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[Book Review of] *Human Sexuality and Personhood: Workshop Proceedings of the Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Research and Education Center*

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to human reason may be known easily by all, with certitude, and without an admixture of error" (Vatican I, Session III, Chap. II). The Council evidently recognized the existence of truths which were theoretically accessible to human reason, but practically (in the above sense) were too much for it. Some of these were undoubtedly moral truths, and more specifically, those of which St. Thomas spoke (*Summa Theologica*, 1-2, q. 94, aa. 4 and 6) as secondary precepts (or remote conclusions from first principles). Since this same need was repeated in Vatican II (*Dei verbum*, 6), it is not clear what the author finds objectionable in an appeal to Church teaching regarding such truths. By calling this kind of appeal *ecclesiastical positivism*, the author gives the impression that this teaching is purely arbitrary; if it hits upon the truth, it is accidental. While one can certainly admit that authentic Church teaching is not infallible, and therefore is open to error, if it is to be reliable at all, the error must be rare. In other words, it is the error that must be accidental, not the truth. If one accepted the viewpoint of Kelly in this matter, it would seem to involve the denial of the validity of Church moral teachings, except in those areas where certainty can readily be established by reason — where it is not really needed. This kind of limitation would render Church teaching superfluous and can hardly be reconciled with the role Vatican I and II give to revelation.

The author clearly had in mind a service to those involved in the health professions when he gathered together the material for this book. And one can be grateful for what he did in putting the work these authors did in a historical context. But one has to regret that he did not take a more open approach to their work.

— John R. Connery, S.J.
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Human Sexuality and Personhood

Workshop Proceedings of the Pope John XXIII
Medical-Moral Research and Education Center

Pope John Center, St. Louis, Mo., 1981, 254 pp., \$9.95.

Two hundred bishops attended a workshop on the above topic, conducted by the Pope John Center from Feb. 2-6, 1981. The Center has been instituted to help the Church respond intelligently and compassionately to the contemporary cultural challenges facing the Catholic view of life, health, and procreation. The overall message of the papers contained in this book, deliberately written to respond to the bishops' explicit request for a more positive theology of human sexuality and a more effective pastoral ministry in a person-centered context, is that human sexuality permeates human personhood, enabling human sexual love to reflect the infinite love within the Trinity.

Bishop Bernard Law, chairman of the board of the Pope John Center, wrote the preface. The introduction reflects the keynote address given by priest-psychiatrist James Gill, S.J.

Father Gill's advice to the bishops can well be taken by physicians, teachers, and other authority figures. He says that people shrink from those who bring them high ideals and strong remedies for their passions, even though the bearers are not really being judgmental or condemnatory. And although bishops today are

leaders who do not look down upon their people for their moral weakness and failings they need to give evidence of this fact — in the way they talk, write, and deal with people.

The book has three parts. The first is a brief historical overview of Catholic teachings from the biblical period to 1918. The second presents a sketch of contemporary scientific and philosophical approaches to human sexuality and personhood. The third offers basic perspectives on contemporary Catholic theology and Church teaching on sexuality and personhood.

In part one, Father Joseph Jensen's essay on human sexuality in the Scriptures presents a good overview, but seems to suggest a loose interpretation of divorce. He says that the words of Jesus "continue to be understood to represent the ideal of marriage, but they are adapted to new situations, as indeed are many of the other words of Jesus found in the Gospels." He claims that the Church has more latitude in matters of marriage and divorce than it is willing to accept. Apparently he regards the words of Jesus as not specifically normative. One of his conclusions is that it would be "pastorally more effective and truer to Scripture to make people aware of issues and choices than to confront them with lists of commandments." The reader might rightly wonder whether the author's alternatives are not simplistic, lacking the desired integrative perspective of compassionate but firm articulation of moral absolutes, along with unflinching readiness to dialog.

