

WITNESS MAGAZINE



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*Witness*

VOLUME 83  
NUMBER 4  
APRIL 2000

● **NO EASY ANSWERS**  
*Gender and sexual ethics for a new age*

# CONTENTS

- 8** **What makes for good sex?** *A farewell to easy answers by Mary E. Hunt*  
As sex moves from the bedroom to the boardroom and from micro-ethics to macro-ethics, the arena of sexual ethics is also changing. Feminist liberation theologian Mary Hunt offers a perspective on “just good sex” that might help as Christian churches and base communities struggle with the topic.
- 14** **‘Neither male nor female ... in Christ’?** *Church debates and the politics of identity by Mary McClintock Fulkerson*  
Once we realize that the deepest thing that can be said about our identities is not our “sex,” argues Duke University theologian Mary Fulkerson, it becomes clear that it is not the disagreements but the agreement shared by liberal and conservative theological positions on sexuality that needs to be addressed.
- 20** **When does Christian marriage begin** — *before or after the wedding?*  
*by Adrian Thatcher*  
Christian moralists who view sex before a wedding as immoral should revisit history, says author Adrian Thatcher. Medieval theories of marriage which were responsible for the practice of betrothal, in fact, may be useful in constructing a postmodern theology of marriage.
- 24** **A sexual ethic of singleness** — *built upon the foundation of celibacy*  
*by Diana L. Hayes*  
Liberation theology scholar Diana Hayes believes a celibate lifestyle can be chosen as a way of life that provides, not a selfish freedom of self-indulgence and irresponsibility, but a responsible freedom to live a life of service to God.

## on the cover

Brooks Walsh  
PLUM STILL LIFE

## DEPARTMENTS

- |                         |                        |                           |
|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>3</b> Letters        | <b>13</b> On the Theme | <b>28</b> Book Review     |
| <b>5</b> Editor's Notes | <b>26</b> Short Takes  | <b>30</b> Witness Profile |
| <b>7</b> Poetry         | <b>27</b> Classifieds  |                           |

Since 1917, *The Witness* has been examining church and society in light of faith and conscience — advocating for those denied systemic power as well as celebrating those who, in theologian William Stringfellow's words, have found ways to “live humanly in the midst of death.” With deep roots in the Episcopal Church, we are a journal of spiritual questing and theology in practice, always ready to hold our own cherished beliefs and convictions up to scrutiny.

**Manuscripts:** We welcome multiple submissions. Given our small staff, writers and artists receive a response only when we are able to publish. Manuscripts will not be returned.

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# The Witness

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## LETTERS

### **Recovering from human evil**

When I used to think of the evil humans do I'd think of war and rape and the torture of political prisoners ... the things written of in your issue on recovering from human evil. I never thought to include my personal experience as a victim of incest. It wasn't "worthy" of being included with the aforementioned. It took years for me (and the professional psychological world) to recognize that I suffered from traumatic shock in many ways identical to soldiers and torture victims. My father used the tactics of tyrants and torturers everywhere to create fear and silence in our home. Child abuse, and especially sexual abuse, may seem too small and personal, or the opposite, too rampant and universal, for most people to want to deal with. That's what I'm telling myself these days as I struggle with the vacuum all around me. I'm trying to understand why good people fail to struggle with, talk about, cry over, preach about the abuse of children. I can think of no greater betrayal among human beings than parents assaulting their own children. If it's too much for most people to comprehend, imagine what it is for the child and the child grown to adulthood, who sees nothing around her — be it church, state, family or friends — that challenges the monster that nearly destroyed her (and at times still threatens to destroy). Silence was, and is, evil's weapon of choice. I'm sorry *The Witness* contained more of that silence. I'm not angry, you understand. I'm just sad, and sadly unsurprised.

So I know I have to speak up, and my thoughts lately have been on how to find the language people can hear. There's a stunning book that provides the vocabulary I've been looking for: Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*. It links all the evils and their effects and makes the kind of sense the wheel must have seemed moments after the first one rolled

out ... why didn't we think of this before??? Now if I can just get someone to read it. So I tell my minister at the peace and social justice church I belong to that I've never heard the word "incest" from the pulpit. For that matter, I've never heard it in church or from a minister or priest at all (not even the priest who heard my childhood confession). Silence. My minister does speak it in a sermon, bless him, but he doesn't know what else to say about it and the Herman book he ordered just doesn't seem to get cracked open. I understand why — there's the Iraqi delegation trip and there's the death penalty issue thing and this corporate take-over of the church's neighborhood to deal with ... But I'm beginning to understand that I can't wait patiently in line to give the devil his due on this. The abuse of children is as plain an evil as you can get and the devil has had a field day with the human race's silence and lack of comprehension. My minister confessed to being afraid to read about trauma and recovery and I told him it was good to know he was afraid and that it wasn't that he simply didn't care. "I pray that's not so," he said, and so do I.

I'm asking this splendid publication to witness to the children, all around us in our homes, schools, churches, who suffer in silence and secrecy. Witness, please, to we who are grown and struggle with an evil few seem to care to attend to. *The Witness* is one of the best things I know of the religious community and I am seeking hope within that community for light, light that will conquer an old, old darkness.

Mary Eldridge

Milford, MI

### **Time and freedom**

During my tenure at All Saints Church, heading our peace and justice ministry, *The Witness* became a major resource for me and our various advocacy groups. I clip articles

and share them with my colleagues and family. I reread back issues (the stack has now become a piece of furniture in my study). So it's time I thanked you for this important and abundant support in my work for justice and nonviolence.

This month I want to render very special thanks for the masterpiece of an article on the living wage. As an Executive Board member and one of the founders of CLUE, I can tell you Camille Colatosti got it right! She did a great job explaining our campaign, defining clearly the impact of poverty wages and the benefits to community, business and workers of a living wage. She captured the spirit of our grassroots, interfaith, cooperative movement here in L.A. We are grateful to her and to you for this definitive piece. You may be certain it will be an invaluable boost to our outreach to the "unconverted."

Mary Coleman  
Pasadena, CA

### Witness praise

I find your magazine wonderful! The articles are so full of real "meat."

Julie Weldon  
Monona, WI

### Thanks, and an invitation

I am a prisoner in the Iowa Prison System taking part in a Christ-centered, Bible-based program called Innerchange Freedom Initiative. We are a group of 150 men who seek and struggle to transform our old self and ways into the new self and ways that are ours through our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

We are doing this in an 18-month program of intense Bible studies, Life Skills classes, Christ-centered Drug Treatment, and lots of prayer and devotion to our Loving Savior God.

We spend a lot of time and energy praying for the needs and concerns of all. We know that God listens to the prayers of all, but maybe especially to those of the lowest of the low, the poorest of the poor, and even to those hidden away from and rejected by society.

I would like to extend an invitation for

prayer requests from you and your readers. We have been praying for the ministry and witness of your journal, as well as for Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann and her family and will continue to do so.

We count it a blessing to be able to pray for others and the world as a whole. All those inside and outside the walls of confinement are in need of the loving arms of God and His people.

Christopher M. Kenline #1102558  
Newton Correctional Facility  
Box 218  
Newton, IA 50208-0218

### Great Issue

The Jan/Feb issue of *The Witness* was outstanding in its comprehensiveness. For example, "Free time for a free people" was a great complement to the article on "Fighting for a living wage." In the latter piece, Camille Colatosti did a very thorough job, capturing both the reach and political thought behind the living wage campaign, and its theological rationale. Bob DeWitt's piece was tremendously moving and evoked many good memories of working with him at the Episcopal Church Publishing Company. One correction in the living wage piece having to do with the Church Pension Fund: The meeting between Fund trustees and the Service Employees International Union did take place, two years ago, urged on by a letter of 80 bishops to the president of the Fund. Together with a new approach by the union to the building contractors in Washington D.C., on behalf of the low wage janitors there, the Fund's cooperation resulted in a new labor agreement. The Diocese of Los Angeles last December passed a resolution commending the Fund for this action, and urging it to go further, following the good example of the Executive Council's Committee for Social Responsibility in Investments. Hopefully a similar resolution will be offered at General Convention, to strongly encourage the Fund to become more pro-active in stockholder actions on behalf of peace and justice.

Dick Gillett  
Minister for Social Justice  
Diocese of Los Angeles

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# Sex, gender and Christian liberty

by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

**We here at *The Witness*** are immensely grateful to contributing editor Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Professor of English, Emeritus, at the William Paterson University in Wayne, N.J., and author of numerous books on sexuality and sexual ethics (including *Sensuous Spirituality: Out from Fundamentalism*, Crossroad 1992), for acting as guest editor for this issue on gender and sexual ethics. The topic couldn't be more timely. As this issue goes to press, Episcopalians and their Anglican sisters and brothers worldwide are digesting the startling news of the irregular consecration of two new bishops by two Anglican primates and four other bishops in response to "a crisis of Christian Faith that has left the Episcopal Church divided." This "crisis," it would appear, centers on disagreement over the ordination of women and the acceptance of partnered homosexual persons in the life of the church.

And yet, if anything, the church's debate over sexual ethics (which owes a great deal to its attitudes on women) has been framed too narrowly. We are only at the very beginning of our journey in understanding the full dimension of the issues involved. As ethicist Mary Hunt points out in this issue's lead article, "church discussions are still being carried out as if bisexual and transgendered people do not exist." Or, as British scholar Adrian Thatcher underscores in his article, as if Christian marriage has always begun with a wedding. It may be painful for persons on all sides of the current "crisis," but as Mollenkott gently prods us to understand, if we are to have a sexual ethics that will serve us in this new age, it is absolutely necessary that we "allow ourselves to be disturbed by the facts of other peoples' lives."

—Julie A. Wortman,  
publisher and co-editor

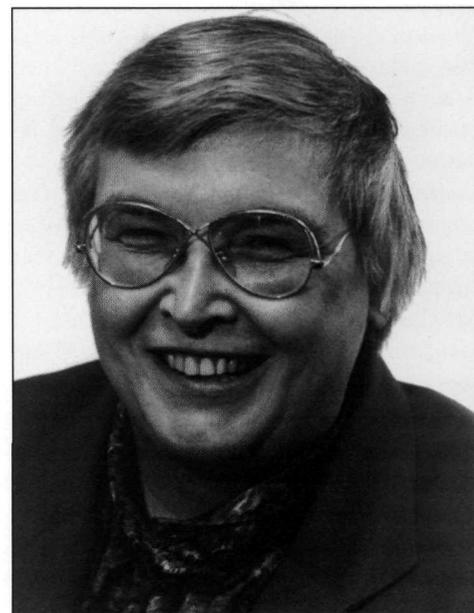
**A**S GARRET KEISER POINTS OUT, "All the divisions that exist in society at large also exist in the church" (*Christian Century*, 2/16/00). And if the church could embrace the kin-dom of God, defined as "an awareness of God as the only real absolute," we would be able to show the world what it means to live in a peace that surpasses understanding. Are we willing to release some of our most dearly prized positions for the sake of God's kin-dom? Our attitudes about sex and gender offer an excellent test case: Are we willing to let our certainties be disturbed by the facts of other peoples' lives?

Many of us have succumbed to an idolatry of the nuclear family. Not just heterosexuals, either; as Kathy Rudy comments in *Sex and the Church*, many lesbian, gay and transgender couples have become adept at impersonating the nuclear family so adored in conservative American religion and politics. "Conventional interpretations teach us to make rules about abstractions," Rudy says: "Sex inside a marriage ... is moral, sex outside marriage is immoral. As long as we are within the boundaries, we never have to think about whether ... our own souls are open, desirable, or even [yearning]." But a truly Christian evaluation of sexuality would "return to the heart of the moral tradition by examining concrete practices in context rather than accepting hollow dictums on abstracts and identities."

Honoring God as our only absolute, Christian people could dare to let go of oversimplified concepts of sex and gender and enter fearlessly into awareness of the splendid biodiversity within the human race God has created. In this issue, the glossary of transgender terminology will provide a glimpse of some diversities that have usually been ignored in churchly discussions of human sexuality. We have truncated ethical discussion by silencing too many voices, ignoring contexts and requiring people to

adjust their lives to fit our generalizations.

Churchly debate has tended to deny that sex and gender are socially constructed. Most of us have accepted the essentialist notion that male and female genitals carry with them "masculinity" or "femininity" as well as heterosexuality. This complete notion has been termed the *binary gender construct*. In order to uphold the binary construct, many church leaders have argued that all forms of transgender (including homosexuality) are evidence of humanity's fall from grace, *not* part of God's original creative plan. So homosexuals must either repent of sin or else find healing; cross-dressers must cease and desist, no matter how that might wither their personal fulfillment; transsexuals must live with their sense of dislocation, even if it isolates them or drives them to suicide; and intersexuals must submit themselves to as many operations as it takes in order to conform to binary gender and keep viable the Defense of Marriage Act. For if marriage is to be reserved exclusively for the relationship



Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

between one man and one woman, as D.O.M.A. dictates, it becomes essential to deny the existence and/or full humanity of all individuals who are both male and female, whether they are physically so (intersexuals) or psychologically so (transsexuals, cross-dressers, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenderists in general).

But what if God truly is “above all, through all, and in all,” as Ephesians 4:6 asserts? What if we were to take seriously the traditional Christian doctrine of God’s omnipresence? If God really creates, sustains and dwells within every person, what gives some of us permission to try to limit the fulfillment of others of us?

