

SEXUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

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THERE HAS BEEN a gradual consensus forming within doctrinal and pastoral quarters of the Christian Churches during the last half century. It affirms that a prophetic stance on social justice is a requirement of the gospel. Not yet, however, has sexuality been defined as a social issue to which justice applies. Sexuality continues to be considered a matter of nature, in the sense of biological function and animal instinct, definitely in need of controls and limits, but not yet entrusted to the same cultural or historical standards that apply to other human transactions in the twentieth century. The acceptability of sexual intentions, actions and relations is therefore judged on a different standard than the other interactions of human beings in society. This would be understandable, perhaps even laudatory, if it produced a moral climate in which minimal requirements of justice were assured and an environment in which the love, hope and community proclaimed by Christ were embodied. As a matter of fact, the continued dependence of the Christian tradition in explicit form, the Roman Catholic tradition, on a different reading of 'natural law' for sexual issues than for social issues has produced an official teaching that can be shown to perpetrate and protect discriminatory and oppressive attitudes and social structures.

Since the nineteenth century papal teaching has accepted as part of its ministry the call to speak and write against social inequities, and where previous teaching was found to be part of the problem rather than part of the solution, the previous teaching was simply superseded in an appeal to a prior, more universal, or more evangelical interpretation. This teaching has been prophetic in the areas of 1) race relations; 2) economic issues such as the rights to employment, to just wage, to share in resources; 3) war and peace issues; and 4) questions of national autonomy and the right to the development of groups and peoples without interference from

others whose self-interest might be lessened by such development. In fact the formal authoritative teaching has gone so far as to assert the duty of developed groups and peoples to assist in a positive way in the fullest development of those just beginning to gain a sense of their own autonomy and worth. Only the area of sexual relations has a static model, denying the possibility of moral development, and asserting an absolute, exceptionless code that is alleged to transcend practical human reason and experience. On no grounds other than the allegation that a divine will is self-evident in the traditional interpretation of what 'nature' requires, the teaching continues to call for the virtues of obedience and self-control, but leaves unchallenged a sexual system in which the *status quo* is not only patently unjust, but continues to function as the prime analogue by which other forms of injustice are learned.

Official Catholic teaching produced a sexual *Rerum novarum* of sorts with the Vatican II emphasis on the integral character of human sexuality, the notion of marriage as primarily a community of love, and the location of ethical thinking in a consideration of the person and her acts. However, before the practical significance for sexual teaching was noted, much less fully explored, the publication, in what seemed to be quick succession, of *Humanae vitae* (1968), *Vatican declaration on sexual ethics* (1975), the *Declaration on the ordination of women* (1976) and the *Letter on the pastoral care of homosexual persons* (1985) firmly reasserted the 'old order' of exclusively physicalist interpretations of the natural law teaching on the matter. To this day, the same content is repeated, though not advanced with new and persuasive argument.

My recent work has been to call attention to the human meanings of sexuality as social, historical meanings; and thereby, to show that in our sexual relations as in our political and economic transactions, justice must be the operative virtue. When mere obedience to material norms is mandated, our standards of moral living are not higher, but less human. In fact, the assumption that sexual relations are dictated by an exceptionless norm of nature has produced, as the effect of the moral system, oppressions and offences against the nature and dignity of human persons. And this in its keeping, not in its transgressing. In the present essay, I would like to indicate what appears to me to be the state of the question regarding reflection on the relationship of sexuality and social justice, by summarizing some of the significant research of

the past two decades and indicating a hopeful direction for the future.

To do this I will develop three points: 1) assumptions and definitions that have produced, at long last, the possibility of applying 'historical' rather than 'classical' consciousness to sexual meanings and issues; 2) insights from some of the literature that documents and enables this shift; and 3) some opening suggestions for a *Populorum progressio* of human sexual life.

Classical consciousness no longer adequate to questions of sexuality

Contemporary theology, from scripture study to doctrinal critique and articulation, has taken the turn from classical to 'linguistic' consciousness, by which is meant that it is now able to think of its formulations in terms of their culture-bound and historically-contingent character. This shift is particularly important in terms of its effect on our understanding of what and how we know. From a classical presupposition about knowledge that assumes the mind can have direct access to knowledge without the mediation of language, there has been a critique followed by a 'turn' which assumes that interpretation (that is, a hermeneutics) is essential to understanding the tradition. David Tracy, in *Plurality and ambiguity* (1987), makes this point. 'To understand at all is to interpret. To act well is to interpret a situation demanding some action and to interpret a correct strategy for that action.'¹ The Church, in its reflection upon its knowledge regarding the compatibility with the gospel of human practices like slavery, usury and freedom of conscience, made this shift toward historic consciousness when it interpreted its previous traditions regarding these questions in terms of its present self-understanding.² Regarding sexual questions, it has not yet been able to do so.

