inspired a person to give up everything and follow the Lord needs to be rekindled and kept alive so that one's celibate vocation may continue to have meaning. It helps to recall the earlier years when one first felt the zeal and desire to commit one's entire life to Christ. Is one still in love with Jesus Christ after all these years? That love is the only effective motive that can keep the celibate religious vocation and commitment alive. Being in love with Jesus has to permeate one's whole lifestyle so that nothing matters more than manifesting the love of Christ in daily life and experience.

Unless the individual sees the need for prayer and reflection and develops a deep desire for a loving relationship with God, it will be difficult to live a happy and meaningful celibate life. A life without meaning and deep spiritual roots can impede healthy growth.

Adequate education is essential for anyone seeking to live authentic celibate/sexual integration. It is not a sign of holiness or purity of heart to be ignorant of a basic understanding of human sexuality in both the biological and the other dimensions of human relationships. Enlightenment through good literature can be quite helpful.

A part of self-knowledge and self-acceptance as a sexual being is the awareness that God made us as sexual beings but did not make us to be attracted exclusively to one person. Clinical experience has shown that a certain amount of sexual electricity is in the air much of the time when a man and a woman are together, even when that electricity is not acknowledged. Because of the emphasis in religious upbringing on the need to control instincts, individuals can expend an enormous amount of psychic energy in trying to repress sexual



fantasies in order to “keep thoughts pure.” Such efforts can have two negative results.

The first is anxiety. Repression builds pressure. Trying to cram the powerful force of our sex drive into the unconscious is like trying to cap a volcano. The second negative result is constant guilt about sexual attractions, because attempts at repression are never fully successful. The best approach to sexual feelings, then, is to accept and befriend them for what they are. Feelings are not wrong in themselves; they have no moral value. So one can allow oneself to feel. What, then, did Jesus mean when he said that when you lust after a woman you have already committed adultery

*Central to the celibate vocation
is an undivided heart.*

with her in your heart (Mt 5:27-28)? If we sin whenever we have a sexual thought, we are all hopelessly “soaked” in sin. A more accurate interpretation is that by “lust,” Jesus meant deliberately plotting to seduce another or allowing oneself to be obsessed with sexual desire. And that is indeed dangerous, for then one has as good as done the deed; the action can easily follow from the obsession. There is a difference between a passing feeling (which is normal) and a focused, single-minded intent to seduce another person.

During the years I interviewed candidates for the priesthood and religious life in Nigeria, it became obvious that a significant number could not accurately respond to a simple question about their feelings. Training to be in touch with and identify inner movements, or feelings, is one important step toward

personal integration as a mature human being. Being aware of one's feelings can indicate affective maturity. I recall interviewing a young woman for religious life who talked about having been a servant and babysitter in the home of a rich couple. The lady of the house once made her eat the food she had thrown into the bin the previous day as a punishment and as a deterrent to being wasteful. Asked how she felt about this experience, she said, "I feel that it is wrong to treat a child like that, even if the child is someone else's and not your own." I made another attempt to see if she would express her feeling, pointing out that when she used the word "that" after "feel," she was expressing an opinion, not her feeling. Her vehement response was, "Sister, I really feel; it is only a very wicked and heartless woman that can do that kind of thing to a child." We finished the conversation without her getting to the point of being able to describe her feelings about that tough experience by which she had obviously been very deeply affected.

Spiritual direction remains a great help in living out the celibate commitment in one's relationship with God. However, because there have been abuses and because many spiritual directors lack adequate training, it is important to seek out competent directors. It is appropriate for the formator to check with the person receiving direction about any ethical issues in the relationship with the director. For example, a spiritual director embracing a directee in an intimate manner is a violation of ministerial boundaries. People need to be aware of what constitutes violation and to name it if it occurs. It is likewise important to ask about the quality of spiritual direction so that it bears fruit instead of being an obstacle to growth. Spiritual direction could become spiritual destruction.

To know oneself is a worthy goal in the journey of



psychosexual growth and integration, and the capacity to allow oneself to be known is a good sign of human maturity. K.P. McClone, reflecting the views of developmental theorists, has maintained that “any adult intimacy involves the capacity to share more of one’s authentic self with another. This presupposes not only a certain self-knowledge but also *skills of self-disclosure* and taking the risks to share with trusted others”⁷ (emphasis added). Verbalizing our sexual stirrings by journaling or conversations with God and appropriate others can assist us to become familiar and more at ease with our sexuality.

Because good intentions and willpower are not enough to check the human tendency toward self-indulgence, especially

in the area of sex, individuals who aspire to religious life have to cultivate a good degree of ascetical practice (self-discipline and mortification) in their lives. These

*Verbalizing our sexual stirrings
by journaling or conversations
with God and appropriate others
can assist us to become familiar
and more at ease with our sexuality.*

help one to integrate bodily and spiritual needs. The goal of human life and of religious life is not the pursuit of sensual pleasures. Some people tend to view as outdated any sort of bodily discomfort, mortification, or other asceticism, but experience shows that these are viable means of self-transcendence, self-discipline, and integration.

