Reflections on the Virtues and Dangers of Sexuality and Celibacy in the Roman Catholic Tradition

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Abstract

This paper outlines past and current teaching on celibacy and marital sexuality within the Roman Catholic tradition, and explores the interconnections between these approaches to sexuality. Given the view of fallen human nature, historically most Roman Catholic theologians viewed celibacy very highly and regarded sexual desire and pleasure as distorted and corrupting. In contrast, Roman Catholic theology today tends to regard both marital sexuality and celibacy to be of positive spiritual benefit. This paper examines both the spiritual significance and dangers of sexual activity and celibate practices in Roman Catholicism, and illustrates briefly some possible parallels and relevance for other religious traditions.

Introduction

This paper outlines and reflects upon contemporary and historical developments in the views of celibacy and marital sexuality within the Roman Catholic tradition, as well as the theological interconnections of these lifestyles. In Roman Catholicism today, sexuality is thought to be potentially of much spiritual benefit to married couples, no less than the practice of celibacy, despite the fact that until fairly recently all sexual desire and pleasure was regarded by most Roman Catholic theologians as spiritually distorted and corrupting. This paper reflects on these various views of sexuality and celibacy, highlighting both the possible dangers and spiritual significance of these lifestyles. It briefly illustrates historical parallels between the Roman Catholic experience of celibacy and that of Theravada Buddhism. The paper also suggests that this spiritual significance of sexuality might apply to other traditions that seek in their religious ideals an integration of sexuality with other facets of the person, rather than a simple transcendence of sexual desire.

1. The Virtue of Chastity

Celibacy and marital sexuality are treated in Roman Catholicism as moral virtues. Official teachings regard both as forms of *chastity*, which in turn falls under the cardinal

virtue of temperance (C*atechism* 1999, 2338). Chastity is a moral virtue of sexual regulation—the "self-moderation and self-regulation in sexual life" (O'Riordan 2003, 442)—which applies differently to people depending upon their status as a married person, a single lay person, or as a member of a Religious or Clerical-Diocesan community. I will illustrate these different applications in a moment. However, I note here that chastity in all its forms involves the integration of sexual passions with the cognitive, emotional, and moral facets of the person. The redemptive ideal in Roman Catholicism is incarnational—it hopes that all aspects of the person will be unified within the healing love and light of Christ. Sexual desire is an essential element of the person which needs to be drawn effectively into this transformative and integrative dynamic. Chastity is a key to this personal, spiritual integration.

According to current official Roman Catholic teachings, there is a "twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life" (*Catechism* 1999, 2363), and these are thought to be intrinsically united and inseparable, given the basic nature of human beings (Paul VI 1968, 12). Sexuality is regarded as an enriching and "intimate giving of spouses to each other" though a physical communion that is "integral" to their love (*Catechism* 2354, 2361). In this view, sexual desire and pleasure are considered to be highly valued aspects of married life. They are key aspects in one's ecstatic and intimate opening to the personal depth of one's spouse, though the misuse of sexuality leads to distortions of the human person and relationships. Pope Benedict XVI observes how some contemporary secular approaches to sexuality tend to degrade the body by objectifying sex as a form of "enjoyable and harmless" recreation. Sex is "no longer integrated into our overall existential freedom…[but] it is more or less relegated to the purely biological sphere". Moreover, *eros* (sexual desire), "reduced to pure 'sex', has become a commodity, a mere 'thing' to be bought and sold" (2005, 5). On the contrary, modern Roman Catholic teaching regards marital sexual activity as a key feature in a person's movement towards spiritual integration and fulfillment in love and happiness. It is a virtue and a grace – an aspect of God's favor and help.

On the other hand, chastity for single persons is an imperative to celibacy—to abstain from sexual activity—where a person actively refuses to participate in actions that maintain, promote or enhance genital pleasure. Single persons are supposed to channel sexual desire into the pursuit of other life-activities and thereby to sublimate it (O'Riordon 2003, 443-444). They are to "practice chastity in continence" (*Catechism* 1999, 2349). Celibacy is a form of chastity that is supposed to be practiced by *all* unmarried Roman Catholics. It is curious how this fact is often neglected in discussions about sacerdotal (Priestly) and consecrated (Religious) celibacy—that unmarried lay Catholics are supposed to act celibately, just as are Priests and Religious Sisters and Brothers. For Religious persons, the difference is that they take a vow of permanent celibacy within the context of the Evangelical Counsels (obedience, poverty, chastity). Sandra Schneiders describes this as a free response of a calling to a "sexually abstinent, life-long commitment to Christ that is externally symbolized by remaining unmarried"

(2001, 177). The celibacy of unmarried lay Catholics, on the other hand, need only be temporary and need not involve such a deeply affective commitment to Christ, though presumably some lay Catholics do make similar commitments, even if they do not include formal religious vows.

Of course, for many non-Religious and non-Clerical Catholics, this can be a very difficult teaching, given the powerful nature of the sexual instinct and the fact that they might not be called to undertake Religious or Priestly vocations and might be actively seeking a permanent relationship. This has led some modern theologians to advocate a reappraisal of the severity of the 'sin' associated with most non-marital sexuality – "as defects in fortitude and self-control" – without denying all negative effects of it (De Vinck 1970, 81, 93). I will return to the status of marital and non-marital sexuality later in the paper, but I turn now to a brief historical overview of celibacy in Christianity, before reflecting on some of the critical issues that are associated with it and their bearing on marital sexuality.

2. A Brief Historical Outline of Christian Celibacy

The earliest Church structures included married deacons, presbyters, and bishops. For the first two hundred and fifty years, sacerdotal celibacy was optional in both the Christian East and West and presented as such by various Church Fathers and other writings and Councils of this period. Although Priestly marriage came to be the regular practice in the Eastern Church, the Roman Church advocated sacerdotal celibacy and, despite ongoing conflicts over it, various papal and council decrees were introduced or reintroduced after the 10th century to support this view. In the face of resistance by some bishops, celibacy was nevertheless established as an aspect of Roman Catholic Priestly discipline by the 13th century (Delhaye 2003, 323, 326). Celibacy was also a practice of some male and female communities by at least the second century (Cahill 1996, 172), and it develops into the formal consecrated celibacy that is practiced by the various Religious orders and communities.

At the Council of Trent in the 16th century, Roman Catholic authorities countered both ongoing criticisms of the practice and the developing Protestant view, which supported sacerdotal marriage, with the position that is current today: although the celibacy of Clergy is not an imperative derived from divine law and not required by the character of the priesthood, the Roman Catholic Church proclaims sacerdotal celibacy as an important aspect of the vocation of ordination (Delhaye 2003, 327; Kelsey 1986, 167-168). The Church has the power to dispense from the vow when special cases warrant and even the power to dispense from the law itself. However, currently sacerdotal celibacy is upheld as "the condition for greater freedom in the service of God" (Delhaye 2003, 328), and this explanation has also been given in support of consecrated celibacy. The other major reasons that have been put forward historically to support the practices of celibacy are the paradigm of Jesus' celibacy given in the New Testament and the

traditional negative views of sexuality. I will explore the question of the sexuality of Jesus before turning to the topic of freedom in ministry and then examining traditional Christian views of sexuality in relation to celibacy in Section 4.

Given the Jewish norms around sexuality at the time, which required marriage and procreation, there has been some speculation in contemporary scholarship that Jesus might have been married (Kripal 2007) or that he might have been homosexual in orientation (Kripal 2007; Phipps 1996). These hypotheses are controversial and seem to me to be highly improbable in the way they tend to focus on a few specific New Testament passages with sometimes very strained or narrow interpretations, while ignoring aspects of these passages or other passages that might counter the view. I do not have the space in this paper to explore these questions in detail, but I would note here that it is most likely that New Testament writers do not mention Jesus as married not because his marital status would go without saying, but simply because he was not married.

As unmarried, Jesus would have been a controversial and perhaps even persecuted figure within the dominant Jewish milieus of the period. At that time, a Jewish movement that spoke highly of even a qualified celibacy, appropriate for some followers, would have been suspect by most Rabbis and regarded as offensive. So celibacy would have to be downplayed, at least initially, by Jesus' followers. Moreover, if we presume that Jesus never advocated celibacy as a necessary norm for his followers, nothing needed to be said explicitly in scriptures about his own celibacy. Indeed, it seems to me most likely that it was Jesus' own celibacy that makes celibacy such a controversial subject right from the beginning of the Church. This is compounded by some of his related teachings, which ran counter to certain social norms of that time and culture. As Sandra Schneiders observes: "Neither sex nor family, according to Jesus, was the ultimate determiner of social status or relationships" (2001, 225). Once Jesus is perceived to be of human *and* divine nature, his celibacy becomes easier to accept amongst Jewish converts, given perspectives on purity requirements in relation to the sacred. However, given negative Jewish attitudes toward celibacy, Christianity begins with significant controversy surrounding its sexual teachings.

This perspective on celibacy is supported especially by Jesus' comments in Matt. 19:12: "For there are some who are born eunuchs from their mother's womb and there are some who have been made eunuchs by men and there are some who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. The one who can let this be his reality, let him do so".[1] Some scholars suggest that Jesus is replying here to the personal

[1] Translation of this passage is from Loader 2005, 131. Also see Loader for reference that supports Jesus' celibacy in the context of this scriptural passage, 133-134, 143-144.

Some opposing views give a radically different interpretation of Matt. 19:12. For example, Gary Taylor and Jeffrey Kripal suggest that, contrary to general perceptions, eunuchs are not impotent and historically were often sexually active as male prostitutes. Jeffrey Kripal writes "*Eunuch* could function as a virtual synonym in Greek and Roman culture for any male who preferred passive homosexual sex"

ridicule that critics are directing at his own celibacy, and that this passage is consistent with some of Jesus' other radical teachings, such as where he advocates the abandonment of family ties and obligations for the sake of his mission and the kingdom of heaven, where he claims that marital relations will not apply in the afterlife, and where he admonishes against divorce.[2]

Also, in imagining Jesus as celibate, we do not need to depict him as narrowly or harshly ascetic, or as espousing a disembodied spirituality as the ideal Christian life. Presumably, in his humanity Jesus would have had sexual desires that might have been expressed in marriage, if his mission had not precluded this. And within a celibate lifestyle, one can imagine that Jesus had very warm connections physically, emotionally, and spiritually with many women and men, without it ever involving what we would understand to be actual sexual relations. It is possible that Jesus was a very tender, sensitive, and passionate man—a deeply personal and intimate teacher and healer for the times—while maintaining a celibate lifestyle. And that is the image that much of the New Testament and Apocryphal writings seem to be giving.

In trying to understand this celibate lifestyle in relation to monogamous relationships, some theologians have interpreted Jesus' stance to represent his equal love for all, which otherwise would have been particularized in a special way to his spouse and children. They suggest there was something about Jesus' love for humanity that prevented him from directing sexual love towards a particular woman and focusing on a family—that such a love would have been too exclusionary and have inhibited the self-giving of his sacrifice. Similarly, they argue, Roman Catholic priests are called to participate in all aspects of Christ's life, including this egalitarian self-giving. Celibacy brings a freedom of vocation that in many cases married persons simply cannot have, given their special loves and responsibilities for spouse and children. Closely related to this freedom, Sandra Schneiders speaks of a particular *relationship* with Jesus that is enabled by the consecrated celibacy of the Religious life: "For Catholic Religious the

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(2007, 40). He argues that this passage suggests that Jesus privileged gay men in a movement that involved a kind of homo-erotic mysticism. Other passages he cites to support this hypothesis are: Mark 14:13 (following the water jar-man); Mark 10: 21 (the loving gaze); John 13: 21-26 (the beloved disciple); Matt. 8:5-13 (the healing of the centurion's slave-boy); Matt. 19:11-12 (afterlife relations); Matt. 22:30 (admonitions to abandon family); John 13:1- 6 (the foot-washing) (Ibid., 39-50).

However, it seems to me most unlikely that Jesus would be advocating a homo-erotic mysticism for his closest disciples in the context of the "eunuch" references. It is extremely difficult to connect such a reading of this passage with the reference to "the kingdom of heaven". What actually is the "kingdom of heaven" in this homo-erotic reading of this passage? How would such a vision relate to other sayings and teachings of Jesus? It seems more likely that Jesus is referring to celibacy here in his reference to "eunuchs".

[2] Scriptural references for these teachings are: Mark 10: 28-30, Matt. 19:29, Luke 18: 29-30; Mark 12:25, Matt. 22:30, Luke 20:35; and Mark 10:2-12, Matt. 19:3-12, Luke 16: 18.

only fully adequate motivation for lifelong consecrated celibacy is the relationship of the Religious to Jesus Christ. This relationship is experienced as a total affective involvement that is incompatible with an analogous marital relationship with another human being, and in its psychological-spiritual exclusivity is self-evidently and necessarily permanent, as is the relationship between spouses" (2000, 14).

In regards to sacerdotal celibacy, Pope Paul VI writes that it "signifies a love without reservation, it stimulates a charity which is open to all" (1967, 24). Priests are called to model the celibate life of Jesus and thereby embrace an evangelical freedom which would not obtain in a marital context. Related to this call to egalitarian love, Paul writes that the celibate priest is able to adhere "wholly and directly to the Lord, and is concerned only with Him and His affairs (1 Cor. 7: 33-35), thus, he manifests in a clearer and more complete way the profoundly transforming reality of the New Testament" (1967, 20). This is related to a sense of spiritual "purity" which celibacy is thought to secure: "The consecrated celibacy of the sacred ministers actually manifests the virginal love of Christ for the Church, and the virginal and supernatural fecundity of this marriage by which the children of God are born but not of flesh and blood (John 1:13)" (1967, 26).

3. The Status of Sexuality in Relation to Celibacy

This idea of "the virginal love of Christ for the Church" relates to the question of the status of sexuality historically in Church-thinking about celibacy. A major factor in the argument for celibacy amongst many Church writers has to do with pessimistic perceptions of the body and earthly life.[3] Even if the privileging of celibacy that occurred early in the history of the Church challenged the current secular social order and "served as an equalizing factor between men and women and between ordained ministers and laity" (Cahill 1996, 172; Brown 148-50; Schneiders 2000, 19), it also contributed to the disparagement of marital sexuality. Sexuality was thought to be negatively carnal and spiritually polluting. This view dates back to the ancient Israelite people, where, despite a positive view of sexuality in relation to marriage and a wholesome depiction of sexuality in *The Song of Songs*, the temple priests were required

[3] Wendy Farley helpfully summarizes the various reasons for the choice of celibacy in early Christianity that are developed by Peter Brown in *The Body and Society*: "freedom to spread the gospel;...the soul can transform the body; conversion of heart is helped by celibate integration of affections in relation to God; sexual nonavailability of women to men can overturn gendered expectations; friendship can be greater if it transcends sexual intimacy; rigorous asceticism includes the repudiation of sex, sexual renunciation provides what martyrdom once offered: the total self-gift to God; the death and resurrection of Jesus can be entered into in a way that makes sex irrelevant" (2006, 255). As Farley notes, not all these motivations to celibate life are based on a negative view of sex. However, some of them are based on a negative view of sex, many of them are based on a negative view of the body in contrast to disembodied spirit, and most of them imply a negative view of sexuality.

to practice periods of sexual abstinence in relation to the purity requirements associated with service at the Temple. One needed to cleanse oneself from the polluting effects of sexual contact in order to participate effectively in sacred ritual. The Essenes extended this view to include the larger cultic community in celibate relation to God (Meier 1991, 336-339).[4] Similar ideas develop within the Christian tradition—that in order to relate to Christ most intimately and completely one needed to be free of or purified from the corrupting effects of sexual contact.

A certain strain of Greek thought no doubt also influenced Church thinking on this issue. A general idea derived from the writings of Plato was that spirit is separable from and opposed to matter. The material body needs to be transcended in the spiritual movement to the Divine. Sexuality is associated with bodily passions that are earthy and temporal, while God is wholly rational and eternal. The religious ideal includes virginity or celibacy, for these orientations contribute to a state of spiritual purity that is a condition for intimate contact with a Divine who is solely spirit. Material aspects of life inhibit an awareness of, or intimacy or unity with, purely spiritual Realities of an eternal nature.

Similar Stoic ideas, such as the ideal of *apatheia* (rational freedom from the passions), influenced early Christian theologians, and Manichaean ideas also entered Church thinking about sexuality, especially by way of the writings of St. Augustine in the 5th century. Although he does not limit the distortions of original sin to sexuality, Augustine characterizes the passion (*concupiscence*) associated with the sexual act to be the very vehicle of the transmission of original sin. David Kelly observes that, for Augustine, "sexual excitement and desire for it, even with one's spouse, are intimately linked to that 'concupiscentia carnis' or 'libido carnis' [lust of the flesh] which is itself the evil result of original sin" (1983, 93). In this thinking, sexual desire involves a passion that is contrary to and resists a person's rational and spiritual will. Augustine understands sexual action to be legitimate and necessary for life within the context of marriage, but the desire and pleasure associated with it are defiling and sinful, even when sexual action is open to procreation. Only when sexuality is pursued solely "for the wish to beget children" does it not involve sin (Augustine 1994, 1.17). Augustine taught that the "weakness of incontinence is hindered from falling into the ruin of profligacy by the honourable state of matrimony" (1994, 1.18), but even the good of marriage cannot transform positively sexual desire, which ought to be controlled and "restrained as much as possible" (Augustine 1994, 1.9; Kelly, 1983, 99).[5]

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[4] Meier also summarizes his views on celibacy for the Essenes and for Jesus in Vol. 3 of *A Marginal Jew* (2001, 504-509, 621-622).

[5] See also Cahill, 1996, 175-179, for interesting speculation on the personal social factors—Augustine's relations to his mother, father, concubines, Manicheanism, and male friends—that would have contributed to his pejorative view of sexuality.

In the 13th century, St. Thomas Aquinas expressed a more positive view of marital life than Augustine, but he was heavily influenced by Augustine in his thinking on sexuality. Although he perceived marriage as a form of friendship and an earthly good, he writes that "the shamefulness of concupiscence… always accompanies the marriage act", and that it is only the "marriage blessing" that excuses the "corruption of concupiscence" (1981, Vol. 5, 41.3; Messenger 1948, 177).[6] Moreover, for Thomas, as for Augustine, "the virginity that is consecrated to God is preferable to carnal fruitfulness" (1981, Vol. 4, 152.4). In such views of marital sexuality, one cannot distinguish between healthy and distorted sexual desire and pleasure, even if sex performed solely for the sake of procreation functions as "a remedy for concupiscence" and does not involve sin (Messenger 1948, 163). This negative view about the status of sexual relations was held by many early Church Fathers, pre-scholastic, and scholastic theologians. Along with Augustine and Thomas, José de Vinck mentions Sts. Jerome, Basil, John Chrysostom, Gregory, Bede, Anselm, Bernard, and Bonaventure as condemning sexual desire and pleasure as a sinful consequence of the Fall, even within a marital context (De Vinck 1970, 28-30).[7] Strict moderation in relation to sex was considered the way of curbing the damages that are always naturally associated with the act, and virginity and celibacy were regarded as morally and spiritually higher states of being than that of marriage.[8]

In this negative view of sexuality, celibacy as a permanent lifestyle is encouraged religiously not simply because of its historical link to Jesus' life or because it enables one to embrace a more egalitarian love that transcends the specifics of a special spousal-familial love. It is advocated because of its religiously *purifying* character. A sexually abstinent person is best able to relate intimately with a God of pure Spirit. The idea here is that there is something spiritually debilitating about sexual experience.[9] Sexual

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6 St. Thomas also held "the view that masturbation is a worse violation of chastity than rape or adultery merely because it is *contra naturam*". I think John Grabowski highlights the severe limitations of Thomas' view of sexuality in suggesting that "this deficiency…may well be the result of a failure to fully appreciate the import of the personal values at stake within sexual intimacy" (2006, 81).

