

Also helpful was Allsopp's outline of the principal theological orientations, tenets, and characteristics of his moral theory: it is *God-focused* (155), *Christ-centered* (157), *Spirit-filled* (159), *biblical* (160), *ecclesial* (161), *personal* (162), and *liberational* (163). But we are still left to wonder what the theory is itself. He tells the reader what shaped and influenced it. He outlines its features. And he assures us in various ways that it is current and in keeping with the latest findings in psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

Is the following sentence, perhaps, the clear statement of his renewed Christian moral theory? "This theory develops a mixed rule deontology in which agents make specific moral decisions on the basis of considered opinions about existent responsibilities toward themselves and others and what they here and now sensitively consider to be their weightiest duties" (192). If so, Allsopp is substituting a duty-based ethic for the principle-based one that characterizes current Catholic moral theory within the Church. It should be noted that the Church does not mandate a particular philosophy for its moral reasoning. It does require that the conclusions drawn are not in contradiction to revealed truths and its official teaching.

In Allsopp's conclusion, on the last page of the text, the reader will find this statement of the author's ethic:

Acceptance of God's will in daily life—and faithfully fulfilling (as best we can) what we see to be our *weightiest* duties—this is Christian morality, righteousness, and the road to paradise. This is the true meaning of "goodness" and "holiness" in Christian thought. And it is what the "voice of conscience" responding to God's Spirit, as well as God's presence in "dappled things," dictates and encourages, warns and guides. Our sense of duty—and our commitment to fulfilling our weightiest duties—shapes us and destines us for Absolute Goodness. (244)

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The Conjugal Act as a Personal Act: A Study of the Catholic Concept of the Conjugal Act in the Light of Christian Anthropology, by Donald P. Ascì. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002. 364 pages. Bibliography.

One of the painful consequences of the sexual revolution was its impact on the institution of marriage. *Gaudium et spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, promulgated at the Second Vatican Council, addressed the ongoing influence of the tendencies toward promiscuity, divorce, adultery, and the contraceptive mentality which were taking a toll on married love in 1965. The muddled movements of those early days of the sexual revolution held marriage, compared to so-called free love, to be restrictive and confining. Wedlock was labeled a stoic ideal of repression of the human appetite from which the newly enlightened masses needed to be liberated.

Conversely, in the most recent wave of the sexual revolution, those who profess similar ideologies now anxiously desire, in the form of same-sex marriage, a facsimile of the very institution they were ready to disregard as stifling to human expression only four decades ago. Ironically, the institution which was then the bane of the sexual revolution is now chased by that revolution as its prize.

Those who support traditional marriage are often on the defensive or, worse still, silent about the dismantling of marriage. The debate about what actually constitutes marriage and family arises often in classrooms and offices, on playing fields and sidewalks, and most especially over the airways. But frayed tempers and brief sound bites barely allow anyone enough time to describe the unparalleled identity of the institution of marriage, much less speak in its defense. Meanwhile, the pundits glibly deconstruct the most recognized institution on the planet.

Donald Ascì's book, *The Conjugal Act as a Person Act: A Study of the Catholic Concept of the Conjugal Act in the Light of Christian Anthropology*, furnishes a foundation for a new confidence in its readers by enabling them to understand the heritage

of traditional marriage. The work is accessible to the current academic generation and within reach of those who are looking beyond the cosmetic comments offered by contemporary society. Asci provides a reiteration of Church teaching on marriage and does so in a new key.

Asci's work is divided into two general sections. The first section is organized into chapters about the magisterial documents of the twentieth century. Chapters 1 and 2 discuss *Casti connubii*, the decisions of the Roman Rota, and the teachings of Pope Pius XII, including his addresses to newlyweds and to the Italian Union of Catholic Midwives. They also give attention to the teaching on marriage in *Gaudium et spes*, *Humanae vitae*, *Donum vitae*, and the magisterium of Pope John Paul II. The inclusion of the jurisprudence of the Roman Rota is especially noteworthy.

At first glance, the table of contents might lead the reader to classify *The Conjugal Act* as a catalog of these Church documents on marriage. Fortunately, the author never allows the work to become a bare chronicle of the documents. He also refrains from dry abstraction. Where necessary, his presentation takes on the tempo of a response to debate without ever overdoing apologetics.

