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[Book Review of] *Sexual Morality: A Catholic Perspective* by Philip S. Keane, S.S.

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the book represents modern psychiatric thinking, their work will be seriously compromised.

Toward the end of the book, the author quotes Father Leo Trese: "Indeed it is quite considerable that one might be a homosexual and become a saint, since it is by the conquest of temptation, that sanctity is developed, under God's grace. Since 'the greater the temptation the greater the merit,' the homosexual who achieves self discipline is doubly admirable, since he must do so despite the lack of safeguards which shelter the person with normal impulses." To that I might add that unfortunately such an individual would have to also overcome the testimony of some psychiatrists that he suffered from mental illness or, in the words of the author, "arrested personality development."

I am curious about this situation. In the 2,000 years of history of the Church, it seems statistically likely to me that some of the saints might have been homosexual. Catholic attitude throughout the centuries has seemed to glorify sexual abstinence over sexual participation. Numerous tales abound of saints who died to protect their virginity. Still often saints are glorified for their struggle against sexual temptation. Was any of the temptation homosexual, I wonder?

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Sexual Morality: A Catholic Perspective

Philip S. Keane, S.S.

Paulist Press, 1865 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023, 1977. x + 236 pp., \$5.95 (paper).

Philip S. Keane, a Sulpician professor of moral theology at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, offers in this work a "new" Catholic perspective on sexual morality. It is a "new" perspective insofar as it differs significantly, as the author himself acknowledges, from the "old" perspective that is reflected in the documents of the ecclesial magisterium, most recently in the *Vatican Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*. It is a "Catholic" perspective, the author urges, insofar as it is rooted in the teachings of contemporary Catholic moral theologians who are seeking to be faithful to the substance of the Catholic tradition. This, in essence, is the basic thrust of the book's argument.

Specifically the "new" Catholic perspective differs from the "old" both in its fundamental presuppositions about the meaning of moral good and evil, the way to determine whether human acts are morally good or evil, and in its specific conclusions about the significance of certain types of sexual behavior. The "old" perspective distinguished between the objective deed or act and the agent's or subject's personal responsibility or culpability for the deed and held that certain kinds of human acts, specified by their moral objects, were intrinsically or by their very nature evil deeds, the kinds of deeds that a human person, in particular a person who had become one with Christ in baptism, simply ought not to do under any circumstances or for any end, however good it might be. As applied to

sexual morality, this "old" perspective held that certain kinds of sexual activity, for example masturbation, non-marital coition (whether fornication or adultery), contraceptive intercourse, and homosexual behavior were intrinsically evil and that therefore a person who knowingly and freely chose to engage in them was sinning and choosing to do something intrinsically evil.

The "new" perspective offered by Keane believes that this "old" perspective places too much emphasis on isolated individual acts. While conceding that an analysis of such acts is important, this "new" perspective lays much greater stress on the "fundamental option" of the person as reflected in the whole style of his/her life and sees individual acts as either facilitating the process of growing or as hindering this process. This "new" perspective, moreover, holds that no human acts which can be described in non-moral terms are intrinsically evil in a morally significant sense, although they may embody physical or non-moral or what Keane terms "ontic" evil. Thus coition with a person who is not one's spouse, coition with a person of the same sex, or masturbation would name activities that embrace a measure of "ontic evil," but such deeds are morally evil and hence unworthy of human choice only because *usually* there is no sufficiently proportionate good capable of fostering growth toward the good of one's fundamental option (God). Still it may be that deeds of this kind can be justified for certain persons in special circumstances. Thus, for example, homosexual acts between homosexually oriented persons which are expressions of a genuine friendship, masturbation even by married persons, contraception, and coition between persons who are committed to each other but unable to marry may, at times, be quite good morally. Keane holds that it is virtually impossible to find a good proportionate enough to justify adultery so that certain kinds of sexual norms, such as *Thou shalt not commit adultery*, are "virtually exceptionless," and generate "practical absolutes." Even here it is, on this "new" perspective, *theoretically* possible for an act of adultery to be morally justifiable even if in practice it cannot be.