In this issue of *The Witness*, theologians Mary E. Hunt and Mary McClintock Fulkeron deal with some of the nuances and contextualizations that are necessary for mature ethical discourse about sex and gender. Ethical pronouncements based on the experience of the normative group may seem correct and universal to that group, but they may, nevertheless, exact major penalties from everyone: stupendous penalties from those excluded from the debate, but less conscious costs from even the most powerful among us. For instance, *Sissies and Tomboys* (reviewed in this issue) emphasizes that training in how to perform masculinity has been conducted chiefly by devaluing females and femininity. The cost has been stupendous for girls and women, placing us in physical danger and limited roles. But it has also been very heavy for boys and men, depriving them of access to and expression of their own feelings of vulnerability, the desire to nurture, and the like.

Similarly, the debate about abortion and reproductive freedom has often been characterized by stereotyped accusations and oversimplifications. In this issue, Marianne Arbogast provides a sensitive depiction of real human kindness among people who are “pro-choice” as well as “pro-life.” And Marge Piercy’s poem portrays a woman’s right to her own moral agency (“Without choice, no politics, no ethics lives”). But she also emphasizes every baby’s right to be welcomed and nourished. As our society ponders the appalling violence among teenagers and preteens, we must consider Piercy’s assertion carefully: “Every baby born

unloved, unwanted, is a bill that will come due...with interest, an anger that must find a target.” Hence mature discussions of sex and gender ethics must begin to emphasize ways of affirming children of every gender, orientation, race, class, shape, and level of ability.

And we must cease discussing sexuality as if everyone were married or soon to be so. In this issue Diana L. Hayes defends celibacy as an honorable vocation for those who are called to it and gifted for it, but she also implies that responsible sexual partnerships can be equally valid. The point is that like everyone else, Christian singles must learn to approach one another’s vulnerability with tender loving-kindness.

Furthermore, during churchly discussions of premarital or extra-marital sex, Adrian Thatcher’s research suggests that it would be wise for us to overcome our amnesia about Christian history. It is surely relevant, for instance, that two currently widespread practices — cohabitation before the wedding and entering into marriage at later ages (26 or 28) — are similar to the practices of 16th-, 17th-, and 18th-century British and American Christians.

All mature ethical discussion must recognize the tremendous power of social constructs. For instance, when Victorian Englishmen constructed “virtuous femininity” as being free of all sexual responsiveness, many married women sought counseling and even clitorectomies to cure their “illness” and/or “evil” — and prostitution flourished for the men who could not find contentment with wives who regarded intercourse as distasteful duty. For another instance, in a 1920 study, over 50 percent of American college women admitted to having “intense emotional relations” with other women, but in 1938, only 4 percent admitted to any such experience. What could account for a 46 percent drop in same-sex college romance in only 18 years? A shift in the social construction of relationships and singleness among women: During the 1920s and 1930s, lesbianism was pathologized and unmarried women were mocked with names like “pseudo-masculine” or “mental hermaphrodite.” And college women got the message loud and clear.

It is because sex and gender are socially constructed that gender roles differ from cul-

ture to culture. Social construction also explains why many non-Western leaders deny that homosexuality exists in their culture. For instance, in Kenya the Meru people recognize a powerful religious leader, the *mugawe*, who dresses like a woman, is often homosexual and sometimes marries a man; the Azande people of Zaire and the Sudan have practiced lesbianism and intergenerational homoeroticism for centuries; and gender-variant deities and sex/gender transformations of worshipers have been documented in the religions of 28 African tribes. Yet it is common for African religious and political leaders to assert that homosexuality and transgenderism are white vices unknown to their people until colonialization by Euro-Americans. They are telling the truth as they see it: There is no “gayness” as it is currently constructed in the Western world. Anglican bishops from East and West cannot hope to achieve intelligent conversation about the ethics of sex and gender until awareness of their social construction undergirds the discourse.

Perhaps it is time for American Christians to deconstruct our binary gender rules and reconstruct an omnigender attitude that affirms the efforts of every person to become all that he or she or s/he was meant to be. Certainly it is necessary to take transgender experience seriously in our ethical concerns. Just as racism is not adequately described by a stark contrast of black vs. white, the ethical waterfront is not covered by binaries like male vs. female, gay vs. straight. As Mary Hunt implies, opening the moral terrain to transgender issues will be as difficult for many homosexuals as for many heterosexuals. But our ethical discourse must concern itself with what makes sex *good* and with creative grateful response to the gender diversities within us and among us, giving the Spirit elbow room to shape us as She will.

“For freedom Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1). And, as Sweet Honey in the Rock sings, “We who believe in freedom will not rest until it comes.” ●

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*Statements made in this editorial will be fully documented in Mollenkott’s forthcoming book, tentatively entitled Gender Diversities: A Christian and Trans-Religious Approach to Omnigender.*

# Right To Life

A woman is not a pear tree  
thrusting her fruit in mindless fecundity  
into the world. Even pear trees bear  
heavily in one year and rest and grow the next.  
An orchid gone wild drops few warm rotting  
fruit in the grass but the trees stretch  
high and wiry gifting the birds forty  
feet up among inch long thorns  
broken atavistically from the smooth wood.

A woman is not a basket you place  
your buns in to keep them warm. Not a brood  
hen you can slip duck eggs under.  
Not the purse holding the coins of your  
descendants till you spend them in wars.  
Not a bank where your genes gather interest  
and interesting mutations in the tainted  
rain, any more than you are.

You plant corn and you harvest  
it to eat or sell. You put the lamb  
in the pasture to fatten and haul it in to  
butcher for chops. You slice the mountain  
in two for a road and gouge the high plains  
for coal and the waters run muddy for  
miles and years. Fish die but you do not  
call them yours unless you wished to eat them.

Now you legislate mineral rights in a woman.  
You lay claim to her pastures for grazing,  
fields for growing babies like iceberg  
lettuce. You value children so dearly  
that none ever go hungry, none weep  
with no one to tend them when mothers  
work, none lack fresh fruit,  
none chew lead or cough to death and your  
orphanages are empty. Every noon the best  
restaurants serve poor children steaks.

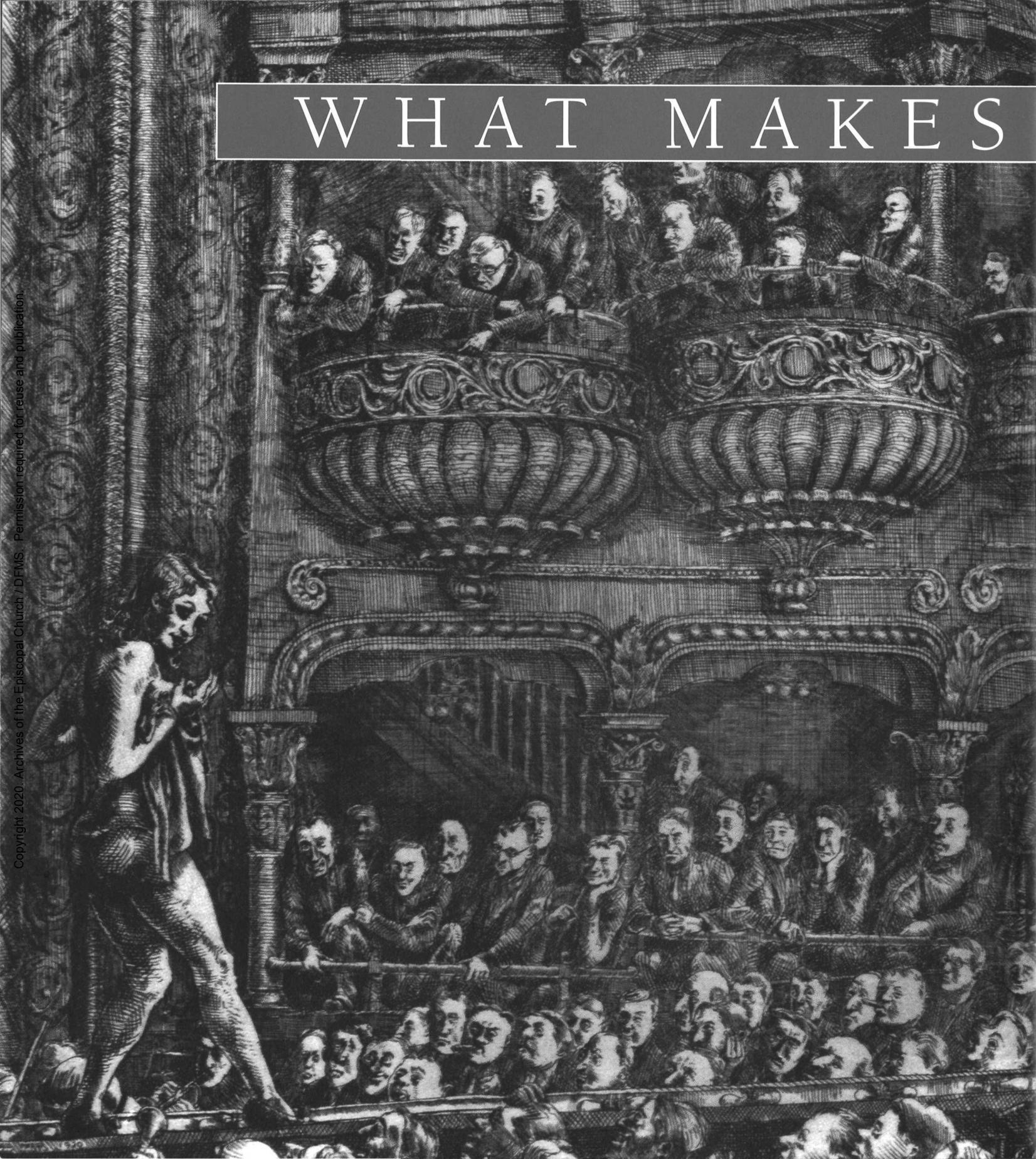
At this moment at nine o'clock a partera  
is performing a table top abortion on an  
unwed mother in Texas who can't get  
Medicaid any longer. In five days she will die  
of tetanus and her little daughter will cry  
and be taken away. Next door a husband  
and wife are sticking pins in the son  
they did not want. They will explain  
for hours how wicked he is,  
how he wants discipline.

We are all born of woman, in the rose  
of the womb we suckled our mother's blood  
and every baby born has a right to love  
like a seedling to sun. Every baby born  
unloved, unwanted, is a bill that will come  
due in twenty years with interest, an anger  
that must find a target, a pain that will  
beget pain. A decade downstream a child  
screams, a woman falls, a synagogue is torched,  
a firing squad is summoned, a button  
is pushed and the world burns.

I will choose what enters me, what becomes  
of my flesh. Without choice, no politics,  
no ethics lives. I am not your cornfield,  
not your uranium mine, not your calf  
for fattening, not your cow for milking.  
You may not use me as your factory.  
Priests and legislators do not hold shares  
in my womb or my mind.  
This is my body. If I give it to you  
I want it back. My life  
is a non-negotiable demand.

*From The Moon Is Always Female by Marge Piercy  
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# WHAT MAKES



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# FOR GOOD SEX?

## A farewell to easy answers

by Mary E. Hunt

THERE IS ONE THING I know for sure about sexual ethics: There are no easy answers. There are not even any easy questions anymore as categories and concepts evaporate like dew in bright sunshine. This will comfort few people. But such a frank admission may pave the way for new discussion in a field where old ways have been tried and found wanting, both by those who seek inclusivity and those who would circle the religious wagons ever more tightly. Indeed the stakes are higher than ever — same-sex marriage, HIV/AIDS, late term-abortions, to mention only the most obvious — demanding of Christian feminist liberationists the most ruthlessly honest analysis we can muster.

Of course there never were any easy answers in the highly charged environment where so many religious battles are fought today. But I, like most people in the fray, was more sure of how to frame the questions last century than I now think warranted. I was more persuaded by my own answers in the 1990s than I am now. This is not to signal any lack of analytic rigor, nor is it to indicate any failure of ethical nerve. To the contrary, it is a public acknowledgement that this is not your mother's playing field, and an equally candid assessment that new data make for new questions.

### **Good sex in a global, pluralistic world**

Most of my ethical reflection has been done in a North American context, with significant time spent in Latin America and Europe, and important visits to Australia and New Zealand. But in a globalized, religiously pluralistic society, that is no longer

enough. Parochial views and ways of formulating ethical questions simply will not yield the necessary insight to handle what are now global, plural problems. It was not until I embarked on the Good Sex Project that I appreciated the importance of a new way of working. Under the aegis of the Milwaukee-based Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health and Ethics, I joined ethicist Patricia Beattie Jung (Loyola University, Chicago) and economist Radhika Balakrishnan (Marymount Manhattan College) in conceptualizing a feminist team approach.

With generous funding from the Ford Foundation, we gathered 13 women scholars/activists from eight countries (Brazil, China, England, India, Nigeria, Thailand, Turkey, the U.S.) and six religious traditions (Buddhism, Chinese religions, Christianity both Catholic and Protestant, Islam and, the common faith, Capitalism). Our two four-day meetings, in 1997 in Philadelphia and in 1998 in Amsterdam, and our rich communication since then, were opportunities to lay out basic assumptions and discuss myriad aspects of what might constitute good sex if women's religious wisdom were taken seriously within and among our respective traditions.

Far from being a how-to guide for bedrooms around the globe, our conversations quickly focused on good sex as an indication of women's well being. Well-being was more obvious in its absence — rape, female clitoral excision, restrictions on reproductive options, trafficking in women and girls, prostitution, prohibitions on pleasure, lesbian hating, honor killings and the like — than in its presence. Our initial focus on sex

MOST OF MY ETHICAL REFLECTION HAS BEEN DONE IN A NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXT, WITH SIGNIFICANT TIME SPENT IN LATIN AMERICA AND EUROPE, AND IMPORTANT VISITS TO AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND. BUT IN A GLOBALIZED, RELIGIOUSLY PLURALISTIC SOCIETY, THAT IS NO LONGER ENOUGH.

