Homosexuality and the Formation of Conscience: An Examination of Traditional Catholic Anthropological, Theological, and Ethical Evaluations in Light of Contemporary Moral Markers

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HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE:
AN EXAMINATION OF CATHOLIC ANTROPOLOGICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND 
ETHICAL EVALUATIONS IN LIGHT OF CONTEMPORARY MORAL MARKERS

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By

John J. Slovikovski

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HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE:
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ABSTRACT

HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE:
AN EXAMINATION OF CATHOLIC ANTHROPOLOGICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND
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John J. Slovikovski

May 2011

Dissertation supervised by James Bailey, Ph.D

The question of homosexuality remains a daunting task to be addressed by the Church as well as theological ethicists. Lively, and often biased opinions have been presented in the last two centuries; however, use of traditional sources, such as Scripture, Natural Law, empirical data, and Tradition result in a doubt of fact, which, according to the established tradition of the Catholicism, requires the Church to follow the safest course of action, i.e., upholding the traditional heterosexual norm. Given that some individuals experience an irreversible homosexual orientation coupled by a lack of a vocation to a celibate lifestyle, which in turn results in a doubt of law, they are required to follow the most reasonable course of action. This situation indicates a clear need for other sources to be consulted in terms of the formation of individual consciences, while not challenging the normative nature of the Church’s teaching regarding same-sex
relationships. Accordingly, homosexuality is viewed vis-à-vis the areas of Catholic social teaching, in particular in the area of justice in its various manifestations, liturgy and sacraments, spirituality, and eschatology, especially in terms of the nature of resurrected life, to allow for the subjective possibility of same-sex relationships in very selective contexts to allow for full human flourishing and fulfillment of the narrative of human destiny thoroughly considered. Appeal to these resources respects both the official teaching of the Church and the integrity of individual conscience.
DEDICATION

To Sister Mary Benedict Joseph Watters, RSM, friend and provider of great editorial support.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT**.................................................................................................................. iv

**INTRODUCTION**............................................................................................................. ix

**CHAPTER I: Traditional Sources for Theological and Ethical Evaluations of Homosexuality: A Precis, Critique, and Modest Proposal** ................................................. 1
  Scripture ........................................................................................................................ 2
  Natural Law and Complementarity ............................................................................. 15
    Complementarity ..................................................................................................... 19
  Using the Empirical Sciences to Evaluate Homosexuality ....................................... 23
  Tradition: Homosexuality and the Community of Faith ......................................... 28
  Conclusion: Traversing a Wider Path ....................................................................... 34

**CHAPTER 2: Just Love or Unjust Restraints: An investigation of Contemporary Catholic Social Teaching and Homosexuality** ................................................................. 42
  The Role of Justice in the Formulation of a Same-Sex Ethic for the Formation of Conscience .................................................................................................................... 43
  The Role of the Concepts of Solidarity, Participation, and the Common Good in the Formation of a Same-Sex Ethic to Conscience Formation ............................................. 71
  Conclusion ................................................................................................................. 85

**CHAPTER THREE: Lex Orandi, Lex Vivendi: Liturgy, Sacramentality, and Homosexuality** ........................................................................................................................... 87
  Ritual, Liturgy, and Sacrament: The Heart of the Catholic Tradition ..................... 88
    The Sacred, The Symbolic, and The Ritualistic Dimensions of the Sacraments ..... 89
  The Paschal Mystery and Its Sacred Embodiment: ............................................... 96
  Liturgy, Sacramentality, and Human Sexuality ......................................................... 96
  Incarnating the Paschal Mystery vis-à-vis the Formulation of a Sexual Ethic: ....... 108
  The Eucharistic Liturgy, Sexuality, and the Evaluation of Same-Sex Relations ...... 108
    The Eucharist and the Moral Life ........................................................................ 109
    The Eucharist, Catholic Sexual Ethics, and Homosexuality ............................ 114
    A Word on Eucharist, Inclusivity, and Homosexuality .................................... 121
  Homosexuality and Other Dimensions of the Church’s Sacramental Life .......... 123
  Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 129
CHAPTER 4: Homosexuality, Wholeness, Holiness, and Spirituality ..................... 132
Christian Spirituality: Theology, Theory and Praxis ..................................... 134
Spirituality and Moral Theology ........................................................................ 141
Morality, Love and Sexual Spirituality: General Parameters .......................... 151
Spirituality and the Formulation of a Same-Sex Ethic ...................................... 162
Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 171

CHAPTER 5: Resurrected Sexuality: Homosexuality and the Formation of Conscience Vis-à-vis Catholic Eschatology ................................................................. 173
Anticipation of the Future While Valuing the Present: ..................................... 176
A Catholic Interpretation of the Theology of Death and Eternal Life .............. 176
Resurrected Embodiment: Eternal Celebration of the Whole Person ............... 178
Sexual Interaction as an Eschatological Reality: ............................................. 185
A Conflation of Past, Present and Future Realities in a Narrative Key ............. 185
Heavenly Sex: From Partnership, Pleasure, and Potency to Eternal Perfection .. 191
Homosexual Orientation and Activity in Light of the Eschatological Horizon .... 208
Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 213

CONCLUSION .................................................................................................... 215

SOURCES CONSULTED .................................................................................... 221
INTRODUCTION

HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE: 
THE STATE OF THE QUESTION, A RATIONALE FOR THE PROPOSED STUDY, 
AND PROPOSING A WIDER PATH FOR AUTHENTIC HUMAN FLOURISHING 
IN THE EVALUATION OF SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

As noted by Margaret Farley, “Questions surrounding the ethics of same-sex relationships are in Christian communities as in Western society at large marked by ongoing controversy and, for many ongoing anguish and anger.”¹ The Official Roman Catholic tradition has been somewhat limited in its helpfulness in attempting to resolve questions regarding homosexuality due to a lack in comprehensiveness and certainty in terms of the application of traditional sources to the issue. Three Roman Catholic Church documents, specifically, the Declaration on Certain Questions on Sexual Ethics (1975), the Letter to Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons², and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (no.2357-2359) provide a resumé of the current articulations of the Church’s official position regarding homosexuality and homogenous behavior.

The Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics covers a wide variety of sexual issues in response to the radically liberal sexual revolution of the 1960’s. Its statement on homosexuality is both concise and definitive. Basing itself on the natural law tradition, the document declares that homosexual acts “lack an essential and indispensable finality” and that they are “intrinsically disordered and can in no case

²Each of the aforementioned documents may be found in The Churches Speak on Homosexuality, ed. J. Gordon Melton (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1991). This resource also contains five other official Roman Catholic statements on homosexuality, as well as official documents from Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, Jewish, and other non-traditional religious denominations.
be approved” (no. 8, par.4). Unfortunately, while scriptural evidence is cited, the document includes and assesses this data not on its own merits. Rather it resorts to prooftexting as a means of misusing scripture to confirm conclusions reached by other methods. Additionally, scientific data is presented abstractly and severely truncated by the document, suggesting a devaluation of empirical evidence.

As indicated by Bruce Williams, O.P., the Magisterium’s official position on homosexuality and homosexual behavior is elaborated upon more fully in the 1986 document, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons.* He notes specific improvements to include a fuller exposition of the theological and scriptural foundations of the Church’s teaching, an explicit affirmation of the intrinsic dignity of homosexual persons, and a healthier pastoral approach to the task of ministering to those persons who possess a homosexual orientation. Despite its marked improvement in its discussion of homosexuality, the 1986 statement is not beyond reproach. In particular, Gerald D. Coleman, S.S. raises two objections which deserve consideration. First, Coleman observes rightly that while the document’s contrast of homosexual activity with the created sexual design of human persons is pertinent to the discussion of homosexuality, specific scriptural references to homosexual activity are not evaluated properly, in terms of contextualization. Second, he remarks that the document’s classification of the homosexual condition as an objective disorder does not consider adequately the theological tradition or the secular disciplines.

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5 Ibid., 731-34. In regard to the contribution of the theological tradition, Coleman argues that the classification of “objective disorder” does not account for the Thomistic understanding of the relationship...
In addition to these observations offered by Coleman, another legitimate criticism may be raised. Specifically, the 1986 Vatican document makes no explicit mention of the natural law tradition which obviously underlies its entire discussion of homosexuality (esp. cf. no.7, par. 1).

A third contemporary discussion of homosexuality in an official Roman Catholic Church document takes place in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nos. 2357-2359). While repeating the content of the 1975 and 1986 documents, four points, which speak further to the lack of comprehensiveness on the part of official Roman Catholic evaluations of homosexuality, deserve consideration. First, the definition of homosexuality presented in the text may indicate confusion between orientation and activity.\(^6\) Second, the appeal to sacred scripture (by way of footnote) isolates specific references to homosexuality outside of their proper context. Third, the argument against homosexuality proceeds essentially from the traditional, physicalist concept of the natural law which views homosexuality as a misuse of the sexual faculty.\(^7\) Finally, the *Catechism* does not speak of the homosexual orientation as “objectively or intrinsically disordered,” acknowledging that the precise cause of homosexual orientation has not been determined. It does suggest however, that the origin of a homosexual orientation has no direct bearing on the evaluation of homosexual acts which are always “intrinsically disordered.”

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\(^6\) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2357. “Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex.

\(^7\) For a discussion of physicalism in contemporary Roman Catholic sexual ethics, see Charles Curran, *Toward an American Catholic Morality*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987. In addition one is reminded of Aquinas’ keen observation that one does not want to quarrel with the more general principles of the natural law; however, when one gets down to specifics there is increasing room for error (*Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q.94, a.4).
Having reviewed the most recent documents of the Roman Catholic Church regarding homosexuality and homogenital acts, moral theologians have made several critical observations concerning these documents, specifically in terms of methodologies and conclusions drawn from these methodologies. Each document does employ the traditional sources of normative Christian ethical reflection; however, not one appeals to all the sources appropriately or simultaneously. Accordingly, contemporary theological ethics has attempted to incorporate and integrate all of the aforementioned sources, “attempting to achieve their balance within a community of interpretation.”

One of the most current volumes regarding the subject of homosexual orientation and activity, *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology*, invited fourteen biblical and moral theologians, scientists and pastors to “wrestle faithfully with these issues.” Unfortunately, a careful review of the aforementioned volume discovers a stalemate where scholars visit traditional sources from polarized interpretive perspectives. Accordingly, honest evaluation of the debate regarding homosexuality realizes that both the Magisterium and theological ethicists continue to find themselves in a state of positive practical doubt. In the Neo-scholastic manualist tradition, cases of positive practical doubt are distinguished and resolved within the parameters of two primary categories: *doubts of fact* and *doubts of law*. In the process of moral evaluation, if a lack of information results in a doubt of fact one must follow the safest course of

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8 Namely, Scripture, natural law, the empirical sciences, and Tradition.


11 Positive practical doubt reflects the suspension of the intellect’s assent and judgment in reference to the morality of a given act. This definition may be found in any of the Neo-scholastic manuals of moral theology.
action. If, on the other hand, one is faced with a situation where the application of a
given law is questionable (i.e., a doubt of law), one must employ the use of reason and
follow a probable opinion, even if said opinion is not considered to be the most cautious.

The moral impasse on the part of both the Magisterium and moral theologians
regarding the status of homosexuality and homosexual acts clearly indicates a state of
positive practical doubt. However, this ethical quandary indicates a unique situation
where both a doubt of fact and a doubt of law exist. In terms of a doubt of fact, although
Scripture exhibits the normative nature of a heterosexual marital commitment,
homosexual orientation and / or acts do not seem to be condemned absolutely. In terms
of the natural law, the Church and theologians have failed to reach a definitive consensus
as to whether traditional or contemporary approaches more accurately reflect the
Creator’s ultimate intent for human sexuality. Empirical research, although inconclusive,
raises the question of whether a homosexual orientation is biologically, psychologically,
or culturally conditioned, and accordingly, whether an individual’s orientation is
irreversible. Finally, historical studies of the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church
indicate that reactions to growing acceptance of homosexuality in late western medieval
society may have resulted in an ecclesial attitude of virulent negativity toward
homosexuality. 12

Clearly the facts are not affirmed universally and theological perspectives are far
from being unbiased, clearly resulting in a doubt of fact. Accordingly, the ecclesial
response has been to follow the safest course of action, declaring that heterosexual
relationships within the context of a marital covenant are normative, thereby condemning

12 A thorough investigation of this proposal is offered in John Boswell, Christianity, Social
homosexual acts in accord with the longstanding tradition of the Church. By contrast, the doubt of fact that results from the appeal to traditional sources of ethical reflection in the question of homosexuality leads naturally to a doubt of law, specifically: does the traditional understanding of the meaning of sexual relations as both love-giving and life-giving apply to all homosexual acts? Since this question has not been resolved definitively, it stands that additional resources need to be employed to arrive at a comprehensive and just theological position regarding homosexuality on both theological and pastoral grounds, in particular in the arena of individual formation of conscience.

In light of the aforementioned observations regarding the proposed inadequacies of the traditional sources in developing a theological posture regarding homosexuality for the formation of conscience on the subjective level, this dissertation will discuss four “contemporary moral markers” that will bring clarity to the debate. First, the stage will be set for the discussion by reviewing the proposed contribution of traditional sources, (i.e., Scripture, Natural Law, Empirical Science, Tradition and moral norms). Second, homosexuality will be viewed through the lens of traditional understandings of the virtue of justice as well as more specific tenets of Catholic social teaching including human dignity, the right to participation, solidarity, and the common good. Third, given the sacramental core of Catholic identity, both the impact of sacramentality in general and the celebration of liturgy will be discussed vis-à-vis homosexuality, attending to the import of the ritualization of the Paschal Mystery more broadly defined to include the whole of the “Christ Event”. Fourth, spirituality, which reflects the incarnation of morality, will be discussed in light of homosexual orientation and activity. In particular, the concepts of radical faithfulness in the relationships that characterize the narrative of
human life, the genuine spiritual gift of virtuous friendship, a sense of one’s vocation in light of ontology and orientation, recognition of and response to the call to holiness, and the embrace of the call to conversion will be considered vis-à-vis the formation of conscience. Fifth, and finally, homosexuality will be discussed from an eschatological perspective, focusing upon the ultimate destiny of human persons, especially the notions of the continuity of the exercise of categorical freedom in life with the transcendental choice that one makes in death, the resurrection of the dead as the redemption of the human narrative which includes all sexual choices achieved in time, the nature of resurrected sexuality, homosexuality and ultimate human destiny, and the role of the eschatological horizon in the subjective formation of conscience will be explored. The intended result will be a carefully crafted discussion of the acceptance of committed homosexual sexual relationships within particular contexts where one enters his or her “sacred sanctuary…There they are alone with God, whose voice echoes in their depths.” This voice, calls them…”to love and do what is good, and to avoid evil” so their conscience may maintain its dignity.

The path that has been proposed requires one final nuance before beginning upon the journey of seeking additional sources for the formation of conscience. The text that follows is not meant to challenge the normative teaching of the Magisterium that would result in a possible significant change in the official teaching. Rather, by providing a degree of academic validation for the need for the formation of conscience regarding same-sex relationships, it intends to provide a canvas where individuals may paint a portrait of their sexual selves before God and the individuals whom they feel called to

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13I.e., the relationships that one has with God, neighbor, self, and world.
14Gaudium et Spes, no. 16.
15Ibid.
love in a physically intimate way. Before embarking upon a more novel approach to the 
aforementioned questions, it is essential to review thoroughly the theological, historical, 
anthropological, and basis of the current normative teaching of the church, as well as 
theological and ethical challenges confronting it.
CHAPTER I

TRADITIONAL SOURCES FOR THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL EVALUATIONS OF HOMOSEXUALITY: A PRECIS, CRITIQUE, AND MODEST PROPOSAL

Having identified the “traditional” sources for Catholic theology’s evaluation of homosexuality, a systematic reappraisal of their content and appropriateness is necessary in order to determine their adequacy when dealing with what can only be identified as one of the most controversial issues in the history of Catholic sexual ethics. Historically, methodological deficiencies, namely, the isolation of and predilection for select sources has resulted in discord and tenuous public dissent from Magisterial teaching. Accordingly, each source will be examined in turn, appealing to both conventional and progressive schools of theological ethics. Such an assessment will demonstrate the polarizing limitations of exclusivity and the need for additional creative and faithful sources required for the formation of conscience regarding the ethical status of both homosexual orientation and activity. This investigation, working in the tradition of some of the early thought of Lisa Sowle Cahill, insists that Christian ethical reflection must incorporate and integrate all of the potential sources “attempting to achieve their balance

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1 Given the nature of the content of the following chapter, and given its identification as a “précis” much of the information contained therein is information that is widely accepted within the theological and ecclesial community. Accordingly it is not meant to be exhaustive. However, periodically I will offer commentary that is less than the traditional fare.

2 One need only peruse the literature surrounding the theological debates surrounding the question of the ethical status of homosexual orientation and behavior, with particular attention to the writings of the seventies and eighties to discover that at least one of the possible sources is either misused or utilized exclusively to advance arguments that are based upon preconceived agendas. In terms of conservative argumentation that is based upon an extremely literal reading of the New Testament, see for example Robert M. Nueumberger, “Good News for the Homosexual,” in Issues in Sexual Ethics, ed. Martin Duffy (Souderton, PA: United Church People for Biblical Witness, 1979), 132.
within a community of interpretation.”

**Scripture**

It has been identified quite correctly that sacred scripture functions as the soul of moral theology; that scripture is an unparalleled encounter with God “who in it, through it, and in each part of it speaks to people of all ages.” Accordingly, sacred scripture serves as the most logical foundation for Christian theological reflection upon the ethical status of homosexuality. To accept the sacred texts as that starting point however requires the acceptance of a clear and consistent methodology. Accordingly, it becomes necessary to develop a comprehensive understanding of the biblical witness that not only looks at the specific question of homosexuality, but also considers the impact of both related issues and certain biblical meta-themes that reflect a faithful understanding of the narrative that is salvation history. Therefore each of the texts will be viewed from an exegetical perspective based upon the historical-critical method. These considerations also will be laced with the two aforementioned observations (i.e., related texts and thematic issues).

The earliest and most cited reference to homosexual activity in the Hebrew Scriptures is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah articulated in Genesis 19:1-29. Historically, this text, thought to articulate a potential incident of homosexual rape as standing at the heart of the cities’ depravity, served as one of the most puissant arguments

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5 Ibid., 105.
6Cahill, 171-187.
to condemn homosexual activity both in popular and organized Christian circles.\(^7\)

Commentators advocating this position look to a view of sexuality rooted in the classicist natural law tradition that lacks a nuanced appreciation for the context of this pericope. In the last several decades however, more careful consideration of the text, from the perspective of both its earliest interpretations in other ancient religious and apocryphal texts and by means of current exegesis, reveals that the “sin” of Sodom refers to both the extreme violations of the divine call to hospitality toward “strangers” and explicit and vile hatred of foreigners.\(^8\) The potential for homosexual rape is symptomatic of the greater contagion of rebellion against the divine command that demands respect for the dignity of all human persons. As expressed powerfully by the analogy offered by Robert A. DiVito, the real sin of Sodom is not unlike “the recent gang rape by New York policemen of an Ethiopian detainee – the ultimate means to attack the manly honor of the victim and to deprive him of his dignity. As such it has nothing to do with one’s being a homosexual with the illegitimacy of same-sex relations.”\(^9\) It is no wonder then that when modern commentators provide lists of biblical texts that decry the abomination of homosexual activity, Genesis 19 is often downplayed\(^10\) or even omitted.

While there appears to be no clear condemnation of homosexual behavior in the story of Sodom, the Holiness Code, specifically Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 appear to

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7 Even the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* continues to reference this text as part of its scriptural prohibition against homosexuality. See no. 2357, note 141.


address the issue unambiguously and mercilessly. Many Christians see the prohibition against same-sex relations as absolute in the Code’s prescriptions that “You shall not lie with a man as with a woman; it is an abomination”;\(^\text{11}\) and “If a man lies with a male as with a woman both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death.”\(^\text{12}\) Surprisingly, by contrast, the theological and ethical communities continue to remain divided about the interpretation of these texts.

On one side of the debate, Todd A. Salzman and Michael C. Lawler, when commenting upon the aforementioned texts, draw the conclusion that “male homosexual behavior may or may not be immoral, but current judgments of its morality cannot be based on what the Old Testament says about it in the context of its own time and place.”\(^\text{13}\)

To substantiate their arguments, they address several important interpretive issues. They address the fact that the ancient Hebrews were limited in their sense of biology and human anatomy. Here they note that homosexuality is viewed as tantamount to murder since it was the male who provided the female with the “homunculus” contained in the male semen. Such actions affirmed that not only did homosexual acts detract from male honor but also they expressed a total disregard for the actions that were most appropriate to it.\(^\text{14}\) Also, they address the fact that the male passivity perceived as being associated with homosexual behavior was detrimental to the heart of the patriarchal social network of ancient Mediterranean society.\(^\text{15}\) It seems if Salzman and Lawler have convincingly complemented the standard arguments that the rejection of homosexual acts found in the

\(^{11}\)Lev. 18:22  
^{12}\)Lev. 20:13  
^{14}\)Ibid., 220.  
^{15}\)Ibid.
Holiness Code reflects time conditioned purity laws that fail to bind believers today.

Taking a very different view is noted biblical scholar, Richard B. Hays. Hays does not deny the cultural context that gave rise to the prohibitions against homosexuality found in the Holiness Code of Leviticus, including the abundance of purity laws. He does note however, that “the Old Testament makes no systematic distinction between ritual law and moral law,” citing a further example to be questioned, namely the prohibition against incest found in Leviticus 18:6-18. Additionally, Hays identifies three biblical metathemes that would support the mandate of the Holiness Code: God’s creative intention for human sexuality, the fallen human condition, and the demythologizing of sex. Finally, by making reference to a general biblical warning regarding sexual practices found in Leviticus 18: 24-26, Hays associates the Levitical ban against homosexual activity as an indication that morality is never merely a private matter but rather something that affects the holiness and wholeness of the entire community:

Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all of these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves. Thus the land became defiled; and I punished it for its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations, either the citizen or the alien who resides among you. (Lev. 18:24-26)

Clearly for Hays, the prohibitions against homosexual activity laid out in Leviticus are meant to protect the integrity of community that he considers to be a powerful biblical

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17Ibid.
18Ibid., 390-91.
Given the lack of scholarly consensus regarding the biblical witness of the Hebrew Scriptures (specifically Leviticus), it is prudent to move to the references found in the Christian Scriptures, that is, three texts found in the letters of Paul and the Pauline tradition. Like the references to same-sex relations found in the Hebrew Scriptures, these references are isolated and infrequent. Accordingly, they demonstrate that like the Old Testament, the New Testament offers no systematic ethic of sexuality. Specialized terminology for homosexuality is not always clear and the nuances of Pauline rhetoric are often difficult to comprehend. Therefore, much time has been invested by contemporary biblical scholarship to achieve some clarity and provide much needed nuance. A summary of the current views regarding these ambiguous texts however should be adequate to evaluate their usefulness in responding to the question of same-sex relations. A primary appeal to Romans 1:26-27 seems most useful given its contested interpretation. In this text, Paul declares that:

For God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. Paul bases his stark condemnation of homosexual behavior upon a natural law argument that is rooted in Jewish thought and belief. Nature in this text reflects the Stoic understanding of it as “the established order of things.” The nexus of that order was the dominance of males over females in society but especially in gender / sexual relationships. Accordingly, what appears to be offensive to Paul in the current text is the

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19Ibid., 391.  
blurring of gender roles that resulted in a complete reversal of roles when it came to sexual activity. On the part of males, Paul viewed such role reversal as resulting in “a ‘shame’ contrary to nature.”\textsuperscript{21} Even more explicitly, Paul would have viewed same-sex activity as directly offensive to the creator because it served as a deliberate rejection the natural law that God had established.\textsuperscript{22}

Paul’s focus upon male homosexuality is directed particularly toward the intensity of the passion involved and the punishment it is destined to receive. According to Brendan Byrne, the punishment is not a punishment for the behavior as such “but a permanent incontrollable desire to engage in the activity in question.”\textsuperscript{23} The idolatry made manifest in male same-sex relationships exchanges the dignity of being created in the divine image for a state of being enslaved in shameful self-indulgence which goes against the very nature of God. Such an argument is quite powerful on an anthropological level for it suggests, at least in the case of male homosexual activity, human nature is changed on the ontological level. Accordingly since being and action are intimately linked, it would appear that all same-sex activity must be condemned.

Not all contemporary scholarship is in agreement with Byrne’s assessment of the present pericope that seems to evaluate homogenital behaviors as perversions meriting absolute condemnation. A number of authors would suggest that while Paul does discuss the concept of “nature” in Romans 1:26-27, it relates not to an ontological category but rather to a psychological one, namely that of sexual orientation. As such, the evaluation of homosexual activity associated with nature proves to be invalid because of the

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 70. 
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid. 70. For a discussion that challenges Byrnes’ association of uncontrollable desire specifically with male homosexual activity, see Dale B. Martin “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-31,” \textit{Biblical Interpretation} 3 (1995), 332-55.
limitations of Paul’s insight into the human psyche thereby invalidating the argument at the heart of the condemnation.\textsuperscript{24} Others have argued that the passage reflects the language of pederasty, the only form of male homosexuality discussed in the time of Paul, which in itself would invalidate the absolute prohibition of same-sex physical intimacy.\textsuperscript{25} Still others have argued that the language of the pericope in no way connotes a notion of “sin”, but rather a sense of “uncleanness”, rendering it completely invalid for contemporary discussions of same-sex relations due to its cultural conditioning.\textsuperscript{26}

Feminist theologians also critique Paul’s concept of “nature” albeit in a different but related light. They believe that going against nature in the mind of Paul is not an ontological phenomenon but rather a sociological one. To assume a different gender role in the mind of Paul is to erode the sociological and cultural patriarchal norms that served as the foundation for first century Palestinian society. The point here is that when men become effeminate through passive participation in homosexual acts, “the issue becomes male superiority, not the direction of erotic desire for male or female”.\textsuperscript{27} Therefore, the injustice of the social construction of heterosexuality as the norm for sexual relationships renders Romans 1:26-27 invalid because of the sin of patriarchy.\textsuperscript{28}

While the feminist stance seems both theologically and historically appealing it

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24}See for example Salzman and Lawler, 222. For an extensive treatment of the rationale for this argument, see, John Boswell, \textit{Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century} (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), 107-114.
\item \textsuperscript{27}Margaret A. Farley, \textit{Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics} (New York: Continuum, 2007), 276.
\item \textsuperscript{28}The crux of this argument will be elaborated upon in chapter II.
\end{itemize}
does raise some questions of merit. On one hand, the argument from the position of male dominance in the context of a patriarchal society does not address the issue of lesbianism and its effects on the surrounding culture. On the other hand, not every male homogenital encounter is one of passivity. Therefore, the proactive and assertive nature of some aspects of same-sex relations in particular, may give the impression that even sophisticated feminist arguments may need to be revisited before claiming the final word on Paul’s moral evaluation of homosexual activity in Romans.

The final texts that surface regularly in biblically based theological evaluations of homosexuality are 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10. The interpretation of these texts revolves around two very technical terms, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* that are found in lists of vices in both letters. Specifically, *malakoi* refers to “youthful, effeminate-looking males” while *arsenokoitai* are those “men who lie with males” (suggesting by context that they “contract” the services of the *malakoi*. Thus, Paul apparently is condemning the practices of pederasty and homosexual prostitution, thereby invalidating these texts as a general prohibition against all forms of homogenital expression. These texts not only speak to the issue of the reversal of gender roles in a patriarchal society, but also they associate same-sex genital activity with violence. Since all homogenital relationships do not reflect these deviations, absolute condemnation of homosexual behavior cannot be deduced from them.

At the end of this cursory survey of the specific texts in the Hebrew and Christian

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29 Scroggs, 106-109, especially 108: “If *malakos* points to the effeminate call-boy, then the *arsenakoites* in this context must be the active partner who keeps the *malakos* as a “mistress” or who hires him on occasion to satisfy his sexual desires…A very specific dimension of pederasty is being denounced with these two terms. Seen in this way, the lists share the disapproval of this form of pederasty with the entire literature of the Greco-Roman world on the topic!”

Scriptures, one thing is certain. There exists no consensus with regard to the moral status of homosexual activity that is unequivocal. A study of the role of scripture in the evaluation of the phenomenon of homosexuality is not complete however by exclusive appeal to specific texts. It is necessary therefore to look to specific texts on related issues to examine how discussions of homosexuality fit into the larger witness of scripture.

Five sets of related texts come to mind immediately when discussing homosexuality and the behaviors that are intrinsically related to it. The first group falls under the heading of gender identity and complementarity and would include the first creation narrative (Gen. 1:27) and the union of man and woman (Gen.2:24). These texts highlight the importance of complementarity in the midst of distinction and seem to point to a heterosexual norm. In the same vein, the second set of texts speaks of heterosexual marriage (Gen. 2:24-25) and procreation (Gen. 1:28). All of the great matriarchs and patriarchs of Israel model marriage and the importance of procreation. Jesus speaks authoritatively and unreservedly about the permanence of marriage (Matt. 19 3-8)

Marriage is also employed by the author of Ephesians as an analogy for the love between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:25-30). Again, it seems that permanent, heterosexual, marital unions have a prominent place in scripture. The importance of familial relationships characterizes the third set of related texts when reflecting upon homosexuality. On one hand, family is showcased as a graced community encounter in the New Testament through images of wedding feasts (Matt. 22:1-14) and parent-child relationships (Lk. 15:11-32). Family is also presented as a community of faith, hope, and charity that assumes particular importance in the life of the Church (Eph. 5:21-6:4; Col. 3:18-21; 1 Peter 1-7). On the other hand, familial status does not designate a privileged
status in the Kingdom of God (Mk. 3:1-35; 12:25; Lk.16:29) for all human relationships must be subordinated to the radical demands of Christian discipleship. Thus while scripture portrays marriage and family quite positively, the ultimate relationship is the one that exists between the believer and Christ. The fourth group of related texts is those that discuss same-sex friendships. The two paradigms for same-sex friendship in the Hebrew Scriptures, namely those that exist between Jonathan and David (1 Samuel: 1-4) and Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1), carry no explicit sexual connotations. New Testament references to same-sex friendships include those of Jesus and Lazarus, Jesus and the Beloved Disciple, Paul and Barnabus, and Paul and Timothy, to name a few. None carry any implication of sexual genital behavior. Love between members of the same sex is viewed as wholesome and holy granted that it does not include physical sexual activity.

The fifth set of texts revolves around the issue of sexual misconduct. Old Testament references exact strict punishments on those persons who commit sexual “crimes”. In the New Testament, Jesus condemns only adultery; however, the sin of lust that motivates it seems to be serious for him (Mt. 5:27-28). At the same time, Jesus shows some of his greatest compassion to an adulteress (cf. Jn. 8:1-11) and he walks in the company of known prostitutes. Paul clearly advocates a very strict moral code (1 Cor. 6:7-10; 1 Tim. 1:8-10) and at times he even seems to have a negative attitude toward marriage (1 Cor. 7). His exhortations however are rooted in his understanding of an immanent Parousia.

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31 Tom Horner argues the case for a homosexual interpretation of both of these relationships in Jonathan loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978). Edward A. Malloy correctly refutes such claims on the basis that no substantial contextual evidence exists to support these claims in Homosexuality and the Christian Way of Life (Landam, MD: University of America Press, 1981), 198-200.
and his desire for pure and exclusive devotion to the coming Lord.32

Once again a dilemma exists. The Scriptures attest to the holy and normative nature of the institutions of marriage and family. Jesus however broadens the concept of family, indicating that the most authentic family is the community of believers. Sexual activity is associated with procreation within the marital covenant. Sexual misconduct is strongly denounced by Paul, yet Jesus seems to be more concerned with the vice of lust. By the same token, Jesus graciously extends his forgiveness and embrace of those who have committed sexual “sin”. Same-sex intimate relationships are celebrated within clear sexual boundaries. Obviously, while a heterosexual norm clearly is present in abundance, it does not appear to be absolute. Thus, the survey of the biblical witness must take one final form, that is, all of the biblical texts that refer to homosexuality must be interpreted further by examining them over and against the larger scriptural themes with which they are imbued. Generally, these themes will include creation, covenant, sin, incarnation, redemption, and resurrection.33

Reflection upon the Christian view of creation and its inherent goodness provides a set of ideals that influence the overall biblical depiction of sexuality. Accordingly, Lisa Sowle Cahill correctly identifies three normative sub-themes as stewardship, procreation, and companionship, all of which seem to be centered around the partnership of a man and

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32The subject of each of these related texts (under the headings of “family”, “friendship”, “marriage”, and “sexuality”) are found in The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Pastoral Theology, ed. Carroll Stuhlmueller (Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1996).

33The majority of this section relies heavily upon Charles E. Curran’s development of a five-fold horizon/stance for moral theology based upon biblical themes. For further study of his treatment of creation, sin, incarnation, redemption, and resurrection, see his Directions in Fundamental Moral Theology (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985): 29-62. Note my inclusion of the theme of covenant that is crucial for any examination of either heterosexual or homosexual relationships. The present additions do not claim to make the present list of themes exhaustive.
woman based on equality.  

While recognizing the extreme value of human sexuality present within the theme of creation, such a vision must realize that the initial sin of pride leads not only to disorder and suffering, but also, in terms of human sexuality, this sinful rebellion results in a hierarchy of sexes that assigns dominant and subordinate sexual roles to men and women respectively. As a result, human relationships are subject to imperfection and a misappropriation of sexuality on a variety of levels. The persistence of sin however can never become an all-encompassing excuse for conceding to the obstacles that hinder the human perception of the Creator’s vision of human sexuality because of the reality of the Paschal Mystery. Unfortunately, sin even corrupts said perception and results in a limited understanding of the fullness of God’s vision for human sexual flourishing.

The biblical symbol of covenant that conveys the image of God’s gracious act of reaching out to humanity in unconditional, steadfast love, as well as humanity’s response, profoundly affects the Christian view of sexuality. This structure of call and response, as noted by Richard Gula, “makes the whole of our life an expression of our relationship to God in and through our relationship to everyone else.” In terms of human sexuality, relationships that are both personally and physically intimate must be characterized by attitudes of self-giving love and appreciation that both respect the dignity of others and the loving plan of the Creator. Thus, in a broader view of covenant, homosexual relationships may have the potential of forming a Christian covenantal bond.

The mystery of the Incarnation, presented in the person and event of Jesus the

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35Ibid., 55.  
Christ, sacramentalizes all that is human and natural in the world.\textsuperscript{37} Undeniably, human sexuality participates in this mystery, providing human relationships with a dignity that is unparalleled. Thus, a biblically based theology of sexuality strives to overcome the brokenness that is the result of sin through a recognition that the Incarnation opens the door to love, forgiveness, unconditional acceptance, and liberation of all who are sexually marginalized, including homosexual persons.

The final biblical themes that influence the Christian view of sexuality are those of redemption and resurrection destiny. In terms of human sexual relationships, these themes translate into a realization that one must constantly seek sexual integration while realizing that this endeavor will never be completed in the present. Sacred and holistic sexuality validates its redemption-resurrection destiny to the degree that it is characterized by agapic love that focuses upon the liberation of the other. Thus, at least in potential, homosexual expressions of sexual love could fulfill this destiny to the degree that they are marked by attitudes of service, self-giving love, and liberation.\textsuperscript{38}

While numerous other themes could be explored, several general conclusions must be drawn in terms of the overall contribution of Scripture to the process of Christian ethical reflection upon homosexuality. First, specific references to homosexuality prohibit sexual behavior; however, such condemnations usually occur in the midst of larger concerns or refer to specific types of oppressive sexual relationships. Second, texts that are related to this issue basically affirm heterosexual love as the norm for human sexual expression with little possibility for exception. Third, Scriptural metathemes, while recognizing the dignity of the heterosexual norm and encouraging the struggle

\textsuperscript{37}Curran, 50-52.
\textsuperscript{38}Cahill, “Moral Methodology: A Case Study,” 178.
against “aberrations” from the norm due to sin, also affirm features of truly Christian relationships that can be present in occasions of homosexual love. Thus, the ambiguity and tension present in the biblical witness leads to the realization that Scripture alone cannot provide a response to the issue of homosexuality that is absolute. Accordingly, scholars realize that other sources of ethical reflection must be investigated and assimilated if a truly Christian perspective on homosexuality is to be adopted.

Natural Law and Complementarity

The Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church invokes several other sources to inform its teaching on homosexuality and homogenital acts. Contemporary commentators generally observe that the bulk of the teaching focuses upon the deficiencies of same-sex relations in two specific areas. Traditionally, homosexual genital acts have been identified as running contrary to the natural law, especially in terms of their lack of procreative intent and ability. Although implicit in the natural law argument, more recently the Church has articulated more explicitly the argument that same-sex genital acts reject the physical complementarity that exists in heterosexual genital relations. Accordingly, each of these foci will be examined individually.

Natural Law

In order to understand the Magisterial arguments that confront and condemn homogenital behaviors, it is essential to discuss, albeit in a cursory fashion, the natural

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39 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2357.
40 Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons, AAS, (2003): 41-57. Although formal theological conversations on this issue are more recent, complementarity arguments were clearly present and developed within the mainline Protestant traditions.
law ethic of Aquinas upon which it is based. Aquinas situates his treatment of natural law within his overall discussion of law in the *Summa Theologicae* (I-II, qqs. 90-97). In developing his theses, he was attempting to reconcile two very different schools of thought that had existed for centuries. The “order of reason” school favored thoughtful prudential judgment based on critical thinking. The “order of nature” school advocated observation of the natural world where the attributes, activity, and aims of the physical order normatively direct the moral order. Essentially, Thomas’ most fundamental definition of the natural law is expressed as humanity’s participation in and obedience to the eternal law of God that one may access through the use of practical reason (cf. I-II, q. 91, a.2; q 93). Knowing that the Thomistic understanding of “reason” refers to the innate desire of the human person to know the whole of reality and arrive at ultimate truth, further clarifies his definition. Ultimately, for Aquinas, natural law requires the use of all of the resources at humanity’s disposal (both scientific and rational) to arrive at an authentic understanding of what is normatively human.\(^{41}\)

While Aquinas’ explicit definition of natural law favors the “order of reason” school, in practice he often vacillates between it and the “order of nature” school. Thus, in his application of natural law principles, he does not attempt to integrate the two interpretations to produce a grand unified theory of natural law. Rather, he often subordinates the use of reason, properly understood, to the “norms” to be discovered in the superiority of the God-given created order.\(^{42}\)

A review of Aquinas’ treatment of sexual matter unveils such an application of

\[^{41}\text{Gula, 224.}\]
\[^{42}\text{Ibid., 225-228.}\]
natural law theory. For him, the most egregious offenses in the realm of human sexuality are those that contradict the visible order of nature (cf. II-II, q. 154, a. 12). Homosexual acts are condemned as sins that preclude procreation and ultimately insult the will of the Creator “written” in the physical order. As indicated by Louis Janssens, for Aquinas, given the dictates of the natural law, the sin of homosexuality is in a very real way, “graver than sacrilege.” Aquinas’ interpretation of the natural law and its application to questions of sexual ethics has been a dominant force in the Roman Catholic debate over the question of homosexuality. Consistently, Church teaching has argued that same-sex behaviors are morally unacceptable, and in fact, “intrinsically evil” since they frustrate the proper use of the sexual faculty. This interpretation clearly indicates a focus upon the “natural” procreative ends of sexual activity and is, as indicated in more recent Catholic moral theology, markedly physicalist.

Some contemporary Christian ethicists have challenged the traditional approach to natural law based upon its static view of the human person as well as its overemphasis upon biological/physical attributes as the source for the discovery of moral norms. These individuals propose an alternative view of natural law that merits consideration seeing that it will ultimately impact the discussion and evaluation of homosexual genital activity. This approach to natural law has been coined as “personalist” as opposed to the “physicalist” approach identified above.

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44 Gula, 226. “‘Physicalism’…refers to the tendency in moral analysis to emphasize, or even to absolutize, the physical and biological aspects of the human person and human actions independently of the function of reason and freedom.”
Simply stated, contemporary approaches to natural law are rooted in the “order of reason” vein of the natural law tradition. Here, reason is seen as the dynamic human tendency to arrive at an awareness of truth via a comprehensive view of reality. This comprehensive view of reality involves many factors and, while realizing its own limitations, gives proper attention to the complexity of reality as human persons have experienced it historically, physically, psychologically, and personally. In this scheme, the biological order is no longer given primary consideration. Rather, physical data is seen as one of the many possible avenues for accumulating information about normative human possibility and potentiality. Thus, as indicated by Gula, “the ‘nature’ which reason explores is no longer separated from the complexity of personal, human life taken in all of its relationships.”

Realizing then that relationality forms the malleable boundary for human possibility, action, and destiny, contemporary views of natural law ultimately become concerned with the maximization of human relational potential.

