

ON SEX & REFORMATION

“The church is 200 years out of date. Why don’t we rouse ourselves? Are we afraid?” ~ Cardinal Carlo Martini

The Roman Catholic Church is in the throes of a Reformation. Cardinal Carlo Martini—a voice of reason in the Church—said, **“Our culture is out of date, our churches are big and empty and the church bureaucracy rises up, (*expands*), our rituals and our cassocks are pompous,”**

Human sexuality is the centerpiece of a scientific and doctrinal conflict analogous to the time of Copernican observations. His insight necessitated a shift of perspective about humanity, our relationship with each other and our place in the world. Reasonable people can no longer hold that their world is the center of the universe.

Modern science and psychology dictate a new view of human sexuality—one that accounts for the observable nature of man and woman. The current worldwide crisis of bishops and priests sexually abusing children has led to an awareness of how desperately the church needs, in the words of Martini, **“to admit its mistakes and begin a radical change, starting from the pope and the bishops.”**

Honest people can no longer cling to an outmoded and patently false sexual moral system that holds every sexual thought, word, desire and action outside of marriage to be mortally sinful.

The Church’s idea about which sexual activity is “Intrinsically evil” — masturbation, contraception, and homosexuality — is a distortion of the idea of natural law. Natural law is that which inheres in human beings and is discernable to rational men and women.

The Church is incorrect and wrong-headed in its teachings on human sexuality. We can no longer defend and teach our children with a clear conscience that all sexual activity outside marriage is mortally sinful. Reasonable and sincere people cannot teach that masturbation, contraception, and sexual love outside marriage are “intrinsically evil”. Neither can we justify the idea that love nor sexual

commitment between members of the same sex is evil, distorted or incompatible with Christian ideals.

Sr. MARGARET FARLEY, RSM, in her monumental book ***Just Love*** (A Framework for Christian Ethics, 2006) leads a reasonable path through the quagmire of historical myth and misconceptions that sustain the so-called religious view of sexuality.

Masturbation: Sr. Farley: 'Masturbation ... usually does not raise any moral questions at all. ... The norms of justice as I have presented them would seem to apply to the choice of sexual self-pleasuring only insofar as this activity may help or harm, only insofar as it supports or limits well-being and liberty of spirit. This remains largely an empirical question, not a moral one.'

Vatican: The firm and constant teaching of the church "and the moral sense of the faithful have been in no doubt and have firmly maintained that masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action," even if one must also take into account factors such as "affective immaturity, force of acquired habit" that may "lessen or even extenuate moral culpability."

Homosexual acts: Sr. Farley: My own view ... is that same-sex relationships and activities can be justified according to the same sexual ethic as heterosexual relationships. Therefore, same-sex oriented persons as well as their activities can and should be respected whether or not they have a choice to be otherwise.

Vatican: "This opinion is not acceptable," While persons with homosexual tendencies "must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity," church tradition, based on Scripture, "has always declared that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to natural law."

Homosexual unions: Sr. Farley argues that antidiscrimination laws play an important role in reversing hatred and stigmatization of gays and lesbians. The Vatican congregation quoted from her book, "Presently one of the most urgent issues before the U.S. public is marriage for same-sex partners – that is, granting of social

recognition and legal standing to unions between lesbians and gays comparable to unions between heterosexuals."

Vatican: "This position is opposed to the teaching of the magisterium," quoting from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and from previous statements it has made on the subject, "The principles of respect and nondiscrimination cannot be invoked to support legal recognition of homosexual persons" – in part because that would mean "approval of deviant behavior, with the consequence of making it a model in present-day society."

Indissolubility of marriage: Farley: "My own position is that a marriage commitment is subject to release on the same ultimate grounds that any extremely serious, nearly unconditional, permanent commitment may cease to bind. ... Can it hold absolutely, in the face of radical and unexpected change? My answer: sometimes it cannot. Sometimes the obligation must be released, and the commitment can be justifiably changed."

Vatican: "This opinion is in contradiction to Catholic teaching on the indissolubility of marriage," Citing church law and the Second Vatican Council among its sources, the Vatican said that "Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement 'until further notice.' ... The Lord Jesus insisted on the original intention of the Creator who willed that marriage be indissoluble. ... Between the baptized, a ratified and consummated marriage cannot be dissolved by any human power or for any reason other than death."

Divorce and remarriage: Farley: "The lives of two persons once married to one another are forever qualified by the experience of that marriage. ... But [if that ends in divorce] does what remains disallow a second marriage? My view is that it does not ... any more than the ongoing union between spouses after one of them has died prohibits a second marriage on the part of the one who still lives." Martini seems to concur when he said, "A woman is abandoned by her husband and finds a new companion to look after her and her children. A second love succeeds. If this family is discriminated against, not just the mother will be cut off but also her children. In this way the Church loses the future generation".

Vatican: Quoting Christ in Mark's Gospel, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery," They added that in church teaching in the case of civil divorce and remarriage, "a new union cannot be recognized as valid, if the first marriage was," and those in such a situation cannot receive Communion unless they repent, confess in the sacrament of penance and commit themselves "to living in complete continence."

Vatican statements about sexual morality have little force because educated men and women are knowledgeable about science and psychology — and have common sense. More importantly many have informed consciences and simply say, "I don't believe that" when the Church speaks about contraception, masturbation, sexual activity outside marriage, homosexuality, mandatory celibacy and women priests. And they act accordingly.

Also many clerics do not believe church teaching.

Worse yet is the sexual hypocrisy of many Roman Catholic clergy from the very top of the Vatican bureaucracy to local dioceses and parishes—they do not practice what they preach.

Some bishops and priests are involved in sexual liaisons' with adult women or men. Although some of that activity is consensual much is patently abusive and destructive. Countless numbers of Catholic clergy abuse minors and the vulnerable.

Sex in the Catholic system demands serious and immediate attention and reform. Why are we—concerned followers of Jesus—afraid to discuss these realities? ~ A.W.R.S.