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The Nature of Sex: Sacred or Profane?

Michael DeCesare

American secularism – promoted through institutions such as movies, TV sitcoms, magazines and other forms of popular media –, perpetuates a view of sex and sexuality that encourages promiscuous sexual behavior and upholds the pursuit of sexual gratification as a natural and moral pursuit. This ideology outrages the Catholic Church, which charges American secularism and its subsequent vehicles with the desacralization of sex by reducing of sex to a means of physical gratification occurring freely with as many partners as one chooses.

However, the Catholic Church has also contributed to the desacralization of sex in American society. The Catholic Church continues to maintain that the sole moral purpose of engaging in coitus must be for procreation between married people. Moreover, the Catholic Church has privileged celibacy over the married life for some time. This teaching became institutionalized during the reign of Pope Gregory (1073-1085), a celibate who instituted these teachings in response to the high occurrences of sexual infidelity among married and non-married people alike and as a reflection of his own celibate lifestyle. Since Pope Gregory's reign, the Church has mandated celibacy for its clergy and has privileged the ascetic life over that of the married householder. As a result of Gregory's mandate, the Church has failed for nearly one thousand years to acknowledge that the sexual act was intended to fulfill the purposes of procreation, unification and sacrament between two married people. Thus, both American secularism and the Catholic Church share responsibility in alienating humans from their sexual selves, evidenced by married people refusing to be intimate with one another and the high occurrence of sexual dysfunction among men. American society thus views sex and sexuality in one of two respects: as a vehicle for experiencing sexual pleasure without any restrictions or guilty feelings or as an action that is relegated to marriage and intended solely for the purpose of having children.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (1975) illustrates well the tension experienced between American secularism and the Catholic Church on the topic

of sexual ethics. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith condemns the "unrestrained glorification of sex" that occurs within American secularism. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith believes that these vehicles give license to all people to have unrestrained sex regardless of whether or not the people are married or intend to have children. These vehicles challenge the moral norms regarding sexuality that the Church has set down as absolute moral guidelines for governing moral responsibility and sexual ethics for Catholics. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith asserts that the Catholic Church must be steadfast in challenging the influence of secular institutions on modern Catholics, for "The Church cannot remain indifferent to this confusion of minds and corruption of morals. It is a matter of utmost importance both for the personal lives of Christians and for the life of society today" (Curran and McCormick 1993, 376).

The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith challenges these secular forces and proclaims that it is wrong to assume that neither human nature nor revealed law provide absolute and unchangeable norms as a guide for individual actions. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith asserts that the Catholic Church's guidelines on proper sexual ethics are mandated by "divine law itself-eternal, objective and universal, by which God orders, directs, and governs the whole world and the ways of the community according to a plan conceived in his wisdom and love" (Curran and McCormick 1993, 377). To disobey these would be to go against the spirit of the gospel. Thus, humans may not make moral judgments arbitrarily, nor do these laws become doubtful when cultural changes take place. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith supports the teaching of the Catholic Church in this respect because it upholds the integrity of the marital act and ensures its morality. By basing its teachings on what it believes to be objective criteria, criteria based on the nature of the human person and human action and criteria that respects the total meaning of mutual self-giving and "human procreation in the context of true love," the Church ensures that the finality of the marital act is respected and that the moral goodness of the act is ensured (Curran and McCormick 1993, 378). The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith closes its argument regarding the marital act stating that the marital act should only occur within the covenant of marriage, for love must be protected by the stability of marriage if sexual intercourse is to meet the demands of its own finality and human dignity.

In a nutshell, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith of 1975 supports the bases for the longstanding, historically located traditions of the Catholic Church that govern what many in this world perceive to be a "strict repudiation" of one's desire and right to explore his/her sexuality. The Congregation for the Doctrine of

Faith maintains that since the Catholic Church's regulations are governed by objective criteria (i.e. natural law) rather than the subjective agendas that cultural changes bring, Catholics must adhere to these guidelines as eternal order, for disobeying them would result in committing a mortal sin.

