

THREE PHILOSOPHIES OF SEX, PLUS ONE

Carlfred B. Broderick

The question of human sexuality and how it shall be interpreted and incorporated into life is one that every comprehensive philosophy of life must cope with. My strong conviction of this grows partly out of my experience as a professional family life educator, researcher into children's normal heterosexual development, and marriage counselor. It also grows partly out of my experience in the Church as a branch president and as a member of the high council, the district presidency, and of a number of elders' courts which were called to try various transgressors for their membership. In each of these roles I have been privileged to work with members of the L.D.S. Church (as well as non-members, of course) on various problems in their lives, including sexual problems. Through this process I have come to believe that in addition to the Gospel itself, which, in my view, provides a marvelously comprehensive and creative philosophy of human sexuality, members are influenced to various degrees by the major philosophies current in the larger society. In this article, I should like to describe what seem to me to be the three main sexual philosophies abroad in the land and their impact on Church members. Then I should like to develop the Gospel view of human sexuality as I interpret it and to make some applications to problems that face every L.D.S. family: how to handle the sex education of young children; how to help adolescents integrate their own newly urgent sexuality into their lives; how to deal with sex as a creative part of marriage; and how to respond to sexual deviations in others, especially members of one's family or members of the Church.

THE EQUATION OF SEXUALITY WITH SIN

One philosophy of sex which has had a great impact upon the people of our culture is the equation of sexuality with sin. The impact of this view has been enormous in our culture; and because there are elements of truth in it, members of the Church are particularly susceptible to its influence. It would be difficult to say where or when this philosophy first originated, but certainly one of its most influential proponents was Augustine, the fifth century Bishop of Hippo in North Africa. Augustine lived his early manhood in estrangement

from the church and, according to his own account, participated freely in sexual activities which were proscribed by the laws of the church. In middle age, however, he felt that God called him from his life of sin to the ministry. He became as zealous in his attack upon sexuality in man as he had been in embracing it previously. In his teachings on sex he drew principally from two sources: the letters of Paul and the writings of Plato.

If one analyzes the man Paul as revealed in his writings to the early branches of the church, one can discover some evidence that he had difficulties in determining what the place of sex in his own life should be. On the one hand, some of the most beautiful scriptures we have concerning the relation between men and women come from his letters (see Ephesians 5:22-33 or I Corinthians 7:3-5, for example). But on the other hand, he also wrote:

It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. . . . For I would that all men were even as I myself. . . . I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: For it is better to marry than to burn. (I Corinthians 6:1-2, 7-9)

Augustine resonated to these passages of scripture. In his own case he had experienced sex only as a part of the "old man" that was now dead. He had now been reborn and had put away all things carnal, including that quintessence of carnality, sex. Moreover, Plato, whose writings were a central part of Augustine's secular education, taught that the lowest form of existence was in the tangible, the particular, the material. As one moved from a particular table to the concept of a table to the concept of a rectangle to the concept of form itself, one moved toward truth and beauty. Translated into moral terms, as one moved away from the body and its senses toward the contemplation of the spirit, one moved toward holiness.

This was not a new idea in the church of that day. Already, in the spirit of Neo-Platonism, the councils of the church had moved to affirm that God had no body and no location, but was instead an abstract and formless power. But Augustine drove the point home in terms of its implications for life. If we would be Godlike, we must put away the tyranny of the flesh and become, as nearly as possible, bodiless spirits like Him.

It was this philosophy which undergirded the concept of a clergy who had no need to marry because of their spirituality. It was "better to marry than to burn," but better still to rise above the flesh altogether and to put away carnality in a life of spiritual service. In the most extreme cases this doctrine led to excoriation of the body through self-inflicted pain or deprivation, as a demonstration of one's victory over carnal considerations.

The equation of sexuality with sin has continued as a theme in Catholic thought throughout the intervening centuries, although increasingly there is evidence of a movement toward a different approach within the Roman Church. The chief vehicle of this philosophy in our own culture, however, has been not Catholicism, but Puritanism. The early Calvinists who settled New England and

many of those who stayed behind protested not against the philosophy of Augustine, but against the failure of the Mother Church to live up to it.

It is my observation that even today, with the open discussion of sexual matters which occurs in the mass media, most Americans are uneasy and uncomfortable with discussions of sex. Furthermore, they feel that they *ought* to be uncomfortable and that there is something unwholesome about openness and candor in this area. Despite the inroads of the competing philosophies of sex which we are about to examine, the "sex as sin" philosophy is probably the dominant one in our nation today—even among the majority of those who break the moral code.