A revised personalist interpretation of natural law has incredible implications for sexual morality in general and the issue of homosexuality in particular. Such an interpretation first acknowledges the limits of human access to the natural law, since the “nature” that persons experience is interpreted and socially constructed. However, this approach sees the natural vocation of the human person as the forming of relationships with other persons based upon one’s loving relationship with Jesus Christ. Human sexuality is a powerful manifestation of human relational potential and cannot be truncated so as to be understood as merely involving physical acts. On the contrary,

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46Gula, 215.
47Although the current study is concerned with the question of the moral status of homosexual acts, human relationality is not restricted to the interaction between human persons, but extends to the divine, the self, and the larger created order.
human sexuality is to be viewed as normatively human when it works to realize and to enhance the ability of human persons to relate to God, others, themselves, and the world. Homosexual acts then, are to be evaluated on the criterion of their ability to fulfill human relational potential in terms of an in depth understanding of human sexuality in all of its complexity. For the individual who may be irreversibly and exclusively homosexual, arguments have been made that homosexual acts are normative, and within “the context of a loving relationship striving for permanency are objectively morally good.”

The aforementioned evaluation of homosexual behaviors according to nature is not without difficulty. The “nature” of the homosexual orientation continues to be debated. Even if said nature is evaluated as permanent and deep-seated within a homosexual person, and if homosexual acts are seen as natural for persons with such an orientation, treating natural facts as moral justification leads one to commit a naturalistic fallacy. To determine the moral status of these behaviors they must be evaluated also as “just, loving and in accord with holistic complementarity.” It is to the final category of complementarity that the present study now turns.

Complementarity

As noted above, according to the Magisterium as well as more traditional schools of Roman Catholic natural law, same-sex behaviors are never considered to be normative based upon heterogential and procreative grounds, i.e. on the basis of a decidedly physicalist view of complementarity. The Unites States Conference of Catholic Bishops

\[\text{Reference:} \ Charles \ E. \ Curran, \ Critical \ Concerns \ in \ Moral \ Theology, \ (Notre \ Dame: \ University \ of \ Notre \ Dame \ Press, \ 1984), \ 92-93. \ For \ a \ more \ fully \ developed \ positive \ view \ of \ homosexual \ activity \ based \ on \ a \ relational \ argument, \ see \ Richard \ A. \ McCormick, \ S.J., \ The \ Critical \ Calling: \ Reflections \ on \ Moral \ Dilemmas \ since \ Vatican \ II, \ (Washington, \ D.C: \ Georgetown \ University \ Press, \ 1989), \ 305-312. \]

\[\text{Reference:} \ See \ the \ section \ “Using \ the \ Empirical \ Sciences \ to \ Evaluate \ Homosexuality,” \ 22-26 \ below. \]

\[\text{Reference:} \ Salzman \ and \ Lawler, \ 227. \]
clearly articulates this view in its most recent statement on homosexuality with its
pronouncement that same-sex genital acts are “not ordered toward the fulfillment of the
natural ends of human sexuality.”51 Such pronouncements do not engage more
personalistic approaches that question whether homonatal sexual activity “can be truly
human on the level of sexual and personal complementarity.”52 However, the personal
experience and testimony same-sex couples seem to indicate that complementarity that is
not restricted to physical criteria can be authentic and effective in homonatal relations.

Margaret Farley is perhaps one of the most vocal contemporary theological
ethicists who advocates an understanding of sexual complementarity based upon
intimacy, both genital and non-genital, with particular interest in the relationships
between homosexual persons. In the early 1980’s, having reviewed in detail the genuine
experiences of same-sex couples, she concluded that such relationships were essential for
those individuals with a permanent and exclusive homosexual orientation since they were
key for sustaining human well-being and human flourishing.53 In a more recent work,
discussing the issue of homosexuality within the framework of an ethic of justice, Farley
continues to advance this claim, noting that the foundation of interpersonal non-physical
complementarity advances the common good by fostering other sacred and wholesome
relationships in the context of family (broadly understood) as well as the contexts of the
church and society.54 In terms of family, very recent published studies have concluded
that same-sex couples demonstrate a greater openness to and desire for the equitable

51United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual
Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care”, Origins 24, no. 36 (November 23, 2006), 381.
52Salzman and Lawler, 228.
53Margaret A. Farley, “An Ethic for Same-Sex Relations,” in A Challenge to Love: Gay and
Lesbian Catholics in the Church, (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 99-100.
54Farley, Just Love, 287.
distribution of labor in their households and more effective conflict resolution skills. In addition, these couples experience tremendous support from friends of both sexes and also report a high degree of relational satisfaction when compared with heterosexual couples. In a more recent document, the Magisterium denies such arguments that would broaden the understanding of sexual and personal complementarity; however, their claims are unsubstantiated by any empirical evidence.

Given the compelling arguments presented here, the question remains whether one can arrive at a definition of sexual complementarity that is unbiased and objective, reflecting as an interpretation of the natural law in its truest Thomistic sense. Without question, such a definition would include the notion of intimacy; however, intimacy is somewhat relative on both intellectual and pragmatic levels. Henri Nouwen wrestles with the notion of intimacy discerning it to be “a divine gift allowing us to transcend fearful distance as well as fearful closeness, and to experience a love before and beyond all human acceptance and rejection.” While both poetic and insightful on a philosophical level, it remains difficult to determine what sexual intimacy entails on a physical level in order to be authentic. Is sexual intercourse, as presented by John Paul II, an expression of sexual complementarity, a language of the body that is both linked to the procreative and unitive meaning of sexual acts and an ontological canvas where

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56 Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons*, no. 7.

biological and psychological elements of a person’s masculinity and femininity become complete within the context of a personal and sacramental commitment? Or do sexual acts complete the human person beyond the two-dimensional level to incorporate emotional, relational, and spiritual levels that both respect and transcend gender reflecting a Catholic anthropology that sees the person as both broken and blessed and able to experience a significant level of complementarity even in same-sex relationships?

While the notion of intimacy is at the core of discussions of sexual complementarity, it is clear that church authorities and theologians follow two very different and decidedly opposing approaches when developing their sexual anthropologies.

In light of this brief overview of both traditional and contemporary approaches to natural law ethics and complementarity issues, a number of general conclusions may be drawn in terms of their contribution to the attempt to formulate a truly Christian perspective on homosexuality, specifically in terms of same-sex genital relations. First, both natural law evaluations of homosexuality as well as arguments from the notion of complementarity vary according to the particular approach employed. Traditional natural law ethics and views of complementarity condemn homosexual acts as contrary to the proper use of the sexual faculty, impossible of fulfilling the procreative element of genital sexuality, and centered upon self-fulfillment rather than mutual fulfillment between the partners in the relationship. Contemporary approaches allow for the possible acceptance of such acts based upon their ability to fulfill relational potential and their possibility for fostering true intimate, creative communion between persons of the same sex. Second, since both approaches to natural law and complementarity are contingent upon

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59 Salzmann and Lawler, 130-138.
observation and reflection, the realization that human persons are “in process,” that they continue to develop both in terms of physiological and sexual self-awareness, results in a relative impossibility of absolutizing any sort of sexual ethic that either condemns or condones homosexuality and homogential behaviors. Clearly, arguments that are advanced on the basis of natural law theories and understandings of human sexual complementarity, when viewed in isolation, have serious limitations and fail to resolve conclusively the issues surrounding homosexuality. While such a realization does not indicate Christianity’s ultimate failure in attempting to develop an authentic ethical response to homosexuality, it does reinforce the continuing need to investigate the contributions of the other normative sources for Christian ethical reflection.

Using the Empirical Sciences to Evaluate Homosexuality

A third complementary alternative for the Christian ethicist is to call upon the data derived from the empirical sciences for assistance in evaluating the nature and normalcy of same-sex orientation and behavior. This source potentially can assist in the refinement of a natural law approach to homosexual orientation and the actions that are associated with it. Unfortunately, to discern the role of the secular disciplines is to cast out into murky waters. As noted by Gerald Coleman, research into the development of an individual’s sexual orientation remains in its infancy.\(^6^0\) Such commentary might suggest a dismissal of empirical data as helpful for discerning the ethics of same-sex relations. By contrast, Margaret Farley, while citing the bias that has been present in the

goals and results of such research,\textsuperscript{61} acknowledges that in recent years empirical research in the area of sexual orientation “has clearly contributed to the de-pathologizing of same-sex erotic orientation.”\textsuperscript{62} Regardless of these differences of opinion, it remains important to investigate the causes of homosexuality to determine if the status of homosexuality as a possible vehicle for authentic human flourishing before God. Accordingly, a brief review of the four primary theories of sexual orientation (genetic, hormonal, neuroanatomical, and environmental) will be explored.

Generally speaking, the evidence that genetics plays some role in the development of a sexual orientation is decidedly strong. Here researchers focus upon three areas: family and twin studies as well as molecular genetics. In terms of family studies, statistics seem to indicate that homosexuality is three times as prevalent when another sibling experiences a same-sex orientation.\textsuperscript{63} Potentially, such findings would be corroborated by twin studies; however, such inquiries have received mixed reviews in the scientific community. In 1991, Bailey and Pillard published a series of studies of twins, based on interviews with both gay and straight brothers. The researchers recruited 110 pairs of male twins, half identical, half fraternal. In every relationship, one twin was self-reportedly gay. Among the identical twins, 52 percent of the brothers were both gay. Among the fraternals, the number was 22 percent, high enough above the background population rate to suggest that there was something distinctive in those families. The

\textsuperscript{61}Farley, \textit{Just Love}, 280. Here Farley notes that studies in sexual orientation have had a decidedly male bias over the course of more than forty years of research.
\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., 281. Here Farley references the decision of the American Psychiatric Association to declassify homosexuality as a disorder of any kind in 1974. See APA, \textit{Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Mental Disorders}, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Association, 1994).
researchers found a very similar pattern with lesbians.\textsuperscript{64} Twin studies have received a number of criticisms however, including an extreme self-selection bias where homosexuals with gay siblings are prone to volunteer for studies and a lack of acknowledgement of the influence of environmental factors in the evolution of one’s sexual orientation.\textsuperscript{65} Results are equally divided in the area of molecular genetics. Some early studies seem to have indicated a location and specific gene that is associated with a homosexual orientation, while subsequent research has failed to identify any genetic marker associated with it.\textsuperscript{66} The only fact that remains clear in the area of genetic studies and sexual orientation is that science must pursue its research more rigorously and objectively.

A second scientific forum that is engaged in research regarding the origins and evolution of sexual orientation concerns hormones. According to this area of research, different levels of select hormones result in the development of heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual orientations. Hormone levels in each of these groups however do not seem to be markedly different according to current research. In fact, hormonal levels seem to affect levels of sexual desire in general rather than the gender to which one is attracted.\textsuperscript{67} Some studies have concluded that disruption of the prenatal hormone Androgen in males may lead to homosexuality;\textsuperscript{68} however, critics assert that relatively few of these studies are associated with human subjects.\textsuperscript{69} Again, most researchers believe that there must be further studies regarding the influence of prenatal hormones.

\textsuperscript{65}Crawford and Zamboni, 220-21.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 221.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 222.
\textsuperscript{69} Crawford and Zamboni, 223.
and that this research should be coupled with studies that investigate genetic dispositions toward a particular sexual orientation.

The last physiological theory regarding the etiology of sexual orientation is known as the neuroanatomical theory. This theory is based upon the concept that brain structures influence an individual’s sexual orientation. Such theories are not well substantiated however, since only a few postmortem studies have been conducted on human species. Also, the results of each of the studies were inconsistent and did not reflect proper controls that would result in the acquisition of data that was objective and accurate.  

The final area where empirical data is employed to determine the causes of homosexual orientation and, correspondingly, the moral status of said orientation is rooted in psychoanalytic, environmental, social, and experiential theories. From these perspectives, origins for a same-sex orientation range from households where there is a dominant mother and a submissive father to unhappy family environments and confusion of social and sexual roles. Ultimately, approximately fifty years of controlled studies have determined that the environment does play some role in the development of sexual orientation; however, much more research needs to be conducted that will account for the variability of the contexts in which these experiments have been performed.  

As noted earlier, social science also provides information about the human response to the occurrence of homosexuality in society. Truly, same-sex orientation and behaviors cannot be understood apart from the reaction of a society which is predominantly heterosexual, in particular the response that is merited from the population.

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70 Ibid., 224.
71 Ibid. 224-25
Generally, society’s attitude toward homosexual persons is based upon negative myths and stereotypes that result in attitudes of fear that are actualized in various forms of discrimination and violence.\textsuperscript{72} From the Christian perspective such an attitude cannot be tolerated; however, the critique of homophobia and its negative consequences cannot factor objectively into the moral status of homosexual orientation and behavior. Undeniably, the Church is concerned with issues of social justice; however, the sin of injustice cannot serve as the basis for a revisionist ethic of homosexuality that demands unconditional acceptance of same-sex behavior as compensation for an extended period of persecution.\textsuperscript{73}

This very brief overview of the contribution of the secular disciplines to the process of Christian ethical reflection in the area of homosexuality yields several conclusions. First, most scientific data is inconclusive regarding the cause of homosexuality, and even if it were in the realm of Catholic moral theology, science is not the foremost source for moral norms. Second, while sociological, psychological and environmental data does shed some light upon overall societal trends and valid orientation variations, statistical frequency does not impact Christian normative moral evaluations of homosexuality significantly. Finally, Christian intolerance of prejudice against homosexual persons cannot justify an unconditionally tolerant same-sex ethic. Once again Christian ethics is bombarded by the fact that all of the normative sources of moral reflection must be evaluated in order to develop a homosexual ethic that is decidedly Christian.


\textsuperscript{73}While this method of argument surfaces infrequently in academic circles, it is often employed in secular society as means of justifying homosexual orientation and behavior.
Tradition: Homosexuality and the Community of Faith

Evaluation of each of the preceding normative sources of Christian ethical reflection on the issue of homosexuality is benighted when isolated from a historical view of the Church’s reception of and response to their evaluations and discoveries. Truly the experience of the Christian people, initially formed by the scriptures and perpetually engaged in the development of an historical self-awareness, plays a pivotal role in Christian ethics. Specifically, since many contemporary ecclesial and theological voices boisterously claim that Tradition consistently presents homosexual acts as “intrinsically disordered,” it is prudent to review critically the content of such a claim. Before embarking on this task however, two precautionary notes are in order and will be reflected in the arrangement of the present section. First, Tradition, properly understood, cannot be confined solely to a present understanding of the Church’s Magisterium seeing that restrictive and exclusive usage of the term “Magisterium” as “hierarchical teaching authority” begins only in the eighteenth century in German theological and canonical circles. Tradition brings the wisdom of the unique revelation of God rooted in the Paschal mystery (broadly understood) to the present age by way of the vehicle of historical interpretation. Second, an interpretation of the Church’s living tradition that ignores the sensus fidelium is severely truncated. Thus, the current survey of the Catholic Tradition’s response to homosexuality incorporates the scriptural witness, the voices of

74 Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2357.
76 Clearly, Tradition is rooted in an prayerful and theological reflection upon the history of the Church’s interpretation of historical responses to questions of the understanding and application of the content of the depositum fidei in matters of faith and morals. For a comprehensive understanding of this view of Tradition see, Yves M.J. Congar, O.P., Tradition and Traditions, The Biblical, Historical, and Theological Evidence for Catholic Teaching on Tradition, (Needham Heights, MA: Simon and Schuster, 1966).
antiquity, historical testimony, societal influences, the consensus of the faithful, and the authoritative teaching of the Magisterium as its essential criteria.

As evidenced by a proper exegesis of the scriptures, homosexual activity was condemned in the Hebrew Scriptures as a secondary violation in the context of larger cultural and religious themes (e.g., hospitality, idolatry, and honor)\(^77\) while in the New Testament it is usually condemned in very specific circumstances such as pederasty that incidentally were also rejected by and large in the greater Greco Roman community.\(^78\) At the same time, a more comprehensive view of the scriptures attests to heterosexual relations within the context of a permanent marital covenant as normative. While the more influential Christian literature of the Patristic period did not address the issue, some of the Church fathers did mention homosexuality; however, as noted by historian John Boswell, these references “were relatively few and generally those representing schools of extreme asceticism.”\(^79\) Eventually the influence of such sources causes homosexuality to be criticized in wider Christian circles as a reduction to animal behavior, a form of pederasty, a blatant expression of hedonism, sexual activity contrary to nature, and a denial of gender identity and expectations.\(^80\) Generally however, homosexuality never received as much attention as the theological articulation of the heterosexual norm of marriage and its intrinsic relationship to procreation, love, and permanent exclusive commitment. In the Roman west, intolerance of and hostility toward homosexuals became increasingly notable as the Roman Empire began to collapse. Most likely this

\(^77\)See my discussion above, 2-5.
\(^78\)Ibid., 5-9.
\(^79\)John Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), 128.
\(^80\)Ibid., 137-166. Boswell asserts that the prescriptions against homosexuality in the Patristic period come under four basic headings: animal behavior, unsavory associations, contrary to nature and inappropriate gender expectations.
overt rejection of same-sex relations was the result of factors such as the disappearance of urban subcultures and increased public regulation of sexual matters based upon a strict asceticism.\textsuperscript{81} Christianity does not appear to have adopted a concurrent attitude of hostility; however, eventually it did subscribe to theological and governmental attitudes that condemned same-sex behavior.

As a consequence of increasing civil and ecclesial intolerance, the topic of homosexuality is almost invisible during the low Middle Ages. Historians find no evidence of a distinctively homosexual subculture during this epoch and merely speculate on a few implicit references in the romantic literature of the period. Homosexuality is mentioned in the penitentials of the early medieval church; however, no explicit theological treatment is offered. At best, moral evaluations of homosexuality through the twelfth century categorized same-sex behaviors along with the sin of fornication, seeing it as contrary to the heterosexual marital union.\textsuperscript{82}

Around the eleventh century, homosexuality once again becomes a more public phenomenon largely due to the revival of large urban centers. By the mid-twelfth century, a substantial homosexual minority becomes visible accompanied by the development of a “gay” subculture. At this time, condemnation of homosexual practices also resurfaces both in the secular and theological arenas.\textsuperscript{83} Aquinas plays a major role in the official ecclesial condemnation of same-sex behaviors, arguing that such activity is loathsome since it frustrates the Creator’s design for human sexuality that is ultimately

\textsuperscript{81}Ibid, 165-174.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 169-206.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 269-302.
procreative and uniative.\textsuperscript{84} His theological opinion and methodology gained widespread acceptance, continuing as the primary influence upon the Catholic/Christian evaluation of same-sex genital relationships through the mid-twentieth century. Overtly, official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church continued to condemn homosexual activity as intrinsically evil based upon the scholastic distinction even after Vatican II.\textsuperscript{85} Implicitly, such methodology continues to guide the moral evaluations of homosexuality held by the Magisterium; however, more recent ecclesial documents demonstrate that the contributions of scripture and the empirical sciences are at least mentioned.\textsuperscript{86} At present, revisionist theologians react to the Church’s methodology by often subscribing to sources for Christian ethics that are almost completely divorced from traditional natural law prohibitions against homosexuality.\textsuperscript{87} In addition to confronting traditional arguments that condemn homosexuality, theologians are now giving serious attention to the attitudes of the lay faithful.

Recent sociological studies relate a greater acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex behaviors. At least two studies conducted within the last 10 years indicate that 41 percent of practicing American Catholics remain completely loyal to pronouncements of the Magisterium while 49 percent of the lay faithful believe that homosexuality is not a matter of conformity but rather a matter that respects personal autonomy and one that is

\textsuperscript{84}Per my discussion above regarding traditional natural law condemnations of homosexuality, see pages 14-18 of this study.
\textsuperscript{85}It is important to note here that “the concept of intrinsic evil was foreign to Thomas.” It was developed and coined by one of his most notable retractors on the cusp of the movement from the “scholastic” period to the “medieval” period, namely, Durandus of Saint Pourçain during the late 13\textsuperscript{th} and early 14\textsuperscript{th} centuries. See, James F. Keenan, “Proposing Cardinal Virtues,” Theological Studies Vol. 56 (December, 1995), 711.
\textsuperscript{86}See for example the Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 2357-2359. Careful reading of these paragraphs does indicate an appeal to scripture, natural law, and concrete human experience; however, there does not appear to be a critical dialogue with these sources.
\textsuperscript{87}For a clear and concise example of an early revisionist same-sex ethic unrelated to traditional natural law theories, see Margaret A. Farley, “An Ethic for Same-Sex Relations” in A Challenge to Love, (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 93-106.
guided by an individual’s informed conscience. What is of even greater interest is that generally speaking, a significant number of married laity have no aversion to homosexual behaviors and find them to be authentic expressions of embodied love. Thus, once again statistical data seems to invalidate the claim of the Magisterium that the moral sense of the Catholic faithful stands in opposition to any acceptance of homosexuality and the behaviors that are fundamentally related to it.

With regard to the data offered above, it is key to note, as do Salzman and Lawler, that sociological data are not a definitive or final expression of the belief and teaching of the Catholic Church. Accordingly, in theory it is correct to claim that statistical data, regardless of results, does not form the foundation for the sensus fidei. It does however “manifest what Catholics actually believe and do not believe, and that experiential reality is a basis for critical reflection on any claim about what “the Church believes””. Personal experience then becomes a significant factor in the equation to determine the motivation for dissent from official church teaching regarding same-sex relations and at the very least an aspect of the sensus fidei which assures that the entire body of the faithful cannot error in matters of faith and morals. Thus, according to moral theologians of a more revisionist bent, the lived experience of the Christian people is

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90Salzman and Lawler, 231.
91Ibid.
92Lumen Gentium, no.12.
foundational and primary source for evaluation the morality of homosexual acts\textsuperscript{93} and a key part of the living Tradition.

While much of the aforementioned argumentation is both valid and appealing, it is not without its own set of problematic aspects. To make the claim that the inconclusiveness of the testimony of the biblical witness, natural law, the secular disciplines and tradition (from a strictly historical perspective) makes concrete human experience the “determining source” on the issue of homosexual relations seems to be overly ambitious.\textsuperscript{94} Specifically, a number of caveats come to mind. First, arguments that stem from concrete human experience fail to recognize the element of human subjectivity in the evaluation of human action. Second, and intrinsically related to the first point, such evaluations of same-sex behaviors fail to acknowledge the reality of original sin that can both impede human judgment in concrete situations and verify the need for guidance from divine revelation as mediated by the Church’s Magisterium. Finally, “contemporary” theology has never adopted the practice of issuing moral pronouncements based upon a singular traditional source for Christian ethical reflection.

Ultimately, Tradition, viewed in isolation, fails the litmus test for being the final arbiter in regard to developing an authentic ethic with regard to same-sex relations. Historically, views of homosexuality and the behaviors intrinsically associated with it seem to be culturally conditioned. A broader view of Tradition, which incorporates the value of human experience, does engage the value of the \textit{sensus fidei} while simultaneously falling prey to the reality of human subjectivity. Clearly, it becomes increasingly important that an adequate Christian ethic of homosexuality attend to all of

\textsuperscript{93}Salzman and Lawler, 231.
\textsuperscript{94}Contra Farley, \textit{Just Love}, 287.
the specific contributions of the sources discussed here to begin to develop a strategy for authentic formation of conscience that both remains faithful to the perennial truths offered by the accepted sources of moral wisdom and acknowledges the need for additional legitimate and complementary sources that assist in the definitive formation of conscience with regard to homosexuality.

**Conclusion: Traversing a Wider Path**

Clearly, the present chapter demonstrates that each of the normative sources for Catholic moral theology which factor into a recognizably Christian ethic of homosexuality, when viewed in isolation, is marked by internal difficulties that seem to result in the failure to formulate *any* same-sex ethic that is absolute and exceptionless. Accordingly, an integration of these sources appears to be the only means of responding to the question definitively. The juxtaposition of these sources in an attempt to resolve the issue however, reveals that an attempt to amalgamate the sources is of an even greater complexity. Overall, evaluations of Scriptural data, coupled with traditional natural law theory clearly appear to favor a heterosexual norm for human sexuality. When viewed in conjunction with the scientific uncertainty surrounding the causes of homosexuality and the general tendency of conventional understandings of Tradition to evaluate homosexual acts as contrary to the proper understanding of human sexuality, it seems as if a universal prohibition against same-sex genital behaviors is warranted. This evaluation however, reflects only one possible means of interpreting, integrating and applying the sources that have been investigated here. An alternate approach might recognize that

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95The term “proper” is employed here in terms of the Catholic Tradition’s consistent historical connection between genital activity and procreation; however, it also includes the notion of the official “living” Traditions that also references the unitive ends of human sexuality.
although the Scriptures do seem to uphold a heterosexual norm, specific texts generally prohibit only certain forms of same-sex activity in very specific contexts. Also, many positive biblical themes (e.g., covenant, resurrection, etc.) may find a sacred incarnation in the context of truly committed and exclusive homosexual relationships that strive for permanency.\footnote{Charles E. Curran, \textit{Critical Concerns in Moral Theology} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 144.} When viewed vis-à-vis contemporary personalist approaches to natural law that emphasize a broader view of human nature in terms of relational potential and, given the evidence that a definitive homosexual orientation may have both a biological and environmental basis, further possibilities for a possible positive Christian assessment of homosexuality arise. Additionally, the testimony of contemporary Christian experience regarding homosexuality that reflects an acceptance of homosexual relationships and behaviors on the part of the majority may make the case that the current ecclesial same-sex ethic needs to be revisited. Thus, in the face of such disagreement and uncertainty, and authentic Christian ethic regarding homosexuality must turn to the broader ethical tradition in order to come to something other than merely a tentative resolution.

The Roman Catholic ethical tradition realizes that certain situations arise where the information on a given moral issue can neither be acquired completely nor applied unequivocally. This results in a state the may be likened to a form of moral paralysis known as “positive practical doubt”.\footnote{A more precise definition of “positive practical doubt” is the suspension of the intellect’s assent and judgment in reference to the morality of a given act. This definition, in variant forms, may be found in any of the neo-scholastic manuals of moral theology.} In the Neo-scholastic manualist tradition, cases of positive practical doubt are distinguished and resolved within the parameters of two primary categories: \textit{doubts of fact} and \textit{doubts of law}. In the process of moral evaluation,
if a lack of information results in a doubt of fact, the Catholic tradition counseled that one must follow the safest course of action. If, on the other hand, one is faced with a situation where the application of a given regulation is questionable (i.e., a doubt of law), one employs the use of reason and follows a probable opinion, even if it is not considered to be the most cautious one. Each of these methods of moral judgment in conflict situations continues to find support in various aspects of the Church’s official moral teaching.  

Given the inconclusive results of the present study in the case of evaluating the moral status of homosexuality, it appears that the Church attends to the doubts of fact that influence its official moral stance on this issue, albeit implicitly. Without certainty regarding the facts, the Magisterium seems to have no just and viable alternative but to follow the safest course of action in its assessment of same-sex relations. Since each of the sources discussed here in some way references the norm of monogamous, heterosexual marriage as the most authentic context for and expression of human sexuality, it is plausible to assert that the ecclesial community has found it necessary to chose the safest course of action as the classification of the homosexual orientation as essentially disordered and the unyielding evaluation that homosexual genital behavior as morally unacceptable. Therefore, the Church solves the dilemma of being paralyzed by positive practical doubt in an absolute condemnation of same-sex relations.

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98 The abortion issue is a case in point where a doubt of fact occurs. Theologically and philosophically, the church acknowledges that it cannot determine the specific point at which the immortal soul enters a human body. Realizing that it is an a state of positive practical doubt concerning the facts, the Church follows the safest course of action by insisting upon the protection of human life from the earliest possible moment, i.e., fertilization. Cases of doubts of law are more difficult to present in a synthetic manner; however, one may find evidence of the Church’s use of reason to solve matters of doubts of law in any number of applications of the principle of double effect.
While the Church’s solution to the problem proposed above is faithful to the Tradition, it is only an interim one. In a sense, while complete knowledge of the meaning of the normative sources of Christian ethics suffers to a degree from invincible ignorance, it does not seem that the discussion of the issue of same-sex relations that incorporate the insights of contemporary theology should suffer from defenestration. As noted by Karl Rahner, the Second Vatican Council called the Church to a new maturity where the response to challenges would require greater personal and ecclesial maturity and accountability.99 The issue of homosexuality and the behaviors associated with it will not disappear merely because the Magisterium has made a pronouncement against it.

A path therefore must be chosen that both remains faithful to the contributions of the normative sources for theological ethics and complements them in a manner that is theologically sound. This path will involve investigation of certain “contemporary moral markers,” that is, aspects of theology and ethics that should and do influence the formation of conscience. In the case of the evaluation of same-sex relationships and behaviors, four such markers appear to be essential to expand the understanding of the mystery of sexual fidelity and fulfillment on the part of homosexual persons within the community of believers.

First, homosexuality must be considered within the context of justice as promoted by the consistent witness of Catholic social teaching. This marker is truly comprehensive, attending to the three fundamental elements of Christian ethics with equal vigor, namely, character, choices, and community.100 This criterion will evaluate the moral status of same-sex relations to the degree that they are creative and not

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destructive. Additionally, a same-sex ethic rooted in the virtue of justice challenges the community of faith to be authentic to the divine call to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Ultimately justice, which seeks authentic human flourishing and fulfillment, will serve as a marker for the preservation of fundamental human dignity in Catholic sexual teaching in the context of a world that is often marked by genuine confusion, dogmatic coercion, and ethical compromise.

Second, same-sex relationships and behaviors will be considered within the contexts of sacramental and liturgical theology. The moral life can never be associated merely with a set of dogmatic pronouncements or formal theologies. Moral actions, affections, virtues, and dispositions must be rooted in the Paschal Mystery in its entirety. The reality of the person and event of Jesus the Christ is mediated to the Christian people by way of the sacraments. These ritual actions are both symbols of human meaning and transformations of human reality. Faithful participation in these rituals potentially express the deepest aspects of our character and bring them in conformity with God’s intention for us in Christ. Therefore, an investigation of homosexuality in conjunction with liturgy and sacrament is essential. Both the Church as a whole and individual homosexual Christians will be forced to engage in radical self-assessment regarding this expression of human sexuality, recognizing through ritual that all

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103 The present study understands the Paschal Mystery as encompassing the period from the Annunciation of the birth of the Lord through the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost. This expanded definition highlights the reality that the human encounter with the person and event of Christ was redemptive in its entirety.
engagements in human relationality are simultaneously graced and broken. Particular references to Baptism, Reconciliation, and Eucharist will prove to be helpful here.

Third, the connection between an ethic of same-sex relations and spirituality must be explored. Generally speaking, as noted by James Keating, “The natural state of reason demands that one thinks and discerns from within a relationship to what one loves. Critiquing the quality, dignity, and completeness of the object of that love is the role of a dynamic spiritual life.” Given the divergence of opinions in the ecclesial and theological communities regarding the ethical status of homosexual orientation and behaviors, determination of the authenticity of the spiritual nature of these states and relationships are of the essence. Specifically, this chapter will chart the path of the relationships between spirituality, embodied love, chastity, and celibacy that are in essence deeply interconnected. In each case, the multivalent character of relationality must be realized. One cannot love and be loved by another concretely without realizing the simultaneous expectations and joys of all others relationships that human persons find themselves engaged in (i.e, relationships with God, self, and world).

Finally, one must consider a same-sex ethic in relation to humanity’s ultimate destiny. After all, all roads do lead to eschatology. Here a number of points deserve mention. As noted by the first preface of the Mass of Christian burial, in the experience of death, “life is changed, not ended.” The narrative of human life is penned in time through actions, as well as through the courageous embrace of virtue. It is this very same life that is transformed and redeemed as one makes the transition from time to eternity. This narrative obviously includes human sexuality both in terms of the “fundamental

component of personality in and through which we, as male and female, experience our relatedness to self, others, the world, and even God” and “the expressions of sexuality which have physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, particularly genital actions resulting in sexual intercourse and / or orgasm.” ¹⁰⁸ In terms of the dimension of human sexuality as an integral part of the “resurrected body,” a key element of the process of redemption includes the authentic healing of human persons and their relationships rather than some return to original innocence as proposed by various contemporary theologies of the body. ¹⁰⁹ Homosexual persons require the same healings that heterosexual persons do in terms of the experience of human brokenness; however, in terms of categories, those persons involved in same-sex relationships may require healing in terms of either misdirected passion, imposed celibacy, or both. In other words, the present musings over same-sex relations and eschatology will attempt to discover what becomes definitive and final in death with regard to human sexuality, what is to be embraced, beholden, and celebrated by God in eternity, and to propose a trajectory for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of homosexuality in the present.

The road to an authentic same-sex ethic is long and the paths are divergent. The journey however is worth the effort since its goal is to develop an understanding of homosexuality and the acts intrinsically related to it that is decidedly Christian. Equally important is the development of a moral stance that promotes human flourishing for a significant minority within the Catholic community. It is in essence a matter of justice

and it is to the issues surrounding justice and homosexuality that the current study now turns.
CHAPTER 2

JUST LOVE OR UNJUST RESTRAINTS:
AN INVESTIGATION OF CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING
AND HOMOSEXUALITY

In his well-known social encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI makes
the bold declaration that “The world is sick.”¹ In light of this powerful and thought
provoking statement within the context of the document, Paul Wadell offers the
following comment,

The world is sick, and the disease eating away at it is the cancer of
injustice. It is not that things are just slightly amiss – a weak flu that just a
little rest can overcome. No, the cancer of injustice runs deep, so much so
that without radical personal and social transformation the survival of the
world is in question…left untreated, it creates a world characterized by
fear, instability and violence.²

While this observation must be viewed vis-à-vis the papal encyclical and its global tone,
the same observations may be applied to physical sexual relationships. The fact that love
and justice are often disconnected from sexuality and sexual ethics is not only scandalous
but also debilitating for both those persons who are engaged in intimate physical
relationships and for pastors and theologians who attempt to illuminate a faithful path to
human flourishing in the sexual sphere. The waters become particularly murky when it
comes to the issue of same-sex relationships. The Magisterium has made commendable
attempts both to insist upon certain fundamental rights for homosexual persons and to

¹Pope Paul VI, “Populorum Progressio: On the Development of Peoples,” in *Catholic Social
Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY:
Orbis Books, 1992), no. 66.
²Paul J. Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*
decry violent and social persecution against them.\textsuperscript{3} Unfortunately, these attempts have failed to address the issue of homosexual relationships and behaviors. Even on the part of theologians and ethicists, application of the norms of justice to the question of the moral status of same-sex relations remain in its infancy.\textsuperscript{4}

Accordingly, it is essential that Catholic sexual ethics examine the status of homosexuality through the lens of Catholic social ethics. This journey begins with an examination of the nature of justice in the Catholic ethical tradition and continues along the path of various principles that have become central to Catholic social teaching. In essence, mapping of this relatively uncharted territory is of the essence, seeing that the issue of homosexuality is anthropologically, theologically, and ethically rooted in Catholic understandings of relationality. Ergo, one must first review the concept of same-sex relationships from the perspective of the three categories of justice in the Catholic tradition.

\textit{The Role of Justice in the Formulation of a Same-Sex Ethic for the Formation of Conscience}\textsuperscript{5}

Justice, rightly identified as the maintenance of a balance between rights and responsibilities that work to support the common good, finds three traditional expressions

\textsuperscript{3}For example, see the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, \textit{Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons}, no. 10: “It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church’s pastors wherever it occurs. It reveals a kind of disregard for others which endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law.”

\textsuperscript{4}The most recent serious applications of the norms of justice in the context of Catholic sexual teaching can be found in Marvin M. Ellison, \textit{Erotic Justice: A Liberating Ethic of Sexuality} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) and Margaret Farley, \textit{Just Love, A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics} (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007). The former text does not reference the explicit connection between issues of justice and same-sex relations. Farley’s text allots only eight pages to the issue.

\textsuperscript{5}Once again the reader is reminded that the following study is not an affront to official Catholic teaching, but rather an aide to conscience formation for homosexual persons who subjectively find themselves in an irreversible homosexual orientation struggling with the call to a celibate lifestyle.
in the Roman Catholic ethical tradition. Each category of justice focuses upon a specific relationship in which human persons are engaged with the goal of fashioning a society that respects the dignity of all parties involved. Most often, justice has been invoked with regard to major social issues such as poverty, war, protection of the innocent, capital punishment, inadequate remuneration for just work, environmental irresponsibility and the like. To this point, questions regarding sexual ethics in general and homosexuality in particular have not been examined through the lens of this foundational moral virtue. Accordingly a review and application of each type of justice in regard to same-sex relationships is essential.

The first category of justice recognized by the Roman tradition is distributive justice. Here, the principles of justice regulate the relationship that exists between societies, institutions, and systems and the individual members of these groups seeking the common good, equitable participation, and individual human flourishing. Specifically, this form of justice “works from the top down,” indicating what responsibilities that organizations have with regard to their individual members. In particular, this expression of justice focuses upon the fundamental right of all persons to have equal access to all of the resources and opportunities that an organization has to offer in order to participate fully in the workings of said society. It goes so far as to say that providing opportunities for participation are a fundamental duty of these organizations.

When it comes to social ethics in a strict sense, distributive justice is a relatively

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easy concept for Catholic moral theology to articulate and to appropriate. When reviewing the essential nature of certain benefits and services such as health care, education, housing, food, protection, and employment, there is little debate in terms of societal responsibility (even though there may be little consensus as to the avenues that need to be taken in order to assure these essential rights for all). 8 In terms of the development of a sexual ethic, especially one that is concerned with the moral status of same-sex relations, appropriation of the virtue of distributive justice becomes much more difficult and contorted. In particular, the insight of David Hollenbach that “the participation of marginalized groups takes priority over the preservation of an order that excludes them” frequently goes unheeded. 9

The Catholic application of the virtue of distributive justice reflects significant imbalance when it comes to same-sex relations. In terms of sexual orientation, the Magisterium has made a concerted effort to articulate the need for basic goods and rights to be afforded to homosexual persons although it seems to be somewhat inconsistent. In its 1986 statement on the pastoral care of homosexual persons, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith strongly denounced any discriminatory behavior against homosexual persons appealing to fundamental norms relating to the notion of distributive justice. 10 In 1997, the then National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement that encouraged just support of homosexual persons by their families, in particular their

8Wadell, 224-25.
9David Hollenbach, Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 204.
10Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons, 1986, no. 10. “It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs. It reveals a kind of disregard for others which endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society.”
parents. On the other hand, the conclusion of the CDF document regarding the legal status of homosexual relationships states,

The Church teaches that respect for homosexual persons cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behaviour or to legal recognition of homosexual unions. The common good requires that laws recognize, promote and protect marriage as the basis of the family, the primary unit of society. Legal recognition of homosexual unions or placing them on the same level as marriage would mean not only the approval of deviant behaviour, with the consequence of making it a model in present-day society, but would also obscure basic values which belong to the common inheritance of humanity. The Church cannot fail to defend these values, for the good of men and women and for the good of society itself.

Thus, while same-sex orientation enjoys the status of conditional acceptance within the church it is clear that homosexual behaviors fail to fall under the umbrella of distributive justice.

What then should moral theologians conclude with regard to homosexuality in its essence and expression when viewing it in the framework of distributive justice properly understood and applied? While important in a larger frame of reference, an analysis of homosexuality in the context of secular society exceeds the boundaries of the current study. The institution in question is that of the Roman Catholic faith tradition. In terms of the question of homosexual orientation and the rights due those persons with an irreversible same-sex orientation, the Church’s responsibilities seem to have been met

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11 National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, 1997. This statement of the NCCB Committee on Marriage and the Family is not novel in terms of theological observations; however, it does stress the importance of the acceptance and integration of persons who discern themselves to possess an irreversible homosexual orientation.

12 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons* (2003), no. 11.
adequately.\textsuperscript{13} By contrast, rights and responsibilities on the part of the Church toward its homosexual members, in terms of physical expressions of love, have rarely been discussed under the umbrella of justice.

Do genuinely homosexual persons have sexual rights according to the virtue of distributive justice? Working from the general definition offered above, the \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church} notes that “distributive justice…regulates what the community owes its citizens in proportion to their contributions and needs.”\textsuperscript{14} Accordingly, the contributions and needs of individuals who experience innate homosexual attractions and desires need to be evaluated to move further to the development of a same-sex ethic that is anthropologically and theologically valid.

In terms of contributions, any of a number of general observations could be offered that correspond with the gifts and talents offered by members of the heterosexual community. Here it seems more important to focus upon three elements that are perhaps not unique, yet distinctive for those individuals who experience same-sex attractions and the desire for physical intimacy that accompanies them. The first of the contributions is the modeling of commitment. Contrary to typical gay stereotypes, as noted by Margaret Farley, commitment in homosexual relationships has the potential to “nurture, sustain, anchor, and transform sexuality” serving as “the heart of an ethic for sexual activities and relationships.”\textsuperscript{15} In homosexual genital relations, the desire for physical intimacy is substantive; it is erotic in the best sense of the term. The entire essence of the other is fascinating, perhaps to the reality of an ontological communion because of gender, and not merely because such intimate union provides the satisfaction of physical pleasure or

\textsuperscript{13}See notes 9, 10 and 11 above.
\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}, no. 2411.
\textsuperscript{15}Farley, \textit{Just Love}, 290.
the hope for a future legacy to be lived out in another. The other person is part of a bond that is not a means to an end, but rather a critical part of an existential union that cannot be severed with any ease. Such a witness to commitment is key for the Church on a variety of levels especially since such commitments are difficult to maintain because of a lack of social and sacramental structures. Here, a number of examples are worthy of notice. First, committed homosexual relationships striving for exclusive and permanent commitment model the “already…not yet” soteriological relationship that exists between Christ and the Church. Simply stated they point to the reality of Christian relational identity as broken yet holy. Second, homosexual relationships that are committed and striving for permanency contribute to personal growth and humanization in Christ’s image. As noted by Richard McCormick, in the case of individuals who are irreversibly homosexual and do not experience the call to celibate chastity, homosexual genital relationships may “approximate the qualities of the covenanted man-woman relationship through fidelity and exclusiveness,” because of the possibility of true spiritual sharing of the love for which human beings were created. Thus, at least in potential, same-sex relations offer a concrete model for societal and interpersonal commitment for the Church and world.

