

WORLD & NATION

Vatican backs parents' priority in sex education

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — A new Vatican document urged parents to take the primary role in their children's sex education and oppose immoral and overly explicit programs in schools.

It said that in today's "sick civilization," parents have the main responsibility to make sure their children are protected from mistaken attitudes about abortion, contraception, premarital sex, homosexuality and masturbation.

The document, issued in Italian Dec. 20 and in English Jan. 22 by the Pontifical Council for the Family, was titled, "The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality."

It emphasized that sex education is best accomplished in the context of a good family relationship, as part of the formation of conscience. Parents should provide individual attention, make sure their teaching always has a moral dimension, present the virtue of chastity in a positive light and explain sexuality in a clear but delicate way, it said.

The document said that in general a child's pre-puberty years "should never be disturbed by unnecessary sexual information." But it said that because information about sex is easily picked up outside the home by youngsters, parents may sometimes need to correct chil-

dren's impressions in a limited but accurate way.

It said young children should learn that there are differences between men and women. Parents should be on guard against "exaggerated opposition" to what some define as stereotyped roles for males and females, it said.

It said puberty is generally the time when more explicit sexual education should be given. Sexuality should be explained in the context of marriage, it said.

Pubescent girls should be taught to welcome their physical and other changes, it said. While this is a good time to provide information about fertility cycles, detailed explanations about sexual union are not needed unless the girl specifically asks.

It said that in late adolescence, children should be introduced to fertility regulation in marriage and natural family planning methods. It said this approach contrasts with many programs today that try to promote contraception.

Parents should explain contraceptive birth control and sterilization only after their children reach adolescence, and make it clear that the practices are morally wrong, it said.

The document said abortion should also be explained in the context of the value of human life and the church's strong teaching against the practice.



CNS/Reuters

Pope John Paul II talks with Guatemalan President Alvaro Arzu after the pope's arrival in Guatemala City Feb. 5 (see story, Page 7). The pope called on the army, militias and rebels to "stop the thunder of war."

Masturbation should be presented as morally wrong, it said, although parents will recognize that due to adolescent immaturity it is not always a grave sin.

It said homosexuality should not be discussed before adolescence, unless there is a specific problem. Parents should teach that homosexual acts are wrong but that people with such tendencies should be treated with respect, dignity and sensitivity, avoiding unjust discrimination.

The document said parents must be extremely vigilant over school-sponsored and other sex education programs. It said parents should oppose such elements as:

- Presentation of erotic materials.
- Dramatic or mime representations of genital or erotic questions.
- Use of sexually explicit images or models.

• Requests to divulge personal or family information about sexuality.

• Oral or written exams about genital or erotic questions.

The document said a common abuse in sex education programs today is the graphic teaching of "genital relations" to young children, as part of "safe sex" campaigns against AIDS.

It said parents should oppose such programs as dangerous and immoral. It is an illusion to think that condoms are adequate protection against AIDS, it said.

Not only do parents have the right and responsibility to withdraw their children from abusive sex education programs, but they should insist that these programs be changed, the document said.

It encouraged parents to inform themselves about the content of such courses, and participate as much as possible.

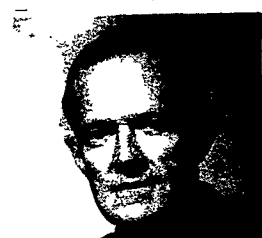


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