7 In 1679, Pope Innocent XI condemned within a marital context "the conjugal act, performed solely for the sake of its pleasure" (Messenger 1948, 176).

8 Jose De Vinck cites a book on the theology of marriage published in 1964 by Joseph E. Kerns, S.J., which claimed "Abstinence from sexual intercourse is associated with nearness to God" (1970, 76). Commenting on how celibacy had been elevated theologically in Christianity as the superior way of life, de Vinck writes in the mid-1960s: "The sacrament of matrimony has long been said to excuse concupiscence in that weaker part of humanity which did not have the courage to practice perfect chastity. Even fairly recent works have been leading novices to believe that the highest mansions of heaven were reserved exclusively for professed religious, and that their greater merit, their aureole, was due to the fact that they had escaped from the danger of sex" (1970, 8).

9 It is interesting to note briefly the similarities between this traditional Christian view of celibacy and that historically in Theravadan Buddhism, despite the different spiritual ideals between the two

actions involve passions, motives, and matter which are defiling and alien to Spirit, even if these negative effects of sexuality can be somewhat neutralized by the goodness of procreation and the marriage sacrament.

However, as I mentioned in Section 1 of this paper, more positive perspectives of sexuality have developed in modern Roman Catholic theology. They were perhaps stimulated especially by the teachings of Pope Pius XI in his 1930 encyclical *Casti connubii* (*On Chaste Marriage*), with its shift towards a more personalist view on human sexuality; by the pronouncements on the positive value of sexuality made at the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s; and then by Pope John Paul II's development of a theology of the body in the 1980s. Jose De Vinck cites a number of other earlier writers also as espousing more positive views of sexuality (Clement of Alexandria, Abelard, Alexander of Hales, Duns Scotus, Denis the Carthusian, and Leonard Lessius) (1970, 38-40); and Margaret Farley mentions writers such as Denis the Carthusian and Martin LeMaistre as beginning "to talk of the integration of spiritual love and sexual pleasure and of the intrinsic good of sexual pleasure" (2006, 45). However, the more negative view of sexuality has been extremely influential in the Christian West.

4. Reflections on Celibacy and Sexuality

We have inherited from Aristotle the idea that human beings are rational animals, where sexuality is considered to be an animal instinct in opposition to the rational

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traditions. In Theravadan Buddhist monastic tradition, the monk undertakes vows of strict celibacy which include all activities that might stimulate sexual desire. The ideal in this tradition is to experience through appropriate moral and meditative practice the transcendence of one's cognitive and sensory faculties. One opens to the condition of *nibbana* (spiritual liberation) only through such radical transcendence of the personal aspects of one's being that are associated with desire. Sexuality involves emotional pleasures that are extremely inhibiting to the spiritual ideal. Shundo Tachibana observes that "pleasures which are enjoyed through the sense-organs are always regarded in Buddhism as mean and detestable, and the greatest of these perhaps is pleasure obtained from sexual relations whether physical or mental" (1999, 118). Moreover, sexual relations can lead to children—a family-life which carries with it responsibilities and attachments that greatly inhibit one's movement towards liberation.

All forms of Theravada Buddhism espouse an ideal that involves the transcendence of the mind, emotions, and senses through monastic or ermetic life-styles that includes strict moral practices and meditative activities. Since sexual feeling has such a tremendous affect on the person, it has been regarded by some monks as one of the most spiritually inhibiting activities. Tachibana, for example, refers to it as "the most powerful instinct that human beings are naturally endowed with" and "the basest pleasure" (1999, p. 118). Understood as such, the monastic celibate lifestyle has been highly respected in Theravada cultures, even amongst lay-Buddhists, as a sign of the greatest personal strength: "To cut off the strongest human bond, or to suppress the meanest human desire, is the most significant preliminary to a course of religious life where vigorous mental struggle is needed" (1999, 118)

Today in Theravada Buddhism many monks have a more positive view of sexuality, even if the desire that is associated with this passion is understood as something to be redirected within a celibate context.

nature of the human spirit. Freud later influentially identifies this animal instinct with the human *libido* (sexual or vital energy)—where sexuality is thought to be the source of all of our physiological vitality. This Freudian view has come to be widely accepted in modern times, even within many Christian circles. Our organic urge for sex provides the vital energy that drives all human activity. This happens by way of sublimation. The physiological energy driving all creative actions is sexual energy that is deflected into other channels of the person. Freud argues that this happens quite naturally and unconsciously, where our primitive sexual instinct is transformed into creative cognitive and emotional states through a process of sublimation. Libido energy is used for higher purposes via this transformative dynamic.

This idea of *sublimation* has been drawn into modern Christian pastoral and theological contexts in significant ways, including an acknowledgement of the power and dangers associated with sexual energy. This helps us to understand some of the serious problems surrounding modern-day sexual disorders, whereby repressed and unreleased sexual tension becomes displaced in neurotic and even psychotic behavior, which can be destructive both to oneself and to others. Jean-Marc Laporte observes: "as we have seen, misplaced or disordered sexual energy is often coupled with feelings of violence, anger, domination, as in the various forms of sexual abuse" (2007, 47).

St. Augustine was correct in recognizing that the sexual urge is one of the most powerful instincts of human nature. At least in the case of male sexuality,[10] there is the acknowledgement in contemporary Christian pastoral theology that celibacy requires one to deal consciously and carefully with these primitive urges, to continuously work to sublimate them in appropriate ways, so that one does not unconsciously act out on them in perversely destructive fashion. Laporte writes that sexuality "needs to be acknowledged, befriended, and integrated". "Ease with one's own self in all its unique characteristics also means ease with the sexual energy which the Lord has bestowed upon each of us, and the ability to channel it constructively, to bring it to a clear and life-giving focus" (2007, 46, 44).

As I developed in Section 4, historically most Christian theologians perceived sexuality as an activity which involves sensory passions that greatly inhibit the spiritually transformative or redemptive dynamic of the person. So one can understand

[10] Lisa Sowle Cahill speculates that for women the primary issues surrounding sexuality are related to maternity rather than that of controlling sexual drives: "Male sexual drives are more genitally focused and urgent than those of most women; male sexual response may seem to have an autonomy and uncontrollability that accentuates sex's danger and easily represents all that is obsessive and addictive in human relationships. ...For women, on the other hand, sexual drives assume less importance on the landscape of identity" (1996, 198). Similarly, Sandra Schneiders mentions a 1993 study of Religious in the U.S. done by Nygren and Ukjeritis which found that women Religious reported "greater fidelity to the vow of chastity than did men" and also that the vow of chastity was the most meaningful vow to the women and the easiest to maintain. On the other hand, the men, which included both Religious brothers and priests, found chastity the least meaningful and the most difficult vow to maintain (2000, 24-25).

why in this perspective some men came to regard women as threatening, and one can find examples within the Christian tradition where this orientation became even destructively misogynous. Whether they try to or not, women can trigger in men extremely powerful desires which can be quite difficult to control and which were thought to adversely affect one's spiritual well-being. In some cases in male celibate traditions of Christianity, these sexual desires came to be regarded as evil. Women became the object of mistrust or even hatred for some men, who blamed women for their own sexual desire, which they perceived to be extremely debilitating spiritually. Women became the scapegoats of the fear men have of their own sexual desire.[11]

Such an anti-female attitude is a clear example of how emotional and spiritual distortions have entered historically into celibate traditions, both East and West. It illustrates how negative views of sexuality tend to lead to psychic and emotional distortions. Just as sexual activity can be both degraded and destructive to oneself and others, so too can the practice of sacerdotal celibacy issue forth in extremely negative orientations and actions. Morton and Barbara Kelsey claim quite plausibly that when "celibacy is practiced because sexuality is perceived as evil, it can become demonic and repressive. A host of moral and psychological problems arise" (1986, 177). When attempts to sublimate sexual desire fail under such conditions, this can lead to mean and destructive behavior, as a person re-directs towards oneself or other people the frustration, fear, and anger associated with the tensions of distorted sexual continence. Celibate lifestyles include real and serious hazards.

On the other hand, if celibate men regard sexuality as something that is genuinely good and a grace, they will hardly be able to harbor ill will towards women for stimulating a desire for something so positive. In Section 2 of this paper, I began to outline affirmative Roman Catholic teachings about sexual desire and pleasure that developed in the 20th century. In the 1980s, Pope John Paul II developed a theology of the body which draws on a personalist philosophy which stresses the deeply spiritual unitive function of sexuality. He writes of a language of the body in terms of the self-giving intimacy of marital sexuality. John Grabowski summarizes key points of his view: "Just as one can communicate through bodily gestures as well as through words, in sexual union a married couple 'speaks' a language on the basis of their masculinity and femininity. That which is communicated in this somatic dialogue is both a word of fidelity and of total self-giving" (2006, 46). Similarly, in creatively expanding upon a natural law theory of sexuality in the 1960s, José de Vinck writes: "Sex is a good gift from God that greatly enriches those who use it properly in both its reproductive and

[11] Apparently this danger applies also in a Buddhist celibate context. Geoffrey Parrinder comments on why monks came to perceive women as dangerous: "Sexual relations would bring attachment that would distract the monk not only from his vow of chastity, but from the search for liberation. Moreover, children might be born and family life would bring further ties. Monks therefore denounced sexual intercourse as 'bestial', and looked on women with fear and contempt" (1980, 45).

personalistic functions; there is a virtue and an obligation of gratitude in taking full advantage of it" (1970, 59).[12]

Chaste sexual activity is here regarded as a virtue equal in status to the practice of celibacy. De Vinck observes how sexual relations might greatly enhance the spiritual condition of the participants: "Love-making may be so transmuted, humanized and spiritualized in intent as to become a magnificent prayer in act—for what is prayer if not an expression of love, and what better expression of love than the supremely human surrender by which we love so overwhelmingly so as to lose the consciousness of ourselves?" (1970, 224). Rosemary Haughton also writes in the 1960s of the potential holiness of marital sexuality, and not just the sacredness of other elements of married life: "The physical love anchors love in the flesh, but it is also the means of transforming the flesh by love … [A] sexual relationship is a normal means of spiritual development" (Haugton 1969, 66-67). Sexuality provides a highly enjoyable way to learn how to shift from self-centered orientations to self-giving stances. Insofar as it contributes in an essential way to a person's spiritual integration and redemptive fulfillment, sex becomes sacramentalized. Haughton observes that sex "is the normal way in which people begin to discover the meaning of knowledge and love by emerging from the selfishness of the flesh" (1969, 68).[13]

Sexuality is potentially *kenotic* or self-giving. Haughton remarks: "Love grows by its expression in intercourse; it learns, and gains strength, and applies this learning to all the incidents of shared living" (1969, 78-79). Sexual experience also possesses a powerful healing quality which helps a couple respond positively to life's struggles and set backs. Through sexual relations, one gradually learns to surrender oneself physically and emotionally within the context of an ecstatic delight that is healing and transforming.[14] Moreover, spiritual passions of sexual intimacy might be naturally redirected outwards beyond the couple, manifested as self-less desire and love for their children, and the caring and support for others.

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[12] Along the lines of de Vinck's development, Lisa Fullam asks, "What are the perfections of our character, the virtues resident inchoatively in our natures that may be developed in the context of sexual relationships?" (2009, 14). She briefly outlines three possibilities: an aesthetic appreciation in relation to incarnation, "an ability of intimacy", and a deep level of understanding and insight (2009, 16-17).

[13] Along the lines of Haughton's development, Philip Sheldrake claims that "To give and to receive sexually has a sacramental quality as long as it truly aspires to be a gift of *self* and a joyful receiving of another person, rather than merely an exchange of bodily stimulation. Spirit touches spirit. We might borrow the old catechism language about sacraments, 'it is an outward sign of inward grace', of a deeper inner reality" (2001, 35-36).

[14] Again, Sheldrake remarks: "Sexual intimacy is eucharistic, a liturgy that may heal and restore loving partners to a spiritual centeredness" (2001, 36).

Obviously there are various possible degrees of self-giving, and one's sexual experience is affected by factors which can inhibit in serious ways one's ability to be open to the deeper spiritual aspects of the experience. Lisa Sowle Cahill names some of the ways "sexual sharing is hampered or disturbed": couples can be "stressed by economic difficulties, an ongoing disagreement about a family matter, blind spots in seeing one another's emotional needs, a crying child, lack of sleep, or an important project due at work" (1996, 203). Nevertheless, despite such distractions, sexuality can become an intensely spiritual act and couples are encouraged to be open in that direction. Moreover, this spiritual significance of sexuality as *kenotic* would seem potentially to apply to all religious traditions that advocate an *integration* of sexual desire and pleasure with the moral and spiritual facets of the person. It would not have meaning in those religious traditions that insist solely on a radical *transcendence* of sexuality in their spiritual ideal.

In this view, sexuality is an ideal opportunity for a person to come to integrate his or her instinctual impulses with higher emotional and moral passions, within the context of an ecstatic experience that is extremely pleasurable and in its highest forms a radical self-giving to one's beloved. Sexuality becomes a vehicle of self-surrender in intimate emotional and physical relations with one's spouse. Insofar as sexual desire can be integrated with one's desire for God, marital sexual union has the potential of becoming a sacred act of immense mystical power. In sexual relations, a person participates directly in sacred mysteries of creation—the couple become co-creators of human life with God—within the context of an experience of radical self-giving and self-surrender. This spiritual significance of sexuality can color profoundly the physical and emotional experience of it, and perhaps begins to parallel mystical views of sexuality that are present in some Jewish mystical traditions.

William Dinges observes how this very positive regard of sexuality has not yet been effectively integrated into current Roman Catholic pastoral contexts: "What a tragedy that our religious tradition has taken so long to acknowledge in a more positive way the sacred nature of sexuality—including genital sexuality. This is why today so many Catholic couples have a difficult time articulating the sacramental nature of their sexual expression".[15] Moreover, it appears that the traditional emphasis of celibacy in

[15] This comment from Dinges was given in correspondence. Along similar lines, Wendy Farley writes: "The blind sense of defilement that still haunts sex and sexuality [in the Christian West] must be subjected to relentless criticism and responsible repudiation". In her book *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, Farley goes on to propose a revision of Christian sexual ethics which would ground it in a framework of "justice in loving", one that attends to four sources (scripture, tradition, secular knowledge, and contemporary experience) in espousing general sexual norms (no unjust harming of others, free consent, mutuality, equality, commitment, fruitfulness, and social justice). She writes, "Insofar as there is a focus on justice, the primary concern is with power inequities in gender relations or with more general considerations of social justice as it shapes sexual identity and activity" (2006, 177-178, 207, 182).

the Roman Catholic tradition has led to the exclusion of sexuality from mysticism. Virtually all of the leading and influential Roman Catholic mystics were celibate, and more affective strands of the mystical tradition tend to advocate a redirecting of sexual desire for other persons into passion for God. Although it seems clear that sexual desire is an essential stimulant in the celibate movement of many Christian mystical experiences,[16] traditionally it was thought that humanf sexual relationships could not possibly be mystical in character, given the distorting character of sexual passions. However, these more positive contemporary understandings of sexuality create the possibility that mystical experience might enter into certain kinds of sexual experience.[17] Dialogue on this with theologians from Jewish mystical traditions might be particularly fruitful, given their experiences of this reality (Laenen 2001, 138-139).

However, with respect to celibate lifestyles, celibate men and women from all religious traditions who genuinely regard sexuality as potentially holy and sacramental will be living within a difficult tension. No doubt it is easier not to act on pressing sexual desires if one thinks of these as evil or negative. If one regards sexuality positively, then sexual desires will be that much harder to resist and to sublimate. This fact perhaps helps to explain the tendencies historically of some celibate traditions cross-religiously to regard sexuality negatively, and I think it supports strongly the contention that celibacy as a permanent vow is a very unusual vocation—a specific calling that is meant only for a few women and men. Moreover, the celibate life can only be understood as a virtuous sacrifice if what is given up in the calling is regarded as something that is good. When one treats sexuality and sexual pleasure as a great good and grants it even a sacred significance, then the willful giving up of celibacy will be something exceptionally valuable.

The value of celibacy seems to be located in its vocational orientation: in most cases, the celibate person possesses a greater freedom to undertake work in harsh,

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[16] For example, Sandra Schneiders seems to suggest that sexual energy of Religious women can be directed towards the person of Jesus. In reference to the traditional nuptial and spousal metaphors in characterizing consecrated celibacy, she writes of the "passion of the personal attachment to Jesus": "The person…experiences herself in intimate relationship with a glorified human being, Jesus" (2001, 188).

[17] For example, in his personalist theology of the body, John Paul II seems to point towards a mystical experience associated with the unitive ideal of marital sexuality: "The fact that they become 'one flesh' is a powerful bond established by the Creator through which they discover their own humanity, both in its original unity and in the duality of a mysterious reciprocal attraction. …When both unite so intimately with each other that they become 'one flesh', their conjugal union presupposes a mature consciousness of the [male and female] body. Better yet, this union *carries within itself a particular awareness of the meaning of that body in the reciprocal self-gift of the persons*." …in every conjugal union of man and woman, there is a new discovery of the same original consciousness of the unitive meaning of the body in its masculinity and femininity; …each union of this kind renews in some way the mystery of creation in its original depth and vital power" (2006, 10.2, 4).

dangerous or isolated conditions, and to concentrate energy over extended periods of time on specific pastoral challenges or tasks that require one's total commitment and attention. Within a Christian context, this might include entering more enclosed settings for long periods or even permanently, to nourish in a more concentrated and isolated way a contemplative opening to Christ. Sandra Schneiders speaks of a "celibate solitude", in arguing that consecrated celibacy is a lifestyle – what she calls a "lifeform" – that involves "an essentially contemplative vocation, a call to mystical immediacy to God that becomes ever more constant and absorbing in the course of a lifetime" (2000, 132). Clearly, some lay Catholics also undertake contemplative practices in serious and significant ways, and some also participate in a movement towards mystical immediacy with God. [18] However, spouse, children and career might require attention and energy which inhibit or at least hinder a married person's ability to undertake certain kinds of pastoral obligations and extended isolated activities.