Another shift which made necessary the rethinking of sexuality in the context of Christian community and Christian teaching was that presided over effectively by Pope Paul VI: a shift in the understanding of justice. After World War II, Catholic social teaching, under the leadership of Pius XII, de-emphasized Pius XI's call for total reorganization of society according to a Thomistic model and supported winnable reforms like trade unionism and other positive liberal social movements. The encyclicals of Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI, the Vatican II document, 'The Church in the modern world', and the statement, 'Justice in the world', issued by the 1971 Synod of Bishops, signalled to many

that the Church had taken a whole new position with regard to the major social and economic questions confronting humankind. That impression has been deepened by the calls to justice and peace of the present Bishop of Rome, John Paul II, as well as the 'already and not yet' letters of the American bishops and other bishops' conferences on peace and the economic order. Since the 1960s the social doctrine of the Church has addressed the global situation and recognized the diversity of the world's regions. It was recognized that for the teaching to serve the common good it would have to evolve and be specially adapted to particular situations. One universal teaching, applicable to all situations, is not expected from the universal Church in social questions. It is a formal, rather than a material, ethic. Its centrepiece is justice, founded in the concern to affirm the rights, dignity and worth of human beings. An aspect of that dignity is the right of the person to participate in decisions regarding her own situation.

In *Populorum progressio*, Paul VI does no less than redefine justice. From the earlier usage denoting the rights and duties incumbent on a person given his place in the established hierarchical order of things, it is now viewed as the reordered rights and duties of individuals and societies *toward* and *within* a new and more equitable order. What is the newfound official Christian response to allegations of injustice in the economic order? No longer to use its powers of persuasion and authority to push people back into the old order! It has recognized in Jesus's teaching the imperatives to stand with those who have named their own oppression, and to call the oppressor to repentance and restitution. It has resisted the temptation to co-opt their right to name their own situation; and it has called prophetically for justice in the land and in the hearts of people. What is the official Christian response to injustice in the sexual order? So far it has been to suppress discussion, development, and to drag behind society at large in structural change.

Social justice is that virtue which seeks to apply the gospel command of love to the way we organize our life together, locally, nationally and internationally. It seeks to help us evaluate the kind of society we have, and most of all, to point to the kind of society we seek to build and shape as we pursue our work in preparing the way for the kingdom of God. Unlike social service which seeks to give immediate help to the person in need, social justice seeks to change the structures and systems in our society that cause

human pain and suffering. It seeks to deal with the causes of social evil, and to create a social context where each person can develop without arbitrary and systematic obstacles.

Merely reading selected passages from *Populorum progressio*³ with sexual development in mind can call attention to their potential applicability.

Since the Church lives in history, she ought to 'scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel' (13).

Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every man (*sic*) and of the whole man (*sic*) . . . In the design of God, every man (*sic*) is called upon to develop and fulfill himself (*sic*), for every life is a vocation. (14, 15)

Development demands bold transformations, innovations that go deep. Urgent reforms should be undertaken without delay. (32)

There can be no progress towards the complete development of man without the simultaneous development of all humanity in the spirit of solidarity. (43)

The teaching of Leo XIII in *Rerum novarum* is always valid: if the positions of the contracting parties are too unequal, the consent of the parties does not suffice to guarantee the justice of their contract, and the rule of free agreement remains subservient to the demands of . . . social justice. (59)

. . . it belongs to the laymen (*sic*) without waiting passively for orders and directives, to take the initiative freely and to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of the community in which they live. . . . They will certainly desire to be in the first ranks of those who collaborate to establish as fact and reality an international morality based on justice and equity. (81)

