

**Sex and the Catholic Church:
Where did we go Wrong?**

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Preface

It is difficult for me to express in words the enthusiasm with which I responded to the invitation to be with you tonight. My feelings were a mix of gratitude for the opportunity to enter a dialogue with eager young minds, the challenge to express myself clearly about some troubling issues, and the nostalgia of a home coming that becomes more precious at 60 years of age.

Minnesota—Robbinsdale to be exact—is where I grew up; and this Newman Club is a part of my history. I cannot return here without thinking of George Garrelts, Mike McDonough and Don Conroy, each of whom retains a revered place in my memory for his intellectual enthusiasm, devotion to Christian ideals and dedication to discourse with young people.

By asking the question, "Sex and the Catholic Church: Where did we go wrong?" I am not trying to be provocative; rather I am trying to be evocative of the spirit and tradition of these men. And, indeed, I am striving to define the parameters of discourse in which we can address sex in a manner worthy of the man for which this Forum was named, John Henry Cardinal Newman.

Sex—The Problem For Our Age—Problematic of the Ages

Let me come straight to the point. Our time together is about discourse: How do we face and talk about the single most complex and difficult challenge Christianity has faced in its two thousand year history? No heresy, no schism, no assault from any external power has ever threatened the integrity and bedrock of the Roman Catholic Church as does its current need to address the sexual/celibate agenda confronting it.

The church's teaching on sexuality is not credible. We have no theology of sex: that is, we have no developed, credible, overarching understanding of the nature and place of sexuality in Christian life and in salvation history.

Lack of Credibility

Summarily, but accurately stated, the church's teaching on sexuality is: "Sex is good, created by God. But every sexual thought, word, desire and action outside of marriage is mortally sinful; every sexual act within marriage not open to conception is also mortally sinful. And there is no paucity of matter." Which means you can lie a little and steal a little without going straight to hell (cutting oneself off from divine love) but you can't have sex even a little without destroying all bonds of grace.

As you well know, this teaching simply is not in accord with the experience of serious and committed Christians and therefore is contrary to the natural law, not an expression of it. It is anthropologically untenable and psychosexually incompatible with

healthy and mature human development. Although the most respected moral theologians of our time, (Haering, Curran, Kung) have spoken forcefully about the inadequacy of the Church's moral teaching on sex, none has yet "cracked the code" and offered us adequate alternatives. This is because no Christian church has yet developed an adequate theology of sex.

No Theology of Sex

Let us look for a moment at this deficiency in Christian thought. What does it affect?

Primarily, this deficit defines the whole sexual/celibate agenda so eloquently outlined by

Dr. Williams Shea, chair of the department of theology at St. Louis University:

The "tangle of issues" that Roman Catholic leadership has failed to deal with credibly all have to do with sexuality.

They are: family life, divorce and remarriage, premarital and extramarital sex, birth control, abortion, homosexuality, masturbation, the role of women in ministry, their ordination to the priesthood, the celibacy of the clergy, and the male monopoly of leadership. Some have suggested that sex is, at bottom, the issue that clogs up our Catholic calendar. Fear of women, and perhaps hatred of them. (America 1986, p. 589)

Failure to address this agenda is not merely a bureaucratic snarl or intransigence.

Avoidance of these vital issues runs the risk of institutional suicide. A process diametrically opposed to the Way, Truth and Life to which we claim a call.

Individual and Ecclesial Pressure

Since we as individual Christians cannot escape the realities and practical consequences of the sexual agenda in our own lives, and since currently we cannot find realistic

guidance in the magisterium, many of us have to make up our own minds as best we can.

Some reject the Church entirely. Avoidance of the issues is not a luxury available to the Christian who is striving for intellectual and spiritual integration. This is life. There is nowhere to hide or escape. The celibate and married are equally challenged.

Those in positions of authority in the Church are in a terrible bind—they are faced with dangerous questions that at present have no simple or even apparent answers. And the ramifications of the questions about sexuality are not limited to morality but effect every sector of theological understanding and praxis—the nature and existence of God, creation, original sin, sacraments, and the Church. Those of us who care about the Church and love our brothers who bear the burden of power can empathize with their dilemmas and conundrums. No one can absolve them from a task that Providence has handed them. As I said earlier the sexual/celibate agenda forms the greatest challenge to the integrity of religion since the time of St. Paul.

How Can We Approach The Problem?

Carefully, reverently, truthfully and decisively. Daunting as it is, there are things we can do to face the question of sex and the Church with intellectual and spiritual integrity and thereby help each other in this crisis.

To struggle effectively with the issues before us, I have four recommendations.

Develop Self-Awareness

Develop acute self-awareness. Religion and human sexuality do not exist apart from people. The more one is self-aware, the more scrupulously honest one is about his or her own religious faith and sexuality, the freer one can be to be amazed by all life, the more one can reverence the experiences of other disciplines, foreign cultures, and distant times. It is not our convictions, no matter how dearly held and ferociously defended, but the truth that makes us free.