SEX AND GENDER ARE  
DEEPLY CONTESTED TERRAIN  
IN POSTMODERN LIFE,  
WITH YOUNG PEOPLE  
FAR MORE FLUID IN THEIR  
SELF-UNDERSTANDINGS THAN  
PREVIOUS GENERATIONS.

qua sex was hard to keep because it was economic, political and religious matters that framed the issues.

We engaged in a wide-reaching conversation in which we sought neither common assumptions nor least common denominators. Ambiguity was honored and differences were explained, not explained away. We reached no firm conclusions except our commitment to promote women's safety and well-being. We spoke and wrote out of our own starting points and according to the priorities of our local settings, all the while becoming increasingly mindful of the global gestalt that was emerging in all of its horrifying specificity. This method stood us in good stead especially when we disagreed or had to stretch to understand how definitions of even common words like "good" and "sex" could be so varied. Several examples of the contentions will illustrate just how broadly based the conversations were — and how different and innovative the approaches.

#### **Sex and motherhood, enlightenment, profits**

Brazilian Lutheran pastor and seminary professor Wanda Deifelt looked at compulsory motherhood in Brazil, standard fare for those of us who cut our feminist teeth on Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*. But Deifelt couched her argument not simply in terms of poor women in her country who are kept from contraceptive and abortive options by religiously influenced laws. Rather, she included wealthy women in Brazil who are now steered toward *in vitro* fertilization, a growing industry in a poor country. Wildly disproportionate resources are spent for some women to conceive while poor women go from pregnancy to pregnancy, their children often dying for lack of prenatal care or malnutrition.

The same could be said for many developed countries. The point is that compulsory motherhood has a new, additional face, not the one that most of us in the affluent West are used to seeing. Indeed, if we take globalization seriously, it may be our faces in the mirror along with wealthy Brazilians.

Suwanna Satha-Anand, a philosopher from Thailand, argued in an equally forceful way that a Buddhist position on women's

sexuality needs to be evaluated in terms of the more encompassing relationship between sexuality and enlightenment. For Buddhists, she claimed, reproduction represents the ensnaring power and danger of pleasure, permitted for lay people but something that serious truth-seekers eventually renounce. An enlightened being is well beyond all worldly attachments including sexual entanglements. In this view, the best sex is no sex at all, a hard sell for many western feminists who have made sexual freedom and sexual pleasure an important sign of liberation. Still, we heard her point and want it to be part of the mix when international decisions are made such as went on at U.N. meetings in Cairo and Beijing in the last decade.

Philosopher of religion Grace Jantzen, a Quaker working in England, makes a major point of Christianity's complicity in the capitalist instrumentalization of sex. As arguably the most effective colonizing force in modern life, Christianity, even with its sometimes-ambivalent view of pleasure, has contributed to sex's becoming one more commodity for sale at the highest price the market will bear. Feminist, including Christian feminist, emphasis on pleasure without reference to the larger justice agenda can, however unintentionally, contribute to this problem.

Muslim scholars Pinar Ikkanacan (Turkey) and Ayesha M. Imam (Nigeria) prevented the team from making easy assumptions about Islam and schooled us in the cultural nuances that result in some women's living and others' dying. We were disabused of any latent prejudices that we might have harbored against a tradition that in many ways is no more (though surely no less) oppressive of women than many others. That in itself was a useful challenge.

Indian economist Radhika Balakrishnan laid out the contradictory complexities of capitalism with her vignettes of women working in factories in India. They experience both oppression and liberation in producing the products that poor women in the U.S. buy — oppression in the working conditions, pay and, for some, the demands of prostitution; liberation in that they have their own source of income and the dignity

of a job.

Meanwhile, poor women in the U.S. experience the same contradictory complexities. Since they cannot afford large purchases, they sometimes feel pleasure in being able to buy a small item, new underwear for example. The fact that they have a choice among brands and styles of underwear makes them feel good as consumers in an economy they see booming for some. But are they buying their pleasure at the expense of their cousins abroad whose exploited work produced the cheap goods?

### **'Just' good sex as a human right?**

It is not easy to parse such situations into ethically discreet parts. But it is clear that sex and pleasure are not primarily bedroom issues, but public, interstructured and often vexing matters. To speak of good sex is to speak of a range of moral goods that go well beyond, though of course include, the genitally sexual. It is to forsake the ethical microscope, at least for now, in favor of a wide-angle lens.

I proposed that we strive for just good sex, as a human right, with "just" being shorthand for justice-seeking. That way we could tie the struggle for economic and social justice to the equally important quest for sexual pleasure and safety. The suggestion evoked consideration, but human rights language is seen by some as excessively individualistic, by others as far too anthropocentric, lacking concern for animals and the earth. Nonetheless, we tried it on for size, and discovered that one size does not fit all in sexual ethics.

Such complexities abound in the sexual arena narrowly defined. U.S. Rabbi Rebecca Alpert pushed the sexual envelope another inch when she laid out guilty pleasures, the claim that sex can be good because it is bad. Religious taboos and prohibitions, she argued, sometimes enhance the pleasure of certain practices with no real harm done. Lots to explore here since virtually all of our traditions have strong taboos in certain areas, e.g., incest, that would need to be evaluated very carefully lest such a potentially useful strategy be misapplied and cause harm.

Catholic ethicist Patricia Beattie Jung made another provocative claim. She sug-

gested that in her tradition it would make more sense to say that sin was involved any time a woman lacked pleasure in a sexual encounter rather than the classic Catholic approach that engenders guilt when there is pleasure. A person who did not help her/his partner to experience sexual delight would be engaging in sinful behavior. Imagine the Vatican theologians pronouncing *that* in grave terms and sonorous tones to a waiting world!

What these and countless other ideas evoked in the team was a deep sense of how much work we have to do on sexual ethics and public policy. Moreover, we all came away from the experience changed in profound ways. We acknowledged the privileged nature of the scholarly experience we had. Nonetheless, we called it a necessary luxury, since adequate sexual ethics and social policy for a globalized and religiously pluralistic world will not emerge simply from our local efforts. Rather, such globalized conversations make our respective in-house differences pale before the stark reality of danger, disease and demand that circumscribe sex for millions of women, especially young women, worldwide. Nonetheless, we went home committed to our local efforts.

### **Developments in the U.S.**

In my local efforts since the Good Sex project, I have come to realize that "act locally, think globally" translates to "make love locally, have implications globally." U.S. sexual discourse is complicated in ways that it was not 40 years ago when the so-called sexual revolution was in full swing, nor even 30 years ago when the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered movements got their impetus. But here on the U.S. scene, several important givens have changed. Unfortunately, many religious conversations are still being carried out as if fundamental changes had not really happened.

The first change is rather basic. We used to talk about men and women, males and females, with fair assurance that we knew what we meant. This is simply no longer the case. Sex and gender are deeply contested terrain in postmodern life, with young people far more fluid in their self-understandings than previous generations.

The first transgendered person I met more than 20 years ago was a Catholic male priest who had married a woman and then become one. She decided that she was heterosexual, so she lived happily ever after, as far as I know, with a man. "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" never sounded so sweet.

Gender bending and sex changes are increasingly common. Martine Rothblatt, a male to female transsexual, describes the apartheid of sex that prevents some people from living out the identity they feel most authentically theirs. Despite problems of essentializing gender stereotypes, life is short and a fit between one's body and one's spirit does not seem a lot to ask. Some people now claim to be bi-gendered, that is, to live in a both/and way as a woman by night and as a man by day, for example. Still others are starting to talk, as Virginia Ramey Mollenkott has suggested, about being omnigendered, encompassing many options in one full life. Much remains to be explored. No easy answers here, nor even any easy questions. But the power of U.S. media assures that such issues have global reach.

The fallout of some courageous people's efforts in this regard is the increasing elasticity of gender categories, greater tolerance for difference, diversity training, and other signs of acceptance of a range of human experiences. Of course, hate crimes and prejudice are part of the same U.S. landscape, and human cruelty is legend. But I imagine that the next census form will need to have a few additional boxes to check, as the binaries of male/female simply do not exhaust the possibilities.

### **Expanding 'queerness'**

A second change that colors the sexual ethical scene is the increasing diversity not only of sex and gender but also of sexual identities, orientations, and options. We are still not sure how to talk about it, but just as male/female no longer covers the waterfront, neither does the binary of homosexual/heterosexual do justice to the forms of love among us.

Right when a critical mass of ever so respectable, job-holding, mortgage-paying, monogamous-acting lesbian and gay people

was making inroads into a previously closed society, the plot thickened. Bisexual people were first on the scene, claiming that their experiences were passed over. Transgendered people named their particularity and claimed their rightful place in the historic movements for change. Queer became a kind of umbrella category for all such people, despite a lack of consensus about its meaning.

Of course this change upset the apple cart of some lesbian and gay people who were in the vanguard of those being accepted, especially if they were white and wealthy. Might our sexual orientation be less than solidly lesbian/gay? Might we, too, be queer? Might our inclusion be slowed because of perceived connection with those people?

Yes answers (some enthusiastic, some tentative) to all of the above questions were the news of the 1990s for progressives. We were required to retool our sense of ourselves and our efforts in light of new data. Nonetheless, some church discussions are still being carried out as if bisexual and transgendered people do not exist. Once more, the Spirit shows us that it is all of us or none of us.

### **Decoupling sex and procreation**

A third clear change in U.S. culture is the decoupling of hetero sex with the process of procreation. This has been a long time in the works, but it is increasingly the case that we do not assume that heterosexual intercourse should or will eventuate in a new life, nor that all new life will come from heterosexual sex. Birth control is widespread although not used as effectively as it could be. Abortion is a contested given, at least until the next Supreme Court decision on late-term abortions. Poor and young women still need more help, not just in these areas but also in education, jobs and housing, so that they can make real choices. But for the majority of U.S. people who engage in heterosexual sex, doing so with the intention to procreate is an increasingly rare experience, while enjoying it for pleasure and companionship is the norm.

Infertility wrote the book in the 1990s. *In vitro* and other techniques are now well accepted, if still very expensive. But infertility is a misnomer for same-sex couples who wish to have children, as they may well be

fertile but not socially paired in such a way as to prove it. The “gayby” boom continues to grow, with some lesbian women doing it the old way, others using *in vitro* techniques at home or in a clinic. Adoption is on the rise among same-sex couples, and of course many raise children from previous heterosexual partnering. In all, the human race is running right along even though we have grown beyond the man-plus-woman-equals-baby stage.

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TO ALL OF THESE SITUATIONS  
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### **Hints for Christian communities**

These changes in the U.S. scene are part of the global conversation. They are also the stuff of Christian denominational struggles that shape contemporary church life. There are no easy answers. But I think it useful to acknowledge that Christianity has relatively little wisdom on sexuality, especially when the ground has shifted beneath its biblical feet. For a tradition whose text was written when we still knew what a man and a woman were, it is asking a lot to provide ethical insight on bisexuality and same-sex partnering. Or is it?

One strategy is simply for Christian ethicists to remain humbly silent and let the scientists do the heavy lifting. That would seem inviting except that we bring expertise that scientists do not share, namely, practice at

problematizing the meaning and value of things, and commitment to bringing about love and justice. This is an expertise in short supply and high demand as the human genome is being mapped and mined and parts of the human community are being ravaged by the increasing gap between those with resources and those without. To all of these situations we bring the weight of our traditional concern with equality, our perennial struggle to be faithful to the gift of creation. After all, the Bible is not a ready reference book, but tangible proof that people over thousands of years have sought to live in cooperation with the divine.

Ethicists will find our role, but the real drama is on the pastoral front, where ministers meet the young man who wants to be a woman, the bisexual baby boomer, the two men who want to raise a child. Their racial/ethnic background, their economic status, and their family/friendship circle of support will determine a lot about their successful survival, much less their living out their dreams. Without selling the Christian ministry short, it is obvious that few pastoral people have the training to be fully helpful. Even the most welcoming and well intentioned need to refer, confer and learn about issues for which their seminary training was simply too early to provide.

What we can offer as Christian communities is a place where people feel free and invited to be themselves. After all, we claim to be more than the workplace, though some workplaces are more welcoming than some churches. We can be value-attentive schools where new issues are debated and discussed with the best scientific information available. Our historical values include a preferential option for those who are marginalized, and a commitment to changing structures so that the margins become the center. Perhaps most uniquely, we can be groups with warm hearts and fervent prayers for guidance into the unknown. Only then will we live faithfully in a globalized, religiously pluralistic world without easy answers. ●

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# The pro-life, pro-choice debate

## Confronting real differences with respect — and hope

by Marianne Arbogast

I AM NOT PRO-CHOICE. But neither am I the person Marge Piercy is addressing in her “Right To Life” poem [see p. 7]. In fact, I’ve never met anyone who really fits the image the poem suggests — a male hypocrite hiding behind a right-to-life banner, who cares nothing for women, children or other living beings, except as they impact his own self-interest.

The pro-life people I’ve known are more like my mother, who used to volunteer at a Birthright office at our church, offering moral and material support to women facing difficult pregnancies. She also sat up countless nights rocking and comforting foster babies she took in as newborns, sometimes drug-addicted at birth, loving them as her own until they were placed with adoptive families. Although she would be inclined to support economic justice programs, oppose exorbitant military spending and want a compassionate criminal justice system, she could never bring herself to vote for a pro-choice candidate.