Bernard Haring, a contemporary Catholic priest, supports the Church's stand regarding the immorality of premarital sex. Haring's response to the question of whether sexual intercourse is moral when conception is not possible stops well short of making allowances for non-married couples. Haring stands firmly behind the Catholic Church's teaching on premarital sex, stating:

Premarital intercourse is another instance where the unitive and procreative functions of marriage are separated: it is a case of seeking the unitive meaning before uniting themselves in a lasting covenant of love, before a marriage that would assure a family setting for expected offspring (1993, 164).

In other words, Haring believes that coitus can serve unitive purposes for married couples when procreation is not possible. However, Haring maintains that it would be immoral to use coitus for unitive purposes before accepting the covenantal responsibility of marriage.

Bernard Haring attempts to counter society's license for a "sexual free-for-all" that the Congregation on the Doctrine of Faith insists is corrupting individual Catholics and threatening the institutional Catholic Church. Haring accomplishes this by working within Church tradition and adhering to the Catholic Church's papal infallibility, for in his estimation, papal infallibility and the absolute norms that govern this issue allow for little room for reform.

The Resacralization of Sex

Within the Catholic Church, multiple people fear that the Church's maintenance of even its oldest teachings on sexuality and its insistence on chastity and purity alienates people from their own sexuality. These people assert that the current Catholic sexual ethic causes people to reject their sexual drive as something "unclean," which has the negative effect of preventing sexual performance and sexual pleasure in the marital context from reaching its fullest. At the same time, the Catholic Church's Social Teaching on sexual ethics also has the effect of dehumanizing and depersonalizing people. Forced celibacy, as mandated for all non-married Catholics and members of the clergy, causes Catholics to become alienated from themselves in their totality and to become somewhat dehumanized. Joa-

Timmerman, a Catholic theologian and married woman, shares the belief of many of her contemporaries. Timmerman works to reconstruct a new view of sexuality that emphasizes both the sacramental/spiritual and natural components of sexuality, a view that will help Catholics be proud of and embrace their sexuality so that it can be enjoyed to its fullest by married people. Timmerman defines sex (and sexuality) as a "sacramental reality... a symbol of God's love; any action or thing that delivers us to the experience of God's presence or places us in touch with the basic mystery-the mystery that we are loved by God" (1993, 47). As a sacramental reality, sexuality embodies more than sexual intercourse. Sexuality symbolizes our embodiment, for it pervades every act of our body-selves. Sexuality involves "the whole range of feelings and acts that embodied persons engage in their process of relating to one another" (Timmerman 1993, 47). These feelings and acts include, but are not limited to, kissing, handholding, petting and after-play. Timmerman asserts that these feelings and actions do not obstruct one from knowing God, but rather help bring oneself to God and participate in God's majesty.

In order for the Catholic Church to promote sexuality as a life-enhancing behavior that when expressed in the marital context will bring couples closer to God, the Church must first rid itself of the many negative connotations regarding sexual experience that it helps foster. The Church in its present state contributes to the desacralization of sex through its adherence to natural law, a philosophy that reduces the sexual act to animal behavior and essentially diminishes the sacredness of such. According to Timmerman, in the Roman Catholic tradition, "Sexual experience has by and large been characterized... as at worst a place of demonic impulses and forces that pull us against our will and as at best an ambiguous reality that inspires fear, guilt, humor, and some often regretted pleasure" (1993, 48-49). Timmerman works to dissolve these negative connotations about sexual experience, for there exists a great danger in the desacralization of sexuality that has been occurring since the Old Testament period: sexuality has become so completely desacralized that it is in danger of becoming depersonalized. Timmerman indicates that effects of the depersonalization of sexuality have already taken hold, for sexuality in the Western world has little significance beyond the two individuals involved in the marital act. One of Timmerman's assumptions is that purity should not equal sexual abstinence for Catholics, and that the human experience of sexual love must be seen as natural and good. Books of the Old Testament, such as Genesis, Song of Songs, and Hosea, depict the human sexual experience as a life-enhancing aspect that illustrates the intimate connection between Yahweh and God's people.