A second overall contribution that homosexual genital relations offer to the Church is an incarnation of the response to be creative on the personalist level. Arguments that there exists a frustrating sterility in homosexual liaisons are decidedly

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16 While speaking of the heterosexual phenomenon of love, C.S. Lewis also provides insight into love-making that is not oriented specifically to the end of functional union and procreation. See his discussion of romantic/sexual love in, The Four Loves (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960).


physicalist and fail to appreciate the nuances and diversity of human generativity. Fruitfulness is not reserved to the conceiving of children. As noted by Margaret Farley, “it can refer to multiple forms of fruitfulness in love for others, care for others, making the world a better place for others than just the two of us.” Strictly physicalist interpretations of procreativity in physical sexual relations seem to disallow the possibility of life being brought into the world in ways other that the conception, delivery, and rearing of children. At best, such an interpretation ignores the creativity attached to the appreciation and analysis of diverse human experience to which homosexual persons can avail us. At worst, a rejection of same-sex physical relationships ignores that the fullness of life was brought into the world not by an act of physical generativity, but rather by the whole of the Paschal Mystery, an intimate, unparalleled soteriological event that redeemed the world on all perceivable levels.

While related intimately to the first two categories of contributions noted above, same-sex attractions and behaviors inform all relationships, ranging from friendship to sacramental commitment, with regard to the virtue of equality. In terms of this instructive observation it must be noted that “engaging in homosexual activity does not…render impossible a proper appreciation of the other sex.” Rather, it seems as if heterosexual relationships often fall prey to the pattern of eroticism that is grounded in dominant/subordinate power models. Accordingly, the interplay that exists in same-sex relationships testifies that such behaviors are oppressive, non-normative, and unnatural.

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Attention to the dynamic that exists in homosexual relationships can model for all
relationships an erosion of the corruption of sexual power and invite an atmosphere of
mutual respect and pleasure that celebrates physical sexual activity along the entire
continuum.\textsuperscript{22}

Clearly the aforementioned points are representative of the significant
contributions that gay relations can offer to society at large as well as to the Church in
specific (especially in the formation of its moral teaching). Distributive justice however
does not refer to contributions of individual members of society, but rather, and perhaps
more importantly to the needs of individual members which in the present scenario is the
homosexual community. Again, three primary needs of homosexual persons that the
Church, in a genuine embrace of the virtue of justice, must respond to are 1) an
exploration of the means by which homosexual liaisons can “represent a good for all” and
be a source of “spiritual communion,”\textsuperscript{23} 2) the need for homosexual persons who are
involved in exclusive relationships striving for permanency to be recognized as fully
human in the eyes of God, society and the Church,\textsuperscript{24} and 3) a sustained engagement in the
struggle for sexual justice.\textsuperscript{25}

For the homosexual person, not called to a life of celibacy, genital expressions of
love may engender the most intimate form of friendship that leads naturally to spiritual
communion between the partners in their interpersonal relationship and their relationship

\textsuperscript{22}Marvin M. Ellison, Erotic Justice: A Liberating Ethic of Sexuality (Louisville: Westminster
\textsuperscript{23}Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2347. See also 2332, “sexuality…in a more general way
affects the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others.”
\textsuperscript{24}National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for
\textsuperscript{25}Mary E. Hobgood, “Marriage, Market Values, and Social Justice: Toward an Examination of
Compulsory Monogamy” in Redefining Sexual Ethics: A Sourcebook of Stories, Essays, and Poems, ed.
Susan E. Davies and Eleanor H. Haney (Cleveland, Pilgrim Press, 1991), 125.
with God. Same-sex genital complementarity that is a genuine expression of love for the other, may be the most authentic means by which gay men and women, “through their beliefs, convictions and actions, through their loves, passions, and attachments, together make themselves into someone they had not been before.”26 Clearly, there is not a physicalist complementarity in same-sex genital relations; however, this differentiation “raises the stakes” of the relationship as it were. “Communion,” especially spiritual communion, entails befriending only those with whom we may be mutually supportive in virtue.27 Additionally, it seems as if the homosexual bond, rooted in some form of physical intimacy, provides all couples “with a more sophisticated understanding of the complexities and relationships of power, attraction, affective bonds, and psychosexual maturity”28 because of the presumed mutuality between the partners. Thus, same-sex relations provide a venue to both fill the need to return models of virtue to the human community at large and allow for deep spiritual communion between individual couples.

A second need that has been identified for persons who seek to live a responsible, committed, and exclusive homosexual lifestyle is that of human fulfillment and flourishing. As noted by David Cloutier,

“human fulfillment ultimately is a matter of participation in relationships; it is sharing in the lives of others and of God. The object of the game of life is not to win or lose, but to sustain the game of love…by becoming a skilled player, a virtuous person in sustaining relationships of love and mutuality. We do so in a marvelous variety of ways, playing many interlocking games in which we learn how to friend and be “friended,” love and be loved…That life is the life of the Holy Spirit, which eternally

builds us into one body in Christ so that we share more and more in each other’s lives and in that communion that Jesus has eternally with the Father. That life never ends.  

Obviously, human fulfillment then involves intimate embrace of the virtue of love. Understanding the nature of the expressions of this love leads persons into very murky waters, especially those persons who find themselves experiencing an irreversible same-sex attraction. Margaret Farley sheds keen insight into the nature of “sexual” love that may inform believers with regard to the moral evaluation of homosexual genital relations that lead to human fulfillment. Specifically, Farley identifies a number of aspects with regard to sexual loves. First, she notes that sexual love is a principal motivating force for and the foundation of “fuller union with, and greater affirmation of, the beloved.” She continues with the observation that sexual love is a both a springboard and true path to “happiness and wholeness” where in learning to love another who is physically present, one can be led to an experience of loving all creation, and beyond that, a true experience of loving and being loved by the divine. Farley also notes that the experience of sexual love, at its apex, allows for the possibility of “conversation and communication,” which a plethora of theological ethicists will identify as being at the heart of human fulfillment.

A third need of homosexual persons, under the auspices of the Church’s attempt

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30Farley, Just Love, 171.
31Ibid., 172. One may assume correctly that Farley is speaking of the notion of happiness based upon the work of Plato and Aristotle, namely that true happiness comes from the fulfillment of one’s divinely willed purpose. As she notes, in the celebration of sexual love, “he or she [the lovers] will finally come to the absolutely Beautiful.”
32Ibid., 173.
to embrace authentically the virtue of justice, is a sustained commitment to the struggle for sexual justice. The key to commitment to this struggle is the recognition that persons, regardless of sexual identity, orientation, or activity must always be embraced as subjects and never viewed as objects.\textsuperscript{34} Such a commitment to ensuring sexual justice does not entail the reversal of sexual hierarchy, that is a fundamental change where the marginalized assert the validity of their sexual identity and physical intimacy to the point where the normative group then become the oppressed.\textsuperscript{35} Obviously, such practices would not only be counter productive, but also equally unjust. Rather, a commitment to the aforementioned struggle involves a healthy skepticism that challenges the use of traditional sources of theological ethics, a critique of the historical evolution of patriarchal values, and lack of concern for the virtue of respectability that prevents homosexual persons from what may be valid engagement in same-sex relations that involve physical genital intimacy.\textsuperscript{36} In addition, the struggle for justice for homosexual persons, requires direct confrontation of the underlying causes for homophobia that both runs rampant in contemporary culture and, correspondingly, prevents much fruitful sociological, psychological, and theological dialogue in this arena.

Having reviewed the issue of same-sex relationality from the perspective of distributive justice, it is necessary to turn to the second category of justice that is articulated in the Roman Catholic Tradition, namely contributive justice, more commonly known as social justice.\textsuperscript{37} While a review of the virtue of distributive justice explores the potential contributions that can be made by practicing same-sex couples, contributive

\textsuperscript{34}James F. Keenen, “Virtue Ethics and Sexual Ethics” \textit{Louvain Studies} (2005): 192.
\textsuperscript{35}Ellison, 70.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., 72-75.
justice explores what individual homosexual persons *owe* to society, and more importantly, in light of the present study, what these persons owe to the institutional Church. Before determining specific categories that indicate what homosexuals owe to society it is best to determine, in an extremely limited fashion what is understood by the concept of duty in the Christian tradition. Basically, for the purposes of the present study, duty implies a motive for action that is “unconditional’ and not subject to external qualifications” so that the action must be performed regardless of “personal inclinations and without calculating the advantages or disadvantages to ourselves based upon the anticipated consequences of the act.” With this nuance in mind, it would seem that homosexual persons, attempting to justify in good conscience the validity of sexual genital relations, would need to attend to the following obligations: 1) authentic embrace of the virtue of chastity and 2) acknowledgement of and respect for the heterosexual norm in terms of Catholic Magisterial teachings and everyday experience.

Many persons have attempted to define “chastity”; however, few articulations have gone beyond a physicalist understanding of sexuality. Gerald Coleman, while quite brief, seems to be on target in his assessment that “chastity is an expression of moral goodness in the sexual sphere.” Such a statement, while entirely correct, requires some exegesis and application if it may be possible to relate this virtue authentically to the experience of same-sex couples who are in committed relationships that are striving for permanency and involve physical genital intimacy. Clearly, chastity involves much more than a mere appropriation of the virtues of prudence and temperance in the realm of

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39 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2337.
genital sexual relations. Chastity is a virtue of integration, the integration of sexual love and desire in one’s full humanity so that he or she may be loving, just, generous, genuine, and faithful in both sexual commitments and the divine call to befriend the whole of humanity. Thus, the goal of chastity does not seem to be sexual repression and a denial of the validity of physical pleasure. Rather, it is a virtue, and a vocation,\textsuperscript{41} that serves to form persons into individuals who respect human dignity and serve the common good. Its aims are to promote human flourishing in both interpersonal and communal relationships. John Grabowski summarizes this understanding of chastity well in noting that

An appreciation and renewed understanding of the virtue of chastity indeed has much to offer contemporary culture. In a culture where sexual expression is routinely reduced to a narcissistic search for ecstatic release and personal satisfaction, it recalls the deeper values at stake in sexual relationships. Chastity enables sex to be understood within the context of human dignity, human growth, and human culture. In this way, it points toward and makes possible the human vocation to communion in love.\textsuperscript{42}

In essence, it seems that the heart of chastity is the desire to serve the other, whether that person be one’s sexual partner or someone who comes under the umbrella of the Christian understanding of “neighbor”.

Given the aforementioned understanding of the virtue of chastity, grounded in the virtue of charity that promotes both individual human dignity as well as the common good, it would appear that homosexual persons in committed relationships are capable of fulfilling their moral obligation to embrace the virtue of chastity. One problem however does remain. In all official Magisterial documents, conjugal chastity is clearly directed

\textsuperscript{41}Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part Three, Article 6, section II.
\textsuperscript{42}John S. Grabowski, Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 95.
toward those persons who have embraced a sacramental marital commitment.\footnote{Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2337.} As indicated clearly in Chapter 1, the church has opted consistently for a heterosexual norm based upon it understanding of scripture, natural law, and tradition. By the same token, this conclusion seems to be based upon a doubt of fact that attempts to safeguard physical complementarity as the framework for physical sexual commitments. The current discussion of the virtue of chastity, within the larger discussion of contributive justice seems to warrant the possibility of the embrace of chastity on the part of persons with same-sex attractions and behaviors, at least on a subjective level. Persons are not reduced to their sexual orientation and activity. Rather authentic humanity is more comprehensive in its call to a commitment to love unconditionally.\footnote{Farley, Just Love, 295.} Therefore, it appears that homosexual persons engaged in sexual relations are at least capable of fulfilling the obligation to embrace the virtue of chastity.

The second significant obligation of homosexual persons under the category of contributive justice is acknowledgement of and respect for the heterosexual norm in terms of Catholic Magisterial teachings and everyday experience. Without question, it has been the teaching of the Roman Catholic Tradition that conjugal love and chastity is expressed normatively in the “union in flesh” between a man and woman in the context of the permanent, exclusive, sacramental context of marriage.\footnote{Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 2331-2337.} A majority of Catholic moral theologians would agree with this point, regardless of their leanings in either the direction of traditional or progressive thought. James Hanigan, who is generally centrist but rather conservative in the area of sexual ethics argues that both male and female
sexuality is fundamentally spousal and that they are “ordered to interpersonal union”.\textsuperscript{46} Richard McCormick, who was also generally centrist with leftist leanings when it came to Catholic sexual ethics argued that physical genital expressions of interpersonal love should lead to personal growth, human fulfillment, and authentic discipleship. Accordingly, he notes that the optimum and normative expression of that love is within the context of “the man-woman relationship of covenanted (permanent and exclusive) friendship.\textsuperscript{47} Ergo, in the theological realm, the majority of ethicists view heterosexual genital relations as the “norm”.

In light of the aforementioned consensus, it seems logical that same-sex couples should acknowledge heterosexual behavior as normative, even if in conscience these gay men and women believe that their relationships and behaviors are not only acceptable but also experiences of grace. Unfortunately, due to what may be perceived as decades of overt discrimination, some authors and some practicing gays and lesbians can fall prey to reverse discrimination where they can become the oppressors completely rejecting the heterosexuality as the norm. In terms of basic human experience, some homosexual persons discriminate against heterosexual persons by way of verbal slurs. For decades, some gay persons refer to straight persons by the pejorative term, “breeders”. Some “gay pride” demonstrations have become not only verbally offensive but also physically


\textsuperscript{47} Richard A. McCormick, S.J., The Critical Calling: Reflection on Moral Dilemmas Since Vatican II (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1989), 308. It is important to note that this observation is the fifth of six points of a “modest suggestion” on the part of McCormick regarding male homosexuality. In his final statement McCormick does conclude that if “an individual is incapable of structuring his sexual intimacy within such a relationship (is irreversibly homosexual) and is not called to celibacy for the Kingdom [subject to his own decision before God] the liberating presence and concern of the community will take a different form.”
violent toward heterosexuals.\textsuperscript{48} Such behavior clearly rejects a heterosexual norm. In terms of texts and treatises, some authors seem to reject the very concept of “norm” when it comes to physical sexuality.\textsuperscript{49}

According to the norms of contributive justice, individuals with a same-sex orientation must adopt such attitudes and behaviors as a matter of duty. This mandate is true for at least two simple but important reasons. First, as noted above, it has been relatively well established by means of an inclusive theological consensus that a heterosexual norm does exist in terms of genital sexual expression. Second, human dignity is a right afforded to all people in society according to Catholic social teaching. Any affront to said dignity, including forms of reverse discrimination in the area of human sexuality, signifies a serious rejection of the universal moral requirement to love one’s neighbor. Therefore, only those homosexual persons who are truly chaste and consciously fulfilling their obligations to society are said to be conforming to the norms of contributive justice.

The last category of justice that applies to the evaluation of homosexuality and the behaviors naturally related to it is that of commutative justice. In particular, commutative justice regulates interpersonal relationships, specifically those arrangements, contracts, and agreements that are established between individual members of society.\textsuperscript{50} In a litigating society, such as the one that characterizes the western hemisphere of the “developed” world, this category of justice does not seem to be taken as seriously as

\textsuperscript{48} The present observation is based upon more than a decade of pastoral counseling to the gay and lesbian community. For a contemporary and public example, see Adrienne P. Samuels, “A New Intolerance Visits Provincetown; Police Say Gays Accused of Slurs,” Boston Globe, July 14, 2006.


needed. If the truth be told however, given the dynamic of interpersonal relations, this approach to justice may be the most important with regard to the evaluation of same-sex relationships in terms of the formation of conscience, especially in circumstances which involve individuals who are irreversibly homosexual and who have not discerned a call to committed celibacy. Accordingly there exist a number of categories that require exploration in order to develop a same sex ethic worthy of consideration in the forum of personal conscience regarding to the virtue of commutative justice. Specifically, these forums are: 1) autonomy and free consent with regard to genital sexual relations; 2) mutuality in terms of both of the partners in relationship; 3) exclusive commitment that strives for permanency; 4) fruitfulness, which in this particular circumstance mandates an acceptance of creative personalist fidelity rather that a rigid physicalist understanding of sexual complementarity and procreation and finally; 5) friendship, which is perhaps the most elusive of the categories. Accordingly, each of these facets of commutative justice will be examined in turn.

Autonomy and free consent with regard to partners in same-sex relations seems to have been problematic within the Christian sphere since the penning of the New Testament texts.\textsuperscript{51} This criteria is based upon a foundational principle of Catholic social teaching; namely that of mutual respect. Nothing that compromises the ability of an individual to enter freely into intimate physical relations with another can be deemed acceptable in terms of a development of a same-sex ethic for conscience formation. Specifically, “rape, violence, harmful use of power, seduction and manipulation of maturity, intellectual disability or special dependency – is ruled out for same-sex

\textsuperscript{51}See my discussion regarding the writings of Paul, in particular those found in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy found in the first section of this study. As noted there, homosexual liaisons frequently were the result of kidnapping and homosexual rape of minors, i.e., pedophilia and ephebophilia.
relationships.” In addition, by virtue of the mandates of commutative justice, homosexual relations must be characterized by honesty on a variety of levels ranging from basic communication with regard to expectations and desires, to on-going discernment of the context and characteristics of the levels of intimacy experienced within the context of the physical parameters of the relationship.

A second area falling under the umbrella of commutative justice in the arena of same-sex relationships is that of mutuality. Necessarily, mutuality entails an appreciation of the innate equality that exists between the partners in the relationship. The haunting question however with regard to this aspect of justice is the definition of “reasonable equality” and “mutuality.” Given the nature of same-sex relationships, especially in the reality of the phenomenon of male homosexuality, the establishment of a clear definition and understanding of mutuality and equality becomes a daunting task. The notion of mutuality seems to be significantly complex. First, there is the notion of desire. As noted by James Hanigan, the notion of “falling in love” is a faulty concept. Accordingly, he argues strongly, in contrast, that love is anything but a passive encounter. Rather entrance into the dynamic of love represents a formal decision and personal commitment to another human being oriented toward (desiring) their existential happiness and ultimately to their good. Such commitment or desire necessarily includes but is not limited to physical communion, which is to be distinguished from physicalist complementarity that cannot be embraced in homosexual genital unions. A second

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52 Farley, Just Love, 289.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
aspect of mutuality is that of action which unfortunately has often been reduced to the notions of complementary proactivity and response. Rather, the foundation of action in any sexual relationship is shared joy, happiness (in the Aristotelian sense), and a desire for good on the part of the couple that respects individual autonomy (as noted above) and that promotes authentic human flourishing both as individuals and as a couple. As observed by Aquinas, as well as modern interpreters of his thought, reciprocity is an essential criterion that is required for authentic mutual love that promotes human flourishing. Note well the commentary of Paul Wadell regarding this insight on the part of Aquinas:

Friendships cannot be one-sided. We may love one another dearly, we may devote ourselves to seeking her good, we may will nothing except what makes her happy, but even though that might be a splendid love, if it were not reciprocated, it would not be a friendship. Friendships are relationships in which each person knows the good he wishes for the other is the also the good the other wishes for him. As Thomas notes, the reciprocity needed for friendship is based on the good intrinsic to the friendship itself. What each friend seeks for the other is this shared good, this good both want for themselves. Friendship has to be reciprocal for the life of the friendship, this ongoing participation in the friendship’s good, to be possible. Unless what we work for in the other is returned to them by us, the project by which friendships are known cannot occur.

While friendship is proposed by the current study as a unique category and criterion for examining the validity of same-sex relationships under the umbrella of commutative justice, as noted above, it is necessary to review the notion of reciprocity that is inherent to friendship. Clearly, as noted by Thomas and his interpreters, reciprocity is key to intimate interpersonal relationships and a criterion that could be satisfied in same-sex unions that are viewed through a lens other than that of physicalism. Finally, the fact that human persons are created in the image and likeness of God can lead to an understanding.

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of mutuality and reciprocity that may validate homosexual relationships. Simply stated, the mutual interplay in love between the members of the Trinity serves as the highest form of love, one that far exceeds human comprehension. In fact, it transcends the limits of human loving that can become limited to a desire for physical communion that can be caught up in the trappings of pleasure and assurances of creating a legacy in the ongoing narrative of humanity. Homosexual love reflects this image in its reciprocity because of the spiritual plane upon which it exists, not that it is devoid of pleasure and sensuality but rather in its innate ability to reflect and respond to the desire of the other in a manner that is not only existential but also ontological.

A third category that is helpful for the formation of conscience with regard to same-sex relations under the heading of commutative justice is that of exclusivity and permanency. It must be clear from the beginning of the current musings that the present category does not attempt to place homosexual relationships in the cast of sacramental marriage as it has been understood by the Church for centuries as existing between a male and female; however, it does understand marriage as a model or type against which the validity of same-sex unions can be measured. Perhaps the best means of examining this possibility of exclusivity and permanency in the contexts of homosexual relationships is through the lens of a theology of covenant. Three aspects of such a theology are worthy of mention here. First, covenants are relationships that are entered into freely by both parties, thereby naturally availing themselves to the characteristics of mutuality and lasting fidelity. Second, it has been the long-standing tradition of the

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59 Salzman & Lawler, *The Sexual Person*
Church to view several sacraments in the context of covenant in light of their natural proclivity toward permanence and fidelity, namely, Baptism, Eucharist and Marriage.  

Third, covenants, which are marked fundamentally by permanence and exclusivity are ordered naturally toward generativity; however, this generativity is not linked fundamentally to the bearing of children, rather it is much more “open-ended,” and involves a couple’s extension of themselves into the world in service.

The final observation regarding the third category that nuances the importance of commutative justice and signifies the exploration of the possibility of a same-sex ethic serves as an appropriate segue to the fourth category, namely fruitfulness, which mandates an acceptance of creative personalist fidelity rather that a rigid physicalist understanding of sexual complementarity and procreation. This category is perhaps best understood from the perspective Henri Nouwen understanding of the pairing of fecundity and love. Nouwen identifies three dimensions of a fecund or fruitful life, all of which are rooted in relationships that do not seem to be restricted to the boundaries of physicalist sexual complementarity. First he discusses the aspect of vulnerability. In essence, this aspect of fecundity is marked by the ability to intimately share acknowledged weaknesses and needs in the spirit of Jesus, who in vulnerability brought the renewed possibility for eternal life. The second characteristic of fecundity identified by Nouwen is gratitude which “presupposes a willingness to recognize our

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64 Ibid., 66.
dependence upon others and to receive their help and support. Finally, fecundity and fruitfulness is marked by care, in particular the mutual love and care that individuals receive from one another. These three characteristics of fecund relationships are in no way restricted to marital sexual intimacy. Gay couples have every opportunity to experience the aspects of fecundity, perhaps even more so because of their marginalized status both in society (socially and politically) and in the Church (anthropologically, theologically and ethically). When liberated from the absolute necessity of combining sexual intimacy with biological procreativity, relationships assume a character that may represent the most authentic expression of mutuality and in so doing, truly reflect a notion of commutative justice that respects the rights and responsibilities of both individuals who have invested themselves in the relationship.

The final category, and perhaps the most important one regarding the moral assessment of the possibility of same-sex genital relations under the auspices of the virtue of commutative justice is that of friendship. A number of observations are in order with regard to meditations upon friendship from Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and in a more contemporary synthesis offered by Paul Wadell. First, noting the work of Aristotle, friendship is an intrinsic good because it is the relationship in which people could come to understand and participate in the purpose for which life is given. Thus, it seems as if Aristotle is suggesting that friendship is a school of virtue in which persons learn about the reality of human fulfillment because it serves as the canvas on which human beings experience true self-knowledge. In truly knowing one’s friend, one comes to know

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65Ibid., 68.
66Ibid., 71.

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himself or herself. It is plausible to assert that in a same-sex relationship, one can experience knowledge of the other on the deepest of levels, that is, both existentially and ontologically, i.e., in terms of concrete relationality and on the level of one’s created and intrinsic nature. The communion between the two partners in such a relationship is profound not due to physicalist complementarity but rather as a result of psycho-spiritual similarities that are inherent to gender. This kinship and connectedness has the potential to cultivate a life of virtue that extends far beyond sexual intercourse. Thus, while Aristotle’s philosophy of friendship does not advocate the possibility of same-sex genital relations in any direct manner, it does provide a means for understanding the opportunity to enter into friendship as an inherent human right. His observations provide a context that allows for the possibility of homosexual friends as an avenue to true human fulfillment that may involve physical sexual engagement between the individuals who are partnered in the friendship.

Even more directly than Aristotle, Augustine fundamentally embraces that friendship as a school of virtue, in particular the school for maturing in Christian love. This observation is no small matter given the fact that love is the primary theological virtue, and as such, friendship becomes the ultimate path to communion with God. In this regard, Marie Aquinas McNamera offers the four following observations regarding Augustine’s analysis of friendship noting as a preface Augustine’s indebtedness to classical authors as a foundation for his personal reflections. Augustine insists that the origin of human friendship is God. Second, he observes that friendship is both rooted in God and passionately seeks God. Third, he insists that true friendship is transformed by

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grace, going beyond the thoughts of the classical authors, but desiring for the friend the embrace of a virtuous life and a desire for eternal life with God in heaven. Fourth, Augustine insists that friendships only reach perfection when all of redeemed humanity is in perfect relationship with God.\(^69\)

Given these observations of Augustine, a number of questions need to be considered when evaluating the status of same-sex genital relationships under the heading of commutative justice. If two individuals find themselves to be irreversibly homosexual as a matter of conscience,\(^70\) and they are seeking a relationship that is striving for permanency that will involve friendship that leads to sexual intimacy, is it not a matter of justice for them to pursue said relationship? Would it be possible to assert that prohibiting such a friendship virtually works to expel them from what Augustine would indirectly equate to a school of Christian love? Additionally, it has been asserted that the preferential love of friendship is “the context in which agape love is learned.”\(^71\) Agapic love is clearly the complete selfless love of others modeled by the kenosis of Jesus upon the cross for the redemption of the world. The traditional teaching of the Catholic Church is that all who are baptized into the death of Christ are called to mirror that love. If this is true, is absolute denial of a same-sex friendship that involves physical sexual activity, which could be for the couple a divine means of instilling the virtue of love, a sin against commutative justice? Given the weight of the issue of the absolute


\(^{70}\)Once again the reader is reminded of two important issues. First, the present study does not purport to advance the argument that same-sex relationships are normative and challenge official church teaching on homosexuality. It does however value the role of conscience in moral decision-making. Accordingly, the aforementioned statement that “If two individuals find themselves to be irreversibly homosexual as a matter of conscience” presumes that both potential partners have attempted to form their consciences by virtue of the established and time tested tradition of the church. In the end if this is the case, per that tradition, conscience remains the final arbiter (per Gaudium et Spes, paragraph no. 16).

prohibition of sexual diversity in the church, as same-sex couples form their consciences, these questions must be given adequate attention.

Thomas Aquinas provides one further traditional nuance when it comes to a theology of friendship that needs to be explored when discussing the potential validity of same-sex relationships that might be physically intimate under the umbrella of the teaching of commutative justice. His discussions of friendship are long and detailed and span several sections of the *Summa Theologicae*. While depending heavily on the work of Aristotle and Augustine, he ultimately connects the notion of friendship with his understanding of happiness. For Thomas, happiness is a teleological reality, characterized by striving for and grasping the universal good which is the Beatific Vision.\(^72\) Happiness, properly understood is the only means by which one can be considered fully human. The journey toward human happiness is not one that is isolated or solitary. While contemplation, which is a solitary activity, is a key element in the pursuit of happiness, action is also essential. One such action is engagement in the commitment of friendship. Quite directly, Thomas is clear in his observation that friends contribute to the possibility of engaging true happiness.\(^73\) Given these basic observations of Aquinas reflecting upon ultimate human destiny through the lens of happiness, it would appear that friendship, in various forms, is not only a fundamental right for

\(^72\) *Summa Theologicae* (hereafter *ST*) Ia IIae q. 5, a. 1

\(^73\) *ST* Ia IIae q. 4 a. 8. For an excellent summary and evaluation of Aquinas’ treatment of the virtue of happiness and its absolute necessity in the Christian life, see George Wieland, “Happiness ( Ia Ilae, qq. 1-5) trans. Grant Kapland in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 57-68. Note well Wieland’s concluding comment: “Thomas has shown what the end of human life consists in: namely the beatific vision. He has shown that the person is by nature able to possess the infinite good. But this fundamental openness does not *eo ipso* include the active ability of the creature to bridge the infinite distance to the Creator through his or her own efforts. The beatific vision remains a gift and a grace. Thomas insists on the proper order of things. The acquisition of happiness depends also on human activity. ‘Therefore, since it is necessary to arrive at happiness through actions, it is necessary to consider next human actions’ (Ia Ilae q. 6 Prol.). Without question, engagement in the commitment of friendship is one of these proleptic, modeling actions.
humans, but even more importantly in the context of his worldview a duty and absolute responsibility.

What then does this brief review of Aquinas’ theology of friendship say to a discussion of homosexual relationships within the context of a discussion of commutative justice related to genital sexual activity? If happiness is an innate right, and also a necessity as it were in the theological framework of Aquinas, and it is achieved by the action of engaging in intimate relationships, it is necessary to consider once again homosexual friendship that involves physical intimacy as a variable in the determination of the legitimacy of same-sex genital relations. As noted earlier in a variety of contexts within the present study, physical intimacy is a means of manifesting one’s truest self to another.74 Within the context of friendship it may be a matter of commutative justice that same-sex genital relations be considered in the formation of conscience within the context of committed, exclusive relationships. This assertion seems to be especially accurate if indeed Aquinas is correct that friendship provides an avenue to happiness in terms of vicarious experience of friendship with God.

The most recent examination of friendship and the most explicit study of friendship and its connection to the moral life within the Catholic Tradition are offered by Paul Wadell75 and may be of great importance when proposing avenues for the formation of conscience regarding homo-genital activity in committed and exclusive relationships. Perhaps what is most insightful in terms of Wadell’s work on friendship is his ability to synthesize the tradition of Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas in his assertion that

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friendship “draws us out of ourselves and teaches us how to care for others for their own sake;” an observation that is overtly important theologically and one that is related intrinsically to the Christian moral life. In accord with the aforementioned Tradition, friendship teaches one benevolence and beneficence which results in human persons moving beyond the realities of personal gratification, self-interest, and self-concern which continue to be the result of the reality of original sin. According to Wadell, friendship also schools individuals in self-knowledge by removing the selectivity of one’s perceptions as well as challenging the arrogance of ignoring one’s shortcomings. Yet another manner in which friendship aids one in the quest to become fully human is in the fact that true friends are fully committed to what is best and most promising for one another. Friendship assists in the true knowledge and love of the good, while never exhausting the possibility for greater appreciation of it and the desire to integrate the good as formally characteristic of one’s moral life. Finally, according to Wadell, friends provide an existential avenue to the sacred. As he notes when it comes to the deepest and most intimate of friends, “it is not just that they help one another understand the attitudes, habits, and practices that are conducive to holiness; rather, it is that through the disciplines, rituals, and practices of a shared way of life, they acquire all those things together.” Friendship, and the characteristics that define it as an existential reality are not a matter of privilege, but rather a matter of commutative justice for all human beings. 

77Wadell, Happiness and the Christian Moral Life, 29.
78Ibid. 31.
80Wadell, Happiness and the Christian Moral Life, 35.
Once again the question arises: What do such observations add to the discussion of same-sex friendships that are genital in nature in relation to the demands of commutative justice? As has been the consistent practice of the present section, it is key to turn to the reality that human persons require and are obligated to engage in intimate relationships with one another as a means of beginning to understand divine intimacy. Looking at the reality of intimacy through yet another lens so as to broaden the appreciation of its importance, Darlene Fozard Weaver has defined it as “…the mutual indwelling of persons, a participation in, belonging to, and possession by one another.”81 In contrast to popular definition, this possession is a vehicle for liberation that allows the partners to be generous and generative, both of which are essential characteristics of Christian discipleship. Also, Wadell’s criteria explored above gives credence to Margaret Farley’s observation that “homosexuality can be a way of embodying responsible love and sustaining human friendship.”82 Finally, Wadell’s criteria supports the claim that in terms of the New Natural Law Theory, homosexual acts in the context of monogamous, loving, and committed relationships may for couples “facilitate the integration of their human sexuality, thereby realizing the basic good of self-realization”83 and lead to full human flourishing.

Given the aforementioned observations of the present section, it is clear that the cardinal virtue of justice in its various manifestations plays an essential role in the evaluation of same-sex relationships and homo-genital activity in terms of the formation

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83 Salzmann and Lawler, The Sexual Person, 66.
of conscience on the part of individual homosexual couples. Justice, as a virtue is not the only aspect of Catholic Social Teaching that can impact the process. Accordingly, this project now turns to an examination of the relationship between concepts of solidarity, participation, the common good and homo-genital behaviors.

The Role of the Concepts of Solidarity, Participation, and the Common Good in the Formation of a Same-Sex Ethic to Conscience Formation

The concepts of solidarity, participation, and the common good are all subsets of the moral virtue of justice; however, their impact upon an evaluation of an ethic for same-sex genital relationships needs to be evaluated separately from the concepts of distributive, contributive, and commutative justice. Accordingly, some basic definitions seem to be appropriate here. In terms of the concept of solidarity, the present study recognizes the plethora of meanings embodied by this term. In essence, it is a statement about human interdependence that is required to allow human persons to realize their full potential and actualize their innate human dignity because of the ability to commune with others in relationships that are mutually beneficial. Michael and Kenneth Himes take this notion of solidarity further in their association of this virtue with the foundational Christian creeds noting that when the Church is described as “‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic’ what is claimed, among other things, is that there is a connection between unity, universality, and trans-temporality and holiness.” Thus, a certain solidarity with the whole human race, “saints and sinners”, regardless of sexual

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84 Investigation of the theme of the common good will mirror conclusions drawn by the discussion of distributive justice above; however, the very concept of the common good invites some significant nuances and further explanations.

85 Thomas Massaro, S.J., Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2000), 120.

orientation and activity, must be explored to assist the church in its struggle to be an authentic presence in the world. Regarding the concept of participation, it is not one that has been utilized in conversations regarding sexuality; however, a more careful consideration of this principle reveals that it does rest at the heart of the Church’s claim to be authentic. By definition, participation, as noted by the U.S. Catholic Bishops, “implies that persons have an obligation to be active and productive participants in the life of the society and that society has a duty to enable them to participate in this way.”

While originally intended for an economic context, this fundamental principle of Catholic social teaching cannot be removed from the area of sexuality, which is essentially relational, and a fundamental means by which persons express their humanity and engage society. Finally, the notion of the common good, while also somewhat elusive in common parlance, can be nuanced for the purposes of the present study which engages Catholic social teaching as an important source for the formation of conscience in the arena of sexual ethics in general and homosexuality in particular. Ultimately, discussion of the common good references the good of society understood inclusively, and following a Thomistic framework (regarding the case in point, i.e., sexual ethics), it necessarily includes the bonds of affection and love that unite persons together in the at the most fundamental levels of community (i.e., interpersonal intimate relationships, family, etc.).

Ergo, the formation of conscience regarding same-sex relationships must be visited vis-à-vis the flourishing of the couple and the potential for betterment of society as a whole.

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Having provided foundational definitions of these key concepts with regard to social ethics, it is essential to apply them to the reality of sexual relationships, in particular homosexual relationships that continue to be the most challenging for both the Church and society. As a point of departure for a discussion of the notion of solidarity, one would do well to note Kelly S. Johnson’s observation in relation to the idea of solidarity that “financially, politically, in environment and culturally, and even spiritually, humans are interconnected and can only live well when they attend to those bonds.”

Given this forum, it is reasonable to place sexuality under the auspices of both culture and spirituality. To live well, human persons must be in right relationships that result in human flourishing. In the case of homosexual men and lesbian women, these healthy bonds cannot be restricted to interpersonal relationships, but rather, they must extend to society as a whole. Such a demanding claim requires the creation of a portrait of these relational bonds.

Key to the development of the aforementioned portrait of the connection between same-sex relationships and solidarity is a foundational understanding of the virtue of love within the context of Christianity on a personal level. David McCarthy encapsulates this understanding very well in manner that is quite helpful. Specifically he notes that

Love has its end in sharing our lives, so that the distinctive character of human love, specifically in terms of our sensual nature, is conceived as our way toward fulfillment in the love of God. Through grace, our longings can be transformed by what we do. Through grace, we can become human agents of God’s love and our loving will have real effects in responding to the alienation of the world. Our need to love, emotions

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90 Certainly, homosexuality is in no way removed from the sphere of politics, a point that will be given brief attention in this study; however, political agendas regarding same-sex unions is not the primary focus of this study. For a brief yet thorough overview of the relationship between justice, solidarity, politics, and homosexuality see Farley, Just Love, 288-294.
and affections, sensory and bodily desires, are reasons for the journey and hunger for the heavenly banquet...Love brings unity and rest, the integrity of our desires and the coherence of relationships between God, self, and neighbor.\textsuperscript{91}

In essence, it is only through personal love that one is able to adopt a stance where they are able to attend to the needs of the wider human community through expressions of agapic love.

Under the general heading of the social teaching of the Catholic Church and its specific call to solidarity the following proposal is essential when evaluating homosexual relations in the formation of conscience. We are responsible to a degree for our fellow human persons’ ability to love inclusively. Our love for them potentially invites reciprocity as well as a desire for their love to be more outwardly focused in general. In essence, our degree of loving others makes us share modestly in the responsibility for their moral goodness or badness.\textsuperscript{92}

On the other hand, when love is given so abundantly that it cannot help but merit a loving response, it becomes the heart, the very “lifeblood of a moral solidarity of persons between us. With every act of love performed a community of love grows.”\textsuperscript{93}

Persons who have the great grace of being loved by others become passionate lovers themselves. They are able to fulfill their destiny to become co-workers in the building up of the kingdom of God. They experience the solidarity that is seeded in Baptism sacramentally and nurtured experientially. They live up to their dignity of being created in the image of God who is the ultimate community of love \textit{ad intra} and \textit{ad extra}.


What then does a discussion of solidarity in the Catholic moral tradition bring to bear on an ethical evaluation of the formation of conscience regarding the sexual intimacy of same-sex couples? One thing is certain anthropologically, theologically, and ethically: human persons have an innate right to be loved by another human person. One of the many ways of expressing this love is through physical sexual intimacy, which necessarily involves pleasure. Rather than fostering narcissism, the pleasurable communion deepens the interests of the relationship. Additionally, it links the interest of the self and the interests of “the other” in a profound way.\footnote{Christine Gudorf, 
\textit{Body, Sex, and Pleasure} (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994), especially chapter 4.} It seems, at least in theory that such an unification cannot result in anything but a love that is outwardly focused toward one’s sisters and brothers in the human family. In addition, one could ask legitimately the question if such love is destined to deepen what can only be called the virtue of solidarity in terms of the lack of the opportunity of experiencing Church approval for same-sex relationships.

What is problematic is that Catholic sexual ethics does not allow such intimacy for same-sex couples. It is clear on the objective level that the aforementioned physical intimacy could not be the experience of lesbian women and homosexual men without falling into the realm of acts that are to be considered intrinsically evil. While it is clear that on the objective level, given the doubt of fact regarding traditional sources, it is most prudent to maintain the stance that heterosexual physical genital relations are normative, given the introduction of the source of Catholic social teaching, in particular solidarity as outlined above, it is not so simple to draw clear lines on the subjective level. Thus,
solidarity that is grounded in interpersonal love, continues to raise questions about individual conscious decisions regarding homosexual acts.

The social justice theme regarding participation also requires significant attention on at least three different levels: interpersonal, societal, and ecclesial. Before attending to these specific levels a few nuances need to be offered to frame the importance of the concept of participation in the development of a “subjective” ethic of homogenital activity for the purpose of conscience formation in light of the recognized lack of infallibility in this area of Catholic sexual ethics. First, exclusion from significant, if not full participation in the life of the communities to which one belongs frustrates one’s legitimate aspirations to express human freedom, thereby detracting from the innate and God-given dignity of the person. Second, lack of full participation fails to acknowledge the fact that human fulfillment and flourishing does not occur in a vacuum since it is recognized that human dignity and destiny are always social categories. Third, full participation in the communities to which human beings belong is necessary to maintain the rights to which these individuals lay claim and to fulfill the responsibilities associated with them. Fourth, full and active participation in the communities to which one belongs ensures that the virtue of and right to equality (an essential element of the virtue of justice) is never compromised.