De-emotionalize The Subject

De-emotionalize the subject. Few subjects (with the possible exception of politics) can equal the power of sex and religion to incite conflict and murderous emotion in the hearts and hands of the avowed merciful and theoretical peacemakers. None of us has to search deeply in our memories or knowledge to validate what Protestant and Catholic mean in Northern Ireland, with Palestinian and Jew signify in the Middle East, and what Moslem and Hindu stand for in India. Currently these are media shortcuts to identify warring factions rather than to describe religious doctrines. It seems that we humans are exquisitely prone to violence and vengeance in the name of faith, justified by our religion. (One of my ancestors was threatened with burning at the stake for his Anabaptist leanings.) Central and South America have long traditions as Catholic countries and equally long histories of sadistic torture for religious or political dissent.

The cross and the crown have been coupled in a variety of alliances and in a host of guises, from gold to bloody thorns, from saving plank to torturous rack.

The emotionalization of sexuality fares little better. The rumor of certain sexual practices or orientations can fuel monstrous persecution and witch hunts of great magnitude. The powerful force of sexual desire has been labeled dangerous by both Hebrew and Christian tradition. Even Judaism, which recognizes sexuality is central to life, and which, like Christianity, teaches that sex is good, calls the sexual drive the Yetzer haar, the "evil impulse."

The threat of emotionalization is not limited to us as individuals. Such disciplines as theology, biology, and psychology tend to lose their balance, their objectivity, when it comes to sex. There is no area of human concern in which traditional religious teaching and current scientific discovery challenge each other more vibrantly than at the vortex of human sexuality. Here basic biological instinct and endowment meet the most refined and rarified of human aspiration, love, and all of its creative/cultural by-products: music, poetry, art, and beauty generally.

Religion and science, each of which should provide an open arena for fertile exchange and productive discussion, too often become emotionally heavily defended bastions dedicated to repelling rather than welcoming visitors from another turf (forgetting that we inhabit the same earth).

It is not easy to avoid excessive emotion when addressing anything that has to do with sex, let alone tackling the nature and function of sexuality. But that is exactly what

I recommend. Avoiding emotionalization does not mean that one should skirt frank confrontation of any facet of the whole sexual agenda facing the Catholic Church: the nature of human sexuality (and its basis in natural law); premarital, marital, and extramarital sexuality; birth control, abortion, the homosexualities, the masturbations, sexual roles and place of women; and celibacy as a mode of sexual adjustment. Sensationalism comes easy to this subject matter. Neutral emotion takes work.

Scholar-Student vs. Pupil-Student

I recommend that we become scholar-students rather than pupil-students. When my son was a senior in high school, he, along with fourteen of his classmates, received scholarships to form a corps of student-scholars within its academic community.

During that year I was privileged by an invitation to address the group about my philosophy of life. I titled my remarks to them "Facing Dangerous Questions," since I think that is what life and learning are all about. I concluded my remarks to those young people with sentiments I would like to share with you.

I think there is something distinct and special about claiming to be a scholar-student versus being a pupil-student.

A pupil can claim religious affiliation or pass through an institution of learning relatively unscathed by the experience, neither being greatly influenced by nor influencing the institution in the process. A pupil can gratefully accept the answers of the professors and dutifully repeat back those same answers or others that are equally

acceptable. A pupil can be extremely self-sacrificing, reflecting many of the institution's externals, exhibiting commendable attributes and values and at the same time remaining hollow, ready, chameleon-like, to reflect the values of a subsequent environment or institution.

A scholar's task is more difficult and complex because it involves a true internal process of transformation. A scholar never leaves an institution or area of study unmarked by his or her presence or efforts. A scholar is always challenged by the real values of people and places and so is indelibly marked by them. This is not accomplished by the transmission of answers. A strong institution not only tolerates questions but encourages them.

A scholar can never be totally committed to any institution because his or her dedication is to the Truth beyond institution or personal grasp. This is, of course, a great service to any institution but is sometimes only reluctantly received.

A scholar's first responsibility is to the self and for the self, without which service becomes a charade, and broader influence becomes manipulation even if it is mistaken for leadership. Responses to others, even love and altruism, are grounded in this center. "The good man ought to be a lover of self," wrote Aristotle in Nichomedean Ethics, "since he will then act nobly and so both benefit and aid his fellows." Christ's law of love dictates that the love of self is the prerequisite and measure of love of another.

Integrity rather than ambition is the scholar's guide, or perhaps I should say integrity is the ambition of the scholar. Success or failure is not measured by fame or acceptance. The scholar cannot be bought and cannot be intimidated.

The scholar in short has the courage to face the unknown. He or she welcomes the dangerous questions, knowing that questions open humankind to its destiny; answers that purport certitude invariably lead to or justify domination or destructiveness.

The questions about sex and the Catholic Church are indeed dangerous; they are prone to politicization, emotionalization, trivialization, and distortion from every quarter—private, professional and institutional. Only the dedication and integrity of a scholar will keep us from the illusion that the answer exists. You will not find answers here, only a clarification of the perilous questions about sex and religion.

Suspend Belief

I recommend that you suspend belief. This may sound puzzling and even contradictory to the process of groping toward a theology of sex, but I think it is necessary and not entirely untraditional in theology. Paul Tillich recommended finding faith not by avoiding doubt but by exhaustively exploring it. Likewise, he felt that hope was not grasped in isolation from despair; hope, he said, is found in the embrace and the penetration of despair.