Schneiders observes, "Consecrated celibacy is a major condition of the possibility of lifelong itinerancy" (2001, 258).[19] I would add that celibacy is also a condition of the possibility of *permanent* contemplative enclosure. However, there would not appear to be anything about married life that would constrain a person from undertaking sacramental responsibilities involved in a Priestly ordination. Just as married deacons are called to minister and assist in certain sacraments, so also married persons might be able to minister effectively the sacramental duties that are associated with the *presbyterium*. There are no Catholic sacraments which require *by their nature* the celibacy of the minister. This is clear from the past and current Roman Catholic union with some eastern traditions which include married priests, and from the fact that some married men have entered the Catholic tradition from other Christian Churches, to minister there as married priests. Moreover, the reasons given to support the requirement of celibacy in the Catholic priesthood do not derive from the nature of the vocation itself.

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[18] Schneiders distinguishes between the "commitment of Religious to Jesus Christ in lifelong consecrated celibacy" and the "commitment of the spouses to Christ through the lifelong commitment to each other in faithful sexual monogamy" (2000, 125). She claims that the former is an "unmediated primary commitment" while the latter is mediated by the "immediate primary commitments" to spouse and children (2000, 313). However, it seems to me that Religious and Married Catholics are both able to make unmediated primary commitments to Jesus, with the difference between the two lifeforms then being that the Religious lives this commitment within celibate community while the Married person lives this commitment within sexual marriage.

[19] Schneiders elsewhere qualifies this condition of itinerancy by claiming: "It seems that matrimony, especially when children are involved, more characteristically gives rise to a householder lifestyle, and consecrated celibacy, especially that of ministerial Religious, to an itinerant lifestyle, although there is nothing absolute about this and it should not be regarded as prescriptive or even normative" (2001, 256).

It would seem that the fundamental difference in lifeform related to the abstention or the expression of genital sexuality is that marriage carries with it commitments and responsibility to spouse and children that will not pertain for celibate Priests, Sisters and Brothers. Their ministerial focus will not include spouse, children and grandchildren. Indeed, this strong social component intrinsic to sexuality has led Lisa Sowle Cahill to stress "that the three 'Catholic' values of sex, love, and procreation are all to be understood as ongoing *personal relationships*, rather than as isolated acts or qualities of acts", and these relationships, she notes, "are intrinsically interconnected" (1992, 70). Sexual pleasure, loving friendship, and parental guidance, creativity, and responsibility are aspects of sexuality that need to be considered *together* in developing a practical sexual ethic.

The way in which community, and not just individual sex acts, is a focus of sexuality is also highlighted in the lifeform of consecrated celibacy. Traditionally Religious life included an extreme renunciation in relation to one's primary family of birth, as well as the refusal to form a secondary family in marriage. So celibacy in that context precludes the personal family relations that follow from marital sexual expression, insofar as it is associated with a commitment to a Religious community, where one becomes connected with friends that one does not fully choose, where one has no socially exclusive relationships and children, and where one's community "is composed completely of adults" (Schneiders 2001, 213). In Roman Catholicism, sexual abstinence or activity determines the direction of one's personal relations, and how one approaches and directs these sexual actions affects their moral and spiritual status. As Schneiders observes, sex is "a language that takes its meaning from intention and relationship, from what is said and meant, as well as from the expression, the act itself" (2001, 231).

5. Concluding Comments

The view of sexuality in Roman Catholicism has shifted significantly in the 20th century, as the traditional focus on its necessary procreative function for human life was complemented with a turn to personalism that stresses the positive moral and spiritual potential of an exclusive and permanent sexual relationship. Traditionally, sexual desire and pleasure have been regarded negatively in the Catholic tradition, within the context of a hierarchical system that ranked sacerdotal and consecrated celibate lifestyles as spiritually higher than the state of chaste marriage. All sexual activity was regarded as morally and spiritually debilitating by most celibate theologians until the 20th century.

Nevertheless, a small minority of Catholic theologians did write positively about the spiritual value of sexual experience for couples themselves, and no doubt many married people had the integrity not to repudiate the authenticity of their positive personal experiences of sexuality. Perhaps these factors helped to stimulate the shift in official teachings. Along with its significance in conceiving human life, genital sexuality,

including the desire and pleasure associated with it, can be drawn into a deeply spiritual, transformative process of the person. One learns through intimate sexual relations to surrender self-isolating passions and inclinations to the ecstatic unity of this emotional and physical self-giving to one's beloved. As I mentioned in section 5, this spiritual significance of sexuality as *kenotic* would seem potentially to apply to all religious traditions that advocate an *integration* of sexual desire and pleasure with the moral and spiritual facets of the person, rather than a transcendence or repression of it.

I also noted possible parallels between celibacy in the Roman Catholic and the Buddhist traditions. Consecrated celibacy in Roman Catholicism includes an abstention from genital relationships within the context of a permanent life-commitment to Jesus. It involves a lifeform that precludes the obligations of secondary family relations, in shifting to an adult-community life that constellates around this relationship to Jesus. Celibacy in Roman Catholicism was also officially associated with Priestly ordination by the 13th century. Roman Catholic theology no longer ranks consecrated and sacerdotal celibacy as "higher spiritual callings" than married life, though some theologians argue that the basic nature of the former, as itinerant or monastic and family-independent, secures a ministerial freedom that marital responsibilities might in some cases preclude. Pastorally, contemporary Roman Catholic theology has also come to recognize the dangers associated with celibate lifestyles, both for the celibate individual and for persons who might be affected by the celibate's personal distortions. Sexual abstinence in and of itself does not make one moral or holy and in fact can be extremely destructive for the well being of the celibate person and his social contacts. Sexual distortions related to celibacy have led to fear and even hatred and violence directed at those who stimulate unwanted sexual desire. Rather than being repressed, ignored, or transcended, sexual energy needs to be consciously acknowledged and sublimated or transmuted into creative orientations that are loving and life-giving. Celibacy, just as sexuality, can easily be degraded or distorted.

Related to these Roman Catholic views of celibacy and sexuality are controversial positions within current secular societies on certain issues in practical sexual ethics, including the prohibition against contraceptives and reproductive technologies, and the status of non-marital sexuality, homosexuality, and the possibilities of the Priestly ordination of women. These views all seem to be connected with the insistence on the necessary openness to procreation in all unitive sexual acts, within the context of a particular view of gender differences and complementarities. I have not explored these issues in this paper, though some of the sources I have cited in other contexts provide discussions of them,[20] and it certainly would be interesting to compare them cross-

[20] See, for example, Farley 2006, 271-311 and Grabowski 2006, 135-140, for current explorations of the question of homosexuality; Cahill 1992, 217-254, on reproductive technologies; and Schneiders 2000, 264-280, on women's ordination.

religions. Indeed, perhaps other traditions have something to teach Catholics on these matters. However, I simply note in conclusion that some contemporary Roman Catholic theologians have been asking Catholic authorities for stronger considerations of the personal and social context and effects of sexual actions, in their critical reflection on these issues.[21] I would hope that such critical discernment in the Roman Catholic tradition continues within the context of an inclusive *inner*-religious dialogue, as well as an inter-religious openness, one that pays special attention to the attitudes and emotions that underlay and color such discussions.[22]

[21] See for example, de Vinck 1970, 101-103; Kosnick 1977, 92-95; Schneiders 2001, 231; and Farley, footnote #15 above. Cahill observes, for example, that "the sexual morality that has surfaced in recent tradition holds sex to be an expression of mutual, reciprocal love and commitment between two equal partners, with children and parenthood as expressing and fulfilling *this relationship*, rather than as required components of individual sex acts. ...This is certainly much more true of "unofficial' moral theology, some grassroots pastoral practice, and the practice and viewpoints of lay Catholics" (2001, 171). Farley writes: "In much of Catholic moral theology and ethics, the procreative norm as the sole or primary justification of sexual activity is gone. ...new understandings of the totality of the person support a radically new concern for sexuality as an expression and a cause of love" (2006, 278).

[22] This paper benefited considerably from critical responses to earlier drafts given by Dorothy Cummings, Cindy Crysdale, John Dadosky, Bill Dinges, and two anonymous Readers of *JIRD*. I appreciate their help.

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Response Article 1: The Perspective of a Roman Catholic Nun

In the Pursuit of Love[23]

By Marianne Farina

Christian teachings about human sexuality emerge from fundamental beliefs about human nature and human development. A critical study of these teachings, or any part of these teachings, e.g. celibacy and marriage, should begin with an exploration of the Church's understanding of the dignity of the human person and the Christian vocation to responsive love. Made in the likeness of God, we learn to "be God-like lovers by responding openly and completely to the transformation in Jesus Christ" (Genovesi 1996, 16). We possess a dignity that is more than a biological phenomena or a philosophical category. It is through knowledge (word) and love (action) of God, self, one another, and all creation that we manifest this truth. As Aquinas stated, "Charity signifies not only the love of God, but also a certain friendship, with him; which implies, besides love, a mutual return of love, together with a certain mutual communion…" (*ST* I-II, 65, 5).

Contemplation of God, the true goal of holiness/wholeness, is the perfect fulfillment of the dignity we possess. We draw closer to God, the source and fulfillment of human longings, by deepening our friendship with God and communion with others. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the infused virtue of charity helps us to live, as Christ did, creatively for others, discovering ways to bring a healing into the world so that all persons may grow in fullness of life, i.e., holiness/wholeness.[24] When the Church claims that human sexuality is a "wonderful gift and awesome responsibility," it affirms the physical (embodied) and relational (generative) aspect of this call to integrity, the dynamic wholeness of responsive love (NCCB 1991, 2).

However, the author of this paper proposes that the Church is inconsistent in its teachings. He claims that despite the Church's positive ideas about the spiritual benefit of married life and celibacy, the Church still needs to discover a better way to integrate a more holisitic understanding of the way sexuality informs one's desire for God (17-19).

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[23] Vincent Genovesi, *In the Pursuit of Love: Catholic Morality and Human Sexuality,* (Collegeville, MN: Glazier Press, 1996). The title suggests, as the author states, that Christian life is an acknowledgement of an affirming response to God's calling us to love…" I add that the love we pursue as sexual beings is to imitate the generative love of God, offered to us in the person of Christ, now and forever.

[24] In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (10:10). The Greek word used here is "*zoe*" which implies dynamic wholeness. Other words could have been chosen like *bios* (conduct of everyday living/possessions) or *psyche* (life or the soul as organizing principle)

The perceived lack of integration between human sexuality and the Christian vocation to love is a concern not only for critics but also for the community. Too often, we fail to pursue a more comprehensive understanding of God's call to responsive love, of moral goodness as freedom in Christ, and to the command "be compassionate as God is compassionate" (Matthew 5:48, NAB) through our reception of the transforming gift of the Holy Spirit. We can become inattentive to the unitive and generative dimensions of working toward a full realization of God's promise of "fullness of life." Looking at the Christian understanding of virtue in light of the Christian call to generative/responsive love might help us understand the way sexuality is integral to life of virtue as the human response to this call.

Christian Virtue: A Call to Holiness

Christian virtue theories describe the relation of moral goodness to a human being's ultimate end, beatitude, and ways this goal informs human thoughts, desires, and actions. A life of virtue, perfected by deepening our friendship with God, is a fuller realization of our human dignity, the transcendence to which we are called, and those "habits, capacities, interests, inclinations, precepts, injunctions, prohibitions" which sustain our journey to fullness of life (Kotva 1996, 17).

Charity, God's friendship with humans, as Servais Pinkcaers explains, "touches and organizes the virtues," the moral and intellectual virtues, without replacing "the proper action of each and every virtue" (2001, 87). Far from lessening human freedom, Aquinas' understanding of the stages of moral development addresses the way God calls us to a maturity of faith and human excellence:

The spiritual increase of charity may be considered in respect of a certain likeness to the growth of the human body. For although this latter growth may be divided into many parts, yet it has a certain fixed divisions according to those particular actions or pursuits to which man is brought by this same growth. Thus we speak of a man being an infant until he has the use of reason, after which we distinguish another state of man wherein he begins to speak and use reason, while there is a third state, that of puberty, when he begins to acquire the power of generation and so on until he arrives at perfection. (*ST* II-II 24.9).

Pinckaers' study of Aquinas' ethics offers a helpful summary for understanding the elements within each stage of our growth in virtue: *beginner, progressive,* and *perfect*. Each stages deepens union with God, just as the mystical tradition described the pathway to perfection: the *purgative, illuminative* and *unitive* way (Pinckaers 1995 361- 369). The call to responsive love is also a call to greater intimacy with God, and virtue manifests this generative love to others in particular ways. In light of this understanding, how do we interpret the Church's teaching about temperance?

The virtue of temperance, as understood by Aquinas, is a capacity to embrace the unified and ordered whole of created existence, especially acknowledging the ways the

body contributes to an inner order from which the serenity of spirit can flow. The "work" of this virtue is about choosing objects of sense that produce "pleasures and desires" capable of manifesting this human excellence. (*ST* II-II 142, 3).

The potential parts of temperance, and the special virtues associated with it, such as continence, humility, gentleness, mildness, modesty, and abstinence and chastity, help us to realize the beauty or glory of the human body. To possess temperance means that we choose the good, especially those of touch, i.e., food, drink, sexual contact (*ST* II-II 141, 5), according to the rule of reason and divine law. Aquinas' writings remind us that we need to be honest about our attractions to these goods and to be open to the transforming power of grace. The author states that chastity is a moral virtue of self-regulation in the sexual life. More correctly, as a species of temperance, chastity is possessing a capacity to experience the pleasures of sexual pleasure fittingly because "human sexuality is a divine gift, a fundamental component of the whole person—body, emotions, soul—whose deepest meaning is to lead the person to the gift of self in love" (USCCB 1991, 74-75).

Marriage, celibacy, or the single abstinent life[25] are positive expressions of the Christian commitment to responsive love. Each manifestation requires informs our commitment to grow morally and spiritually. Human sexuality is an integral to this transformation. The author notes that communities, leaders, and scholars have not always promoted such a positive understanding of human sexuality. Yet, there are, and have been, consistent teachings about the gift of human sexuality, when open to grace makes us more fully "a responsible lover and life-giver" (Ferder 2007, 22).

Christian Living: A Generative Process

As Christians, we embark on a life-long journey or conversion of heart. We seek the good in material and spiritual realities because they have a unique potential to shape us into loving, responsible, and generative persons. Real violence happens when human thoughts and actions, i.e., personal, social, or institutional, become obstacles to this transformation. The author states that "traditional emphasis of celibacy in the Roman Catholic tradition has led to the exclusion of sexuality in mysticism." However, as noted above, to understand Christian living as responsive love realizes the sacramental nature of this call.

Christ is our model, not because he lived celibately but because of his example of love and service. Through grace of sacrament, the faithful participate in "Christ's Priesthood, which flows from Christ Himself" (Aquinas ST, III, 63,3). Charity, the "bond of perfection," unites all the diverse and unique, gifts, callings, and works of the faithful as they "move toward perfection . . . without delay and confusion, signifying the dignity

[25] Some may choose abstinence for a period of time or choose to remain abstinent without a commitment to the vow of celibacy in a formal way i.e., as in joining a religious order.

and beauty of the Church in its unity of faith, charity and mutual service" (Aquinas, ST, III, 183.1,2). The Church teaches that there are various ways for believers to experience this "transformation in Christ" as they strive to fulfill their call to responsive love. Some will embrace their vocation to responsive love as married persons. Others will discover they have the gift of celibacy and accept their vocation in this manner. While others will find the single life is their vocation. In each of these ways, the call to responsive love is for greater communion with God, "whose very being if Gift and whose life as Trinity of Persons is an eternal communion of love" (Grabowski 2003, 168).

To embrace the Sacrament of Marriage means to be en-mission with God's Love, celebrating both the procreative and unitive aspects of God's generative and gracious love. In imitating God's love, the couple nurtures a "solid and long-lasting" true friendship, moving beyond friendships of utility or pleasure (McKay 2008). Friendship here is a promise "to encourage and support," through living realities of commitment, intimacy, and passion (Genovesi 1996, 244). John Paul II's teachings on Theology of the Body, reflects ways this embodiment is a type of "language of the body" communicating "complete fidelity and self-donation" in this committed love (1980). This teaching, when presented more comprehensively in discussion about all the virtues, helps us realize that responsive love is more than the perfection of chastity. Married persons and their families called to responsive love strive to fulfill the mission of promoting, by their example and service, a "civilization of love" (John Paul II 1994, 15).

This is also true for celibates as they accept their call to responsive love. Celibacy is a type of loving that orients human relationships toward imitating God's love and the goal of beatitude. Celibates love God and all others in God, exercising perfect charity, and in this way uniting human longing in all its dimensions – physical, spiritual, and psychological. Celibacy is not ministerial pragmatism about having "more time and space" for ministry. Celibacy is a commitment to deepen one's knowledge of and love for God. The celibate life is a choice for a holistic relatedness and the particular integration of one's life and service characterized by the "…the ultimate intention of total transformation in Christ" (Schneiders 2001, 144). It is a "dangerous lifestyle" when it does not manifest an incarnational view of human sexuality or when it fails to realize the call of responsive love as a call to union with God and of communion of love and service for others (O'Murchu 1999, 107).

The single life is a third manifestation of living the Christian call to responsive love. As the Church states, "there is no simple definition for the single life." Some are single by preference and others by circumstance (USCCB 1991, 51). However, single persons "can and do commit themselves in a variety of intimate relationships" (USCCB 1991, 52,54). The love of family and true friends empowers them to participate fully in the Church's life and apostolic mission by means of this important and particular manifestation of responsive love.

Carter Heyward claimed human sexuality was "the yearning, the hunger, the drive" for communion. It empowers us to "break down the walls that separate person

from person, creature from creature, creature from creator; and to the making of reciprocal connections between and among us in which we find our common good—the common-wealth of God." (Heyward 2009). As Christians who freely accept God's invitation to bearers of responsive love, we learn the ways of progressing toward this union. However, there are dangers, but these exist not solely in the province of human sexuality, but in our misconceptions of the Christian call to holiness itself.

For if we do not embrace an incarnational and holistic understanding of human sexuality; or fail to meet the challenge to live this call with integrity; or stop listening and learning from others about their sexual experiences, concerns, or struggles, then we are most certainly in danger. Such weaknesses, pathologies, and injustices threaten the very promise written into our common human nature: "Of the fullness of life, we have all had a share, love following upon love (John 1: 16, NAB). Married life, celibacy or the single life within the Catholic Church is the pathway to this fullness, proclaiming to the world of God's love and concern for all creation.

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Editor's Note: Michael Stoeber requested the opportunity to respond to two Marianne Farina's points. We hope that this in-print discussion prompts further discussions on the Journal's website itself. Those who wish to respond are welcome to do so in the "Discussion" section available with each article at http://www.irdialogue.org/journal.