Or they are like Catholic Worker friends who, one year, held quiet, prayerful vigils outside a clinic where abortions were performed. Some have gone to jail for nuclear weapons protests, and are part of a community that, for the past 24 years, has opened its doors to homeless women and children.

Or they can be like some of our soup kitchen volunteers — religious and political conservatives whose perspective on many issues appalls me. Still, they put in hours of hard work to help feed hungry people.

Undoubtedly, there are pro-life advocates who are deserving of Piercy’s indictment. But a great many of us are not.

From talking with pro-choice friends, I know that they, too, take exception to the stereotypes promulgated about them.

*Witness* co-editor Julie Wortman — who, with her partner Anne Cox, once offered to adopt a child whose mother was considering abortion — finds herself explaining, over and over, that “pro-choice” does not mean “pro-abortion.” She would never deny that there are important moral and ethical questions involved in the choice.

Julie and I would both hope for a world in which no woman would feel compelled to have an abortion. Our differences, as I understand them, center around how we believe we can best move toward that world, and what to do in the meantime. In practice, I think it’s likely that we would respond to a woman faced with a crisis pregnancy in much the same way.

At times, the differences of conscience on abortion among *Witness* staff members have been difficult. But they have forced us to struggle to communicate in ways that don’t just evoke the same old stereotypes. None of us can fall back into language that unfairly demonizes the other, or rest in untested assumptions about one another’s convictions.

For the most part, we have steered clear of the issue in the magazine, unsure as to whether we are practicing an unconscionable avoidance or a commendable silence in a debate that has grown too shrill and too self-righteous. When we have broached the topic, we have tried to do so in a way that respects our differing views, such as the dialogue on abortion rights between Carter Heyward and Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann [6/93] and a story on the Common Ground approach, through which people who disagree on abortion have been able to work together on concerns they share, like nutrition programs for women and children [4/94].

It was sad to hear of the rupture this past year within the Fellowship of Reconciliation over the abortion issue. In June of 1999, Jim Forest — one of the F.O.R.’s most long-term and active members — resigned from the F.O.R., with the Orthodox Peace Fellowship following in his wake, after the F.O.R. National Council issued a statement on abortion that he perceived as shutting the door on a request he and others had made for a dialogue which would take the pacifist pro-life position seriously.

Dan Ebener, another pro-life F.O.R. member who had joined in the request, has chosen to remain in the F.O.R., but continues to call for better communication. Since the F.O.R. includes both pro-choice and pro-life members, he sees it as offering the chance to model a nonviolent approach to conflict.

“Because diversity like this often leads toward violence in our world, it is an opportunity for the F.O.R. to deal with something emotional that divides us,” Ebener says. “We can reflect to society how healing can begin to occur. Because we value others in the Fellowship, we value diversity of opinion in the Fellowship.”

I think the effort to communicate honestly and fairly with each other has been worthwhile for all of us at *The Witness*. Julie has said that, because of our conversations, she is unable to completely dismiss the pro-life stance. I would say the same, in reverse. Our differences are real, but we’ve also found large areas of common ground. That gives me hope that there could be a way through this impasse that splits even people who are seriously committed to a just and peaceful world. ●

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness*, <marianne@thewitness.org>.

# 'NEITHER MALE NOR

## Church debates and the politics of identity

by Mary McClintock Fulkerson

**D**EBATES ON THE FULL participation by gay and lesbian persons in the life of the church matter very much to feminist theologians. The feminist vision of God's realm has at its center resistance to relations of domination, whether they be in the form of heterosexism or misogyny. A wealth of lesbian feminist theologies have explored this vision in concrete ways, lifting up the rich biblical and theological imagery for a progressive stance on sexuality and offering powerful interpretations of the meaning of Christian love through their writings about women loving women. But the discourse of biblical and sexual justice may not be the only place to put our energies. Nor is the endless back and forth on what Scripture says on the subject. What is striking about the terms of the ecclesiastical debate is not the differences between the opposing positions — as acrimonious as they sometimes become — but the assumptions shared by both those who would have an inclusive church and those who would not.

### **Questioning sexed identity**

Ostensibly, it is the disagreements that stand out in ecclesiastical debates. They cluster most vociferously around different uses and understandings of Scripture, but also in discussions of what causes homosexual identity. This latter concern plays a major role in determining whether full inclusion into the "status" of other baptized members is possible. The bottom line is whether one's sexual identity as non-heterosexual is affirmed by God or not.

What both sides share in this debate is an understanding of sexual identity which comes from modernist therapeutic and scientific discourses. Both those who refuse gay and lesbian persons and those who insist upon their inclusion in the life of the church share the idea that persons have corresponding sexual identity and sexual preference and that this identity, for good or ill, is an absolutely fundamental reality. It is just this idea of sexed identity, however, that feminist theorists outside of the church and its theological conversations are calling into

question. At the same time that gays and lesbians are pressing for full consideration in mainline church denominations, feminists are questioning the stable identities that are assumed by a "politics of inclusion/exclusion."

Feminist theory has long raised the question of the construction of gender and separated it out from the categories "sex" and "woman." Sex is the category for anatomical differentiation of bodies. Thus there are female bodies which are women and male bodies which are men. Gender is a category which has helped identify the way in which the definitions of "masculinity" and "femininity," the features which define men and women beyond their bodies, are social constructions. Gender explorations inquire into the use of these definitions to stereotype and limit the possibilities of male and female "subjects" or persons. As Simone DeBeauvoir claimed, "One is not born a woman."

When gender is opposed to the category of sex, it construes the sexed body as a "given." Although feminist theory and theology typically rely upon the sexed-body "woman" as the starting point for theoretical reflection upon liberation, "post-structuralist" feminists argue that such gendered categories are organized by current power arrangements. The assumption that sex refers to "natural" realities for which we do not need analyses may work fine on the level of everyday interaction. Analytically, however, the binary division of bodies into anatomical men and women has the potential of all naturalized categories. It can support oppressive (gender) relationships. As long as subjects are viewed as sexed (male and female) prior to the considerations of power relationships, some notion of gender is operative. What even DeBeauvoir failed to recognize was that "sex" as well as gender is something one becomes — or is done to one.

### **'No doer prior to the deed'**

Judith Butler takes on the daunting task of attacking the "woman" subject of feminist theology (and, by implication, of all theology) from a poststructuralist position. Nietzsche was right, she says: There is "no doer prior to

# FEMALE...IN CHRIST'?



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Brooks Walsh—Deer/Papaya Still Life

the deed.” Informed by Foucault’s archeology of the sexualized subject, she shows that a notion of the interior self plus a Freudian discourse of identity results in sexed subjects. Defining oneself as having some essential, internal, identity for which the primary feature is one’s gendered, sexual desire is a peculiar development of modern discourses, argues Foucault, one which occurs with the medicalization of scientific discourse.

Foucault’s work shows that the pair sex/sexuality has a history. It is not a fixed, unchanging natural feature of human being. Since the 19th century, says another historian of sexuality, the West has treated sex — our gendered desire — as “the ‘truth’ of our being [which] defines us socially and morally; its release or proper functioning can be a factor in health, energy, activity; its frustration is a cause of ill health, social unorthodoxy, even madness.” One might compare this view with the medieval corporate “subject” who lacks a separate individual identity and is defined by his/her relationship to the community and place in the divine ordering of things. By contrast, the modern subject is an autonomous self, an entity unto him/herself. As such, s/he is defined fundamentally by her identity. The peculiarly modern move is not only individualist, but identifies sexuality as the central explanatory principle in human subjects — sexuality is the desire that emerges from being male or being female. This way of identifying human subjecthood or personhood produces the notion that one’s sex/gender coincides with one’s essential self. As Jeffrey Weeks puts it, sex becomes “the supreme secret (the ‘mystery of sex’) and the general substratum of our existence.”

### **Body, gender and desire**

This anatomy of the modern sexed subject exposes a relationship of reciprocity between body, gender and desire. Desire expresses gender; gender expresses desire; and one might even say that sex and gender are collapsed — sex is gendered. Butler says that the “metaphysical unity of the three is assumed to be truly known and expressed in a differentiating desire for an oppositional gender — that is, in a form of oppositional heterosexuality.” The clarity of gender identity is discerned by one’s difference from the

other, opposing, gender. “Woman” has no meaning except as that which is not man. The modernity of this concern with the binary oppositional “sex” of the subject’s proper object contrasts with ancient societies in which the class of the partner, not the gender, was the significant issue.

Foucault’s account of Herculine Barbin helps Butler confound the modern sexualized subject in a graphic way. Foucault’s description of this 19th-century hermaphrodite is a gripping display of the case that sex is not the inner truth of a subject, her/his “intractable depth and inner substance,” but a construction of bodies, various pleasures and affectivities and body parts; s/he is legally defined as female at points early in his/her life, and legally a male later on. His/her journals provide access to Herculine’s pleasures, which defy easy categorization. Butler points out that the temptation to explain his/her desire for girls by appeal to the “male” parts of her anatomy (and vice versa), is confuted by his/her body, which refuses to be unified. The very temptation to unify this person as a sexual subject is a display of the normalizing heterosexual regime of knowledge/power that “we” bring to his/her body. If we are to take Herculine seriously without “explaining” him/her with the discourse of pathology or subhumanity, we must question the notion that desire is “caused” by an essentially unified gendered body. It is just this configuration — the metaphysical threesome of sex, gender, desire — that keeps the man-woman binary in place.

### **Power**

Recognition of the force of this threesome introduces a third feature of Butler’s analysis: power. The unintelligibility of the figure of Herculine is not the result of his/her essential unintelligibility. It is the effect of a particular regime of truth about subjects — not a natural fact. A regime of truth is the set of rules that define the “sayable in any particular social order.” It determines what kinds of statements and inquiries will be taken seriously. The regulating regime at stake here is compulsory heterosexuality, and it defines the truth about subjects. As a dominant ordering of reality, compulsory heterosexuality regulates plea-

sure and bodies; it cuts up reality into two human identities and defines their legitimate and illegitimate experiences. This regulating of identities means that certain kinds of identity simply cannot exist — “Those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender.” The normalized relating of the threesome, sex, gender and desire, is predicated upon heterosexual difference. Object choice is defined in relation to the sexed body; desire is channeled and defined by the sexes it connects; and those sexes are two — male and female. Any thinking about desire and human relations is locked into this grid; any subject which does not conform is disciplined.

### **Feminism without women?**

Butler’s destabilizing of fixed sexed identity does not have to eliminate feminist practices or support anti-feminist politics, but it can make more evident the problems with identity politics. Butler’s is a challenge to the dominations that are effected by a set of rules operative about sexual identity, its relation to desire and the assumption that there are two kinds of subjects. The problem with “the identity woman” is its propensity to reinforce the notion that what is true about a subject is her/his gender and, thereby, contribute to the hegemonic effects of a set of definitions that legislate compulsory heterosexuality.

Feminist politics is about resisting dominations based upon gender. Secular and theological feminisms habitually include resisting dominations of race, class and sexual preference as well. Feminists have discovered from the voices of womanists, *Mujeristas*, Asian and African women, that we assume women are in some sense “the same” only at our peril. Butler challenges us to ask even more difficult questions about the construction of identity and the work it might do.

If we would resist the dominant sexual arrangements of heterosexism and sexism, we must take seriously the instability of all identities. Butler’s call is to resist the implicit notion of “real woman” that continues to define the heterosexual regime. As long as the internal “truth” of our iden-

ties is given by the regime of binary sex, then the problems identified with the constructed nature of gender have not been totally resolved. She asks us to forgo the belief that being a “woman” is a natural identity, that it is the inner truth about subjects, because that discourse deploys other hegemonic discourses that lock the lesbian and the homosexual as forever wrong, distorted, and deviant in their desire and practice. If we take Butler seriously, we see that the lesbian is no more a “real woman” than is the heterosexual “woman.” Their dependence upon these identities often reinforces the heterosexual regime and its assumption that the deepest thing that can be said about our identities is our “sex.” The category that merits elimination, in short, is the notion of “real.” Our “real” identities are only problematically identified with any fixed feature, not the least of which is our maleness/femaleness.

Destabilizing of the notion of a “real woman” is a move which should not be confused with getting rid of projects which resist specific forms of domination. It is important, however, to recognize the limits of resistance, which do not rule out change but point us toward a different politics than one which relies upon transcendental acts. The clue for gender resistance comes from the unstable social relations of heterosexuality: Women/men are not “natural” and fixed entities. They exist not by ontological truth but by virtue of “repetition” and difference. If we would subvert such identities, we must destabilize the acts that produce them. Through a patient process of denaturalization we can expose the fallible, constructed nature of the thing. Since the target is the notion that heterosexuality is the “original,” the response must be a “copy” that calls the feigned original into question. The new category Butler offers for such subversive acts is gender parody.

### **Gender as performance**

Parody, or mimicry with a twist, aims at displacing the reproduction of the difference — man/woman — and is thus directed at the heterosexually-defined boundaries on bodies. This subversion is clearly not accomplished

by the idea that the subject’s true nature as female or as lesbian is expressed in her emancipatory acts, a version of the notion that one’s inner true self is expressed in one’s behavior. Neither is this a turn to what is “real” or really true about women, namely, the body. Parody is a subversion of the surface body or the gendered body as it presents itself as male or female. The body, like the subject’s sense of self, is always socially coded. Butler’s alternative form of resistance proffers an image that moves us out of the identity categories which continue to legitimate and naturalize femininity. If parody is the alternative to invoking the real, it is also a new definition of gender. Subversive acts of parody which contest compulsory heterosexuality categorize gender as performance.