THE EQUATION OF SEXUALITY WITH FUN

The philosophy that sex is far too good a thing to be encumbered with rules and guilt and social pressures is as old as civilization. Sometimes it is expressed as pure hedonism: that which is pleasurable is good. Sometimes it is packaged in more sophisticated terms. It has been fashionable in various groups in our recent history to argue free sex from the Marxist point of view (that it frees the female from the tyranny of the family), from the pseudo-Freudian point of view (that repression is bad and leads to mental illness and societal conflict—"Make Love, Not War" is a current expression of this version), and from the Existential point of view (that experience itself, being and becoming, is the great goal of life—that sexual union, L.S.D. trips, and all other intense experiences are of value in and of themselves because they are real and involving).

These views are persuasively expressed by their advocates in print. Perhaps the most scholarly attempt to develop such a philosophy fully is Albert Ellis's *The American Sexual Tragedy*. Such views are also current among some of the "beat" youth groups (currently the "hippies") who have such an appeal to many youth in and out of the Church. It is probably true, however, that these views are so diametrically and openly opposed to the Church's position that they appeal mostly to those youth who feel the need to rebel against the Church and its teachings.

SEXUALITY IN A PHILOSOPHY OF SITUATIONAL ETHICS

The philosophy of sex which seems to be winning the most adherents among the responsible educated classes today, however, is different from both of those described above. It rejects the equation of sex with sin as unworthy of our current understanding of the place of sex in our lives. It rejects the equation of sex with fun as dangerously anarchistic. Although its proponents reject a revealed basis for moral standards and in fact reject absolute standards of any sort, they nevertheless are committed to the welfare of the individual and of the society. Being humanistic, they frequently take as their fundamental value love or concern for the other person's welfare. A growing number of liberal Protestant clergymen, such as Fletcher and Pike, propound this philosophy under the title of "situational ethics." The most influential sociologists in the field of sexual behavior (such as Ira Reiss, Lester Kirkendall, and Isadore Rubin) call their version "permissiveness with affection," emphasizing that constraints grow out

of concern for the loved one, rather than any law. In general these philosophers are conservative in their estimates of how often premarital or extramarital sexual intercourse would be justified under these standards, in view of what is known about the common human tendency toward sexual exploitation. But the key point, according to their view, is that this is a personal rather than a societal definition of right and wrong.

In a society that is less and less certain about the validity of revelation, this philosophy, with its emphasis on responsible, loving behavior (rather than simple hedonism) and on a wholesome attitude toward sexuality (rather than a rejection of everything associated with body functions), has found a welcome reception. It probably has appeal also for some intellectually disgruntled members of the Church who are trying to find a "more rational" basis for the doctrines of the Church than revelation. But I believe that for most members of the Church it will come to have importance chiefly as the major competition for our own philosophy in our struggle to influence the values of good men.

THE GOSPEL PHILOSOPHY OF SEX

There are two basic elements in the Gospel view of sexuality as I interpret it from the scriptures. The first is that sex is good—that sexuality, far from being the antithesis of spirituality, is actually an attribute of God. Latter-day Saints are, perhaps, the only people to take literally Paul's proclamation to his Athenian listeners on Mars Hill: "For in him we live and move and have our being; as certain of your own poets have said, for we are also his *offspring*" (Acts 17:28. Italics mine).

This same doctrine is referred to also in Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants when, referring to their vision of the Savior, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon bear witness, "That by him and through him and of him the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are *begotten* sons and daughters unto God" (Doctrine and Covenants 76:24. Italics mine).

In the light of their understanding that God is a procreating personage of flesh and bone, latter-day prophets have made it clear that despite what it says in Matthew 1:20, the Holy Ghost was not the father of Jesus. Luke, the physician, makes the respective roles of the Holy Spirit and of the Father quite clear in his account. In response to Mary's question, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? . . . the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 2:34-5).

Mary's own description of the event is given in the forty-ninth verse: "For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name."

In a vision the Spirit of the Lord revealed these things to Nephi as follows:

Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God after the manner of the flesh. And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit: and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in

her arms. And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, even the Son of the Eternal Father! (I Nephi 11:18-21)

A careful reading of these scriptures indicates that in this, as in many parallel instances, the role of the Holy Ghost was to make it possible for the mortal, Mary, to withstand the immediate presence of God (see Moses 1:2, 11, 14; John 6:46). The Savior was fathered by a personage of flesh and bone, and was literally what Nephi said he was, "Son of the Eternal Father."