Comments from Michael Stoeber:

1. Professor Farina claims that my paper "proposes that the Church is inconsistent in its teachings" (32). However, I do not intend to propose "that the Church is inconsistent in its teachings" on sexuality, but rather that the Church's teachings on sexuality have developed historically.

2. Professor Farina also suggests that I contend "that despite the Church's positive ideas about the spiritual benefit of married life and celibacy, the Church still needs to discover a better way to integrate a more holistic understanding of the way sexuality informs one's desire for God" (29). Rather, I sought to express that the Church's "very positive regard of sexuality has not yet been effectively integrated into current Roman Catholic pastoral contexts" (22), in line with the reference I make to the thought of William Dinges.

Response Article 2: The Perspective of a Muslim Scholar

Virtue and Danger: Sexuality and Prophetic Norms in Muslim Life and Thought

By Kecia Ali

A famous statement attributed to the Prophet Muhammad declares: "Marriage is my *sunnah* (exemplary practice); whoever abstains from it is not from me."[26] Another states that those who marry have "completed half their religion." (Zayla'i 2000: 2:444). Still another Prophetic dictum rejects the notion of a celibate religious life: "There is no monkery in Islam." (Maghen 2005: 5, n. 11) And one warns married believers not to let pious practices of daytime fasting and night-long prayer vigils keep them from satisfying their basic drives for food, rest, and sex. Muhammad insists that a believer's body, eyes, and wife have claims on him – and that Muslims are to follow his own example: he fasts and prays, but also eats, sleeps, and has sex with women[27] (Bukhari 1987: 7:97). These brief extracts from the voluminous compilations of hadith – authoritative (to varying degrees) records of Muhammad's words and deeds that supplement the Qur'an as a source for religious knowledge – touch on vital themes relevant to celibacy and sexuality in Islamic thought and Muslim life. These include the role of Muhammad as a model for believers, the lack of an ordained clergy or vow-bound religious class, and the implications of treating the normative believer as male. There are thus various points where Muslim and Roman Catholic perspectives, as outlined by Michael Stoeber, disagree vehemently, others where they can profitably converse, and a few where they barely come within shouting distance of one another.

To begin with the most obvious distinction, there is no tradition of clerical celibacy in Islam in part because there is not really a clergy. Historically, the religious scholars, the *ulama*, have been more akin to rabbis than ordained priests. Islam has rituals but no sacraments. Those who perform clerical functions – prayer leadership, preaching, legal guidance, and spiritual advising – have no sacerdotal role and take no

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[26] The hadith in this precise form, though ubiquitous, is not cited in the most respected collections, though variations on the sentiment appear. The final segment of a hadith in *Sahih Muslim* ends quite similarly, though, after it raises the issues of eating, sleeping, and sex mentioned below: "I marry women also. And he who turns away from my Sunnah, he has no relation with me." *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Nikah, "One who can afford to should marry," Book 8, #323.

[27] *Sahih Bukhari,* Kitab al-Nikah, "Your wife has a right over you," trans. Khan, 7:97; see also Ali 2006: 10-11, Maghen 2005: 27-8.

vows that distinguish them from laypeople. Some Muslim subgroups, including both the Twelver Shi'a and the Ismailis, maintain more formalized and hierarchical authority structures, but on the whole a fecund and fragmented informality has ruled. That said, maleness as a qualification for religious leadership is often assumed, if under siege in some quarters today. Moreover, debates over the intersections of religious law and civil law regarding marriage and divorce roil diverse Muslim publics. Gender, sexuality, and religious authority are thus linked in modern Muslim thought but in ways that differ from how they are related in Catholic and other Christian debates over female ordination, clerical celibacy, clerical homosexuality, and same-sex unions.

Of course, Islam has had its share of ascetics and contemplatives, both loners and those in mystical orders. Some Muslim renunciants have remained celibate despite the prohibition against "monkery," but they have always been a minority. Muslim jurists oscillate between strongly recommending marriage and deeming it obligatory; that it could be undesirable as a general matter is inconceivable (Abou El Fadl 2001: 195). Still, scholars acknowledge that some people are unsuited for married life. Some do not need it, for instance those who lack sexual desire, and some cannot fulfill its obligations, like those (men) who cannot support a wife. Indeed, the eleventh century scholar al-Ghazali counted among the dangers of marriage the possibility that a man might be led by financial need to unethical dealings (Ghazzali 2002: 15). Marriage was also, as the hadith from Muhammad attests, a distraction from worship (Ghazzali 2002: 16). While the Prophet praised balance rather than abstinence, his advice was intended for an already married man, and there were certainly some who considered the trade-off too great -- once again, Prophetic admonitions to marry notwithstanding.

From early in the history of Christianity, debates over marriage (Ought one to marry?) and married sex (Should spouses have sex? Should it be for procreation only? Should they enjoy it?) have occupied thinkers whose answers have, as Stoeber shows, varied considerably. The spectrum of views within Muslim circles has been considerably narrower and much more strongly positive: marriage is good and sex within marriage is religiously meritorious as well as physically pleasurable, even when procreation is not the aim.[28] Marriage functions as a fortress against unrestrained sexual urges, which are potentially destructive of the social fabric as well as devastating for individual morality. In a popular hadith, Muhammad counsels a man that God will reward him for having sex with his wife, just as God would punish him for an illicit liaison (Ali 2006: 60-61). The key juxtaposition in Muslim thought, then, is not between marriage and celibacy but between lawful and unlawful sex: the former is good in part because the latter is so

[28] The vast majority of scholars have permitted birth control, and most require the wife's permission to practice coitus interruptus. Some dislike contraception, however – an opinion which seems to have grown in popularity today – if practiced without a solid reason. See Musallam 1992 and Brockopp, ed., 2003. Al-Ghazali (2002: 10-12) considers children the primary benefit of marriage and one of its major aims.

very bad. As in some strands of Christian thinking, one finds the negative association of women with temptation, but sex itself is not evil, just extremely dangerous.

Marriage as a hedge against sin has its own complications. Stoeber paints a broad-brushstroke portrait of coupled sexuality where harmonious physical intimacy deepens spiritual life and spousal love. But sex can also be contentious. Muslim sources, perhaps inadvertently, acknowledge friction between partners when desires are out of sync. A handful of hadith insist that wives must acquiesce to their husbands' requests for sex, even when the women are otherwise occupied or uninterested.[29] Married women were, according to legal rulings, required to be sexually available to their husbands. This availability could conflict with their voluntary pious practices, such as fasting (which required abstention from sex as well as food), and nighttime devotions (which precluded joining one's spouse in the marriage bed). Although they were never allowed to interfere with their wives' obligatory devotions, men could thus prohibit supererogatory acts of worship on the grounds that they interfered with men's marital rights. But we have seen that men, too, were enjoined to be attentive to their wives' needs. If the Prophet's exhortation that a wife had a right over her husband was sometimes overshadowed in classical religious discourses, which stressed wives' sexual obligations rather than their needs, an element that valued and promoted women's sexual pleasure was always present (Al-Ghazali 2002: 28-9, Hidayatullah 2003). This discourse has come to the fore prominently in the modern world and served as one basis for the Western view of Islam as "a sex-positive religion" –and the muddled and contested view of the Prophet as a role model for Muslim men in their marital relations.

Muhammad as an ideal husband is a notion that will, perhaps, be strange for Western audiences. There has been a long – though by no means uniform or static – Western tradition of tandem criticism of Muhammad and Islam, with much of the nastiest material centering on the Prophet's relations with women. Charges of sensuality formed an integral part of the character assassination in premodern European polemic (Reeves 2001). The most common objections were to his polygamy, his unflattering preoccupation with sex, and his marriage to his former daughter-in-law, the ex-wife of his adopted son. (This last marriage raised the most qualms for early Muslims as well.) In late modernity, Muhammad's polygamy still comes in for censure, but Muhammad's marriage to his friend and supporter Abu Bakr's young daughter Aisha has taken center stage as evidence of his depravity. For these critics, Muhammad's wanton sensualism stands in explicit contrast to Jesus's exemplary celibacy. Modern Muslims grapple with various strands of this critique as they engage in debate over what Muhammad's example means. There is no longer a discrete Muslim tradition in isolation from a

[29] *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab Al-Nikah, "It is not permissible for a woman to abandon the bed of her husband," trans. Siddiqi, vol. 1–2, p. 732; *Sahih Bukhari*, Kitab al-Nikah, "If a woman spends the night deserting her husband's bed," trans. Khan, vol. 7, p. 93; see also Abou El Fadl 2001: 211-14 Maghen 2005: 27; Ali 2006: 10-11.

Western one; thinking about Muhammad as a husband and as a model for other husbands proceeds through the medium of an integrated set of questions about the propriety of his conduct and its applicability in the world today. Some Christians today ask, in assessing a course of action, "What would Jesus do?" Muslims often ask, "What *did* Muhammad do?"

Jesus and Muhammad are clearly incommensurable in certain theological respects, but there are productive areas for comparative conversation about what it means to have such a role model. Other topics for discussion include the linkages between abstinence and power, and the relationship between ordination and religious authority. Less immediately obvious but potentially interesting avenues of exploration would be broader consideration of favoritism and its connection with sexuality. One of the more intriguing Roman Catholic arguments in favor of clerical celibacy that Stoeber presents is that by virtue of not forming exclusive personal bonds, priests or religious can devote themselves equally to all of humanity, whereas a married person must first attend to spouse and children. But I wonder whether some forms of favoritism are inevitable, whether they are not necessarily bad, and whether the sexual bond is necessarily the most dramatic key to intimacy. To have closer relationships with some people than others – friends as well as kin – is simply part of most people's experience of being human. Love for broader segments of humanity needn't always be hampered by close personal ties; those ties can serve as training grounds for intimacy and empathy. On the other hand, the linkage of favoritism with sexuality is potentially explosive. Actual or potential polygamy, rare and controversial though it is in most Muslim contexts today, complicates marital dynamics. Can one derive lessons about favoritism from Muslim sources which acknowledge Muhammad's scrupulous equality in certain dealings with his wives as well as his greater emotional investment in some relationships than others (Ghazzali 2002: 27)?

Of course, marriage in Muhammad's era meant something quite different than it does to Muslims today, just as the Church fathers' visions differed not only from one another but also, quite dramatically, from the present. Debates over sexuality in marriage (and outside it) must be connected to shifting ideas about what kind of relationship marriage is or should be. Stephanie Coontz subtitled a recent history of Western marriage "from obedience to intimacy" and the incomplete and contested shifts she describes have their counterparts among Muslims worldwide. The pace and specific dynamics of some of the shifts (to nuclear families, for instance) differ widely between Muslims in Iran and Indonesia, Turkey and Toronto, or Australia and Afghanistan. Key elements of patriarchal marriage are being heatedly debated nearly everywhere and occasionally jettisoned. But whether patriarchal or egalitarian, whether Muslims are in the minority or the majority, whether Islam is the state religion or not, marriage – and sex within it – remains normative.

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Response Article 3: The Perspective of a Hindu Swami

Celibacy: A Hindu Perspective

By Swami Tyagananda

Hindu monks take the vow of poverty and celibacy. The Sanskrit word for celibacy is *brahmacharya*, "dwelling in Brahman." What do I mean by Brahman? What does "dwelling in" mean and how is it to be practiced? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to understand the Hindu worldview.

In Hinduism, the ultimate reality is called *Brahman*. Brahman is neither the name of a person, nor a state to be attained, nor a place to be reached. Literally the word simply means "that which is vast." It is used to denote pure consciousness. Why "pure" consciousness? By that is meant not the consciousness "of" something but "consciousness-itself." Understood thus, Brahman—or "consciousness-itself"—is undivided, all pervading, birthless, and deathless.

The characteristics of Brahman are best described by the phrase "Being, Consciousness, Bliss Absolute" (*sat-cit-ananda,* in Sanskrit). Brahman is not merely consciousness-itself but also existence-itself and bliss-itself. To be "dwelling in Brahman" is the same as being one with existence, consciousness, and bliss. Oneness with existence removes the threat of being reduced to nonbeing or "nothingness" (which is what death looks like), oneness with consciousness removes the threat of being reduced to dust (the eventual fate of the body), and oneness with bliss removes the threat of sorrow and suffering in this life and the afterlife. Being-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute is not just the "ultimate" reality; it is also the "present" reality of you and me.

Our current experience is, of course, vastly different. We see ourselves as just ordinary human beings—weak, imperfect, and vulnerable to forces outside of ourselves. According to Hindu teachers, this happens because something is obstructing us from getting in touch with our true reality. My true reality is my real Self, it is the "real me," which is different from the ego. Hindus see the ego as a function of the mind. According to them, the mind is still outside—or is a kind of covering over—the "real me," which is sometimes called the true Self (to distinguish it from the ego) or the divine Self (to distinguish it from our frail human identity)—usually the "S" is capitalized in writing.

The Self—with a capital S—is the only spiritual part of the human personality. By spiritual I mean non-material. Both the body and the mind are the material parts. That the body is made up of material particles is perhaps easy to understand, but it may sound strange that even the mind is material. Hindus say that the mind is not visible the way the body is because it is made of subtle matter. Our sense organs have limitations and so we cannot see the mind the way we can see the body.

The mind is similar to the body in many ways: both undergo changes for better or worse, both are subject to illness and both have doctors, both get tired and need rest, and both can produce joy and sorrow. The only obvious difference between the two is that one can be seen while the other can only be felt. Hindu thinkers attribute this not to a difference in kind but in degree: they say that both the body and the mind are material, one made of gross matter and the other of subtle matter. Both the body and mind cover—or, at least, seem to cover—the spiritual Self, which is why our true identity remains hidden from us.

The goal of life—or the supreme consummation of life—is reached when we have a direct experience of our true nature as divine beings, and when we dwell continually in that blessed experience. Those who attain this state are called enlightened: these are the people who are truly in the state of *brahmacharya,* because they are truly dwelling in Brahman.

The body and the mind limit the full manifestation of our divine nature. It is a big climb-down really: imagine being reduced to a miserable, bound, imperfect and mortal human being from our original status as the blissful, free, perfect and immortal divine being. For Hindus, spiritual life is a conscious and voluntary effort to go back to our original state of joy and freedom, pristine purity and perfection. For this spiritual journey to be successful, every hurdle on the way needs to be overcome and transcended.

Of hurdles and obstacles there will be plenty (as every spiritual seeker can testify), but the root problem is the chronic forgetfulness of our joyful spiritual identity and the amazing attachment to our frail, sorrow-ridden human identity. What make us human are, of course, the human body and the human mind (which includes the intellect and the ego). My human identity is inseparably connected with perceiving my body and mind as "me." Every demand of the body and mind is considered "my" demand—and in the process, the spiritual Self within is forgotten; my body/mind complex becomes my de facto "self."

The practice of *brahmacharya*, "dwelling in Brahman," involves moving away from the body/mind complex, which is the false self, and affirming the true Self, the "real me." What makes the "moving away" process difficult is the strong claim that the body and the mind exert over me, the constant demands that they make of me. Hunger and thirst, rest and work, joy and sorrow, ambition and frustration, likes and dislikes—who has been free from the demands and pressures of these? The body and mind make their presence felt through all of these and more. But the intensity of sexual desire is often more powerful and more persistent than that of our other needs, so the meaning of *brahmacharya* often gets narrowed down to sexual abstinence.

Sexuality plays an important part in human life and it often absorbs much of our thinking, feeling and willing. In Hinduism it is customary to view most things at three levels: physical, mental, and verbal. *Brahmacharya*, or celibacy, includes sexual abstinence at all these levels. Celibacy thus is not limited to merely physical abstinence

from sexual activity but also includes non-indulgence in sexual fantasy and sexual talk. Body, mind and speech are interconnected and they tend to influence one another. When these three become compartmentalized and disconnected, the result is disharmony, which often leads to mental stress and anxiety, physical illness, and unhealthy interpersonal relations.

The Hindu tradition believes that the ideal of *brahmacharya* is relevant to all, but its "application" to monastic life is different from its application to married life. Marriage is not a license to do away with all restraints. Chastity and fidelity are the foundation on which a strong and happy marital relationship can be built. In a world full of temptations, if a married person can fulfill these duties, he or she can get the same benefits that a monastic does through a sincere practice of celibacy.

Since *brahmacharya* is about self-restraint, it doesn't really matter to whom one feels sexually attracted or with whom one has a committed long-term relationship. Sex is sex, whether heterosexual or homosexual. For spiritual seekers of every persuasion, the ideal is still *brahmacharya*. This ideal is not about sex per se. It means "dwelling in Brahman," or dwelling in the experience of our identity as Being, Consciousness, Bliss Absolute.

The troubled times in which we live today may lead us to imagine that the *brahmacharya* ideal is unattainable. But there are, in every generation, people who have lived up to this ideal, and that gives hope to the rest of us. Furthermore, the ideal of *brahmacharya*, although relevant for all, is not mandatory for all. Not everyone feels the call to practice *brahmacharya*, and those who do, have options and a graded system of employing it in their own lives. For those who choose monastic life, the rules are most stringent and uncompromising, given the difference in the vocation of those called to monasticism. In marriage, the emphasis is on fidelity—remaining faithful to one's spouse. Indeed, the glory of chastity in married life and the spiritual power it can generate have been described in great detail in Hindu history as well as in mythology.

The benefits of celibacy are many. It cultivates spiritual intuition, a strong memory and a remarkable capacity to grasp the subtle realities of life. The faithful attest that the lack of it results in loss of mental vigor and moral strength. Furthermore, for a sustained practice of contemplation our brain needs to be strong and calm—and this becomes possible through *brahmacharya* because it provides nourishment and vigor to the brain. The validity of these claims is borne out by the actual experience of people who have practiced *brahmacharya*.

It is needless to say that the ideal of celibacy, like any other ideal, has its own challenges and pitfalls. These challenges have to be faced head-on and the pitfalls have to be avoided. This has to be done by both individuals as well as institutions. Among the things important to foster if one intends to keep the ideal of celibacy are strong motivation, spiritual longing, the practice of detachment and self-restraint, and the direction of one's energies in higher creative pursuits.

Celibacy is a lofty ideal, and it is a rewarding experience to know how this ideal is defined and practiced in faith traditions other than one's own. Why? We have much to learn from one another. The more we do that, the better our understanding will be of the ideals that we hold dear in our own lives.

Response Article 4: The Perspective of a Protestant Scholar

Reflections on Celibacy – and Dialogue More Broadly

By Robert Hunt

This paper, although not fully related to inter-religious dialogue, provides in its brief discussion of celibacy in the Theravada Buddhist tradition a helpful reminder of some essential questions to the very task of inter-religious engagement.