The second section, consisting of Chapters 3 and 4, introduces the distinct character of the work. These chapters provide the filter that collates the central themes of magisterial teaching into a theology of the conjugal act. Asci takes the various documents, from numerous authors writing in different times and on distinct themes, and brings them together into a clear presentation of this theology—a theology that reveals the conjugal act as directly expressive of the identity of the human person. His review reveals a deft circuitry running through the documents, which forms a rich personalist network of meaning.

The human person is a union of body and soul. Asci carefully shows how “the human person cannot be relegated or reduced to any single element of the human composite” (251), and how any attempt to do so quickly distorts the union and wounds the

adequate personalism so vital to Christian anthropology.

The human person communicates broadly in and through the body. Most significant is the communication of love. A particular, primordial, and holy expression of love takes place in human sexuality. As Asci says, “In and through the sexual faculty, physical expressions signify and effect a profound love and spiritual communion” (250). Human sexuality thus can never be reduced to simple satisfaction of personal erotic need. Human sexuality, when it is intelligible, is always an incomparable and sacred expression of the person, a form of communication which finds its proper expression only in marriage and the conjugal act.

The goods of the human person correspond to the goods of human sexuality, love, the conjugal act, and procreation in specific ways. The human person experiences the prompting to actualize these goods in an expression of self-gift. This interior call to love is expressed in a unique manner in human sexuality: “While every man and woman fully realizes himself or herself through the sincere gift of self, ‘the moment of conjugal union constitutes a very particular expression of this’ because ‘it is then that man and woman, in the truth of the masculinity and femininity, become a mutual gift to each other’” (136, quoting John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, n. 12). Asci thus highlights a truly adequate personalist spectrum of the conjugal act.

The organizing theme of the work is expressed in the title: the conjugal act as a *personal* act. The conjugal act is exclusively a personal act. Asci's use of the word *personal* is not the sense of restrictively private. Rather, the act is personal in that it expresses the whole person as a *treasured gift*. The conjugal act is personal in that it is a matrix which represents the strategic intersection of several realities: the person as a union of body and soul, human love, human sexuality, spousal union, and procreation.

The sexual revolution has sought the disintegration of the conjugal act as a personal act, preferring exclusively the confidential or private sense of the term *personal*. In

this sense, the participants in the act merely highlight one of its aspects, such as pleasure, affect, sentimentality, or the relief of sexual tension. Contemporary ideologies examine each of these as independent and isolated venues of choice.

Where society divides and separates, Asci unites and joins. He presents human sexuality as more than a sensation. If any factor or meaning of the personalist spectrum is curtailed, dismissed, or undervalued, each of the others is diminished and collapses. The author highlights in particular how the conjugal act in its very structure is inescapably procreative. As such, it can never be deliberately deprived of its procreative potential without being so altered that it ceases to be conjugal and becomes self-centered instead. A theory of the significance of human action establishes a vital connection between the human person and love, sexuality, the conjugal act, and procreation. These are not a dislocated series of isolated ventures, but a continuum of internally affiliated events which redound to the very identity of each person.

The conjugal act as such enacts a structure of goods, purposes, meanings, and blessings made intelligible only in marriage. It is the consummation of the act of consent in marriage and can never be reduced to a merely genital act, a momentary act of erotic pleasure. Man, in choosing marriage and the conjugal act, cooperates with God Who is the author of love and marriage. Asci composes a response to the ideologies of the twentieth century and to revisionist theologians whose teachings reduce and disintegrate the meaning of the conjugal act. He assembles key meanings in the twentieth century teaching on marriage which together constitute a Christian anthropology.

Asci responds to several controversies over the Church's teaching on marriage. One concerns the interpretation of the teaching of *Gaudium et spes* on the goods of marriage. The traditional teaching maintains the primacy of procreation and the education of children among these goods. This teaching was asserted by St. Augustine and reiterated most notably by St. Thomas Aquinas and by Pope Pius XI in *Casti connubii*.

Gaudium et spes (n. 48) teaches that the institution of marriage is "based upon the 'mutual surrender' of the spouses to each other, 'is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring,' and entails fidelity and unity between the spouses" (67–68). The goods of fidelity and unity between the spouses are thus integrated with the procreative good of marriage to form the threefold good of marriage: procreation (and the education of children), fidelity, and sacrament.