When gender is defined as performance, it can no longer be viewed as the “inner truth” of one’s being. As parody, gender refuses the real. Gender is a corporeal style; it is acts, gestures, and enactments which invoke and construct meanings available in the culture, rather than representing or expressing the truth of one’s inner sexual self. The mix of styles in punk culture is suggestive of gender performance; drag and cross-dressing; butch and femme styles among lesbians are the more productive examples of parodic gender performance. When I perform a kind of woman, I am invoking a host of cultural signs which reproduce my gender identity. As long as my bodily display is recognizably “female,” its difference is with dominant constructions of “male,” and my performance makes no gender trouble. It simply repeats the dominant codes. Resistance to oppressive power regimes cannot happen with repetition of the binary codes for gender, but it cannot occur outside of the available codes. That is why resistance requires parody of this order. Drag, cross-dressing and butch/femme lesbians are exemplary of subversive parody because they set up contradictions between the presumed anatomy, the gender prescribed by social code and the gender being performed. The dissonances between the anatomical body, the culturally defined gender, and the bodily display signify decentering challenges to the “real identity” of the performer. They signify parodically with the compulsory cultural

system of binary sex.

### **Addressing liberal/conservative agreement, not disagreements**

In light of Butler’s critique, it is not the disagreements but the discourse shared by liberal and conservative theological positions on homosexuality (namely, that persons are sexed objects) that needs to be addressed. Even though the progressive inclusionary positions eschew the conservatives’ discourse about natural orders for sexuality and sexual desire and refuse to treat biblical texts as divine prescriptions, they share the modern discourse of sexuality as a phenomenon “deeply rooted in a personality structure,” as a Presbyterian document puts it. And they share the convergence of binary (male and female) genders with that of sexuality. Both pro and con invoke a sexual preference: Sexuality is something that persons have as an orientation. Sexuality is “our way of being in the world as embodied selves, male and female.” Where they differ, of course, is whether it is acceptable to be the kind of person whose preference is for the same gender/sex.

What is troubling about this shared territory is the assumption of both positions that sexual identity is fundamental to a person’s being, and that there are two kinds of sexual persons: heterosexual and homosexual. Although that does not lead to the same views of the relation between one’s sex and one’s desire, since the progressives are free to wonder if sexual orientation is fixed, the frame still assumes that anatomical sex and gender coincide in two types of subject, allowing for desire itself to be defined by difference. The definition of desire on this heterosexual grid means that even the progressive position damns with faint praise the very subjects it wishes to liberate. As always the phenomenon that must be explained is not sexuality in all its complexities, but the veering off of a subject’s desire from its proper binary opposite to its mirror image: The search is for the causes of homosexuality, never the causes of heterosexuality.

As a consequence, the only target attacked by progressive positions is homophobia. The goal is equality — achievement of justice by the inclusion of gays and lesbians. I admit

that this is no small target; the difference between progressives and conservatives is a crucial one, and the strategies necessary to dislodging heterosexual dominance are necessarily multiple. However, this discourse of equality does reproduce the heterosexual frame of sexed subjects. Progressive church positions have yet to become a challenge to heterosexuality as the “real.” (The Presbyterian version specifically distances its inclusionary vision from cross-dressers and drag.)

### **Seeking an alternative to the theology of inclusion**

The discourse of inclusion of lesbian and gay persons — of the goodness of non-heterosexual subjects as creatures — does some important work: It names as good what has been branded inherently sinful in church traditions. This discourse, however, does not expose the constructed and unstable nature of all sexual configurations. If identity is the effect of a regime of power, then homophobia is not the only problem. Reproduction of heterosexuality has produced the illusion that subjects are constituted by a real, sexed essence which is naturally or unnaturally expressed by practice. Given the strength of that construction, and the productive as well as juridical nature of power, the only way to contest compulsory heterosexuality is performance of gender that calls the security of that regime into question.

In order to work toward a theological position better suited to challenging contemporary forms of domination than a theology of inclusion, another look needs to be given to feminist reliance upon the fixed subject, woman, as it is habitually invoked. To be sure, there are contexts where appeal to “women’s experience” and its validity may be a justifiable strategy to expose the silencing and oppression of women. However, it is not contradictory to feminist practice to conceive of an alternative form of engagement against sexism and heterosexism. That alternative engagement might take seriously the proposal that sexed identity is not an essential given of Christian discourse. This does not prevent us from taking seriously constructions of binary gender in particular situations. My point is

that feminist recognition of difference and its use to oppress is not preserved only by practices which accept the notion that differences are fixed essences of subjects. In fact, the obsession with sexual difference as the definitive mark of subjects may be precisely an accommodation to modern cultural discourses. More importantly, it very well may be a modernism that a theological proposal should most strenuously refuse.

One can certainly take issue with my conclusion that Christians are called to challenge the heterosexual as the real. Both the absence and the illegitimacy of a challenge to the heterosexual organizing of our identities and our “normal” sexual identities and objects of desire are defensible on theological and biblical bases. Implicitly, church documents warrant refusals to take up this challenge on the basis of their appeal to biblical traditions that seem to proscribe homosexual behavior. More directly, they appeal to passages from Genesis about the creation of human being as male-female, or the directive to procreate. Theologies of creation make arguments about the God-intended order that rule out of order my challenge to heterosexuality as the “real.” However, as defined by Foucault, Jeffrey Weeks, David Halperin and Judith Butler, to name a few, the “modern” character of the operative terms in the self-understandings produced by this heterosexual regime should give us pause with regard to the settled character of this issue. Any assumption that our notions of real sexual identity are somehow identical with the categories and worldviews of ancient or biblical communities — if that is our theological authorization — is simply naive.

A more adequate theological grammar of subjects would wonder about what the Christian gospel has to do with the nature of subjects. How closely tied to the essential vision of a Christian liberationist theology, or any other Christian vision, is a particular cultural code for defining a person? If it is clear that notions of inner sexual identity and the accompanying matrix that routes and normalizes desire from gendered identity are historically constructed, it behooves Christians to ask if these are identical with that which is constitutive of the Gospel. It is

not that theology has nothing to say about subjects; a theological doctrine of creatures would define them as *imago dei*, as finite, good in their creatureliness and finitude, vulnerable to temptation and idolatry, distorted by sin and reliant upon God for redemption. Given the judgment that constructions of subject-identities are themselves subject to the ordering of a theological grammar, we might conclude, however, that definitions of sexuality as well as our behaviors are characterized by fallibility, impermanence and finitude and are not essential to the community’s ongoing identity.

### **Iconoclastic criticism and radical love**

This is clearly not to say our identities are not God-given, shaped by a grammar of faithfulness, of dependence upon God, of ecclesially-formed practices of forgiveness, self-love, call to confession, and agape for the stranger. It is to rank prescriptions against idolatry higher than the specific cultural codes — physiology of desire in the ancient world; psychological, medical, psychiatric, in the modern — that we are tempted to absolutize in our ethical codes. I appeal, then, to a theological grammar that resists the absolutized notions of sexed identity that support heterosexism.

The Christian community’s discourse of fallibility, its beliefs that what is created is finite, partial, subject to error and a candidate for idolatry, come under another ordering in a theological grammar. Iconoclastic criticism in the Christian community is ordered toward a radical love. More specifically, this radical love is displayed in a community whose relations of respect, forgiveness, confession, accountability and agape toward the stranger are made available without conditions. The *kerygma* of the Christian community displaced the conditions that required one to become a Jew for faithful worship; its good news was that membership in the family of God was open to anyone, that salvation was by grace through faith.

If we follow this theological logic, we see that new conditions have been placed on membership in the community which gathers around Jesus, and they endanger the

*kerygma*. A modern definition of personhood which relies upon sexual identity places conditions upon access to the status of child of God. Radical love is invoked in the community to support a reality where there is neither slave nor free, male nor female in Christ Jesus, a reality defined by a grammar of justification by faith alone. A contemporary version of this grammar can expand its logic, a logic which refuses to put conditions on access to the Gospel, and do that by refusing to require binary gendered identity just as it refuses to require circumcision. This Christian grammar of iconoclasm for the purposes of life is, in short, intrinsically expandable — even to gendered identity itself. It extends our notion of justification by grace through faith in a new way. It confesses that our conceptions of identity are susceptible not only to the located and limited perspectives of the cultures that produce them, but that we are not saved by making of them requirements for full communion.

If the modern notion of sexualized identity is clearly indefensible as a historically consistent aspect of original and normalized Christian self-understandings — and I think it is indefensible — it is no less problematic when viewed as part of the essence of a transformative Christian theological vision. As long as normalizing discourses create heterosexuality as the “real” way that human beings may relate and are undergirded by the notion that the important thing about subjects is their identity as (real) men or (real) women, extension of theologies that focus on including women are not helpfully made to include homosexuals. It may be that inclusionary readings of Scripture are not subverting of oppression and it is time to read Galatians 3:28 with a new literalness, admitting that we are all performing our sex/gender. ●

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# TRANSGENDER

## **TRANSGENDER**

An umbrella term for anyone who transgresses societal norms of sex and gender. Although it formerly referred only to people who lived in another gender but did not desire gender reassignment surgery, the term now includes TRANSSEXUALS. All of the following categories are commonly included within the term TRANSGENDER.

## **CROSS-DRESSER**

The preferred term for men who enjoy assuming women’s clothing and social roles, usually part-time; the medical term is TRANSVESTITE. Historically, women who have cross-dressed have done it full time in order to serve in the military or gain access to other male-only domains. The overwhelming majority of male cross-dressers identify as heterosexual, and many are married.

## **DRAG**

Adoption of the clothing and behaviors of the other gender for enjoyment, entertainment, or eroticism. Originally used only concerning gay men (DRAG QUEENS, as opposed to CROSS-DRESSERS), the term now refers also to lesbians (DRAG KINGS).

## **GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL:**

People in these categories are considered transgenderist by many, in that they transgress the binary gender rule that says “real men” desire only women and vice versa. But most gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are comfortable with their gender of birth (gender identity), although they may manifest a wide diversity of gender presentation (degrees of “masculinity” or “femininity”). Some heterosexual people also present themselves in a transgender manner: not all “feminine” men or “masculine” women are either homosexual or cross-dressers.

## **INTERSEXUAL (formerly called HERMAPHRODITE)**

People born with genitals that are ambiguous, neither completely male nor female (about one in every 2000 births), or with an atypical set of sex chromosomes (about one person in every five hundred has a karyotype other than XX or XY). Many intersexual newborns and children are subjected to cosmetic surgery to “correct” their genitals, procedures that often result in permanent loss of erotic genital sensation.

## **TRANSSEXUAL**

Individuals who want to live in another gender and are willing to change their bodies through hormones and surgery to reflect that gender. Not all transsexuals can afford the expensive surgeries, which are often not covered by health insurance; and not all desire complete genital surgery. About 50 percent are male to female (M2F’s) and about 50 percent are female to male (F2M’s).

— Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

# TERMINOLOGY

# WHEN DOES CHRISTIAN

**T**HERE ARE TWO TRADITIONS regarding the beginning of marriage. The conventional Christian view is that a marriage begins with a wedding. An earlier Christian view is that marriage begins with betrothal, followed later by the marriage ceremony. Sexual experience regularly began after betrothal and before the wedding. There are historical and theological grounds for this earlier view, but there is also an explanation for its eclipse in the 18th and 19th centuries. Might this earlier alternative view of the entry into marriage have something to teach the churches in their struggle to accommodate cohabitation? Could conclusions be drawn from the earlier tradition for the churches' developing theology of marriage?

The possibility that this paper opens up is that alongside the near-universal assumption that marriage begins with a wedding is another — equally traditional — view that the entry into marriage is a process involving stages, with the wedding marking both the “solemnization” of life commitments already entered into, and the recognition and reception of the changed status of the couple by the community or communities to which each belongs. If this possibility is sound, one of the consequences that will undoubtedly follow is that at least some cases of “sex before marriage” which used to be frenetically discussed among Christians were misdescribed. The alternative view, that marriage is entered into in stages, renders superfluous those easy temporal distinctions between “before” and “after” provided by the identification between the beginning of a marriage with a wedding.

## **Two rival theories about marriage**

It is necessary to begin as far back as the 12th century for an alternative view of marriage to emerge, although its roots are earlier. The

# MARRIAGE BEGIN?

## Before or after the wedding?

by Adrian Thatcher

12th century Western church developed two rival theories of what made a marriage. Gratian and the Italians held to a two-stage theory of initiation and completion. The exchange of consent was the first phase; first intercourse was the consummation (J.A. Brundage, *Sex, Law and Marriage*). This view combined the emphasis in Roman law on marriage being defined by mutual consent, together with the biblical emphasis on marriage as a “one flesh” unity of partners. Lombard and the Parisians held that consent alone made the marriage. A principal reason was the strong belief, unquestioned at the time, that the marriage of Mary, the mother of Jesus — and *virgo perpetua* — to Joseph was never physically consummated and was therefore perfect. Consent could be made in either the present or the future tense, *de praesenti* or *de futuro*. Consent in the present tense was marriage. Consent in the future tense was not marriage, but betrothal (*sponsalia*). Betrothal “was dissoluble by mutual agreement or unilaterally for good cause” (Brundage).

The first known instance in the West of a blessing by a priest during a wedding ceremony is the 950 ritual of Durham, England (J.-B. Molin and P. Mutembe, *Le rituel du mariage en France du XII<sup>me</sup> au XVI<sup>me</sup> siecle*). Although the fourth Lateran Council of 1215 required the blessing of a priest, it was unnecessary for the validity of the marriage. Only after the Council of Trent in 1563 was a ceremony compulsory for Roman Catholics. Not until 1754, after the Hardwicke Marriage Act had been passed, was a ceremony a legal requirement in England and Wales.

