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Human Sexuality, New Directions in American Catholic Thought

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magazine, *Bannawag*. This reviewer is inclined to believe that they did not. If they did, their work would have included many more entries than are included here.

Spanish Elements in Iloko, therefore, is what may be considered a preliminary study; a more comprehensive work on the subject still awaits the efforts of equally dedicated scholars.

Marcelino A. Foronda, Jr.

HUMAN SEXUALITY, NEW DIRECTIONS IN AMERICAN CATHOLIC THOUGHT. By Anthony Kosnik, William Carroll, Agnes Cunningham, Ronald Modras, and James Schulte. New York: Paulist Press, 1977. 322 pages.

If anyone doubts that the Catholic teaching on sexuality is in a state of crisis, a sampling of post-Vatican II writings should quickly eliminate the doubt. The volume of *Concilium* (10/10): *Sexuality in Contemporary Catholicism*, highlights the current malaise which has bred uncertainty, confusion, and not a little scepticism. The multiple cultural influences, especially TV, cinema and youth cults have been affecting the moral judgments of the young in a way that has yet to be fully appreciated. The young are often in revolt against elders and tradition. The negative image of the magisterial Church insofar as sexual matters are concerned does not help. This attitude is due to many factors, including, in particular, the reaction to *Humanae Vitae*.

The growing acceptance of couples living together and openly rejecting marriage has been singled out by Fr. Richard A. McCormick (*Theological Studies* 34 [1973]) as a proof that marriage itself is in crisis. "If men and women in increasing numbers are abandoning the desirability of a permanent relationship of exclusive fidelity, then clearly the meaning of sexuality before marriage is bound to be affected" (p. 92). He concludes that it is "the man-woman relationship and the condition for growth in intimacy that we ought to be discussing" (*ibid.*).

Admitting that youth and young adults are not going to make their decision in terms of the judgment of their elders since "we disappointed them too often and too long" (p. 90), McCormick adds that "education by edict has probably had its day" (*ibid.*). In its place a new form of communication is needed. One form that he suggests is "the open, patient, nonjudgmental exploration with young adults of the meaning of marriage and human sexuality" (*ibid.*).

If we appreciate the opinions and suggestions of these writers, then we should welcome *Human Sexuality* as an effort to come to grips with the problem. This does not mean that the book deserves a blanket endorsement, anymore than it deserves a total condemnation. It should be taken as a tentative, probing study, as the authors explicitly affirm it to be in their "Preface."

The authors treat of human sexuality in the Bible (25 pages), in the

Christian tradition (19 pages), in the empirical sciences (24 pages), and in theology (20 pages). Obviously, these brief sketches could not do full justice to such vast amounts of history and thought. Finally they present pastoral guidelines for the contemporary critical areas of human sexuality covering 139 pages. Great emphasis is placed on the norm of "the nature of the person and his acts" as found in Vatican II, and developed in the 1975 document of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics" (published as appendix 3 of *Human Sexuality*). The authors acclaim this as a new era "ushered in with regard to the Church's understanding of and approach to sexuality — human sexuality must serve the radical purpose of promoting growth toward personal maturity and integration into society" (pp. 50–51). In applying this principle they reject both the extremely subjective criterion of sincere intention alone as well as the exaggerated objective criterion of act alone as unacceptable. The authors propose as a fundamental principle in all sexual activity: creative growth toward integration (chapter IV, *passim*).

It is on this area of practical pastoral guidelines where most criticism of the book will focus. Not everyone will agree with their application of principle to the questions of marital and premarital sex, contraception, sterilization, and homosexuality, the most important topics treated.

Insofar as *Human Sexuality* represents the writings of many respected Catholic theologians on the questions of contraception and sterilization, they cannot be rejected out of hand, even though their teaching does not agree completely with the official teaching of the Magisterium. In this area of non-infallible teaching the Magisterium must respect the charism of the theologians in their scholarly effort to seek the truth. As Yves Congar has stated so forcefully (*Theology Digest* 25 [1977]: 20) we must put "truth, the apostolic faith which has been handed down, confessed, preached and celebrated, at the top. And under it, at its service, we must place the magisterium of apostolic ministry and the research and teaching of theologians, together with the belief of the faithful." The writings of so many dedicated theologians can be ignored or condemned only at great peril to the credibility of the Magisterium. Respect for the age-old tradition of solidly probable opinions does not die easily. Today especially it is dangerous to ignore such opinions because, as Congar says, "The social and philosophical climate has also changed. Authoritative and official assertions are no longer automatically accepted" (*ibid.*).

