

and achievements, most especially its inexorable drive away from the objectivity of truth to a totally relativistic ethic. Critical of the modernity project though they are, most conservative Catholics want to remain engaged with the larger culture in the hope that they might be catalysts in a cultural transformation. Wittingly or not, the editors cede a compelling reason for adopting the conservative understanding of Catholicism: it's right and not wrong. Conservative Catholics, although confident, should not be presumptive, however. Presumption, like despair, is an enemy of hope. And in the crisis of faith, you want hope as an ally.

Besides not doing badly by the title, conservative Catholics fare pretty well in the essays which are contained in this volume. They and their concerns are treated fairly. Given the polarization in the Church today, this is no small accomplishment. But then again, *Being Right* is, in the view of co-editor Scott Appleby, a descriptive exercise. Were it to be prescriptive, we would have a very different kind of work.

In a concluding chapter, Scott Appleby takes up a consideration of the difference conservative Catholics will make in the future. He admits that conservative Catholics who are not "world renouncers," i.e., who can connect with a larger public, are in the best position to influence the Church and the world. For conservative Catholics of this type, Appleby allows that the future may indeed be promising. But promising within a certain context: that liberal Catholicism retain its hold on the majority of American Catholics and their institutions. Conservative Catholics could be another party, the minority one of course. And, then, as in any democratic polity, the minority could influence legislation but not govern. The descriptive accomplishment of *Being Right* is partially attenuated by this unspoken and implied assumption.

Being Right is the first volume of a project designed eventually to provide a map of post-conciliar American Catholicism. The editors are off to a good start in their descriptive task. We await their next volume, which will no doubt be called *Being Left*.

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Arnold, Johann Christoph. *A Plea for Purity*. Farmington, Pennsylvania: Plough Publishing House, 1995. 147 pages. \$13.00 (paper). (800) 521-8011.

Webster's Third International Dictionary defines purity as the quality or state of being pure. Under the word "pure" in the same dictionary, the inquisitive person will find the words "chastity" and "continent." But pure as chaste and continent comes some thirty-two lines after the entry. In America today, purity is associated with the quality of the water we drink and the kind of

frankfurter we eat *before* it is associated with the sexual urge or faculty. Of course, that's not to say that Americans are uninterested in sex; as we know, Americans have a voracious appetite for things sexual. In the United States, sex is everywhere: in the bedroom, on the television screen, in the classroom, and in the workplace. You name it and sex is probably there in America. Sex in America is ubiquitous—if you mean body parts and mechanics.

When the physicality of sex is not at issue and there is inquiry into the state of the beings who possess the parts and can exercise the same, we are dealing with an altogether different subject. I don't mean that the two considerations are unconnected; for bodiliness and consciousness are inexorably tied together. What I do mean is that physicalism is not exhaustive of sexuality. In other words, the question, "How does it work?," is not unrelated to the question of "For what purpose does it work?" But nonetheless the two questions are different.

Today, according to Johann Christoph Arnold, we have stopped asking the question, "For what purpose?" He makes this claim in a small book entitled *A Plea for Purity*, published by Plough Publishing House of Farmington, Pennsylvania.

The notion of sex being pure is really not new. It's as old in the Christian dispensation as the Sermon on the Mount, wherein Jesus declared, "Blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God" (Matt 5:8). Followers of Christ have used this Beatitude as a governing principle for their sexual conduct. Since the sexual revolution, though, there are some still preferring to call themselves Christian who have sought to "revise" this key to the good life by accomodating it to the libidinous interests of modernity. Our author is surely not one of these Christians. He and the community to which he belongs, the Bruderhof, hold that Christ *really* wanted His disciples to be pure even if the twentieth century and its proclivity for satisfying carnal desire is stronger than the allurements of first-century Palestine. The circumstances for living Christ's teaching may be different today but these circumstances in themselves do not suggest reason for softening or watering down the word of the Son of God. It just means that we try harder to live in a way worthy of the Gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27).

The title for Arnold's book suggests a sense of urgency. After Christians call for pure living, they plead for it. It's not hard to join Arnold in his plea. By now, it should be plain that the vaunted sexual revolution was no revolution at all but a revolt. A revolution implies a successful overthrow of some oppressor. A revolt signals that an effort was made to relieve the oppression but it failed. The failure is plain for us to see: more pre-marital intercourse, more abortion, more divorce, more sterilization, more fatherless children, more unmarried mothers. The exception of course is that the experts and enlightened opinion makers, in an act of denying the obvious, call more immorality progress and liberation. The experts and enlightened opinion makers in a secularized society such as ours call the wisdom of the Gospel merely the foolishness of the masses.

Christ liberates the heart from the oppression of sensuality. The secular cognoscenti, however, do not see any oppression in disordered love. The oppression, they say, comes from not having love on your own terms, not being able to determine on your own the meaning of love. But when we dare to determine the meaning of love on our own as the secular credo proposes, we close ourselves off from freedom and truth at the same time. Yet, freedom and truth are not subjectively determined either. This is the crisis addressed in *Veritatis Splendor*. The emancipation we need is not for the purpose of constructing love, freedom, and truth according to our own design but to find these in the very gift of life itself or in the incomparable gift of Revelation.

For those who want to counsel purity in matters sexual, the objective is to write a book which does not come across as puritanical. For the most part, Mr. Arnold achieves this goal. He attempts to steer clear of a fear of sex on the one hand and an obsession with it on the other. Mr. Arnold's approach is traditional without being prudish. But not everything in the book will strike the reader as traditional. Indeed, a few things will probably strike the traditional reader as quirky. Usually, though, the quirky items are explained as practices of the Bruderhof community. In this context, the practices are not necessarily quirky as they are the observances of a devout band of like-minded disciples.

This book is compact, with only 147 pages of text. Each of the nineteen chapters is just a few pages long. Without the terminology that they are accustomed to hearing or reading on the topic of sexuality, traditional Catholics will still recognize in *A Plea for Purity* many familiar themes. In fact, it will remind older Catholics of the advice found in the monographs and short books of their Catholic adolescence. *A Plea for Purity* is the kind of book which could still be of service to many Catholic young people today. It could very well serve the purpose of being a much-needed corrective to the anatomically-dominated sex education curricula on the market today and in many classrooms. It will also be a challenge to those sex education curricula of Christian inspiration which pretend that there wasn't an Original Sin, or suggest that the only problem we have today is the lack of tolerance for alternative lifestyles. *Although A Plea for Purity* is not—strictly speaking—a sex education book, some of its contents could be the basis for an instruction of the young in what we used to call self-mastery.

While this reviewer is appreciative of the many scriptural citations in *A Plea for Purity*, he did not find every one of them to be aptly placed. A few are even taken out of their proper context in the Bible. Additional flaws are to be found in the editing and typesetting of Mr. Arnold's book. Perhaps a third printing of the volume will see to changes in these areas.

Compliments go to the author for the contribution he has made to a better understanding of the evangelical precept to be pure. His message, once it is pleaded, now needs to be heeded.

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