Having provided a backdrop for the principle of participation, one can now move to an exploration of the specific levels mentioned above. First is the right to interpersonal participation, i.e., that is the ability to engage freely in intimate relationships with others which may include genital intimacy. It is clear from the last chapter’s review of the

95 Massaro, Living Justice, 123.
96 Johnson, Catholic Social Teaching, 228.
teaching of the Magisterium that this scenario is not a possibility for the homosexual person. Celibate chastity is imposed and not chosen. Therefore, same-sex couples do not have full access to the means of participation in an important avenue toward human flourishing and fulfillment.\textsuperscript{97} What may be most problematic when undergoing the rigors of the formation of conscience is determining whether the denial of potential participation in same-sex relationships that can mirror family life\textsuperscript{98}, is more sinful than physical acts of intimacy that are undeniably non-normative and morally prohibited by Church teaching. As always, this does not suggest that a genital dimension to same-sex relationships is acceptable absolutely, for “the intensity of friendships – precisely without genital content – can sometimes surpass the intimacy of those who are sexually partnered.”\textsuperscript{99} Thus, appeal to participation as a criterion for validation of gay and lesbian sexual relations must remain the subjective arena.

Perhaps the most visible dimension of a challenge to the theme of participation is found in the public forum. While both ecclesial bodies and theological ethicists have addressed this issue for decades, the one of the most recent and lucid treatments of it comes at the hands of Margaret Farley. Farley provides the basic

\textsuperscript{97}In a positive review of freely chosen, lifelong committed celibacy, Margaret A. Farley makes the analogy that celibacy is comparable to “living on a park bench – without a home or a place to lay one’s head. Though a Christian celibate life is certainly not ‘world-denying,’ nonetheless to embrace it is fundamentally a decision to ‘leave all things’ for the sake of the reign of God,” see Margaret A. Farley, “Celibacy under the Sign of the Cross,” in \textit{Sexuality and the U.S. Catholic Church: Crisis and Renewal}, eds. Lisa Sowle Cahill, John Garvey, and T. Frank Kennedy, S.J. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), 142. While certainly poetic as well as accurate for the freely chosen celibate, for the one upon whom celibacy is imposed, when desiring participation in a permanent exclusive homosexual relationship, “living on a park bench” may be perceived as degrading and as a permanent boundary to human flourishing and generativity.

\textsuperscript{98}As noted by Lisa Sowle Cahill, in her work, \textit{Family: A Christian Social Perspective} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 16, “Humans have a natural capacity for intimacy, empathy, compassion, and altruism that can be learned and fostered in close relationships like the family…” In The same text, she acknowledges the existence of gay and lesbian families when reviewing various alternative visions of the institution, see xi.

\textsuperscript{99}Farley, “Celibacy Under the Sign of the Cross,” 141.
parameters for addressing the rights of homosexual persons to participate fully in society as well as the challenges that exist presently vis-à-vis those rights. Specifically, she addresses questions of the respect that is afforded to members of society that are engaged in heterosexual relationships, protection of rights that are considered to be essential with regard to both natural and civil law, and the validation of commitments between same-sex couples that for heterosexual persons is a presumed right through the institution and sacrament of marriage.\textsuperscript{100}

First, Farley tackles the question of respect for gay men and lesbian women as a precursor for full participation in civil society. She first acknowledges the reality of the overwhelming negative attitudes that exist regarding same-sex activities and relationships that carries the weight of a “social and political force.”\textsuperscript{101} As a response, she advocates education that confronts the myths that create and maintain irrational attitudes regarding same-sex behavior that will allow acknowledgement and protection of the rights of homosexual persons in committed sexual relationships.\textsuperscript{102} Second, Farley speaks of the importance of legislation that advocates the non-discrimination of gay and lesbian couples which presumes the presence of genital sexuality within the context of the relationship. In particular, her concern is the violence that is imposed upon homosexual persons due to incorrect perceptions of their behaviors. Accordingly, legal protection of domestic partnerships is seen as a powerful force in enabling fuller participation for gays

\textsuperscript{100}Farley, \textit{Just Love}, 291. Farley does not mention natural law specifically; however, two points are pertinent to this discussion. First, the Catholic moral tradition has made at the very least implicit connections between the natural law and civil law since the scholastic period. Second, there is a lack of agreement with regard to the specifics of those things that lead to human fulfillment in both Basic Goods Theory and Revisionist theories of Natural Law. On the other hand, both theories acknowledge the importance of justice in relationality which would include participation logically and necessarily. For a summary of these theories of Natural Law, see, Todd A. Salzman, \textit{What are they Saying about Catholic Ethical Method} (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 17-37.

\textsuperscript{101}Farley, \textit{Just Love}, 291.

\textsuperscript{102}Ibid., 292.
and lesbians in society.\textsuperscript{103} Finally, Farley examines the issue of same-sex marriage, perhaps one of the most divisive issues in society in general as well as in some components of gay culture.\textsuperscript{104} Two observations are worthy of discussion in regard to participation of same-sex couples in the institution of marriage. First, Farley notes the injustice of denying the communal and societal support of marriage based upon the argument that gay marriage weakens views of traditional marriage and family.\textsuperscript{105} She validates this observation by appealing to the observation of Charles Curran that no major movements exist to eradicate the possibility of legalized divorce which seems to be a greater threat to heterosexual marriage than gay unions.\textsuperscript{106} On the other hand, she is wise to note that many homosexual persons reject the idea of gay marriage on the basis that it is “so frayed, so inadequate, and so rejecting of gays that it would be a mistake to mimic it in any way through legalization of gay or lesbian unions.”\textsuperscript{107} By the same token, it should also be observed that opposition to gay marriage has a more philosophical and theological basis, namely that desire for entrance into a proposed sacramental union may convey conformity to heterosexual norms. In any case, the issue of participation in the public forum does raise some legitimate questions for those discerning the wrongness or rightness of homosexual relationships that involve genital activity. It is important to remember at this juncture however that Christian persons are called to be in the world but

\textsuperscript{103}Ibid, 293. See also, Richard Peddicord, O.P., \textit{Gay and Lesbian Rights: Sexual Ethics or Social Justice}. Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1996. One of the most powerful statements in the text is perhaps one of the simplest: “discrimination against lesbians and gay men on the basis that they are likely to have sex with members of their own sex is arbitrary and indefensible.” (p.184)

\textsuperscript{104}The present observation is related to justice issues and not sacramental or liturgical ones which will be explored modestly in chapter three of the present study.

\textsuperscript{105}Farley, \textit{Just Love}, 293.


\textsuperscript{107}Farley, \textit{Just Love}, 294.
not of the world, a reality that necessarily involves some degree of suffering which is tied to the suffering of Christ and is mysteriously yet powerfully redemptive. In essence, the call to celibate chastity may be a cross that the homosexual person must bear for authentic participation in the communion of saints.

The final issue with regard to participation deals with the question of inclusion of active same-sex couples in the ecclesial community. This aspect of the justice of the fundamental right to full participation may be the most troublesome in terms of the formation of conscience with regard to same-sex relations. While it is clear that the Church declares that homosexual persons “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity,” and that prejudicial treatment of gays and lesbians damages their emotional well being and thereby violates their human dignity, efforts toward full inclusivity in the Catholic family are in their infancy at best. In fact the lack of the ability to participate in the Catholic community are a source of great pain for many. Andrew Sullivan, an openly gay committed Catholic man made the following observation with regard to the participation of active homosexual persons in the Church: “Here is a population within the church, and outside the church, desperately seeking spiritual health and values. And the church refuses to come to our aid, refuses to listen to this call.”

The truth of this claim speaks to both the integrity of Church teaching regarding participation as a fundamental social value and to the integrity of universal prohibition of homosexual acts. It cannot be denied that openly practicing same-sex couples cannot participate fully in the Eucharist and that they are denied the joy and grace of

108 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2358.
reconciliation without complete renunciation of a gay lifestyle. Openly active gay persons cannot offer their gifts in terms of responding to the call to serve in liturgical ministries or other public ecclesial roles. While a plethora of individual examples could be offered it is sufficient to observe that it is the Church’s conscience rather that the individual conscience is challenged regarding the integrity of the relationship between the Church’s social and sexual teaching. Personal reflection upon what appears to be something of an inconsistency will influence the subjective formation of conscience in terms of personal authenticity and levels of assent to Church teaching regarding homosexual behavior in committed homosexual relationships striving for permanency.

A final brief observation of this section is related to Catholic social teaching regarding the common good vis-à-vis ethical evaluations of homosexual relationships that are genital in nature. As noted by Pope John XXIII, the common good reflects “the sum total of those conditions of social living whereby men are enabled more fully and more readily to achieve their own perfection.” Once again it is necessary to determine whether those who participate in same-sex relationships are capable of participation of the achievement of the common good which leads to the preservation of their right to journey on the road to perfection.

The question is simple: What do practicing homosexual couples contribute to the betterment of society? In light of the proposed observations, what are their obligations in order to validate their commitment and activity, at least on the subjective level? While not exhaustive, the following three points illuminate significant means by which

111 It is to be acknowledged that the current reflection expands the traditional discourse on the common good that is largely economical in nature.

112 Pope John XXIII, Mater et Magistra, no. 65.
homosexual relationships may add to the realization of the common good in the area of sexuality.

First, on a practical level, homosexual persons in relationship can contribute to the common good on a secular level by providing insight into the embrace of the universal call to holiness in a morally complex world. Morality, the incarnation of spirituality which is at the root of the call to holiness, values deeply reflection upon human experience, especially experience in concrete relationships. Such reflection illuminates what is required of human persons from an ethical standpoint.\textsuperscript{113} The experience of same-sex couples mirrors the experience of heterosexual couples but in a sense goes beyond the latter in emphasis upon the intricacies of a relationship that extends beyond physical complementarity and procreativity. As noted by Christina Traina, “the ultimate fruitfulness and durability of any union – heterosexual or homosexual…have everything to do with faith, friendship, generosity, communal support, the serendipity of personalities, sexual and verbal affection, and the hard work that goes into mutual formation of a working partnership.”\textsuperscript{114} Thus, it is clear that homosexual couples have the potential for modeling strong relational virtues for diverse couples on a multitude of levels.

Second, on a theological and ethical level, the narrative of active homosexual persons in relationship advance the common good on a theological level by attesting to the importance of experience as a source of moral knowledge.\textsuperscript{115} Experience engages

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113}Richard M. Gula, \textit{The Call to Holiness: Embracing a Fully Christian Life} (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 35.
\item \textsuperscript{115}Salzman and Lawler, \textit{The Sexual Person}, 232.
\end{itemize}
Magisterial rhetoric to determine whether there is a disconnect between a living, evolving, and engaged understanding of contemporary biblical, theological and scientific discussions and the failure to see their reflection in official ecclesial pronouncements and decrees.\(^{116}\) What is important here is the ability to reflect upon this difficulty in the area of the evaluation of homosexual acts in committed relationships that can carry over to other issues in the area of Catholic moral theology.\(^{117}\)

Third, on a wider societal level, one deeply imbued in the Catholic social tradition, is the ability of the acceptance of the possibility of committed permanent same-sex relationships to work toward the recognition of and response to social sin. Generally speaking, social sin refers to the embodiment of personal sin in social structures as well as the way the systems, structures, and institutions take on their own life and entice persons to accept patterns of sin.\(^{118}\) These patterns of sin become stronger with time and influence attitudes of not only individuals but also entire cultures. For the last several decades, “heterosexism” has been placed under the umbrella of social sin by many Catholic theological ethicists.\(^{119}\) Heterosexism refers to individual intolerance of same-sex orientation and activity that becomes institutionalized and sustained by a culture that is predominantly heterosexual, and moves far beyond the outdated term “homophobia” which fails to capture the nuances of prejudice and discrimination.\(^{120}\) In any case, it is

\(^{116}\)Ibid.
\(^{117}\)The goal here is not to incite dissent but rather to encourage creative fidelity to the tradition that has been received.
\(^{120}\)Isiaah Crawford and Brian D. Zamboni, “Informing the Debate on Homosexuality: The Behavioral Sciences and the Church” in Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of
logical to assume that the witness of successful, committed, exclusive, and permanent homosexual partnerships hold the possibility of confronting the social sin of heterosexism. In addition, and in accord with the clarion call for all persons to work toward the common good, the example of the diminishment of heterosexism has the potential of inspiring a prophetic response to other social sins such as racism, sexism (in particular varying levels of misogyny), and ethnocentrism to name but a few examples.\textsuperscript{121} Here one would do well to realize the power of such conversion in pursuit of the common good. Virginia Mollenkott puts it well with her observation that “A tremendous outpouring of grace will reward the awareness that overcoming heterosexism (and all other ‘isms’) is to the immeasurable benefit of all of us. Only in this way can we participate in the completion of the Body of Christ.”\textsuperscript{122}

Thus it is clear that homosexual unions, which very likely will involve genital relations, have the potential for working toward the common good in three distinct ways. First, they have the potential to define the aspirations and expectations of healthy relationships whether they be heterosexual or homosexual. Second, they validate the importance of consideration of lived human experience in the face of a plethora of concrete moral questions. Third, they inspire individuals to work toward the eradication of all social sin for the establishment of a society that can claim that it is just with authenticity. All three observations must play a significant role in the formation of conscience regarding the ethics of same-sex relations.

\textit{Moral Theology} eds. Patricia Beattie Jung with Joseph Andrew Coray (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 239.

\textsuperscript{121} For further discussion of the importance of conversion on a societal level, see Peter J. Henriot, “Social Sin and Conversion: A Theology of the Church’s Involvement” in Chicago Studies 11 (Summer 1972), 115-130.

Conclusion

The present chapter has explored the connection of various components of Catholic social teaching as a complementary source for the evaluation of homosexual relationships which presumably involve genital intimacy. In particular, issues of justice (distributive, contributive, and commutative justice) as well as solidarity, participation, and the common good have been explored vis-à-vis the aforementioned relationships. In the majority of cases, arguments have been made that may lead to the conclusion that in the subjective process of conscience formation it is undeniable that same-sex physical intimacy is acceptable within the parameters of a loving, equal, permanent, and exclusive commitment. While accurate, the aforementioned statement requires nuance. In terms of issues regarding contributive justice, it is difficult for many committed gay and lesbian couples to accept that a heterosexual lifestyle is normative, given the fact that such a claim implies the “objectively disordered” nature of homosexuality in general. This rejection could signify a violation of personal responsibility with regard to contributive justice. In addition, it may be argued that while solidarity insists that every human person has a right to be loved by another, it does not mandate that such love be manifested in a physical manner seeing that genuine intimacy can assume a variety of forms. In terms of the issue of full participation in the sacramental life, some may argue that inclusion of practicing homosexual persons may compromise the dignity of the sacrament and the sacramental system which insists upon freedom from “mortal sin”\textsuperscript{123} as well as be a cause of scandal to the faithful in general. Lastly, with regard to the claim

\textsuperscript{123}This scenario refers primarily to the celebration of Eucharist.
that acceptance of both homosexual orientation and activity reveals an increased appeal to human experience, some may consider such emphasis to be relativistic.

Once again it is clear that no one source can serve as the defining factor in either the objective evaluation of homosexuality and the sexual behaviors intrinsically related to it or in the subjective formation of conscience. As noted in the introduction, the world is “sick” in terms of the evaluation of homogenital relationships; however, a review of the impact of the key themes of Catholic social teaching addresses some symptoms but does not provide an all encompassing cure. It is clear that more “contemporary moral markers” must be considered. Having reviewed in significant detail the social teaching of the Church, it seems prudent to turn now to an examination of the Church and its primary means of experiencing itself as community. Accordingly, the relationship between liturgy, sacrament, and homosexuality will now be explored.
While the associations that are made regarding the ethics of same-sex relations and Catholic Social Teaching may seem to be readily apparent given the aforementioned discussion, the connection between the phenomenon of homosexuality and the vast liturgical experience of the Church is not acknowledged significantly within contemporary sacramental or ethical writings of the Catholic tradition. This reality reflects a notable departure from earlier conversations regarding specific moral theology within the Catholic tradition which wove together both the insights of all of the disciplines of theology with the practicality of the Christian moral life in general. Specifically, it ignores blatantly the undeniable claim that prayer, worship, liturgy and sacrament “provide[s] the matrix which shapes the affections and virtues requisite for the moral life.”¹ Ultimately, the fact of the matter is that while it has been acknowledged widely that the law of prayer is the law of belief, the question remains whether lex orandi, lex vivendi (or lex faciendi) is valued and embraced by the Catholic Moral Tradition in praxis.²

How do discussions of same-sex ethics relate to theological reflections on liturgy and sacramentality specifically? In order to arrive at a tentative response that is useful for the formation of conscience with regard to an overall evaluation of same-sex


²See Mary Ewing Stamps, “Lives of Living Prayer: Christomorphism and the Life of Prayer in the Rule of Saint Benedict,” in Liturgy and the Moral Self (above). While the connection between lex vivendi and same-sex relationship may be made easily in that sexuality must be seen within the context of the greater Christian life, Stamp’s observation suggests that liturgy and specific actions, choices, behaviors, and behavior patterns must be connected for full human flourishing.
relations, a number of issues need to be addressed. First, the core of Catholic identity, practice and investment in fundamental human relationships is the role of ritual and the concept of sacramentality broadly defined yet inclusive of the standard understanding of the traditional sacraments that exist within the Roman tradition. Accordingly, a formal and relatively brief review of the concepts of ritual, symbolism, the sacred and sacramentality will be provided. Second, given the intrinsic connection between the paschal mystery and Christian anthropology, the fundamental connection between liturgy, sacramentality, and human sexuality will be explored. Third, the relationship between liturgy and homosexuality will be explored within the particular context of the Eucharistic liturgy and under the auspices of the theme of “inclusivity.” Fourth, same-sex relations will be discussed within the contexts of several of the other sacraments of the Roman Catholic tradition, beginning with a discussion of the sacraments of initiation, that is, Baptism and Confirmation, as well as an investigation of the healing sacrament of Reconciliation. Ultimately, the current chapter will investigate the connections between the lived prayer experience of the Catholic community and its appropriation of Catholic sexual ethics in the arena of conscience.

*Ritual*, Liturgy, and Sacrament: The Heart of the Catholic Tradition

Throughout the whole of his writings, Bernard Haring gives credence to the claim of twentieth century phenomenologists that religious experience and encounter are the

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4The aforementioned groupings are taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1211 and 1421.
5Here the term “ritual” implies the sacred and the symbolic, see below pp. 3ff.
basis of the religious life, and more precisely, the foundation of the narrative of the moral life in Christ. Accordingly, it is more than appropriate to discuss the nature of ritual, sacrament, and liturgy since these categories form the foundation of Catholic experience and encounter and which provide the subtext for the evolution of Catholic sexual identity and practice.

*The Sacred, The Symbolic, and The Ritualistic Dimensions of the Sacraments*

**The Sacred Dimension:** All those who have a religious perspective would acknowledge that the concept of the sacred is an authentic aspect of human consciousness, where one experiences the “presence of God or the power of grace.” These experiences may be objective or subjective; they may be part of formal rituals or incredibly personal and private encounters. However, any genuine encounter with the divine or transcendent, regardless of the perceived context, is considered to be an authentic human experience. These experiences are dynamic and radiate a type of intensity and vitality where the subject experiences a profound sense of reverence and awe. When he or she experiences the holy, the believer moves into another dimension of reality. Joseph Martos describes the experience as moving into “a world in which we have an altered sense of space and time: the space that we inhabit is somehow sanctified, and the time or period in which it occurs is likewise made holy.” The experience of the sacred is not only reserved to times, places and events. Individuals can also manifest the

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8 Ibid., 10.
sacred by what sociologists of religion have referred to as “charismata”. Ultimately, the experience of the sacred in either persons, places, or events is the experience of mystery. It is not fully comprehensible or describable; however, it is a valid experience of what is holy for the subject and has a profound effect upon the individual who is undergoing the experience.

While many students of theology, spirituality, and the sociology of religion would argue that encounters with the sacred occur more frequently within the contexts of personal prayer, lectio divina, or in encounters of faith sharing, the present study would argue that it is more accurate to identify relationships as the canvas upon which human persons experience the aesthetic of the sacred, Abraham Maslow identifies these sacred relational encounters as either “peak” or “plateau” experiences which are tremendous and transforming moments of existential awareness, the latter of which are more frequent and even repetitive heightened experiences of the sacred. These encounters affirm values, beliefs, and feelings that are intrinsic to the persons engaged in the personal encounter. They are evoked by a familiarity with certain symbols and realized by the mysterious reality of grace.

Given the aforementioned explanation of the notion of the sacred, it is relatively easy to make the connection between sexuality and the sacred. When identified as a truly unitive moment in the narrative of evolving human relationships, and not one that reflects an imbalance regarding the importance of procreation in the physical expression of

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10For a nuanced discussion of “peak” and “plateau” experiences, see Abraham H. Maslow: *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (New York, Viking Press, 1970).
11Martos, 15.
love, such sexual relationships are revelatory of the power and presence of God in human life in a very personalistic manner. Such an understanding of the sacred, vis-à-vis human genital sexual relations implies a sacred intimacy that may impact an understanding of several dimensions of the relationships experienced by same-sex couples. A more thorough understanding of the notion of the importance of the symbolic dimension of sacramentality is required to provide a subjective commentary that may aid in evaluation of homosexual orientation and behaviors for the purpose of conscience formation.

The Symbolic Dimension: In order to understand the symbolic nature of liturgy, ritual, and sacrament one must distinguish between the realities of sign and symbol. There are a number of ways of differentiating signs from symbols; however, it is best to determine the basic nature of a sign before reviewing the complex nature of a symbol. Signs, a basic component of the traditional notion of sacrament prior to the Second Vatican Council, confers a basic meaning which is understood universally, whereas symbols point toward subjective interpretations which are rich in connotations.

Religious symbols, a heading under which sexuality naturally falls, have a number of characteristics that lend themselves to an accurate understanding of intimate human relationality that is both personal and genital. Six characteristics seem to prove their relevance here. First, symbolic mediation requires immediate and direct participation on the part of those individuals who encounter the symbol. This engagement is necessarily subjective and existential. In essence, individuals must be

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12 Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes, nos. 47-52.
13 Martos, 16.
14 This designation presumes a more personalistic understanding of natural law and human sexuality as is noted in chapter one above.
15 For this section, I am heavily dependent upon Roger Haight, S.J., Dynamics of Theology (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), especially 127-166.
drawn into the symbols that they experience in order to comprehend the transcendent realities behind them. Second, symbols communicate meaning by engagement of the cognitive aspect of the human psyche. Simply put, the meaning behind symbols need to be discovered; symbols need to be interpreted. Third, symbols participate in and point to the transcendent. Symbols, when interpreted as directly representative of what appears to be immanent, prove to be a distortion of the meaning of ultimate reality. Fourth, the essence of human reality is conveyed by means of symbolic mediation. In this sense, symbols are unique in their ability to provide insight into the meaning of human existence vis-à-vis the whole of reality by providing an individual with a depth of self-knowledge that moves beyond objective criteria to a plane of “mythic” quality that speaks to ultimate truth regarding both self identity and participation in the most intimate of human relationships. Fifth, symbols by their very nature are multivalent and cannot be reduced to a single meaning or interpretation. In essence, symbolic knowledge and action succeed as a medium for understanding reality by moving interpretation from a series of propositions to a subjective understanding of the human dynamic that is grounded in ultimate truth. This multivalent structure of interpretation is especially helpful in the formation of conscience with regard to human sexuality given the personal nature of human intimacy. Sixth, and finally, religious symbols, by means of dialectic, provide a bridge between the sacred and the worldly. This aspect of symbolism provides a system of checks and balances so that symbols do not become relativistic and arbitrary, but rather a means of interpretation that calls upon experience, reason, and intuition for discernment of meaning. In essence, the dialectical nature of symbols with regard to

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sexuality serves as a protective boundary in the formation of conscience with regard to individual questions regarding genital sexual behavior.

*The Ritualistic Dimension:* The ritualistic dimension of sacraments, both those events that are defined magisterially and other sacramental encounters that are central to the dynamic of human existence (in specific, physical sexual intimacy), are deeply wedded to the notion of symbol. As noted by Joseph Martos, “most symbols that give rise to hierophanies occur in the context of rituals.”  

18 To understand the marrying of the notions of symbol and ritual, a basic comprehension of the concept of “liminality” must be conveyed. And while a number of sacramental theologians have translated this particular term to convey the notion of transition in the context of the sacramental life, a far more nuanced understanding must be present if the importance of ritual is to be related to the sacred nature of human sexuality.

Classic definitions of liminality identify it as state as a situation of “in-between-ness”. In a sense this characterization is meant to be abstract; however, given the task of applying this transcendental reality to the phenomenon of sexuality, one needs to provide more concrete clarification. Liminality is a state of being that removes the human person from what is ordinary and expected. More importantly, when one participates in an experience that is truly liminal, “part of our old perception of reality is disintegrating or is in suspension, and we are open to a new integration, a new vision of reality.”

19 While remaining prudent in rituals (of numerous varieties from the sacred to the profane),

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18 Martos, *The Sacraments*, 29. Hierophanies refer to manifestations of the sacred that are less restrictive than those that are expressed by the term “theophany”. Accordingly, this term applies easily to rituals of human existence that are not defined in traditional Catholic theology. This theme runs consistently runs throughout the works of Eliade mentioned above.

19 Martos, 27. More appropriate to the discussion of the formation of conscience with regard to same sex relations is the notion of “suspension” that will be discussed below.
formal and accepted patterns of thought, feeling, and behaving may have the opportunity to be transcended. By the same token, liminal realities are temporary although they are transformative. One returns to the practical realm of existence; however, he or she is forever changed. One specific modality of that transformation is the notion of the psychic bond that develops between individuals who share intimate liminal experiences, as in the case of intimate sexual encounter. As noted by Victor Turner, “Liminal experiences are undifferentiated, egalitarian, direct, extant, nonrational, existential, I-Thou relationships.” Ultimately, all of these characteristics reference to the reality of human genital intimacy in its multiplicity of forms. Underscoring this fact is the reality that since rituals are often repeated (obviously in terms of genital sexual relationships that are striving for permanency), the liminal quality assigned to them avails persons to the realization that they need to be incarnating the reality that they symbolize. In essence this means, in the realm of love and sexuality, even though persons may not embody these qualities at present, participation in the ritual, in this case the sexual act, will in time help them to embrace and engender the realities that such relations signify.

Before moving toward a connection between the Paschal Mystery (expressed in sacrament) and sexuality, it is necessary to consider five fundamental elements of ritual that will color the present study’s understanding of the effect of the celebration of individual traditional sacraments on the development of a same-sex ethic that assists in the formation of conscience. First, rituals provide a “hermeneutic of experience” that

lead to a greater understanding of reality in general and personhood within specific contexts in particular. In the area of sexuality, such an interpretive key can reveal the truth that lies behind specific relationships and actions. Second, rituals are means toward maturation in virtue. Sexual maturation, given its role in human life, leads to authentic personhood before God and others. Third, rituals make persons present to one another on an ontological level in that they present positive change in all who engage in them. Such a characteristic of sexual ritual is obvious since the lovers grow in their desire to know and to be known (a possibility for both heterosexual and homosexual couples). Fourth, rituals orient participants to wider engagement of the community through service. Every sexual relationship must move outside itself and share the love generated therein with all of their brothers and sisters in the human family. Fifth, Christian rituals are always a celebration of friendship. As seen earlier in this study, friendship is essential for true intimacy which is the hinge upon which sexual relationships turn. The establishment of deeper friendship through ritual and sacrament may offer some validity to the proposal that same-sex relationships, which involve genital behavior, are not intrinsically evil, and not even merely tolerable, but perhaps in certain circumstances, with individuals who have consciences that are well formed, a vehicle of revelation of the divine.

Having explored three fundamental aspects of sacramental theology, namely the sacred, the symbolic, and the ritual dimensions, it is essential to connect these realities with the notion of the paschal mystery and the redemption that it brings to human sexuality both on ontological and existential levels.

23See chapter 2 of the present study, 21-27.
At the heart of sacramental and liturgical theology is the reality of the Paschal Mystery, and at the heart of the Paschal Mystery is the reality of human fulfillment. David Cloutier rightly observes that human fulfillment is ultimately “a matter of participation in relationships; it is sharing in the lives of others and of God…of building and sustaining relationships of love and mutuality.” What he fails to do is to connect to the Christ event, more appropriately identified in the tradition as the Paschal Mystery.

Unfortunately, the present author, exploring the relationship between liturgy, sacramentality, and human sexuality, finds traditional articulations of the Paschal Mystery to be rather truncated and limited. Generally speaking, Magisterially, liturgically and theologically, the term “paschal mystery” has been limited to the critical events that transpire from the Passion of Christ until the sending of the Holy Spirit, identifying these events as the means to the full revelation and accomplishment of the mystery of salvation. A more comprehensive and helpful understanding of the Paschal Mystery, from both a sacramental and ethical standpoint would do well to include also the following: the Annunciation, Nativity and Public Ministry of Jesus, as well as the coming of the Kingdom in its fullness. In particular, the redemptive nature of the

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25Specifically, the assumed events include the Passion, Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit exclusively. See for example, Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1067.

26This unconventional assertion is affirmed by the following observation by Joseph Martos, “All three synoptic gospels open with a call to conversion, a cry for repentance, an invitation to turn from one way of living to another. That in itself is something of a passing over from one way of being in the world to another, so it could rightly be called a paschal movement. Living through a change in attitude and lifestyle would be something that is experienced and partly, though not fully understood, so it could also be called a mystery. But the mystery into which Jesus invited people, and the mystery that is most properly called paschal, is the mystery of self giving love or agáπē.” Therefore, all aspects of the Christ event must
public ministry of Jesus is helpful in connecting sacramentality with sexuality. In any case, each of the aforementioned aspects of an expanded view of the Paschal Mystery will be explored briefly as foundation for a sacramental view of sexuality that will assist in an eventual sacramental evaluation of same-sex relations for the purpose of authentic and well informed conscience formation.

As noted by Elizabeth Johnson, “the Annunciation is a faith event” which opens a new chapter in the narrative of God’s relationship with the world. It gives new meaning to the reality of embodiment in terms of human relationships that allow persons to experience one another in ways that are faithful to the call of God to be holy, without strict adherence to traditional categories. The Annunciation “revives our hope in the midst of struggle, and summon our energies for creative action.” God calls all people to respond to the call of grace to become who they are and to express their vocation in ways that are unique ontologically and manifested in existential diversity. In terms of sexuality, the application of the reality of this first phase of the Paschal Mystery invites persons to explore their particular call to intimacy in ways that may be realized in ways that are not traditional. With regard to same-sex relations, this may mean that God becomes incarnate for others in everyday life in committed homosexual relationships that strive to increase personal integrity and generate an atmosphere of faith and love that is nothing other than what could be categorized as one sanctifying paradigm vis-à-vis accepted forms of sexual expression.

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be incorporated into a contemporary understanding of the Paschal Mystery. See, Martos, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study*, 187.


28Ibid., 258.
The Incarnation, a subject widely discussed throughout the history of Christianity, has unquestionable soteriological value. Ultimately, the Incarnation is the means by which humanity realizes its destiny, “its divinely intended fulfillment.” The fact that God has freely chosen to become flesh in the person of Jesus the Christ, the good and sacred nature of the material world, and for the purposes of the present study the unquestionable value of the body or the flesh is beyond question. Humanity is redeemed in its ability to become properly relational after the fall. Now the person is able to experience happiness and fulfillment in relationships that are not only spiritual but also personal and physical. These observations have profound implications for sacramental theology and for a sexual ethic that is grounded in it. As noted by Bernard Haring who speaks of the relevance of the Incarnation within the context of a sacramental theology that grounds moral reasoning:

The sacraments with all the freshness of created nature in their use of material elements to manifest and signify spiritual meaning, and by reference to the visible body of man as well as to the spiritual soul, express most concretely and graphically the great truth: we in our whole present existence of body and soul stand before God and must respond to Him with the responsibility of our whole being.

While Haring is speaking specifically of the sacraments defined in Church doctrine at this point it is not a stretch to apply his thinking to the broader concept of sacramentality that is being developed in the present study. In particular and succinctly, Haring, in fidelity with the tradition, allows us to affirm the sacred nature of bodily relationality and intimacy. Accordingly, sexuality, a fundamental aspect of every human person is an

avenue to holiness. If this assertion is correct, then one cannot deny one’s sexual nature since it serves as an avenue to the fulfillment of human destiny properly understood. Ergo, the redemptive nature of the incarnation as an essential element of the Paschal Mystery cannot be denied when attempting to evaluate the subjective moral status of homogenital relations.

A third aspect of the Paschal Mystery largely overlooked is the public ministry of Jesus. Failure to include the personal and intimate encounters of Jesus with the persons with whom he was in relationship represents a significant lacuna with regard to accurate articulations of the Paschal Mystery. The redemptive character of the ministry may be summarized in three distinct yet interlocking facets of his activity: Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the working of wondrous deeds, and his teaching which led to both controversy among the religious leadership and catharsis among those who were open to be saved. Proclamation of the Kingdom was a primary beacon of hope for a people who did not experience a peaceful, good, and ordered universe, who needed to turn from rebellion to right relationship, who once again need to feel chosen in order to truly be open to the love of God. Indeed to hope is to be open to the invitation to be saved. The miraculous activity of Jesus is linked to the proclamation of the coming Kingdom of God, that sacred space of redemption, by virtue of the fact that the healing that the wondrous actions of Jesus frees the believer to hear and respond to the soteriological invitation of this segment of the Paschal Mystery. Finally, the teaching of Jesus was redemptive and should be included in the development of paschal identity because of its

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32 For a brief but helpful expansion of this view of Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God, see Michael J. McClymond, Familiar Stranger: An Introduction to Jesus of Nazareth (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 67-81.

33 Ibid., 92.
ability to incarnate the parameters of right relationship with God and with fellow human beings.\textsuperscript{34} Ultimately, having reviewed briefly the three aforementioned modalities of ministry on the part of Jesus in the public sphere, easily one can make the connection that Jesus’ practical ministry is redemptive in that he mediates the divine without losing sight of finite human existence.\textsuperscript{35} Clearly, these observations have relevance for the development of a same-sex ethic that is rooted in human experience since sexuality is not only a sensual encounter, but also a spiritual one. The intimacy modeled by Jesus in terms of the mediation of hope, the opportunity for healing, and the development of wholistic and authentic relationships envisions a soteriological reality that was never present even in the “prelapsarian days of Eden” when sexuality was proposed as perfectly relational and reciprocral without needing to be regulated.\textsuperscript{36}

Having reviewed the public ministry of Jesus as an essential component of the paschal mystery that is mediated sacramentally, one can return to the traditional definition of this reality offered by the Church, namely the passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.\textsuperscript{37} In terms of the redemptive quality of Jesus’ Passion and Death, it is best to consider the possibilities under the auspices of the symbol of the Cross. Thomas Rausch offers perhaps one of the best foundational interpretations of the soteriological value of the Cross in his observation that the Cross “is a sign of God’s love revealed in Jesus; not just his remaining united to God in the face of evil, but also because in his refusal of violence in the face of evil, he remains in solidarity with all

\textsuperscript{34}It is important to note that these teachings address only anything overtly related to human sexuality in a marginal way.

\textsuperscript{35}For further discussion on the means by which Jesus redemptively makes present the human face of God, see John F. O’Grady, \textit{Models of Jesus Revisited} (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 175-195.

\textsuperscript{36}Here one presumes the mythic quality of the Genesis narratives.

\textsuperscript{37}Per the \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}, 1067.
those victims of violence throughout history. Interestingly enough, this image presents two possibilities for those individuals who are attempting to form their consciences properly with regard to a same sex ethic. On one hand, the symbol of the cross underscores the reality of suffering in the Christian life. Such an interpretation may help one to understand the call of the Church for homosexual persons to embrace “disinterested friendship” in the expression of their sexual selves, and “to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord’s Cross the difficulties that they may encounter from their condition” since physical intimacy is outside the realm of acceptable parameters of the Church’s moral teaching. On the other hand, the cross as a symbol of solidarity with marginal victims of violence may provide an internal forum whereby individuals assess participation in same-sex relationship that are exclusive, truly committed, and oriented toward a generativity that cooperates with grace in the building up of the kingdom as valid expressions of human sexuality. Interestingly enough, the Cross’s ability to mediate paradox seems to be multi-faceted, calling for an embrace of celibate chastity on the part of homosexual persons from one perspective, liberating homosexuals from isolation and a sense of existential loneliness on the other.

Central to the Paschal Mystery is the Resurrection which declares boldly that the Cross is not the exclusive means to human redemption in all of its diversity. In contemporary theology, one of the key elements of understanding the Resurrection as a soteriological reality that extends beyond the person and event of Jesus is that eternal embodiment restores individuals to full humanity rather than propose an eschatological

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39 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2359.
40 Ibid, 2358, italics added.
premise of disembodied bliss that is dualistic in nature. In terms of a basic application to a general sexual ethic that could inform an evaluation of same-sex relations on the level of conscience, William Mattison is rather helpful. The risen Christ does not erase, but rather transcends and transforms the wounds of his passion and death. Applied to the family of humanity on all levels, which includes our sexual lives, the experience of redemption that is intrinsic to the resurrection helps us to realize that through grace, imperfection can be brought to a state of not original innocence, but rather redeemed brokenness. While our behaviors may not always be normative, they may be a means of embracing the love of God made manifest concretely in relationships. In the case of same-sex relationships, once again this perception may lead in two radically different directions regarding the formation of Christian conscience. Love draws us outside of ourselves, especially within a sacramental context, but in what direction? On one hand, the embodiment that is transfigured in the Paschal Mystery by means of Resurrection highlights the importance of complementarity which may include physical complementarity as part of the wise design of the creator (especially in terms of sharing in the nature of God by means of co-creativity and physical generativity). By contrast, the Resurrection, as a sacramental event, reveals the importance of the primacy of love,

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41 N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 126-149, especially 134. What “eternal embodiment” entails is a difficult question and certainly falls under the heading mystery since those of a physicalist cast would tend to take this concept rather literally while those of a more personalist purview have interpreted resurrection of the body in terms of the narrative that was penned in life by individuals through the vehicle of the body. This concept will be discussed in greater detail in the section that relates eschatology to human sexuality (chapter 5 of the present study).


the importance of vulnerability over the imposition of power, and the necessity of justice in relationships that are intimate and not always traditional in terms of their personalist character. Practically speaking, such an assessment may suggest that homosexual genital relationships have the potential of embracing the Resurrection as a key component of the Paschal Mystery and as an aspect of authentic paschal identity.

The Ascension of Jesus hold a unique status in terms of its participation in the Paschal Mystery and its implications for Christian morality in general and sexual ethics in particular, especially in terms of its soteriological value. These observations manifest themselves on both ontological and existential level. In terms of the former, the notion of Christ’s enthronement with the Father gives rise to the conclusion that because of the Ascension, which is a natural conclusion to the unfolding of the mystery of the Incarnation, human beings can now “relate to the Christ as the one who represents every person who is human and the one who shares in that humanity in all the essentials of the human condition.” In terms of an application to a sacramental sexual ethic, this interpretation of the Ascension acknowledges that the summation of the life and ministry of Jesus, as encountered directly by human beings (i.e., his public ministry, including his post-Resurrectional appearances) leads to a re-affirmation of the goodness of humanity in its fullness. This divine cachet extends to human sexuality, and it may be argued that it does so in terms of diverse sexual expressions whether they be heterosexual or homosexual. It may in fact affirm the observation of Cristina Traina that

The ultimate fruitfulness and durability of any union—heterosexual or homosexual—have nothing to do with gender complementarity or the lack thereof. But they have everything to do with faith, friendship, generosity, communal support, the serendipity of personalities, sexual and verbal affection, and the hard work that goes into mutual formation of a working partnership.  

The exalted Christ knows both human love and suffering at the right hand of the Father, a reality which is in itself redemptive and sacramental.

In terms of the existential implications of the Ascension, this final witnessed event in the life of Jesus represents something of a commissioning. It is preparatory in light of this revised program for understanding the Paschal Mystery for it anticipates the spiritual outpouring that the disciples will experience at Pentecost. Also, and perhaps more importantly for the present discussion, it is a clarion call for them to return to the city of Jerusalem to be enabled to give redoubtable prophetic witness to all the nations that Jesus the Christ has liberated the world from sin and death, and by so doing redeemed the human race (at least in terms of its potential to enter into right relationship with God, neighbor, self, and world). In terms of the evaluation of a same sex ethic, unfortunately the proposed implications of this facet of the Paschal Mystery in terms of sexuality are polarized. On one hand, the prophetic word that could be spoken may be liberating in terms of its bold proclamation of a rejection of a “radical dualism between the self and the body” with regard to sexual behaviors, thereby challenging

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47The implications of which will be discussed below.
49Clearly, this aspect of the Ascension highlights the notion of ritual/sacrament (both of which mediate the Paschal Mystery) especially in terms of the categories of presence and service suggested by Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy. See note 22 above.
official church teaching. On the other hand, the prophetic witness to be offered may be one of embracing a life of celibate chastity.

