

MORAL THEOLOGY II—TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Moral Theology Topic II
Convener: Christina Astorga, Fordham University
Moderator: Amy Pauley, St. Paul University, Ottawa
Presenters: Todd Salzman, Creighton University,
Kari-Shane Davis Zimmerman, College of St. Benedict & St.
John's University,
Kent Lasnoski, Quincy University

Amy Pauley introduced Todd Salzman, who presented a paper co-authored with Michael Lawler called “Intellectual Conversion and the Sexual Person.” This paper addressed areas of intellectual conversion (methodological and anthropological). Salzman supported a shift toward virtue methods, noting that “norms do not give meaning in the way that relationship can.” He then presented ways in which views of sexual human dignity might develop further in light of the methodological developments of moral theology following Vatican II. This led to a description of holistic sexual complementarity. Finally, a sexual virtue ethic was proposed. This ethic would develop in dialogue with theology and also with science; both essential sources for understanding human sexual dignity.

Pauley opened the floor for clarifying questions and a brief discussion of how moral theologians might learn from the sciences ensued. Pauley then introduced Kari-Shane Davis Zimmerman and Kent Lasnoski, who presented their jointly authored “Conversion of Heart and Home.”

Davis Zimmerman and Lasnoski began by explaining that their paper was a venture into “experimental moral theology” in pursuit of this question: “Can persons who dispute the fundamental meaning of heterosexual genital intercourse within Catholic Church teaching theologize about marital fecundity?” They answered yes, indicating that the key is to look for a holistically integrated understanding of “conjugal fecundity.” The experiment began with *Familiaris Consortio* and drew from principles of householding and CST principles of the preferential option for the poor, of solidarity, and of the common good. To demonstrate what this might look like they described practices for married couples such as taking in an unmarried pregnant woman, living intergenerationally, and opening one’s home to a recent college graduate. These practices would allow them to live out their marital vocation “to be fruitful and multiply” in kinds of ways that this paper recommended.

Davis Zimmerman and Lasnoski began with some history, noting patristic traditions regarding spiritual fecundity (in Jerome, Augustine, and Chrysostom) and then looking to the Catechism where spiritual fecundity of a marriage is still “couched in terms of biological fertility.” Finally, they observed that, while *Familiaris Consortio* “gives us a hint of where the conversation about spiritual and biological fecundity could go,” it “does not take us all the way there.” They read here an “invitation” from John Paul II for “Christian spouses (whether biologically fecund or not) to see their marital fruitfulness as rooted in the practice of becoming a mission-oriented communion of persons. In other words, marital fecundity includes a conversion of heart and home.”

In response to this invitation, they considered *community* and the preferential option for the poor. They described and spoke against the contemporary preference for “closed” homes, arguing that married couples ought to engage in an intellectual conversion which would allow their home to become an “open home,” through which they might better practice the principles of hospitality and solidarity.” In this way, they could “multiply the effects of their marital fecundity beyond the family unit and biological borders of the spousal unit.”

Pauley then opened the floor for discussion. Authors of both papers addressed questions about their decisions to work with traditional Catholic language. Salzman addressed the decision to use “complementarity” language, noting that this terminology was chosen in order to allow them to deconstruct and reconstruct it “in a way that is credible and informed by the sciences, human experience, scripture, and the best of tradition, especially its reflections on the unitive meaning of human sexuality.” Davis Zimmerman and Lasnoski agreed and noted that their language choice allowed them to be in dialogue with a broader audience.

At this point it became clear that Davis-Zimmerman and Lasnoski’s theological experiment had been embodied as well as intellectual. In addition to thinking through these principles and practices Davis Zimmerman and Lasnoski have followed these principles in their decisions to enter into collaboration with one another in part because they recognized the ways in which they disagreed on issues pertaining to this project. They also put into practice some of the concrete recommendations they described in this paper within their own marriages.

The thematic parallels between these two papers and their excellence facilitated an interesting discussion that led to new ideas and possible next steps for both papers and for moral theology as a whole.

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