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## [Book Review of] *Issues in Sexual and Medical Ethics*, by Charles E. Curran

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Appropriately, this volume on the relation of science, technology and ethics ends with discussions of the need for, benefits from and pitfalls of interdisciplinary studies in ethics and the sciences. There are overlapping areas of subject matter and methodology, deriving in part from the shared historical contexts of ethics and the sciences. Science may provide important insights into ethical system building, and certainly enlarges the scope of moral responsibility. The fruitful insights achieved in this volume are an invitation to scholars to continue to explore the interrelatedness of contemporary science and ethics.

An index and identification of contributors is provided.

— Patricia Fauser, Ph.D.  
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## *Issues in Sexual and Medical Ethics*

Charles E. Curran

*Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind., 1978. 240 pp., \$9.95.*

Rev. Charles E. Curran, prolific and persistent professor of theology at the Catholic University of America, offers this compendium of eight articles already published elsewhere in the fields of sexual and medical ethics. Most of the articles are of a survey character so that the book is rather easy reading. This means, however, that no one issue is explored in great depth.

Father Curran is thoroughly familiar with the contemporary ethical climate within the Christian and Catholic communities. In this book he records his opinions on key issues and he often points up his particular stance in contrast to other well-known authors such as Paul Ramsey or Richard McCormick, S.J.

Father Curran notes three levels of interest in the essays he presents: the significant ethical issues he raises, the methodology of moral theology to be used in discussing them, and the credibility of the Church as a teacher of sexual and medical ethics. In various chapters he outlines the kind of methodology he recommends and often chides the Church for not adopting that methodology to his satisfaction.

The book is divided into three parts: sexual ethics, medical ethics, and institutional and public policy in sexual and medical ethics. In the first part Father Curran presents two chapters, one on divorce and Christian marriage, the other a critique of the Vatican Declaration on Sexual Ethics issued in January, 1976.

In the first chapter, he almost casually reminds readers of his position that the Catholic Church should change its teaching on indissolubility and acknowledge the possibility of divorce and remarriage. After outlining cultural reasons for abandoning indissolubility (pp. 13-16), he presents a longer treatment (pp. 16-27) on strengthening Christian marital commitment in the face of cultural opposition.

In the second chapter, originally published in *The Linacre Quarterly*, he lists numerous criticisms of the methodology used in the Vatican Declaration on Sexual Ethics — all reflecting his dissatisfaction with the emphasis there on the essential order of human nature which he describes as physicalism. The key issue which he raises in his analysis is that of the objective order of sexual activity. Father Curran briefly presents his theory of compromise according to which definitive homosexuals may develop a loving commitment so that in a certain sense their actions are not wrong for them.

Part two presents an introductory chapter with a history and an overview of

medical ethics and then one chapter each on human experimentation and genetics. Both chapters survey the complex issues without considering the particulars; both reflect extensive research by the author.

Part three on institutional policy contains three chapters: one is on the use of the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Facilities, another deals with population control, and the last treats respect for life. While strongly reaffirming his dissent from the magisterial teaching opposing contraception and sterilization, the author offers brief reflections on the limits of dissent (pp. 154-158). He appeals to the praxis of the Church as an indicator of the legitimacy of dissent, noting that on abortion and euthanasia the praxis of the Church has not moved away from the hierarchical magisterium as it has on contraception.

This volume could never stand alone as an adequate textbook in sexual and medical ethics since it represents only one author's opinions on key issues. It manifests Father Curran's competence and convictions, of course. It uses a methodology of moral analysis which he advocates and which admits of divorce and remarriage, morally acceptable homosexual activity, and sterilization for both medical and non-medical reasons.

Moral theologians who are closer to the traditional positions of the magisterium cannot ignore opinions like those advanced in this book. But only time and the guidance of the Holy Spirit will tell if the kind of moral methodology advocated by Father Curran will be accepted within the Church. This reviewer feels doubtful about such an outcome, but it would take more than a review to explain why.

— Rev. Donald McCarthy  
Professor of Moral Theology  
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## ***The Gift of Life: The Social and Psychological Impact of Organ Transplantation***

(Health, Medicine and Society: A Wiley-Interscience Series)

Robert G. Simms et al, Editors

Wiley, New York, 1977. No price given.

In a pre-technological age, the concept of a catastrophic illness was unthinkable. When illness occurred, people either got better or died. Now with the advent of the technological age, illness can be catastrophic not only in terms of its effects on the patient, but also in terms of its implications for the family, the family's financial reserves, and the utilization of scarce and/or expensive medical resources. By focusing on many of the phenomena surrounding kidney transplantation, the book provides a unique view of many of the multi-faceted dimensions of this one catastrophic disease of renal failure.

Primarily this book is, as its subtitle indicates, an examination of the social and psychological dimensions of organ transplantation and reception. Through interviews and questionnaires, the authors critically examine often discussed issues such as the psychological impact of kidney disease on adults and children, problems with rehabilitation, the psychological and social implications of both donat-