

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

essential strength of the movement is not to be found in the logic of its doctrine but rather "in the experience of warm, chaste, unselfish, morally principled, and ordered fraternity"—none of which is incompatible with Christian theology.

Conjugal Confusion

"Christianity, Marriage, and Sex" by Francis X. Murphy, C.S.S.R., in *Commonweal* (June 16, 1978), 232 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

Roman Catholic moralists and theologians are re-evaluating the Church's attitude toward love and sex. Despite the "ecclesial arrogance" displayed by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani and his conservative associates in the papal curia during Vatican Council II (1964) in opposing any change in the Church's moral and doctrinal teachings, the Council provoked a deeper examination of human sexuality and a closer look at the Church's views on the subject. So writes Father Murphy, rector of Holy Redeemer College in Washington, D.C.

Much of the confusion now surrounding Catholic teachings on conjugal love springs from the mistaken notion that the basic guidelines have been "uniform and constant from the beginning." Not so, says Murphy, citing differing views of love and marriage expressed by Jesus, St. Paul, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and others.

By the time of Vatican II, the early pre-Augustine view of marriage as "a sacramental covenant with God as a third party and the joys of carnal and spiritual love its primary component" had long since been replaced in Church doctrine by a legalistic vision of marriage as a contract between two parties, sealed by coitus. This view, Murphy says, "narrowed the function of sex to the process of procreation" and relegated "the energy, joy, pleasure, and love involved in erotic experience to the realm of the sinful—in thought, word, and deed—if indulged outside of marriage."

Vatican II legitimized a pluralism of opinion among diverse schools of moral and doctrinal theology. The Church now relies on a welter of "approved authors" (e.g., Andrew Greeley in *Sexual Intimacy*) who explore Christian approaches to sexuality. This has brought a remarkable liberalization of the Church's views on what constitutes the state of matrimony and the role of sexual love. For example, the Rota, the Vatican's principal marriage tribunal, has recognized that a lack of love necessarily negates the marriage bond—a finding, Murphy notes, that must logically apply as well "to the situation in which love that once existed in a marriage has been totally eradicated and replaced by hatred."

Confusion persists, Murphy concludes, when the Vatican reiterates the absolutist positions of previous ages, as in the 1974 and 1975 documents dealing with masturbation and homosexuality. But among the achievements of the post-Council debate is the fact that in its 1975 Declaration Regarding Sexual Ethics, the Holy See accepted the absolute nature of sexuality as the foundation of the human person.