The first of these emerges in historicizing of the practice of celibacy in the Roman Catholic tradition, so that the reader understands how justifications and uses of the practice changed in different cultural and social settings even as the Roman Catholic church sought to highlight a consistent rational for priestly celibacy in the larger framework of human sexuality in relation to spiritual goals. Too often in interfaith dialogue a practice such as celibacy is treated, by all parties, as a uniform practice with a consistent purpose and rational over the length of the tradition. Historicizing traditions complicates dialogue, but may lead to a more realistic assessment of similarity and difference between traditions that appear at any given moment to be either highly divergent or nearly synchronic.

It is likewise useful to note that despite changes over time celibacy in the Roman Catholic tradition has been seen as a sexual practice, and thus remains linked to Roman Catholic ideas about sexuality and theological anthropology more generally. Understanding this helps highlight the underlying differences between the practice of celibacy in the Roman Catholic and Theravada traditions, and presumably other religious traditions as well. In contrast to Roman Catholicism, in Theravada Buddhism celibacy is not so much a sexual practice as a denial of the significance of sexuality, and indeed all illusory human distinctions.

Unfortunately not mentioned explicitly in this paper, but apparent in its account of both Roman Catholic and Theravada celibacy, is the relation of sublimation of human drives and its unspoken compliment, the domination of those perceived to enliven or increase those drives. More specifically this emerges in the domination of women, since apparently both Roman Catholicism and Buddhism see female sexual desire as somehow less quickened by the physical presence of men than the reverse. This then raises the further question of the extent to which the understandings of sexuality that lead to the practice of celibacy are rooted in theological reflection within these different traditions, or are borrowed from a deeper patriarchal cultural heritage, and indeed whether this distinction between theological reflection and culture is possible.

Given the admonition in the Christian New Testament, “Wives, submit your selves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church . . .” (Ephesians 6:22-23 in the Christian New

Testament) the Christian practice of celibacy as a sexual practice as well as marriage as sexual practice seems to be rooted in conceptions of hierarchy and patterns of dominance that extend beyond the human realm to the divine. If this is the case then it is rooted in a somewhat different ontology than that of Theravada Buddhism which recognizes neither divinity nor hierarchy as ultimately real.

The paper ends with a rather positive assessment of the recent changes in Roman Catholic understandings of sexuality, changes that refine the understanding of the relationship between celibacy before marriage, celibacy as part of a distinctly monastic vocation, and celibacy in the priesthood. Of course whether these changes adequately address the problems of earlier doctrine is another matter. And while this respondent has heard a paper by Maria Reis Habito suggesting that some re-evaluation of Buddhist understandings of sexuality and celibacy is necessary to overcome apparent misogyny in the Buddhist tradition (in the setting of Buddhist Muslim dialogue), and knows of the work of Rita Gross in this regard, this does not appear to be a common topic of Buddhist Christian dialogue. Certainly not to the extent that environmental concerns and broader issues related to poverty and human justice come frequently to the fore in such dialogue. This begs then one of the most troubling questions for those engaged in inter-religious dialogue. At what point does dialogue move beyond seeking to understand and be understood toward seeking an agreement on matters of shared concern, such as for example human rights in relation to sexuality, and then an insistence on plumbing together the religious depths from which injustice may be emerging? Practice, however apparently benign, may be an indicator of a theology/ontology/philosophy less than perfect for human flourishing.

Picturing Bodies: Sacred Images and Transformative Practice in Byzantium and Tibet

By Thomas Cattoi

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore briefly the way in which iconic representations of divine embodiment serve analogous and yet distinct purposes in different traditions. In the Byzantine East, images of the glorified body of Christ and the saints prefigure the deification of the practitioners that will be accomplished at the end of time. For the Tibetan master Bokar Rinpoche, the mental visualization of the Tantric deity Chenrezig enables one to retrieve the nirvanic dimension of one's body, which is usually obfuscated by ignorance and emotion. The comparison illumines the tradition's different conceptions of temporality, individuality, and soteriology.

In his *First Refutation of the Iconoclasts*, Theodore the Studite (759-826) addresses the vexed question of the legitimacy of the veneration of icons, which during the eighth and ninth century was the object of severe critiques coming from defenders of a more "intellectual" approach to Christian practice (St. Theodore 1981).[30]

In this work, the great Byzantine author and mystic, famous for his extensive writings on the spiritual life and his role in the reorganization of monastic life, outlines and defends the propedeutic value of iconic representation of Christ and the saints, pointing to the deep relationship between the mystery of the hypostatic union and the deification of the individual, and indicating that icons portray the eschatological destiny of the individual. In this perspective, the icons of the incarnate Word and his mother, as well as the images of the saints, remind one that the event of the incarnation embraces and redeems the whole of humanity, both in its spiritual and its bodily dimension.

In the Buddhist tradition of Tibet, one may also find extensive literature on religious imagery and their role in spiritual practice. Within Vajrayāna Buddhism, the Yogacara tradition on the three different levels of reality, building on the Madhyamaka distinction between conventional and ultimate truth, serves as template for a

[30] From the declarations of the Council of Hiera (754), one sees that iconoclast theology was characterized by a general mistrust for the concrete and the material, echoing Origenist positions that continued to enjoy a certain degree of popularity despite their condemnation in the mid 6th century. See John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir Seminary's Press, 1997), Ch. 3, 6. 20

sophisticated speculative reflection on the different embodiments of Buddhahood, which encompass the whole cosmos no less than the historical manifestations of the historical Buddha (Makransky 1997, 85-104).[31] The Kagyud tradition of Vajrayāna, which can be traced back to the 11th century teachings of Tilopa and Nāropa, teaches that the mental visualization of Tantric deities—themselves manifestations of the Buddha's compassion—can serve as support for spiritual practice as the individual comes to a deeper grasping of the inextricable link of *samsara* and *nirvāna*.[32] The work *Chenrezig Lord of Love* by the contemporary Tibetan master Bokar Rinpoche offers an insightful and simultaneously straightforward overview of deity visualization, reminding his readers how the Vajrayāna tradition envisages the nirvanic reality of Buddhahood as already present in the individual, who fails to discern it because of the defilements of ignorance and disordered emotionality (Rinpoche 1997).[33]

The course of this paper is to offer a brief overview of the points of contact, as well as of the similarities between these two different theologies of the sacred image, which rest on two different notions of embodiment and the ultimate destiny of the individual. In particular, I will address the question of how different notions of temporality and eschatology are reflected in distinct visions of embodiment and gender. Reading Theodore's text after becoming acquainted with Bokar Rinpoche's vision helps one rediscover the specific character of the Christian understanding of embodiment: while the Byzantine icon gestures towards an eschatological horizon in the future where our body will be transfigured by its communion with God, the images of Tibetan deities

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[31] Vajrayāna (literally, the "adamantine" vehicle) can either be considered a special form of Mahayāna (the great vehicle), as a third branch of Buddhism alongside Mahayāna and Theravada (the school of the elders). The term Vajra is used to indicate the indestructible reality of the Buddha nature that is concealed within every aspect of reality. See Paul Williams, *Mahayāna Buddhism: the Doctrinal Foundations* (New York: Routledge, 2008), Ch. 9, 187-209.

[32] While Theravada insists that *samsara* and *nirvāna* are distinct realities, Mahayāna claims that *nirvāna* is the authentic essence of *samsara*, and therefore views the whole of reality as inherently pure. A number of Mahayāna schools, as well as Vajrayāna, underscore the identity between *nirvāna* and Buddhahood, so that the whole cosmos becomes an expression of the compassion of the Buddha. See Paul Williams, Ch. 8, 172-87.

[33] The four chief Tibetan schools are dGe lugs pa (which enjoyed political and cultural supremacy in Tibet between 1642 and 1950), bKa brgyud, Sa skya, and rNying ma, the Dalai Lamas always belonged to the dGe lugs pa school, even if they also received instruction in the teachings of the other schools. See Reginald Ray, *Indestructible Truth: The Living Spirituality of Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Shambala, 2002), Ch. 5-9 (on Kagyud, see Ch. 5, 152-89). The simplified spelling "Kagyud" is used throughout.

serve as a sophisticated *aide-memoir*, reminding one of the intrinsic purity of one's body, which is already one with the Buddha's nirvanic quality.[34]

The theology of divine embodiment that undergirds Theodore's vision is undergirded by the understanding of the hypostatic union that had become normative for the majority of Eastern churches in the wake of the Council of Chalcedon.[35] In the first part of the 5th century, the prolonged disputes on the theological appropriateness of the term "Theotokos" for the Virgin Mary had led to a renewed interest in speculative reflection on the relationship between humanity and divinity in the person of Christ. While the Council of Nicaea had asserted the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, the same council had stopped short of developing an exhaustive theology of Christ's humanity.[36] Athanasios' own preference for the term *sarx*—as opposed to *sōma*— in his treatise *De Incarnatione*, as well as his failure to say anything about Christ's soul, ensured that his theology could actually be regarded as compatible with Apollinarian or even later monophysite Christologies (Athanasio 2004, 70-73;78-88).[37] The Chalcedonian assertion of the presence of a full humanity and a full divinity in the person of Christ, which in 553 Constantinople II would equate with the Second Person of the Trinity, would provide the starting point for the later Christological synthesis of Maximos the Confessor, who would envisage the cosmos and the incarnation as mirror images of each other, both regulated by the dialectic of union without confusion.

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[34] While this article is an experiment in comparative theology rather than an actual instance of inter-religious dialogue, I believe that engaging in a close reading of Buddhist and Christian texts can pave the way to a more informed and sustained dialogue between members of the different traditions.

[35] The Council of Chalcedon (451) is considered to be the Fourth Ecumenical Council by the Roman Catholic as well as the Orthodox Churches, but its legitimacy is denied by the oriental Orthodox Churches. This Council promulgated a Christological confession of faith (*horos*), stating that in Christ there was one center of subjectivity (*hypostasis*) and two natures (*physeis*). In this way, the concept of consubstantiality (*homoousia*) deployed at Nicaea to express the ontological relationship of Father and Son is here applied to the ontological relationship between Christ and humanity. See Sarah Coakley, "What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not" in S. Davis, D. Kendall and G. O' Collins SJ (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 143-64.

[36] For a quick overview of the development of Christological doctrine, see Gerald O' Collins S.J., *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus Christ* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), Ch. 7-8, 153-203. On the Theotokos dispute, see John McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy: its Theology, History, and Texts* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir Seminary's Press, 2004). Chalcedon's assertion of a single subject in Christ implicitly acknowledged the legitimacy of "Theotokos" language.

[37] As the hypostasis of the Logos played the role of the soul, Apollinarian Christology effectively denied the full humanity of Christ.

By the eighth century, the teaching of Christ's "double consubstantiality" with the Godhead and with humanity had become the pivot of speculative theology no less than of spiritual theology. The teaching of the communication of the idioms adumbrated by Cyril of Alexandria, whereby the properties of Christ's divinity are appropriated by his humanity but those of the humanity are also appropriated by the divinity, offers a paradigm for the deification of the individual, who will undergo in her flesh whatever happened in the hypostatic union (Kelly 1978; Meyendorff 1997).[38] In his *Aporiae*, Leontius of Jerusalem elaborates further on the nature of the union, suggesting that the divine nature of Christ is enhypostatic, as it rests in a divine hypostasis, whereas his human nature, lacking a corresponding human hypostasis, may be said to be anhypostatic. While so-called semi-Nestorian *homo assumptus* Christologies thought it necessary to postulate a human center of subjectivity in Christ so as to balance the presence of the divine hypostasis, for Leontius this *de facto* Christological asymmetry is what guarantees the effectiveness of the incarnation: Christ is a sort of concrete universal, where the totality of the human nature—in no way different from the humanity we all share—is subsumed into the divine hypostasis, and yet it remains fully human (Gray 2006).[39]

What is then the nature of Christ's body if Christ has assumed human nature *in general*? The so-called *agraptodocetae* asserted that the teaching of anhypostasy indicated that Christ did not possess any describable human characteristic, and for this reason the Gospels never offered any information about Christ's physical appearance, such as his stature or the color of his hair (Meyendorff 1997, 187). One might object that if one human hypostasis had been assumed, the effects of the redemption would have been limited to just this one individual, but for some the fact that Christ is invested with a general *ousia* might somehow detract from the historical reality of the incarnation. In response to those who viewed anhypostasy as a sort of Trojan horse introducing docetism into the Chalcedonian paradigm, John Damascene insisted in his writings against the iconoclasts that the historical Jesus was invested with a divine hypostasis and two natures, as well as with the characteristics (*idiomata*) of a human individuality. These *idiomata* were what distinguished Christ from his own mother and from all other men and women of his time. In John's vision, the idea that Christ assumed humanity in general, and yet this humanity subsisted *en atomō* (in a particular case), ensures that the hypostatic union impacts humanity as a whole, and simultaneously that his

[38] This teaching argues that the properties of each of the two natures of Christ can also be ascribed to the other, thereby legitimizing statements such as "God dies" or "the man Jesus rules the universe."

[39] The various *homo assumptus* Christologies that have emerged over the centuries would suggest that Christ was also a human subject, and therefore tended to upset the Chalcedonian balance.

historical body was a body that, as far as its nature was concerned, did not differ from that of other human beings (Damascene 2003, I, 4).[40]

The purpose of Theodore's writings against the iconoclasts is to reassert John Damascene's teaching on Christology, at the same time indicating that the act of venerating icons is the highest form of orthodox behavior. For Theodore, in the representation of Christ's body one may contemplate the mysterious mingling of the uncircumscribable divinity and the circumscribable flesh (Theodore 1981, II, 41-7). As noted by Pelikan in the second volume of his history of theology, iconoclasts were concerned that the legitimacy of icons could be defended arguing that icons represented the humanity of Christ as opposed to the divinity, thereby reintroducing some sort of Nestorian distinction between two dimensions in Christ (Pelikan 1977, 116). Theodore insists not only that the body of Christ bears both the divinity and the humanity, but also that the divinity remains uncircumscribable even as it comes to dwell in the humanity of the incarnate Word. As such, on one hand it is necessary to say that Christ is circumscribable, given that his humanity, albeit general, is contemplated in an individual manner, and on the other hand it is necessary to assert his uncircumscribability: the eternal Logos is the ordering principle of the cosmos, but he is also the principle of subjectivity in the person of Christ (Theodore 1981, II, 1-15).

In this perspective, it is Christ's physical body that is the locus of the hypostatic union, the place where the mysterious exchange of properties between the natures is accomplished in all its glory. The images of Christ that are worshipped by the faithful cannot portray the fullness of the divinity, which escapes pictorial representation, but they represent the deified humanity of the eternal Word, whose every action is performed by the Second Person of the Trinity. Theodore argues that the incarnation ratifies the intrinsic dignity of matter; if Christ had assumed a mere noetic form, we would be justified in remaining in pure mental contemplation, but as Christ chose to embrace our humanity in his "sublime condescension," hence assuming the same body and sufferings that we all share, to refuse to represent Christ's body would be to fail to give God his proper honor (Theodore 1981, I, 7).

The veneration of the images has a propedeutic role, to the extent that it reminds us of the mystery of our salvation, but at the same time it also points to the reality of our individual deification. While earlier authors such as Evagrios Pontikos had been reluctant to envisage a role for images of any kind in the later stages of spiritual progress, Theodore, much like his predecessor John Damascene, insists that if Christ could not be represented, this would entail that he was not truly human, and then our salvation would not have been accomplished. For Theodore, echoing Maximos the Confessor and John Damascene, the hypostatic union is a historical event that marks an

[40] The contention that Christ's humanity was *en atomō* enabled John Damascene to assert the legitimacy of icon veneration.

irreversible transformation in the ordering of the cosmos; in the incarnation, humanity is subsumed into the divinity, so that it is possible to assert that the hypostasis of Christ is now a composite hypostasis, bearing within itself two natures (Törönen 2007, 95; Meyendorff 1997, 82). Images of Christ invite us to raise our gaze to the end of times, when every individual will be transfigured as Christ once was. The saints are a warrant that this transformation is indeed possible, and by honoring them we actually honor the effectiveness of Christ's salvific work; in John Damascene's earlier treatment of this topic, we are told that the saints are like the cloud of glory that surrounds the victorious general, so that choosing not to represent the saints defrauds Christ of his glory (Damascene 2003, I, 21).[41]

The theology of the icon stresses the diachronic dimension of Christian soteriology, where the event of the hypostatic union represents a unique instance of divine involvement with human history, inaugurating a dynamic process whereby the whole cosmos will eventually be transfigured. It is important to note that the school of Origenist spirituality represented by Evagrios and his followers tended to view history as moving according to a circular pattern, and therefore striving towards the restoration of an initial condition of unity when all rational beings were one with God. This teaching, which appears to be suggested by Origen as a possibility in *De Principiis* and is taken up by Evagrios in the *Kephalaia Gnostika*, would effectively envisage individual personhood as a provisional reality that would not endure in the last day (Origen 111-413; Pontikos 1958, Book IV).[42] On the contrary, the stronger incarnational dimension, which, after the Council of Chalcedon, would become normative in Christian theology, would rather emphasize the uniqueness of the incarnation and effectively underscore the intrinsic value of each and every individual. The fact that traditional Byzantine icons portray the bodies of the saints in the fullness of their glory is a pledge of hope in the resurrection of the dead that will take place on the last day.

The approach developed by the Tibetan writer Bokar Rinpoche (1940-2004) rests on the dialectical relationship between ultimate and conventional reality, which are both present in the images of Chenrezig, the bodhisattva of compassion. The term *bodhicitta*, or "mind of enlightenment" is used to indicate the nirvanic nature of reality, which encompasses an absolute aspect (the realm of emptiness or wisdom) as well as a relative aspect (the realm of form or compassion). While the body of Christ embraces a divine as well as a human nature, Chenrezig encompasses both absolute and conventional bodhicitta, which are given a variety of names: "emptiness and compassion," "knowledge and means," "absolute aspect and relative aspect," or "mode of being and mode of manifestation." Yet, while Christ is distinct and separate from us, Chenrezig

[41] John Damascene, *op. cit.*, I, 21.

[42] In this perspective, there is no ultimate ontological distinction between the individual and Christ.

may be said to *be* within us already, because in the Vajrayāna tradition wisdom and compassion are already potentially within us as part of the awakened state that is our very nature. Rinpoche notes that the different degrees of love and compassion that one can observe between different beings "corresponds to a greater or lesser actualization of this potential, and to the influence in greater or lesser degree of Chenrezig in ourselves." In what one could call a perichoretic manner, the ultimate nature of the mind as wisdom is the basis and ground of its compassionate manifestation; the body of Chenrezig is the way in which the Buddha nature helps us activate the wisdom and compassion that are already present in us (Rinpoche 1997, 11-17).