A third factor that overturns not only some assumptions and definitions of past theology, but goes so deeply as to introduce a completely new hermeneutic, a vision of reality that calls into question all previous philosophical and religious assumptions, is the women's movement, which in its intellectual form might be referred to as the feminist premise. The feminist premise is the premise that whatever does not affirm the full humanity of women is false and to be denied the allegiance warranted by truth.⁴ This is so whether the affirmation is as old as the oldest text in scripture or whether it comes from the most recent speculation. On face

value, any system of 'justice' that assumes as acceptable the structured and unquestioned subordination of women is therefore unable to support its claim to truth and obedience, whether that claim is made in the name of a God or a humanism. Thus most, if not all, traditional formulations that claim to be revelation must be reinterpreted. This is true for religious symbols as well as for guidelines for human interaction. If Jesus Christ is to be the norm and salvation for the fully human, it must become possible to think of him as containing, not only the new Adam but also the new *Eve*. Resistance to such a thought signals at least two things: an inability to value the feminine to the extent the masculine has been valued, and a lack of consciousness of the extent to which the symbol of Eve has been associated with evil, even after and unredeemed by the doctrine of the incarnation of the divine in the human Christ. Moreover, not only the symbol of Christ but the symbol of Mary would require reinterpretation. For example, St Ambrose speaks of the Mother of God 'whose life was such that it can be a pattern for all' (*De virginibus*, lib II, cap II, n15: PL 16,22). This is quoted in papal documents as if addressing women only, and the quote is used to admonish women only to domestic lives of service. Even in the original context, it is clear that Mary is envisioned as a model for women in terms of a virginal sexuality that was not normative for men. If Mary is to be a model for any Christian at all, according to feminist analysis, she should be invoked as a model for all. The assumption of two 'natures' of humanity implicit in previous use of religious symbolism reveals the conclusions to be patently false.

There are, of course, many other clusters of assumptions and definitions at stake in the analysis of sexuality as a social justice issue. Here at least three shifts were shown to be relevant: that from a classical to a historical/linguistic consciousness; that from an understanding of justice as right order of relationships relative to an unchallenged and already structured system to justice as development of the person with an absolute regard for her dignity and equality; and finally, the shift from a patriarchal to a feminist perspective, which applies a hermeneutic of suspicion to all symbols of power.

Themes and insights from recent scholarship

Since not all topics pertinent to the consideration of sexuality and social justice can be included in an article this length, I will

propose three. Anthropology has made significant progress in identifying the origins of social inequities. Moral thinkers have contributed to this theme with the discovery of the unity of the personal and the political. And issue-oriented scholarship has contributed significantly to sex-related social justice issues, such issues as rape, pornography and forced child-bearing.

1. *The sex-gender origins of structured injustice*

The recent book by Gerda Lerner (*The creation of patriarchy*), is identified as the first volume in a series on women and history. Professor Lerner is Senior Distinguished Research Professor at the University of Wisconsin, and a historian held in great respect by the American Historical Association. These credentials are important given the conclusions reached by her research, conclusions regarding the mutual effects of civilization (in the sense of the establishing of stable and ordered city-states) and sexism (in the sense of gradual but universal and pervasive subordination of women). The relationship between these two is difficult to accept, given the fact that civilization is considered a good and sexism an evil. As she analyzes the ancient Mesopotamian sources she finds evidence that the ideology of male supremacy based on beliefs about male superiority grows out of and mutually supports structures of institutionalized patriarchy.

In fact, patriarchy as a system of hierarchy was learned historically from the subordination of women, sometimes done with application of force and other times in exchange for protection and privilege. She prefers (as do I) the term subordination to oppression, since the latter term tends to hide, in its rhetorical force the evidence that women,

more than any other group, have collaborated in their own subordination through their acceptance of the sex-gender system. They have internalized the values that subordinate them to such an extent that they voluntarily pass them on to their children.⁵

The cooperation of women is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination, educational deprivation, the denial to women of knowledge of their history, the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining 'respectability' and 'deviance' according to women's sexual activities, by restraint and outright violence, by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power,

and by awarding class privilege to conforming women. This, while certainly a long enough list, omits that, at least for the past three thousand years, religious authority has invested this system, objectively unjust, with sanctions that dispense divine reward for its internalization and communication, and condemn in God's name as sinful those women who would reject it. One very good reason that sex-gender issues must come to be considered in a new way by Christian leaders committed to justice is that organized religion is, in our day, the most powerful and self-righteous enforcer of paternalistic dominance over women's sexuality.