Of course it is difficult to endure doubt. Of course it is painful to experience despair, but those are necessary steps in the process of establishing faith and hope. It

is no less difficult and painful to suspend all of one's religious beliefs, all of one's ethical presumptions and convictions about sex, but such suspension of belief is as crucial to understanding human sexuality as the suspension of disbelief is to the discovery of poetic and literary truth.

As we proceed to a deeper exploration of the Catholic Church and sex, it will become apparent how crucial is our preparation. If one is not alerted to difficulties and dangers in entering unexplored territory—realms in which questions are more plentiful than answers—one can be unduly frightened and resort to old, seemingly secure paths that lead to the same blind alleys. We will have to call on the provisions of self-knowledge, de-emotionalization, a scholar's stance that can tolerate dangerous questions without racing for answers, and that most exquisite sacrifice a religious person can make—the suspension of belief.

To suspect belief in our gods is the only way to assure ourselves that we can approach the altar with pure intent. This is a lonely discipline, but we must resist the temptation to "run to god" for refuge with our sexual uncertainties before we face them ourselves.

It is easier to abandon any other vestige of childhood security than to revise our child's view of god. The child's image of god can remain virtually intact as a man or woman grows to psychic and intellectual maturity embracing even more sophisticated and refined concepts of existence and the universe. It is almost shocking to see accomplished physicians and scientists, well regarded and intellectually disciplined in

their specialties, revert to the reasoning of fifth graders when it comes to the understanding and even the practice of religion. Their willingness to suspend their own reasoning and expertise in favor of "legitimate authority" is an exercise in singular abandon or disregard—something they refuse to do in any other sphere of their lives. This is the same avenue that gives entre to superstition and magical thinking, disguised as religion or religious practice. In any other garb such thoughts or practice would be unmasked and exposed as fraudulent by ordinary scientific reasoning, and common sense. If we need anything in facing sexuality, we need adult common sense.

Sex and religion have a notorious ability to retain their infantile and primitive force—aided and fostered, albeit sometimes unwittingly, by church, state (law), and medicine. Denial, rationalization, splitting, and reaction formation can be institutionalized as well as individual mental mechanisms that defend against integration of reality into awareness and behavior.

Our task is to confront at the deepest personal level possible our own persistence and style in avoiding the real issues that confront us in these two areas of our understanding and behavior: sex and religion—that is, our sexuality and our religion.

One must, if motivated by any true religious spirit, be extremely tolerant and careful not to judge another's religious experience. But the same spirit of religious honesty (desire for Truth) will motivate one to be most exacting about one's own religious and sexual experience and conviction. There is no justification for sloppy or negligent attention in the rigorous examination of one's religious or sexual integration.

What are the Roots of the Sexual Problematic?

Sex is not a new problem for religion and Christianity. Part of the problem is intimately intertwined with its Judaic seed and the Roman and Hellenistic soil in which we grew up. The church and God got "sexed" – Father Walter Ong expresses the situation of the Church elegantly:

"The Church's teaching is structured permanently in the deep feminine-masculine polarities that shift dialectically through time to produce, for example, today the needed and welcome ascendancy of the feminine in consciousness signaled most conspicuously by women's liberation movements and also perhaps even more by worldwide ecological concern, which regards the whole universe as a house, a home. Since sex is a biological phenomenon, the masculine-feminine dialectic is basically biological, however complexly related to much, or indeed virtually everything else, in human life. *Catholic doctrine has a biological base in the sense that the female-male relationship forms the human ground in which redemption, freedom, and love take root.* A residual Manichaeism—from which Christians have still not entirely liberated themselves—would downgrade the material universe and make a biological foundation for anything human distasteful. But the foundation is there nevertheless, and should not be dismaying to those who truly believe that the Word became flesh.

(Fighting For Life, pp. 171-172)

The "sexed-ness" of the church causes some problems: It is nearly impossible to approach the problem of a sexed god until we have assumed the stance I outlined above—that is self-awareness, de-emotionalization, the attitude of scholar and the rejection of childhood religious bias. We cannot pretend that this territory can be approached without the sacrifice of some of our traditional intellectual comforts and

supports. We must strip ourselves of our **PROJECTIONS** in order to clarify our **PERCEPTIONS**. We must remove our sandals because we approach holy ground. Scholarship like psychotherapy can only be pursued in an atmosphere of deprivation.

Our talk about God is so distorted by our projections that we have become desensitized to the fact that we—and our religious ancestors have "sexed" god—far beyond the self revelation "I Am Who Am." I think it was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who suggested that religionists place a twenty-five year moratorium on the use of the word "God" in order to discourse more accurately and discover more fully the reality we are trying to describe.

Pope John Paul II said "Science and purify religion from error and superstition, religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes. Each can draw the other to a wider world, a world in which both can flourish."

In considering sex and the Catholic Church we are staring the relative positions of science and religion squarely in the eyes. Certainly we are working for a world in which both science and religion thrive for the benefit of all.

If science is to purify religion of its sexual superstitions and errors we will have to examine the concept of god, our appeal to god's will, our interpretation of scripture, and our understanding of natural law.

Sexed God

Let us be blunt: a god that is a sexed god is no better than the gods of the Greeks and Romans. To say that the sexualization of god is the result of the limitation of language begs the question. To say that sexual language has no significance or meaning is a self-deception of rank proportions. To claim that the sexualization of god is necessary to introduce children into religious thinking and practice gives credence to Freud's observation that religion is our illusion, based on the most elemental of childhood mental projections.