The pastoral guidelines on premarital sexual intercourse are carefully nuanced in *Human Sexuality*. If we accept, as it seems we must, that "it would be rash to presume that a clear and unambiguous norm will provide a simple resolution of the problem, so that nothing more need be said" (p. 164), then we will be prepared to go along with the authors in asking the many difficult questions that must be answered by those sincerely trying to form their conscience in a Christian manner. The authors are articulating the current

malaise when they say that "the traditional moral code regarding premarital sex is inadequate, particularly in its lack of distinction between the ages, attitudes and intentions of the people involved" (p. 167). They insist, however, that the alternative "is not simply moral relativism or the surrender of human values, Christian ideals, or ethical norms. Fidelity, fairness, and respect for the dignity of persons are fundamental and enduring aspects of the Christian ethical response to the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ" (ibid.). Spelling out the many questions that counselors should make young people face to truly evaluate this premarital intimacy problem, insisting on "the essential relationship between sex and marriage," they affirm that "even in the wake of a sexual revolution, it can be maintained and substantiated that marriage is the ideal context for the full human realization and self-communication that is involved in the sexual expression of love" (ibid.). They are quite traditional in holding that "among the characteristics of wholesome human sexuality, fidelity is not among the least" (ibid.).

Realism finds them cautioning that "one would be well advised not to trust oneself to be trustworthy, much less ask another to trust him or her, without assuming the commitments of marriage" (p. 169). There is much wisdom in their observation that "it is the human capacity for responsibility and fidelity to the being and well-being of another that makes marriage possible; it is the human inclination to irresponsibility and infidelity that make marriage necessary" (ibid.).

It is difficult to reconcile these insights on sexual intimacy for the unmarried with the possibility of extramarital affairs which the authors would allow with "the greatest caution" to married people in extraordinary situations when such adultery would be truly "creative and integrative" for all concerned. What is true for the single must be true also for the married. What happened to their insights on the responsibility and fidelity to the being and well-being of another in marriage?

Homosexuality is a very controversial subject today for the Catholic theologian. The research of Scripture scholars will almost certainly force a revision of the biblical argument condemning homosexual activity. However, theologians who will admit the need for a revision are not always willing to accept the new position that equates heterosexual with homosexual as two available life styles. In spite of the reservations of the authors the "lesser evil" position of such writers as Richard A. McCormick, Eugene Kennedy, and Charles Curran seems the most acceptable, recognizing that homosexual acts are wrong but not necessarily condemning every form of homosexual expression or union as absolutely immoral. Without endorsing homosexuality as such this position recognizes that not all can live up to the ideal (celibacy not freely chosen) and reluctantly allows homosexual expressions and unions as the lesser of two evils or as the only way in which some persons can find

a satisfying degree of humanity in their lives. The alternative would be to lead a promiscuous life filled with guilt and fear (p. 203).

As partial support for their position on homosexuality the authors cite the new direction taken by the American Psychiatric Association (A.P.A.) in removing homosexuality from the test of recognized mental disorders, reducing it to a new category of "sexual orientation disturbance" (p. 70). The controversy that still surrounds this 14 December 1973 decision of the A.P.A. is briefly mentioned by the authors. Slightly less than 6,000 out of 17,000 members approved, with only 11,000 participating in the voting; 4,000 disapproved and the rest abstained (p. 71).

Arguing from this the authors state that A.P.A. is divided on the issue, that it is saying that homosexuality is not an optimal condition, at least in our society (*ibid.*). But when giving pastoral guidelines on homosexuality the authors state that "current research and the direction taken by the A.P.A. admit the possibility of healthy homosexuality, in which there is no inherent connection between homosexual orientation and clinical symptoms of mental or emotional illness" (p. 211).