A second, equally fundamental insight to come from Lerner's work is that experiential knowledge gained from controlling women enabled early warriors to take, and early rulers to establish slavery. The success of the system of the exchange of women, along with the practical benefits of taking the women of conquered enemies into slavery while killing the men created the conditions not only for the acceptability but the presumed naturalness of slavery within civilized society. Women themselves became a resource, exchanged or bought in marriages for the benefit of their families, later conquered or bought in slavery, where their sexual services were part of their labour and their children were the property of their masters. Says Lerner,

Sexism stands in the same relation to paternalism as racism does to slavery. Both ideologies enabled the dominant to convince themselves that they were extending paternalistic benevolence to creatures inferior and weaker than themselves.⁶

The truly prophetic task for Christian community in its members and its leaders is to see through this system of subordination as caretaking and *unlearn* it. At its very root were practised the skills that made possible all the related forms of oppression that have come to light in our time. With the renunciation of sexism; slavery, racism and classism of all sorts are robbed of their justifying paradigm.

Lerner succeeds admirably, through her historical analysis, in showing why sexism is a more difficult injustice to see, much less correct. While slaves were driven to group solidarity by racism, women were separated from one another by sexism. Moreover, in societies where structured patriarchy might have given way to egalitarianism, as long as sexism as an ideology existed or exists,

patriarchal relations could easily be re-established, even when legal changes have occurred to outlaw them. Where the very ideal of Christian community is modelled on patriarchal family, there is no liberating community for women. Previous historical work showed no precedent for an alternative to the pervasive evidences of systems of male superiority. Thus no alternatives could be imagined. This feature of male hegemony has been most damaging to women and has ensured their subordinate status for millennia. The denial to women of their history has reinforced their acceptance of the ideology of patriarchy and has undermined the individual woman's sense of self-worth. Christian theology, as developed and canonized to this century, has not ameliorated the situation. In fact by the development of the model of the Trinity entirely within patriarchal categories, the economy of salvation has actually functioned as an economy of alienation for women—from each other prior to coming to consciousness of this situation; from patriarchal images of God and Church when conscious of their own solidarity.

But the force of Lerner's scholarship is not despair at the *status quo*; it gives an ability to see through the past in such a way that the tasks are clear and the energy is summoned. At least two tasks emerge in the interests of justice: 1) be (temporarily) woman-centred and 2) leave patriarchal thought behind. Being woman-centred means ignoring all evidence of women's marginality, and asking: if women were central to this argument, how would it be defined? When using methods and concepts from traditional systems of thought, it means using them from the vantage point of the centrality of women. In moving to the centre, they transform the system. Leaving patriarchal thought behind means being sceptical toward all assumptions, ordering values and definitions. It means 'getting rid of the great men in our heads and substituting for them ourselves, our sisters, our anonymous foremothers'.⁷ After all, the system of patriarchy has now been shown to be a historic construct; it has a beginning; it will have an end. Reading the signs of the times (as *Mater et magistra* encouraged), from the perspective of the 'poor', one can see that the hierarchical dualism of this system no longer serves the needs of men or women. Moreover, 'in its inextricable linkage to militarism, hierarchy, and racism it threatens the very existence of life on earth'.⁸

Scholarship on the relationship between ancient sex-gender arrangements and current social injustices includes more than light

on the origins of subordination according to gender. Perhaps the most telling point for me was the insight that it is not accurate to include male sexuality in the generalization that sex was devalued with the devaluation of female functions and gender role definitions. Predating historical record is the recognition of the male function in procreation. The sacralizing of male procreative sex took place, as we know from evidence in myth and religious symbol, with a shift from the veneration of the Mother-Goddess in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods.⁹ This is confirmed by archaeological data. The leading metaphors in religious consciousness then changed 1) from the vulva of the goddess to the seed of man, 2) from the tree of life to the tree of knowledge; and 3) from the celebration of the Sacred Marriage to the biblical covenants. The move away from the Mother-Goddess as the sole principle of creativity to the creative spirit as an abstract, unseen power was a precondition for the move toward monotheism. This process of moving from the numerous anthropomorphic gods and goddesses as symbols of the divine to the One God continued for a period of more than a thousand years and culminated in the Book of Genesis.