### Sex, betrothal and marriage

The importance of the distinction between

betrothal and marriage, and the transition from one to the other, cannot be overestimated. The distinction continued until well after the Reformation (A. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*). Up to the 16th century, the spousal or spousals “probably constituted the main part of the contract.” Children born to couples conceived during betrothal would be regarded as legitimate, provided they married. According to Macfarlane, “it was really only in the middle of the 16th century that the betrothal, which constituted the ‘real’ marriage, was joined to the nuptials or celebration of that marriage. Consequently, during the Middle Ages and up to the 18th century it was widely held that sexual cohabitation was permitted after the betrothal.” In France sexual relations regularly began with betrothal, at least until the 16th century when the post-Tridentine church moved against it (see J. Rémy, *The Family in Crisis or in Transition: A Sociological and Theological Perspective*). In Britain, “Until far down into the 18th century the engaged lovers before the nuptials were held to be legally husband and wife. It was common for them to begin living together immediately after the betrothal ceremony” (Macfarlane). According to the social historian John Gillis, “Although the church officially frowned on couples taking themselves as ‘man and wife’ before it had ratified their vows, it had to acknowledge that vows ‘done rite’ were the equivalent of a church wedding” (*For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present*).

### ‘Processual marriage’

The term “processual marriage” is sometimes used to describe these arrangements, that is, “where the formation of marriage was regarded as a process rather than a

clearly defined rite of passage” (S. Parker *Informal Marriage, Cohabitation and the Law, 1750-1989*).

It is no longer generally recognized that the Anglican marriage service was an attempt to combine elements of two separate occasions into a single liturgical event. Alan Macfarlane develops the point in detail: “In Anglo-Saxon England the ‘wedding’ was the occasion when the betrothal or pledging of the couple to each other in words of the present tense took place. This was in effect the legally binding act: It was, combined with consummation, the marriage. Later, a public celebration and announcement of the wedding might take place — the ‘gift’, the ‘bridal’, or ‘nuptials’, as it became known. This was the occasion when friends and relatives assembled to feast and to hear the financial details. These two stages remained separate in essence until they were united into one occasion after the Reformation. Thus the modern Anglican wedding service includes both spousals and nuptials (Macfarlane).

This pre-modern distinction between spousals and nuptials has been largely forgotten; indeed, its very recollection is likely to be resisted because it shows a cherished assumption about the entry into marriage — that it necessarily begins with a wedding — to be historically dubious. Betrothal, says Gillis, “constituted the recognized rite of transition from friends to lovers, conferring on the couple the right to sexual as well as social intimacy.” Betrothal “granted them freedom to explore any personal faults or incompatibilities that had remained hidden during the earlier, more inhibited phases of courtship and could be disastrous if carried into the indissoluble status of marriage.”

It has also been forgotten that about half of all brides in Britain and North America were pregnant at their weddings in the 18th century (L. Stone, "Passionate Attachments in the West in Historical Perspective," in K. Scott and Mr. Warren [eds.], *Perspectives on Marriage: A Reader*). According to Stone, "this tells us more about sexual customs than about passionate attachments: Sex began at the moment of engagement, and marriage in church came later, often triggered by the pregnancy." He concludes that "among the English and American plebs in the last half of the 18th century, almost all brides below the social elite had experienced sexual intercourse with their future husbands before marriage."

### Registration by bureaucracy

The Hardwicke Marriage Act of 1753 required registration of all marriages in England and Wales, and set up a bureaucratic apparatus for doing so. Verbal contracts or pledges were no longer regarded as binding. Couples were offered the choice of having banns called in the parish of one of them, or of obtaining a licence to dispense with the banns. Marriages at first took place in parish churches; priests seeking to conduct informal marriages were liable to transportation to America (R.B. Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage in England, 1500-1800*). The creeping extension of the bureaucratic state to encompass the entry into marriage is characteristic of the apparatus of modernity. Uniformity was imposed and policed. Betrothal no longer had any legal force. While the working classes continued to practice alternatives to legal marriage, the stigma of illegitimacy now attached itself to children whose parents had not been through a wedding ceremony. Gone was the transitional phase from singleness to marriage.

The achievement of the widespread belief that a marriage begins with a wedding was not so much a religious or theological, but a class matter. The upper and middle classes had the political clout to enforce the social respectability of the new marriage laws, and they used it. As John Gillis writes, "From the mid-18th century onwards *sexual politics became increasingly bitter as the propertied*

*classes attempted to impose their standards on the rest of society.*"

### Virginity for social reasons

In contrast to plebeian practice where betrothal continued long after it had any legal force, in the upper class new courtship procedures required pre-ceremonial virginity of brides, for social rather than moral reasons. Gillis writes, "For all women of this group virginity was obligatory. Their class had broken with the older tradition of betrothal that had offered the couple some measure of pre-marital conjugality and had substituted for it a highly ritualized courtship that for women began with the 'coming out' party and ended with the elaborate white wedding, symbolizing their purity and status."

I hope it is by now apparent that the widespread entry into marriage in the 1990s through cohabitation represents remarkable parallels with practice in pre-modern Britain. The rise in the age of first marriage in the last quarter of the 20th century, to 28 for men, and 26 for women, is a precise return to what it was (for both sexes) during the reign of Elizabeth I. The destigmatization of pregnancy prior to a wedding is a return to earlier, but still modern, ways.

Gillis' verdict, written in 1985, is: "Together law and society appear to have reinstated a situation very much like that which existed before 1753, when betrothal licensed pre-marital conjugality. It is also like the situation that existed in the late 18th and early 19th centuries when so many people made their own private 'little weddings,' postponing the public, official event until such time as they could gather the resources necessary to a proper household."

### Conclusions

There are some tentative conclusions that may be drawn from a consideration of the entry into marriage during earlier periods.

First, there is no longer any provision for the two-staged entry into marriage. In the absence of this, it is possible to read the practice of cohabiting but not-yet-married couples as a return to earlier informalities and as a rejection, not so much of Christian marriage, but of the bourgeois form of it that became established at the end of the 18th

century and was then consolidated in the Victorian era.

Secondly, Christian marriage in the modern period has accommodated enormous changes (which have largely been forgotten) and must be expected to accommodate further changes in this new century. The Protestant denial of the sacramentality of marriage, the social permission accorded to marrying parties to choose their partners for themselves, the incorporation of romantic love into the meanings of marriage, the abolition of betrothal and informal marriage, the widespread acceptance by almost all churches of the use of contraception within marriage, the increasing acceptance by the churches of the ending of marriage (whether by divorce or annulment) — all indicate that Christian marriage is a remarkably flexible institution. There may be a deep irony here. Those conservative Christians who are generally opposed to changes to marriage on historical grounds do not always appear to be familiar with the history.

Thirdly, Christian morality should not equate pre-marital chastity with the expectation that marrying couples should not make love before their wedding. It would be dishonest to assert or assume that the tradition is unanimous about the matter or that no other way of entry into marriage had ever been tried, or that no theological grounds were available for thinking differently. Yet this is what much official Christian literature still does.

Fourthly, the possibility exists that the old medieval theories of marriage, which were responsible for the practice of betrothal, may be serviceable in the construction of the postmodern theology of entry into marriage which would have considerable practical value at the present time. ●

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# Back from the brink

by Ira Schorr

ON JANUARY 25, 1995, millions of people were minutes away from being incinerated by a mistaken nuclear weapons launch. Russian radar had detected a U.S.-Norwegian rocket that looked like a U.S. Trident nuclear missile. The routine notice that it was a weather rocket was lost in the bureaucracy. The black suitcase containing Russian nuclear launch codes was already with President Yeltsin when he was informed that it was a mistaken alert.

There have been many false alerts on the U.S. side as well, including one in which a nuclear warfare training tape being run on the command center computer was mistaken for the real thing.

The Cold War officially ended after the Soviet Union fell apart eight years ago. Yet today, the people of the U.S. and Russia still face the risk of being evaporated in an accidental nuclear war. That risk is increasing because of deteriorating infrastructure and the poor state of the Russian economy.

There is something that can be done to greatly reduce this risk: take nuclear weapons off of hair trigger alert. De-alerting nuclear weapons does not require a change in the size of the U.S. or Russian arsenals. Nor are lengthy arms reduction negotiations or legislative debates needed. De-alerting simply requires a determination by national leaders to increase nuclear safety and abandon confrontational nuclear postures.

On December 9, 1999, a major national effort to de-alert nuclear weapons, the "Back from the Brink Campaign," was launched. That morning, a new video made by the Center for Defense Information, discussing nuclear dangers and how de-alerting can reduce them, was released at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Speakers included Bruce Blair, one of the world's foremost authorities on the subject and a MacArthur Fellow; former Senator Dale Bumpers, now head of the Center for Defense Information; Beatrice Brailsford, Program Director of the Snake River Alliance, a statewide peace and environmental



group in Idaho, and Arjun Makhijani, President of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research in Takoma Park, Maryland.

The heart of the campaign is outside Washington, D.C. That's from where the pressure to persuade President Clinton as well as the House and Senate to de-alert nuclear weapons must come.

You can participate in the launch of the Back from the Brink Campaign by showing the video at a house party or on your local cable access channel. Free copies of the Back from the Brink Campaign video are available. To get one, send an e-mail to <srabb@earthlink.net>; write the temporary campaign office at 310 E. Center, Suite 205, Pocatello, Idaho 83201; or call our toll free number at 1-877-55BESAFE.

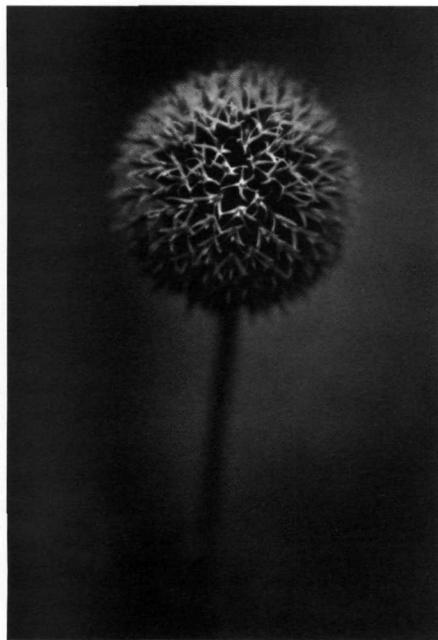
You can also arrange a news briefing in your community around the showing of the video. The campaign can send you sample press materials and other information in a packet that you can use and distribute to local media. The website of the campaign is at <www.dealert.com>. ●

THE PEOPLE OF  
THE UNITED STATES  
AND RUSSIA STILL  
FACE THE RISK OF  
BEING EVAPORATED  
IN AN ACCIDENTAL  
NUCLEAR WAR.

# A SEXUAL ETHIC

## — built upon the foundation of celibacy

by Diana L. Hayes



I WOULD LIKE TO AFFIRM  
THE VIRTUES OF CELIBACY  
WHILE, AT THE SAME TIME,  
ACKNOWLEDGING THE  
GREATER FREEDOM THAT  
THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION  
HAS PROVIDED, ESPECIALLY  
FOR WOMEN.

**T**O BE SINGLE AND CELIBATE without having taken religious vows, and sometimes even if you have, in today's world is to be seen as something of an anomaly, someone out of sync with the times. The sexual revolution is usually interpreted as giving persons the freedom to engage in sexual intimacy without guilt or the fear of disapproval from others. As a vowed celibate laywoman, I believe, however, that that freedom has too often not just been interpreted as providing a sexual license to engage in any and all forms of sexual intimacy but, in actuality, as setting forth a mandate or demand that one must engage in sexual relationships or be labeled a puritan or prude. This overemphasis on "having" sex has too often forced us to overlook some of the more negative side effects to the sexual revolution. The individual need and desire for a loving committed relationship and the responsibility to be aware of the needs and concerns of others (whether sexual partners or friends, relatives and children) have been negatively impacted.

### **The sexual revolution: greater freedom for women**

I would like to affirm the virtues of celibacy while, at the same time, acknowledging the greater freedom that the sexual revolution has provided, especially for women. Traditionally, in most cultures, but especially in that of the Christian West, a person was expected to remain a virgin until either married or firmly and irrevocably engaged. There were legal sanctions for men who "toyed" with the affections of a woman and then left her "ruined" and unmarriageable. Yet most of

the responsibility to remain virtuous was laid at the feet of women while men were usually allowed to sow their "wild oats."

The restrictions applied only to some women, usually privileged white women. Women of color and lower-working-class women were too often seen as women without virtue regardless of how they lived their lives. They were the victims of societal stereotyping. Women of African descent in the U.S. were especially believed to be naturally promiscuous and incapable of living moral lives. As the victims of rape and other forms of sexual assault, first as slaves and later as domestics and factory workers, they were blamed for what they could not defend themselves against without risking their lives or employment. This labeling persists to the present day for poor women of color who are believed to have children for the sake of a few dollars. Little recognition is given to the fact that these women don't usually have recourse to contraceptive methods available to more privileged women nor that they have often served as a sexual outlet for males of the dominant society to engage in acts unacceptable amongst their peers.

