

## SEMINAR ON THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

### A. ANTHROPOLOGIES IN CONFLICT

Cross-disciplinary dialogue between systematic theology and Christian ethics on foundational questions of sexual anthropology and embodiment was the focus of the 1988 seminar on theological anthropology. During the first session John Farrelly (De Sales School of Theology) proposed an anthropological basis from which to construct a Christian sexual ethic to which Richard A. McCormick (University of Notre Dame) responded critically and constructively.

Developing a theological context for a discussion of human sexuality in terms of the anthropological themes of creation, sin, and redemption, Farrelly asserted that the Judaeo-Christian view of the meaning of sexuality derives from chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis. The meaning of sexual differentiation located there, he observed, is "that man and woman together image God and share in God's creation by propagating the human race"; the meaning of sexuality is "companionship—the unity and mutuality of man and woman as different but equal." According to the Genesis account sin is responsible for the distortion of sexuality that issued in man's domination of woman and the alienation that resulted between person and sexuality, man and woman, and the human couple and God. Noting that salvation refers preeminently to the eschatological gift of liberation, Farrelly cited as one example of the reality and values of the reign of God already present the union of man and wife in love and fidelity.

The major focus of Farrelly's presentation was a discussion of the nature and meaning of human sexuality. Seeking an anthropology that does not create a false dichotomy between human nature and human history, Farrelly nonetheless claimed that "there is an intrinsic meaning to our human sexuality that is normative for us." As he stated later in his presentation, "There is a good proper or essential to direct genital activity that is antecedent to and independent of the individual or individual culture." (He further noted, however, that from his perspective, this normative meaning still makes room for a proportionalism in ethics.) Discussing this intrinsic meaning of human sexuality in terms of "sexual intercourse that finds its meaning in monogamous marriage," Farrelly described intercourse as an act characterized by freedom, self-possession, and self-gift, "a sign of love expressive of a self gift that is exclusive, permanent, and faithful . . . and expressive of a kind of love that is open to life or to the procreation and raising of children." This normative expression of sexuality integrates body and spirit, man and woman, the couple and the larger community of humankind. Hence the "full human good" to which we are bound may legitimate "some instances of contraceptive marital intercourse," but from Farrelly's perspective direct genital activity outside (heterosexual) marriage "subverts the right order."

Arguing that there is no contradiction between our responsibility to history and our responsibility to nature if human persons use technology and human initiatives in the area of human sexuality in a way that is not divorced from "its full genuine human meaning," Farrelly suggested that this approach recognizes the limits of human control over nature, views human interventions as a genuine participation in God's providence, and accepts that human fulfillment is ultimately eschatological and involves participation in the cross of Christ.

While he agreed with some of Farrelly's conclusions, McCormick explained that he perceived his role in the seminar as being "deliberately provocative" in order to elicit discussion. Characterizing Farrelly's presentation as "old wine in somewhat new wineskins," McCormick criticized Farrelly's sexual anthropology as act-oriented, essentially deductive, marginalizing experience as a source of theology, unconnected with specifically Christian realities, and using language that does not resonate with married Christians' experience. In particular, McCormick took issue with Farrelly's central claim that there is an intrinsic meaning to sexual expression that preexists the individual and culture.

McCormick proposed that what is needed is a whole new approach to human sexuality that begins with charity as the central dynamism of the moral life (or what he calls "the shape of the engendering deed"). Rooted in Jesus as God's incarnate self-gift, the Christian response to this restorative and empowering deed is a life "lived for others" in a similar mode of self-gift.

Within the broad context of sexuality as "our radical capacity for relationship," McCormick described genital sexual expression as "the language of relationship" which can be expressive of multiple meanings: anger, celebration, enlightenment, reconciliation, procreation. The general criterion of the rightness or wrongness of sexual expression is the person integrally and adequately considered (Farrelly's "full human good"). Hence moral judgments regarding specific sexual activity should be measured in relation to the central vitality of our moral lives: Does this activity contribute to growth in other-concern or not? Here McCormick noted that the experience of married Christians should be central to answering that question since the judgment involved is an experiential one, rather than a deduction from an intrinsic moral norm.

## DISCUSSION

The following fundamental issues were raised:

1. Use of the term "sexuality" shifted in the presentations (sometimes identified with sexual intercourse; elsewhere, "the capacity for relationship").
2. Importance of starting point in discussions of sexual anthropology/ethics: Why not begin at more fundamental levels of questions of gender and affectivity before discussions of genital expression? Why focus on contraception and homosexual genital expression rather than sexual violence and abuse?
3. Whose experience counts?: The voices of women and gay Christians have been conspicuously absent from discussions of sexual ethics in Catholic tradition.
4. The need for further reflection on sexual expression as language with range of meanings was noted.