Lerner finds a correlation between the social organization favouring male dominance and the religious beliefs reflecting one male God in Egypt as well as in Israel and Mesopotamia. It is a tragic accident of history that the enormous advance of human beings in the direction of abstract thought and the definition of universally valid symbols occurred under circumstances which strengthened and affirmed patriarchy. Thus for females, the redefinition of sexuality with the Book of Genesis was beneficial and redemptive only within the boundaries of patriarchal dominance. The procreative function had been claimed by the male; female sexuality, in so far as it did not serve the patriarchal function, was decreed as outside the divine plan. From this historical point it is not sexuality but *female* sexuality which is excluded from directly being able to represent the divine principle. Procreativity, under the control of the male, remains sacred. But allegedly by the will of Creator, according to the claim of the biblical narrative, women are included in his covenant only through the mediation of men. When Aristotle's inferior and incomplete female is added to the major metaphor of the fallen Eve, and incorporated into every major explanatory system, the devaluation of female sexuality takes on the life and force of actuality. This is built into the language, philosophy and religion of western civilization.

Given the assumption of their inferior status by nature, the sexuality of women could be made a commodity, bought, sold and possessed. Significant for the study of sexuality in relation to justice is the subtle but important point that it was never women as such but their sexuality and reproductive capacity which was perceived as a commodity and so treated. Since women's sexuality, as an aspect of their body, was controlled by others, women always and to this day lived in a relatively greater state of un-freedom than did men of their group. Even Christian patriarchy, which is based upon monogamy and an ideal of mutuality, assumes a double sexual standard. This, which disadvantages women and separates them into respectable and unrespectable according to their sexual conformity, has always been part of the system. The family not merely mirrors the order in the state and educates its children to follow it, it also creates and constantly reinforces that order. The control of male procreative capacity was relative and cultural; the control of female sexuality has been absolute and viewed as natural. Records of a female experience of sexuality untouched by patriarchy, while recorded in myth and symbol, not history, give glimpses of sexuality as it was 'in the beginning': sacred, rich in diversity, and fully in the service of life.

2. *The personal is the political*

In the recent literature of morality and ethics, a connection is acknowledged between the rules imposed on persons and the interests of those holding power. For me the connection between political control and sexuality was first made forcefully by Samuel Laeuchli in his book, *Power and sexuality*,¹¹ a study of the canons of the Council of Elvira, the first council of the Church to legislate regarding sexual matters. His analysis showed that not the requirement of gospel morality, but the need for a distinctive and superior social stance gave rise to authoritative and centralized teaching about particular relations and acts. The Church, just recently emerged from persecuted status, and newly established within the empire, urged an absolutized ethic of restraint as a means of asserting identity over against other groups and of bonding within a group that now needed a principle of cohesion. This goes far to explain the sense of seriousness that has attended any deviation from community sexual norms. The trespassing of sexual taboos is condemned disproportionately to deviations from other norms (e.g. regarding property, violence, food, or an inflated sense of

self). Sexual self-discipline has been regarded as a condition for membership and a measure of morality in general, not unlike dietary self-discipline in pre-Christian Jewish life. Norms regarding other social relations have carried no such onus for Christians.

Current developments in moral thinking are increasingly willing to consider moral questions within their communal contexts.¹² In fact, every human community follows certain patterns of moral behaviour that are bound up with the total pattern of a given culture. Social ethics particularly has taught us to recognize that the interests of gaining and sustaining power are never far from the concrete rules that order a particular unit of society.

Morality refers to the complex of norms that human beings think must guide them in their freedom. It presupposes freedom, without which there can be no morality. It presupposes consciousness of the norms to which freedom is to be subjected. That norm, then, lives in human consciousness. It is essentially a 'thought'. Remaining an ideal, it is expressed in concrete terms according to the demands and possibilities of the constantly changing and developing situation. What keeps it going? Its dynamism can be understood as the interplay of two opposed tendencies. On the one hand, morality shows an inclination to become 'established'. The patterns of social behaviour, set up to satisfy the needs of the community and to adapt to a current situation, are so sanctioned by social pressure that they become second nature. In the language of sociology, the adaptive tends to become 'addictive'. It can appear that the ability to see 'through' the concrete norms to the foundational ideal has been lost. On the other hand, the human person who values her authenticity will try constantly to break through a moral code that threatens her integrity and to bring back to life the genuine ideal. This counter tendency tries to keep morality from being collapsed into the moral code, and to enable human beings to imagine alternatives to fixed customs when these are experienced as inauthentic. It is in order to lead them back to authentic morality that the laws must give priority to persons' good. This dialectic has operated throughout the history of morality; what appears to be newly glimpsed by moral thinkers today is that the interplay is not just between individual and community, but between the community in its present institution and its possible future forms. That is, the development toward true morality is not just the transformation of the individual, but of the community as well.¹³ In this way the moral wisdom of a social justice approach

transcends that of a personalist Christian ethic. Social justice norms applied to concrete situations in sexual life promise to make the person more fully developed toward authentic loving action *by* moving the Christian community in a prophetic direction. They will not erode the true authority of the community with regard to personal conscience because they will re-call the community itself to authentic morality.