In order to address the desacralization of sexuality that continues to occur within the Catholic Church, Timmerman proposes what she believes to be three practical effects of accepting the sacramental character of human capacity for sexual love. The first practical effect that evolves is an understanding that sexual lives and spiritual lives are not mutually exclusive, but rather go hand-in-hand. By conceiving of their sexual and spiritual lives as integrative features that enhance one another, humans can understand how their sexuality, as expressed in the covenant of marriage, can help bring them closer to God. The second practical effect is that accepting the sacramental character of the human capacity for sexual love helps Catholics reformulate their obligation to cultivate the human capacity to respond sexually. Catholics can thus understand their obligation to respond sexually as something to affirm and embrace rather than feel guilty about. The third practical effect is to teach Catholics to use prayer to challenge false dichotomies between body and spirit, sexuality and sacredness and to welcome God's love into their personal universes. Timmerman asserts that prayer needs to be reformulated to include the sexual aspects of life.

Like Joan Timmerman, Fr. Andre Guindon believes that the Church needs to dispel various ill-informed myths that place a negative connotation on sexuality and alienate Catholics from themselves. Fr. Guindon also constructs a theory of sexual ethics that is both consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church and applicable to the challenges and realities of the modern world. Guindon's rationale for creating a new Catholic sexual ethic is his belief that the Christian faith is not a philosophy but rather an assertion of a belief in a divine being and an assent to participating in the building of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Thus, Guindon argues that experiencing sexuality as shameful obstructs one from knowing God. One of the bases of Guindon's theory is to reject various negative interpretations of sexual activity and create a more holistic, interpersonal and relational view of sexual activity that helps bring Catholics closer to God. Guindon believes that the principal misconception about sexual activity is the teaching that "sex is dirty, save it for someone you love" (Guindon 1993, 26). According to Guindon, sexual virtue is not the practice of self-refusal, nor should sexuality between married persons be experienced as "private property" or something to be ashamed of, for God created sexual, mutually attracted people for reasons beyond that of procreation.

However, in his attempt to create a more holistic view of sexual activity as something that is both relational and pleasing to God, Guindon steadfastly holds to the belief that sexual activity is reserved for married couples. In addition, Guindon believes that in order to wholeheartedly embrace the intimate and mutually beneficial

aspects of sexual activity for married couples, spouses must communicate about sexual activity. According to Guindon, "Sexual activity finds its very meaning in the truthful communication of intimate selves" (1993, 29). Communicating about sexual activity also helps bring couples closer to God and emphasizes sex as a means of glorifying God. Relational sexuality reflects and teaches the relational personhood and activity of the Triune God, for through sex "we share our intimate life with others and recognize the face of a God who is relational" (Guindon 1993, 33). Catholics must stop viewing sexual activity as something that is evil or dirty and re-conceive sexuality as an act of loving reciprocity between intimate beings, one that gives Catholics a sense of pride in themselves as sexual beings and an understanding that coitus within the context of marriage is pleasing to God.

While Guindon acknowledges the liberating aspects of his theory of sexual ethics for married couples, Guindon guards against allowing his theory of sexual ethics to lend credence to a "sexual free-for-all." Guindon supports the Church's opposition to a "contraceptive mentality" and the idea of sexual pleasure being sought for its own sake, both assertions that Guindon believes follow the logic of faith in the God of the Covenant. According to Guindon:

The Christian experience of sexuality refuses to see any likeness between itself and a sexuality lived as the dreary repetition of orgasmic instants which would periodically draw us away from our existential truth in order to help us forget our daily chores and the insignificance of an existence without a History (1993, 40).

In other words, Catholics must not abuse the wonderful aspects of sexuality to satisfy their daily sexual desires through extramarital affairs or other unchaste actions, for by doing so Catholics would be placing fleeting pleasures ahead of their primary commitments to God and their spouse. Guindon calls for the same discretion in making everyday decisions regarding sexuality for both married and non-married Christians, and reminds Christians to base their decisions on what they "ought" to do rather than what will "feel good" physically or emotionally.