While authors such as John Damascene or Theodore the Studite discuss the propedeutic value of painted images, the reflection of Tibetan authors such as Bokar Rinpoche tends to focus on images that are visualized in the mind of the practitioner. The Madhyamaka philosophical tradition that for many centuries was considered normative in Tibet used the term *dharmakāya* (body of dharma) to indicate the all-encompassing, cosmic dimension of Buddhahood, and distinguished it from the co-called *rupakāya*s (body of form), which the manifestations of the former in conventional reality. Bokar Rinpoche presupposes this conceptual differentiation, but he also accepts the Yogacāra-influenced distinction between the manifestations that one encounters in our ordinary reality (*nirmanakāya*s) from those that dwell in the celestial realms of the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas (*sambhogakāya*s). The latter, whose name may be translated as "body of communal enjoyment," are customarily depicted as having bodies of marvelous beauty and power, adorned in splendid garments and invested with extraordinary powers. The bodhisattva of compassion that the Indian tradition calls Avalokiteshvara, and the Tibetan tradition calls Chenrezig, is one such *sambhogakāya*. While the term "Tantric deity" is often used to indicate these "bodies of enjoyment," one should not forget that such "deities" are not "gods" in the ordinary sense of the term, but should rather be seen as hypostatizations of qualities that inhere in the human mind, and as such are already present in all of us. The purpose of mind visualizing the body of such deities serves the specific propedeutic purpose of reminding us that our intrinsic nature is no different from Buddhahood, even if ordinarily we are not aware of it.[43]

Bokar Rinpoche distinguishes two phases in the process of visualization: in the first phase, one mentally recreates the appearance of the deity (*phase of creation*), whereas in the second phase (*phase of completion*) the appearances are dissolved into emptiness. The tradition underscores how in essence the two phases are not separate realities, but they participate of the same Buddha nature; it is the same mind that

[43] For an introduction to the teaching of the Buddha bodies, see John Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied*, Ch. 3-4, 29-84; Reginald Ray, *Indestructible Truth*, Ch. 16, 419-49. From a Madhyamaka perspective, the *dharmakāya* (body of dharma) is identified with ultimate reality, while the *rupakāya*s correspond to the different aspects of conventional reality.

visualizes the image and that dissolves it into emptiness (Rinpoche 1997, 72-87). In the phase of creation, practitioners recite the mantra of Chenrezig and begin to picture the body of Chenrezig as seated in his pure realm, wearing marvelous garments and accompanied by a retinue of supernatural beings. The visual splendor of the deity's appearance is meant to "disengage" us from our ordinary way of perceiving reality as well as our assumption that the conventional reality we inhabit *is* the only reality in existence. In the words of Bokar Rinpoche, "divine appearances replace ordinary appearances and neutralize our fixation on their reality" (Rinpoche 1997, 61). It is important to remember that the body of the deity that is being visualized only exists within our mind: Chenrezig is an appearance and yet it is devoid of material existence. Every aspect of the body's manifestation has an allegorical meaning, and different texts elaborate at great length on the connections between various Tantric teachings and different part of the deity's appearance: the four arms of Chenrezig indicate the four immeasurables, the two crossed legs suggest the union of *samsara* and *nirvāna* as well as of emptiness and compassion, the multi-colored garments indicate the five wisdoms, and so on.

In the course of the visualization, the individual lets go of one's attachment to the ego, which is a form of pride at the most basic level, and cultivates the so-called "pride of the deity," based on the conviction that "one is Chenrezig." Identification of one's body with the body of Chenrezig should cut the development of ordinary desires and aversions, and the awareness that the body of the deity is a manifestation of an empty reality ensures that this "pride" is not a self-centered boasting.[44] According to Bokar Rinpoche, the pride of the deity helps one no longer identify with one's illusory "I" and instead affirm one's identity with the Tantric deity. One may object that the replacement of one's identity with another will not constitute a significant change, but the Tibetan tradition envisages this shift as a move from a situation where one grasps at material existence to a situation where one lets go of delusion and experiences peace. The phase of completion, when one lets go of the image of the deity and all phenomena return into emptiness, helps one remember that every aspect of the body of Chenrezig is in fact a visualization of different qualities of awakening, which ultimately possess no form at all (Rinpoche 1997, 64-65).

It is clear that the deified body of Christ and the saints, on one hand, and the glorious body of the Tantric deity, on the other, are the pivot around which revolve two different approaches to spiritual practice and individual transformation. The notion of

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[44] A related issue is of course the use of the sexual energies as a resource for spiritual progress that is ultimately identical with Buddahood; visualization would then help purify sexual desire from its more self-centered aspects. While Theodore does not discuss sexuality, Maximos the Confessor views the incarnation as healing the conflict between the two genders that sin. See John Stevens, *Lust for Enlightenment: Buddhism and Sex* (Boston: Shambala, 1990); Adam G. Cooper, *The Body in St. Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

incarnation that undergirds the theology of Theodore the Studite insists on the uniqueness of the hypostatic union, where the whole of our humanity is subsumed into the divinity in an event marking an irreversible change in the very texture of the cosmos. The plurality of *rupakāyāh* in the Tibetan worldview, on the contrary, exists in a timeless horizon where no ontological change is possible, and the manifestations of the Buddha in our reality merely help practitioners uncover a pre-existent reality.

Terms such as deification and "pride of the deity" are intriguingly similar, but the two approaches rest on radically distinct assumptions regarding individual subjectivity and temporality. While some Tibetan traditions—notably Nyingma—have developed "creation narratives" that are intriguingly close to certain strands of the Christian tradition, the emphasis in the Kagyud approach is on the rediscovery of one's ever present nirvanic reality, which knows of no beginning or end.[45] For authors such as Theodore, on the contrary, the hypostatic union ensures that within the person of Christ the divinity and the humanity acquire characteristics that belong to the other nature, prefiguring what will be accomplished in the body of the saints at the end of time. Within a framework of temporal progress, where the natural order moves towards its eschatological completion, the incarnation is a unique event that inaugurates the process of cosmic deification. Within an a-temporal reality, on the contrary, there can be an endless plurality of bodily manifestations of Buddhahood, all of which gesture towards the intrinsic unity of *samsara* and *nirvāna*. In the body of Christ and his saints, humanity and divinity mingle in a perichoretic exchange; in the countless bodies of the Buddha and of his manifestations such as Chenrezig, samsaric and nirvanic reality are eternally present, to quip, "without distinction or separation."

This comparison, while very brief, should help Christian theologians gain a better understanding of the specificity of the Christian—and specifically Orthodox Christian—take on the purpose of sacred images. Both the Byzantine and the Tibetan tradition view them as a support for spiritual practice, and in both cases, be they concrete works of art or mental visualizations, they can exert a transformative impact on the life of the practitioners. In the former case, however, the individual identity of the practitioner is eschatologically preserved; the deified self retains his or her characteristics even as it is fully deified. In the latter case, "pride of the deity" reminds us that one's identity is only part of conventional reality, and as such the images of the *rupakāyāh* can only bring

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[45] For an example of a Tibetan "creation narrative," see Anon., *The supreme source*: *The Fundamental Tantra of the Dzogchen Semde 'Kunjed Gyalpo'* (Translated and introduced by Chos rgyal nam kha nor bu and A. Clemente. Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Pub., 1999).

about an epistemological transformation, reminding us of what we truly are. A comparative theological reflection on iconography allows one to rediscover how God's manifestation in the flesh inaugurates a new era, where every individual body is rescued from dissolution and comes to participate in the divine life.

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The Influence of Black Church Culture: How Black Church Leaders Frame the HIV/AIDS Discourse

By Sandra L. Barnes

Abstract

Although the Black Church has historically responded to social problems, collective action to combat HIV/AIDS has been limited. Focus group conversations from Black Church leaders are used to examine attitudes and actions on the subject. Of particular interest is whether framing of the discourse is influenced by Black Church culture. Findings suggest the tendency to associate HIV/AIDS with homosexuality and conflate it with other social challenges. Tensions arose concerning how to reconcile HIV/AIDS without violating Christian tenets as well as inactivity that violates the Christian calling to serve the Black community. Yet regardless of views about theology, humanity, morality, and sexuality, strategies for redress reflected the Black Church self-help tradition.

The devastating effects of HIV/AIDS in the Black community are well documented. In 2005, about half (49 percent) of persons diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in the United States were Black, 41 percent of men living with HIV/AIDS were Black, and 64 percent of women living with HIV/AIDS were Black. Based on the latter figure, it has been suggested that the contemporary "face of AIDS" in the U.S. is Black, heterosexual, and female (Centers for Disease Control 2007, 2008). Studies also document the Black Church's[46] legacy of responding to social problems (DuBois 1903[2003]; Mays and Nicholson 1933), undergirded by church cultural tools (Barnes 2004; Cone 1995; Pattillo-McCoy 1998; Wilmore 1994). However, its collective response to the pandemic has been limited (Douglas 1999; Hammonds 1992, 1986; Herek and Capitanio 1999; Neuman 2002).

Limited information exists about dynamics that influence Black Church-based HIV/AIDS programs (Cohen 1999; Lemelle et al. 2000; Neuman 2002). However, literature shows the centrality of Black Church leaders such as pastors, other clergy, and

[46] The term "the Black Church" is used to represent the institution as a collective and "Black church" when specific congregations are referenced. Use of the former term should not suggest the lack of diversity among Black congregations based on factors such as denomination, theological focus, worship style, programmatic efforts, and community involvement.

key lay leaders in shaping congregational purposes and programs (Billingsley 1999; Fears 2004; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Thus it is important to consider the views of such leaders regarding HIV/AIDS. Although not exhaustive, this research examines possible cultural exemplars to better understand the attitudes and behavior of a sample of thirty-five Black Church leaders who have histories of involvement in community action. Qualitative data are used to explore: how they frame the HIV/AIDS pandemic; whether Black Church cultural components are influential; and how their views affect interventions.

The Black Community, The Black Church, and HIV/AIDS

The most common individual-level factors associated with the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among U.S. Blacks include intravenous (IV) drug use, unprotected heterosexual sex, heterosexual sex with IV drug users, and men-sleeping-with men (MSM) (CDC 2003, 2004; Malebranche 2003; O'Neill 1987). Systemic correlates to HIV/AIDS disparity based on race/ethnicity include historic and current inequality; poverty; health inequities; Black male incarceration rates; relative differences in funding for research and interventions; and, some scholars suggest, the tendency to implement ethnocentric interventions (Airhihenbuwa et al. 2003, CDC 2008).

According to studies, the Black community tends to be sexually conservative; sexuality is considered taboo and not a subject to be addressed in the public or religious sphere (Billingsley 1992; Douglas 1999; Higginbotham 1993; Sterk-Elifson 1994). Historically HIV/AIDS has been considered a "White gay males'" disease that has been stigmatized by some Blacks (Battle and Bennett 2000; Cochran and Mays 1999; Lemelle et al. 2000; Valdiserri 2002). Conservative Christian dictates in general seem to have exacerbated stigma such that views found in the larger Black community also manifest among some church members (Douglas 1999; Fullilove and Fullilove 1999; Leland and Miller 1998; Reeves 2004). And for persons who espouse such negative views, the leap to automatically associate HIV/AIDS with homosexuality is an easy one (Davis 2005; Paulson 2004; Reeves 2004). HIV/AIDS is often associated with immoral behavior and considered in diametric opposition to Black Church tenets (Cohen 1999; Davis 2005; Douglas 1999; Herek and Capitanio 1999; Paulson 2004; Reeves 2004). Although the Black Church has successfully spearheaded other health-related interventions in response to cancer, diabetes, and Alzheimer's, the tendency to characterize HIV/AIDS as a sex-related issue rather than a health-related one has undermined interventions (Malebranche 2003).

Strategists suggest initiating conversation with clergy and churches open to discussing sexual issues and HIV/AIDS because they may also be more amenable to sponsoring interventions. Airhihenbuwa et al. (2003, 34) provide a germane suggestion:

> The African-American church may present a good entry point… [However,] moralization of sexual matters and diseases (of which HIV/AIDS is perceived to be the very epitome)…thus presents a problem on how this should be addressed. In this instance, it may be best to use men that occupy leadership/authority positions as "beginners" in this initiative.

Some scholars also contend that Black churches equipped with resources and support from organizations such as The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) would be significant forces against the pandemic (Okigbo et al. 2002). Although community-based agencies such as Blacks Educating Blacks about Sexual Health Issues (BEBASHI) exist, such services are rare (Airhihenbuwa et al. 2003). Church-based programs focused on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention include the Balm in Gilead, Inc., Gospel Against AIDS, Interfaith HIV Network, and the ITC AIDS Project. However, there is an absence of national and local HIV/AIDS programs specifically directed toward the Black community (Williams 2002). For example, a study by Rubin, Billingsley, and Caldwell (1994) of over 170 Black churches showed that only 3 percent sponsored some type of AIDS-related health program. Because of the benefits of Black Church culture and leadership in motivating adherents toward community action (Barnes 2004, 2005; Morris 1984; Patillo-McCoy 1998), it is important to consider their influence when the subject of HIV/AIDS is considered.

Cultural Theory: Framing the HIV/AIDS Discourse

Swidler (1986) defines culture as "symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices" (273). A cultural "tool kit" reflects symbols, stories, beliefs, and rituals used to organize and develop specific processes to bring about specific outcomes. Culture can provide both motivation and meaning to foster resource mobilization by enabling supporters to determine problems, make sense out of them, and develop appropriate solutions. Because, according to Swidler, "culture provides the materials from which individuals and groups construct strategies of action" (280), the goal here is to determine church cultural tools that affect church leaders' attitudes and actions about HIV/AIDS. This analysis examines how Black Church culture is framed (i.e., purposely arranged, produced, and presented) to affect beliefs and behavior about HIV/AIDS (Goffman 1974; Snow et al. 1986).

According to Benford (1993), framing and the actions that follow can provide group consensus and shared group identity that can be cyclic in their ability to influence subsequent frames. Thus how Black Church leaders frame the HIV/AIDS discourse would be expected to influence interventions or inactivity. Furthermore, conflict surrounding the framing process could undermine group consensus and action. Bolman

and Deal (1991) posit that framing based on cultural components such as rituals, myths, stories, and ceremonies is more effective in creating meaning and motivation in organizations, even religious groups, than regulations and managerial authority. Thus what an issue *means* to group members is as important as the issue itself. Moreover, disparate intra-group meanings can make it difficult for groups to meet goals and objectives and reconcile problems. For these authors, culture is both process and product that can empower groups who face paradoxes, uncertainty, and seemingly insurmountable situations. For Black Church leaders, cultural symbols would be expected to provide meaning for issues such as HIV/AIDS as well as possible interventions.

The application of work by several other scholars helps inform an understanding of this framing in the Black Church context. Goffman (1963) defines stigma as a deeply discrediting attribute that is understood in society based on a "language of relationships" (3). Of his three categories of stigma, the second group consists of homosexuals and others with "blemishes of individual character… or unnatural passions." Blacks are included in the third group based on the "tribal stigma of race[,] these being stigma that can be transmitted through lineages" (4).[47] Simply put, these groups are less desirable because they are different. Furthermore, society creates an ideology with which stigmatized and non-stigmatized persons (i.e., "normals" per Goffman) understand themselves, each other, and how to negotiate encounters. He describes how stigmatized groups contend with shame; discredited identities; negative experiences among normals; and the desire for acceptance. Goffman also details ways people attempt to manage stigma germane to this study that include attempting to correct their *deficiency*; overcompensating; and unconventionally interpreting their identity to counter society's negative portrait. Historic stigmatizing symbols associated with Black sexuality (West 1993) and the Black Churches' response in encouraging modesty and traditional sexual norms may illumine the current analysis (Higginbotham 1993).

In addition to religious/spiritual, cultural, and socio-psychological challenges in responding to the pandemic, Cohen (1999) details political issues that have stymied Black Church involvement. She contends that negative framing has undermined HIV/AIDS mobilization. Although many Blacks have historically embraced a linked-fate ideology in response to social problems, Cohen suggests that those who consider

[47] The first stigmatized group includes persons with physical deformities. Goffman suggests that most stigmatized persons consider themselves no different from other human beings, although they and others define them as "different." He contends that stigma can function as a means of formal social control, and to exclude groups for societal competition for scarce resources. Lastly, Goffman's following observation informs the experiences of Blacks, gays, and lesbians as well as a broader dialogue regarding stigma and diversity: "in an important sense there is only one unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports" (128).

HIV/AIDS largely a problem for the gay community have difficulty understanding its relevance to them as a problem to be championed. As such, a marginalized group (i.e., Blacks in general) subsequently marginalizes even more subordinated sub-groups within their own race (i.e., Blacks who are gay and lesbian, drug users, or considered sexually promiscuous). This premise further suggests that part of the Black Church's historic political role has been to police the sexual and moral behavior of the Black community to avoid stigma and maintain its wholesome image (Hammonds 1986, 1992). Cohen and others contend that the Black Church has not placed AIDS on its national political agenda largely because it cannot decide on the *worthiness* of certain victims for time, resources, and energy (Cooper 1988). Its weak political stance is summarized as follows:

Overall there has been very little reframing of AIDS to awaken the consciousness of black communities and mobilize their political strength in response to this epidemic. Instead, AIDS has most often been represented as an individual medical/moral problem caused, depending on your perspective, by bad people or salvageable individuals engaged in bad behavior(Cohen 1999, 288).

The Cultural Repertoire in the Black Church

The Black Church cultural repertoire includes scriptural redaction, stories, rituals, spirituals, call-and-response, gospel music, prayer, self-help, and symbols germane to the Black experience (Barnes 2005; Cone 1995; Costen 1993; Morris 1984; Pattillo-McCoy 1998). These tools validate members, evoke God for assistance, bolster positive group identity, and fuel social action (Billingsley 1999). In particular, the Bible informs Blacks about appropriate spiritual and temporal pursuits; whether and how God plans to intervene; whether and how they should spearhead social change; and the consequences of deviating from "godly" dictates (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). The theological stance of some Black Church members about sexual immorality is informed by Genesis 19 and 1 Corinthians 6:9.[3] Symbolism that excludes segments of society from eternal life because of immoral living—a list that includes a sub-group believed to be homosexuals—has been used to illustrate God's stance about such lifestyles. Other scriptural references used to condemn homosexuality include Judges 19:22-23, 25; Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; and, 1 Timothy 1:8-10. For those who embrace such biblical interpretations, HIV/AIDS is often equated with homosexuality and characterized as God's wrath on persons engaged in sinful behavior (McMorris 2004; Paulson 2004; Reeves 2004; Texeira 2005). A representative quote by Neuman (2002) correlates Black Church culture to historic community action and current inactivity in regard to HIV/AIDS:

> It was the church that offered education, job training, food, and shelter… Whenever people were oppressed, [the Black Church] was there, marching,

> protesting, shouting, preaching, praying, proclaiming, giving, exhorting, crying, working. We have stared down sickness, poverty, unemployment, racism, water hoses, and vicious dogs; now our communities are threatened by something that has no cure – HIV/AIDS… Yet the loudest, most influential voice in the history of Africans in America sits in the pulpit and pews of our churches silent on Sunday… [T]he church's role is to do whatever is necessary to create and promote healing in the lives of people. (146-7)

Other less noted elements of Black Church culture are conservatism characterized by family and child-centeredness, the tendency to avoid sexuality-related dialogue, and heterosexism (Douglas 1999; Fears 2004; Lemelle et al. 2000; Texeira 2005). For some, current Black Church difficulties mobilizing around HIV/AIDS represent a conundrum in light of its self-help tradition during periods such as the Jim Crow era and the Civil Rights movement.