The sending of the Spirit serves as the next logical progression in an investigation of a revised and broadened view of the Paschal Mystery. The question is: What is the theological and sacramental importance of Pentecost vis-à-vis an attempt to formulate criteria for the formation of conscience regarding homosexual lifestyle and behavior? Given the proposed “polytechnics of theophany” that is recorded by Luke (cf. Acts 2-13) it is important to remember that “the real event of Pentecost is the empowerment of the disciples by the Holy Spirit.” This fledging and fearful band of followers of the crucified and risen Lord are about to challenge a tradition that has been proposed as sacred and immutable for thousands of years. Such an observation begs yet another question: what does such revolutionary activity, celebrated in sacrament, propose for a genuine sexual ethic that evaluates same-sex relationships? A number of issues are pertinent here. First, reception of the Spirit calls the Church to engender a reality that is at the heart of Christian anthropology and community: evolution and change. This means that there needs to be true openness in the development of doctrine at least and creative, faithful application of such doctrine at best. In the area of sexual ethics, this means exploring the possibilities that subjective interpretations of received moral teaching may be warranted in particular circumstances, e.g., in the formulation of a personal response to the question of homosexuality. To do so incarnates the soteriological underpinnings of the Paschal Mystery by allowing one to embrace his or

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51 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2359.
her full humanity. Second, moving beyond the subjective realm of conscience formation, the consequences of the sending of the Spirit may provide an avenue for objective change in terms of certain teachings, especially in the area of sexual morality. This charism can only be embraced if the sensus fidelium reflects yet another charism of the Spirit, namely indefectibility. A desire and quest for accuracy such as this one is redemptive in that it allows human persons to move closer to the “truth” which helps them to live out their anthropological destiny.

The final movement of this analysis of an expanded view of the Paschal Mystery as a foundation for a sacramental and theological lens though which one can refine a Christian sexual ethic is the “anticipation” of the coming of the Kingdom in its fullness.

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World provides perhaps the best synopsis of this culmination of the Paschal Mystery that is captured and expressed in the sacramental life of the Church

We know neither the moment of the consummation of the earth and of humanity nor the way that the universe will be transformed... When we have spread on earth the fruits of our nature and enterprise – human dignity, brotherly communion, and freedom – according to the command of the Lord and his Spirit, we will find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured, when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal kingdom of “truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace.”

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53 “Indefectibility” is to be differentiated from “infallibility” in a number of ways. In essence, the former allows for nuance and revision with the assurance that the Church, by virtue of the gift of the Spirit will not stray from the truth. The latter proclaims that particular teachings are completely free from error and are meant to fulfill the task of the Magisterium to preserve the pilgrim People of God from “deviations and defections” with regard to faith and morals. For official statements on infallibility, see the Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 888-892. For an excellent interpretive device that speaks to the status and mutability of church teaching (at least on the level of nuance and accuracy) see Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium (New York: Paulist Press, 1996).

54 This topic will be treated briefly in light of the fact that the final chapter of this study is dedicated to the relationship between eschatology and the formulation of a same-sex ethic.
earth the kingdom is mysteriously present; when the Lord comes it will enter into its perfection.\textsuperscript{55}

What this evaluation articulates is that the last portion of the Paschal Mystery, i.e., anticipation of the Parousia, is the hope for human wholeness, not in spite of who we are, but rather because of God’s desire to save us for who we are…persons who are broken but worthy of redemption. Concretely that means that even though the social character and effects of sin are explicit in various forms of injustice that we encounter in the world, “hope springs eternal” in the human quest for salvation.\textsuperscript{56} In terms of application to a sexual ethic, this realization provides the venue to experience the reality of justice and peace for those who are sexually marginalized. In view of this future reality, a clarion call is issued to all believers to be faithful to the call of the risen and ascended Lord to look forward rather than holding on to trappings of the past that may prohibit full human flourishing. Even more specifically, the anticipation of the coming of the kingdom in its fullness may mean that the promise of the coming of the kingdom in its fullness gives rise to hope that the committed love of God can be realized in relationships that are defined only by the boundary of committed love.\textsuperscript{57} Such an observation may give rise to the possibility of evaluating same-sex relationships, which are genital in nature, as means of cooperating with grace to advance the coming of God’s kingdom in its fullness, thereby rounding out a sacred, symbolic, and ritualistic nature of these encounters.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Gaudium et Spes}, no. 39.
\textsuperscript{57} Farley, “An Ethic for Same-Sex Relations,” 344.
Incarnating the Paschal Mystery vis-à-vis the Formulation of a Sexual Ethic: The Eucharistic Liturgy, Sexuality, and the Evaluation of Same-Sex Relations

“Christ’s paschal mystery manifests itself fully in the celebration of the liturgy, especially during the Eucharist.”58 Eucharist is precisely the “source and summit” of the redemption of creation59 because it mediates God’s enabling presence to the cosmos. Mysteriously and simultaneously, it transforms what would otherwise seem to be impossible or unthinkable to the possible and attractive while also validating the credibility of human experience before God in its multiple manifestations.60 The Real Presence of Jesus in this sacrament transforms the fragmentation of human life and relationships into valid commitments between individuals and the divine that have the capacity to assist with the work of love and justice in the world.61 The celebration of this greatest of mysteries verifies that intimate, and even pleasurable, loving human relationships are valid and good if they work to build up the common good. Thus, the way of mystery, incarnated in the Eucharist, is intimately bound up with the Church’s moral life in general and the development of an authentic sexual ethic in particular.62

In light of these preliminary observations, the trajectory of the present section will take the following shape. First, the connection between the Eucharist and the moral life will be articulated more precisely. Second, the implications of this connection will be applied to the formulation of a Catholic sexual ethic that may accommodate the possibility of the validity of same-sex relationships.

59Lumen Gentium, No. 11.
61For an extensive discussion of the relationship between Eucharist and commitments (both human and divine), see Duffy, especially chapters 1, 4, and 7.
62Billy and Keating, 25.
When connecting the encounter and experience of the Eucharistic Liturgy with the Moral Life, Dennis Billy and James Keating make a strong argument that the association between this sacrament and the moral life unfolds in three interrelated areas: the formation of conscience, the discovery of a spiritual and sacramental esplanade to moral living and conversion, and the most authentic forum for the discernment of human action. Accordingly, each of these areas needs to be appraised in summary fashion in order to formulate a succinct yet accurate connection between the Eucharist and the moral life.

In terms of the formation of conscience the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy perfectly embodies the five elements of ritual noted above, namely the development of a hermeneutic of experience, an invitation to personal and spiritual maturation, an experience of presence which is simultaneously an transcendent encounter with the presence of God, a call to loving service, and an intimate and penetrating experience of friendship with others. All of these aspects of the liturgy lead to a moral conversion that affects the formation of conscience in multiple dimensions. First, Eucharist addresses the deepest human hungers, expectations, and needs, specifically the healing that is required because of human brokenness, the transformation of personal agendas to an orientation toward ultimate truth, and a deepening of love for God and neighbor as well as the moral good. This movement in turn frees individuals to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to move forward in the moral life and vulnerably expose

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63 Ibid., 31-135.
64 Cooke and Macy, 52-53.
65 Billy and Keating, 78-79. Please note that the following seven points will be based upon the observations of the aforementioned authors.
their true paschal identity in all of their relationships celebrating their joys without despairing of their own limitations and weaknesses. Second, celebration of the Eucharist is essential for Christians to discover and discern an authentic Christian anthropology that is essential for the formation of conscience in that it provides the foundation for the development of an ethics of character and virtue. Intrinsically, human beings are terribly complex. At one moment human character and action can reflect the reality of being *Imago Dei*, created in the image of God and being called to grow in God’s likeness, and then, in and instant humans can become and act narcissistically and cruelly, losing sight of the true meaning of happiness that is fulfilled in human relationships. Persons forget that true love, for which we have been made, and which is manifested in intimacy with God and one another, has “a constitutive historical or narrative character” Worship however helps to heal this fractured element of humanity by its fundamental nature as a font of sacramental healing and on-going transformation in terms of both being and praxis. By embracing and incarnating the Paschal Mystery for believers, Eucharist manifests the hope of the Annunciation, the relationality of the Incarnation that is free from personal agendas, the healing of the Public Ministry of Jesus, the vulnerable love made present in the Death of Jesus, the paradoxical integration and transformation of human life made present in the Resurrection, the grace of embodiment for the exercise for the free and responsible exercise of love reflected in the Ascension, the call to live out one’s destiny to be prophetic witnesses for change made present in the

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67Dennis and Billy, 80.
Sending of the Spirit, and motivation to work for justice and peace in the hope of a world made new as reflected in the promise of the coming of the kingdom in its fullness. And, what is the response to this tremendous gift mediated in the Eucharist? It is sincere humility and gratitude.\textsuperscript{69} Humility is required since it acknowledges that God is the source of all that persons have and are which in turn prompts us to serve and to love one another in authentic justice.\textsuperscript{70} Gratitude also must be cultivated since it “shapes the fabric of the grace of perseverance in the good.”\textsuperscript{71} Gratitude or thanksgiving makes love for others an innate activity rather than something that appears to be a chore that removes person from their own self-interests. It is no question that Eucharist shapes persons anthropologically since it provides a sacred venue to the development of the virtues of an authentic life. Third, Eucharistic worship addresses the human sinful condition directly and strengthens the virtue of fortitude that is necessary to resist temptation to sin\textsuperscript{72} and it does so in terms of both word and sacrament, the convergence of which is unveiled in the Eucharistic Liturgy. At Eucharist, people learn that God is merciful and compassionate rather than condemning and punitive. By the same token, they learn that in accepting the aforementioned graces, we enter into the process of conversion which is an ontological share in the suffering of Christ experienced in his passion and death. In participating in this manifestation of suffering human persons make the transition from sin to virtue which, although incredibly painful, invites them to enter into the interior life of Christ and move from the extremes of pride and despair to the centrist and healthy dispositions.

\textsuperscript{69}Dennis and Billy, 80.
\textsuperscript{70}Bernard Häring, The Virtues of an Authentic Life: A Celebration of Spiritual Maturity (Liguori, MS: Ligouri Publications, 1997), 136.
\textsuperscript{71}Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{72}Billy and Keating, 80.
of holiness and wholeness,\textsuperscript{73} qualities that are essential for living an authentic life in Christ. Fourth, and related to the third, “worship highlights the need to develop an interior life and correctly form the conscience out of loving obedience.”\textsuperscript{74} Here development of the interior life means sustaining a genuine level of comfort in terms of conscience formation. It entails remembering, which is at the heart of the Eucharistic Liturgy, that conscience is the one sacred space where human persons are alone before God and must be accountable for who they are and how they have chosen to act in the world.\textsuperscript{75} Such a recollection results from attentiveness to the word of God proclaimed at Eucharist as well as the reenactment of the Last Supper made present by the prayerful engagement of the institution narratives that serve as the hinge of the Eucharistic Prayers. Fifth, and largely overlooked in formal evaluations of the moral life, participation in liturgy underscores the importance of the saints as “sources of moral reflection and grace.”\textsuperscript{76} Modeling is key to the moral life. Eucharist provides a medium for taking on the mind of Christ and living not only appropriately, but also in a grace filled manner. During the liturgical year, believers have the opportunity to encounter the saints through scripture and communal prayer. In these encounters, one is taught to celebrate the consolations of grace and to hope for the ability to appropriate patient endurance in the face of suffering. Also, a devotion to the saints teaches persons to be in right relationship with others who seem to be beyond their reach. Liturgy provides believers with the opportunity not to mimic their achievements, but rather to embrace their mindset and

\textsuperscript{73}Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{74}Billy and Keating, 81. The reader is reminded that the present focus is that of conscience formation vis-a-vis liturgy. Personal spirituality will be referenced briefly; however, it remains the subject of chapter four of this study.
\textsuperscript{75}See \textit{Lumen Gentium}, no. 16.
\textsuperscript{76}Billy and Keating, 82.
practices that are totally focused upon God. Sixth, full, active, conscious participation in the Eucharistic liturgy enables the faithful “to share in the divine life, making growth in virtue a work of the indwelling mystery of Christ and not simply our own willing of the moral good.” This dynamic allows persons to have an experience of wonder and a renewed energy as we strive to move toward the good. Communion with God at Eucharist (and beyond) becomes the fabric of our very lifeblood and a true source of joy. Participation in this sacramental gift forms human persons in virtue which in turn naturally pours over into decisions and actions. Seventh, and finally, Eucharist frees human persons to accept the full power of grace so as to avoid self-centeredness and to become completely oriented toward the other. It is the sincere acceptance of friendship with God that allows human beings to share intimately in his virtues. Friendship with Christ is marked by four major elements: presence, power, gift, and promise, all of which are terse yet fundamental descriptors of the essence of the Paschal Mystery mediated by the Eucharist. This friendship, with its unique characteristics allows one to bridge the gap between the interior life and the active life. It fulfills the hunger for completeness, especially in terms of relationality, it satiates the unquenchable desire for peace (both within and without), and it provides a resolution for the endless longing for healing. But, even more importantly, it allows one the freedom to live for the other.

Given the reflections offered above, it is not only clear that the connection between the Eucharist and the moral life exists, but also that with proper leadership and collaboration, it can flourish and can be applied to specific areas of moral theology.

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 82-83.
79 See the description of a broadened view of the Paschal Mystery described above.
Accordingly, a review of the connection between Eucharist and sexual ethics is more than appropriate with a particular focus upon the formulation of a same-sex ethic that is useful for individual conscience formation.

*The Eucharist, Catholic Sexual Ethics, and Homosexuality*

When investigating the import of the Eucharist for a sexual ethic that evaluates the validity of homosexual relationships in particular contexts, two specific areas must be explored. First, the criteria applied to the moral life in general, which have been discussed above, must be applied to the specifics of a same-sex ethic. Second, and on a more practical and pastoral level, the issue of inclusivity in Eucharistic celebration and worship requires attention in light of the reality that participation in ritual is said to be not only a communing with the Lord but also an fundamental act of social interaction.\(^81\) Such interaction is essential in order to respond to the call to human flourishing for those persons who find themselves to possess a homosexual orientation and who desire to be in relationship in earnest.

First, the Eucharist calls the Church to conversion in the arena of sexual ethics. For centuries, such an ethic has been dominated by a teleological methodology that is grounded in physicalism and legalism. In this context homosexual expression becomes one of the “frequent targets for religio-moral absolutes.”\(^82\) Precise rules and objective standards are absolutely exceptionless. In a community where the Eucharist is at the heart of its existence, such absolute rules are seen as more of a normative guide than “the last word.” The interpretive key in a Eucharistic sexual ethic which considers the

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possibility of homogenital expression is love that brings divinely intended human fulfillment and expresses faithfulness in one’s relationship with God, neighbor self, and world. This is not an ethic of laxity or license, but rather one that helps persons to enter into the mystery of “becoming” fully human.\textsuperscript{83} Thus, on the subjective level of conscience formation, homogenital activity may be acceptable in some contexts.

Second, and related to the first, a Eucharistic sexual ethic must reflect an authentic anthropology that is grounded in the dynamics of grace. Human relationality provides a forum for resolving the disconnect between the realities of freedom and autonomy, agency and passivity, assertiveness and obedience, grace and sin.\textsuperscript{84} Wholesome relationality is confirmed in the mystery of Eucharist, both in terms of its incarnation of the public ministry of Christ and its invitation to genuine communion with him and with the gathered assembly. Such interconnections bring us closer to discovering the truth of what it means to be truly human.\textsuperscript{85} Regarding sexual ethics in general and same-sex ethics in particular, this means that the Church must “protect the weak without disempowering them.”\textsuperscript{86} In the experience of the Roman Catholic Community, adherence to this dictum is questionable. On one hand, the rights and dignity of homosexual persons has been advanced in the social arena of the Church.\textsuperscript{87} On the other hand, restrictions regarding intimate and genital expressions of love on the part of same-sex couples may frustrate their discovery of their true identity in Christ. Once

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{83} Ibid.
\bibitem{84} Steven J. Duffy, \textit{The Dynamics of Grace: Perspectives in Theological Anthropology} (Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1993), 387-393.
\bibitem{85} Billy and Keating, 80.
\end{thebibliography}
again, this aspect of a sexual ethic informed by Eucharistic morality must be left to the arena of the formation of conscience.

Third, sexual ethics that is grounded in Eucharistic spirituality and participation must address the aspects of human life that are fragmented and enable individuals to develop a moral stance that resists temptation. The sexual ethic proposed by the Church is meant to assist persons in their quest for the true meaning and probity of sexuality in light of human brokenness, and what at times can only be identified as a relativistic subjectivity. Accordingly, celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy plunges believers into a narrative reality that transcends present realities that are focused upon the self by identifying truths that are older and deeper than the contemporary Christian community. It communicates a wisdom that allows individuals to exercise prudence and holiness in terms of their choices in the most intimate relationships, i.e., sexual partnerships. Normatively, this means that individuals express their sexuality in a physical manner within the context of marital relationships which are healing and supportive when lived out authentically. Normativity does not preclude the possibility that same-sex couples are capable of exclusivity, fidelity, justice, and love, all of which are ontologically and existentially restorative for both of the partners, thereby providing them with a context that allows them to embrace the virtue of chastity and avoid sexual temptation.

Therefore, in a Eucharistic sexual ethic, the possibility to consider homosexual relations

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88 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics, nos. 5-6.
90 This observation regarding the connection between Eucharist and wisdom cannot be taken lightly given the testimony of the Gospel of John that moves the Eucharistic discourse from the celebration of the Last Supper to the Public Ministry of Jesus. Here, Jesus is portrayed as wisdom before he is identified as flesh and blood to be consumed (John 6:35-59). For a developed discussion of Jesus as wisdom in the Gospel of John see Raymond E. Brown, The Gospel of John I-XII: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 272.
as a valid form of sexual expression within the arena of conscience, while not absolute, is reasonable.

Fourth, as noted earlier, Eucharistic morality also proposes a disposition toward loving obedience which leads to a conversion from narcissism to an embrace of the common good.\textsuperscript{91} In terms of virtuous choices in the arena of sexual ethics, this means adherence to Church teaching if one seeks the truth. It takes the Paschal Mystery seriously as revealed in the scriptures, handed down in the Tradition, and advanced by the Magisterium. Once again, normatively, this means embracing the teachings of the Church with regard to sexual ethics which proposes sexual activity within the context of marriage as the sacred forum given the intention that such activity is open to both life and love. The ecclesial standard that seems to be set is heterosexual marital sexuality coupled with complete rejection of homosexual behaviors if one is to be obedient to the Church.\textsuperscript{92} There is another dimension to obedience as has been noted before, and that is the obedience of the individual to his or her conscience.\textsuperscript{93} Properly formed, a conscience cannot be acted against. A well-formed conscience that appropriates the wisdom incarnate in the Paschal Mystery can only identify Christ as the supreme liberator through his life, death, and resurrection. This liberating presence of Christ has tremendous implications for homosexual persons. One possibility is a nuanced acceptance of homosexual behaviors as noted by Richard McCormick,

If...an individual is incapable of structuring his sexual intimacy within such a relationship (is irreversibly homosexual), and is not called to celibacy for the Kingdom, the liberating presence and concern of the community will take a different form (for \textit{nemo tenetur ad impossibile}). In this instance, both the Church and her ministers will be a liberating

\textsuperscript{91}Dennis and Billy, 81.  
\textsuperscript{92}See the \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}, 2357.  
\textsuperscript{93}\textit{Gaudium et Spes}, no.16.
presence to the homosexual: (a) by inviting him to approximate the qualities of the covenanted man-woman relationship through fidelity and exclusiveness; (b) by aiding the individual to develop those healthy, outgoing attitudes and emotional responses that make this possible; (c) by extending the full sacramental and social supports of the Church to his striving; (d) by condemning and combating all social, legal and ecclesial discrimination against and oppression of the homosexual.\textsuperscript{94}

All in all, true obedience to the Spirit of God must be discerned by the agent guided by the wisdom of the Magisterium and the insights of theologians both of whom must be informed by Eucharistic ethic that is outwardly focused, i.e., it seeks first the common good before personal good.

Fifth, Eucharistic worship has also been said to underscore the lives of the saints as sources of moral reflection and grace,\textsuperscript{95} an insight that can be translated from fundamental moral theology to the realm of sexual ethics which continues to be “in process” of the development of a stance regarding homogenital behavior. Saints, in short are those persons who “are profoundly transformed by the Christian vision and way of life, and whose lives intersect with others in an explosively transforming manner.”\textsuperscript{96} In a sense, this means that they have come to love truth and in so doing, they achieve a love of God which is reflected in intimate relationships with others, a sacred intersection of persons, the desire for which becomes contagious. In coming to know the saints, we become acquainted with their moral vision and “their struggles to put on virtue.”\textsuperscript{97} They are sources that move the soul toward conversion. While one is hard pressed to discover the moral vision in the life of the saints with regard to same-sex relationships, the

\textsuperscript{95}Billy and Keating, 82.
\textsuperscript{97}James Keating and David M. McCarthy, “Moral Theology with the Saints” \textit{Modern Theology} 19:2 (April 2003), 208.
potential contributions in this area are not devalued especially in the area of personal and communal moral conversion. In history, many saints have challenged the Church to review its teaching and practice regarding human flourishing and happiness. This could be an indicator that some of the saints that believers meet in the Eucharist on a regular basis issue a call beyond time and space for prophets to be raised up to embrace the challenge of prayerfully evaluating Catholic teaching regarding homosexuality. On the other hand, the personal discipline, sacrifice, and suffering that is embodied in the lives of many saints may point toward a renewed appreciation of the Church’s call to live a life of celibate chastity. Once again, realizing the importance of the saints in Christian worship and Christian living does not give absolute answers to the question of same-sex relationships, but realistic possibilities to be considered in the prayerful development of a virtuous conscience.

Sixth, Eucharist enables human persons to share in the divine life by the experience of the indwelling of Christ. Encounter with the divine is inseparable from the experience of sexual intimacy with another. Eucharist allows persons to enter into a unique relationship with God and one another by means of giving one access to the “divine energy of creativity and love…for the purpose of giving life and deepening communion.” The same may be said of human sexuality.98 Application of this observation to the phenomenon of homosexuality is paramount. The basic point is that selfless love gives rise to shared life and generativity broadly understood.99 For the

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homosexual person, the only context that this may be realized absolutely is in the context of interpersonal relationships. This does not mean that the homosexual person’s energy is mediated solely by the sexual relationship; however, it does see the experience of sexual love as an impetus for participating the communal life of the Church and world by participation in sacrament and striving for the common good. Experience of the Paschal Mystery by means of Eucharist provides a venue and model for establishing the parameters of sexual relationship by means of experiencing the indwelling of Christ who is the incarnation of love and justice. According, same-sex relationships may provide an avenue to the holy, in conjunction with communal participation in the Eucharist, in terms of modeling such love and justice in a personalist manner that is not tied to biological complementarity and generativity.

Seventh, and finally, Eucharistic participation graces human persons to enter into deep friendship with Christ, and correspondingly intimate friendship with others who image Christ, making life and love a school of virtue. As noted earlier in this work, sexuality provides the canvas for painting the portrait of the most unique and intimate form of friendship. The metaphor of the canvas is employed here since is has been argued that the experiences of sexuality can be diverse and the creative opportunities to develop an intimate sexual friendship should be available to all persons as a matter of justice since friendship is often considered to be the normative adult relationship. This model of friendship serves as a critique of patriarchal ways of thinking about both homosexuality and heterosexuality. Therefore, although an official change has not occurred with regard

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100 This concept will be discussed briefly below under the heading of homosexuality and inclusivity.
101 See chapter 2 of the present study.
to same-sex ethics on the part of the Church, participation in the Eucharist which is the “source and summit” of salvation and which by it very nature demands the right to, necessity of, and obligation to intimate friendships, may color the subjective evaluation of homosexual behaviors in the area of the formation of conscience.

A Word on Eucharist, Inclusivity, and Homosexuality

The major problematic that exists regarding the aforementioned arguments concerning the connection between Eucharist and the development of a sexual ethic that addresses homosexuality genuinely is that of inclusivity. As discussed earlier in the present study, the Church asks for full, active conscious participation on the part of all believers and that it is demanded by the very nature of the Eucharistic liturgy itself. Such a command is not surprising since to participate in the Eucharist is a sacred moment when human persons share in the divine life. To share in the life of the Trinity affects persons anthropologically since it is the most potent reminder that human beings are created to exist and thrive in community. And again, participation in the Eucharist brings human persons face to face with the redemptive grace of the Paschal Mystery. It is no wonder that Thomas Talley notes that “ritual is a life-and-death matter because it is a matter of Death and Life.”

Herein lies the potential problem for the homosexual person who does not feel called to celibacy either for his or her own desire for intimate relationality or for the sake of the kingdom. A popular Catholic hymn declares,

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live…Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true, where

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104 Lawrence E. Mick, To Live as We Worship (Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1984), 92.
all God’s children dare to seek to dream God’s reign anew…Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word. Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace, let this house proclaim from floor to rafter all are welcome…

For the active homosexual Catholic these sentiments do not ring true. Same-sex couples who act upon a perceived irreversible homosexual orientation are considered to be in the state of mortal sin and as a result cannot participate fully in Eucharistic worship since they cannot participate in the reception of communion.

The Church would do well to remember that denial of full participation in Eucharist in the situation of same-sex couples results in a considerable dilemma. It would also do well to remember that in the scriptural witness, Paul castigated the Corinthian community regarding their exclusive practices regarding the Lord’s supper not because of faulty liturgical formulae or invalid elements, but rather due to their lack of incorporating and embracing the marginalized of the community. Whether adherence to established Church teaching is maintained or prophetic challenge gives rise to hope in terms to the qualified acceptance of the struggles of homosexual couples, the standard of full, active, conscious participation in Eucharist should be maintained for all the members of the Body of Christ. Failure to do so may challenge the authenticity of the Church’s claim to being a beacon of compassion. In any case, same-sex couples should take the importance of active engagement in the Eucharist in the formation of their consciences.

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Homosexuality and Other Dimensions of the Church’s Sacramental Life

There are other ways in which the Paschal Mystery is mediated, albeit not in the comprehensive manner that Eucharist provides. These means are present in the other official sacraments of the Church that will be discussed here briefly in order to round out the present discussion of sacraments, liturgy, and homosexuality. Specifically, investigation of the nature and import of three additional sacraments stand out, namely, baptism, confirmation, and reconciliation. Accordingly, each one will be discussed in turn with their potential for assisting in the formation of conscience of homosexual persons.

With regard to baptism, the Code of Canon Law states that baptism is “the gate to the sacraments, necessary for salvation” and the means by which “men and women are freed from their sins, reborn as children of God, and configured to Christ by an indelible character” and “incorporated into the Church.” This observation is no small matter for it declares succinctly that Baptism is the vehicle through which an individual is able to become aware of and to participate in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Accordingly, many liturgical and sacramental theologians have provided observations that merit reflection since they can be readily applied to the question of the connection between Baptism and the formulation of a sexual ethic that considers the validity of homosexual activity. For the purposes of the present study, a number of observations on the part of Bernard Cooke will be considered.

108 Marriage is not addressed here because of its treatment in previous chapters.
109 Code of Canon Law, Canon 849.
First, Baptism is considered to be a rite of welcome and in turn the earliest ritualized means of an extension of hospitality by the Christian community since the baptismal neophyte experiences for the first time in this sacrament full membership in the community of faith and is identified as an authentic Christian.\textsuperscript{111} Hospitality is a virtue that has deep biblical roots, originating in the ancient Semitic ethic of “welcoming the stranger.”\textsuperscript{112} Such hospitality should be extended through the life of the baptized through the welcoming and nurturing community. The Roman Catholic Church has not adopted this practice entirely with regard to the practicing homosexual. As noted above in the section concerning Eucharist, such an individual is not afforded the right to participate fully in other sacraments, in particular the Eucharist. A homosexual person is truly a stranger in the community and therefore by virtue of his or her baptism should be welcomed to the Table of the Lord with open arms. Given the parameters of liturgical and canon law, this decision must be left to the individual as a matter of conscience.

Second, the ritual of signing the cross on the forehead of the baptized is of extreme significance for it is the mark of initial initiation for the candidate. This cross may be interpreted in two ways with regard to the manner in which the homosexual lives out his or her life. On one hand, celibacy that is mandated by the church may be a means of refining the human capacity to love on the part of the kingdom in ways that do not include genital intimacy.\textsuperscript{113} On the other hand, the sign of the cross may be a sign of the need for prophetic witness with regard to the transformation of ideas and ideals when it

\textsuperscript{111}Bernard Cooke, \textit{Sacraments and Sacramentality} (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2009), 139.
comes to same-sex relationships on both objective and subjective levels. The initial sign of the cross of the forehead of the new Christian may be a powerful reminder and sign that Christians are to adopt the stances of Jesus and Paul who challenged traditional notions of sin in order to advance an ethic of inclusion that was truly rooted in the love that God offers to all of humanity.\textsuperscript{114} Once again, the personal decision lies with the individual believer and cannot at this time serve as an offense to Catholic doctrine.

Third, and finally, the election of the baptized by God and by the community is thoroughly sacramental.\textsuperscript{115} Baptism publicly identifies the person as a disciple of Christ who is capable of accepting the invitation to salvation. Baptism therefore enables the Christian to experience the realities of “self-liberation, other enrichment, honesty, fidelity, service to life, social responsibility, and joy.”\textsuperscript{116} Does current Catholic Church teaching allow for these realities to manifest themselves? For example, can the homosexual person engaged in a committed same-sex relationship experience liberation since the only way of being true to the narrative of his or her life entail hiding aspects of their personal stories? Or, can one experience joy, when told that the intimate acts that they are engaged in with another are intrinsically evil? One would do well to ponder these questions when evaluating the morality of same-sex relations.

Another sacrament that has ramifications for the development of a personal same-sex ethic is Confirmation. The words of the rite implore the Lord to provide the candidates with a “spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence” all of which a required for giving

\textsuperscript{115}Cooke, Sacraments and Sacramentality, 139.
“witness to Christ by lives that are built on faith and love.” If the Church believes that such charismata are received by an outpouring of the Lord’s Spirit, these are definite implications for moral discernment in general and also in the area of sexual ethics.

First, a word about moral discernment on the part of mature Christians needs to be discussed. While moral discernment begins with the basic capacity to distinguish good from evil, a more mature approach means discovery of what is worth striving for as a matter of the heart. It requires believers to connect the sacrament of confirmation with a personal and heartfelt appropriation of the norms of social justice. As mentioned in chapter two of the present study this commands believers to connect a sexual ethic with the concept of “just love.” In addition, this requires a balance between the concepts of understanding, encouragement, and challenge on the part of the Magisterium, theologians, and pastoral ministers with regard to the question of same-sex relationships. In sum, this means that either the Church must provide more support for those who wrestle with a call to celibacy in the face of a homosexual orientation or address the need for radical change in Church teaching with regard to sexuality.

Second, a conversation regarding the role of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are received in their fullness in the celebration of Confirmation must be entertained. Wisdom is a gift of the Spirit to assist the believer in practicing virtue more perfectly and discern God’s will in particular circumstances. Courage, which is the virtual equivalent of fortitude, is “that quality of character through which its possessor is able to endure hardships and to overcome fears that would deflect an individual from the pursuit of the

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117 The Rite of Confirmation, no. 25.
120 Gula, Moral Discernment, 117-120.
aims of a humanly and Christian good life." Knowledge speaks to the requirement of gathering as much information to result in a well-formed conscience. These gifts of the Holy Spirit inform a same-sex ethic on the level of the development of conscience. They help one to integrate their sexual selves into the whole of their personhood. For the individual that is truly irreversibly homosexual, the grace of the sacrament of Confirmation acknowledges the autonomy that individuals have for decision making, the good will of the Magisterium of the Church and the desire for the human and sexual flourishing of homosexual persons. Unfortunately, once again it would be irresponsible to propose definitive answers here; however, reflection upon the grace of confirmation broadens the field for reflection about the possibility of the validity and goodness of same-sex relationships in particular circumstances.

The final sacrament to be considered with regard to the question of homosexuality is Reconciliation. Generally speaking, the matrix around which an understanding of the sacrament of Reconciliation unfolds is that of justice. This assertion is made given the origins and evolution of the sacrament from the days of the Order of Penitents through the development of auricular private confession. In essence throughout the history of Christianity, the Church’s pastors realized that there was an inherent right on the part of believers to participate fully in the Church’s life. Ergo, the Church devised sacramental methods of reconciling individuals with God and the Church. Ultimately this

sacrament showcases that the Church is concerned with the balance of rights and responsibilities of individuals in terms of the moral life.

Very often, the sacrament of Reconciliation is connected with the moral categories of restorative or punitive justice, which is not incorrect; however, a review of the biblical origins of this sacrament demonstrates that the justice that is truly advanced in this sacrament is restorative justice. Restorative justice is concerned with what is seen as the heart of the moral life, that is relationships, and aims to restore them to wholeness and holiness. Progressive yet traditional understandings of restorative justice within the context of reconciliation focus first upon restoration of right relationship with God and expand to include the restoration of right relationships with neighbor. One is hard pressed to hear of the importance of the restoration of right relationship with self and world, two affiliations that are not always naturally affiliated with the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Given the importance of relationships in the moral life, the sacrament of Reconciliation has profound importance for understanding sexual dynamics and the development of a same-sex ethic. On one hand, given the current teaching of the Church, sacramental Reconciliation is essential for those who struggle with a homosexual relationship and activity. In order to be reintegrated into the community of the Church they both require and deserve an opportunity to be freed from what is considered to be “gravely sinful” when they engage in homosexual behaviors, whatever the context. Such an approach is truly well-intended and manifest a desire for the genuine advancement of

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124 See, Charles E. Curran, The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 77-83. Curran stresses the four aforementioned relationships as key to both authentic experiences of reconciliation (79) and essential for the development of a moral stance in general.
the virtue of justice in the lives of homosexual persons. Revisionist approaches to same-sex relations and the need for reconciliation are radically different in focus and approach. They focus upon the relationship with the self that needs to be healed given what is at least an implicit allegation that homosexuality reflects a narcissistic sexual “dis-ease” that results in tremendous “guilt over self-love.”\textsuperscript{125} Such reconciliation is potentially capable of freeing homosexual persons from all the suspicions about self-love, exclusive and committed love of their partner, and the goodness connected with bodily sexual expression.\textsuperscript{126} Reconciliation in this vein is healing in terms of its opportunity to free a homosexual from what can only be called the sin of subversive self-hatred. It also manifests the connection with the virtue of justice that is connected with the sacrament, since it enables persons to express ontologically and existentially their capacity for love that reflects their nature as created in and developing into the image of God. Accordingly, on both sides of the debate association of the Sacrament of Reconciliation with homogenital expressions of love is essential. It is however a matter of conscience properly understood to determine how one avails oneself to this sacrament.

\textit{Conclusion}

The connection between the moral life and the sacramental life is paramount. Human persons are grounded in the sacred phenomenological realities of symbol and ritual. These realities are played out in the narrative of human life by means of the experiences of sacraments that unfold in the context of various liturgies. These theologically informed rituals are not isolated; rather they impact the Christian life on

\textsuperscript{125}Nelson, \textit{Where are We: Seven Sinful Problems and Seven Virtuous Possibilites}, 98.
\textsuperscript{126}Ibid. 99.
various levels. For the purposes of the present study, this realization had been restricted to the sexual experience of believers with a more narrow focus on same-sex relationships.

There exists a sort of “queer” fidelity in terms of examining homosexual relationships and activity vis-à-vis the sacramental and liturgical theology advance by the Church. It has been determined here that at the very least, same-sex relationships must be marked by an expanded understanding of the Paschal Mystery that informs both anthropology and ethics and which embraces the notion of inclusivity in both ecclesial and secular communities. Eucharist has been demonstrated to be the primary canvas for developing such a portrait of the Christian life for the active homosexual, although variant interpretations of this context have been offered. In addition, homosexual behavior within the context of committed relationships has been examined in view of the other sacraments of initiation (Baptism and Eucharist) as well as in light of the Church’s fervent desire to advance Christ’s ministry of compassion and reconciliation.

The ultimate conclusion with regard to the Church’s teaching regarding the connection between the sacramental/liturgical life and human sexuality that is played out in the context of a homosexual relationship is not resolved here. The validity of both official moral teachings of the Church and the highly reflective insights of moral theologians do leave believers at an impasse. The hope is that the present chapter does contribute to the formation of individual consciences in a way that is both creative and faithful. If the matter is to be resolved (if this is indeed possible), one must move to the

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127 The present discussion speaks to the reality that Magisterial discussions of homosexuality in the forum of conscience formation does not often speak to “the challenges to moral reflection that the People of God actually face.” See, David Coutier, “Moral Theology for Real People: Agency, Practical Reason, and the Task of the Moral Theologian” in New Wine, New Wineskins: A Next Generation Reflects on Key Issues in Catholic Moral Theology, ed. William C. Mattison III (New York: Sheed &Ward, 2005), 120-121.
natural progression of any discussion of liturgy, namely spirituality, with particular focus
upon the spirituality of the homosexual and its impact on the validity on entering into
intimate genital liaisons.
Having spoken of the importance of referencing the liturgy and sacramentality that is part and parcel of Roman Catholic culture in that it infuses every aspect of the life of the believer, it is essential that liturgy, the public prayer of the Church, be incorporated into a personal and authentic spirituality on the part of all the faithful. The concept of spirituality however eludes simple definition, and requires significant reflection, both prayerful and cerebral, if this notion is to be understood and incorporated into the whole of one’s personality. Perhaps a starting point is to view two fundamental definitions of spirituality that provide a forum for discussing the importance of incorporating attention to the phenomenon of spirituality into the embrace of a truly moral life. The first is the simple definition that authentic “Christian spirituality is a person’s foundational relationship with the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, lived out in daily life.”

Without question, such attention to this foundational relationship will influence all other human relationships (i.e., with neighbor, self, and world) on all levels, including the discovery and integration of the sexual self. Nurturing these relationships, from the divine to the human to the whole of creation, will allow believers to express their engendered humanity in the most genuine way that is possible. It will also give rise to a comprehensive and mature anthropology that both speaks to the embodiment of the image of God that, while broken, is present in every human person especially in terms of

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1It should be noted from the onset of this chapter that while the discussion does attend to anthropological, theological and ethical argument, the present discussion is somewhat more pastoral and focused in tone – a necessity in any discussion of the possibility of the moral rectitude of gay and lesbian genital sexual relationships.

developing one’s conscience with regard to human interpersonal relationality on the most intimate of levels, i.e., in the sexual forum. The second definition to rest in the background of the formulation of an authentic sexual spirituality is the understanding of spirituality as “the way in which a person understands and lives within his or her historical context that aspect of his or her religion, philosophy, or ethic that is viewed as the loftiest, the noblest, the most calculated to lead to the fullness of the ideal or perfection being sought.”\(^3\) This definition takes human experience seriously and speaks to the reality that narrative of life in all of its diversity is being co-authored by both the human and the divine.

In light of these preliminary observations, a trajectory for the present chapter may be formulated. First, a thorough understanding of “spirituality” will be developed that includes both the insights of conventional wisdom as well as more modern and novel approaches. Second, the fundamental connections between spirituality and moral theology will be articulated. Third, the means by which morality, love, and sexuality are intimately intertwined will be examined. Fourth, and finally, the import of the development of an authentic spirituality for the formulation of a mature conscience discerning the morality of same-sex relationships will be explored. This investigation will provide yet one more piece of the puzzle that attempts to ground the experience of homosexual genital behaviors within the context of a Catholic ethic that respects the Tradition and the experience of human persons.

Christian Spirituality: Theology, Theory and Praxis

Given the aforementioned initial definitions of spirituality, it is essential to develop a thorough understanding of this concept vis-à-vis the human experience and the human condition in order to ascend to an understanding of human life and relationships that is truly “good.” In the last several decades, there has been a veritable flood of literature on spirituality and spiritual theology; ergo, attempts to capture the essence of Christian spirituality are something of a daunting task. And although there has been a proliferation of “spiritualities” one aspect of the attempt to grasp this concept remains constant: spirituality entails embodiment of the reality of the Paschal Mystery, broadly defined, and integration of this reality into one’s daily existence.  

In order to develop an understanding of spirituality that is helpful for the present task, one must first develop a sense of its foundation, that is, its formalization by means of systematic reflection through the theological discipline of spiritual theology. Once again, the concept of spiritual theology eludes singular or simple definition; however, Jordan Aumann provides a thorough working definition

Spiritual theology is that part of theology that, proceeding from the truths of divine revelation and the religious experience of individual persons, defines the nature of the supernatural life, formulates directives for its growth and development, and explains the process by which souls advance from the beginning of the spiritual life to its full perfection.

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4See, “spirituality, forms of” The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought: Intellectual, Spiritual and Moral Dimensions Horizons of Christian Thought (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 685. “For the Christian, spirituality is essentially life in the Holy Spirit, the life and love of God himself, released by the death and glorification of Jesus Christ. Grounded in a sense of Incarnation, it both transcends and involves the material and the physical, the means of subsistence, and the satisfaction of bodily appetites.” The present study will return to this definition in light of its importance for the development of a sexual spirituality.

134
Simon Chan identifies three elements for understanding this definition that clarify the discipline of spiritual theology as a prelude to the development of any authentic spirituality. First, spiritual theology clarifies the very nature of the spiritual life, marked by grace, virtue, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as an existence that is renewed in the person and event of Jesus the Christ. Second, spiritual theology provides directives for the embrace of such a life including wrestling with the reality of sin and the cultivation of attitudes and disciplines that advance one on the way of perfection. Third, it explains the process by which believers move from the initial attraction to the spiritual life to its perfection. In essence, spiritual theology is a valid and ascetical discipline that results in human flourishing in relationships both human and divine.