This vote of the A.P.A. has to be studied more carefully to be properly evaluated. Charles Socarides, an associate clinical professor of Psychiatry at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City, treats the matter in detail in his paper, "Homosexuality is not just an Alternate Life Style." (*Male and Female*, edited by Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse and Urban T. Holmes [New York: Seabury Press, 1976], pp. 144-56). Dr. Socarides, a collaborating psychoanalyst at the Columbia Institute, has previously published over 40 psychoanalytic papers and two books, *The Overt Homosexual* and *Beyond Sexual Freedom*.

The politics behind the A.P.A. decision is spelled out by Dr. Socarides. An *Ad Hoc Committee Against the Deletion of Homosexuality* was formed by members of the A.P.A. But their effort to force a reversal of the original vote by a referendum was blunted by a letter which, though not acknowledged as such, actually emanated from the National Gay Liberation Task Force, and Dr. Socarides claims "may have indeed constituted unfair and hidden lobbying with certain of our members and was a violation of the ethical and fair voting procedures of our organization" (p. 151). When the results of the referendum were announced on 8 April 1974, the President of the A.P.A., Dr. Alfred Freedman, tried to clarify the new position by saying that the A.P.A. "doesn't state it (homosexuality) as normal. It merely states that it is not a mental illness" (*ibid.*).

In the opinion of Dr. Socarides this "change of direction of the A.P.A." pronouncing on "the normalcy of one of psychiatry's most severe examples of sexual pathology is all the more remarkable, brash, and outrageous when one considers that it involved the out-of-hand and peremptory disregard and dismissal, not only of hundreds of psychiatric and psychoanalytic research

papers and reports but of a number of other serious studies by groups of psychiatrists, psychologists and educators over the past seventy years; for example, the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry Report, 1955; New York Academy of Medicine Report, 1964, etc." (p. 150).

One of the strongest arguments of Dr. Socarides is the effect on adolescents if homosexuality is accepted as an alternative life style, on a par with heterosexuality. "Adolescents, nearly all of whom experience some degree of uncertainty as to sexual identity, will be discouraged from assuming that one form of gender identity is preferable to another. Those persons who already have a homosexual problem will be discouraged from finding their way out of a self-destructive fantasy, discouraged from learning to accept themselves as male or female — homosexuality cannot make a society or keep ours going for very long. It operates against the cohesive elements of society Those who reinforce the disintegrative elements in our society will get no thanks from future generations. The family will become the ultimate victim in homosexuality" (p. 154).

Another writer, William Muehl, Anglican lawyer, professor of homiletics at the Yale Divinity School, writes "Some Words of Caution," (pp. 167–74 of *Male and Female*), warning against the current simplistic rush to change the Christian approach to homosexuality. When the more militant homosexuals insist on linking their cause with crusades on behalf of blacks, poor people, antiwar programs and women's rights, Muehl points out a "very important distinction between the proposals of Gay Liberation and such other appeals for changes in the attitudes of Christian Churches" (p. 173). These other causes are asking Christians to bring their conduct in line with their principles; the Gay Liberation movement is asking the Christians to change their principles, to "reverse their position on a moral issue of great importance to both themselves and society revising principle to accommodate a particular and somewhat exotic practice. It is critical that Christians bear this distinction in mind and not allow their guilt feelings to push them into premature and ill-advised responses toward homosexuality" (p. 174).

We must all avoid the excesses of the past in treating homosexuals as some sort of depraved species to be driven from the Church and harassed at law. Homosexuality is a neutral condition, morally speaking; it does not tell us whether the individual is a saint or a sinner, any more than does heterosexuality as an identifying label. But Muehl insists that when all of this is affirmed we must still clearly and firmly state that the homosexual relationship cannot "be defined as an appropriate expression of Christian love in interpersonal terms" (*ibid.*).

Space does not permit further comment. But what has been said in this review should show the value of the work at hand and, at the same time, the caution with which it must be accepted, mindful always of its tentative, probing approach to one of the most serious problems of our day. Disagreement and reservations are to be expected when so many aspects of human sexuality are treated in our post-Vatican II era.

Gerald W. Healy