To sex a god is to render the Supreme, Uncreated into our hands, into our power. To unsex god is not to render the Ineffable, the Unseen into unreality but to render us powerless over the transcendent. This is a position unacceptable to many individuals and institutions. This is a position unacceptable to many individuals and institutions who would rather retain comforting illusions (and power over vast multitudes) than endure the torment of powerlessness and the experience of existence and nature.

Many of us remain alienated from ourselves and the universe in the name of a god of our own making—fashioned as surely by words, story, and idea as any golden, graven image. We can think we know god because we have sexed Him in our own image. There is no essential progress in feminizing god, although there may be some poetic justice and political advantage in god—She. Sexed language does make a difference. As a friend of mine (Sr. Joan Chittister) responded when a bishop said that

sexist language really didn't make any difference—all people were included in man and he. "Well if it doesn't make any difference let's say for the next thousand years 'Christ died for all women.'" Sexual language does make a political, cultural, poetic, and economic difference when used in relationship to us humans who are sexual. Sexual language applied to god also has profound implications in our pursuit of truth.

There is a certain fashionableness in the use of She in referring to god. Leon Lederman, a Nobel Laureate in physics, consistently refers to god as she in his book *The God Particle* (Houghton-Mifflin 1993). Of course he is not dealing with the question of sexuality. However, he makes a point very significant to our gropings: namely, that science (physics) is not religion. In attempting to purify our concepts and language we are not trying to find a scientific god but rather the rightful place for science and religion in relationship to sex and conversely to find the rightful place for sexuality undergirded by sound science and religion. Each is a distinct, if interrelated, entity. One cannot be substituted for the other.

Sex is essential to our existence. We are material. We are like all the rest of nature. Any god worthy of the name, especially one solely credited with the creation of all matter and the author of the nature of things, cannot be limited by sex without peril.

Medieval Christian culture was more sensitive to the problem of a sexed god than was the Renaissance, which embraced almost universally the image of god as a powerful, wise, and awesome old man. Michelangelo's creation in the Sistine Chapel (and to some extent his Moses) solidified the image—as if reality—of the male supreme being or divine

representative. But prior to the Renaissance there were examples that addressed Deus Pater, Materque. There were treatises that considered the "maternity" of Christ and religious authorities. Although these historical gropings are a recognition of the problem of a sexed god, they do not solve the problem. However, one thing is absolutely clear: the failure to conceptualize god in any but a sexed mode reveals a degree of projection and anthropomorphization which in the end is theologically intolerable.

The great fear shared by many folk in suspending belief, is that people (mostly other people) will become atheists, bereft of any faith or belief in god; or worse, they will become libertines without any moral guides to ensure virtue and justice. Chaos, especially sexual chaos, will reign if we suspend belief even briefly in the service of a refined understanding of the transcendent and our own sexual nature.

Some fear that the populace will end up like Hemingway's protagonist in *Farewell To Arms* at the fireside, mourning the death of his beloved Catherine and their child and rejecting a god who tortures humans for his own amusement and plays with them with sadistic delight like termites in a sizzling log.

This of course is the god of projection, not the god of perception.

The sexed god is one who can invest other sexed beings—usually the same-sexed beings—with power. He offers himself for their disposition and use. The sexed god can also become a valuable commodity, a tool of power and control, and the source of rules and regulations and awesome taboos. In his novel of sex and religion, *Portnoy's Complaint*, Philip Roth spoke for the struggle of young people of many religions who

are discovering their sexuality in the contexts of their religious assumptions and with a clear idea, a projected idea, of god.

That taboo (eating lobster) so easily and simply broken, confidence may have been given to the whole slimy, suicidal Dionysian side of my nature; the lesson may have been learned that to break the law, all you have to do it—just go ahead and break it! All you have to do is stop trembling and quaking and finding it unimaginable and beyond you: all you have to do, is do it! What else, I ask you, were all those prohibitive dietary rules and regulations all about to begin with, what else but to give us little Jewish children practice in being repressed? Practice, darling, practice, practice, practice. Inhibition doesn't grow on trees, you know—takes patients, takes concentration, takes a dedicated and self-sacrificing parent and a hard-working attentive little child to create in only a few years' time a really constrained and tight-ass human being. Why else the two sets of dishes? Why else the kosher soap and salt? Why else, I ask you, but to remind us three times a day that life is boundaries and restrictions if it's anything, hundreds of thousands of little rules laid down by none other than None Other, rules which either you obey without question, regardless of how idiotic they may appear (and thus remain, by obeying, in His good graces), or you transgress, most likely in the name of outraged common sense—which you transgress because even a child doesn't like to go around feeling like an absolute moron and schmuck—yes, you transgress, only with the strong likelihood (my father assures me) that comes next Yom Kippur and the names are written in the big book where He writes the names of those who are going to get to live until the following September (a scene which manages somehow to engrave itself upon my imagination), and lo, your own precious name ain't among them. Now who's the schmuck, huh? And it doesn't make any difference either (this I understand from the outset, about the way this God, Who runs things, reasons) how big or how small the rule is that you break: it's the breaking alone that gets His goat—it's the simple fact of waywardness, and that alone, that He absolutely cannot stand, and which He does not forget either, when He sits angrily down (fuming probably, and surely with a smashing miserable headache, like my father at the height of his constipation) and begins to leave the names out of that book.