The major merit of Keane's book, in my judgment, is that it so clearly and, indeed, brilliantly applies to the area of sexual morality the fundamental moral theory that is today held by so many influential and esteemed moral theologians and, perhaps, by many of our contemporaries. The major problem with his book consists in his acceptance of this theory for, in my judgment, it is not only a theory which directly contradicts what the Church actually teaches about the meaning of human acts, but it is also a theory that is quite erroneous and subject to devastating criticism.

It must be remembered that at the heart of Keane's book is a general moral theory, one that denies that there are *any* human deeds describable in non-moral terms that are intrinsically evil. What this means is there is no kind of *external* act, capable of being chosen freely and intelligently by a moral agent, that ought never to be done. Obviously an act of *cruel* torture or of *unjustly* roasting a neonate, for example, would be condemned, but for Keane and his school (which numbers among its members such writers as Richard A. McCormick, Josef Fuchs, Bruno Schuller, Daniel Maguire, and with which Charles E. Curran is deeply sympathetic) acts of torturing a human being, of roasting a neonate, and of dropping a 10 megaton bomb on a populated city are not, of themselves, intrinsically or inherently evil in a *moral* sense. They are simply ontically evil and could *become* morally good if there were a good proportionate enough to justify them.

The fundamental moral theory of Keane, in other words, is a theory that is consequentialistic, i.e., it justifies the deed by reason of the end or consequences which it brings about. I believe that the morality taught by the Church and truly capable of being intelligently defended is a morality that takes human acts seriously insofar as these acts have a meaning or intelligibility. They have something to say as well as something to accomplish. Through choosing them we make or break

our moral lives and take on a certain kind of identity, the identity of killers, for example, or the identity of masturbators or fornicators, if the acts in question are truly acts of killing, of masturbation, of fornication. And, I submit, we ought not to take on this identity, for this is an identity which is simply not the kind to be taken on by a human being, in particular the human being who has become one with Christ in and through baptism.

Keane's book is filled with a sense of concern for people and their needs. Unfortunately, in my judgment at any rate, the moral policy it articulates is one that is not responsive to the deepest needs of people.

Recently (March, 1978), Richard A. McCormick, S.J., attempted to reformulate in a more compelling and persuasive manner the moral theory embodied in Keane's book and to show that those who reject this theory misrepresent it, misunderstand it, and argue in vicious circles (cf. "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies*, March, 1978). It is not possible here to discuss further the fundamental issues involved. But there is clearly a profound difference in the approach taken to moral questions in general and to issues in human sexuality in particular by writers who, like Keane, hold that it can be morally good directly to intend ontic evil and by many others who believe that it is morally wrong directly to intend, i.e., set one's being, on evil, even if by doing so one can serve some very significant good.

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On Understanding Human Sexuality

W. E. May and J. F. Harvey

Franciscan Herald Press (Synthesis Series), 1434 W. 51st St., Chicago, Ill. 60609, 1977. 79 pp., \$1.50.

The subtitle of this little volume tells it all: "A restatement of the position of The Roman Catholic Church on questions of sexuality written in response to *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought*." *Human Sexuality* by A. Kosnik, et. al. was published in June of 1977 by Paulist Press and has evoked widespread praise and condemnation. In fact, it has incurred official condemnation because it does not restate in detail official Catholic teaching. The May-Harvey endeavor is such a restatement. Although their effort, at times caustic, is not a convincing one, it does provide a brief occasion to re-examine this mystery-laden phenomenon called human sexuality.

The authors begin with an overview of *Human Sexuality* and then direct their analysis to the following topics: the meaning and purpose of "human sexuality", moral methodology, the use of Scripture and Christian tradition, the use of empirical sciences, and the treatment of homosexuality. I shall comment on each topic according to the foregoing sequence. (Throughout this review the abbreviation HS will refer to *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought*.)

With regard to the meaning and purpose of "human sexuality," May and Harvey would have us note (p. 13) that the authors of HS in defining sexuality place "all their emphasis on the 'other-relating' aspect of sexuality; not a hint is offered that human sexuality is related to the generation of new human life" (this from p. 83 of HS). There is no such hint at this point (although it is mentioned on the