Catholic sexual morality in the patristic and medieval periods is clearly summarized by Rev. Francis Firth. James Hitchcock provides an interesting overview of historical influences on the development of Catholic doctrine concerning sexual morality, from 1300 to 1918. Of particular interest are his observations on the effects of Protestantism and Jansenism, and the ineffectiveness of Catholic theology in the 18th and 19th centuries.

In the second section of the book, James Monteleone, M.D., gives a brief account of the physiological development of individual sexuality. He concludes by citing three areas of study that he regards as most significant: the underlying influence of the genetic on homosexual behavior, the function of protein receptors in the brain, and hormone-induced behavior modification done in animals that suggests homosexuality begins early in life — either *in utero* or shortly after birth. His essay includes a glossary of terms.

In his chapter on the psychological aspects of human sexual behaviors, Rev. Michael Peterson, M.D., expresses the need to close the ever-widening gap between sexual practices and their scientific explanation on the one hand and the theological reflection of the Christian church on the other. Among other things, he discusses four major areas of behaviors and brain processes: the erotic or cognitive/affective component, the heterosexual and homosexual component, genital behaviors, and behaviors relating to family, child-rearing, and nurturing. The total complexity of human sexual behavior, from a psychological perspective, is reasonably well represented.

Sociologist Paul Peachey's lengthy essay entitled "A 'Sex Revolution' in American Culture" expands significantly the reader's consciousness of complexity and depth in human sexual behavior. After calling attention to some of the problems involved in cultural analysis, he discusses American cultural values on sex, including the influence of the utilitarian ethic and of the hedonistic impulses released partly by the frontier experience and governmental encouragement of individualism. At one point he concludes that, insofar as a revolutionary change toward erotic freedom is underway, it may well be viewed as an extension of values already prevalent in the culture, not the result of something alien and new. His final conclusion, that the real sexual revolution still lies in the future, caps a uniquely valuable study.

A sound philosophical discussion of personhood, sex, and marriage follows. Rev. Ambrose McNicholl, O.P., deals with the salient trends of thought today —

notably that reality is dynamic, evolutionary, and intrinsically marked by change and that relevant thought is quantitative and functional in perspective, not ontological. His exposition is clear and accurate. He then gives a strong analysis of the ontological meaning of person and affiliated concepts, supported by insights from contemporary Thomistic thought. The analogical notion of nature and of human nature (both changing and unchanging) is treated, preparing the way for a brief examination of natural law morality, sexuality, and marriage. The transcultural meaning of these subjects is defended as fundamental, always valid and available.

Four moral theologians contribute to the final section, providing an overview of the major theological concerns about human sexuality that have emerged in the Catholic Church in the 20th century. The major issues are analyzed, some only briefly, and reflect the tension in Catholic moral theology today.

Guided by care for avoiding the extremes of Puritanism and playboyism and by a positive desire to indicate the close relationship between social and sexual ethics, Rev. Francis X. Meehan singles out two contemporary Catholic emphases for discussion: intrinsicism (ethical norms are inherent in ethical actions) and personalism (persons are responsible for their own personal and interpersonal development). He shows how the unitive and procreative dimensions of intercourse are both intrinsic and personalist. He likens the inherent meanings of love and life in sexual action to facial gestures which bespeak themselves, regardless of the intentionality we might like to attach to them. He defends *Humanae Vitae* as not only a teaching on birth control, but also an anthropological insight that love responds to life — so much so that any lack of orientation to life actually flaws the love. His further discussion includes the Church's teaching as prophetic, ecological, anti-Manichean, anti-Narcissistic, anti-individualistic, and integrally caring about the "direct and inherent interaction between sexual practices and social practices."

This last feature may be controversial if misunderstood. Father Meehan articulates well the need for persons to see the broader social implications of the Church's teaching on specifically sexual issues and to translate them to issues of poverty, starvation, overpopulation, and the rest. One can only hope that he is concerned about both *status quo* conservatism (that tends to overlook these connections) and *status quo* liberalism (that tends to forsake the intrinsicism in sexual morality for the sake of social utility and out of an overreaction to the authoritarianism and legalism of the past). He does not even hint at *status quo* liberalism.