(pp. 79-80)

It is belief in this "constipated" God that I am asking you to suspend. At least recognize that any concept of a sexed God cannot be entirely free of an equivalent distortion.

You can tell that I am being careful to avoid, as much as possible, the fury of the theologians, because our explorations are intended to help rather than hinder their task—to engage them in the dialectic rather than elicit a diatribe.

The perceived danger of my approach to sexuality is the threat to loss of power over the sexed god and the loss of control of those who speak for god and his will.

God's Will

I am indebted to colleagues at an ecumenical think tank for an awareness imprinted indelibly on my religious and scientific consciousness. Day after day as we sat around the conference table one theologian after the other declared that "God says this," "This is the will of God," or "God intends thus and so." It was all said with the ease, facility, assurance and conviction of a child reciting the multiplication tables; the experience was capped when I viewed a television documentary on South Africa. An Afrikaner being interviewed in the vestibule of his church, the choir singing in the background, stated with the same assured tone as my colleagues, "God wills that Blacks be subject to us." The Mormon elder receives a directive from god that Blacks are now able to be received as full members of the church. "It is 'His' will." David Koresh waited for and claimed to have received a direct communication from God as law enforcement officers surrounded his compound in Waco, Texas in March and April of this year.

Solom pronouncements that appeal to divine authority (god's will) in issues that might well be considered human judgments and subject to legitimate controversy are rife

with power if not with logic. Consider, for instance, the statement, "The fact that the call to ministerial priesthood is addressed only to men is not arbitrary, nor is it rooted in a view that women are inferior as persons." A male priesthood is "willed by the Lord" (1992, American Bishops). The shift from earlier theological positions is not because of any doubt about male access to the male "will of God" but is rooted in its abandonment of explicit denigration of women as inferior and unsuited for the priesthood "by nature."

For two hundred years the *Malleus Maleficarum*, endorsed by a Bull of Pope Innocent VIII in 1484, stood as the testament to the nature of woman: a witch in her most extreme, but inclined by "nature" and the "will of God" as inferior to men—weak, vulnerable, and ultimately dangerous.

According to the *Malleus*, women are chiefly addicted to evil superstition in spite of the fact that corrupted clerics can also be reprehensible (pp. 42-47). "All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman" (p. 43). "When a woman thinks alone she thinks evil." "Women are naturally more impressionable" [than men].... "They have slippery tongues."... "They are feebler in both mind and body."... "Women are intellectually like children.... [They are] more carnal than a man as is clear from [their] many carnal abominations."... "[They are] ever weaker to hold and preserve the faith."

The two 15th-century priests who wrote the *Malleus* did not have trouble finding pagan sources to bolster their argument that heaven (god's will) and nature conspired to

ordain women unstable, inferior to men, and unworthy to be "like Christ" in the priesthood.

Bishops today who claim access to "god's will" in excluding women from the priesthood assure us that that judgment has nothing to do with a view that women are inferior as persons. It is simply "willed by the Lord" (what's a poor man to do, faced with the clear will of god?). But the argument rings hollow to those who know the history of theology.

The central argument has not changed. The sexed god demonstrates his will through Jesus Christ whose sex then becomes the validation for men, who, if not always superior, are at least always willed to power by this clear demonstration of god's will, presumably obvious to all who accept the confluence of nature and god's mind.

What can one say to or about someone who claims to know the will of god? How can one argue with one who says he is in touch with and speaks for god? Frequently the young struggling with the realities of their own sexuality react, regardless of their particular religious affiliation, the way Roth's Portnoy reacted to his rabbi.

I find no argument for the existence of God, or for the benevolence and virtue of the Jews, in the fact that the most re-ver-ed man in all of Newark came to sit for "a whole half hour" beside my mother's bed. If he emptied her bedpan, if he fed her meals, that might be the beginning of something, but to come for half an hour and sit beside a bed? What else has he got to do, Mother? To him, uttering beautiful banalities to people scared out of their wits—that is to him what playing baseball is to me! He loves it! And who wouldn't? Mother, Rabbi Warshaw is a fat, pompous, impatient fraud, with an absolutely grotesque superiority

complex, a character out of Dickens is what he is, someone who if you stood next to him on the bus and didn't know he was so revered, you would say, "That man stinks to high heaven of cigarettes," and that is all you would say. This is a man who somewhere along the line got the idea that the basic unit of meaning in the English language is the syllable. So no word he pronounces has less than three of them, not even the word God . . . Oh God, oh Guh-ah-dud, if you're up there shining down your countenance, why not spare us from here on out the enunciation of the rabbis! Why not spare us the rabbis themselves! Look, why not spare us religion, if only in the name of our human dignity!

(pp. 73-74)

If those individuals who claim to know the will of god are not always reliable perhaps we can find the answers to human sexuality and its real meaning in Scripture.

It is not a faithless exercise to discipline oneself carefully about the use of the word "God" and to abrogate to one's self the "will of God" only after the most meticulous examination of all the facts available and only with the greatest reservation and with superior humility and never as an exercise of personal power. I contend that it is a consummate act of religion to reject projection in matters of faith and to dedicate ones energies to the perception of reality and the nature of humans wherein both God and God's will are more likely to be found.