Joan Timmerman and Andre Guindon call into question the negative connotation that the Catholic Church places on sexual pleasure and sexuality. Each theologian reevaluates human sexuality in a context that can foster appreciation for individual sexuality and its fullest expression in the marital context as well as speak to those Catholics who are either alienated from themselves as a result of the Church or de-alienated from the Church due to grievances on this issue. What about the very basis of the Church's stance on matters of sexual ethics? What about

natural law and how it translates into orthopraxis for all Catholics? In the following section, Charles E. Curran and Elizabeth Gudorf will each take a risk. Curran and Gudorf will both attack the very foundation of Catholic social teaching on sexual ethics, its oversights and ways in which a new sexual ethic will not threaten one's relationship with God or commitment to the Church.

Against the Reduction of Sex to a Natural Function

Unlike many of the previous theologians that have been examined in this paper, Charles E. Curran finds the Catholic Church's teachings regarding sexual ethics to be problematic. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Catholic Church relies on natural law as the basis for its authority on sexual ethics. The natural law approach to human sexuality maintains that a source of ethical wisdom and knowledge exists apart from the explicit revelation of God in Scripture. Natural law breaks sin into two categories: sins against nature and sins according to nature. Sins against nature include all actions in which the natural process (i.e. conception) does not (or is prevented from) take place. These sins include masturbation, homosexual acts, and the use of contraceptives. Sins according to nature entail other sins opposed to the human aspects of sexuality. These sins include incest and rape, among others. St. Thomas Aquinas, as cited by Charles Curran in *Readings in Moral Theology Number Eight: Dialogue about Catholic Sexual Teaching*, aptly sums up why the natural law approach maintains that sins against nature are so grave: "Sins against sexuality are so grave because they go against an important order of nature or because the absence of marriage between the parties fails to provide for the education of the children who might be born into such a union" (Curran 1993, 408).

Curran is quick to point out what he believes to be two principal inadequacies with the Catholic Church's approach to sexual ethics. The first is the Church's reliance on natural law for its authority for governing sexual ethics. Curran rejects natural law as the sole means of authority because it negates the human experience and reduces human sexuality to that of animals. In other words, natural law removes the sacredness from sex. Curran specifically criticizes natural law's view of sins against nature. According to Curran, the view that all sins against nature constitute a grave matter rests on a very inadequate notion of natural law that has exaggerated the importance attached to actions against sexuality. This notion of natural law sees sexuality only in terms of the physical, biological process and fails to see the individual action in relation to the person. By negating the emotional and psychological aspects of human sexuality, natural law effectively reduces human sexuality to that of animals rather than recognizing it as an imitation and a glorification

of God (characteristics that distinguish human beings from animals).

The second inadequacy of the Catholic Church's approach to sexual ethics is its overemphasis on procreation as the primary end of marriage and sexuality. Curran opposes the Catholic Church's glorification of the procreative aspect of coitus for two reasons. First, scientific innovation has shown that procreation is not a possible end of every act of coitus. This discovery, not available at the onset of natural law, should serve to dispel notions that God only intended sexual intercourse for procreative purposes. Second, the Church's emphasis on procreation relegates the love union aspect of marriage and sexuality to a secondary end. Curran, much like Timmerman, believes that the relational aspect of coitus and its unitive purpose is of equal, if not greater, importance to the procreational aspect. Along the same lines, Curran asserts that to deny the value and importance of the emotional and psychological aspects of sexual intercourse is to distort the meaning of human sexuality. Curran's position would likely find acceptance among the many de-alienated Catholics angered by what they deem to be "Stone Age" views of the Church on sexuality.

In addition, Charles Curran criticizes the Church's "blanket statement" toward premarital sex. According to Curran, all premarital sex cannot be branded under the same blanket of fornication. Curran gives two cases as examples: a man having premarital intercourse with his wife-to-be versus a man hiring a prostitute to relieve his sexual frustration. Whereas the couple-to-be expresses their conjugal love and is doing so for unitive purposes and thereby is glorifying God, the man who hires the prostitute both objectifies the woman and seeks sex for solely physical pleasures. This is an additional reason why Curran rejects natural law as the sole authority regarding sexual ethics, for "criteria which cannot come to grips with the difference involved in such cases do not seem to be adequate criteria" (Curran 1993, 413).