It has been acknowledged that the development of an adequate spiritual theology that leads to both wholeness and holiness must be subject to certain criteria. Chan suggests three benchmarks for an authentic spiritual theology that may be incarnated in the pursuit of a truly Christian existence that leads one to become “a skilled player, a virtuous person, in building and sustaining relationships of love and mutuality.”

The first criterion for an adequate spiritual theology that can assist in the development of an authentic spirituality is comprehensiveness. This requires the adoption of a conceptual framework that is extensive enough to account for the diversity of human and spiritual experiences that are penned in the narrative of one’s life. To be authentically comprehensive, one must engage all of the resources that are available to the Pilgrim People of God. This certainly would include the standard resources such as Scripture,
Tradition, human experience, the sciences, and moral norms, but also, this would entail engaging other aspects of theology such as the Church’s social teaching, liturgical celebration and participation, the testimony of saints and other spiritual writers and the contextualization of a healthy eschatological vision. Such a balanced approach to development of spiritual theology results in a purview that will allow one to truly progress in the spiritual life, and correspondingly the moral life.9

A second criterion adopted for an analysis of the development of an adequate spiritual theology is coherence, meaning specifically that it exhibits a certain consistency that recognizes the innate relationship of its various dimensions.10 This does not dismiss the reality of mystery and paradox in the formulation of such a theology; however, discussion of and reflection upon these realities do need to occur within consistent and realistic understanding of Christianity in general and, for the purposes of the present study, Catholicism in particular. At the same time, the criterion of coherence must articulate an authentic understanding of our heritage that can be translated into concrete practice. It must recognize the impact of the Christian system of belief and prayer on the cultivation of virtue both individually and communally.11

The third and final criterion for the development of a spiritual theology that is oriented toward growth in virtue and holiness is that of evocability. As noted by Chan, “a spiritual theology that is intended to lead us in the way of godliness should be able to direct our attention beyond the rational formulation to the spiritual realities they

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9Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 22-23. As noted above, the specific connections between spirituality and the moral life will be addressed later in the present chapter.
10Ibid., 23.
express.” Simply stated, evocability speaks to a need for balance between devotional and theological motivations for life in the world that is marked by a Christian persona. There must be a freedom of movement between these two pillars of the Christian life for advancement in maturity of relationship with God, neighbor, self, and world.\textsuperscript{13}

In light of this brief investigation of the criteria necessary to develop a genuine and realistic spiritual theology, one can begin to format a definition of spirituality that is comprehensive, coherent, and evocative. Such a definition does not negate the definitions proposed above; however, it does situate spirituality in a context that is helpful when attempting to locate the importance of spirituality within the context of the moral life. Accordingly, for the advancement of the present study, the following will serve as a basic definition of spirituality for the purposes of the present investigation. Christian spirituality reflects the unfolding Tradition of the Catholic community that lovingly draws individuals into the dynamics of ongoing conversion of heart as an interior movement toward holiness and wholeness that has exterior manifestations and ramifications. It calls for a clarification of one’s personal and communal sense of vocation by attending to the call of God that expresses itself from the deepest recesses of one’s being and participation with the life of the Church at prayer. It consists in the formation of right relationships by means of docility to the Holy Spirit by valuing and emulating the life of the saints as a moral and spiritual paradigm.\textsuperscript{14} In light of the

\textsuperscript{12}Chan, \textit{Spiritual Theology}, 24.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{14}See, \textit{Spirituality and Morality: Integrating Prayer and Action}, eds., Dennis J. Billy C.S.S.R. and Donna Lynn Orsuto (New York: Paulist Press, 1996). Of premier importance for the present reflection is the impact of relationships on the maturation of one’s spirituality. The aspects of this proposed definition will be exegeted more thoroughly in the section on the connection between morality and spirituality.
aforementioned proposed definition, a few nuances need to be provided. As articulated in this definition, a number of aspects are subject to refinement.

Spirituality is first concerned with fidelity to the Tradition of the Church. As noted by Avery Dulles, “only through the expressions of faith of past believers can anyone today become a Christian.” Without a time tested historical context, conversations and embodiment of a valid approach to spirituality cannot evolve. Accordingly, spirituality must take to heart the unfolding nature of the Church’s understanding of Jesus the Christ in a manner that is both faithful and creative. This will be helpful in examining the potential for the development of doctrine in moral matters and in the ongoing formation of conscience in the same venue.

Secondly, conversion is at the heart of Christian spirituality. While conversions may be related to specific life events, spirituality is concerned more with conversion that is continuous reflecting a personal commitment that deepens as one continues to pen the narrative of one’s life. It is an espousal of the virtue of metanoia, a movement away from sin and self-centeredness toward loving God and concern for the good of one’s neighbor. Conversion clarifies one’s vision to see the “real world of value” in which one is engaged, leading to virtuous commitments. When one sharpens one’s insight regarding

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ultimate relational priorities, Christian character is translated into virtuous action which validates the genuineness of one’s spirituality.

Third, spirituality clarifies one’s sense of vocation, not merely in terms of a personal calling to a particular task or duty, but rather to the very expression of oneself vis-à-vis his or her relationship with God, neighbor, self, and world. This awareness of vocation is clearly nourished by one’s faith and personal discernment that speaks to the center of his or her life. It sees the fundamental vocation of the Christian as a call that “both transforms and obligates a person.” Recognition and radical acceptance of this vocation leads to the freedom “to witness to the proper ordering of … life according to Christian charity.” In essence, embrace of personal vocation incarnates one’s spirituality by providing the forum for the development of right relationships in the Church and in the world.

Fourth, the development of a spirituality that leads to holiness and wholeness needs to allow a person to grow in the likeness of God in whose image he or she is created. Quite simply, this requires one to listen to the voice of God that is inherently present within him or her. This requires skill in the art of prayer. Prayer helps the person to realize that God is active in one’s life and not passive; it is an invitation into the life of grace; it calls persons in their true humanity to obedience to the will of God, and allows persons to encounter Christ by the memory of and participation in the Paschal Mystery.

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Attentiveness to this call can take the form of private prayer or participation in the life of the Church at prayer.\textsuperscript{21}

Fifth, anticipating the connection between morality and spirituality, the formation of right relationships takes center stage in the formation of one’s personal and ecclesial spirituality. This involves the formation of friendships to varying degrees with God, neighbor, self, and world. Here a number of movements are key. First, intimate communion with God is essential to embracing the call to holiness and developing a spirituality that is more than adequate. As noted by Karl Rahner, a true Christian must have a “genuine experience of God emerging from the very heart of our existence.”\textsuperscript{22} The implication on this level of friendship is that commitment to faith and morals must emerge from relationship rather than mere adherence to doctrine proposed by the Church’s Magisterium.\textsuperscript{23} Accordingly, following this mode of living, in the spirit of Jesus, one will be in right relationship with God. In terms of relationality on a human level, Elizabeth Johnson’s observation that “a spirituality is a concrete way of living the gospel inspired by the Spirit and in company with others” is particularly helpful since it “commits one to discipleship in loving solidarity with all.”\textsuperscript{24} Clearly acceptance of this mode of spirituality realizes that adoption of a life that is truly human and truly Christian does not take the form of a monologue. Rather, it is a creative and grace filled dialogue with the other in varying contexts which lies at the heart of the dynamic of genuine

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21}The importance of public prayer in the development of one’s spirituality is yet another impetus to challenge the Church to be truly inclusive in its invitation to the sacramental life.
\item \textsuperscript{23}This statement does not dismiss that validity and authority of Church teaching, which is more than often a vehicle to intimate encounter with the divine. It does however place value on the personal experience that one has with the divine via the development of an operative and meaningful spirituality.
\item \textsuperscript{24}Elizabeth A. Johnson, \textit{Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God} (New York, Continuum, 2007), 87.
\end{itemize}
friendship. It requires a unique balance between proactivity in loving and docility to the Spirit of God. Finally, as noted above with regard to the discussion of liturgy,\textsuperscript{25} progression in the spiritual life requires attentiveness to the life and example of the saints who are revered in the Tradition. Quite clearly, saints are paradigms of discipleship who, by virtue of the manifestation of grace, are able to discern the path to holiness and embrace it whole-heartedly. By the same token, saints are not only spiritual guides or models, they are also “companions on the journey.”\textsuperscript{26} Their fellowship is a key element to human formation in the spiritual life.

Thus spirituality is a many-splendored thing. It provides persons with a valid affinity for the desire to form right relationships in every aspect of their lives. This phenomenon takes on greater importance when coupled with the notion of embracing the moral life from a Christian perspective.

\textit{Spirituality and Moral Theology}

Richard Gula sets the tone for an initial conversation regarding the convergence of morality and spirituality (as discussed above) as a precursor to the advancement of a spiritual sexuality:

\begin{quote}
Christian spirituality and Christian morality converge in the good life. Spirituality is concerned with the wellspring of our actions. If we focus on the actions that get done, then we neglect what nourishes and sustains those actions. There is more to us, and more to life, that what we do. Our interior life affects our exterior behavior. If we understand that the purpose of life is to live in friendship with God, then there can be no real separation of the moral and spiritual life. Our searching for meaning,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25}See chapter 3 of the present study.
hungering for love, yearning to connect, or seeking fulfillment are, themselves, response to self-giving love.  

While implicit in Gula’s reflection, it is important to note at the outset of the discussion of the intersection of morality and spirituality, this convergence will affect our relationships on the existential level, that is, in terms of our development of a stand of agapic love toward the other in various forms, including, and perhaps most importantly, on the level of sexual relationality.

Speaking generally, what then does it mean to live “the good life”? As with the development of any spirituality, coupled with a desire to move toward moral perfection, the answer is multifaceted. At the very least, and for the purposes of grounding a unique, yet accurate portrait of the intrinsic connections between the moral and spiritual life, a number of issues must be attended to if such a spirituality can be tailored to touch the sexual side of human existence. While not comprehensive or profoundly daedal, the following five points speak to a convergence of morality and spirituality that serve as a bedrock for the development of a sexual spirituality: faithfulness, friendship, freedom and responsibility, human fulfillment and formation of conscience. 

*Faithfulness:* Human faithfulness speaks to the reality that human persons are imaged in and grow in the likeness of God who is in complete solidarity with the persons that he has created and with whom he wishes to exist as a covenantal partner. In covenantal relationships that foster the development of an authentic spirituality one is

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28 While clear connections will be made regarding these spiritual/moral virtues, no particular order is proposed. Again, it is of extreme importance to recognize the place of virtue in the formation of conscience and the evaluation of particular behaviors.
29 Gula, *The Good Life*, 70.
called to become rooted in the partnership with fidelity, loyalty, and trustworthiness. These relationships allow one to know that one is trusted by God in terms of personal life choices and in turn he or she must elicit the trustworthiness of others by acknowledging their gifts and talents to move toward full human flourishing. In being faithful and making such acts of trust, one is called recognize the power that they hold in relationships and to gravitate away from tendencies toward controlling, dominating, and manipulating behaviors so as to be in right relationship with others on both personal and communal levels. In addition, trustworthiness is filled with ambiguity, knowing that both we and the other act with various motivations, thereby asking persons to examine their wants and desires if they truly seek to live the good life. Such an incarnation of trustworthiness speaks to the respect for boundaries that make any relationship wholesome, holy, and fruitful.

Friendship: Although friendship has been discussed earlier in this study, it is important to note its correlation with a spirituality that converges naturally with the moral life in anticipation of a formulation of a mature sexual spirituality that informs Catholic moral teaching. In particular, it is important for friendship to be seen here as a paradigm for all right relationships that reflect the notion that relationality is fundamental to human existence, especially from the perspective that friendship with God naturally progresses to just relationships with one’s fellow human beings marked by love, mutuality, and self-transcendence.

30Ibid., 72.
31Ibid., 75.
32Ibid., 76.
Spirituality and psychology coexist as cousins in the sphere of basic human formation. Many theories of human development acknowledge that true personal growth is the result of a steady and progressive movement from an absolute autonomous existence marked by self-absorption to the development of a secure self-identity that results in free and full commitment of oneself to others in the context of meaningful relationships. These relationships range from the interpersonal and intimate, to the communal, to the transcendent and to the divine.\(^{34}\) Success in these relationships requires a profound awareness of oneself as foundational relational being.

What then is the significance of friendship for the intersection of the spiritual and moral life? Ultimately it is two-fold. First, an examination of the significance of human friendships in the convergence of spirituality and the moral life is required. Second, the importance of friendship with God as the means to full human goodness vis-à-vis the dynamic of human friendships must be explored to allow the human heart to rest in God and lead to full maturation of the human spirit. This in itself leads to decision-making that reflects faithfulness, authenticity, and intimacy with the God who created humanity out of love moving outside God’s-self, redemption in light of the person and event of Jesus the Christ, and on-going sanctification by the Holy Spirit who calls us to holiness and wholeness that far surpasses the prelapsarian state of human existence.

Again, it is important to pose the question: What is the significance for human friendships for the spiritual and moral life? A number of points are significant here. True friendships assist the partners to grow in virtue as competence to imagine and embrace the moral and spiritual life.\(^{35}\) Also, friendships hone the abilities of the partners

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\(^{34}\)Ibid., 99.

\(^{35}\)Haring, *The Virtues of An Authentic Life*, 3-6.
in their unique perception of what is good and holy through its embodiment in the other and their actions. As noted by the foremost expert on the connection between friendship and the moral life, “Friendship begins in recognition of the other, requires appreciation for them as other, and deepens as each moves further out of self and toward the other. In this respect, friendship is a paradigm for the moral life.” Thus, sincere friendship also provides a potential avenue to holiness and wholeness that is an integral element in the cultivation of a genuine spirituality. Additionally, human friendship provides a springboard for understanding and embracing the greatest of all relationships, that is, friendship with God which is only experienced apophatically and is truly the only means of living a genuine good life.

Friendship with God recognizes both the importance and limitation of human relationships. As noted by Augustine, “our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, O God.” Human friendships are in a sense finite unless their end is in God and accordingly lead one to personal encounter with the divine. There must be a personal and phenomenological transformation of the understanding of human friendship since relationship with another can never fully grasp the perfection of beauty, wisdom, human maturity and fulfillment, conformity to the image of God, or attraction to the beauty of the Good. Paradoxically, one cannot enter into such communion with the divine without an awareness of the importance of these relationships which are irreducibly meaningful however finite they may be. Ultimately, “only through friendship with God,”

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which is the very core and essence of the moral life, can one experience his or her “original destiny,…original image and likeness,” and “fulfillment.” Without a spiritual relationship with the God of Jesus Christ, persons cannot engage in substantive and sacred relationships with the other who is before them. Ergo, in the interpersonal communion with the divine, one does experience the convergence of morality and spirituality.

*Formation of Conscience*: Moral discernment in the Christian life lies at the heart of the present musings. Numerous helpful definitions have been offered in recent years regarding different aspects of conscience that work in tandem in terms of the process of moral discernment. Unfortunately, even these definitions of conscience that are revisionist and more comprehensive than those of the prior Tradition tend to result in parabolic directives that at the very best usually result in virtually exceptionless norms if not ones that are absolutely exceptionless. In fact, they can, at times, tend to misuse several of the normative sources for Christian ethical reflection in a way that attends to a comprehensive Christian Ethic, namely one that attends to character and both personal and communal engagement. If morality is to be connected to the central role of

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41Ibid., 109.
42For a brief overview see, *Conscience: Readings in Moral Theology No. 14*, ed. Charles E. Curran (New York: Paulist Press, 2004). This volume contains various essays that fall into three categories: the historical evolution of an understanding of conscience from a theological perspective; the presentation of the concept of conscience present in official church teaching as well as theological response to hierarchical church teaching, and the coupling of the notion of conscience with specific issues. In particular two articles are helpful in understanding the perspective of conscience as being related, almost exclusively to the category of decision making. See Timothy E. O’Connell, “An Understanding of Conscience,” and Richard M. Gula, “The Moral Conscience” in the present volume.
43One example of this is in the area of the use of scripture in moral formation. Rather than encouraging the extraction of moral absolutes, modern commentators often encourage engagement of the analogical imagination that results in growth in virtue that leads more naturally to more appropriate decision-making. See, for example, William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006) and James M. Gustafson, *Moral Discernment in the Christian Life: Essays in Theological Ethics*, eds. Theo A. Boer and Paul E. Capetz (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 198-212.
spirituality in the moral life, then discussions of conscience must transcend the standard
definitions that are related almost exclusively to decision-making. At present, Anne
Patrick seems to come closest to refining the definition to reflect the three fundamental
dimensions of Christian ethics vis-à-vis the development of a healthy spirituality that is
truly Catholic. She speaks to the importance of moral agency in the formation of
conscience; however, she continues by providing her own definition which identifies
conscience as a “personal moral awareness, experienced in the course of anticipating
future situations and making moral decisions, as well as in the process of reflecting upon
one’s past decisions and the quality of one’s character, that is, the sort of person one is
becoming.”

A second point of note made by Patrick is that conscience reflects the
reality that no one lives in isolation and that the narratives of persons’ lives always unfold
via the backdrop of their relationships and, accordingly, an “awareness of moral
obligation is intimately bound up with our experiences of others who are significant in
our lives.” Thus, spirituality is coupled naturally with the concepts of moral
discernment and the formation of conscience because of the role played by self-
transcendence and life-integration moving toward the ultimate values of mature
relationships placed in perspective.

The aforementioned comprehensive discussion of the formation of conscience,
under the auspices of the foundational relationship between all things moral and all things

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44 Anne Patrick, *Liberating Conscience: Feminist Explorations in Catholic Moral Theology* (New
York: Continuum, 1996), 35.
46 This definition reflects that of Sandra Schneiders, “The Study of Christian Spirituality: The
Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline, *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 1 ((Spring, 1998), 1, 3-12. It does
extend her perception of spirituality in that it acknowledges the importance of abiding present relationships
in light of the “ultimate value” placed on one’s relationship with God. This nuance and conflation is
important in light of the proposal of a sexual ethic, especially one that evaluates the validity of same-sex
relationships on the level of conscience formation.
spiritual reveals that the Catholic Tradition has an intrinsic difficulty with regard to understanding the progression toward a mature and informed conscience that is faithful to the Tradition without being a slave to it. Unfortunately, from the Manualist period through the present, both the Magisterium and Catholic theologians have been focused exclusively upon informing consciences, that is, providing a basis for discernment of right from wrong, rather than the formation of conscience which fosters a love for the good and a distaste for those things that are truly ontologically and intrinsically bad.\footnote{Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., “The Formation of Conscience: The Sin of Sloth and the Significance of Spirituality” in \textit{Spirituality and Moral Theology: Essays from a Pastoral Perspective}, ed. James Keating (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 74.} This requires a movement from the vice of sloth properly understood. From a moral and spiritual perspective, one who has fallen prey to the enticements of sloth is morally apathetic and incapable of true loving commitment in relationship.\footnote{Ibid., 64.} In so doing, one is incapacitated in the quest to discover what is most authentically human by divine imitation and human engagement. Therefore the convergence between the spiritual and moral life is most authentic when it is not only cerebral but also visceral. Human persons must discover the good by falling in love with the God of Jesus Christ by means of intimate engagement with one another on all levels of existence. Only then can they live “the good life” as a basic premise to the development of a faithful sexual spirituality. 

\textit{Fulfillment:} When one discerns the nexus of the interplay between morality and spirituality, one must respond to the question: What is the object of human fulfillment? While in need of further commentary, a teleological observation sets the tone for an adequate response. Basically speaking, as noted by Jean Porter, the purpose of human life is the primarily the identification of who one is to become before God in terms of
spiritual and moral identity, and then and only then the discovery of the manner in which human identity plays out in the existential reality of the narrative of human life.\(^4^9\)

In the quest for human fulfillment, the next logical question becomes: Who is the human person called to be in the concrete circumstances? The answer lies in the embrace of a virtuous life. The virtuous life cannot be lived in isolation however, for walking the path to human fulfillment is a team sport. An essential, authentic, and consummate life is a matter of being in right relationship with others.\(^5^0\)

As noted earlier, even though secondary in the moral and spiritual life, human fulfillment, rooted in virtue, also involves action. As noted by David Cloutier, “action depends upon identity, and identity depends upon participation in relationships.”\(^5^1\) Ergo, in the spirit of Aquinas the meaning and fulfillment of human life is rooted in the dynamics of love. While insufficient interpretations of the concept are employed almost \textit{ad nauseam} in common parlance, authentic and just love is perhaps one of the most elusive virtues in terms of both our understanding and embrace of it. Truly Christian love is a multi-dimensional reality. It is rooted in the belief of God as Trinity, a community of divine persons who experience mutual indwelling known by the Tradition as perichoresis. This love is created by the Father, modeled by the Son for the sake of the redemption of humanity, and sustained in the lives of the membership of the Church by virtue of the movement of the Holy Spirit.\(^5^2\) Love, the foundation of human fulfillment then stresses interdependence and intimacy which are essential for the development of a sexual


\(^{5^1}\)Ibid.

\(^{5^2}\)This model is proposed by Stephen G. Post, \textit{A Theory of Agape} (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1990); however, the synthesis is my own.
spirituality that reflects a truly Catholic ethic, especially in the context of same-sex couples who faithfully perceive that their fulfillment is rooted in relationships that are mature, mutual, and striving for permanency.

Freedom and Responsibility: The final insight regarding the intersection of morality and spirituality for the purposes of this study deals with an insight that is relatively basic to philosophical and theological anthropology, namely, the idea that the unique identity of human person is marked by the characteristics of freedom (properly understood) and responsibility. Karl Rahner, in his revisionist theological anthropology, clarified the designation that freedom falls into two distinct categories, one dealing with daily life, the other oriented toward the fullness of life. As a note of preface to the articulation of the difference between these two types of freedom, Rahner highlights that the basis of freedom is rooted in the intentionality and responsibility of the whole self. Freedom is conceived as an extension of the self that is not “freedom from” some obligation or restriction. Rather, it is “freedom for” fulfilling one’s responsibility to the dynamic of the two most fundamental relationships that characterize human life, namely, love of God and neighbor.53

In terms of the two deliberate modes of freedom, Rahner distinguishes between categorical and transcendental freedom. Simply stated, categorical freedom is freedom related to decisions made about specific actions. On the other hand, transcendental freedom which is distinct from but related to the latter, deals with fundamental choice to be in relationship with God as a transcendental acting subject on the ontological level.

Exercise of this freedom is the most expressive of our relationship with the divine and it can be made manifest in acts of categorical freedom.\textsuperscript{54}

Freedom is therefore both moral and spiritual because of its manifestations on existential and ontological levels. It is a call to develop a heightened awareness of one’s divinely willed purpose, to strive for genuine fulfillment, and perhaps most importantly, to take responsibility for the choices that one makes both categorically and transcendentally.\textsuperscript{55} All of the aforementioned categories are related to one’s relational activity that is intrinsic to human nature, and thus will have a significant bearing on the construction of a valid sexual ethic.

Morality, Love and Sexual Spirituality: General Parameters\textsuperscript{56}

Until now, the present chapter has engaged in the important task of preparing the stage for the development of a sexual spirituality that is steeped in morality. It has reviewed several key themes with regard to spirituality, namely, creative fidelity, conversion, clarification of vocation, the call to holiness and wholeness, and the cultivation of right relationships. In addition, it has explored points of convergence between morality and spirituality for the development of a fruitful and faithful conversation regarding sexuality: faithfulness, friendship, formation of conscience,\textsuperscript{57} human fulfillment and freedom and responsibility. With these tools in hand, knowing that one cannot be wedded to them exclusively, an articulation of a plausible sexual

\begin{footnotes}
\item[54]Ibid.
\item[56]The present section is intended to make clear associations between the principles mentioned above and the contours of general sexual ethic as a prelude to the discussion of the connection between spirituality and same-sex relationships.
\item[57]Once again it is important to recall that the ultimate goal of the present study is to provide those persons who experience a moral paralysis of sorts with regard to their sexual choices a comprehensive schema for the formation of their consciences.
\end{footnotes}
spirituality as the foreground of a faithful and dynamic Christian sexual ethic is warranted.

James B. Nelson makes the simple yet profound observation that “the sixth deadly sin of which our religious traditions are often guilty is a sexless image of spirituality.”58 This observation is not completely true given the fact that sexuality is an integral part of human personality that is fundamentally relational, an observation that has been conveyed by the Catholic tradition. “Sexuality is a dimension of one’s restless heart, which continually yearns for interpersonal communion, glimpsed and experienced to varying degrees in this life, ultimately finding full oneness only in God, here and hereafter.”59 Accordingly, the themes of spirituality in general and the convergence of spirituality and morality in particular must be explored adequately to develop a foundational sexual spirituality.

The springboard for a discussion of the formulation of a sexual spirituality is the articulation of the Church’s credible witness with regard to its sexual teaching. A delicate balance is needed here. While it is valid to make the claim that the time-tested pronouncements of the Church evidence a degree of credibility by virtue of their ability to preserve certain sexual values that are universally accepted (e.g., love, mutuality, justice, etc.) this is not a guarantee of their absolute and exceptionless credibility on the subjective level. As noted by Lisa Sowle Cahill in her observations regarding the teaching of the Magisterium on sexual ethics, “the Church must speak to the modern world with sympathy, with genuine understanding of the situations to be addressed, and

with willingness to learn new lessons, even to reformulate its moral wisdom."  

Credible witness with regard to sexuality helps to formulate a spirituality where one aspires to holiness and wholeness by seeking “the good life” by means of entering into right relationship with another. Given the possibility of the development of doctrine in the area of sexual ethics, such right relationships might transcend traditional categories.

Conversion is a category that is equally important in the development of a sexual spirituality with significant moral import. This is a difficult concept for the term conversion has different meanings for various interpreters of the tradition. For our purposes, Richard Gula’s simple yet accurate definition within the context of virtue ethics seems to be helpful. He notes that “the ongoing conversion to which one is called involves a change of heart and will that reaches into the depths of one’s identity, since conversion engages all aspects of one’s character.”

This definition is helpful in the overall evaluation of the Church’s sexual ethic because it reveals the complexity of conversion with regard to sexual ethics. In particular, conversion can affect the development of a valid sexual ethic in one of two ways. On one hand, on a personal level, conversion may be required of individuals in terms of the adoption of a docile attitude to the official teaching of the Magisterium. On the other hand, the work of moral theologians may provide a challenge to the Church to embrace the grace of conversion given the fact that certain teachings may need to be nuanced, reformulated, or at the very least, require additional refinement.

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60Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Current Teaching on Sexual Ethics,” in Readings in Moral Theology No. 8: Dialogue About Catholic Sexual Teaching, eds, Charles E. Curran and Richard A, McCormick, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 534., italics added.  This sentence is meant to advance the argument that teachings should evidence some flexibility on the subjective level of moral decision-making as well as the individual’s conscience that is well-formed.

61This concept will be discussed later below.  For a general reflection on the development of doctrine pertinent to Catholic sexual ethics see, Charles E. Curran, ed., Readings in Catholic Moral Theology No. 13: Change in Official Catholic Moral Teachings (New York, Paulist Press, 2003).

least revisited in concrete circumstances to allow for the full development of human persons who are naturally called to participate in intimate relationships with others that may involve physicality. 63

A sexual spirituality that is helpful for the creation of a valid sexual ethic also attempts to attend to the discernment of one’s vocation in life. The primary vocation is responding to the call to holiness. The corollary is incarnating that response in the narrative of human life. Even though a general positive description of vocation has been offered here, it is not without problematic elements. The Church speaks frequently of the priestly vocation, the married vocation, and the vocation of the single life; however, careful analysis of standard conversations on and questions about vocation center upon “doing”. 64 A sexual spirituality focused upon the creation of a relational ethic of physical intimacy must transcend this understanding to include and give primacy to sexual vocation that is focused upon “being.” The value of a person’s sexual identity is often disregarded in spiritual and moral discernment of the validity, sanctity, and necessity of engagement in sexual activity. Margaret Farley comes closest to recognizing the importance of identity/vocation in the development of a sexual ethic that is grounded in a mature spirituality

In each vocation there is need for a home – if not a dwelling place, at least a home in the heart of God and the hearts of some others. In each vocation a life is laid down, again and again. In each vocation there is fulfillment and nonfulfillment, rejoicing and waiting, in the mystery of already and not-yet. In each vocation, there is waxing and waning of

63 For a notable example of such embrace of the potential call to conversion on the part of the Church in its sexual teaching (especially in the area of homosexuality), see Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton, “A Call to Listen: The Church’s Pastoral and Theological Response to Gays and Lesbians,” in Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology, ed. Patrick Beattie Jung with Joseph Andrew Coray (Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 2001), 3-21.
64 See for example the Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos., 1603-1604, 1607, 2331, 1583, 2337-2359, 2369, etc.
courage and energy and devotion and love. Each vocation is in itself a life and a ministry.\textsuperscript{65}

A sense of “sexual” vocation clearly prepares one for meaningful and generative relationship with the other on levels both human and divine.

Spirituality, sexuality, and morality experience a common frame of reference in that they are encounters with the living God of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{66} Having spoken about spirituality and morality, both of which are representative of the human response to the call to holiness, it is important to recognize the role of sexuality in this response. In truly sexual encounters that may play out in a physical context individuals are “caught up” in someone through personal intimate involvement, investment, and reflection. When this experience is encountered within the context of our understanding of the Catholic moral and spiritual tradition one can develop an authentic, albeit subjective, sense of the rightness or wrongness of actions with sexual relationships.\textsuperscript{67} Thus, the positive response to the call to holiness via sexual relationships that include genital involvement may be a valid means of embracing a truly Christian life. The point in question here, to be determined by individual believers is: Does the response to this call, which results in a movement toward wholeness in the quest of becoming fully human before God involve personalist or physicalist interpretations of sexual intercourse? Can one become complete only by way of the traditional prescriptions of Catholic teaching on sexual ethics? Specific discussions on homosexual genital relationships found below will help to formulate a prospective answer to this question.


\textsuperscript{66}Gula, \textit{The Call to Holiness}, 65. While the connection with sexuality is not overt here or in the entirety of the chapter, the anthropological and theological connection are more than reasonable.

Cultivation of right relationships is yet another characteristic that strengthens the bond between sexuality, morality, and spirituality. In terms of sexual relationships, certain norms must be embodied by the partners. The norms include the following: Do no unjust harm, free consent, mutuality, equality, commitment, fruitfulness and social justice.\(^6^8\) It may be argued that the context in which these norms are played out is not absolute although the Church advances that the only arena in which good and just sexual relationships that include physicality occur in the context of the covenant of married life.

An expansion of these boundaries will be explored in the section that deals specifically with the possibility of same-sex relations in a clearly defined and limited context that includes but also transcends genital activity because it is a truly sacred encounter with the divine.

A natural corollary to the expectation of love that is right and just in sexual relationships is the concept of faithfulness/fidelity. This implies that sexual relationships are destined by God to be extraordinarily covenantal in that in the context of love, intimacy, and sexual behavior individuals are called to an “acceptance of accountability for one another and for the consequences of our human relations.”\(^6^9\) Such fidelity is clearly articulated sacramentally and spiritually in the rite of marriage in terms of the pre-marital promises that the partners make to one another.\(^7^0\) This observation however, serves only as one example of faithfulness and does not preclude the possibility of fidelity in other sexual expressions. Sexual covenantal faithfulness is an imitation of God’s fidelity to all members of the human family that results from entrusting others and

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\(^{70}\) National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Rite of Marriage* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1970), 12. In particular the second question is significant here: “Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?”
eliciting trust from them. Adherence to these sacred standards of faithful relationship in intimate and truly loving sexual experiences is truly spiritual since it galvanizes one in his or her quest for the living God who revealed to humankind the truth of the kingdom in the person and event of Jesus the Christ and who continues to do so in the dynamic of fellowship with the Holy Spirit. It may be possible that one not need only enter into the covenant of marriage to experience such tremendous spiritual growth through faithful sexual expression.

Much has been said about friendship in the present study; however, it is important to revisit this very human dynamic in relation to human sexuality and its physical manifestation. While not stated overtly until this point, previous musings in this study support the observation that friendship is a primary school of love and correspondingly a school of sexual spirituality. As noted by Marie Aquinas McNamara, Christian friendship is a relationship that is transformed and elevated by grace and that “friends united by its bonds wish for each other a supernaturally virtuous life here and eternal happiness with God in heaven.” Sexual intimacy that corresponds with all of the just and faithful characteristics that are mentioned above can do nothing but strengthen that desire that leads to full human flourishing. Once again however, context is everything in the eyes of the Magisterium and theologians: Is sexual intimacy restricted to the covenant of marriage? Is it tolerable in certain circumstances that mirror the covenant of marriage? Is it universally acceptable in matters of sexual love that takes on physical

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73 Marie Aquinas McNamara, O.P., Friendship in Saint Augustine (Fribourg: Fribourg University Press, 1958), 197.
dimensions outside of marriage? These questions will be addressed in the subsequent discussion of spiritual evaluations of same-sex relationships.

If a spiritual and human understanding of love and sexuality is to lead to a healthy sexual ethic, freedom and responsibility must be respected in the spirit that they have been discussed above, realizing that categorical choices for love and sex influence transcendental freedom tremendously. Love and its manifestation in sexual intimacy affirms its object by free choice. Human persons must freely identify with their loves and ratify them, taking responsibility for their part in the dynamic of the relationship. They have the freedom to consider the hierarchy of loving, and choose between agapic, philial, and erotic relationships. Exercising freedom to dwell in only one type of loving may be irresponsible in terms of a sexual ethic and in turn lead to an evaluation of it as invalid. By contrast, recognizing that true freedom is “freedom for” which would embrace all of the forms of loving in sexual relationships would prove to be more responsible. Even more importantly, exercising all of these forms of loving generates genuine excitement for the pursuit of the reign of God which is at the heart of spirituality that is truly Christian and truly Catholic. Ergo, the manner in which human person loves impacts the exercise of their transcendental freedom tremendously. Accordingly, one must wonder if the sexual context that serves as a context for the exercise of such freedom may

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74 Farley, Just Love, 205.
75 Fran Ferder, F.S.P.A. and John Heagal, “Tender Fires: The Spiritual Promise of Sexuality,” in Human Sexuality in the Catholic Tradition, eds. Kieran Scott and Harold Daly Horell (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 18. *Agape* is considered to be the highest form of love, since it embodies God’s way of loving: it is generous, other-centered, and disinterested in control or possession. *Philia* is the love of friendship and mutuality, in which self-interest is tempered by the care we have for our family members, friends, coworkers, or neighbors. *Eros* is the “lowest” form of loving, since, from this spiritual viewpoint, it seeks to satisfy our physical and emotional needs instead of those of the other person. Contra the authors of this text, *Eros* can present itself as a truly holy longing for the other both in terms of love of God and love of neighbor. See, James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, Holy Eros: Pathways to a Passionate God (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).
76 Whitehead and Whitehead, Holy Eros, see especially 177-184.
be delineated strictly on the categorical level. Speaking more practically, the question arises, does the heterosexual sacramental marital norm provide the only avenue to right relationship with God, or does an ethics of sexuality that is truly grounded in spirituality allow one the freedom to act in accord with one’s perceived nature and orientation?

Human fulfillment, another characteristic of the intersection between spirituality and morality, would suggest that sexuality is a venue toward embracing the virtue of true humanity. “The human person is so profoundly affected by sexuality that it must be considered as one of the factors that give to each individual’s life the principal traits that distinguish it.” To distinguish is to give meaning and this cannot happen in isolation in order to bring fulfillment to one’s sexual self. Human fulfillment means then an outright rejection of the cultural temptation toward absolute independence and autonomy. Rather, it is a call to intimacy with others. Remembering that intimacy involves sharing one’s truest self with others so that one can be equally transparent with God, love and sexuality, whether physical or emotional, must provide the perfect framework for fulfillment, given that one is called to engage in such relationships. This will involve the adoption of the notion that sexuality is a “language” of intimacy, a language that allows those involved in sexual relationships to be nourished and reach out of themselves. A portrait of such sexual engagement involves a number of dynamics. First, one must be able to feel and listen to the “body-self” to be aware of somatic and spiritual sensitivities. Second, the concept of desire that recognizes the validity of the erotic desire of the lover for the beloved must be acknowledged. Third, fulfillment subsists in the sexual arena of human

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life by means of striving for unity that does not absorb the other, but rather, images the teleological goal of human life: communion with God. Fourth, the concept of incarnation stresses the goodness of said sexual communion and is a route to true happiness, the fulfillment of our divinely willed purpose. Fifth, compassion, which involves authentic care for others by being present to them rounds out the quest for holiness and wholeness in human persons. Thus, the spiritual elements of feeling, desire, communion, incarnation, and compassion in sexual relationships provide a portrait of the spiritual means to human fulfillment by way of the affirmation of human sexuality, love, and intimacy in concrete relationships. The question remains: Must such fulfillment be restricted to the patriarchal heterosexual norm in every circumstance or is there room for flexibility in other sexual scenarios? Do individuals frustrate themselves and move away from the path to human fulfillment by adopting a sexual spirituality that strays from these norms? Does one’s striving for fulfillment bridge the gap between the fall from grace in the “Garden of Eden” to the embrace of the “Erotic Garden” that affirms human goodness even in its brokenness?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly in the embrace of general parameters of a sexual spirituality, one must consider sexual identity and activity in light of the formation of conscience. As noted above, the Tradition’s understanding of the formation of conscience has focused often and exclusively upon the rightness or wrongness of particular actions of a subject as a moral agent. Further theological reflection revealed that it is equally important, if not more so, to see the formation of conscience as a means

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80 Ibid., 13.
of discovering who a person ought to become in order to embrace a fully Christian life. In terms of the integration of spirituality and sexuality in the formation of conscience in this vein, African-American Liberation Theologian Toinette Eugene offers the helpful observation that “spirituality is no longer identified simply with asceticism, mysticism, the practice of virtue and methods of prayer. Spirituality, i.e., the human capacity to be self-transcending, relational, and freely committed, encompasses all of life, including our human sexuality.”

Thus, sexual expression is not only good, but also a means to achieving the ideal of “the good life.” Through sexuality persons can form their consciences by learning that the morally good life is both desirable and possible. This does not mean necessarily absolute conformity to established rules in a deontological modality, but rather adherence to broader principles that lead to fulfillment, human flourishing, and genuine friendship freely chosen and responsibly undertaken. As noted in various sections above what is most important here in not a static physical complementarity in terms of genital expression, but rather an embrace of the core values of human relationality such as fidelity, mutuality, equality, respect, and love, since these virtuous dispositions lead to the realization of a conscience that is well-formed. Additionally, the development of a genuine sexual spirituality requires that one of the most important formative tasks is “to awaken and sharpen moral sensitivity.” This requires attention to both personal and communal experience so as to discern what is at stake in the formulation of a decision in terms of the morality of particular dispositions.

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81 Toinette Eugene, “While Love is Unfashionable: An Exploration of Black Spirituality and Sexuality,” *Women’s Consciousness, Women’s Conscience*, ed. Barbara Hilkert Andolsen et al., (Minneapolis, Winston Press, 1985), 124. I believe that in terms of the comment “the practice of virtue”, Eugene is referring to action and not necessarily the cultivation of a virtuous character which is at the heart of the present proposal.


83 Ibid., 76.
and action with regard to sexuality. A well-formed conscience that is attuned to spiritual as well as empirical realities will be aware of both celebration and sacrifice, pleasure and self-restraint, potential and promise in order to make room for moral growth in the area of sexual morality, especially in terms of forming a foundation for an honest evaluation of homosexual orientation and behavior in particular circumstances.

**Spirituality and the Formulation of a Same-Sex Ethic**

Having set the stage and painted an extensive portrait of a spiritually oriented sexual ethic from a Catholic perspective, in light of the aims of the present study it is necessary to move to a subjective view of the connection between homosexuality and spirituality in the hope of arriving at set of criteria that leads to the possibility of genuine conscience formation for situations that lie outside of the norm (i.e., homosexual genital relations). It is best to begin with a recognition of the implicit connections between spirituality and sexuality made in Magisterial teaching,

The official teaching of the Catholic Church on homosexuality offers gay Catholics a spirituality of the Cross that would symbolize a participation in the sufferings of Christ. These sufferings, as a means of cooperation with God’s grace, would gradually help to transform the life of the homosexual into a state approximating if not even reaching perfection in the practice of chaste sexual abstinence, a kind of catharsis from the burden of the condition itself. Participation in the Cross would therefore prevent the intrinsic direction of this sexuality from reaching its finality, in the death of sin. Like the unchosen condition of homosexuality itself, which for some is the only way they can be, the path of the Cross is the only route through Christian life for the Gay Catholic. The Cross of Christ is not a path one chooses out of freedom alone; it is in a sense the only way for one who is beset by the paradox of a sexuality that is at once a part of God’s creation yet oriented toward evil. The Cross is therefore set forth as a task, a path of necessary asceticism that leads, through obedience, toward a transcendent form of loving.  

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A number of items are presumed here and are worthy of note here when reflecting upon the aforementioned statement, its foundations, and its implications. First, it acknowledges that Church teaching is reflective of the testimony of both tradition and Sacred Scripture. Second, the theological and anthropological of this teaching is evidenced specifically in the creation narratives of Genesis which reflect the essential “spousal character” of human sexuality which seems to be the original scheme intended by God. Third, Genesis also attests to the fact that this original scheme is skewed by original sin which results in the loss of the “covenantal character” of sexual relationships between women and men. Fourth, marriage is seen as the “only sanctioned context” genital sexual relations. Fifth, homosexual behavior is “objectively disordered” because of a fundamental orientation toward self-indulgence. Sixth, homosexual acts undermine personal freedom and dignity as it is properly understood. Seventh, and ultimately in light of these observations, the Church can only call homosexual believers to a life of celibate chastity which involves the spiritual movement on the part of the homosexual person to embrace the Lord’s cross for the sake of the Kingdom.