Research Questions

This project is guided by several questions. What are the views of clergy and other church leaders about HIV/AIDS in the Black community? How do they make sense of the pandemic? Is the influence of Black Church culture evident? Do views influence HIV/AIDS programs?

Dialogue Context: Black Church Leaders' Perspectives

In the summer of 2003, a group of thirty-five seminary students who were also Black Church leaders engaged in dialogue during three focus groups while matriculating at a seminary in the Southwest. A series of five broad questions were posed to stimulate general discussion and encourage varied responses without unduly influencing the focus of discussion. The questions were: (1) What is the most pressing problem facing the Black community/Black Church?; (2) How is the Black Church you attend meeting the needs of the Black community?; (3) Talk about gender inclusivity and the Black Church—what are your views?; (4) Talk about sexual orientation and the Black Church—what are your views?; and (5) How has the Black Church responded to these issues in questions 3 and 4? The groups were not organized to specifically discuss one issue, but rather to consider social problems that affect the contemporary Black Church. Yet despite broad questions, issues related to HIV/AIDS and homosexuality consistently emerged. Each session, approximately two hours in length, was video- and audio-taped on campus. Clergy (pastors, preachers, evangelists) as well as Christian educators, and ministers of music were included. The majority of participants are pastors of predominately Black churches. The groups consisted of a total of 21 males and 14 females. Heterogeneity existed in terms of religious vocation, denomination, age, and

sex. Content analysis was used to uncover the representative quotes provided here from the focus group members in the sample (pseudonyms are used and vocations are excluded to insure anonymity).

Framing Homosexuality Among Black Church Leaders

Sentiments about HIV/AIDS were tied to how sample members framed sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular as well as traditional biblical redaction. It was common to associate the pandemic with risky, inappropriate behavior (Douglas 1999; Jemmott et al. 2001; Mays and Cochran 1987). Symbolizing the pandemic in this manner meant associated beliefs and cultural practices were usually understood in a similar way (Swidler 1986, 1995). Furthermore, focus group members believe that the subject continues to be an uncomfortable topic in the Black Church and Black community (Neuman 2002; Sterk-Elifson 1994; West 1993). Thus sexual conservatism, a component of Black Church culture, has made it difficult to examine HIV/AIDS:

Loretta: Because it deals with human sexuality. It's something that's done in secret, but nobody talk about it. And I think because it has been so taboo in this country and the church has been the forerunner of this in so many ways, we don't look at human sexuality in a holistic way. And it has created, I feel, AIDS in our community—it's like hush, hush.

Although scripture was used to frame focus group discourses, the underlying conflicts evolved around appropriate ways to conceptualize and respond to the pandemic that both does justice to the humanity of infected persons and does not violate Christian tenets. Sample members posited that conservative views in Black Church spaces mean the subjects of sexuality, homosexuality, and, by extension, HIV/AIDS are often taboo. Despite its increased prevalence among Black heterosexual women, members of the sample tended to correlate HIV/AIDS with homosexuality and the pandemic was framed based on four themes: denial and dirty laundry, homosexuality as sin, deliverance, and inclusivity.

"The Truth Shall Make You Free": Denial and Dirty Laundry

Historic stigma of Blacks by Whites, stigma toward homosexuals, and stigma management were noted among sample members (Goffman 1963). Some participants believe that the Black Church and community are in denial regarding the prevalence and effects of HIV/AIDS among Blacks and are more concerned about airing its "dirty laundry" than addressing the social problem. As such, homosexuality represents another potential stigma in the Black community. Focus group members with these views believed that, given society's tendency to characterize Blacks negatively (Higginbotham

1993), churches respond by attempting to present a "perfect" image to the world - even at the expense of intervening on behalf of the physically ill. And just as cultural framing can provide the stimulus to develop a shared group identity (Benford 1993; Cohen 1999), such group members considered themselves part of a collective called the *Black Church*, but critiqued what they considered to be a preoccupation with presenting a collective identity devoid of flaws. According to the following comment, focus on rituals and ceremonies reflect attempts to deny reality of the pandemic and reinforce the desired image (Goffman 1959, 1974; Hammond 1992, 1986; Okigbo et al. 2002), but can take precedence over proactively combating social problems like HIVAIDS:

> Mary: They just don't want to deal with the facts. We just want to sweep it all away and say oh, they're sick… We just want everybody to look like it's perfect… We just keep having our beautiful days and wearing our beautiful hats and suits… [T]hese are issues that even the heads of our churches will not take a stand about one way or the other…just divorce that segment of people and say they're gays and lesbians—go somewhere else—you're just wrong—you're just evil. We want to look at the Catholic Church and point to them. But we don't want to point to ourselves. Who wants to unveil all of this stuff? And when you unveil it, what do you do with it? We just keep having our beautiful days and wearing our beautiful hats and suits.

In this regard, routinized events solidify group identity and cultural practices (Benford 1993; Swidler 1986, 1995) and also motivate church members toward corresponding behavior.

By "circling the wagons," the Black Church has difficulty articulating social problems and developing strategies and solutions. Leaders with these views appeared frustrated by what they believed to be the Black Church's preoccupation with a façade of respectability, pomp and circumstance, and perfection that ignores problems. However, even critical participants articulated their allegiance to the Black Church and its overall mission of empowerment.

"Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin": Homosexuality as Sin

Negro pews, persecution, threats of denominational ousting, and paternalism by Whites in sacred spaces resulted in a separate Black religious tradition with a different culture. In this new space, adherents were sensitized and challenged to follow biblical dictates and respect and value all of humanity—including those considered to be sinners

(Sernett 1985).[48] They believed in a God who loved humanity unconditionally—even the poor and other disenfranchised groups (DuBois 1953[1996]; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Wilmore 1994). When characterizing homosexuality, some focus group respondents distinguished people from their actions. This meant that homosexuality was less often considered an identity with a corresponding lifestyle (i.e., who persons are), but rather behavior (i.e., what persons do). Leaders with such views usually associate homosexuality with sin; HIV/AIDS represents the expected outcome associated with persons who engage in homosexual behavior (Cohen 1999; Douglas 1999; Herek and Capitanio 1999; Malebranche 2003). Although respondents were sympathetic about the circumstances and challenges with which infected persons and their families contend, views ranged from considering gays and lesbians sinners *en masse* to defining such couples as adulterous because they do not reflect the traditional, legal marital arrangement. Biblical texts that condemn immorality were important in grounding such views:

> Lester: You also have to consider the fact that love doesn't rejoice with evil, but it rejoices with the truth [paraphrasing 1 Corinthians 13:6]. And if I love you as a brother then I'm going to confront you in love and say the things that you're doing are wrong [homosexuality], not because I'm so big or I know everything that's right and wrong.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me…to preach deliverance to the captives": Deliverance

Some focus group members viewed outreach to the gay and lesbian community as well as HIV/AIDS interventions as opportunities for evangelism. For them, programs should be developed to deliver persons from homosexuality. In these instances, homosexuality was often conflated with pedophilia. These opinions parallel comments

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[48] Genesis 19 is often interpreted as God's destruction of Sodom for immorality linked to homosexuality. The following verses (4-7, 12-13) from the New International Version of the bible summarize the scenario: "Before Lot and his guests had gone to bed, all of the men came from every part of the city of Sodom. Young and old men alike surrounded the house. They called out to Lot. They said, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us. We want to have sex with them." Lot went outside to meet them. He shut the door behind him. He said, "No, my friends. Don't do such an evil thing…The two men [angels] said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here? Do you have sons-in-law, sons or daughters? Does anyone else in the city belong to you? Get them out of here. We are going to destroy this place. There has been a great cry to the Lord against the people of this city. So he has sent us to destroy it." Similarly, I Corinthians 6:9 notes, "Don't you know that evil people will not receive God's kingdom? Don't be fooled. Those who commit sexual sins will not receive the kingdom. Neither will those who worship statues of gods or commit adultery. Neither will men who are prostitutes or who commit homosexual acts".

in a recent op-ed piece that it is common to correlate gay males with pedophilia and mental illness (Kort 2005). Sample members that espoused these views fear that even tacit support of homosexuality could lower sexual standards for everyone and foster unacceptable *heterosexual* lifestyles, a potential "snowball" effect, and subsequent sexual immorality that the Black Church would have difficulty addressing:

> Peter: I'm going to seek God for your deliverance. But I also gotta realize the fact that I put the other members of the congregation at risk—I put the children at risk… 'Cause what I'm saying is that what this person does is okay. What I'm saying is that what those priests who molested those children is doing is okay.

Although most leaders had clear opinions about what they considered immoral *theoretically and theologically*, many were conflicted by the reality that their views could, in some way, hurt people they are called to serve by failing to respond to their spiritual, physical, and emotional needs.

"Whosoever Will Let Him Come": Inclusivity

A legacy of exclusion that relegated Blacks as second-class citizens in a society that purported to be Christian (DuBois 1903[2003], 1953[1996]; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Sernett 1985), challenged some Black Christians to develop inclusive churches. This sentiment emerged among sample members. In addition to views that tended to separate individuals (sinners) from their attitudes and behavior (sins) and the willingness to embrace the former, but reject the latter, discussion revealed divergent opinions about inclusivity:

> Joseph: Well, see that goes back to this whole thing with what's right and what's wrong. We consider that you, ah, having sex out of marriage or you being homosexual, we consider that to be wrong… But I always challenge people to go to the scriptures—what book, what verse that Jesus dealt with that [*Jesus* directly rejecting homosexuality] and said that you shouldn't do this or do that. I think the problem is we shouldn't put these people down.

Somewhat inclusive views were evident in the tendency to group homosexuality with other "problematic" behavior (i.e., drinking) and other sex-related concerns (i.e., adultery). However, this correlation was generally followed by the tendency to characterize homosexuality as part of an ever-escalating problem of immorality that the Black Church faces. For most leaders, the Church should be welcoming, but not affirming. And for a few leaders, embracing homosexuality means full participation by gays and lesbians in the life of the church:

> Loretta: But I think they are still God's children and it's been an issue that I've had to struggle with personally myself, in looking at how I feel about it. Some of my better friends that I've worked with have been gay men. I'm sure that I have worked with lesbians. But I've taken them as persons.

Comments suggest that decisions about the place of HIV/AIDS on the Black Church agenda are often directly correlated with decisions about the place of gays and lesbians in the Black Church.

"The Least of These": Strategies to Combat HIV/AIDS

Most leaders had varied emotionally-laden views about HIV/AIDS. However, the tenor of the group changed when discussing solutions. Leaders appeared to cognitively move past conflicted views about how HIV is contracted as well as concerns about morality to a dialogue based on the *reality* of the disease. Blacks with HIV/AIDS were no longer mere bodies with a disease of problematic origin, but brothers and sisters in need of assistance. Suggestions reflected the Black Church self-help tradition and focused on honest communication; education; links between HIV/AIDS, drug use, and heterosexuality; and collective action (Barnes 2004; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990):

> Candace: I think that basically the Black Church is just getting to the place, some of them, that they are willing to even talk about homosexuality—that they're even willing to talk about AIDS in the church. But it has come to such a great phenomenon in the Black community. And not only is it just with gay and lesbian in the Black community. It's getting into heterosexual families and drugs can also create AIDS. And so with the infestation of drugs and substance abuse in the Black community, therefore AIDS is sort of rampant among our people. Churches are just beginning to get to the place that they are willing to look and say wait a minute, we do have to do something.

> Paula: We need to not be afraid of HIV… [W]e need to get out of the stigma about HIV. People come to church for help… If we cast them out, where do they go?

Bolman and Deal's (1991) concept of *symbolic framing* informs the role of scripture in this analysis and its potential to transform and/or routinize. They noted, "the symbolic frame seeks to interpret and illuminate the basic issues of meaning and faith that make symbols so powerful in every aspect of the human experience, including life in organizations…[and] religious orders (15, 244-45). As suggested by the quote below, changing scripture-based beliefs will be important in altering current sentiments about sexuality, homosexuality, and HIV/AIDS. This comment illustrated the influence of biblical interpretation in informing the Black Church about the impetus of the disease.

These leaders suggest that persons who consider HIV/AIDS an indictment from God will be less inclined to actively support efforts to combat the disease:

> Tom: I think education is the key… [O]f course we have to dispel the myth that the AIDS disease is a curse from God. That's been the church's ideology for a long time… You know, you sin like that, God punishes you… [N]o longer can we say that it's just a gay disease. It can happen to anybody. It's been *proven* that it's not just a gay disease.

Strategies of action suggested by sample members (Swidler 1986) included publicizing AIDS as a social problem and strengthening the relationship between academia and churches in hopes that research may provide congregations with additional evidence of the prevalence, effects, and solutions. Black Church leaders are considered central to reducing stigma (Airhihenbuwa et al. 2003; Herek and Capitanio 1999) associated with the disease. This suggestion would require leaders to reframe how HIV/AIDS has been traditionally symbolized to change how the disease is understood among congregants (Stevenson 1994). The following cleric describes a multi-pronged response plan that includes education, assistance, and empowerment:

> Joseph: The first thing we definitely have to bring forth awareness—and then analysis and then a plan of action. We need to set out strategic things that will move us to help those that are in those predicaments. We need to set up things where we can empower people [,] let people know that HIV is now becoming the epidemic in the Black community.

Several group members mentioned church ministries that sponsor HIV/AIDS outreach programs and provide free testing. Despite a general consensus to respond to HIV/AIDS *in theory*, understanding its complexities and harnessing resources to respond to a seemingly insurmountable disease appear to be primary roadblocks to collective redress. Leaders agreed that the Black Church should provide interventions including financial support, paid HIV/AIDS church staff, inter-church resources, and committed leadership:

> Antonio: I feel that the church has the resources - financial resources and leadership. The problem I feel that faces the Church is the lack of community in networking and combining resources with other churches to attack the problems[,] denominational lines, barriers, and pastors and churches competing against each other keep the community divided.

Others stressed increased Black Church accountability reflective of its historic stance as a change agent and its self-help tradition:

> Mary: I think we forget our purpose. The Black Church has always been the anvil that has compelled Black people to the successes that they have today... [M]ost everything was originally in the Black Church, it used to be a social hall, a spiritual place, it was our hospital. It met our every need. I truly believe if the church took its stand as the example of Jesus Christ, we could deal with a lot of the issues in our Black community.

All of the sample members are involved in church efforts that parallel studies on Black Church action such as prison ministries, economic and food programs, family counseling, and youth programs (Barnes 2004, 2005; Billingsley 1999; DuBois 1903[2003]; Frazier 1964; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Mays and Nicholson 1933). Such efforts tend to focus on clearly identified problems; foci that correspond to broadly understood biblical tenets (i.e., biblical charge to care for widows, orphans, and the poor) and attainable outcomes that can be met using existing resources. A programmatic pattern that focuses on historically successful programs more than newer challenges may be better understood using cultural theory where the Black Church tends to "look for a line of action for which [it] already has the cultural equipment" (Swidler 1986, 275). As suggested by Cohen (1999), these efforts tend to also be family- and heterosexual-oriented. Most focus group members acknowledged their respective churches are ill-prepared and ill-equipped to address AIDS-related issues. Their comments suggest that although a self-help stance is evident when HIV/AIDS is considered, efforts lack the impetus of collective efforts paralleling the Civil Rights Movement due largely to varied, often conflicting symbolic framing tied to varied scriptural interpretations and inconsistent use of cultural components.

Unsettled Periods: Black Church Culture and HIV/AIDS

Culture influences attitudes and actions more subtly during everyday life. Less cultural control is required to maintain strategies of action. Yet during times of conflict, which Swidler (1986) calls "unsettled" periods, cultural tools are vital to social transformation. It can be argued that, concerning HIV/AIDS, this is an *unsettled period* for the Black Church and society at large. Long-held values and beliefs are being challenged, resulting in conflict when people are asked to respond to change in new ways. Persons attached to existing cultural models attempt to reinforce existing rituals (for example, marriage) to stabilize supporters, minimize anxieties, and undermine new models (Bolman and Deal 1991). According to Swidler (1986), varied cultural models "battle to dominate the world-views, assumptions, and habits of their members" to determine "how human beings should live" (279). This means that new ideologies compete with existing ones to control behavior. Based on the comments from Black Church leaders in this study, unsettledness concerning the HIV/AIDS pandemic is

apparent given the inability of Black churches to collectively respond based on continued use of past cultural models that appear to undermine dialogue and decision-making. Additionally, because existing values and behavior tend to be tied to existing cultural proficiencies (Swidler 1986), groups are more likely to continue to use existing strategies of action largely because they are expedient rather than effective. Thus cultural revisions are necessary—starting with candid conversations among people and groups that are both interested in responding and that have access to the resources to do so (Bolman and Deal 1991).

Dialogue: Tensions, Trials, and Triumphs

Although not the initial subject of the discussions, Black Church leaders engaged in a candid, often conflicted, dialogue about HIV/AIDS. Most leaders espouse a conservative theology that parallels earlier studies (Douglas 1999; Fullilove and Fullilove 1999; Henking 2008). Most did not dialogue about HIV/AIDS without discussing homosexuality. However, many are experiencing tensions that may require them to reframe the discourse to directly consider healthcare and poverty concerns rather than sexuality (Airhihenbuwa et al. 2003). Consensus exists that the Black Church should respond; tensions surround motivations, logistics, and theological implications. Some leaders appear torn about how to reconcile their vocations with other relevant factors including conflicting views about humanity and sexuality; divergent understanding about determinants of HIV/AIDS; traditional biblical interpretations; and sentiments that result in intra-racial exclusion. Initial dialogue seemed to associate HIV/AIDS with abstract, disengaged, and diseased bodies; as they continued to engage each other, much more nuanced thoughts and questions emerged for which "black and white" answers were not apparent.

Because the pandemic is directly correlated with systemic and historic inequities, this writer contends that it is important to consider whether the onus to address HIV/AIDS should rest primarily on the shoulders of the Black Church. Marginalized groups have tended to privatize social problems and tacitly exonerate the larger society from its role as a possible change agent. Readers may leap to disparage these leaders for their frankness and, in some instances, indecisiveness; yet honest dialogue is one of the first steps in responding to challenges. Nor should these findings be generalized. However, they shed light on how a group of Black leaders intricately involved in community action are wrestling with this complex subject. These findings suggest the importance of continued group dialogues in safe, neutral spaces where church leaders can interact, strategize, and if necessary, debate and argue. How Black Church leaders reconcile issues of humanity, inequality, morality, and sexuality—and determine the most appropriate, expedient responses to HIV/AIDS—are in process and will ultimately shape church programs (Airhihenbuwa et al. 2003; Neuman 2002). Yet such

conversations must continue and seem best informed by the following leader's remark, which also reflects scriptural redaction in the Black Church tradition:

> Terry: Well, I think that we don't want to say sin, because we don't want to say, at least some people don't want to say that we're sinners. And we don't want to admit that, you know, that we're *all* sinners saved by grace [paraphrasing Ephesians 2:5]. And that we need to work with that; we need to accept that and move on. And we're, yes we're going to be striving towards perfection and not sinning. But we need to accept that and not put ourselves on a pedestal as people who are not sinners.