Much like Charles Curran, Christine Gudorf, a married and lifelong Catholic, has a problem with how contemporary Christian churches, notably the Catholic Church, address Christian sexual ethics. Gudorf finds it very problematic that Christian churches continue to rely on outdated and ill-informed traditions to guide them toward an appropriate sexual ethic. Gudorf asserts that these traditions bind Christian churches and render them unable to speak to sexual issues not only for married couples, but also teenagers and single people. At the same time, however, Christian churches "fear abandoning the confines of the Christian sexual tradition and developing a new Christian sexual ethic" (Gudorf 1994, 3). Gudorf seeks a new approach to Christian sexuality that includes both biological and social sci-

ence analysis of sexuality and embodies the notion of experience in developing new appropriate Christian sexual ethic. Gudorf states that in order to reconstruct Christian sexual ethics appropriately for modern Christians, Christians must begin by studying human sexuality and honestly describing the reality of their sexual situation and experience.

Gudorf believes that the entire approach of Christian sexual ethics is flawed. According to Gudorf, these ethics are based on pre-scientific understandings of human anatomy, physiology and reproduction, understandings that cannot speak to the modern day reality of sexuality. These ill-informed bases of Christian sexual ethics cause internal problems within the Christian faith. Traditional Christian sexual ethics are incompatible with the God that Christians worship. God's teaching in both the Old and New Testament neither explicitly nor consistently condemn sexual attitudes. Nor did God cast out of the Kingdom of God those who practiced sexual behaviors that conservative Christians and the Catholic Church would deem "sexually immoral." For example, when Gomer, the prostitute wife of the prophet Hosea, openly and repeatedly committed adultery against Hosea, God did not cast her out of the Kingdom. Rather, God embraced Gomer and urged the community to show her the same compassion that Hosea did.

Gudorf also asserts that the Christian tradition on sexuality is limited in addressing contemporary sexual ethics because the Christian tradition restricts its scope in this arena to too small of a sphere. The Catholic tradition on sexuality centers its teaching on individual sexual acts, specifically those that the Church regards as sinful. This list of "sexual sins" includes premarital sex, extramarital sex, masturbation, homosexuality, the use of artificial contraception and adultery. Consequently, the Christian tradition equates virtue in sexuality with avoiding the specific sexual acts. Gudorf finds this approach to be shortsighted and proclaims that individual churches have not done a good job of recognizing sexual sin, and that this traditional list of sexual sins is far too brief. For example, many churches say very little about sexual violence, or are blind to its occurrence altogether. At the same time, Gudorf believes that churches perpetuate a social silence about sex, a silence that encourages, among other problems, sexual dysfunction" (1994, 20). In order to effectively address these and other problems associated with sexuality, Gudorf states that Christians must enlarge their treatment of sexual sin "from individual overt acts to include a critique of social models and institutions which give rise to them" (1994, 18).

One main obstacle to redefining Christian sexual ethics in terms of a greater understanding of social science, hard science and experience is the Christian belief

of procreationism. Gudorf defines procreationism as "the assumption that sex is naturally oriented toward creation of human life" (1994, 29). Gudorf asserts that procreationism is prevalent in our society in three major areas. The first is the belief that coitus is the sexual act and that all other sexual acts are either solely foreplay or perversions. Gudorf believes this assumption is destructive because it assumes that other sexual acts cannot be satisfying or uniting in themselves. The second problem that Gudorf finds with procreationism is that it denigrates sexual relationships in which coitus is not possible. This viewpoint either fails to consider or ignores the experiences of the various elderly people or handicapped for which coitus is not possible. Gudorf argues that procreationism alienates these people from their sexuality, an integral part of all people's personality as sexual beings, and results in sexual deprivation in other non-coital manners for these groups as a whole. A third problem that Gudorf finds with procreationism is its attitudes toward contraception. Procreationism upholds the belief that sexual activity without artificial means of contraception is more moral than sexual activity with artificial means of contraception regardless of whether conception is desired. While Gudorf suggests that Christians turn toward alternative sexual activities in order to enhance their sexual relationships and experience, for most persons, the "major disincentive to engaging in alternative sexual activities is negative attitudes strongly influenced by cultural procreationism" (Gudorf 1994, 32).