Scripture Must Be Respected For What It Is Not, As Well As For What It Is

We find ourselves constrained and deprived of our former security by having to admit that Scripture is not a manual of the natural sciences anymore than for the physical sciences. The authors of Scripture were limited by their personal and cultural

constraints. The nature of humans and sexual nature were not well understood by the authors nor accurately interpreted by commentators who are subject to the same constraints as the authors.

Two very clear examples of Scriptural misinterpretation of sexuality (or at times more accurately misinterpretation of Scripture) in matters sexual are in regard to the masturbations and the homosexualities. The Jesuit John McNeill has traced most convincingly the history of these sexual misunderstandings.

It is impossible to show that masturbation or homosexuality are "against nature" from the perception of nature. In fact, the eminently cautious E. O. Wilson from Harvard states "there is, I wish to suggest, a strong possibility that homosexuality is normal in the biological sense, that it is a distinctive beneficent behavior that evolved as an important element of early human social organization. Homosexuals may be the genetic carriers of some of mankind's' rare altruistic impulses." He continues, "Homosexual behavior is common in other animals from insects to mammals..." and concludes, "Homosexuality is above all a form of bonding."

McNeill as well as John Bosell of Yale have shown that some religious thinkers agreed more with Wilson than with moral misinterpretations of the stories of Oman and Sodom.

Scripture and scriptural commentators have been simply wrong about the sexual natures of men and women, and the nature of sexuality itself.

There was a consistent glorification of men (the phallus and even semen which was thought to be "almost human" by Gaelon and St. Clement). This overvaluation reduced women to secondary importance and in the view of some ancients, to the role of a necessary evil. Very clearly, pleasure, sin and unnatural became equated with sexuality as if one of the main purposes of scripture was to warn and rile against it.

It is simply wrong.

It was up to Augustine (354-430) (probably) to coin the term original sin for the crime of Adam. It was surely Augustine who forever stamped the first sin as sexually disordered and rendered "even a legitimate marriage. . .only the good usage of an evil thing" (Delumeau, p. 247). That judgment has pretty well penetrated all of Church teaching on human sexuality even to the present day and even when it is explicitly denied. Certainly Christian marriage is frequently compared with the bond of Christ with his Church, but repeatedly there is a caveat. Virginity is better; even Christian marriage is dangerous.

Once dualism (philosophically), whether in the form of neoplatonism or stoicism, had penetrated Christian thought Augustine's reasoning would be secured for posterity. Body would be inimical to spirit (soul); flesh would be the enemy, to be dominated, controlled, and eventually discarded in the service of real love and real life in heaven.

As Augustine understood it, in their original created state, Adam and Eve were in perfect control of all of the inclinations of their bodies, especially their sexual desires. According to Augustine, in the ideal state children are conceived without any pleasure,

or at least with a pleasure ruled and ordered by the will (*De correptione et gratia*, cf. Delumeau, p. 247). Paradise and the tree of life protected Adam and Eve from death. But all of this eternity was lost. Loss of rational control, ignorance, and concupiscence, which shows in sexual excitement, are the lasting results for all humanity.

This equation of sin with sex has marked Christian culture; discourse on grace, free will, predestination, and salvation revolves around the sexual nature of humans as defined from this vantage. There is no doubt that all of these Augustinian assumptions have found their way into the Church's understanding of marriage (and celibacy).

Although it is clear also from gospel accounts mentioned Adam or Adam's sin and spent no time talking about sexual sin or the dangers of sex, those who speak "for Jesus"—priests—have had a great deal to say about sex and especially about its sinfulness and its danger even in marriage.

St. Bernadine of Siena could say "Out of a thousand marriages, I believe 999 belong to the devil." Another French priest (Pierre De la Font) even in a sermon that reflects on the wedding at Cana, said, "The apostles rightly found it too difficult and onerous to have to keep a woman by one's side. . . a woman replete with defects and disorders; to live with this domestic enemy of one's rest; hence it was more tolerable to resist the natural inclinations that lead to marriage than to make oneself constantly suffer the mad and outlandish behavior of a woman" (1679 edition cited by Delumeau, p. 432).

To summarize: the roots of sexual distortion and misunderstanding run deep. The threat many people feel in questioning these roots is the threat of dissolution—

rootlessness. In the face of threat we are tempted to reinforce those very roots that should be pruned. God-meaning-existence-love are not threatened by the examination or removal of auxiliary supports we individually and culturally have sunk to keep us secure while we search for better and more complete answers. Fidelity to our religious tradition does not only entail preserving the past, but also the ability to grow beyond it, learn from it, revise the present and the future in light of its lessons and mistakes. Such is the message and life of Jesus.

Didn't Jesus Solve The Celibate Sexual Problem?

Yes. We have every evidence that Jesus was a perfectly integrated human being—the epitome of human evolution. We cannot extrapolate any other conclusion from the gospel accounts.

For the structure of the sexual/celibate conflict we must turn to another written source even earlier than the gospels—St. Paul. Paul, like us, never saw Jesus in the flesh. He was smitten by the story and words of Jesus. They transformed his life. I spent many years thinking that Paul was a misogynist: that he extolled celibacy at the price of perpetuating male glorification, domination, female inferiority and contamination.

