

Catholic Church Teachings on Chastity: Understanding Moral Formation Among Youth in Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya

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Abstract- *This study examined the Catholic Church's teachings on chastity among youth in Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya, against rising teenage pregnancy rates and changing social norms. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 421 respondents including priests, catechists, parents, and youth through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Findings reveal that the Church emphasizes chastity as foundational for building strong relationships, preserving emotional and spiritual well-being, and honoring God's will. Youth are introduced to chastity teachings during Confirmation, through sermons, retreats, and youth programs. The Church addresses sexual immorality through counseling, support groups, community engagement, and peer mentorship. The study recommends adopting interactive approaches, leveraging technology, strengthening parental involvement, and collaborating with schools to enhance chastity education effectiveness.*

Indexed Terms- *Catholic Church, chastity, youth moral formation, sexual morality*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church has historically played a central role in moral education, particularly regarding sexuality and relationships (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2394-2395). In Kenya, this role has become increasingly significant as the country ranks third globally in teenage pregnancies, with over 380,000 teenagers aged 12-18 years becoming mothers annually (NCPD, 2020). Trans-Nzoia County faces particular challenges with teenage pregnancy rates exceeding 11,800 cases (All Africa, 2021).

Catholic chastity teachings represent a comprehensive moral framework extending beyond sexual abstinence to encompass emotional maturity, spiritual development, and relational integrity (Spitzer, 2022). Chastity is defined as "the integration of sexuality within the person" including "an apprenticeship in self-mastery" (CCC, 2394). This positions chastity as a virtue enabling authentic love and meaningful relationships grounded in mutual respect.

In Trans-Nzoia County, the Catholic Church constitutes 22% of the population and sponsors over 100 schools, providing significant moral education influence (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). However, effectiveness faces challenges from globalization, media influence, and evolving social attitudes. The Supreme Court of Kenya's 2023 ruling affirming LGBTQ+ association rights exemplifies tension between traditional religious teachings and contemporary social movements.

This study addresses gaps in understanding how Catholic chastity teachings are formulated, communicated, and received in specific socio-cultural contexts. While existing literature covers Catholic sexual ethics theologically, limited empirical research examines practical implementation in African contexts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theological Foundations

Catholic chastity teachings are rooted in biblical principles and theological development. The Catechism presents Christ as the chastity model, emphasizing that every baptized person is called to chaste living according to their life state (Kawama,

2022). Przygoda, Świąś, and Rozpędowski (2023) argue that chastity fosters emotional maturity, relational stability, and spiritual growth, helping youth develop stronger, more committed relationships.

The Church opposes sexual immorality including masturbation, fornication, pornography, prostitution, and homosexual practices (CCC 2396). Thomas Aquinas classified these as "unnatural vices" contradicting proper human sexuality ordering toward marriage and procreation (Magno et al., 2023).

2.2 Chastity Education Approaches

Spitzer (2022) emphasizes that effective religious instruction requires regular reinforcement through sermons, educational programs, and community discussions. However, traditional approaches may struggle engaging contemporary youth accustomed to interactive learning. Jagopaas (2022) found that introducing chastity teachings during significant milestones like Confirmation serves as critical moments for imparting moral values.

Vanderbeke (2023) argues that traditional purity culture approaches, including symbolic virginity messaging, can create shame rather than promoting healthy sexual development. This highlights needs for nuanced approaches emphasizing positive sexual integrity aspects.

2.3 Community and Family Involvement

Bweyale and Sekaye (2023) found community engagement crucial in reinforcing moral teachings, creating environments supporting chastity as individual and collective values. Parental involvement emerges as critical. Ibe (2023) argues parental sexuality guidance creates strong foundations for youth living according to faith values. However, Marcelo (2021) notes many parents feel uncomfortable discussing sexuality, creating moral formation gaps.