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Kabbalah/Yoga

By Cia Sautter

Abstract

This paper explores positive religious views of spirituality as embodied, active, and physical, through examination of performance in kabbalah and hatha yoga. Several Zohar passages on prayer movement are presented to explore how traditional prayer movements were interpreted. This examination includes rabbinic and Zohar commentary as well as comparison to hatha yoga texts and practices. Importantly, underlying concepts of initiating justice through ritual motion are examined.

Like some forms of yoga, some practices of kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) entail symbolic physical movement. Often an overlooked aspect of the tradition, it is mentioned in many of the best know texts of kabbalah. In a similar vein, the physical, ritual-like quality of hatha yoga is often dismissed as the surface level of the tradition. While technically correct, the result tends to be avoidance of the physical practice itself. Both groups understood intentional, specific physical performance to be essential, since these actions initiated important spiritual transformations in self and society.

Since practices of the Zohar are largely active, engaging the body in specific movements for prayer and meditation, they may be compared with hatha yoga. Such comparisons in particular reveal similarities between concepts of *sefirot* and *chakras*, energy centers that relate to the body. Overall, the two traditions transmit an understanding of the body as vital for living justly, so that all physical performance may be a means of creating a better world. In such a conception of life, sex is not only positive but holy.

While kabbalah and yoga are both offshoot traditions incorporated back into these official religions, the extremely positive view of the body they offer may prove helpful in dealing with the roots of wide-ranging modern issues such as obesity, sexual assault, and pornography. Yet it is the performance aspects of both that may prove especially valuable, as they teach how to re-pattern one's actions toward justice. Ritual and sexual actions may then actually change the world into a better place. In this article, I examine these traditions' views on the body, their understanding of ritual, sex, and spirituality, and finally discuss their underlying ethics.

1. Basic Points of Comparison: Body Perceptions

Hatha yoga's beginnings are attributed to Goraksha Natha, who lived in the late tenth to the eleventh century. Hatha yoga scriptures were written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with a date of 1350 for the *Hatha-Yoga Pradipika*, perhaps its most important text (Feurstein, 385-386; 450-451). In comparison, the *Zohar* was published in the late thirteenth century.

It is possible that a similar understanding of human anatomy produced parallel results between basic theories of the body in these two spiritually focused practices. Through Arab scholars' investigation of human anatomy, knowledge about physiology spread both East and West. Noting this, Rabbi Mark Verman comments that in this time period there was great interest in the physical and spiritual significance of the spine (81). Both the *sefirot* of kabbalah and the *chakras* of hatha yoga are identified with this inner core of the body, along with theological metaphors of divine presence.

For the Zohar kabbalists, the *sefirot* were actually understood as divine energies that flowed down to earth and sustained it, yet identified with parts of the body – the head and brain with *keter* (crown), *binah* (understanding) and *chochmat* (wisdom); the heart, and right and left arms with *tiferet* (beauty), *gevurah* (strength), *hesed* (mercy) form the second triad; the pelvic center and legs with *yesod* (foundation), *nitzach* (victory), *hod* (glory) form the third triad; and *malchut* (earth).

Despite this identification, Isaiah Tishby points out that in the Zohar the body is degraded to a mere shell, and that it is the soul that is important. But Eliot Wolfson states that for the Zohar kabbalist, embodied action is perceived as a means to change the universe. The kabbalists understood that the divine feminine *Shekinah* is in exile on earth and that performance of the commandments might allow her to rejoin with the heavenly realm. Without the body, such actions could not be achieved, so deliberate physical movements for prayer were considered essential.

Hatha yoga's understanding of the *chakras* seems quite parallel to the *sefirot*, but is much more explicit in understanding them as wheels of energy existing in the body. Unlike earlier forms of yoga, hatha does not consider the body an impediment to spiritual development. Rather, it is an integral part of the process of seeking liberation. In yoga terminology, *prakriti* (matter) does not prevent you from finding *purusha* (true self or soul). The *Kula-Arvana Tantra* (9:41) expresses this philosophy, emphasizing that knowledge of the body is also means of ending ignorance of God: "The body is the abode of God, O Goddess…the psyche (*jiva*) is God *Sada-Shiva*. One should abandon the offering -remains of ignorance; one should worship with the thought 'I am He.'" Feurstein explains this quotation as one that reveals that "enlightenment" is possible "here and now" in a "divine or immortal body." This subtle body is achieved through "the state of balance…in the body" (390).

The physical body is enlightened through the practice of hatha yoga. The names of the seven tantric chakras engaged to achieve this subtle body are *muladhara* (at the base of the spine), *svadhishthana* (area of the "genitals") *manipura* (abdomen or navel),

anahata (heart level), *vissuda* (throat), *ajna* (space between the eyes) and *(*top of the head) (Feurstein 354). If one opens the channels of the chakras, releasing latent energy in the spine – *kundalini*-one frees the soul for a state of true understanding and mystic unity. As with the kabbalah idea of *sefirot*, *chakras* are considered male and female, and identified with one side of the body. They exist in the body, but also outside the body.

2. Performing: The body, ritual, and sexuality

For hatha yoga, specific body positions (*asana*) and sequences of positions release the *kundalini* energy in the body. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* states this metaphorically:

> As the chief of the snakes is the support of the earth with all the mountains and forests on it, so all the Tantras (Yoga practices) rest on the *Kundalini*. ...When the sleeping *Kundalini* awakens by favour of a guru, then all the lotuses [*chakras*] and all the knots are pierced through. (Sihn 3.2).

This is achieved through "various postures and different Kumbhakas [breath retentions], when the great power ... awakens" and the life force "becomes absorbed in" a meditative state (4.10). Though the directions for prayer in the Zohar are not as elaborate as for *asana* in the yoga text, the motions for prayer do have a similar immediate goal – preparation for meditation. A prime example is from the *Raya Mehemnah* (Zohar 3: 821). It is based on a passage from the Talmud in which the rabbis determine that one must involve the spine in prayer (*B. Berachot* 28b). The Zohar passage considers the custom of shaking a palm branch (*lulav*) for the harvest festival of *Sukkot*, saying it " is like the spinal chord that contains eighteen vertebra..." In this interpretation, like the *lulav*, the body's spine is also correlated with the name of God (Verman, 83).

The *Tikkunei Zohar*, written after the Zohar but now included with the main text, provides even more specifics, stating when and how often to bow. This was because "the letters" of the word for bowing (*baruch*) "alludes to the various *Sefirot*," and it was important to unify them (Verman, 82-83):

> ... bow four times during the *Amidah*, twice during the initial three [blessings] and twice during the latter three. This corresponds to the four letters of [God's name]...They also straighten up four times, corresponding to its four letters... One must bend the eighteen vertebrae each time, corresponding the eighteen benedictions, which are included in the eighteen worlds...The spine is a *lulav*, for if it is split, it becomes defective...(18:37a).

Another example of prayer performance comes from the introduction to the Zohar: one was to prostrate before entering the sanctuary for prayer (Matt, 2004, vol. 1, 74-75). This is justified by quoting Psalm 5:8: " I will bow down to you" (*ishtchoh* from the Hebrew *shachah*). Additionally, full prostration for prayer is discussed as part of the central *Amidah* standing prayer. Tishby notes that the action is 1) a sign of respect for the *Shekhinah* 2) a motion signifying rebirth, and 3) a symbolic death. Prostration is also for modesty, as there is an imagined intercourse of the *Shekhinah* with the Divine presence (Zohar 2.129a; PDZ, 381-82). Finally, the movement "involves the renewal of the soul, a kind of rebirth, by making it participate in the insemination of new souls" (382). The Zohar explains that "…at the time she [the *Shekhinah*] receives souls and spirits through the pleasure of a single union, a man devotes his own heart and will to this and offers his own soul in union ……"(Zohar 2.200b ; PDZ, 382). Here, the desire of humans is positive, as the attachment is to the *feminine* presence of God on earth. The metaphors employed also affirm sex as positive and necessary for communion with God's presence (Biale, 102).

Tishby's discussion of the *Shema* prayer provides a glimpse of what leads into the *Amidah*, involving the body, bowing, and visualization. For this prayer, the middle *sefirot* are associated with "two arms of the male" and the upper sefirot with the head and heart, so the unification within the body is of head and heart. Similar to hatha yoga and its conception of joining *shiva* and *shakti* male and female energies, Tishby notes that "the unification of divine names is regarded as a preparation for intercourse." The "upper *sefirot*, which represent the head, the home of the brain" are "thought to be the source of semen" (PDZ, 384- 386). Yet another unification technique for the *Shema* involves the center of the body with the head male, earth female, and heart central. The Zohar states this cryptically:

> One at the top, the place of the beginning, whence paths extend to all sides; one in the middle, the mystery where Moses included himself among Abraham and Isaac, one is the measure of King David; there is a single method of restoration for them all." (PDZ, 384).

Tishby's considers the stillness and inward focus of prostration. Rather than simply intensifying ordinary prayer, such techniques are actually extraordinary in meaning. Though not as extreme as yoga *asana*, the Zohar prayer movements are dramatic, with a presumed significant effect on the individual practitioner. One does not perform such actions in everyday life, for they have significant meaning and will change the ordinary world. They must be done intentionally, with specific motions such as prostration. Prostration in prayer is often symbolically rich in meaning.

In consideration of the *sefirot*, the body would symbolize the *malkhut* or *Shekhinah* level. Given the words of the Zohar, and the association of parts of the body

with the *sefirot*, this makes a great deal of sense. It is a humble position, and in yoga it would be called *balasana*- the child's pose- for it's fetus-like look. Not surprisingly, in yoga, such a pose is considered restorative. The central metaphor of this behavior was one of *kavvanah* (intention), symbolized in the phrase "worship of the Heart." While the concept of worship of the heart was important in medieval Jewish thought, it received particular attention from the zoharists. The word they used for *kavvanah* was the Aramaic *re'utah*, which implies will or desire. In practice, this meant that one was to include the body in ritual, rather than thoughts alone. For "correct intention of both mind and body cause the radiance of the *Shekhinah* to descend upon them." Furthermore, it was important to sense the "internal parts" of the body in prayer, rather than just the "outer" body. As a part of prayer, the body may then be viewed as a "sacrifice, set on flame by the fires of the heart "(PDZ 343-356). As a result, "good will suffuses all the body organs…and they attract the radiance of the *Shekhinah* to dwell on them…."(360-361). In hatha yoga, as part of Tantric tradition, similar metaphors come into play. Yogis refer to the fires built in the physical body through breathing and *asana* practice, which burn away what they call the ethereal body. This allows for the individual yogi to join with the Universal, cosmic body. Additionally, the yogic concept of the subtle body included six layers to overcome, to attain a celestial body (See Feursteing, 390; White). This is not unlike the ascent of the kabbalah soul through the *sefirot*.

3. Performing for Justice

Catherine Bell reminds us that ritual happens in and through the ritual body, and it is important to pay attention to the practice of ritual. Moshe Idel comments that this is true for the kabbalists, and it is important to give more attention to their actual practices rather than simply the written texts (2005, 221-227). Words, of course, are still important to Jewish rituals. Yet the zoharists understand their ritual performance to have had universal implications. Viewed as ritual for meditation, yoga might be seen as a similar type of performance, for yogis also understand their actions affect the world. Examining the stated focus, implied meanings, and, importantly, the intentions of these two practices as ritual may allow for an understanding of major metaphors employed by both (see Grimes,1982, 43; Langer, 2).

The specific metaphors enlisted in the zohar and hatha yoga are body-based, if not sexual, with the major symbolism of bowing in ritual most likely one of transformation. In hatha yoga, the purpose for the use of this specific motion is clearly for transformation to an enlightened body, capable of achieving *samhadi,* a temporary state of equilibrium and unity. It occurs through the body, which transforms to include a subtle and superior state. Wolfson suggests that the transformation in the Zohar view of prayer is to an angelic body. Just as the purpose of hatha *asana* was to affirm the gross physical body as a vehicle to realizing an enlightened body, it appears the kabbalist

prayer motions were envisioned as a means of developing a higher corporeal state. The zoharists did sometimes express disdain for the physical body, but, according to Wolfson, this is a reflection of medieval rather than rabbinic thought. So the zoharist response was to consider how the physical body might be transformed to a state of higher being. Flesh then is not simply flesh, but truly a reflection of God.

Wolfon relates that the kabbalists understood the body as a means of enacting Torah. Understood as "limb strengthens limb" the implications were that human actions affect God, and in the process the human body is also transformed. Therefore, ritual actions become important to zoharists, understanding that their performance "fortifies the divine attributes, which are imaginally envisioned as bodily limbs**…**"(490; 492). Ritual performance was important as "an instrument through which the physical body is conjoined to and transformed in light of the imaginal body of God" (490; 492). It then "becomes the perfect vehicle to execute the will of the soul and soul becomes the perfect guide in directing the will of the body. …" Wolfson calls this the "transformed angelic body" (492-493).

4. Tantric Yoga and the Subtle Body

The angelic body of the kabbalist may be quite fairly compared with the subtle body of the yogi. Even the erotic implications are present in both tantric-inspired hatha yoga and kabbalah. As Idel reaffirms, the similarities are striking. He attributes this to the need for the body to translate an imagined reality. The story of hatha yoga, though, also suggests the reason that the zoharists intensified, if not changed, Jewish ritual activity. In hatha yoga manipulation of the body leads to spiritual development, yet the human body is a microcosm of the universe, and connected to the whole. The motions and positions of the body in yoga practice might refine it to overcome death, but also to change the world –physically moving it to a higher plane of existence. According to David Gordon White, the yoga body was the alchemical body, capable of transforming physical reality, falling into a state of *samhadi*, and thereby transforming the world. By allowing for the entrance of the divine into the self, the greater Self enters the world. *Siva* or *Visnu* ultimately "awakens — pours himself out into mundane being…it is nothing other than the *pralaya*, the universal restoration of all mundane existence in the primal and primordial essence that is the Absolute God" (221).

This idea is similar to the kabbalist refrain of "as above, so below." In their view, the structure of the universe is what Idel calls the "great chain of being" or the "enchanted chain" (2005, 74-75). He finds this to be a common image in what he calls psycho-spiritual practices such as yoga and kabbalah. The understanding for the kabbalists, at least, was that human action was part of a bi-polar flow. Divine energy flowing down from above enlightened humans. Human physical response resulted in a flow of energy upward, affecting the divine sphere.

5. Body and Performance

Perhaps more similar in the two systems are the reasons they were created with such a pronounced stress on physical performance. In Vedic and earlier yoga tradition, there is a strong bias against the physical world. In medieval Judaism, there was also a bias against the body, despite rabbinic affirmation of humans as the image of God.

On Indian views of the body prior to *tantric* yoga, Feurstein simply states that the Vedic texts contain a strong, historic bias against the physical (506; 586). In contrast, in his *Guide to the Perplexed,* Maimonides' view of the human body is fairly positive. Nevertheless, he does devalue prayer movements and gesture, and determines that imagined realities are inventions and "no test for the reality of a thing" (130-131). The practice of the Zohar kabbalists and the hatha yogis seem a medieval response to such negative conceptions of the body and the value of human actions. While the late medieval world included considerable disdain for human bodies in both India and Europe, it was still a period rich in sensuous liturgical drama that combined music, dance, and poetry (see Kirstein; Shiloah; Taylor). According to Doug Adams, such ritual activity in medieval times was opposite the idea of intellectual meditation, which requires withdrawal from the world. In contrast, ritual performance activities draw people together (38-39). Meditation and prayer need not be a matter of withdrawal from the world. They may be communal, involving action, gestures, and motions that facilitate meditation. Such embodied ritual preparation may itself mark the stillness that follows it in meditation, when the body and thought rest. This is yet another aspect of the bipolar reality of being. Furthermore, as it was communal, the movement of the ritual body was also a means of connection to the larger world.

It was also understood that the body's movement had the potential, at least symbolically, to activate the "potencies, found in [hu]man, nature, and the divinity" (Idel, 2005, 75). While this occurred during ritual, the effects were lasting. By reprogramming the body symbolically, the actions of the individual would also change outside the ritual setting. Furthermore, the effect was not only on the individual, but also transformative of the community, since divine energy was released by symbolic activity.

Conclusions: Ritual Transformation and Embodiment

We live in a physical world that is not removed from spiritual reality. This idea was hardly new to either the zoharists or the hatha yogis. Jewish ritual established itself on the basis of motion, with many blessings requiring actions, gestures, and motions. Yoga's background in Pantanjali's *Sankhya*-based *Yoga Sutras* also recognizes that the body and mind are not separate, are part of the world, and that physical control of the body was beneficial in overcoming the barriers of mind and matter. What was particular to both the Zohar's interpretation of Jewish ritual and hatha yoga, though, was that the

body was essential for individual and community transformation. It was through and with the body that the transformation occurred. Additionally, for the sake of community, intentional physical performance of specific movements initiated important spiritual changes in the individual and in the world.

Wolfson's re-evaluation of the understanding of the body in the Zohar is quite helpful in seeing that ritual performance was perceived as a means of channeling divine energy into the world. Use and emphasis on movement into specific prayer and meditation positions might even be described as the yoga *asana* of kabbalah. The Zohar's approach was not simply to reaffirm rabbinic dictates for prayer, but to add to the meaning of specific actions and motions. When performed with deliberate and focused intention, they allow for entrance into meditative prayer. In turn, this transforms the individual. As in yoga, while human physiology might be affected, the stress is on recognizing the body as spiritual.

Meaningful ritual inherently involves bodies in movement. The very nature of symbolic movement instills in a community the need and desire to take action – to move and change. Hatha yoga recognized such power of movement, and used it to develop positions that created the enlightened body, capable of serving the community. A similar process occurred in the zoharist understanding of prayer positions, with the image of the spine as the enchanted chain apparently a major shared metaphor for both yoga and kabbalah. It allowed these traditions to assign great value to human movement and specific, symbolic positions. Quite literally, if you transform your body, you change the world.

Yoga's subtle body and the Zohar's angelic body inform us that it was not physical being alone that was important, but active engagement of the body that initiated change on many levels. The movement of prayer, with its specific positions allowed one to live in a transformed and renewed state, and in a transformed world. The underlying ethic of the transformation stressed a repatterning of movement, which allowed for divine justice to enter the world via the individual. The implications of this insight are many, but at very least is a reminder of why the body is of great spiritual worth.

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