The language of earlier iterations was philosophical and technical, whereas the language of *Gaudium et spes* is pastoral. The author maintains that some theologians read too much into the linguistic shift and interpreted a rerouting in content as well. They maintained that the teaching of the council disassembled the hierarchy of goods of marriage, so that procreation was no longer primary but rather coequal with conjugal love—two goods of marriage on equal footing. By this interpretation, if procreation and conjugal love shared an equal status, the good of procreation could now come into conflict with the good of conjugal love. Conjugal love, the relation between the spouses, could be threatened by the pressures of a large family, for example, or in some circumstances by the presence of any children at all. If the goods of procreation and union were coequal, such pressures would clear the way for spouses to act against the procreative good by using contraception in interest of preserving conjugal love. The implications of such an interpretation are significant, and would indicate a major change in the teaching of the Church.

Asci holds that *Gaudium et spes* clearly supports the traditional teaching on procreation as the highest good in marriage, and he argues the position well and logically. He finds the wording of the Council's teaching consistent with the hierarchic understanding—specifically in references to children as "the supreme gift of marriage" and its "crowning glory" and to procreation as the "most excellent gift" of marriage (69)—and he presents the teaching in light of an anthropology which interprets the goods of chil-

dren, fidelity, and sacrament as interrelated and directed to the substance of the conjugal act. This pastoral expression of a significant anthropology is directly compatible with the personalism of Pope John Paul II, a father of the council, who noted that in *Gaudium et spes* "the traditional teaching on the ends of marriage (and their hierarchy) is reaffirmed and at the same time deepened from the viewpoint of the interior life of the spouses" (70, quoting John Paul II, General Audience of October 10, 1984). Asci thus contends that the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on marriage was not a turning point in the teaching of the Church, but a consistent and direct articulation of the same teaching in anthropological terminology.

Asci conveys the breadth of the teaching of the magisterium on marriage in the twentieth century. In his section on the Roman Rota, he points to an important source of jurisprudence on marriage, focusing on a rotal statement of 1944 (in *AAS* 36) that clearly affirms procreation as marriage's primary end. Future studies of rotal decisions and pontifical addresses to the Rota will further deepen our understanding of the anthropology of marriage and debates about it.

The Conjugal Act as a Personal Act explains and interprets the wide body of Church teaching by a method that honors the congruence between the metaphysical foundations of the conjugal act and its phenomenological expression. Asci's methodology is thus similar to that of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. *The Conjugal Act* lays a foundation on which future works can base refined and practical applications for a spirituality of the family. Asci traces a pattern of the theology of marriage along an anthropological continuum which expresses an adequate personalism, and in doing so makes an original contribution not only to commentaries on the theology of marriage but also to the New Evangelization itself.

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***Belmont Revisited: Ethical Principles for Research with Human Subjects*, edited by James F. Childress, Eric M. Meslin, and Harold T. Shapiro. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005.**

In 1974, the *National Research Act* was promulgated and, as part of the act, the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research was formed. The inception of the act was in response to a series of research abuses stemming from the Nazi experiments: the Tuskegee syphilis study (1932–1972), the Willowbrook hepatitis study (1963–1966), radiation tests on mentally impaired boys (1946–1965), and others. The commission was given the task of identifying basic ethical principles that should guide research on human subjects. These principles were to be universal, so that they would be relevant for numerous kinds of human-subjects research, and yet specific enough for investigators and study coordinators to apply in practice. The result was called the *Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*. The specific principles enumerated in the report were respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. The final version of the Belmont Report was published in 1979.

Thirty years later, scholars came together to analyze the history, influence, and philosophical content of the Belmont Report in an exciting volume titled *Belmont Revisited: Ethical Principles for Research with Human Subjects*. The volume is divided into three parts: the first part comprises two essays devoted to the background and origins of the report; the second part pertains to its influence on and application to both clinical and research issues; and the third part addresses some limitations of the report and lingering philosophical issues. There is a good introduction to the collection, which provides interesting background and good summaries of the articles.

It is difficult to summarize and comment on a collection of essays in that there is usually not a single argument running through the work, as is the case with a monograph.