Excessive time spent in chattering and small talk, or an addiction to movies or the Internet, makes it hard to hear the “still small voice” within. An atmosphere

of considerable quiet and opportunity for interior solitude are important for the deepening of the spiritual life and celibate commitment. Along these lines we need to develop the capacity for solitude, which includes skills for managing loneliness.

Respect for the Body and Whole Self

Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Proper care, appreciation, and nurture of the body are therefore essential for psychosexual development. Celibacy is not drudgery. Regular exercise, good eating habits, and other physiological care foster health. Care of the soul, which is part of caring for the self, includes engaging in hobbies or other enjoyable activities. Developing the ability to play and learning to laugh at ourselves keep us from taking life or ourselves too seriously. To keep growing, everyone needs to attend to vital issues in one's past life that have not yet been dealt with. We have a responsibility to find a safe place to deal with hurts instead of inflicting on others the pain and anger that we carry from those hurts.

Caring Presence and Generativity

Living out the gift of sexuality means transcending one's own needs and reaching out in love to the other. Celibate religious life, lived authentically, can promote the realization of this goal. The call to celibate chastity has more to do with self-transcendence than with self-fulfillment; a vocation to love, it renders the heart more free to love God and others, unencumbered by mundane worries (1 Co 7:32-34). Those called to celibate life are freed from the duties of conjugal love and, consequently, should become better able to offer gratuitous love to other sisters and brothers. Learning com-



passion and empathy for others encourages such love. One matures by moving from centering on oneself to caring for others, bearing their burdens with them, and sharing in their joys.

Good Friendships

We do not thrive in isolation. Everyone needs human relationships and interaction to mature psychologically and psychospiritually. A healthy sense of self and “at-home-ness” with oneself make it easier to relate well with others. Friendship and intimacy in the life of the religious celibate facilitate community living and availability for viable mission and ministry in the wider faith community. In other words, a religious celibate’s friendships should assist others to grow in the love of all of God’s people and creation.

In *The Velveteen Rabbit*, the Rabbit asks the Skin Horse what “real” means. The Skin Horse’s response is remarkably wise: “It doesn’t happen all at once. You become. It takes a long time.”⁸ Becoming “real” does not occur all at once. Nor do psychosexual maturity and integration occur automatically or “all at once.” The process is gradual. Human sexuality is not easy to understand. Neither is religious celibacy. That is probably why serious discussions on celibate and sexual integration are not as prevalent as they should be. Simply being aware that one is living a countercultural value will not automatically provide the day-to-day gift of appreciation of and the grace needed to live the celibate life. But commitment to ongoing formation can have a significantly positive impact.

The religious celibate is challenged to nurture the gift of self through prayer, retreats, discipline, and the self-care of rest, relaxation, recreation, healthy friend-

ships, intimacy, and creative activities. Self-neglect, overeating, overdrinking, neglect of prayer, workaholicism, emotional withdrawal, or impulsive behavior indicates immaturity and a lack of integration. We do not move to the transcendent by skipping over the human, but by knowing the human to the full.

Consecrated celibates cannot dismiss the basic human sexual drive as insignificant or unimportant; they need to face, accept, and embrace the reality honestly while channeling its energies. Individuals have to find out for themselves the productive and acceptable ways of channeling these energies. Sexuality of itself, however, can hardly bring us to wholeness and fullness of love. A conscious spiritual life and a growing relationship with God and neighbor go hand-in-hand with sexual integration. Our sexuality, like our celibate vocation, is a means of growing in love and closeness to others and to God through a relationship that calls us to transcend ourselves in love for the sake of the other and the Other. For that, a great deal of honesty and trust is required.

Notes

¹ C.U. Okeke, *Love: With or Without Sex—The things you would want to know about love and sex but might not know how to ask* (Nimo, Nigeria: Rex Charles & Patrick LTD, 2005), p. 21.

² F. Ferder and J. Heagle, *Your Sexual Self: Pathway To Authentic Intimacy* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1992), p. 10.

³ In moral theology *parvity of matter* refers to an act in which the matter is not serious so that the act is either a venial sin or no sin at all. Some young people (especially those who tend to be scrupulous) feel tormented for having normal healthy adolescent sexual fantasies. They could grow up despising themselves as *dirty* or *irredeemable*. Another risk of such focus on sexual sin is that cruelty, dishonesty, or a serious lack of charity could be ignored as unimportant while sexual matters are obsessively overemphasized.



⁴ T.W. Krenik, *Formation for Priestly Celibacy: A Resource Book* (New York: National Catholic Education Association, 1999), p. 29.

⁵ A. Cencini and A. Manenti, *Psychology and Formation—Structures and Dynamics*, trans. A. Plathara and A. Mattapallil (Bombay: Pauline Sisters, 1985), pp. 331-332.

⁶ M.A. Friederich, "Motivations for Coitus," *Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology* 13 (September 1970): 691-700.

⁷ K.P. McClone, "Intimacy and Healthy Affective Maturity—Guidelines for Formation," *Human Development* 30 (Winter 2009): 9.

⁸ Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit* (New York: Doubleday, 1922), p. 5.

Bevies of Taut Grapes

*Bevies of taut grapes
cram August vines
with purple prophecies of wine
fulfilled when these flesh beads,
these Lenten rosaries,
plucked and crushed
have bled.*

Patricia Schnapp RSM