According to this doctrine, then, man's sexuality is not something that dies with him in the grave, of the earth, earthy, and unworthy of a place in his heavenly estate. At least those who are sealed together in the temples and who endure in the covenants they made there are promised that their marital vows ". . . shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels and the gods which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, *which glory shall be a fullness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever*" (Doctrine and Covenants 132:19. Italics mine).

By contrast, those who fail to meet these requirements "cannot have increase" (Doctrine and Covenants 131:1-4) and cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition to all eternity; and from henceforth are not gods, but are angels of God forever and ever" (Doctrine and Covenants 132:16-17).

In other words, the eternal preservation of reproductive sexuality is the central, distinguishing characteristic differentiating the exalted from the merely saved.

This brings us to the second of the two basic elements in the Gospel view of sex. Although, as we have seen, sex is good, in fact a divine attribute, it is a force to be disciplined through self-control. The emphasis of the Church upon the control of sexual impulsivity (for example, Doctrine and Covenants 42:25-6), has seemed extreme to some, but the reasons are more easily understood in view of the importance that is placed upon the procreative function in the eternal scheme of things.

The whole function of the Church is to train its members in the skills needed "that you may come up unto the crown prepared for you and be made rulers over many kingdoms" (Doctrine and Covenants 78:15).

Thus it is precisely because sex is seen as *good* rather than bad, as *divine* rather than devilish, that such importance is placed upon the restrictions surrounding its use.

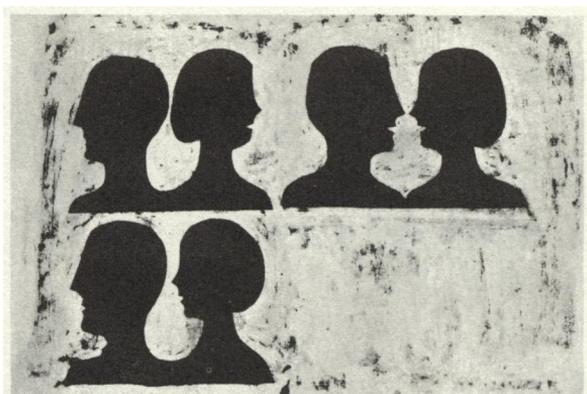
This leaves the Church with many of the same prohibitions which the "sex is sin" camp would impose, but for quite different reasons and with very different goals in mind. Unfortunately it seems to me that we seldom take full advantage of the difference in our actual teaching. Too often we end up teaching the right things for the wrong reasons. Then our youth, discovering that our reasons are faulty, mistakenly conclude that the commandment itself is suspect.

THE SEX EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

It is impossible for a parent to avoid giving sex education to his children. I am aware of course that many parents, in and out of the Church, never give

their children any very explicit information about reproduction. But sex is a part of everyday life; and long before most children become aware of the so-called "facts of life," they know a great deal about sex and sexuality.

For example, the care and training of young children involves considerable contact with and reference to their genitals. Parents can convey a very great deal of their own feelings and attitudes about sex simply by the way they handle the child, the language they use, the tone of voice, the level of emotion, the degree of comfort with the subject. Every parent, in and out of the Church, must frequently cope with situations growing out of the young child's natural tendency to be free of the encumbrance of clothes or to absent-mindedly touch or rub his genitals (especially when he feels uncomfortable, as for instance, when the home teachers are visiting or when he is participating in the Primary prayer). Every parent has to decide what to do when the child insists on joining him (or her) in the bathroom or while dressing.



When dealing with this type of occurrence, some parents are casual, some are embarrassed, some are shocked and angry. Probably most of us are capable of all three kinds of impulses, depending on the circumstances. The point is that whatever we do or don't do, we are engaged in sex education. In my opinion, the least helpful response is one of shock and indignation. Such an attitude teaches that something is very wrong, but it does not explain or give a reason or a context for understanding why or what is wrong. There is the widest range of ways of handling these sorts of ordinary occurrences. It is through the culmination of these experiences, much more than through any "little talk" that might come in middle childhood, that children's attitudes toward themselves as persons, and particularly as sexual persons, are basically formed.

This is not to say that the "little talk" is of no value. It is true that children will, almost without exception, learn the elementary facts about reproduction (and fairly accurately, too) even if their parents never tell them about it. There is, however, a real point in the parents' being a major source of information. Judson and Mary Landis (*Building a Successful Marriage*, 3rd Ed., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1958, pp. 628-9) report that in their study of 3,000 college students, those who had learned about reproduction from their parents or in school were more likely to be chaste in college than those who had learned

from other children. The same study showed that the more information the children got from parents, the more likely they were to have “desirable” attitudes toward sex. (That is, they were *more* likely to agree with such items as “Sex is for mutual husband and wife enjoyment” and *less* likely to agree with such items as “Sex is dirty and vulgar.”)