Open moral debate regarding issues of economics and defence provide a prophetic model for what has recently been called the 'community of moral discourse'.¹⁴ When this acknowledges also the 'discipleship of equals',¹⁵ it is clear that open moral debate *and* respect for authoritative teaching can co-exist. The theological reason for listening to the moral reflection on sexuality from groups characterized by their silence and powerlessness is that those considered the poor and marginalized are 'God's own privileged ones' in the eyes of the great prophets. In fact, women, non-European Christians, and gay and lesbian Christians are all beginning to contribute to the moral debate on sexual ethics, though not without great personal courage. The stages in their growth to articulation have typically been 1) 'conscientization'; 2) work for social justice for themselves and others; 3) a spirituality that recognized the need for self-purification as well as self-confidence; and 4) the call to speak in the midst of the Church. It could be described as a journey from social awareness to spirituality to theology. Its effect is likely to be the establishment of a new theological agenda to promote 'just love'¹⁶ in the world.

Sexuality, it is important to remind ourselves, involves both more and less than morality. The temptation of the past was to reduce it to rules for procreation within marriage; the temptation of the present is to allow it to be subsumed under metaphors of disease and violence. This leads us to a consideration of the issues facing social policy and ministry in dealing with sexual exploitation.

3. *Issues and response*

The slight nod of agreement that one can count on when addressing the theme of sexuality and justice comes when one raises the issues that 'cry to heaven'. Few are unaware of the destructiveness of a sexuality that appears aroused by violence and intent on its own satisfaction no matter what the cost to the object of its attention. In our day the social contract for secrecy regarding domestic life has been broken. We are awakened with new urgency

to the pervasiveness of sexual crimes. Consciousness has also been raised regarding the victimization of those whom the law assumed needed no protection, namely spouses and children. Work in documenting the facts regarding sexual exploitation as well as serving to minister to the survivors of such exploitation has been proceeding rapidly and with transforming effect. I would like only to call attention to a few ideas that this work raises for me as I consider the state of the question.

In facing the challenge, as all do, to cooperate in bringing about structures and institutions in which 'just love' thrives and all forms of exploitative, manipulative or violent 'love' wither like seeds planted on rock, we may be wise to use the criterion of spiritual and liturgical life: we must discern 'what must die and what must be transformed'. Two general guidelines may help. 1) Persons must not be treated like commodities; and 2) those things which thrive on the ignorance, powerlessness and pseudo-autonomy of those who have not yet taken ownership of their own sexuality must be considered oppressive forces. They must be opposed with all the moral and political power of an enlightened Christian community, committed to the sexual liberation of its members.

The first of these guidelines applies unambiguously to a whole spectrum of issues. In this context it becomes clear that children are not for the emotional fulfillment (only) of their parents. Decisions about parental rights, communal responsibility and reproductive technology can all benefit from reflection upon this principle. Moreover, those issues which depend upon reducing persons to their sexuality and relegating that sexuality to the category of disreputable can be understood more accurately by virtue of this principle. It turns upside down some of the moral judgements regarding gays and lesbians, prostitutes and others. The second of these guidelines could go far toward encouraging the fullest development toward religious, moral and sexual adulthood of human persons. To do so, the community would have to stand, not primarily against the victims who were co-opted into acquiescence in actions or roles they had insufficient knowledge or power to refuse, but primarily against those entrepreneurs and structures which benefit from the immaturity and fear of others. Here the pornography industry is indicted. So too are those who protect their self-righteousness by excessive identification of AIDS with homosexuality and use fear of the disease to truncate the civil and religious rights of others. Here also the institutionalized deprivation

of education that characterizes the Church in relation to human sexual expression must be identified as a sign of sin, not a sign of grace.