Magisterial teaching from the *Code of Canon Law* in 1918 to the present is traced by Rev. John Gallagher, C.S.B. He concludes by citing what he regards as three of the most important questions that emerge today and bear upon the tasks of the bishops' workshop: Why are sex and marriage essentially directed toward procreation? Why is contraception wrong in each and every case? What weight is to be given to the traditional teaching of the Roman Catholic Church in sexual and marriage ethics?

The critical issue of the value of proportionalism as a methodology is addressed by Rev. Paul McKeever. While he gives the proportionalist position a reasonably accurate outline and states various criticisms of it by traditional, orthodox theologians, he fails to appreciate these criticisms. Of many defects in this essay, only a few will be cited.

Proportionalism denies that there is any intrinsic, ontological structure to the moral act such that some acts are necessarily (under all conditions) wrong, despite the best of intentions and the extreme nature of the circumstances. The most that can be said, according to the proportionalist view, is that some acts are virtually exceptionless (rape, incest, torture of children, and so forth). The author does not clearly acknowledge this philosophical position. On the biblical side, he adopts a kind of fundamentalism that says if no wording in biblical texts directly rules out proportionalism we must continue to take it seriously — unless it can be ruled out

philosophically, which Father McKeever seems unable to do. The inevitably sterile consequentialism implied or stated in contemporary attempts at proportionalism escapes him. In his conclusion he assumes that defending proportionalism (which he does not purport to do, in this essay at least) is not directly contrary to the explicit teaching of the Church because, as he says, there is no explicit teaching on it. While he admits that magisterial language implies a position contrary to proportionalism, he says that magisterial statements are not on the level of infallibility. He does not mention the excellent arguments raised by Ford, Grisez, and others on behalf of the infallibility of the ordinary magisterium in moral matters, and notably conception. Moreover, he seems unaware of the fundamental ambiguity involved in the proportionalists' use of the term *ontic* or *pre-moral evil*. The bishops were not well served by this essay.

The concluding chapter strengthens the book. Among many cogent points and several distinctive contributions, Rev. Benedict Ashley, O.P., shows that Church teaching on the inseparability of the unitive and procreative meaning of intercourse involves a corollary: the inseparability of the value of sexual pleasure considered as a positive human good. He finds that the inseparability of pleasure from marital love is solidly founded in Scripture and tradition, and he thinks it is potentially definable by the magisterium. His grasp of contemporary objections to Church teaching is outstanding and his general perspective for their refutation is good. Father Ashley cites three major priorities in the Church's teaching on sexuality and seven major points of consensus among most Catholic theologians. The themes of analysis, dialog, and pastoral care, common to all contributors in this book, are particularly well expressed in this essay.

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Current Literature

Material appearing below is thought to be of particular interest to Linacre Quarterly readers because of its moral, religious, or philosophic content. The medical literature constitutes the primary, but not the sole source of such material. In general, abstracts are intended to reflect the substance of the original article. Contributions and comments from readers are invited. (E. G. Laforet, M.D., 2000 Washington St., Newton Lower Falls, MA 02162)

Gustafson JM: Nature, sin, and covenant: three bases for sexual ethics. *Perspect Biol & Med* 24:483-497 Spring 1981.

In Western society rapid revisions are occurring in prescriptive sexual ethics. Such revisions, however, must take into account three fundamental bases in human nature and experience. These are our nature as humans, the concept of sin, and the social or covenantal aspect of human experience.

Karasu TB: The ethics of psychotherapy. *Am J Psychiat* 137:1502-1512 Dec 1980.

In today's social milieu, psychiatry faces intensified questioning and review from within and without the profession with respect to ethical tenets. Problem areas include dual allegiance of the psychiatrist, homosexuality, confidentiality, and therapist-patient sex. "Ethical dilemmas in psychotherapy are not entirely