### **The limits of freedom**

Today, access to contraceptives and even access to abortion, regardless of one's views on their morality, is still too often decided by one's economic status rather than one's needs. At the same time, many persons of color see a push for contraception as a push towards limiting their numbers. These concerns, plus the growing alarm over the rise of HIV/AIDS cases among women and chil-

# OF SINGLENESSES

dren of color, also have an impact on the mores of black community. There, the numbers of women who have contracted HIV/AIDS is rising in alarming proportions, while the numbers of gay white men, traditionally seen as the victims of this disease, are on the decline. These shifts are scary because they reveal that a community already negatively impacted by racism, sexism, and classism is now being disproportionately targeted medically as well.

The numbers are rising partly due to what can be called a conspiracy of silence within these communities. Young people are constantly bombarded with media depictions of the “joys of sex”; they listen to music which is graphic in its depiction of sexuality and almost pornographic in its negative and derogatory depictions of women. Public service announcements, usually screened late at night and rarely during the programs that attract young people, cannot possibly lift the almost criminal silence about the harmful and life-threatening “gangsta” and “thug” life. Little information is provided in schools other than on how to use a condom, which most can’t afford or be bothered with. Nothing is said about alternate styles of life which uphold and promote humanity while providing a positive outlet for feelings with which many young people are still grappling.

Obviously, there are many reasons why sex is attractive beyond the obvious: that it “feels good.” The creation of a child, if we are honest, is usually far from the minds of those engaging in the sexual act, especially with new or even unknown partners. A sexual relationship, whether it lasts only one night or results in a more permanent relationship, answers many of the basic human needs. It conveys a sense of belonging, of being cared for, of being needed and desired. At the same time, it satisfies a longing for intimacy often lacking in today’s rushed and over-organized life-styles. Young people, especially, want to be accepted by their peers

so much so that having sex becomes an act of initiation into adulthood.

## Responsible freedom

I take my status as a vowed celibate laywoman very seriously. Initially my calling to the celibate life was something that I strongly felt but did not fully understand. It was, somehow, right for me. It was only as a result of serious effort that I grew in my understanding of my self and my calling. Many saw my celibate state as masking a fear of sexual intimacy while others believed I was lying about my commitment. Now, in light of the rise in sexually transmitted diseases and abusive relationships, many others are beginning to acknowledge the wisdom of standing back and attempting to discern who one is as an individual and how one relates to others, not just for purely selfish reasons but in a very intimate world of give and take.

A celibate lifestyle cannot simply be an afterthought or something you fall into until something better comes along. It is a way of life that must be chosen because it affects all that you are at every level. For me, the celibate state provides, not a selfish freedom of self-indulgence and irresponsibility, but a responsible freedom to live a life of service to God. My commitment is for life, yet others may be just as committed for only a part of their life. The ethic which guides my life is the response to the question cynically raised by Cain to God after he slew his brother Abel. “Am I my brother’s (and sister’s) keeper?” My answer is an unequivocal yes.

My single state has freed me not only to assist family members when in need, it has allowed me the singular grace of the company of my mother’s living and traveling with me for the last 10 years of her life, allowing us to forge a relationship which went far beyond that of mother and daughter. It has enabled me to provide opportunities, first for my nieces and nephews and now for their children, that their parents could not, an

introduction to worlds and possibilities they may otherwise not have known. But it has also enabled me to change professions in mid-life, from law to theology, returning to graduate school for eight years without having to fear the impact of loss of income for anyone but myself.

Today, I am free to travel, to write, to work on behalf of others, to develop loving and close friendships with both men and women without the tensions that such relationships too often bring when the possibility of sexual intimacy is present. It has also required me to live with loneliness and to feel, at times, unloved and forgotten. But it has rewarded me in the end with experiences and relationships beyond compare. Thus, for me, and I believe many others, a sexual ethic of singleness built upon the foundation of celibacy is a viable way of being in today’s world, open to God’s call, and free to respond often with very short notice.

A sexual ethic of singleness is not easy to live in today’s world of instant gratification. It requires hard and conscious work, that of getting to know yourself as an individual and as part of another’s or others’ lives in a deeply responsible and responsive way. It requires openness to periods of loneliness and self-doubt but its reward is great. One is given the grace to walk into a new phase of a life of celibacy shared within a community of loving friends and/or a committed partnership with someone that you truly know and love. Either path is equally valid but both begin alone. ●

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## Listening to militia members

"If you go to a farm auction, time after time you'll see someone crying and putting his arm around the man who's losing his farm," says Joel Dyer, author of *Harvest of Rage: Why Oklahoma City is Only the Beginning*, in an interview with *The Sun*. "Chances are, that will be a local John Bircher or a local militia member. He's there because he's lost his farm, too, and he understands what that farmer is going through. He's saying, 'It's not your fault, man. It's the government's fault. It's the evil Jewish conspiracy's fault. I love you, and you can come with me now and fight this battle. Here's another reason to live.' What a message!

"If someone were there for that farmer with another message — and that person would have to know and care about what the farmer was going through; it couldn't be just another urban type trying to manipulate the farmer — then the farmer might go in another direction. ...

"When I first started cruising around talking to suicidal farmers, my friends would say, 'My God, you're not going to Watonga looking like that, are you? They won't even serve you in restaurants there.' In a sense, they were right to be concerned, because I had hair almost down to my butt and wore an earring. And there would be a sudden silence when I walked through the door of the local diner. But then I'd say, 'I'm here to talk to so-and-so about how the banks are screwing him out of his farm,' and instantly they'd say, 'Hey, you want to come to my house for dinner?' and 'If you need a truck while you're here ...' Once we had a common cause, our other differences didn't matter.

"During my book tour, I went on TV shows like *Good Morning America* and *Today*. On one show, they introduced me as 'Joel Dyer, who went undercover into the antigovernment movement.' As soon as I came on, I said, 'I never went undercover anywhere. I walked up and knocked on doors and said, "I want to know what you

think, and why you're angry," and they told me.' The TV people couldn't believe that somebody in an armed compound had let me in just like that. I said, 'They're angry, and they want to tell someone why, but the only time a reporter ever shows up is to cover a shootout or ask stupid questions about how many guns they have. No one ever shows up to really talk to them, which involves listening.'"

## Organic food health research

New research supports the claim that organically grown produce is healthier, according to The Soil Association, a British group that promotes organic farming.

The research, done in Denmark and Germany, has shown that organic crops contain more secondary metabolites than conventionally grown plants. Secondary metabolites are substances which form part of the immune system of plants, and help to fight cancer in humans. Organic crops were also shown to contain a measurably higher quantity of vitamins.

Moreover, organic farming reduces the risk of pesticide poisoning, which afflicts between 3.5 and 5 million people globally each year, according to World Health Organization estimates.



## Execution feasts

State expenditures for meals served to guests at executions sometimes exceed the amount allocated for the defense of indigent persons, Leroy White, an Alabama death row inmate, writes in the *Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty* newsletter (11076 County Road 267, Lanett, AL 36863).

White reports that Michael Mears, director of the Georgia Indigent Defense Council, was able to obtain records from his state.

"For one execution luncheon, the state provided invited guests with an elaborate meal including 225 pounds of chicken, 20 pounds of turkey pastrami, and 10 pounds each of turkey ham and turkey salami at a cost of \$821. That is certainly a small sum compared to the millions spent in legal fees to support the prosecution's charge, conviction and sentence. But it is definitely an enormous sum compared to the \$212 that state and county governments combined allocated each year per case for defense of poor people accused of criminal offenses, according to a 1997 American Bar Association report. ...

"The true nature of these events is clear from another execution lunch menu Mears published. In addition to the basics of 20 pounds of roast beef, four cases of chicken, 30 pounds of lunch meats and cheeses, and

cases of chicken, tuna and macaroni salad, the menu includes 'one pan of cheese straws, two trays of hors d'oeuvres, and three trays of party sandwiches.'

"In an effort not to seem insensitive to the pain of families and friends of murder victims, I will rule out saying it is ludicrous to go feasting at the site of someone being killed. But I do want to point out how states are persuading guests to overlook the bad that is really being done, by providing them with such elaborate meals. The focus is taken away from the actual killing and any possible forethought of whether it is wrong or right, or even necessary, to kill the prisoner."

## Drug war targets women

The war on drugs has had a "very disproportionate impact" on women, according to Marc Mauer, assistant director of The Sentencing Project and co-author of a new report, "Gender and Justice: Women, Drugs and the Sentencing Policy."

According to the study, the number of women in state and federal prisons rose 573 percent in 17 years, largely due to drug convictions.

"They don't commit other, more violent offenses as often as men do, so, as you escalate the number of drug offenses and make the sentences harsher, more women are affected," Mauer said. "We need to direct more resources to treatment approaches as well as reconsider the mandatory sentencing policies that have aggravated the number of women going to prison."

## Oil, cola and genocide

Although two million people have died and more than four million been displaced in a genocidal war waged by the government of Sudan against its own people in the south, the crisis has received far less international attention than it warrants, according to an *America* magazine interview with Roman Catholic Bishop Macram Max Gassis of south central Sudan. Gassis cites religious, racial and economic factors as reasons.

"The Christian world is afraid that if they say there is a persecution of Christians by

the Muslims, it might create an outcry in the Islamic world. But we are not here to criticize Islam itself. We are speaking about a group of Islamic fundamentalists who are using religion as a lever to persecute the non-Muslim, non-Arab peoples of Sudan.

"Second, there is an interest in the oil discovered by Chevron in the area, and therefore they do not want to speak about the situation in Sudan. ... So they are not concerned about our fate or the ethnic elimination of the Africans or about the persecution of the Christians and Africans of traditional beliefs. ... The interest is in the resources of Sudan: the oil and the gum arabic which is mainly used in Coca Cola. ... So I'm making an appeal to my brothers and sisters in the U.S. ... to realize that there is a church that is facing total annihilation, if we do not come to the rescue of this church."

## Norway calls U.S. prisons inhumane

Norway refused to extradite Harry Hendrickson, a man charged in a drug conspiracy in Vermont, after the Norwegian Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision, questioned whether U.S. prisons meet the humanitarian standards required for extradition (*FAMM-gram*, 10-12/99). Hendrickson, currently in a Norwegian refugee center, will not face trial and will be granted asylum based on human rights considerations.

## Ban lifted on Muslim student's prayer

A Muslim college student in Michigan who was forbidden to begin her class presentation with a reference to God was later told she was within her rights to do so and allowed to make up assignments to get credit for the course, according to The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a Washington-based Islamic advocacy group.

Before the student at Washtenaw Community College in Ann Arbor, Mich., could give her presentation, the instructor handed her a letter stating that she could not begin it with the traditional Islamic phrase, "in the name of God, most Merciful, most Gracious," as she had done on a previous occasion.

The instructor's letter stated that the phrase was "inappropriate and unacceptable in an American classroom" and that the student must adapt to the "cultural expectations of the U.S."

CAIR argued that the ACLU interprets separation of church and state as applying to government and not individual activity. According to an ACLU handbook, "students are thus free to read their Bibles, recite the rosary, or pray before meals or math tests. Public school officials are prohibited by the Constitution from interfering with these activities."

Washtenaw President Larry Whitworth apologized to the student, stating that "it appears that the instructor misunderstood the meaning of the separation of church and state." ●

## CLASSIFIEDS

### Women's Caucus

Christian feminists: Plan now to attend the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus biennial conference, "And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy," July 27-30, 2000, North Park University, Chicago, IL. Speakers include Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B. and author/EEWC foremother Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. For information, visit <<http://www.eewc.com>> or call 847-825-5651.

### Episcopal Urban Interns

Work in social service, live in Christian community in Los Angeles. For adults 21-30. Apply now for the 2000-2001 year. Contact: EUIP, 260 N. Locust St., Inglewood, CA 90301; 310-674-7700; email <[euip@pacbell.net](mailto:euip@pacbell.net)>.

### Order of Jonathan Daniels

An Episcopal religious community-in-formation striving for justice and peace among all people. OJD, PO Box 29, Boston, MA 02134.

# Gender, ethics and parenting

by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott



## Parenting the Strong-Willed Child

by Rex Forehand and  
Nicholas Long,  
NCT/Contemporary  
Publishing Company,  
Lincolnwood,  
Illinois, 1996.

## Sissies and Tomboys: Gender Nonconformity and Homosexual Childhood

ed. Matthew Rottnek,  
New York University  
Press, 1999.

## The Case Against Spanking: How to Discipline Your Child Without Hitting

by Irwin A. Hyman,  
Jossey-Bass Publishers,  
San Francisco, 1997.

WHEN I BOUGHT the Irwin Hyman and Rex Forehand-Long books about parenting, I had no intention of reviewing them for this or any other publication. I read them simply as the grandmother of two dynamic little girls, seeking ways to support my son and daughter-in-law in their decision to raise their children without resort to corporal punishment. But while *Witness* co-editor Julie Wortman and I were brainstorming about gender and sex ethics, it struck me that these parenting books throw some important light on those topics.

Irwin Hyman, who teaches school psychology at Temple University, is nationally known for his campaign against spanking on such television shows as *Oprah*, *Today*, and *Good Morning America*. In 1996 when California legislators voted on reintroducing corporal punishment in their school systems, the motion was defeated in part by Hyman's photographs of bruised and welted children who had been legally paddled in one of the 23 states that still permit such abuses. Any adult who assaulted another adult and left welts and bruises would be prosecuted; why

would it be legal to do to helpless children what adults are not permitted to do to one another?

Hyman provides a 27-question Parent Punitiveness Quiz so that readers can find out how their attitudes about discipline compare to others' in our society. He describes exactly how to use positive reinforcement and punishment techniques (praise, money, stars, privileges; verbal reprimands, unpleasant consequences, withdrawal of privileges) as well as negative reinforcement and punishment techniques (removing unpleasant conditions to reinforce good behavior; time-out from play, family activities, or television for unacceptable behavior).