This assessment of Catholic teaching with regard to the development of a same-sex spirituality, while faithful to the testimony of Scripture, tradition, and current Church teaching, is not free from certain potential problematics. Specifically, the counsel of the cross presented in the official teaching of the hierarchy could appear to make the Cross a

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85 The following seven points are drawn from Crowley’s response to the request from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for the provision of a context that would address the theological and anthropological foundations of the Catholic Church’s teaching on homosexuality, as well as its rational and reasonableness. See, Paul G. Crowley, S.J., “Homosexuality and the Counsel of the Cross: A Clarification,” *Theological Studies* 69, (2008), 637-640.
86 Ibid., 638.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
“symbol of existential imprisonment in a condition that is not of one’s choosing.”

More specifically, recommendation of the Cross as “self-sacrificial suffering” which is the only spiritual path that leads to holiness for the homosexual may miss the mark in terms of understanding the mystery of the Cross, in particular with regard to Christ’s free acceptance of such suffering. Other paths, without losing sight of the true path of the Cross, may be worth investigating in light of the understanding of spirituality articulated above.

As is the case with all believers, homosexual spirituality takes human experience seriously. As noted above, the development of such a spirituality is multi-dimensional. It clearly involves the areas of creative fidelity, conversion, awareness of one’s ultimate relational vocation, acknowledgement of the desire for holiness, wholeness, and fulfillment, faithful friendship, embrace of the deepest levels of freedom in the making of and execution of sexual choices, all for the purpose of forming one’s conscience, all within full sight of the norm of heterosexual marriage as the only acceptable relationship where an individual can express himself or herself in a genital sexual way. These benchmarks will make certain that any deviation from the norm is not only well intended, but also true to the nature of the persons who find themselves in a state of an irreversible homosexual orientation and called to love in an intimate, tactile, and genital manner.

89 Crowley, “Homosexuality and the Counsel of the Cross,” 516.
90 Ibid.
91 Two notes are important before proceeding here. First, this “alternative” spirituality is not meant to repudiate the teaching of the Church that is clear in articles 2357 and 2359 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church that speaks of the intrinsic morality of homosexual acts and the call to celibate chastity on the part of the homosexual persons. As noted by Crowley, this theological musing is meant for those individuals who possess a homosexual orientation that is reasonably assumed to be irreversible and who do not see their divinely willed fulfillment as emanating from a life of celibate chastity. It is not meant to show that either the decrees of the Magisterium or the present proposal is a formulaic answer to this very complicated anthropological and ethical dilemma. The subsequent reflections do not deny that in most cases, the counsel of the Cross for Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual and Trans-gendered persons, as articulated in
Accordingly, an alternative path may expand the notion of homosexual spirituality to broaden the view of the cross, and to expand the route to holiness, that is union with God, to include other aspects of the Paschal Mystery as well as alternative avenues to union with God by virtue of one’s embrace of the call to relationality with neighbor by means of intimacy and interdependence.

As noted in the section that explored the connection between liturgical prayer and sexuality, the public ministry of Jesus cannot be overlooked. Biblically based spirituality cannot ignore the activities of Jesus as he approached the Cross. Jesus ate and drank with sinners and with the poor. He was a companion to those who had only their humanity to share. He promised to provide for the deepest spiritual thirsts and hungers of human persons. In essence, those who were on the margins, not accepted by society, were welcomed into his presence to experience the advent of the kingdom of God in him. Such redemptive activity must inform an authentic spirituality for homosexual persons, a spirituality that is incarnated in genuine friendship that may take the form of intimate sexual relations. As noted by James F. Keenan, homosexual persons need to be permitted to respond to the call to love since “like other groups of people who have been oppressed by, among others, the Church, they help us to see that by silencing and marginalizing them, we do harm to them, ourselves, the Church and the gospel.” In light of current Church teaching, this response must be personal and attend to individual circumstances being worked out in the forum of conscience.

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the official teaching of the Church is rational and reasonable. However, it does afford the opportunity for further reflection on the part of homosexual persons to resolve what appears to be a lack of resonance when attempting to bridge the gap between the ontological and the existential. For a foundation of this proposal, see also, Crowley, “Homosexuality and the Counsel of the Cross,” 639-640.

92 Note the narratives of the multiplication of the loves and fish as well as Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well.

In addition to (and related to) the biblical witness, there is the contemporary concern on the part of moral theologians regarding human flourishing which must include sexual behaviors on the part of gays and lesbians in terms of the development of an authentic same-sex spirituality. Andrew Sullivan notes that one’s sexual orientation affects a person so profoundly that if one were denied the ability and opportunity to experience the faithful and self-giving love of sexual union, the person would be denied “what the Church holds to be intrinsic to the notion of human flourishing in the vast majority of human lives.” Once again it is clear that the possibility of human flourishing is essential for the development of a spirituality that places one in right relationship with God and with others, perhaps even if certain behaviors that honor the “spiritual promise of sexuality” deviate from the norm that is advanced by the Church’s Magisterium. Such a deviation should not be classified as either standard or merely tolerable given the wisdom of the Magisterium as well as the concrete testimony of human experience. Perhaps what should be remembered most is that while the whole of the narrative of one’s life is not marked by concrete expressions of love that manifest themselves corporeally by means of embodiment, the significance of love, conjoined with sexuality, does depend upon the persons that we love and our most intimate interpersonal relationships with them. Accordingly, the validity of same-sex relations in particular contexts may be considered by individuals who find themselves in the state of a permanent homosexual orientation. Comfort with the sanctity of such actions must

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94Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality*, 2nd. Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 44-45. This is not a call to free license but rather free and responsible discernment of on the part of individuals who find themselves to be irreversibly homosexual and not called to a life of celibate chastity.

95Whitehead and Whitehead, *Holy Eros*, 188.

correspond with the movement of Grace that “elevates us to shared life with God.” It must exercise genuine freedom and mature faith in terms of the formation of one’s conscience with regard to the evaluation of homosexual acts on a personal level.

Gay and lesbian spirituality must be marked by mutuality and equality if one is to pave the path to the God in whose image he or she is made. In terms of mutuality, homosexual relations may have the potential of embracing the virtues of gratitude physically, emotionally, and spiritually that not only make one authentic to another, but also in terms of one’s relationship with God and one’s exercise of transcendental freedom. Three characteristics of gratitude are of note here. As observed by Edward Vacek the first characteristic of gratitude that leads to mutuality in relationship is reception, that is, gladly welcoming “the contribution that another makes to our lives.” Additionally, with regard to homosexual relationships, Vacek’s insight that receptivity is marked by the overcoming of narcissism, receiving without any distortion or distraction what other persons have to offer in love is pertinent for an evaluation of homosexual relationships. The other enriches our lives, making us more fully human and more fully Christian. If sexuality is the means to achieving this end for homosexual persons, the denial of the opportunity to be receptively grateful in genital and spiritual ways could stand on the threshold of serious sin.

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99Ibid. The most important insight at this juncture is that many persons who dismiss the possibility of loving, exclusive, and permanent same-sex relationships often attribute homosexuality to a disordered narcissism.
Second, the embrace of the virtue of gratitude in the moral, sexual, and spiritual life for the homosexual person is a matter of affective response to one’s intimate companion.\(^{100}\) It is an exercise of the mature and natural inclination to respond in love and benevolence to another with love, without anticipation or estimation of personal gain.\(^{101}\) In responding to the gift that is one’s partner, one consents to involvement with him or her. In fact, in homosexual unions, this disposition leads to tremendous generativity in terms of giving back as much or more than one has received.\(^{102}\) While such generativity is not physicalist in nature, it may meet the requirement that homosexual unions are truly life-giving as well as love-giving.

Third, and finally, in terms of the promotion of a healthy spirituality on the part of homosexual persons, with reference to the virtue of gratitude, one must adopt a stance of “grateful use” of the gift one has received in the other.\(^{103}\) In terms of same-sex relationships, this implies that the gift of life and love that results from intimate partnership with another on erotic levels that are carnal, psychological, and genital, must be used appropriately if one is to be faithful to the image of God that is incarnated in him or herself as a sexual being. In fact, it has been argued in terms of mutuality that there is a moral responsibility for one to be grateful in sexual relationships that strive toward holiness. Living the “good life” means creating and strengthening bonds with others that is in accord with one’s sexual nature and orientation as determined by a creative yet faithful exercise of conscience.\(^{104}\) To do otherwise is to deny the responsibility of

\(^{100}\)Ibid., 104
\(^{101}\)Fred R. Berger, “Gratitude,” *Ethics*, vol. 84 no. 4 (July 1975), 300-301.
\(^{103}\)Ibid. Use of the phrase “grateful use” must be interpreted so as not to convey any sense of objectification of the other.
\(^{104}\)Ibid., 108.
mutuality in relationship. To do so is to acknowledge that the “good life” allows one to
become a friend of God by becoming an intimate friend of another in a relationship
where spirituality and morality coincide by expressing personal fidelity and sustaining
mutual love\(^{105}\) by means of proactive and reactive desire for and devotion to the good of
the other.\(^{106}\)

Equality is of similar significance in terms of forging same-sex relationships that
stand the litmus test of the formation of conscience before God. Sexual commitments
require a discipleship of equals that reflects the liberating intent of Jesus’ ministry that is
reflected in the diverse consistency of the gospel narratives.\(^{107}\) Specifically, a Christian
ethic of sexuality that is spiritually grounded must not allow “experiential observation to
override or replace the biblical paradigms of the integrity of the human individual as
embodied and as free, and of the ideal of equality” since “differences ought to be
appreciated rather than denied, but not interpreted with a narrowness that excludes
freedom and equality.”\(^{108}\) Therefore, equality, rooted in justice and freedom, needs to be
mediated through a particular venue in the arena of sexuality, especially in the ambiguous
arena of attending to an evaluation of same-sex engagements. Necessarily, a homosexual
spirituality, rooted in equality, must possess a “generous assessment of the human

\(^{105}\)Gula, *The Good Life*, 119-128. See also, Guftafson, *Moral Discernment in the Christian Life*,
102-106.

\(^{106}\)Farley, *Just Love*, 289.

\(^{107}\)Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian
Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 32. See Also, James D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New
Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, Second Edition (Harrisburg, PA:

\(^{108}\)Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality*,
(Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985), 100. Cahill’s original intent in this section is to discuss equality
within the context of gender issues; however, it is easy to apply this concept of equality within the context
of same-sex relationships.
capacity to grow freely in the knowledge and love of God as revealed in sexual relationships that can only be identified as the most intimate form of friendship.

Once again in the present study, we find ourselves musing over the importance of the dynamics of friendship, a relationship that is cultivated both in diversity and equality. This musing however is done through the lens of the development of an authentic sexual spirituality. Such a spirituality, as noted by St. Paul, must realize that in Christ “there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, there is no longer male of female (Gal 3:28). It lends itself to the conclusion that since the human person is a beneficiary of a divinely inspired freedom from the fear of inequality that corresponds with friendship, one is able to reach what he or she desires, which is ultimately agapic love and ontological goodness that “forms us in what we hope to become.”

Given the friendship that unfolds in sexual love, whether heterosexual or homosexual, one cannot deny a concrete experience of equality in relationships that, while refusing to deny the individuality of persons, are marked by the equitable and responsible use of power (in the face of freely chosen vulnerability toward the beloved) and a lack of seduction, manipulation, and dependency. To the degree that a homosexual relationship in particular can emulate these criteria, it stands as yet more sacred counsel in the evolving quest of developing a well-formed conscience. For homosexual friends and lovers, this requires the movement toward a spiritual awakening to adopt the stance of “Jesus’ bravery in the face of a newness within God’s continually unfolding revelation.”

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110 Wadell, Friendship and the Christian Moral Life, 135.

111 See Farley, Just Love, 289.

on the cusp of the “good life.”

Conclusion

The preceding section has examined the connection between spirituality, moral theology in general, and ethical evaluations of sexual behavior and choices with ultimate reference to the formation of conscience with regard to same-sex relationships. As is the case with spirituality, at times these reflections have been thoroughly systematic, at others rather contemplative and somewhat random. Perhaps the observations of Dennis Billy would serve the reader well in terms of formulating a basis for a sound conclusion:

Contemplative ethics requires a continuous backdrop of inner silence or solitude of heart. It bids us to consider every dimension of our human makeup in the light of Jesus Christ, the New Man. It embraces a threefold movement of contemplation, communion, and mission. It focuses not only on human actions and the virtues needed to perform them, but also on the attitudes we must have to sustain the options we have chosen to direct us. It encourages serious reflection on particular issues and the decisions to be made concerning them. It involves naming and taking ownership of our feelings about areas of moral concern. It requires identifying the personal and social needs involved in our decisions. It bids us to look to the area of concrete action.\textsuperscript{113}

The connection between spirituality and the personal formulation of a same-sex ethic for conscience formation is essential for a number of reasons, since even if in error, i.e., not corresponding exactly to the divine law as mediated by the Magisterium, when well formed, conscience must exercise prudent judgment that does not reflect the norm.\textsuperscript{114} As noted above, every dimension of human existence must be considered in the formation of conscience. Accordingly, an investigation of various dimensions of spirituality has been


\textsuperscript{114}For a thorough review of the tradition regarding the status of conscience in the face of personal uncertainty that is addressed responsibly, see Brian V. Johnstone, “Conscience and Error” in \textit{Readings in Moral Theology No. 14: Conscience}, ed. Charles E. Curran (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 163-174. Also note, the exercise of conscience is required since the tradition insists upon movement from positive practical doubt to decision-making and execution of these decisions.
offered, including faithfulness, virtuous friendship, a sense of vocation, embrace of the call to holiness and wholeness, and an awareness of the need for conversion. While not exhaustive, these categories provide a canvas upon which the homosexual Christian, who does not feel called to celibate chastity, can paint a portrait of authentic same-sex spirituality that leads naturally to decisive choices about relationships and genital behavior in a spirit of creative fidelity to the ethos of Roman Catholicism.

Realistically, an investigation of the relationship between spirituality and sexuality is somewhat tentative for two reasons. As noted earlier, interpretation of the categories mentioned above is subjective and somewhat tentative. Additionally, the “practice” of spirituality exists in time. Accordingly, one must look forward to the role of sexuality in the ultimate destiny of the human person. Therefore, the formulation of a same-sex ethic that allows for faithful formation of the Christian conscience must attend to questions of eschatology.
CHAPTER 5
RESURRECTED SEXUALITY: HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE VIS-À-VIS CATHOLIC ESCHATOLOGY

Several contemporary theologians critique an exaggerated emphasis upon individual eschatology and give priority to a collective and ecological eschatology.¹ Both approaches however miss the mark in terms of not speaking to the notion of a “relational” eschatology, both in terms of the divine, and the human person in his or her completeness. Ladislaus Boros does provide a foundation for a relational eschatology as he notes that “death gives man the opportunity of posing his first completely personal act; death is therefore, by reason of its very being, the moment above all others for the awakening of consciousness, freedom for the encounter with God, for the final decision about his eternal destiny.”² In this statement, Boros does not relegate death exclusively to the end of life as experienced in time. Rather, he posits a connection between time and eternity arguing that “dying” does occur throughout life and that all decisions made on the level of categorical freedom impact a person’s eternal destiny.³ This observation on the part of Boros potentially has tremendous impact on the relationship between eschatology and ethics in general, as well as in the attempt to develop an eschatologically based same-sex ethic in particular.

A number of observations and questions come to mind in light of Boros’ keen observations. It seems that the true meaning of life, which includes human sexuality, to a large part is about personal and communal openness to God’s eternity. It is a summons toward Easter which transforms personal tentativeness in the moral life to spiritual ecstasy through attentiveness to and anticipation of divine judgment that has made that eternity simultaneously the proper content of human historical memory of the narrative woven in life, a lens through which one can understand correctly his or her created nature and purpose, and ultimately the true object of human hope.\(^4\) Here the term “narrative” is the hinge upon which the present portion of this study is built given the ontological and existential connections between the narrative that is penned in this life and the ultimate conclusion experienced in the fullness of life. Human beings ultimately become who they are supposed to be because of who they have been relationally, a dynamic that needs to be perceived briefly.

Successful relationality results in a particular experience of the Beatific Vision. First the experience of the Beatific Vision is one of truly knowing God personally both contemplatively and through encounter with other human persons, which “implies that the transformed self persists through death.”\(^5\) Second, the Beatific Vision fulfills our capacity for loving that is innate to our being created in the image and likeness of God. In life, we have attempted to love, in eternity we love since we have achieved the most mature image of Trinitarian perichoritic activity.\(^6\) Third, in the fully human experience


\(^6\)Ibid., 152-153. NB: Perichoresis refers to the love that exists exclusively among the persons of the Trinity.
of the Beatific Vision one enjoys God, a dynamic that implies relationship without expectation, merely experiencing the beloved that is God, which has been modeled in human interpersonal relationships in life.\(^7\)

In light of these observations, one further observation needs to be offered before attending to the matter at hand. Simply stated, love and sexuality are essential elements in terms of penning the narrative that leads human beings to knowing, loving, and enjoying God in the movement from time to eternity. Love and sexuality provide a vehicle for interpreting life which through death leads individuals to their end in God. As Hans Schwarz notes

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\text{Death gives each moment of our life its singularity; we cannot repeat one act of our life. Unceasingly and unresistingly we are on our way to the eschaton. Whether we want it or not, whether we realize it or not, we exist truly eschatologically, since the potential presence of the eschaton at any moment of our life gives our life its singularity. Even love has to be seen together with this aspect of death, since love is essentially giving away a part of oneself to another person or persons. We irretrievably give away part of our life and die a little more whenever we extend our love. Thus love is sacrifice of our life. But it would be totally wrong to understand this kind of voluntary sacrifice as a heroic deed. Giving away life is possible only because we received it in the first place.}^{8}\]

Love and sexuality must inform the human understanding of sexuality since they, in all of their singularity and diversity, play such an important role in terms of the journey from here to the hereafter, from image of God being formed in the divine likeness to full authentic humanity equipped for universal graced relationality which encapsulates human destiny and human happiness.

In view of these introductory observations, a general trajectory may be plotted regarding the overall relationship between eschatology and sexuality in general and

\(^{7}\)Ibid., 153-155.
eschatology and homosexuality in particular, keeping in mind that the goal of this investigation is providing assistance to the conscience that is compelled, at the very essence of the human person, to consider the possibility of participation in a same-sex relationship as a means of fulfilling his or her God given purpose. Accordingly, the following issues will be addressed. First, a relatively brief consideration of the connection between the dynamics of life and the reality of the fullness of life in eternity achieved through death will be explored. Second, and more specifically, the nature of the resurrected body will be investigated given the importance of embodiment in life both in terms of clarifying current musings on resurrected life in general, and as a means of choosing a disposition for or against God in the movement from time to eternity. Third, an investigation of the manner in which human persons continue to be sexual persons in eternity will be pursued. Fourth, a discussion of the evaluation of homosexual orientation and activity in light of the ultimate destiny of the human person will be explored. Finally, conclusions will be drawn with regard to same-sex orientation and behavior in light of the eschatological horizon as the ultimate goal of the formation of individual conscience with regard to the evaluation of sexual behaviors.

Anticipation of the Future While Valuing the Present: A Catholic Interpretation of the Theology of Death and Eternal Life

To begin a discussion of eschatology that will ultimately inform the Christian on the level of being, sexual orientation, and sexual activity, a simple observation must be

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9See the discussion of Rahner’s notion of categorical and transcendental freedom in chapter four, the present study indicating that individual moral dispositions and decisions in this life affect the decision that one makes in light of the fullest expression of God that one experiences in death.

10By nature of the discipline of eschatology, readers must remain soberly aware that the following proposals remain an appoximation of the life of hope given both the fragile status of human nature and the inability of the theologian to postulate eschatological realities with absolute certainty. This portion of the current study is not a “best guess” scenario however. It reflects the insights of Scripture and tradition, modestly attempting to appropriate them to the plight of homosexual persons who do not experience a genuine call to celibacy.
acknowledged: Life, ultimately, is a mystery. So is death.\textsuperscript{11} By the same token, some things concerning eschatological realities may be known with confidence, but not with absolute certainty. First, eschatological statements, personal or communal, look forward to future events and the ultimate destiny of the individual. Second, “to understand the future, it is necessary to understand the past…” as well as the present; “in other words, humanity’s ending must be linked with its beginning, eschatology with protology,”\textsuperscript{12} that is an anthropology that views God’s ultimate purpose for humanity in a trans-temporal way. Third, eschatology is ultimately concerned with hope for the full realization of humanity, anticipating an ever-greater future of God’s reign.\textsuperscript{13} Fourth, in light of the aforementioned proposals, it is appropriate to posit, as did Karl Rahner, that eschatology is proleptic anthropology; however, it must always be defined by Christological images rooted in Scripture and the tradition of the Church.\textsuperscript{14}

In view of these modest eschatological presumptions and the ultimate goal of the present study, that is, attempting to assess the weight that eschatological assertions bear on sexual ethics in general and the development of a same-sex ethic in particular, it is necessary to investigate the multifaceted question: What occurs with regard to the human person in both the transition from time to eternity and in the reality of eternity grounded in the divine life of the Tripersonal God?\textsuperscript{15} Each of these issues must be taken in turn

\textsuperscript{11}Donovan, \textit{The Mystery of Death}, 3.
\textsuperscript{12}Phan, “Roman Catholic Theology,” 222.
\textsuperscript{15}The use of “Tripersonal God” is deliberate since it speaks with greater authenticity to what both the tradition and contemporary theology has posited about the divine essence. See, Gerald O’Collins, S.J., \textit{The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity} (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).
with mindfulness of the backdrop of a communal eschatology that is necessary for understanding interpersonal ethics.

*Resurrected Embodiment: Eternal Celebration of the Whole Person*

Before speaking to the nature of resurrected existence for persons, three further notes of preface need to be offered in terms of official Church teaching. First, when dealing with the human person’s situation after death, one must be especially aware of arbitrary imaginative representations: excess of this kind is a major cause of difficulties that Christian faith often encounters. Respect must, however, be given to the images employed in Scripture. Their profound meaning must be discerned, while avoiding the risk of overattenuating them since this often empties the realities designated by the images.¹⁶

Thus, curiosity regarding the exact nature of the resurrected body must be informed by Scripture and interpreted by the tradition rather than succumbing to the musings of individuals and popular culture. Second, “the resurrection cannot be explained independently of the body that once lived.”¹⁷ Third, and in relation to the second, the Church understands resurrected existence to refer to the whole person in all of his or her modalities.¹⁸

In light of these observations, the next natural question to arise is: what is the nature of the resurrected body and what is the connection between the narrative penned in life corporeally and the experience of God and the rest of God’s creation in the context of eternity? Again, affirming that no eschatological proposal can assume absolute certainty, a number of assertions can be made.

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There is no denial that a quest for an image of the resurrected body is as old as the beginning of the Christian Scriptures. As noted by Saint Paul, in his attempt to respond to hecklers against the Christian community at Corinth, regarding their rejection of a physical resurrection, the employment of a metaphor of a seed being sown is helpful in specifying the unity in diversity regarding the resurrected body: “And what you sow is not the body that is to be but a bare kernel of wheat, perhaps, or of some other kind; but God gives it a body as he chooses, and to each of the seeds its own body…There are both heavenly bodies and earthy bodies, but the brightness of the heavenly is of one kind and that of the earthly another…It [the body] is sown corruptible; it is raised incorruptible. It is sown dishonorable; it is raised glorious. It is sown weak; it is raised powerful. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:37-38, 40, 42b-44). Here Paul emphasizes continuity in the midst of difference. There is no annihilation of the body one was graced with in terms of creation; however, there is significant transformation.19 This interpretation of the resurrection of the body is, in line with many of the goals of the present study not slavishly physicalist, as was the trend of the Jewish reflections of the time, but rather, and more importantly, it is faithful to New Testament nuances20 that speak to the transcendental relational character of the life of the risen Christ that informs the understanding of human resurrection. Ultimately, resurrected life must be understood as relational and personalist in accord with the God’s ultimate goal for humanity, a goal which will necessarily involve the sexual self.21

21A goal that will be realized below in the specific discussion of sexuality and eternal life.
Thus, having excluded certain rigid interpretations of the resurrected body, what does contemporary theology have to say regarding a realistic proposal concerning the resurrected life? This question is a matter of characteristics and identity both of which are important, however, with the latter being more significant to a discussion of the implications of eschatology for sexual relationships in the future. In order to move to the more pertinent question of identity, let us look momentarily to the question of characteristics of resurrected embodiment.

Speculation regarding the characteristics of the resurrected body stem from both scholastic reflections and popular thought. Traditional theology delineated three sets of characteristics for the risen body: universal characteristics of risen bodies, characteristics of heavenly bodies, and characteristics of the bodies of the damned. For the limited purpose of the present study, only the first two need to be mentioned. In terms of characteristics of all risen bodies, there are two: immortality and integrity (with a literal understanding of wholistic endowment, i.e., all of its parts and organs). Regarding the bodies of the blessed heavenly bodies there are four: agility, namely, movement with immeasurable speed; impassibility, i.e., the inability to experience any form of corruption or pain; splendor, or incomparable illumination; and subtly, that is, being immaterial to the degree that the body could pass through solid objects.

Two items are of particular note regarding these scholastic conceptions of the risen body. First, they reflect the image of Jesus’ resurrected body as mediated by the Scriptures. Second, and as noted by Peter Phan, by means of their imagination and culture, the scholastics attempted to provide a portrait of what might be the perfect

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22 The section regarding the nature/characteristics of the risen body is indebted almost completely to Aquinas. For a detailed study of these musings in Thomistic philosophy and theology, see his Summa Theologica, 3, q. 51-54.
Such imaging is similar in contemporary popular culture which often sees heavenly resurrection as perfection and freedom from end on a linear timeline. What is problematic, especially anticipating the import of this aspect of eschatology for a sexual ethic that could incorporate homosexual activity, at least on the level of conscience, is that none of the aforementioned language is terribly relational. Accordingly, one must attend to the “identity” of the risen body. Two theologians are helpful here; however, it may be necessary to provide some additional nuance to their reflections. First, Peter Phan speaks of the resurrection in terms of a glorified experience of personal selfsameness. In so speaking, he emphasizes not the same atoms of molecules of the person, but rather completion and perfection of an individual’s personal narrative. That narrative is marked by personal choice on the categorical level which can only be achieved through bodily existence. Thus, it is one’s “concrete history” that becomes definitive in the resurrection of the dead and given a perfected existence.

Second is the work of Bernard Prusak who speaks of eschatological embodiment in terms of a creative yet resolved musical composition

All the notes which form “the melody” of an individual person’s life, echoing through the movements of an unfinished symphony within history will, in the resurrection of the dead, become fully integrated within the once unfinished but now once and for all completed symphony of history and creation. In the final consummation, we will all together experience the entire symphonies of our histories – after the final note has been written and played. All the notes of our individual melodies will have been composed with an embodied history, like molecules of ink on a material score, but in the completed cosmic symphony echoing in eternity in union with God, each individual, personal melody will resonate, together with all the others, the whole identity of our embodied history with a deeper reality than the molecules of the bodies in which the identity

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23Peter C. Phan, Responses to 101 Questions on Death and Eternal Life (New York: Paulist Press, 101-102)
24Ibid., 101.
25Ibid.
of our life was originally composed. In that dynamic finality, “matter and spirit will belong to each other in a definitive fashion.”26

A number of observations should be offered at this point in terms of both the importance of recognizing the nature of resurrected identity and certain limitations in these contemporary approaches viewed vis-à-vis the development of a same-sex ethic. First, both Phan’s insistence on the importance of the value of history and its contribution to the notion of being resurrected in the sense of personal self-sameness must be applauded. His conception of the resurrected body takes human freedom and experience seriously, a necessary requirement for any sexual ethic grounded in eschatology. Second, Prusak’s metaphor of the symphony, that underscores the importance of individuality and plurality (or harmony), highlights the importance of resurrection of the body as naturally inclined toward relationality. Once again, one discerns a non-literal yet creatively faithful approach to the resurrection of the dead that is helpful for sexual ethics. At the same time, these efforts represent only a beginning of the discussion of bodily resurrection, taken in context, as homosexuals attempt to inform their consciences in light of their ultimate destiny.

At the beginning stages of any development of a view of the resurrected body, a few limitations need to be noted. First, there continues to fail to be an articulation of how believers are incorporated into the Body of Christ in their resurrected state,27 especially in terms of sexual interaction. Second, there exists a failure to recognize that in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, there is a significant amount of brokenness in the human person that needs to be healed in order to achieve a redeemed sexuality. As

noted by Miroslav Volf, “Persons cannot be healed without the healing of their specific socially constructed and temporarily (sic) constructed identities.” Third, and finally, each of the present speculations seems to integrate little if any notion of virtue in the understanding of the resurrected body and the divine and interpersonal context of redeemed existence.

Accordingly, a new metaphor for the context of redeemed embodiment may be required; however, it must incorporate the best aspects of the proposals made by Phan and Prusak. In light of this observation, I would suggest the motif of bodily resurrection as perfect reintegration into the family of God. To begin, such reintegration takes Phan’s understanding of resurrected self-sameness seriously. It acknowledges that God, as Father, allows human persons the freedom to make choices based upon their understanding of the person and event of Jesus the Christ. These choices must include the realm of sexuality given its importance in the achievement of full human flourishing, which is central to the notion of family. Accordingly, history is important in the event of reintegration into the family of God by means of resurrection because history is a record of what one hopes to become personally and sexually. Additionally, the notion of resurrected life as reintegration into the family of God takes the importance of historical experiences of community seriously, as noted by Prusak. It is important to realize that the import of community is not always widespread but also interpersonal, and in some means sexual. Finally, reintegration into the family of God by means of resurrection does celebrate the whole person, especially in terms of the perfection of virtue. In the family

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of humanity, one experiences “a school of intimacy, empathy, and love,”29 all virtues that are necessary for human persons to realize their divinely willed destiny. Perfected, they lead to ultimate relationality, in God, in Christ, and in fully human love and interaction. Once again, such a metaphor is not physicalist in terms of resurrection of the body; however, it does realize that human action shapes the experience of redeemed embodiment.

What does the discussion of redeemed embodiment mean for the possible evolution of a same-sex ethic on the level of conscience? First, it does take concrete choices to love seriously as constitutive of who we become in death and may lessen our notion of restrictions regarding same-sex activity. Second, it realizes that human persons are called to community as part of their final destiny and that if that call includes homosexual relationships, any effort to frustrate such a communion may actually contradict the will of God. Finally, redeemed embodiment is built upon the cultivation of virtue, “the highest of which is love” (1 Cor. 13:13) and cannot be ignored in the physical development of an individual’s personal narrative, which often includes genital sexual activity.

In the end, a discussion of redeemed embodiment hopes to achieve two things in light of the aims of the present study. First, and most fundamentally, “we do not live hermetically sealed ‘natural’ (or inner-worldly) and ‘supernatural’ lives. Grace perfects nature rather than leaving it untouched.”30 Persons are in their personal, emotional, spiritual, and sexual lives becoming the persons that they are destined to become through

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Second, the present understanding of the resurrected body is meant to serve as a corrective to popular notions of resurrected life, especially those that might include presumed sexual activity. Third, it underscores the importance of our embodied choices in terms of our final destiny. Thus, it is important to understand how human persons continue to be sexual in the experience of heavenly glory in light of their sexual past.

Sexual Interaction as an Eschatological Reality: A Conflation of Past, Present and Future Realities in a Narrative Key

The philosopher Peter Kreeft, in a popular yet erudite text offers the following simple yet necessary observation regarding eschatological sexuality: “If sexuality is part of our inner essence, then it follows that there is sexuality in heaven.” The questions that are essential for the present study are: How will such sexual expression manifest itself in light of concrete experiences both past and present? How does who we are and who we have been impact our eschatological sexual selves? Is earthly sexuality a shadow or a foretaste, an abstraction or an image of the intimacy that we are called to have with God and neighbor in the heaven? Do restrictions that fail to see that grace builds upon nature, even nature that is perceived and not proven (as is the case in terms of homosexual orientation and activity), contradictory to the teleological nature of persons who are ultimately called to relationality?

What is the import of sexual behaviors past and present in light of eschatological hopes and “expectations”? Once again, it is necessary to revisit the fundamental meaning of human sexuality in a new key before attending to the human person’s situation after

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31 Peter Kreeft, Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Heaven But Never Dreamed of Asking (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 120.
32 Ibid., 132.
death. Determination of the nature of glorified sexuality is difficult and delicate enough without the added variable to the potential of homosexual relationships informing that reality. Accordingly, it is necessary to tread lightly.

Once again the question is proposed: What is the nature of sexuality in view of the future destiny of humanity and since the transition from time to eternity is on the horizon throughout our lives? One is first reminded of the existential questions of Michel Foucault, regarding the “secrets” of sexuality. Accordingly, it is necessary to review several essential elements of human sexuality in time to discover their need to be transformed ultimately in eternity. As noted by Margaret Farley, these elements include, albeit not exclusively, emotion, pleasure, relationality, creativity, power, credible witness and the ultimate goals of sexual activity.

Emotion is intrinsic to sexual identity and behavior. Too much emotion has the potential to paralyze an individual in terms of moral action; to little emotion may result in indifference which will not allow for a fruitful sexual existence. Therefore emotion must be taken seriously in terms of sexual expression in this life in anticipation of the life to come. Emotions reflect the realities of both empowerment and freedom while at the same time experiences of vulnerability, both of which reflect the experience embodied in the risen Christ and are necessary for healthy sexual relationships. Unfortunately, the experience of emotion within the context of sexual relationships often leaves one conflicted, i.e. resulting in an ontological and existential experience of cacophony in

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34 Farley, *Just Love*, 161-164. The notion of “credible witness” is taken from an essay by Lisa Sowle Cahill and will be cited below.
terms of experiences of happiness and sadness, pleasure and pain, self-validation and shame, especially when same-sex behaviors are considered, even in conscience. Ergo, redemption is necessary in light of timely attempts to enter into healthy sexual relationships. Here the past and present define the healing that is required for the transition from time to eternity and for the perfection of divine and human relationships in the experience of heaven.

Pleasure is also an element of human sexuality that requires redemption. Pleasure is a key component in the sexual relationship, an observation that is relatively recent in Catholic moral theology. In the tradition, sexuality first did not move beyond the purpose of conception. As noted earlier, sexuality was highlighted as an expression of mutual love, especially in terms of Vatican II and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. More recently, pleasure in sexuality has been viewed as a good in itself (moderated by the virtue of temperance), and a fundamental characteristic of affective sexuality. Pleasure however is multi-dimensional; it must be not only physical, but also psychological and spiritual, including the essential elements of mutuality, bonding and transcendence, with the latter being more important than the former. All too often physical pleasure does become the focus of sexual activity, thereby testifying to the need for redemption in this area of sexuality. Given this reality, one might wonder, if homosexual love may have something of an advantage in regard to a healthy view of pleasure because of the effort, intimacy, and mutual understanding of need that may be present in these relationships. Same-sex relationships that provide for healthy pleasure

37See Gaudium et Spes, nos. 49-50.
38Genovesi, In Pursuit of Love, 246.
39Farley, Just Love, 162.
within the context of a healthy commitment may be a foreshadowing of hope that our sexual relationships will be perfected in heaven.

Key to an understanding of a redeemed sexuality is the notion of relationality that takes seriously the consideration of sex as the most intimate form of language for social communication. Sexuality is an expression of our most personal selves and at its essence is meant to communicate the totality of who we are in the language of intimacy.\textsuperscript{40}

Similar to other forms of human communication, sexual language is diverse and complicated, involving emotion, joy, and hope for the purpose of establishing a committed, exclusive, and permanent relationship.\textsuperscript{41} It is simultaneously an experience of risk and potential liberation. Unfortunately, on this side of eternal bliss, revelation of “secrets” is difficult in both physicalist and personalist interpretations of sexuality. To articulate who one is to another for the purpose of mutual love can be a source of fear and trembling. For both heterosexual and homosexual couples, such exposure and openness requires a vision of the future that foresees an eternal moment when one can be accepted for whom he or she truly is without judgment either within the context of the relationship or in terms of the moral mandates of the Church. Perhaps, the language of sexuality is the aspect of it that is in most need of redemption.

Another component of a view of redeemed sexuality is creativity. Sex cannot only be viewed for its own sake, but also in terms of its goals and aims. To be fashioned in the image of God is to realize one’s capacity for co-creation. Therefore, passion, tenderness, and love must mediate new being, i.e., shared love must result in


\textsuperscript{41} Farley, \textit{Just Love}, 162.
“fruitfulness.”\textsuperscript{42} Creativity however cannot be strictly defined. Limiting creativity to biological creativity may be overly exclusive and result in a diminishment of the possibility of human flourishing on the part of some persons. In regard to homosexuals, it must be noted that there exists the possibility that in the context of a same-sex relationship, the possibility that these persons may be a part of God’s creative plan and that they have very special gifts and qualities that could make a “very positive contribution to society,”\textsuperscript{43} especially in terms of a communal dynamic. As a result, a view of the new creation, marked by harmony and mutual indwelling among all persons must be kept in mind in the personal evaluation of sexual behaviors in conscience, given the lack of such balance in the present.

It is impossible to envision sexuality without conjuring notions of the power that individuals are capable of exercising over one another. Aspects of this type of power center around notions of acceptance and rejection, possessiveness and freedom, objectification and loving appreciation, to name but a few. Perhaps it is equally important when envisioning a redeemed sexuality to realize the power that societies, institutions, and structures have wielded in terms of the normalization of sexual behavior.\textsuperscript{44} Determining the meaning of sexuality according to established norms without appeal to individual human experience may frustrate the experience of full human flourishing in accord with one’s ultimate destiny in the present. This most likely impinges upon evaluations of homosexuality and subjects sexual power to the need for redemption which begins in the present but is only to be realized in the radical future.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid, 162-163.
\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., 163-164.
All of the aforementioned observations naturally lead to a few thoughts regarding the ultimate aims and motivations for sex. Margaret Farley provides an insightful but not exhaustive list in terms of her evaluation that the meaning of sexuality can include “a desire to enhance self-esteem, drive out depression and despair, express love and faithfulness, sustain a relationship of a marriage that is without mutual love, repay favors, escape into recreation and play, reveal one’s intimate self and attain access to the intimate self of another, earn a living, and on and on.” Meanings and aims of sexuality correspond with the different chapters of one’s personal narrative. As observed in the aforementioned examples, at times one seeks to view the other as subject in the context of mutual love and freedom while in other contexts persons can become objectified through the neediness and control of others. In light of these inconsistencies and the Catholic belief that human persons are perfected in their relationship with God and one another, it is essential that the true meaning of sex be clarified in eternity, without personal or physicalist restraints.

In light of these observations, one theological construct is almost beyond question: human persons must retain their sexual identity in heavenly glory, albeit in a transformed manner. That does not mean a return to the Garden of Eden; rather, it entails genuine understanding of the witness of the past, willingness to address the situations of the present (which may or may not conform to official church teaching as a matter of conscience), and a genuine willingness to learn new lessons based upon eschatological hopes and expectations. Accordingly, it is appropriate to investigate the nature of

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sexuality in the context of eternity since “no one can claim sexual wholeness in the present” since, “human beings live with deformities caused by fear and guilt, by the ravages of spiritualistic and sexist dualism, by sexual abuse and homophobia (emphasis mine), by the curtains of silence and shame lowered in this supposedly enlightened time.\(^{47}\)

*Heavenly Sex: From Partnership, Pleasure, and Potency to Eternal Perfection*

In light of the importance of a redeemed sexuality noted above, the next logical question becomes how are we eternal sexual persons? We have already noted that the eschatological horizon of Christianity requires radical and authentic witness on the part of the Church and its individual members in terms of relationality to varying degrees in time. “The eschatological horizon also means that the kingdom awaits fulfillment by God’s definitive judgment and act\(^{48}\) in eternity. Therefore, it is essential to discover descriptively the potential nature of heavenly sexuality so as to retroactively impose these proposals upon current ethical proposals regarding sexual behavior, including that which is experienced by same-sex couples. All the while, it is essential to remember that any eschatological scenario, especially those that deal with human sexuality, “expressions of the hope that whatever brings happiness and communion on earth will find its most perfect fulfillment in heaven.”\(^{49}\)

Peter Kreeft asserts directly that “sexual intercourse” does occur in heaven; not

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\(^{47}\)Nelson, *Between Two Gardens*, 181-182

\(^{48}\)Cahill, *Beyond the Sexes*, 76-77.