An Apology to St. Paul

I was wrong. My eyes were originally opened not by studying St. Paul, but by listening to men who had achieved celibacy. Over and over I observed that men, who

were clearly defined as "achieved celibates," shared a striking characteristic "an expanding awareness of universal interrelatedness." This quality that I found "on the hoof" so to speak, led me back to St. Paul. Now, his ecstatic declaration "*There are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all are one in Christ Jesus.*" (Gal. 3:28). This was not merely a doctrinal definition of baptism. This has the force of personal experience—conviction born of insight and transformation. Not symbol—reality.

How could I reconcile Paul's denunciation of women; his explicit "putting them in their place;" for instance (1 Tim 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-9) passages that declare only males could be considered ministers "*I am not giving permission for a woman to teach or to tell a man what to do. A woman ought not to speak, because Adam was formed first and Eve afterward, and it was not Adam who was led astray but the woman who was led astray and fell into sin.*" (1 Tim 2:12-14).

Paul had explicitly repudiated the distinction of primacy (in 1 Cor. 11:7-12) "both come from God." The prohibition to women (in 1 Cor. 14:34-35) to speak, "*Women are to remain quiet at meetings*" and "*they must keep in the background;*" if they have questions, "*they should ask their husbands at home.*" Father Jerome Murphy O'Connor of the Ecole Biblique says it "has long been recognized that these versus are an intrusion, which appeal to a non Pauline argument based on the Law, and which contradict Paul's position on women praying and prophesying in public (1 Cor. 11:5). These versus were inserted after Paul's death in order to borrow his authority for a view which he would

have energetically refused." (*Priest and People*, Aug.-Sept. 1992, p. 311). O'Connor and his fellow scripture scholars likewise reject the household codes that subjugate women (Col. 3:18, Eph. 5:22) as unauthentic, not written by Paul but by his disciples.

Paul embraced and articulated equality by referring to women as "co-workers" (Phil. 4:3) not distinct from males. He calls a woman "an apostle" (Phil. 4:7). It is clear that St. Paul believed that women who labored for the gospel deserved to be leaders in the community "because their gifts had been achieved in service." These women were collaborators—co-apostles in Paul's estimation, not merely patrons like Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) who supported the Church with their contribution of money and acting as host to the apostles.

The early Church, the early Christian Community and culture was not ready or able to absorb the sexual/celebrate experience of either St. Paul or Jesus Christ. The evolutionary leaps that Jesus represented—one that established religion and tradition could not absorb—was correctly perceived and experienced by St. Paul. Even some of his disciples could not translate his experience into Ecclesial reality.

The history of the People of God is not dissociated from evolutionary struggles where sometimes culture and custom triumph over spiritual reality.

Dialogue With The Fourth Century.

[TO BE ADDED]

Solutions: What Direction?

Is there any hope that we can do any better than St. Paul's disciples? Is there any chance that we can sort out the authentic spiritual foundations of sexuality from cultural distortions and religious bias?

The Need To Question

Yes: The time has come: there is a convergence of intellectual and moral focus that force the question. Question is the operative word. We must be willing to face the dangerous questions of sexuality/celibacy and spirituality. Will some old biases, dearly held theories, "sacred cows" have to die if we do ask the operant questions? Surely. But we must remember that the history of religion and the history of all thought including science is marked by the graves of theories, ideas, beliefs whose time had come and gone. We are not frightened by life nor doubt its validity because we see the graves of our ancestors. We should be no more frightened by the death and burial of our outmoded religious beliefs. The Way, Truth and Life is a reality not dependent on our partial understandings and inadequate descriptions. We must strive for a clearer and more adequate understanding and description of Reality. All thinking people, including theologians, were forced to make a Copernican Shift four centuries ago in order to adjust for a new understanding of physical reality. Theologians did not lose their faith or their credibility by doing so. We must now make a shift of equal intensity, and

proportions to account for the new understanding of human nature and human sexual nature made possible by advances in the natural sciences.

Jesuit, Christopher Mooney, has put the challenge clearly: "Insofar as theologians fail to take account of physics and biology, their interpretations of their own data as well as their models of God must inevitably lose credibility."

The shift is not a minor adjustment: it entails a shift from dualism to monism—from projection to perception—a shift to scientific materialism.

The Death of Dualism

At this point, Dualism undergirds all of the official Church assumptions about sexuality. There are two essential difficulties with maintaining the current position on human sexuality. One is philosophical. Platonism, which glorified the reality of the ideal world and subordinated matter to spirit, served a prescientific order well. Stoicism, which imposed the order of reason over instinct, also served the development of the sense of the spiritual. Both reinforced the fear and distrust of sexuality (and the body in general) and glorified the ideal and the ideational (hopefully the spiritual). Delumeau (*Sin and Fear*, p. 446) put it this way:

"The distrust of sexuality involved several converging ethical values and attitudes: the Judaic concern with ritual purity, the rejection of the body by neoplatonic pessimism, and the mistrust of worldly attachments common to Stoicism and the Book of Wisdom. These three ancient traditions thus also involve the discourse of the contemptus mundi, which in fact had adopted, accumulated, and propagated them."