For myself, I want my children to be able to integrate the sexual information they get into a broader scheme of things. I want it to be meaningful. I want them to see sexuality as an important part of life, a good part, and a responsible part. They are not as likely to learn this from others as from me.

HELPING THE ADOLESCENT DEAL WITH HIS OWN SEXUALITY

As the child matures physically, his sexual awareness increases. In fear of the consequences of these portentous stirrings, many parents seek to keep their children ignorant of all but the reproductive aspects as long as possible. The last thing they would try to convey is that sex is enjoyable. Yet, this is the first thing that the child learns from non-familial sources. Again, I for one want to have a first crack at that idea. Of course sex is enjoyable. That is one of the most important things about it. My job is to help the child to see that like many other kinds of good things, it can be most fully enjoyed in the right way at the right time. I would acknowledge to him that some young people don't wait for the right way or the right time. But they thereby give up some beautiful things, such as the exclusiveness of later intimacy in the marital relationship and the trust that goes with it. And they jeopardize their own birthright, to inherit the kingdom of their Father.

It is disturbing, however, to see how infrequently this positive approach is used. Most parents, in and out of the Church, use arguments for chastity which are almost entirely negative. The sole reasons they give for not having premarital sex are:

1. It is shameful: your reputation will suffer. No one wants to marry someone who has been used by others, a second-hand article.
2. It is harmful: you may get venereal diseases and so ruin not only your own life, but the life of your baby who may suffer defects from these causes.
3. It is dangerous: you may get pregnant and so ruin your life.
4. It is sinful: you will be detected and punished by God.

Now, each of these threats is real and ought to give pause to someone considering premarital intercourse, but unfortunately young people often feel that they can avoid these consequences if they are careful. If they are careful, they feel, they will not get caught, and so their reputation will remain intact. Besides, they probably plan to marry this person anyhow; so what is so second-hand? Moreover, there are simple precautions which can virtually eliminate the probability of either pregnancy or disease. Even the disapproval of God need not be permanent, for there is the principle of repentance—and besides, they are likely to feel that God understands love and its urgencies better than parents do. With such rationalizations parental warnings can be reasoned away.

For myself, I would prefer to give my children a sense of what they are

saving themselves for, both the quality of life and the eternal rewards, rather than what they must fear if they are not careful. I want them to have, through living in an affectionate home, a concept of how good the man-woman relationship can be when it is prepared for through self-control and mutual respect and nurtured as it should be in marriage. I want them to have a view of their own worth and a prospectus of their own potential destiny so that life itself makes sense to them, drawing meaning from this larger context. I want them to have a rich, full, and concrete awareness of the goals they are aiming toward through their self-control: a mission, temple marriage, exaltation. It is my faith that these things, understood, have a greater power to influence behavior than the grimmest threats.

MAKING SEX MEANINGFUL IN MARRIAGE

The scriptures make it clear that sex, in addition to its procreative function, was intended to function as a powerful reinforcement to the marital bond:

Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.

Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent, for a time, that ye may give yourself to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt ye not for your incontinency. . . . (I Corinthians 7: 3-5.)

It does not always function that way in the lives of members of the Church. To my knowledge there has been no research done on the incidence of sexual problems in L.D.S. marriages, but there is some evidence that in the larger culture these problems are more likely to cause dissatisfaction than any other. My own informal observation, both as a professional counselor and as a branch president, would lead me to guess that this is also the case in L.D.S. marriages. Experience has taught me that the sexual relationship is a very complex part of life and that there is no single factor which can account for all or even most of the unhappiness that occurs. The sexual union brings a man and woman together in a way that involves their minds, bodies, and spirits—their loves, angers, needs, fears, and grievances. Therefore, this part of marriage is almost as extensive and complicated as life itself. But it is for this very reason that a philosophy of life which places sex in a broad, positive context makes a real difference. Many problems in this area stem from one partner or the other (or both) having been taught with real emotion that sex was evil.

But whether this or some still more complicated pattern is involved, the simple recognition of this as an area of legitimate concern to both members, as a proper subject for communication, is a big step in the direction of the alleviation of difficulties. Certainly an understanding of the place of sex in the plan of eternal progression should help to provide this perspective and, in addition, add motivation to solve the problem rather than simply to wait for it to disappear as a result of old age.