\(^{49}\)Phan, *101 Questions on Death and Eternal Life*, 107. Two things are important to note here. First, whether intended by Phan or not, the concept of happiness must be teleologically oriented, i.e., happiness must be understood in the context of one fulfilling one’s divinely willed purpose. Second, communion must be understood in terms of relationality. Specifically, this refers to the concept of justice that recognizes and respects rights and responsibilities in relationship. See both chapter 2 and chapter 5 of the current study for further elucidation of justice as a sexual virtue (which is realized perfectly on the eschatological horizon).
for traditional purposes, but rather for the purpose of “spiritual intercourse.” While not untrue, such a broad statement is in need of significant nuance beyond Kreeft’s observation that spiritual intercourse moves beyond and is “something more specific than universal charity” and “a special communion with the sexually complementary.” Accordingly, the current discussion would argue that heavenly sexuality results in the fulfillment of human nature, the healing of sin rooted in alienation, and response to the need on the part of every human person to forge covenants with others through the proper ordering of desire and a mature and authentic realization of love.

_The Importance of Narrative:_ In anticipation of sexuality as a significant aspect of the fulfillment of human nature, it must be remembered first, that human existence evolves fundamentally in a narrative key. Ontologically, human beings are stories, and the existential communication of the personal narratives of others provides a vital framework in which a portrait of human life can be considered authentic and fruitful. As noted by Paul Wadell, “the narratives of our lives also shape our view of the world, our sense of reality and history, and our expectations for the future.” It is valid to assert that the narratives of human love achieve the very same goal. Therefore, human sexuality must pay attention to its narrative quality to assess its validity and transition to perfection in eternity. Stories of loving, within the boundaries of official teaching of the Church or evolving beyond while attempting to remain faithful in conscience are critically

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50 Kreeft, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Heaven*, 129.
51 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 137.
important since these living texts will be incorporated into the hymn of personal self-sameness that humans hope for in the eschaton.

Although not distinctly related to sexuality in anticipation of redeemed existence, Wadell offers a helpful question when determining a relatively comprehensive sexual ethic that takes eschatology seriously: “With so many rival accounts of life, how can we tell the difference between stories ‘that distort the real meaning of what it is to be human’ and stories that help us achieve our distinctive excellence?”\(^5^6\) In response to this question, he offers eight criteria for a dynamic human narrative that are applicable to human sexuality and its redemption in resurrected life.

First, human narrative existence must “recognize, respect, and respond to” the authentic humanity of all persons regardless of diversity whether it be cultural, religious, racial, or in light of the aims of the present study, sexual.\(^5^7\) As seen above, the Catholic social tradition has acknowledged the inherent worth of all persons, as subjects who, though obedient to the divine will, are able to exercise autonomy in terms of categorical and transcendent choices. Choices with regard to sexuality do not diminish that worth, even though they do impinge upon the character of relationships. Given the reality of original sin, a sustained inauthenticity,\(^5^8\) evaluations of these choices will not always be correct on the part of individuals, and their elucidations may be imperfect on the part of the Church. This fact underscores that human nature needs to be fulfilled. Unsustained development toward sexual maturity in the eschaton leads to an arrested sense of true

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\(^5^7\)Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life*, 141.

personhood. Only a proleptic vision of the redeemed narrative of the person can lead to sexual choices that are authentic in conscience if not universally accepted in theory. In essence, eternal glory will incorporate all of the aspects of a human person’s sexual experiences, and in light of that reality, anticipation of future glory must take past and present choices made in radical honesty with the utmost seriousness. “Heavenly sex” looks beyond externals to the fundamental nature of the other resulting in love that reflects the perichoretic activity of the Trinity. Heavenly sex is acceptance of the image of God as diverse – a realization that is essential to the development of a personal yet faithful sexual ethic, especially one that will wrestle with same-sex issues.

The second criterion, related to the first, means that the human narrative must be interpreted in such a manner that it illuminates the full truth of who we are. The story to be redeemed must showcase the human ability to love and challenge the tendencies to be self-serving. In terms of sexuality, truth telling is not always revelatory of the full story of our nature. We want to present ourselves to the other, as desirable and loveable, which exercises a type of unjust power over the other. A redeemed sexual narrative (true “heavenly sex”) results in truth telling and vulnerability. Again, anticipation of this aspect of ultimate human destiny can inform sexual behaviors, regardless of orientation, and allow for the most genuine development of individual conscience. Proposals regarding sex outside of time clearly manifest redeemed intimacy since the truest self is being presented to the other.

A third characteristic of an authentic human narrative on the “other side” of time

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60 Farley, *Just Love*, 164-173.
is that of true community and a consistent commitment to relationships that is reflective of the narrative of the relational quality the person and event of Jesus the Christ, culminating in his resurrection and exultation. In particular, Gerald O’Collins speaks to redemption of the human narrative as multifaceted; it involves salvation from “all kinds of alienation from oneself (the divided self); from other human beings; from the world (lack of harmony with nature); and from God.” In terms of the heavenly sexual existence, this provides a number of insights. In eternity, human persons will not experience sexual shame. They will not carve out a narrative based upon personal neediness. They will not be divided because of their past attractions. They will not resort to violence in terms of any “assessment” of the other in relationship. These insights are key in terms of envisioning a redeemed sexual self that can inform sexual ethics today since it invites the possibility of interpenetration on the part of individuals that is faithful to truth but not overly burdened by strict regulation that is not open to the realm of mystery.

A fourth criterion of redeemed human narrative that is critical for the development for a faithful sexual stance is that it provides a framework for working against “our tendencies toward rationalization and self-deception so that we can see the world, other people, and ourselves justly and truthfully.” Often arguments to justify certain sexual behaviors are emotive and revelatory of personal agendas. A redeemed sexuality will acknowledge choices both appropriate and inappropriate in light of the will

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64See, for example, Christopher Wolfe, “Homosexuality and the Church,” in *Sexuality and the U.S. Catholic Church: Crisis and Renewal*, eds. Lisa Sowle Cahill, John Garvey, and T. Frank Kennedy, S.J., 144-162. Here, Wolfe accepts homosexual orientation while “condemning” same-sex activity through the emotional medium of a letter to an imaginary son of a friend.
of God the creator by means of a well-formed conscience. It will not allow relationality to decay due to illusion or deceit. It will not permit the blinding self-centeredness that can characterize any sexual relationship. It will renew vulnerability and humility to flourish as sexual virtues in any context where divinely sanctioned love is present. It will confront the realities of heterosexuality and homosexism. It will speak the truth in love to both heterosexual and same-sex couples so that their stories may be authentic and complete.

Wadell’s fifth characteristic of a healthy narrative, which we are attempting to apply to the reality of the redeemed sexual self, is the need for hospitality and openness to the other in light of diversity that might be experienced as personally threatening. The sexual self in eternity will exhibit perfect hospitality, that is, it will welcome the other and not assume the natural tendency, as a result of original sin, to move toward overly critical judgment of the other. The redeemed sexual self, on a personalistic level, will no longer be subject to “harming by exclusion.” Sexuality will be a communal experience of transcendental interpenetration without any hints of guilt, shame, or promiscuity since redeemed motives are oriented toward the love shown the human person perfected in their image in the likeness of God. This is the essence of hospitality. In terms of openness, in light of an investigation of human sexuality, it is clear that “openness makes us inventive and creative.” It is not tied to a single perspective, while appreciating the contributions of time-tested wisdom regarding relationships. This

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65 Homosexism is proposed as an attitude that neither accepts heterosexual behaviors as “normative” and in fact demeans such relationships.
66 Wadell, Happiness and the Christian Moral Life, 143.
68 Haring, The Virtues of An Authentic Life, 169.
particular aspect of the human narrative to be redeemed, especially in regard to sexuality, once again makes absolute statements on the moral status of same-sex relationships difficult to assert definitively.

Justice is the sixth variable in the assessment of a narrative that is authentic, yet in need of redemption.69 This aspect of the human story has several earmarks that are easily recognized, yet painfully achieved. It is marked by genuine human flourishing and fulfillment. It refuses to be driven by exclusion and a desire for privileged status. It is driven by desire for the good of the other and not promotion of the self. A truly just narrative embraces the virtue of solidarity with all others, regardless of the manifestation of their poverty.70 A just narrative attends to rights and responsibilities in all relationships: personal, interpersonal, and communal.

The virtue of Justice lies at the heart of the Kingdom of God.71 Therefore it must mark the vision of a future redeemed sexuality than can inform decisions and actions in the present. How then does the just heavenly “sexual” narrative potentially manifest itself? Simply put, it respects and celebrates the vulnerable love demonstrated in present and past relationships; it is transcendent and freely given; it exhibits the characteristics of perfect mutuality and equality; it is fully committed; it reflects a spiritual fecundity; it is oriented toward inclusivity while respecting the distinct “earthly narrative” upon which it is built.72 All of these ideal eschatological characteristics of human sexuality must

69 Wadell, Happiness in the Moral Life, 143.
70 Ibid.
71 As noted by Bernard Haring in his discussion of the virtue of Justice, “There are only two paths: either the kingdom of solidarity in salvation attained through true justice and love or the domain of perdition with all of its consequences for those who seek it.” See his, The Virtues of an Authentic Life, 34-37.
inform human relationships in the present, especially in the intimate storytelling of
sexuality.

Criterion seven of a healthy personal narrative that is redeemed in terms of the
“sexual” self is perhaps the most difficult to embrace in time. Human stories that help us
to achieve our distinctive excellence cannot deny the reality of suffering in life, in
particular, disappointments in relationships which often scar us to the bone. Anticipation
of redeemed stories such as these however, teach one to deal with such misfortunes with
hope. 73 No life is without its share of sorrows; sexual life is often permeated with
suffering, adversity, pain, sorrow, losses, and grief, given the fragile nature of the human
person and his or her capacity for relationship. This observation does not abandon the
realities of joy, pleasure, generosity, fruitfulness, and love that characterize human sexual
relationships; however, it does teach one the reliance that is needed with regard to the
virtues of faith and hope. Confidence in the fact that disappointments will be
transformed in eternity gives one the courage to make choices that transcend one’s
personal sexual desires.

The last characteristic to be reviewed in the assessment of authentic human
narratives that inform sexual dispositions, when viewed though the lens of eternity, is the
gift of perfect freedom that leads to the fullness of life. 74 Human persons shape their
sexual lives by the exercise of freedom. In eternity, it can be anticipated that freedom
will be oriented toward perfect relationality, modeling the loving circumincension of the
immanent Trinity. Such freedom looks to union that is intimate and creative in ways that

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73 Wadell, *Happiness in the Moral Life*, 144.
74 Ibid. Once again the reader is reminded that Wadell is focused upon relationships in time, while
the present study aims to translate the perfection of these relationships in the radical future of the eschaton
to present choices and behaviors.
transcends the physical. Retroactively, that means in life that the ultimate goal of human persons, in their construction of a sexual narrative, and in light of eschatological perfection, is to embody “fruitfulness for the future” which is characterized by creativity and care.\(^{75}\) Such dispositions, without question, have the potential of crossing the strict lines and evaluations of sexual orientation and behavior.

In view of the aforementioned discussion, it is clear that narrative is essential, that the redeemed narrative of the human person is essential for the formation of conscience vis-à-vis embodied sexuality. As noted by Jurgen Moltmann

> To be raised to eternal life means that nothing has ever been lost for God – not the pains in this life, and not its moments of happiness. Men and women will find again with God not only the final moment, but their whole history – but as the reconciled, the rectified and healed complete history of their whole lives. What is experienced in this life as grace will be consummated in glory.\(^{76}\)

Accordingly, the redemption of the sexual self does not only celebrate the goodness of the unfolding narrative of the human person, but also the humbling and liberating redemption of sexual sin.

*The Eternal Redemption of the Sexual Person from the Sin of Alienation*: A healthy theological anthropology would acknowledge sin is a denial of creaturely identity. “To speak of sin as the denial of creaturely identity is a concise way to summarize its various faces and disguises.”\(^{77}\) A the heart of creaturely identity rests the concept of relationality. Therefore it is appropriate to set forth the following definition of sin to guide a discussion of eschatological redemption of the sexual person: Sin entails


the possibility of breaking, weakening, or obscuring one’s relationship with God neighbor, self, and or world, given the lived dynamic of the human person. With regard to the potential for sexual sinfulness, brokenness to varying degrees would be reserved to the realities of relationship with neighbor and self.

Accordingly if it is to be redeemed, for the sake of retrojecting a potential picture of risen life onto present sexual practices, it is important to develop a sense of the nature of sexual sin. Current reflections on “sexual sin” tend to move more in the direction of the cultivation of virtue rather than the evaluation of individual acts that are isolated from an introspective anthropology. As noted by Lisa Sowle Cahill,

Much of the Christian tradition… reinforce[s] exactly the kind of boundaries of judgment and exclusion against which original discipleship stood. A Christian sexual ethics does not function first or most strongly to “mark off” and condemn, but rather to inspire, and encourage the disciple to do good.

Failing to do the good in sexual relationships in the purview of contemporary moral theology, invites the need for redemption on a number of levels. First, the problematics of exploitation and harassment describe sins of serious sexual misconduct in common parlance. These egregious faults speak to one of the most disturbing aspects of relational immorality, that is, objectification of the other. They unveil a selfishness that transcends the castigation of traditional rules of conduct. It reflects an ontological dysfunction on the part of the agent who fails to see the other as a self-determining subject who desires not only pleasure but also fulfillment. In essence, these dehumanize

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78 The four categories of relationship are derived from the observations of Charles Curran while the three categories of action are my own. See Curran, The Catholic Moral Tradition Today, 73ff.
80 Gustafson, Moral Discernment in the Christian Moral Life, 105.
81 Ibid.
the other, offering the fundamental reason for the need for them to be perfectly redeemed by God in the eschaton. Life, and the fullness of life is oriented toward the realization of full humanity. In resurrected relationality, freedom will be completely respected, goodness affirmed, and intimacy celebrated. When transferring these characteristics retroactively to sexual relationships in the present, it must be acknowledged that perfection is most likely less than possible. One insight however, that goes without question is that the cultivation of sexual virtue does supersede criticism of action based upon presumed physiological complementarity when one engages in the formation of conscience. This observation crosses the boundaries of orientation, i.e., it is applicable to both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Alienation and harassment alienate others across lines that are not marred by the proclivities of orientation.

Another aspect of human fault that impacts perceptions of sexual sin that is need of redemption vis-a-vis one’s personal narrative is the human “propensity to deceive others.” A lack of commitment to truthfulness in relationship can lead to resentment which breaks down bonds that were initially established in love. Sexual relationships can be fertile ground for deception either due to a lack of self-esteem or a need to present a perfect self, that, as we have seen, only becomes realized in the transition from time to eternity. Closely related to deception is the possibility of betrayal in relationships. Unfortunately, due to personal neediness, vulnerability in the communication of intimacy, and lack of confidence in the trustworthiness of the other, betrayal, to varying degrees, can factor into the equation of sexual sin as alienation. The redeemed sexual

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84 Ibid.
self in the eschaton will be marked by perfect truthfulness and dedication to the other. Sexuality will take on the meaning of total self-offering as the truest expression of love for the beloved.  

85 For the sexual person in the present, this implies once again the embrace of virtue in relationship which may entail moving away from imposed rules of conduct.

**Sexual Covenants: Eternal and Redeemed:** Any sexual ethic that takes the notion of eschatological redemption seriously must view human sexuality through the lens of the concept of “covenant,” which makes reference to personal commitments that call for accountability and an awareness of the consequences of action. 

86 Covenants are not extraordinary realities, but rather indicative of fundamental human longings: personal, sacramental, sexual and spiritual. 

87 They guard one against sins that alienate and they sustain mutual love between persons, especially those who are engaged in the most intimate of relationships. Covenants guard the values of equality, mutuality, and love in relationship. In the arena of human intimacy, they “arise out of our experience as sexual beings and can foster our human well-being; they are not merely heteronomous, extrinsic contracts forced on persons…” 

88 Ultimately, covenants, sexual and otherwise, are grounded in human nature and experience.

The sobering reality of intimate human relationships that evolve in time is that covenants are difficult to establish and maintain. Often sexual union has the potential to isolate persons from others and from themselves. We formulate the risks of loving and

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85 Ibid.  
86 Ibid.  
being loved, knowing and being known, and we withhold our whole selves from the relationship or even retract ourselves completely. In addition, fallen human nature has a natural proclivity toward power in relationship that leads to injustice that is not characteristic of covenants. Desire often becomes a means of control, commitment is translated into captivity, attempts at love and admiration are morphed into self-serving objectification of the other.

What then will be the nature of redeemed sexuality in the eschaton in light of the reality of covenant which is the backdrop against which the drama of humanity is unfolding? What does it mean for a sexual covenant to be totally and finally realized? To begin, partners in eschatological covenants speak in the “language of healed sinfulness.” Relationality is marked by prudent desire, freedom, equality, and mutuality and reflects a degree of intimacy that transcends physicality and traditional conceptions of sexual relationships, perhaps including exceptions in conscience from restrictions of sexual intimacy to heterosexual couples. Additionally, covenanted sexuality in light of eschatological existence is devoid of self-deception in terms of needs, desires, motives, and activity. The human person who is presented to the other is unquestionably authentic. Finally, covenanted and redeemed sexuality realizes that relationships are not exclusive in the afterlife; however, in eternity one does not need to balance all of the competing demands of love as is the case in early existence. This observation by no means implies a lack of exclusivity in human relationships in time, but acknowledges the

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89Farley, Just Love, 224-225.
91Wadell, Happiness and the Christian Moral Life, 207.
importance of extending human sexual loves into all of our relationships. Recognition of this divine transformation in the human capacity for loving may be important for evaluating sexual relationships in the present. To the degree that sexual relationships are life-giving to all may determine their moral status in conscience despite the traditional articulation of ethical norms.

The Eschatological Ordering of Love and Desire: At the heart of discussions of love in eternity, one must ask the fundamental question: What is love? In essence, “love is the actively receptive movement of the heart that creatively enhances the value of both the lover and the beloved through a union that affirms their respective dynamisms. Where there is love, there is greater vitality, richer beauty, deeper ideas, stronger fidelity…”\textsuperscript{93} Thus, love can be experienced as proactive, affirming, life-giving, aesthetically enticing, reflective, indicative of an ontological and existential integrity in relationship. Love also enables a degree of freedom that ratifies the other as subject and agent that allows us to identify with others without succumbing to the temptation to objectify or control them.\textsuperscript{94} All of this must be viewed with the understanding that there are different types of love and that the present study is concerned primarily with romantic and sexual love,\textsuperscript{95} attempting to paint a portrait of this affective dynamic that matures when one has made his or her final choice for God in the face of eternity. Variation in loving in this way pays attention to the manner in which the object of our love modifies

\textsuperscript{94}Farley, \textit{Just Love}, 204-205.
\textsuperscript{95}Vacek, \textit{Love, Human and Divine}, 43.
its intensity and veracity. It values the fact that every human person in his or her distinctness loves differently as subject both in initiative and response.  

Human experience however, is very telling. It confronts us with the reality that romantic and sexual love are not always mature, just, and authentic. Such love is often disordered in life and can prove to be a disvalue in a number of ways on the level of a lack of virtue, including the areas of lust, lack of exclusivity and permanence, casual, harassing, abusive, seductive, violent and coercive. Vulnerability gives way to control, dogmatic pronouncements can lead to isolation and enslavement in fear. In time, and due to the reality of original sin that serves as the impetus for personal and social sin, potentially valid sexual behaviors in particular contexts may be suppressed and serve as an unjust affront to full human flourishing in time. The sexual self becomes a means to the end of pleasure and attitudes and behaviors result from the fear of the suffering of aloneness.

Eschatological awareness and anticipation allow believers to construct an alternative sexual anthropology realizing that “to be is to be in relation, to exist is always to co-exist, and is to co-experience a radical relationality – a relationality reaching back to origins, embracing the present and stretching out towards the transcendence of the future.” It does not cling to physicality but rather to self-identification as persons that are “shaped by mercy in the pursuit of justice, fidelity, self-care, and prudence.” While maintaining the heterosexual norm of marital sexual fidelity, such a vision of the future

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96 Ibid. 44.
does not necessarily discount the possibility of faithful homosexual relationships on the level of conscience in the present.

Finally, the concept of “heavenly sex” does not discount the proper ordering of desire. While the concept of desire is often associated with the vice of lust, desire is more appropriately associated with the concept of union that transcends the limitations of sexual objectification. As noted by Margaret Farley, genuine desire is virtuous, “to be with the beloved, to know the beloved better, to be closer, to share with the beloved more deeply.”\(^{100}\) It is not a craving for unrestricted sexual pleasure, but rather, a communion of persons that mirrors the interaction of the persons of the immanent Trinity who communicate honestly, reveal themselves openly, and interrelate perfectly. Desire is a quest for holiness and wholeness that is transcendentally authentic.

In reality, desire does not always manifest itself with such resolute purity. It is often oriented toward unbridled pleasure, controlling power, subtle yet painful perfidy, and shallow pretense for the sake of personal gain. Once again, desire, “satisfied” in the heat of sexual passion, leads to objectification of the other that results in an unholy and unacceptable objectification of the other. Desire often tempts one toward inappropriate sexual expressions that can lead to violence and betrayal.\(^{101}\) Sexual and romantic desire, due to the fact that becoming human is “a fragile process, not a given”\(^{102}\) because of the vestiges of original sin in our lives and in the world, can move one away from pursuit of the beautiful in sexual loving and toward merely carnal satisfaction that distorts human personality before God, self, and others.

\(^{100}\)Farley, \textit{Just Love}, 169.

\(^{101}\)James F. Keenan, \textit{Commandments of Compassion} (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 1999), 31-35.

Redeemed sexual desire does reflect human flourishing in the experience of eschatological fulfillment. It suggests that one has finally and fully integrated the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance in sexual relationships for both self-care and merciful union with others.\textsuperscript{103} This eschatological union remembers that desire for the other is inextricably connected with the desire for God, in whose image humans are created, thereby purifying desire and transforming it from vice to virtue. It respects the graced existence of all persons in the new creation.\textsuperscript{104}

There exist a number of ramifications for a redeemed view of desire when constructing a sexual ethic in the present. First, legitimate desire will intimately value persons as agents while respectful of their freedoms that are actualized in choices and boundaries. This takes on different meanings in different sexual contexts. For the heterosexual couple in the normative covenant of marriage, it is translated into mutuality and equality in the making of sexual choices with regard to genital activity in light of sexual admiration, attraction, longings and passions which allow the other to maintain a sense of self that is not truncated by the sexual or emotional power that one has over the other because of the manifestation of desire.\textsuperscript{105} The same is true with regard to couples that find themselves to possess a genuine homosexual orientation without a complementary call to celibacy; however, balances of power are usually not as uneven in said contexts. Second, appropriate sexual desire in light of the vision of a future redeemed anthropology moves from the profane to the sacred and sacramental whether

\textsuperscript{103}{Keenan, “Virtue Ethics and Sexual Ethics,” 129-133.}
\textsuperscript{104}{Lane, Keeping Hope Alive, 38.}
\textsuperscript{105}{Se Farley, Just Love, 223. One of Farley’s major concerns in the development of a sexual ethic that is grounded in the virtue of justice is the assurance that the power attributed to each of the partners is not misused to manipulate the other. Since desire can play upon the psyche of another, special care must be taken here in a sexual ethic that reflects eternal flourishing and fulfillment.}
such desire invites an experience of the mystical or if it is merely lighthearted and playful. In this sense sexual behaviors are seen as truly intimate, loving, and oriented toward genuine friendship that can exist regardless of gender or orientation given that they fall within the boundaries of fidelity and commitment. Here it must be underscored that desire may be easier to manage within the context of heterosexual relationships given the possible responsibilities for physical creativity and the extension of love outside of the particular relationship of the couple in terms of the potential evolution into the reality of family that coincides with every sexual act. Third, present desire based upon a vision of future existence is erotic in terms of its appreciation of beauty. The knowledge of the other who is love exists in “embodied, sensual forms.” Desire is the experience of being enamored with the other that leads to respect that validates God given human dignity. Pure desire teaches lovers to trust and treasure, rather than to trespass boundaries for self-gratification.

_Homosexual Orientation and Activity in Light of the Eschatological Horizon_

Until now, a general theory of the impact of redeemed existence for the formulation of a Catholic sexual ethic has been explored. The focus now moves toward the impact of these musings upon an evaluation of homosexual orientation and activity. These insights will be discussed for the purpose of informing believers who hope to develop a well-formed conscience in the face of positive practical doubt. The reflections once again represent personal possibilities rather than the proposal of new norms in the light of extenuating circumstances.

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107 Farley, _Just Love_, 172.
To view same-sex orientation and activity in light of the eschatological horizon, a number of themes need to be investigated and others revisited. First, the specific impact of the redeemed narrative of the homosexual person must be explored, i.e., how final destiny impacts relationality in the present for same-sex couples. Second, the eternal importance of virtue in the life of the homosexual must be considered. Third, the notion of liberation that is central to redeemed humanity in general and human relationships in particular must be considered when evaluating the moral status of same-sex relationships on the level of conscience. Fourth, a view of homosexuality under both the counsel of the cross and the promise of hope for the future must be reviewed. Fifth, and finally, the tentative nature of eschatological morality vis-à-vis the attempt to develop a coherent and authentic sexual ethic must be acknowledged.

“The hope of resurrection is for fulfillment of the lives we know by transformation into something of which we have only hints and that is a hope we are given not only for our individual lives, but for the entire creation…” I arise the same though changed.”

Distinctively Christian love is key to the story of the human person’s relationship with God, neighbor, self, and world. It is the foundation upon which the human narrative is built. Relationship with God and world, which is mysterious yet graced, is contingent upon the love that we have for self and neighbor. This hope is essential for the personal evaluation of same-sex relations in the arena of conscience since it is reflective of the changed yet self-same personhood of the homosexual. It challenges traditional and normative heterosexual categories based upon myths that are clearly situated in medieval culture and theology both in terms of

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understandings of sexual expression and the nature of resurrected humanity.  

It allows for “active receptivity” of love on the part of homosexual persons without the requirement of being made complete, as is suggested by the recent reflections on the theology of the body noted above. Rather, it strives for perfection in loving by realizing the ontological reality of one’s personhood, in the concrete experience of sexual love; not denying who one is due to physicalist categories regarding same sex relations, but embracing personal commitments to be true to self and true to God. For the homosexual person who struggles with the proposed call to celibacy, Resurrection destiny speaks to the importance of who persons are called to be.

All persons are called to strive for virtue in life as the fundamental dynamic of Christian living since virtue naturally inclines persons toward the good in response to graced existence, that is, a graced nature that is given, affirmed, and redeemed by God. Thus, the eternal importance of virtue in the life of the homosexual person must be considered in the formation of conscience. In the new creation, justice reigns supreme. The in-breaking of the ultimate future anticipates the healing of the “fragile reeds of social arrangement,” especially in the area of sexuality, and in particular homosexuality, to allow same-sex partners the valid opportunity to experience intimacy to varying degrees, even on the physical level. This is true because of a commitment to the virtue of justice as understood by the Catholic tradition, especially in its eschatological manifestation as a reconstructed dynamic that involves the embodied narrative of homosexual persons. In time, justice has had three traditional manifestations

109 This observation merely reflects the importance of creativity in the transmission of authentic moral tradition in Catholic culture.


in the Catholic tradition: distributive, legal, and commutative.\textsuperscript{112} As it is well known in the tradition, distributive justice speaks to the responsibilities of societies and institutions to particular individuals. In this case, an eschatological ethic of homosexuality has begun to be realized in the call to respect and maintain the protection of homosexual persons in society. In terms of Church, when forming a religious stance on homosexuality, especially in the case of same-sex couples, the eschatological challenge may need to continue to be issued with regard to inclusion in worship and acceptance in the face of individual choices to engage in sexual practices.

The concept of liberation on multiple levels is key to the formulation of an eschatological sexual ethic with regard to same-sex relations. As noted by John Polkinghorne, essential to resurrected life, which includes the redemption of our sexual selves, is “that encounter with the holy reality of God that we have called judgement, together with the associated cleansing from those many unrealities with which our lives have been laden.”\textsuperscript{113} Such redemptive freedom has two potential implications for a same-sex ethic. On one hand, in line with the traditional Roman Catholic approach, anticipation of full freedom may suggest the adoption of a certain degree of asceticism with regard to sexual practices, namely, restraint that normally comes under the heading of chaste celibacy. On the other hand, such liberation may not suggest “freedom from” but rather, “freedom for” entry into intimate liaisons that are life giving and authentic in terms of the true identity of the persons to be redeemed. Such freedom will involve the “rejection of systems of concepts we are familiar with” and result in the construction of concepts that include them [gays and lesbians] and their ways of experiencing life in the


\textsuperscript{113}Polkinghorne, The God of Hope and the End of the World, 133.
human family.”¹¹⁴ In conscience then, it may mean while non-normative, some genital sexual activity on the part of homosexual couples may be tolerated or acceptable. Once again we see the somewhat illusive and limited nature of any source for Catholic evaluations of homosexual orientation and activity.

Eschatological evaluations of same-sex behavior must consider both the counsel of the Cross and promise of hope for the future as revealed in the Paschal Mystery. As noted by Margaret Farley, “lifelong celibacy, chosen for the sake of the reign of God, has from early Christian centuries been valued in part as a witness to an unlimited future – an embodiment of eschatological hope in a world to come.”¹¹⁵ Ergo, it could be proposed that with the adoption of a chaste celibate lifestyle, homosexual persons dispose themselves in hope to the grace of fulfillment of their resurrected destiny. At the same time, the aforementioned proposal clearly employs the term “chosen;” celibacy that is imposed from without does not seem to inspire redemption in light of the modeling of Jesus’ embrace of the cross and his subsequent resurrection. True embrace of the cross may mean following the dictates of one’s conscience with regard to homosexual acts when they conflict to varying degrees with the pronouncements of ecclesiastical authorities, realizing that they do not speak to the norm on the part of Christian living as proposed by the Church. Hope factors into the equation when the homosexual person realizes that the greatest mandate is presenting one’s most authentic sexual self before God.

Finally, the tentative nature of eschatological morality vis-à-vis the attempt to develop a coherent and authentic sexual ethic must be acknowledged. As noted by Richard Baucham

Human imagination does not function in Christian eschatology as an alternative to God’s revelation. Rather, the revelatory promise of God in Christ and Scripture appeals to the human imagination; seizes, transforms, and expands the imagination; makes the imagination the locus and vehicle of its reception. It is the imagination transfigured by God’s promise that is able to envisage in hope the promised transfiguration of reality. It is this Christian imagination that can envision the coming kingdom sufficiently for it to empower Christian living without reducing the kingdom to a reality that can be all too easily perfected already.  

Clearly, the presumption for sexual behaviors comes under the umbrella of a heterosexual norm and must favor the revelation that is mediated by the Church. At the same time, in light of eschatological proposals, certain questions may be proposed regarding individual evaluations of same-sex behavior in light of the ultimate destiny of redeemed persons who discern the vocation to love and intimacy personally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Here, while the waters are murky, reasonable Christian eschatological themes that may nuance but never contradict the teaching of the Church may provide appropriate direction for full human flourishing which naturally leads individuals to perfected communion with God in the Eschaton.

**Conclusion**

While it is familiar to see arguments regarding the moral status of homosexuality as such relationships play out in time, consideration of same-sex ethics in view of sound eschatological premises is less frequent. The current chapter has attempted the latter in view of the ongoing quest for the valid formation of conscience on the part of gays and

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lesbians who do not feel called to celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Accordingly, several things have become clear. The dynamic of the transition from time to eternity does have relevance for Catholic considerations of sexual ethics. The nature of the resurrected body as narrative, redeemed from sin and alienation, and the importance of sexual covenants that are perfected in eternity has been underscored. In light of the resurrection and God’s gift of redemption, love and desire take on new meaning that continues to value traditional norms associated with sexual justice (e.g., fidelity, equality, mutuality, permanence, etc.) which loosen the ties to physicalist restrictions in some cases. In fact, an entire life of sexual virtue seems to take on greater value than independent sexual acts. Ultimately, however, all eschatological propositions are to be considered as tentative and cannot be used to justify changes in dogma. On the subjective level of the formation of conscience in the case of positive practical doubt, their importance is paramount.
CONCLUSION

“Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances; instead, examine everything: that is hold fast to what is good; abstain from every kind of evil” (1 Thes. 5:19-22). While addressed originally to the community founded by Paul in Thessalonica regarding pneumatic activity within the community in light of immanent expectation of the Parousia, its overall sentiment of personal and communal discernment by virtue of attentiveness to the Spirit serves well as an introduction to the formulation of some important conclusions regarding the current study on the formation of conscience in light of the question of homosexuality in general and same-sex behavior in particular.¹ It speaks to a desire to return to the integration of all of the areas of theology, as was the modus operandi of Patristic and Medieval theologies, thereby embracing the Christian mystery as a whole when faced with questions of anthropology, theology, and ethics.² It proposes a unified vision of creation that impacts human understanding in one of the most important themes of the narrative of human existence: sexuality. The normativity

²Adian Nichols, O.P., The Shape of Catholic Theology (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 345. In particular, with regard to Aquinas, Thomas O’Meara is helpful here. In terms of interpreting Aquinas’ approach to moral theology, he notes that “As part of the entire Summa Theologiae, the Second Part narrates the journeying of Christian life touched by the processions of the Trinity and the emerging of a psychology of the human being existing in salvation-history through a life principle, which is the gift and presence of the Holy Spirit. Precisely by drawing the new currents of his time into a theology, Aquinas became Aristotelian, a thinker of nature’s forms, and in light of the De anima, a moral theologian of faculties, habits, and activities flowing from nature and grace...But Aquinas’ moral theology begins with the selection of the eschaton as the goal of men and women, and for this, it spotlights a second life-principle, grace. Within the pattern of crescendo acquired and infused virtues, realms of realities (laws), and charismatic gifts enter and remain. A moral theology is not Christian because an Aristotelian philosophy is adorned with passages from the Bible, but because it sees reality in light of the kingdom of God and explains how incarnation continues in so many lives. Incarnation is an underlying pattern of the Summa theologicae and it reaches from the mission of the word to the sacrament of the sick and the dying. See, Thomas F. O’Meara, O.P., “Interpreting Thomas Aquinas: Aspects of the Dominican School of Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century,” in The Ethics of Aquinas, ed. Stephen Pope (Washington, Georgetown University Press, 2002), 355-373, esp., 366.
of the teaching of the Magisterium is acknowledged and embraced; however, it is integrated uniquely by means of the avenue of personal experience, both lived and anticipated, which rests at the heart of the current investigation. The present consideration of the moral status of same-sex behavior in the arena of conscience formation is oriented toward the good, in particular the full flourishing of human persons in relationships, and it recognizes the difficulties of such discernment, striving to “avoid evil.”

In spite of the urgency of the question of same-sex activity on the part of those individuals who are irreversibly homosexual and do not genuinely experience a call to celibacy, the Church has remained true to form. A situation exists where positive practical doubt could exist and result in moral paralysis because of a doubt of fact given the limitations of the human interpretations and applications of the normative sources of Christian ethical reflection (scripture, natural law, the empirical sciences, Tradition, and moral norms) regarding human sexuality. Therefore, the heterosexual norm has been upheld and same-sex acts have continued to be condemned and morally prohibited. On an objective level, such moral judgments have not been challenged.

The current study has proposed a response that is both academic and pastoral on the subjective level, realizing that part of the task that God has placed in the hands of theologians, theological ethicists in particular, is integration and reconciliation of all individuals, in the current situation homosexual persons, into the community of believers.

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3 This assertion speaks to the fundamental and classical distinction in moral theology between the *Iudicium de actu ponendo* and the *Iudicium de positione actus*. This study has addressed the question of homosexuality from the position of the latter. Basically put, for the irreversibly homosexual person who engages in same-sex behaviors, acting in good faith, and with a conscience that is well-formed, the former may be erroneous what the latter in principle could not be so, since the telos of the act is the good, at least in a subjective yet valid sense. See, James T. Bretzke, *A Morally Complex World: Engaging Contemporary Moral Theology* (Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 2004), 233.
Ergo, if our work is not only cerebral but also pastoral, as summarized by Margaret Farley, “we are still pressed with the task of discerning what must characterize same-sex relationships if they are to conduce to human flourishing.” Accordingly, new yet valid sources for the formation of conscience regarding homosexuality have been introduced: Catholic social teaching, liturgy and sacramentality, spirituality, as well as eschatology all of which are “contemporary moral markers” that serve as benchmarks of the advancement of human dignity and paths to an authentic embrace of human destiny.

A path to just love in terms of sexuality in general and same-sex relationships in particular is absolutely essential. It must discover its foundation in the Church’s social teaching and continue to move forward in the articulation of the living tradition of the Church and the individual formation of conscience. The present reflections have relied heavily upon various themes in the Catholic social tradition, including the virtue of justice, the innate right and need to participate in intimate relationships, solidarity, and love, in its various manifestations, including the genital, as a means toward achieving the common good, in particular on the part of homosexual persons. Justice has been shown to incarnate love, to nurture it and protect it, especially in the contexts of gays and lesbians who attempt to develop a well-formed conscience which may be viewed as contrary to the official teachings of the Magisterium to varying degrees. What just love may provide for homosexual persons is an avenue to foster true, divinely willed creativity on a level that moves beyond the physical, but rather a level that embraces the call to

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5This assertion presumes a particular conception of Tradition that reflects the evolving character of its articulation. As noted by Yves Congar, “Tradition is the grasp, varying in the means and resources it employs, of the treasure which living Christianity has possessed as a reality from the beginning, and which passes progressively, as a result of reflection, from the level of the implicit (*l’implicite vécu*) to that of the expressively known (*l’explicite connu*).” See Yves M.J. Congar, O.P., *Tradition and Traditions: The Biblical, Historical, and Theological Evidence for Catholic Teaching on Tradition* (Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Shuster, 1966), 363.
grow in the likeness of God.⁶ For potential partners contemplating a same-sex relationship, union of mind, body, and heart may be the means of bringing their most authentic and complete selves forward, cultivating a genuine attraction to the good in the whole of their lives and fulfilling their divinely willed purpose which is the true goal of human happiness and flourishing.⁷

The question of the importance of community, and its dynamics in a subjective evaluation of homosexual relations is recapitulated naturally in a discussion of liturgy and sacraments. As noted above, the experience of sacramental and liturgical realities leads to what Walter Bruggemann identifies as “prophetic energizing”⁸ marked by an expanded vision of the Paschal Mystery that informs theological reflection and ethical reflection in the area of same-sex encounters. This vision unfolds in the believer’s participation in the sacramental life of the Church, in particular Baptism, Eucharist, and Reconciliation, participation that is often occluded by objective ecclesiastical pronouncements on homosexuality. Through the lens of the sacramental life of the church the “faithful homosexual person” can arrive at a decision of conscience that not only speaks to his or her familiarity with traditional sources, but also one that reflects the core of one’s character and results in a concrete judgment that speaks to his or her transcendental relationship before God in freedom.⁹ Thus, in the situation of committed same-sex relationships striving for permanency, the possibility of physical interpersonal intimacy

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⁶ See, Farley, Just Love, 311
may exist as in essence they have potential for moving one forward as she or he strives for holiness.

In light of the importance of sacramentality and liturgy, it would be irresponsible to revisit the subjective morality of same-sex relationships without attending to the contours of spirituality. It recognizes a conflation of prayer and action in the areas of fidelity, friendship, vocation, the active pursuit of holiness and deep awareness and desire for conversion. Pairing evaluations of homosexuality with spirituality recognizes that sexuality is more than a choice, but rather a profound call to communion with another marked by devotion that includes but transcends physical intimacy. Ultimately, acknowledgement of the connection between spirituality and the development of a same-sex ethic mandates the need for conversion to achieve virtuous and authentic friendship among the partners which proves to be an ongoing process for both members of the relationship.¹⁰

Eschatological realities have weighed heavily upon the present study, realizing that the ultimate destiny of the human person must serve as the framework for the subjective formation of conscience in the realm of sexual ethics and the acceptance of an authentic same-sex ethic in particular circumstances. As noted by Gustafson, “judgments about eschatology affect the interpretation of events”¹¹ as well as personal choices, especially in the arena of an interpersonal dynamic. The movement from time to eternity and the proposed nature of the resurrected body as redeemed narrative which foreshadows an existence where justice is promoted purely in relationships informs the evaluation of same-sex relationships. Ultimately, it has been argued that the hope for

perfect human fulfillment in heaven, in terms of relationality that is related to the narrative of human life more than physical complementarity may allow for the subjective formation and exercise of conscience that would allow for same-sex relations in context that speak to the veracity of relationships that strive for permanence and fidelity.

Considerations of a Catholic same-sex ethic that is employed in the formation of conscience marks a movement from romanticism to reality. In an ideal world, not touched by the vestiges of sin, in particular, the failure to acknowledge the possibility for human sexual flourishing outside of the context of a functional view of human complimentarity, sexuality would be concerned primarily with “sex as God intended,” a source of joy, pleasure, and love that ultimately leads to divine communion that transcends human limitations in evaluations of sexual acts.\textsuperscript{12} This does not negate, given the scope of the current investigation that heterosexual relationships do serve as the norm; however, it also does not reject physically intimate relationships on the part of gays and lesbians as a potentially authentic path to entrance into the divine life. Thus, the pastoral and academic goal of the present study has been to provide contexts and sources for the legitimate formation of conscience with regard to a same sex ethic, which when accepted reflects the heart of the individual who attempts to mirror Trinitarian life and intimacy.

\textsuperscript{12}See McNeil, \textit{Sex as God Intended}, esp. 39-41.


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