2.4 Contemporary Challenges

Modern chastity education faces challenges from digital media, changing social norms, and cultural pluralism. Bergenfeld et al. (2022) discuss how youth navigate conflicting sexuality messages from

religious teachings, peer influences, and media portrayals. Saheed and Seedat-Khan (2024) found digital platforms significantly influence youth sexual behaviors, often promoting values contradicting religious chastity teachings.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Area

This study employed descriptive survey design in Kiminini and Endebess sub-counties of Trans-Nzoia County, selected due to high teenage pregnancy rates. The target population comprised 4,542 individuals including 14 priests, 14 catechists, 3,000 youth (aged 15-30), and 1,500 parents from 14 Catholic parishes.

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

Purposive sampling selected 7 parishes with at least 200 registered youth. From these, 7 priests and 7 catechists were purposively selected. A 10% sample was drawn for youth (300) and parents (150) using stratified then simple random sampling. Data collection used structured questionnaires for youth, semi-structured interviews for religious leaders, and focus group discussions for parents.

3.3 Data Analysis and Ethics

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data were thematically analyzed with responses coded according to emerging themes. The study received approval from Kibabii University and NACOSTI, with informed consent obtained from all participants.

IV. RESULTS

The study achieved a response rate of 90.7% with 421 respondents out of 464 targeted participants, including 7 priests, 5 catechists, 140 parents, and 269 youth. The analysis focused on understanding the Catholic Church's teachings on chastity as communicated to youth in Trans-Nzoia County.

4.1 Core Teachings on Chastity and Sexual Morality
Analysis of interviews with priests and catechists revealed three fundamental themes that characterize the Catholic Church's approach to teaching chastity:

4.1.1 Chastity as Foundation for Healthy Relationships

The majority of religious leaders (6 out of 7 priests, 85.7%) emphasized that chastity serves as the cornerstone for building strong, emotionally stable relationships. This teaching frames chastity not as a restrictive prohibition but as a positive framework that enhances relationship quality. As one priest articulated: "The Catholic Church emphasizes the importance of chastity before marriage as a foundation for building strong, healthy relationships" (Priest 007). This perspective positions chastity as essential for developing trust, mutual respect, and emotional maturity between partners.

4.1.2 Chastity as Self-Respect and Dignity Preservation

Religious leaders (5 out of 7, 71.4%) consistently taught that chastity represents an act of self-respect that preserves personal dignity and emotional well-being. This teaching approach emphasizes personal empowerment rather than external compliance. A catechist explained: "Chastity is taught as a form of self-respect, helping youth preserve their dignity and emotional well-being" (Catechist 002). This framing helps youth understand chastity as a choice that protects their psychological and emotional health while maintaining their sense of self-worth.

4.1.3 Chastity as Spiritual Purity and Divine Connection

All interviewed religious leaders (100%) connected chastity teachings with spiritual development and relationship with God. This spiritual dimension elevates chastity beyond behavioral modification to encompass holistic spiritual formation. One priest noted: "The Church emphasizes the connection between chastity and spiritual purity, teaching youth to maintain a strong relationship with God" (Priest 010). This teaching positions the human body as sacred and chastity as a means of honoring divine will.

4.2 Stages of Introduction to Chastity Teachings

The research identified specific developmental and liturgical stages at which youth encounter formal chastity instruction:

4.2.1 Confirmation as Primary Gateway

The majority of respondents (5 out of 7, 71.4%) identified the sacrament of Confirmation as the most significant stage for introducing comprehensive chastity teachings. This timing aligns with adolescent development when youth begin serious consideration of their moral responsibilities. One priest explained: "Youth are introduced to teachings on chastity during Confirmation, marking an important stage in their spiritual development" (Priest 006). The Confirmation process provides structured catechetical instruction that includes sexual morality as part of broader Christian formation.

4.2.2 Retreats and Seminars for Deep Engagement

Religious leaders (6 out of 7, 85.7%) reported utilizing retreats and seminars to provide intensive chastity education in focused environments. These settings allow for extended reflection and discussion away from daily distractions. A catechist observed: "Retreats and seminars provide a deeper exploration of sexual morality, often focusing on chastity" (Catechist 012). The immersive nature of these experiences enables more personal engagement with chastity teachings and their practical applications.