5. Use of biblical sources/hermeneutics: Is Genesis an adequate basis for a Christian sexual anthropology? Alternate hermeneutical perspectives were suggested including those of Phyllis Trible and Paul Ricoeur. The Song of Songs (critically appropriated in a way that incorporates, rather than abstracts from sexual imagery) provides another paradigm for consideration of human/divine relationship.
6. Sin as selfishness/growth in charity as growth in "other concern": Note the feminist critique that one must be a genuine self before one can authentically give oneself in true "other concern."

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#### B. FEMINIST CONCEPTIONS OF THE BODY; GENETIC ENGINEERING

In the second session of the Theological Anthropology Seminar two papers were presented, followed by a brief discussion of the future direction of the seminar.

##### (1) *Feminist Conceptions of the Body and Theological Anthropology*

Susan Ross, of Loyola University of Chicago, discussed two perspectives which share a common concern for the body and nature: traditional Roman Catholic theology and contemporary feminist theology. The underlying sacramental vision of Catholic theology views nature and the body as intrinsically good and revelatory of the sacred. However, dualism, an exaggeration of the importance of sexuality, and an ahistorical approach to nature have caused problems for our understanding of human persons. The complementarity of the sexes proposed by this model (men as active; women as receptive) often perpetuates a subtle form of sexism.

After a brief, contrasting description of feminist theology's understanding of the body (historical, differentiated, "single nature"), Ross concluded by mentioning some implications of this approach for theological anthropology: (1) dualistic conceptions of the human person are inadequate; (2) the notion of complementarity of women and men should be bracketed at present; (3) we must move beyond a sex-based (and in particular an intercourse-based) understanding of the body to a more differentiated view which recognizes the many functions of our bodily existence; (4) conceptions of the person as essentially rational or transcendent need to be informed by embodiment; (5) persons must be seen as intrinsically related to the natural world; and (6) we must use inclusive God-language and images, since women's bodies are also appropriate symbols for the divine.

In the discussion that followed, one participant emphasized the need for a developed phenomenological description of this new understanding of the body. It was also suggested that the complementarity model might still be redeemed in time,

just as the formerly derogatory term "colored" has now been resurrected in the more general designation "people of color."

(2) *Karl Rahner and Genetic Engineering:  
The Use of Theological Principles in Moral Analysis*

David F. Kelly, a moral theologian from Duquesne University, discussed in more detail than can be presented here two of Rahner's essays from *Theological Investigations*, vol. 9, focusing upon how Rahner moves from anthropological principles to moral judgments. The first essay, "The Experiment with Man: Theological Observations on Man's Self-manipulation," is largely an anthropology and deals with many types of human self-manipulation. Familiar Rahnerian themes of human self-determination and freedom, openness to the future as well as to the transcendent are sounded. These render Raher sympathetic to self-manipulation, yet cautious because of the grave dangers it poses when used inappropriately.

In the second essay, "The Problem of Genetic Manipulation," Rahner treats the specific moral issue of artificial insemination by donor (AID), concluding that all AID is immoral. Kelly's interest here is to discern the reason for the shift from the greater openness of the first essay to the more restrictive position of the second. Kelly questions Rahner's appeal to a faith-intuitionist metaethical principle (which intrudes into Rahner's general natural law approach) and to a deontological norm (no fundamental separation of procreation from marital union). These two warrants lead Rahner to reject all AID, a conclusion that harmonizes neither with his theological anthropology nor with the position outlined in the first essay.

Kelly concluded his presentation with a proposal for how theological principles should be used in moral reflection: as hermeneutic themes, not ethical rules. Their proper place is to help in interpreting the meaning of the human person, who is at once co-creator and creature. Both these poles, when kept in tension, are more adequate to the mystery of the human person than the more traditional approach, which tends toward ecclesiastical positivism and physicalism.

### C. FUTURE PLANNING

In the final twenty minutes of the session, participants agreed on several points. A new format is needed, one which will promote long-term commitment to the seminar and active working relationships among members. One session of the seminar next year will be devoted to "Teaching Issues in Theological Anthropology." Participants will share their syllabi and discuss the relation between their theological anthropology and teaching. Thanks were rendered to M. John Farrelly for chairing the seminar during the past five years. Susan Ross agreed to become the next chair.

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