Gudorf calls for a new Christian sexual ethic, a sexual ethic that is distinct from the reproductive ethic. Establishing a separation between sex and reproduction calls for a radical shift in consciousness, one that acknowledges that coitus and conception cannot be separate phenomena and that it is physically impossible for conception to be the end of all acts of coitus.

In order to realize not only the unifying ability but also the beauty of sex, Christians must transform their understanding of sexual pleasure from something to be regarded negatively to something that is regarded as a gift from God. According to Gudorf, "Recognition of the power of sexuality in our lives and world is essential for understanding sexuality as a positive force, as a source of transforming grace" (1994, 81). Many contemporary Christians regard sexual pleasure as a source of evil. These Christians base their sexual ethic on one of two popular views held within the Christian tradition. St. Augustine viewed sexual pleasure as dangerous because it is virtually irresistible and turns our thoughts from the higher planes of glorifying God to temporal, physical fulfillment. St. Thomas Aquinas amplifies this ethic because he saw sexual pleasure as an "ugly" component of humans that is something that humans have in common with animals. Gudorf

addresses the more predominant view within the Catholic Church, that of Augustine. Gudorf finds St. Augustine's teachings to be inaccurate for two reasons. First, St. Augustine more or less mandates sexual avoidance, a behavior that is neither healthy for nurturing relationships nor mandated by either the Catholic Church or the Biblical text. Second, St. Augustine's teaching indirectly allows people to provide excuses for irresponsible behavior in sexual situations. "I couldn't control myself" has become a popular response among promiscuous teenagers who put themselves in dangerous sexual situations as well as spouses who cheat on one another. At the same time, viewing sexual urges as "irresistible" privileges the person with a greater sex drive, whether male or female, in a sexual relationship, a phenomenon that neither emphasizes love nor allows for mutual sexual pleasure between two people.

Gudorf disagrees with St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas' denigrating sexual pleasure as a moral evil. Sex should not be viewed solely as a private, secret act that is designated only for the purposes of procreation. Rather, sexual pleasure should be acknowledged for both its unifying aspects and its divine intention. Gudorf believes that sex should be a way of "lessening the anxiety men [and women] experience in other areas of life" (1994, 87). Gudorf asserts that sexual pleasure is also a divine intention of God, and supports this by referring to the woman's clitoris. What purpose does the clitoris possibly serve other than that of stimulating and enhancing sexual pleasure? Despite the fact that the woman's clitoris is intended for sexual stimulation and pleasure, the Church continues to deny that pleasure is the primary end of sex. The Church's credibility on sex would be dramatically increased if "the Church began its sexual teaching by insisting that God deliberately made sex both good and pleasurable" (Gudorf 1994, 100). The challenge in reconstructing Christian sexual ethics, Gudorf sees as an imperative the reexamination of the notion sexual pleasure in Christian sexual relationships.

Gudorf boldly asserts that sexual pleasure must be the primary ethical criterion for evaluating sexual activity. Gudorf's argument in favor of the wonder and aspects of sexual pleasure and assumption that mutual sexual pleasure should have a prominent place in all sexual relationships begins with her notion of sexual pleasure as a premoral good. Gudorf defines a premoral good as something that is "good in the normal scheme of things before we evaluate its role in any particular situation" (1994, 114). Gudorf links this definition of a premoral good to her view that masturbation is not only acceptable but also appropriate. The Christian tradition of sexual ethics condemns masturbation because masturbation involves "creating pleasure for one's self" and has no procreative purposes. Gudorf condemns the

notions, asserting:

Only when we recognize the sexual pleasure in masturbation as a premoral good, and masturbation itself as acceptable moral behavior aimed at that good, will we be able to justify sexual activity in itself, and not for its ability to produce some other nonsexual good (1994, 106).