There is great danger in contempt for this world inspired by dualism. Disdain for life, of course, was not universal even among the monastic movement, but dualistic contempt for the material corrodes the sense of self in individuals; it also violates creation and the place of human life within the whole of material nature. The body, sex, and matter are not an accidental part of existence. Matter and sexuality are not necessary evils. Just as physical reality and laws are disregarded in the insistence of a literal biblical and a pre-Copernican understanding of the "sun rising" or "orbiting the earth," so a dualistic explanation of sexuality violates natural science. Evolutionary biology, archaeology, paleontology, genetics, and astrophysics all point toward a unitary monistic and materialistic philosophy to undergird our theology. Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin confronted the dilemma at its origin already in 1922.

"It is a doubly serious difficulty for us to retain the former representation of original sin, and this difficulty can be summed up as follows: "The more we scientifically revive the Past, the less we find any place for Adam or the earthly paradise."

The Wilsonian Shift

The Church must make a profound shift in its understanding of human sexuality. This shift will entail a reevaluation of Scripture, tradition, and the current teaching of the Church in the area of human sexuality.

The shift is as thoroughgoing than the Copernican shift which challenged the Church in the 1600s. The natural sciences now challenge irrevocable and incontrovertible former understandings of human sexuality. There is no turning back.

There can be no avoidance or denial of the profound effect that new knowledge in the natural (and social) sciences has brought to the human condition.

I believe that the theories postulated by E. O. Wilson provide the most logical framework within which to recast our understanding of human sexuality and to find our theological bearings. His approach is in some way similar, but more internally coherent and simpler than that of Teilhard. From the vantage of evolutionary biology he constructs a theory of sociobiology which is "The systematic study of the biological basis of all forms of social behavior in all kinds of organisms, including man" (OHN, p. 16).

He faces the question, "What is man's ultimate nature?" and asserts, "Biology is the key to human nature, and the social scientists cannot afford to ignore its rapidly tightening principles" (OHN, p. 13). Neither can the theologians.

There is an Aristotelian purity to Wilson in his refusal to indulge in "God Talk." He espouses a scientific materialism and advocates that theologians redefine their natural philosophy. There is here a quality of honesty and integrity which allows theologians freedom for speculation within their own domain while simultaneously holding them to the rigorous demands of scientific observation and proof.

After years of struggling to understand human sexuality within the Christian context it finally dawned on me that although every course or treatment of sex in Catholic classrooms involved a "segment on biology," none really took biology seriously. Even psychoanalysis, so conscious of the force of sexuality in human thought and function, did not acknowledge the full implications of the biological imperatives in

individual or social reality. Wilson's stance is not amoral; contrarily, he is convinced that ethical premises are "inherent in man's biological nature" (OHN, p. 5). Certainly there are dilemmas, but says Wilson, "to search for a new morality based upon a more truthful definition of man it is necessary to look inward, to dissect the machinery of the mind and to retrace its evolutionary history" (OHN, p. 4).

The fainthearted, or those looking prematurely for heresy, may be frightened by Wilson's scientific materialism. I claim that this is an asset rather than a detriment to serious theological speculation. By "injecting" our conceptualized god prematurely into a consideration of nature we do not save faith but merely allay our own discomfort. Questions of origin—"Why is there something rather than nothing?"—and questions of destiny—"What is the ultimate meaning of it all?"—are properly theological questions beyond the pale of science. They will not go away and are not betrayed by using science to help us understand the nature of humans, which is, after all, a proper study of science as well as a concern of the Church.

Mysticism: From Projection to Perception

Science, psychiatry and religion have all conspired to give mysticism a bad name. Science dismisses mysticism as an unreal entity or a fancy that indulges the unreal. Psychiatry has tended to equate mysticism with psychic illness or deviation. Some years ago I had a serious disagreement with some psychoanalysts I greatly admired who were studying mysticism. They selected diagnosed schizophrenics as subjects. Not that

spirituality is closed to the mentally ill any more than those who suffer physical illness, but the study reinforced the assumption that mysticism is a form of mental activity akin to "lack of touch with reality" when in fact, my definition demands from spirituality a greater than average contact with reality in the broadest sense. Religions tend to mark mysticism as dangerous since it cannot be contained by ritual or law.

The scientific materialism that Wilson espouses does not exclude the possibility of a spirituality and mysticism; it only restates in more sophisticated terms (required by discoveries of modern science) the Aristotelian-Thomistic axiom "There is nothing in the mind, unless previously in the senses"—There is no reality perceptible to man that is unmediated by matter. Grace, goodness, love, beauty and truth are not available to us humans except through matter.

This fact challenges religion to self examination and exhilarating interaction with the sciences in the most profound and productive exchange since the middle ages. The purification of religion from its superstitions, and magic is inevitable in a movement toward perception, and in the rejection of projections. This is where science and religion meet—here is the birth of mysticism—the perception of reality as yet unmeasurable and unfathomable.

We have often heard, "Talk is cheap." Truth and life can be cheaply championed, but are grasped only at the price of hard won perception. "Faith has no language adequate to God."

"Faith" is a word that should be used to denote our perception of Reality not as an excuse to remain intellectual and spiritual children.

Nothing challenges religious reality more profoundly than the current need to integrate sexuality and love, life and matter, Truth and perception. We live in a wonderful and exciting time, when questions demand that we stretch our energies to the fullest and cooperate with one another in our journey toward survival—salvation.