Another idea that deserves attention in the context of worldwide awareness of destructive sexuality is that one is influenced by one's allies. Obviously Christian leaders have always sought to ally with likeminded others to work together toward common elements in their vision of society. From the times of Paul's alliance with Stoic philosophy and Augustine's alliance with neo-Platonism it has been clear that evil as well as good effects may come from such combined efforts. The value that was more foundational to the Christian community was, on occasion, lost to view for centuries because the fervour of stamping out a social disorder destroyed a related value. Another way of saying the same thing is to say that the desire to rid society of an abuse may backfire and deprive it also of a legitimate 'use'.¹⁷ We have examples of this in the institution of compulsory celibacy for the clergy, in the suppression of the Beguines and other spiritual movements of the laity, and in the inquisitional activities of the 'Holy Office' that delayed for generations the practice of a truly constructive and critical form of theological inquiry. We see the same phenomenon, but from a positive vantage point, in the recovery by Vatican II of an almost forgotten value for freedom of conscience.

The challenge to thinking Christians facing public recital of so many forms of abusive sexuality is to deal with the violence and disease without succumbing to the temptation to see all of sexuality in its shadow.

The agenda for the present includes, as I see it, both the sacral and the prophetic functions that the Church continues to be called to perform. By its sacramental function, it must continue to disclose the joy and beauty of God's presence in sexual as in other aspects of human life and history. The celebration of the holy meaning of sexual love connects those who love to the past, and calls to their memory its prime analogate: the great mystery of Jesus's passage through death to risen life. By its prophetic function the Christian community must challenge present forms for the sake of a fuller vision of the future to which Christ calls us. It involves:

- turning from the ideology that rationalizes the subordination of women to a *Populorum progressio* approach to sexuality;
- committing each and every one of our resources to the fullest personal development of all;

—imagining into existence a community that is at the same time a community of memory, a discipleship of equals and a community of dynamic moral discourse.

The Christian community, this time not the monastics but the spiritually and theologically literate laity, can be for a transformed use of sexuality what the Church was for culture in the early medieval period. Out of the danger and opportunity of a crisis can come a community characterized by 'just love'. 'See *how* they love one another,' the people will say, . . . 'with justice'.

NOTES

- ¹ Tracy, David: *Plurality and ambiguity: hermeneutics, religion, hope* (San Francisco, 1987), p 9.
- ² For usury and slavery cf White, R. E. O.: *Christian ethics: the historical development* (Atlanta, 1981); for freedom of conscience cf Murray, John Courtney, S. J.: *Religious liberty: an end and a beginning* (New York, 1966), as well as *Dignitatis humanae*.
- ³ Gremillion, Joseph (ed): *The gospel of peace and justice* (Marynoll, 1976), pp 387-426.
- ⁴ Ruether, Rosemary Radford: *Sexism and God-talk* (Boston, 1983), pp 18-19.
- ⁵ Lerner, Gerda: *The creation of patriarchy* (Oxford, 1986), p 234.
- ⁶ *Op. cit.*, p 240.
- ⁷ *Op. cit.*, p 228.
- ⁸ *Op. cit.*, p 229.
- ⁹ *Op. cit.*, p 146.
- ¹⁰ Cameron, Anne: *Daughters of copper woman* (Vancouver, B.C., 1981); Reed, Evelyn: *Woman's evolution from matriarchal clan to patriarchal family* (New York, 1975); Weigle, Marta: *Spiders and spinsters: women and mythology* (Albuquerque, 1982).
- ¹¹ Laeuchli, Samuel: *Power and sexuality* (Temple, 1972).
- ¹² Patrick, Anne E.: 'The linguistic turn and moral theology', *Proceedings of the Forty-Second Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America* (Philadelphia, 1987), vol 42, pp 38-56.
- ¹³ Cf Hauerwas, Stanley: *A community of character* (Notre Dame, 1982), pp 175-285; Egan, Edmund J.: 'The transformation of ethics in heterosexual consciousness', *Cross Currents* (Summer, 1976), pp 168-182; and Langan, John, S.J.: 'Violence and injustice in society: recent Catholic teaching', *Theological Studies* vol 46 (1985), pp 685-699.
- ¹⁴ Cf Gustafson, James F.: 'The university as a community of moral discourse', *The Journal of Religion* vol 53 (1973), pp 397-409.
- ¹⁵ This phrase was used by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in her book of New Testament hermeneutics, *In memory of her* (New York, 1983).
- ¹⁶ Margaret Farley uses this particularly happy juxtaposition of words in *Personal commitments: beginning, keeping, changing* (San Francisco, 1986), p 99.
- ¹⁷ This point is developed in my book, *The Mardi Gras syndrome: rethinking Christian sexuality* (New York, 1984).