Gudorf also attempts to undermine notions of orgasm as evil and impure by countering that orgasm and sex are divine actions, citing the authors of *Embodied Love* in support of her argument. According to Gallagher et al., sexual intercourse resides in the "ecstatic experience of orgasm" and that "intercourse does not merely express or symbolize love, express or symbolize intimacy with God. It is love. It is Trinitarian intimacy, our intimacy with the three divine persons" (Gudorf 1994, 109). Sexual intercourse symbolizes Trinitarian intimacy in that by having sexual relations with a loved one, humans acknowledge the pleasure aspect of the divine and give glory to God through their expression of love toward one another. Gudorf finds discomfort with the notion that sexual pleasure among Christians is an obstacle for knowing God, and faults the Church and the Christian tradition on sexual ethics for this discomfort. The Christian Church is to blame for failing to promote self-love in individuals more, for the tendency of the Christian Church has been to put love for neighbor ahead of love for self. Love for self and love for others are both prerequisites for fostering mutuality both within relationships and in the sexual act. At the same time, Christians must have a social recognition of bodily rights, full personhood and moral agency in humans. This is also the responsibility of the Christian Church: to teach its members to be comfortable with their bodies so that they can not only address the topic of sex more effectively, but also be able to take care of themselves and avoid sexually dangerous situations.

Not only is sexual pleasure capable of transforming grace, but also sexual pleasure is powerful. The power of sex can be expressed and understood symbolically. Sex sustains life through its ability to bond, and thus has distinct communal and relational notions. A new Christian sexual ethic must uphold sex as something that symbolizes the ability of persons to experience union and strengthen the community by not repressing one another with outdated and oppressive notions of sexuality.

Curran and Gudorf argue that the current Catholic sexual ethic is both inconsistent and inappropriate for dealing with sexuality for people of all ages, gender and marital status in the modern era. These two theologians illustrate how a new sexual ethic can foster an appreciation for one's sexuality while continuing to emphasize the unitive and mutually pleasing aspects that must be present in the

marital context. Curran and Gudorf also emphasize an important aspect of Christianity that appears to be lost in most of the works on Catholic sexual ethics: understanding and forgiveness. Neither Curran nor Gudorf believe that one who commits a mortal sin, or a sin whose punishment entails a sort of spiritual death, who he/she partakes in what the Catholic Church views as a sexual sin. Curran depicts how many of the Church's teachings on mortal sins are ill-informed and inconsistent, while Gudorf aptly illustrates the case of Gomer, the wife of Hosea, to emphasize God's compassion in dealing with sinners as well as the forgiveness that God will give to those that regret what they have done. It appears that Curran and Gudorf have discovered manners that could reduce the amount of alienation from oneself that Catholics feel as a result of Catholic Social Teaching on sexual ethics, as well as speak to de-alienated selves in the Church and find ways in which the members can re-evaluate their commitment to the Church. However, theologians like Curran and Gudorf have a potentially tumultuous task in front of them, for the Church has endured a long history of criticism toward its position on sexual ethics. Nonetheless, Curran and Gudorf demonstrate how sex is a gift from God and, when such, is intended to be mutually pleasing, symbolic of love between two people and expressive of unity between two people giving glory to God.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church has relied on natural law for its Social Teaching governing sexual ethics for the better part of its two-thousand year history. St. Augustine's assertion that sexual activity is animal-like and uncontrollable has influenced the Catholic Church to repudiate the pursuit of sexual pleasure between married people and engagement in sexual activity by clergy altogether. The Church's teaching has alienated various selves within the Church, causing them to believe that engagement in coitus turns Catholics away from God instead of glorifying God.

However, I maintain that this is not the case. God intended sex for reasons beyond that of procreation. Not only is sex uniting for two people who love one another and want to understand and experience God's love, but also sex is sacramental in that much like prayer, song and communion, sex brings couples into God's presence. Whether or not the Church acknowledges this explicitly, it reinforces this notion through the prudential value that it assigns to marriage by relating the sexual act to and asserting its appropriateness within the context of marriage. Married couples, on account of having partaken in the sacrament of marriage, should thus be able to fully realize the purposes for which God intends sex: procreation, unification and sacrament. At the same time, non-married couples

who love one another and engage in coitus so that they can give glory to God should not be ostracized by the Church for not having yet completed the marriage sacrament.

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