Since over 90 percent of American parents admit that they have spanked their toddlers, Hyman's suggestions could spare little children a great deal of misery. And might even save lives: Of 201 documented cases of the murder of children by parents or caretakers, 31 percent occurred as a result of punishment procedures for such misbehaviors as "refusal to eat dinner" or "blocking my view of the TV."

Rex Forehand and Nicholas Long, both pedi-

atric psychologists, provide a very specific five-week program for addressing strong-willed behavior through “attends” (descriptions or imitations of what the child is doing right), rewards for desirable behavior, ignoring (withholding physical, verbal or eye contact because of undesirable but not dangerous behaviors such as tantrums and extreme showing off), learning to give clear and effective directions, and precise procedures for administering time out.

What does all this have to do with the ethics of sex and gender? Of course there is the obvious recommendation of non-violent interaction between human beings no matter what their age. (As a compliant person who was nevertheless whipped on the principle of “spare the rod, spoil the child,” I find it pathetic that toddlers are in danger of being hit more often than anyone else in our society.) But beyond non-violence, these parenting books emphasize attending to children, trying to grasp the reasoning behind children’s misbehaviors. They demonstrate the ineffectiveness and the brutalizing results of yelling, inconsistency, and modelling inappropriate behavior such as lack of respect for the child. (If the medium is the message, how is a child whose parents hit and holler supposed to learn not to hit and holler? How are children whose parents showed no respect for them supposed to learn respect for themselves and others? I am convinced that the rage of many adolescents and adults stems from what they were subjected to during childhood.)

Which brings me to the third book, *Sissies and Tomboys*. It is those children who do not or cannot conform to our society’s binary gender system of “masculine” males and “feminine” females who are in the greatest danger of being so punished and shamed that they run away. Some are turned out into the streets by their own families. Sexual predators await these children, many of whom lack any skills to support themselves and therefore become sex workers. HIV/AIDS is a common fate. Although neither Hyman nor Forehand and Long take up transgender issues, if their advice about parental listening and respect for their offspring were followed, many gender injustices could be avoided.

It’s called “receiving the children” as Jesus received them: just as they are. And when those children who are well received have grown up, they stand a better chance of establishing relationships of mutual respect and supportiveness with other adults — and with any children they may in turn acquire by birth or adoption.

But for those parents whose children do not and/or cannot conform to our society’s gender norms, *Sissies and Tomboys* could provide additional insights. Based on a conference sponsored by City University’s Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (N.Y.), the book is a collection of essays by leaders in various aspects of the transgender movement. My advice to parents would be to start with the final section, “Sissies and Tomboys Speak,” before circling back to the sections on “Gender Identity Disorder (GID) and the Normal” and “Theorizing Gender Nonconformity.” It is easier to reject theory than it is to resist personal narratives such as Arnie Kantrowiz’ “Such a Polite Little Boy.” Arnie’s mother gave him hormone shots and urged his friends to assault him in order to stop him from laughing at too high a pitch and swaying his hips when he walked. Now in his 50s and the 16th year of his partnership with Larry Mass, Arnie Kantrowiz is glad to be “the particular mix of male and female that I am ... I feel like a person in a human being’s body.” But Arnie was one of the more flexible ones, able to retrain himself to “act in an acceptably male manner” that satisfied his mother’s — and society’s — dictates.

A theological question here might be, suppose God wanted to manifest Herself/Himself/Itself within a Jewish boy who laughs with a high tone and sways when he walks? (Why else was Arnie created that way?) Who are we to risk a child’s internal well-being by insisting on conformity to human-made standards that have nothing to do with health or decency? Although Kantrowiz has achieved self-approval in his middle age, there is a bitter tone in his “Thanks, Mom!” that betrays a great deal of alienation and struggle along the way.

The personal stories put human faces on the more theoretical essays, which perhaps could be summarized in this remark by Ken

Corbett: “By not examining boyhood femininity [and girlhood masculinity] across a broader range of mental health, gender is sustained as a system of conformity as opposed to a system of variation. The emphasis on conformity sustains the shaming attribution of a nonconforming, damaged, or abjected gender to those boys [and girls] who step over the normative line.” Although young tomboys are well tolerated in our society, the prisonhouse begins to close around girls at eleven or twelve, when they are urged to adopt restraints in order to be “more ladylike.” By contrast, boys are warned away from femininity throughout their childhood through words that “scapegoat women, flowers, or fruit ... swish, nelly, fruit, fruitcake, pussy, pansy, fluff, sissy, Nancy, Molly, Mary, and Mary Ann.” Why should we be surprised that many grow up with misogynistic attitudes?

As the introduction to *Sissies and Tomboys* makes clear, “Differently gendered lives — their individual variation, their differences from the majority — constitute a normal diversity of gendered experience.” But acknowledging such diversity is difficult because by its very nature, diversity resists categorization. Democratic pluralism tolerates only social groups that have achieved recognition as coherently conforming to some dominant social principle or another.

My suggestion of a dominant social principle that would embrace differently gendered lives is a very old one: the Golden Rule. As Richard Rorty wrote in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1996), “human solidarity is to be achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by *increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people*” (emphasis mine). Such an increase of sensitivity can best be stimulated by listening and attending.

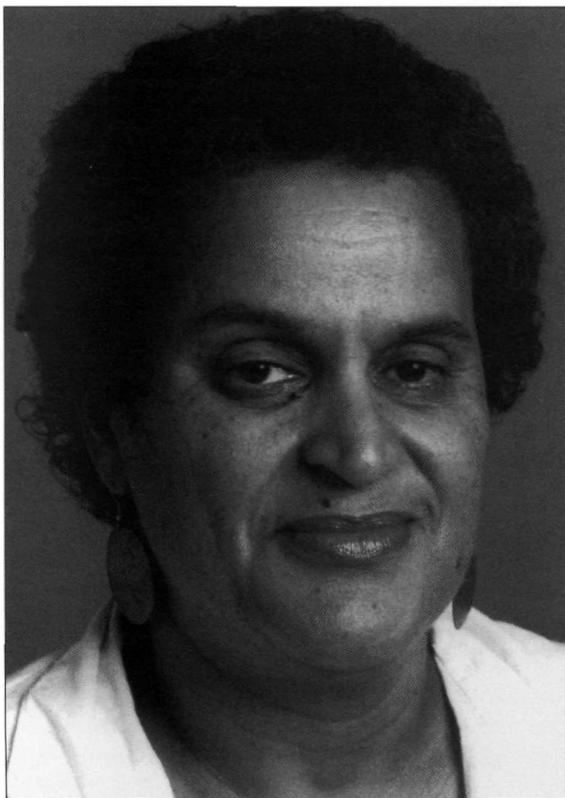
Even to tomboys. Even to sissies. Even to toddlers. ●

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# Seeking 'a way out of no way'

by Rachel Roberson



**D**ELORES WILLIAMS' FIRST BOOK, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Orbis, 1993), starts off in the desert. There, Hagar, the slave of Sarah and Abraham, is struggling to find "a way out of no way."

She is a slave with a murderously jealous mistress, Sarah. She has been raped by her master, Abraham, and forced to carry his child. She is completely cut off from her homeland and her people. She is at the bottom of the social hierarchy of the time.

Yet God speaks to her. When she runs into the desert, preferring to die rather than submit to Sarah, God tells her to return for her child's sake.

Hagar's life of hardship and her intense and personal exchanges with the Divine occurred centuries ago. But her story resonates still. For womanist theologians like Williams, Hagar exemplifies the struggle of black women throughout history.

"Hagar's predicament involved slavery, poverty, ethnicity, sexual and economic exploitation, surrogacy, rape, domestic violence, homelessness, motherhood, single-parenting and radical encounters with God," Williams writes in *Sisters*. "Even today, Hagar's situation is congruent with many African-American women's predicament."

In the end, although Hagar is banished by Sarah, God protects her from dying in the desert. She and Ishmael survive and flourish, and Hagar lives to see Ishmael become a leader of his people. She found her way.

But Hagar is still such a powerful symbol today because so many women haven't, says Williams, who is Professor of Theology and Culture at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

"So many of us are single parents, like Hagar," she says. "We may or may not be dealing with poverty or violence or personal grief."

Williams herself has had plenty of "Hagar moments." Her husband died suddenly in 1987 when Williams was in the middle of doctoral work in theology at Union. She was left to raise four children in their teens and twenties, finish her dissertation and find a way to survive economically.

Like Hagar, Williams, who is Presbyterian, says intense encounters with God and a deepening faith helped her slog through the grief and turmoil after her husband's death.

"We were between a rock and a hard place, and I didn't know for awhile what we would do," Williams remembers. "But I went back to the faith of my mother and grandmother, and it was a wonderful kind of inspiration."

Williams says her childhood in Louisville, Ky., was largely spent in church.

"My mother and grandmother were Seventh Day Adventists, my stepfather was Baptist, my father was Catholic, and my grandfather was a Presbyterian," she says.

"We would go to church on Saturday evenings, Sunday mornings — and often in the middle of the week, too."

There were church school and prayers and competitions to see which child could look up a Bible verse the fastest. But as a young Williams scrambled to learn the books of the Old Testament, she watched her mother and grandmother supplying the church suppers, staffing the outreach committees, and pouring their spare money into the offering plates.

"WOMEN AT A CHURCH HERE IN  
NEW YORK WROTE: 'WE WON'T  
GIVE UNTIL WE HAVE A WOMAN  
PREACHER' AND PUT THE PIECES  
OF PAPER INTO THE COLLECTION  
PLATES. WELL, THEY HIRED  
A WOMAN PREACHER THE  
NEXT WEEK."

“I noticed, even as a child, that the women were never deacons or leaders,” Williams said. “The women were the backbone of the church, but they were never elevated into formal leadership positions.”

Today, Williams has become a voice for women who, like her mother and grandmother, give their time, money, and spirit to churches that don't want to hear their voices.

“In my mother's and grandmother's time, it was the spiritual power of the women moving a male agenda,” Williams said. “The women didn't exert authority, but without the women there would be no black churches.”

Williams says her own womanist awakening was a long time coming. During college in Louisville, she threw herself into the Civil Rights Movement by organizing demonstrations for the NAACP youth council.

“At the time, I didn't question why women were doing a lot of the work and getting none of the credit,” Williams says. “As for the church, I didn't think that it was at all relevant in any revolutionary way.”

Today, Williams as a seminary professor continues to remember the wisdom of her mother and grandmother. Her habit of weaving childhood stories in with her graduate-level classes has earned her a reputation of being “down-home and brilliant,” according to former students.

And Williams is still in the business of unraveling and naming the history of the oppression of black women — and helping them break the centuries-old patterns of sexism and exploitation. As she writes in *Sisters*, “Womanist theology opposes all oppression based on race, sex, class, sexual preference, physical disability and caste.” She faults African-American denominational churches for a multitude of sins against black women, including responding to the

HIV/AIDS crisis with denial, sacralizing the male image, encouraging homophobia, and exploiting emotion rather than provoking thoughtful questions and responses.

Black women in particular, she notes, are in a double bind — bound both by notions of what is acceptably female and by a history of slavery.

“[In the antebellum period ] black women were forced to take the place of men in work roles that, according to the larger society's understanding of male and female roles, belonged to men,” Williams writes in *Sisters in the Wilderness*. So overcoming racism and sexism for black women, she says, means not only claiming full humanity, but the right to their own gender as well.

“There's still a lot of work to be done,” Williams admits. “This is by no means ancient history.”

Williams tells the story of a recent luncheon with Hillary Rodham Clinton at the traditionally black New York Theological Seminary. Although plenty of women clergy and students were in the audience, Williams noticed that not one joined the ranks of clergymen who asked Clinton campaign-related questions.

“This tells me that many women may still be bowing to male authority,” Williams said. “I realized that drastic measures will have to be taken to challenge what is happening.”

Williams wonders if picketing churches or, better yet, withholding pledges might not make clergymen sit up and take notice. Keeping back the money usually gets the job done, she says.

“Women at a church here in New York wrote: ‘We won't give until we have a woman preacher’ and put the pieces of paper into the collection plates,” Williams said. “Well, they hired a woman preacher the next week.”

Less public measures might include

requiring all seminary students to take a feminist or womanist theology course.

“Many students look on these courses as the ‘fluff’ courses because they are electives and seen as not that important,” Williams says. “But the only way we're going to get a wider audience to understand the issues is to educate them.”

For many, the education may not come without a great deal of resistance.

During the now-infamous 1993 “Re-Imagining Conference” in Minneapolis, Minn., a comment Williams made about the violence inherent in the crucifixion was lifted out of context and broadcast in national news reports about the event. Williams points to the sexism of the conservative press, which viciously attacked many conference participants and caused some to lose their jobs.

Afterwards, Williams kept quiet, but did not take back a single word. In fact, she is now at work on a book on atonement theory that examines the sacred status our culture gives to violence.

Williams also works hard to address that violence on the streets, where as a young woman she performed as a poet. She chairs the board of Project Green Hope: Services for Women, an agency now headed by Williams' first Ph.D. student at Union, Anne Rebecca Elliott. Each year Project Green Hope helps about 200 women fight substance abuse and successfully adjust to life after prison.

As in the classroom or in the lecture hall or in her books, Williams' compelling conviction as she works with Project Green Hope's clients is that for each, as for Hagar, God will speak — and help them find their dearest wish: “a way out of no way.” ●

Rachel Roberson is a freelance writer living in San Francisco, <rayrober1@aol.com>.

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Paul Caponigro—Apple Orchard, New Mexico 1976

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