4.2.3 Regular Liturgical Reinforcement

All respondents (100%) indicated that chastity and sexual morality are regularly addressed during Mass homilies, providing ongoing reinforcement to the entire parish community. This consistent messaging ensures that chastity teachings remain visible and relevant in the community's spiritual life.

4.3 Methods for Addressing Sexual Immorality

The study identified four primary pastoral strategies employed by the Church to address instances where youth have deviated from chastity teachings:

4.3.1 Pastoral Counseling and Support Systems

The majority of religious leaders (6 out of 7, 85.7%) emphasized providing individual counseling and group support services for youth struggling with sexual immorality. This approach reflects the Church's pastoral care model, focusing on restoration rather than condemnation. One priest explained: "The Church provides counseling and support groups to help youth deal with the consequences of sexual immorality and guide them back to chastity" (Priest

002). These services address both spiritual and emotional dimensions of recovery.

4.3.2 Community-Based Reinforcement

All religious leaders (100%) stressed the importance of broader community involvement in supporting chastity among youth. This approach recognizes that moral formation requires social support beyond individual instruction. A priest noted: "Community engagement is key in reinforcing the messages of chastity, creating a supportive environment for the youth" (Priest 007). Community involvement includes parish-wide initiatives, family engagement, and peer support networks.

4.3.3 Peer Mentorship Programs

Most respondents (5 out of 7, 71.4%) reported implementing structured peer mentorship initiatives where spiritually mature older youth provide guidance and support to younger members. This approach leverages positive peer influence for moral development while creating accountability relationships within the youth community.

4.3.4 Family Integration and Parental Involvement

All religious leaders (100%) emphasized the critical role of parents and families in reinforcing chastity teachings. This recognition acknowledges the family as the primary context for moral formation and seeks to align church and home messaging.

4.4 Strategies for Improving Contemporary Relevance

Religious leaders provided specific recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of chastity teachings among modern youth:

4.4.1 Interactive Educational Approaches

Most respondents (6 out of 7, 85.7%) suggested developing more interactive and participatory educational programs that directly address contemporary youth challenges. This recommendation reflects recognition that traditional lecture-based approaches may not effectively engage digital-native youth populations.

4.4.2 Technology Integration

A significant portion of leaders (5 out of 7, 71.4%) recommended leveraging digital platforms, social

media, and mobile applications to reach youth more effectively. This suggestion acknowledges the central role of technology in youth communication and relationship formation.

4.4.3 Educational Institution Partnerships

Some respondents (4 out of 7, 57.1%) proposed developing collaborative relationships with schools to integrate Catholic perspectives on sexual morality into broader educational curricula, extending the Church's influence into academic settings.

4.4.4 Enhanced Parental Capacity Building

All respondents (100%) emphasized the need for strengthening parental capabilities in chastity education through training programs, resources, and ongoing support systems that equip parents to serve as primary moral educators in their families

CONCLUSION

The Catholic Church in Trans-Nzoia County maintains comprehensive chastity education encompassing spiritual, emotional, and relational dimensions. Teachings present chastity as positive virtue enhancing personal dignity, emotional well-being, and spiritual growth rather than merely prohibiting sexual activity. Integration into significant spiritual milestones, particularly Confirmation, demonstrates strategic timing aligning moral formation with broader faith development.

The multi-faceted approach addressing sexual immorality through counseling, community engagement, peer mentorship, and family involvement reflects understanding of complex factors influencing youth moral development. However, challenges indicate traditional methods require adaptation for contemporary contexts characterized by digital media influence, changing social norms, and competing moral frameworks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop interactive and participatory chastity education approaches incorporating multimedia resources and real-life applications resonating with contemporary youth learning preferences.

Leverage social media platforms, mobile applications, and digital content for ongoing youth engagement in chastity dialogue, ensuring consistent reinforcement outside traditional church settings.

Implement comprehensive parent training programs enhancing confidence in discussing sexuality and chastity with children, providing resources for effective family-based moral education.

Pursue collaborative relationships with educational institutions integrating Catholic sexual morality perspectives into broader sex education curricula, ensuring consistent messaging across youth development contexts.

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