Often difficulties in this area are hard to overcome without the help of counsel from a third party. In my experience many bishops and stake presidents can be helpful, drawing upon their own experience in life. It is also true, however, that it is possible to be a good bishop and yet to have personal problems or attitudes that interfere with being a good counselor in the area of sex. When this is the case, couples who come for counsel too often get reactions which are not helpful and may even be hurtful. Therefore, if a couple for any reason feels uncomfortable in going to their ward or stake leaders for help in this sensitive area, I would strongly advise seeking help from a professional psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, or marriage counselor. Contrary to the fears of some, it is my observation that most of these professionals will fully respect the Church members' values. Such a person can usually be counted upon to place his considerable skill at the disposal of the couple to achieve their own rather than his goals. He will generally be more than happy to assist the husband and wife in their efforts to apply Gospel principles more effectively to the sexual side of their lives.

DEALING WITH SEXUAL TRANSGRESSORS

It is a sheltered person indeed who does not have to come to grips, at some time in his life, with the problem of how to handle cases of sexual misconduct that involve his own relatives or friends or fellow ward members. In my opinion, the first question that one should ask of himself is "What can I do or say that will be most helpful to the person involved?"

For example, suppose I am a bishop interviewing a sixteen year old boy for advancement to the office of a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood. One of the items I have been instructed to include in the interview concerns masturbation. From having interviewed many such boys in the past I know that this is a problem which most boys have to struggle with. How can I deal with this question so as to be most helpful to the boy? One would think it obvious that neither an embarrassed, too quickly skipped-over treatment nor a heavy-handed cross-examination and lecture on the evils of masturbation would be of most benefit. Yet those seem to be the most common approaches. My own view is that such an interview should involve three principles:

1. In view of the commonness of the problem, I would put the question this way, "At your age many boys have difficulties with resisting the temptation to masturbate. How do you deal with this problem in your own life?"
2. If the boy was having difficulties, I would stress the positive reasons for self-mastery in this area, rather than dipping into the terrible chamber of horrors that many people use to try to dissuade boys from this practice. The plain fact is that there is not the slightest evidence that there are any physically harmful consequences from masturbation. It does not lead to pimples or to mental illness or to impotency any more than legitimate sexual outlets in marriage have these consequences. (I remember my own bishop bearing solemn witness that all of these things were sure attendants of this practice when he talked to our priests' quorum about it.) The only reason that young people should not masturbate is that it is an indulgence which tends to undercut self-control in an area where self-control is

much needed. That is a good enough reason without making up false ones.

3. If the boy was having difficulties, I would remember that my chief duty was to help the boy, not to condemn him.

The last point applies with equal force to any transgression. How often the premaritally pregnant girl is met with recriminations and reproach from everyone, when her desperate need is for help and support—not approval of her behavior, but affirmation of her worth as a person. Sometimes it appears that people view their task as protecting the Church from the bad influence of such girls, when it ought to be to extend the influence of the Church to them. The same could be said of homosexuals and others who have got themselves into sexual difficulties. Again, in these instances competent professional help is often an important element in the process of rehabilitation.

The case of adultery is, perhaps, most difficult of all, because the Lord has defined it as such a grievous sin. Yet research has shown that the occasion for the sin is often a lack of satisfaction with one's own marriage. No one is immune from temptation. There have been men and women who have become involved in this type of relationship while holding high and responsible offices at every level of Church government.

Even in this instance, however, the chief duty of the Church is toward the members who are in difficulty. In my own experience, a number of good people have been reclaimed for the Church through the patient fellowshipping of members who were more moved by the worth of the person than by the unworthiness of the act. When we are dealing with transgression, no less than in the case of legitimate sexual expression, an eternal perspective may make an important difference in the success or failure of one's efforts.

The Gospel philosophy of sex is in competition in the world with other philosophies which have powerful grips on the minds of men. If it is to have an impact on the morals and manners of the world, it must first be incorporated into the lives of the members of the Church. In my opinion, many, perhaps most, of the present generation are too entrapped in the negative frame of reference that they grew up with. But there is hope for the rising generation.

THIS—WORLDLY AND OTHER—WORLDLY SEX: A RESPONSE

Lowell Bennion

Carl Broderick's essay treats many aspects of sex in an objective, discreet, and interesting way which should be helpful to Latter-day Saints, both in personal and family living and also in their responsibilities in the Church.

Only in one area, in his "Gospel philosophy of sex," do I wish to take issue with him and propose a different emphasis. The author goes to considerable length to sanctify sex by making it part of man's eternal existence and also of God's nature. This emphasis on the eternal and godly nature of sex is presented as Latter-day Saint doctrine without qualification. This I wish to seriously question. It may be true, but again it may not be.