

## CHANGING GENITAL BEHAVIOR IN THE AGE OF AIDS

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A Q/A Thinksheet responding to questions in responses to #2584 ("The Sexual [ie, Genital] & the Spiritual Spectrums")

1 *How do you see the Madonna phenomenon in the light of #2584?*

As the reverse image of the Madonna, in rebellion against her background (RCC). Mother Mary had no sex (coitus) but had a Child: Madonna is the current American sex goddess (Marilyn Monroe rediviva) & is childless. For 95¢ you can learn all we know about the Madonna (the price of a paperback NT): add \$49 & you can find out more than you want to know about Madonna (the price of her pornographic, sadomasochistic book, SEX).

But the two women are of the same species & of the same human reality. As I said in ¶3 (not §3) of #2584, "spirituality-sexuality is a **continuum**." Said an old surgeon, "I stand as much in awe of the body as of the spirit, for the body is the spirit thickened." Take the analogy of the electromagnetic spectrum: as the visible range is only a small part of it, the body is only a small part of the person. The two errors are the extremes: to consider the body to be the person (the materialist error, the spirit being epiphenomenal to the body), & to consider the body as the mere temporary container of the soul-spirit (the spiritualist error, the body being epiphenomenal to the spirit). Madonna has lived both extremes. She grew up spiritualist (perpetual virginity of Mary, antisex, prosuffering [crucifixes, bloody paintings of martyrs]) & is now materialist (max sex, Catholic suffering transmuted into S&M). (She talks about it in a NEWSWEEK interview, conjoint with the cover story, "The New Voyeurism: Madonna and the Selling of Sex," 2 Nov 92.)

2 *With the AIDS scare reducing genital activity in the populace, why is a personal symbol of wide-open genital activity selling so big?*

Compensation. The libido can't now so rush through the genitals, so it squirts up into the fantasy. As NW p.3 puts it, Madonna's book is porn "destigmatized out of viral [AIDS] necessity." What one can't any longer do with one's genitals, one can & in this lurid book does do with one's eyeballs. The erotic energy, so goes this bound-to-be-popular theory, has to go somewhere, & you can't contract AIDS through your eyeballs--so this erotic activity is a protection against AIDS (as, male rationalization has argued through the centuries, a mistress &/or whores protect one's marriage from divorce).

However you slice it, something big's going on here. SEX sold 150,000 copies the first day! Only a great hunger can explain it, but a hunger for what? The next titillation escalation of a sex-jaded populace? Caruso, it's said, killed himself trying to steal a beat on Caruso: can Madonna "improve" on SEX? It's probable that SEX already goes too far, so far that it's a cure for libido, a reverse aphrodisiac. At age ten I smoked  $\frac{1}{2}$  pack of cigs one after another, was two days in bed, & have been repulsed by cigarettes ever since. I don't want to see SEX & get cured of sex....To some of the sex-jaded, the thought occurs that the hunger must have been for something else, a hunger through to something-someOne Beyond. At that point, one's in danger of flipping out to the other extreme, as did Augustine, who's more responsible than anyone else for the West's negative tradition on sex.

Surrogation should be added to compensation as a second hermeneutic piece. Some folks let Mother Teresa do their spirituality for them, some let Madonna do their sex for them. Vicariousness is a deeper word for it, as when in the Christian doctrine of atonement Jesus does our sin-suffering for us.

3 *I wonder at your definition of "sexual."*

In #2584 I don't define "sexual" in its full range, because there I'm concerned only with what we might call its short end, viz the genitals, which are the points at which the thickened spirit (ie, "the body") locks in genitally/orally/anally with another thickened spirit--in the penile-vaginal case, in the bio-interest (whether or not the psycho-interest) of producing another thickened spirit (or, to speak genetically, the points at which the genes struggle to reproduce themselves). Is this narrow focus legitimate? Of course. Consider: (1) A man and a woman are

not said to be "having an affair" if they only shake hands, hug, & even kiss: "affair" always implies genital activity. (2) "Sex," in general-common parlance, means what you do with your genitals. (3) Jesus said something like Where your eyeballs are, there will your heart be also. He condemned not a rich fantasy life but a lustful focus on one person other than one's spouse (which is what, in the much-laughed-at PLAYBOY article, Jimmy Carter was repenting of; "committing adultery with her in his heart" [Mt.5.28]).

The moral dimension of "sex" in this narrow sense emerges in the question, What **limits** do you set on the actual use, the action, of your genitals? Limit-setting is an action of will, God's & ours. God "called the worlds into being" (as the UCC Statement of Faith puts the basic action in Gn.1-2). His second act of will was to limit, by fiat, what Adam & Eve were to eat--& humanity's first act of will was to violate that will & thus become conscious of willing & of the responsibility to use will to limit. The reason that science (as distinguished from technology) appeared only where the biblical paradigm was regnant is that the scientific method is the steady, disciplined, knowledge-accumulating use of will. (See Stanley J. Jaki's magisterial work, THE PURPOSE OF IT ALL, Regnery-Gateway/90.) There's dis/continuity between God's will & ours, & he calls us to abandon the former (ie, discontinuity; as in "Thy will be done"). One form of discontinuity is the failure to rein in our passions: God calls us, apparently alone among the creatures, to decide on limits. If one decides against sex (ie, decides for celibacy), there are "out there" no potential lays. If one decides for marital faithfulness (ie, genital loyalty), there are out there no potential lays (so, psychofunctionally, with the exception of one's spouse, people do not have genitals). If one decides for open marriage, one is open to finding out there additional lays (a fact complicating one's relations with others & threatening to ensnare one in others' genitals)....In an odd way, my bluntness in so speaking parallels the visual-textual bluntness of Madonna's book, & you just might find both offensive. But in my teaching & counseling, many have found my plain speech helpful in their decision-making, & in their own teaching & counseling.

4 *Aren't you being utopian & irrelevant in preaching #2584.2(6) ("The faithful spouse: no genital contact outside of marriage") & virginal marriage? Futurists claim there's no future for such puritanism.*

Futurists are straight-line thinkers who become wrong when the road turns & dead wrong when the road reverses (when, to change the figure, the cultural pendulum swings from cavalier to puritan, as sooner or later happens). What futurists anticipated the Iranian swing from secularism to puritanism ("Islamic fundamentalism," of which Khomeini is the personal symbol)? Under Herman Kahn's Hudson Institute, in doing some scenarioing on the future of religion, I learned something of the powers & limits of futuring. I prophesy a soon & radical puritan swing in American culture. My own uptight sex-style might become popular! Under the fear of AIDS, abstinence is gaining in popularity. Of course we pray for a soon cure for AIDS, but none's in sight. Run out thirty years, or even twenty, & sex mores in America may be more uptight than now if no AIDS cure is found.

5 *I know why you can say a good word for AIDS. It's because you believe people should be afraid of sex, not just in awe of it. Doesn't the Bible say love drives out fear?*

It's dumb not to be afraid of something dangerous, & it's wrong to fail to teach others to be afraid of it. A collegemate of Loree's, now a successful lawyer, was blinded in 1945 when her husband brought home as a souvenir a Japanese hand-grenade & did not warn her not to play with it. Sex, too, can go boom in your face, can destroy you, & kids should be told so even if there were no AIDS scare. Without learning the fear barrier (reinforced with horror stories), kids move naturally from autoerotic pleasure to interpersonal erotic pleasure & suffer emotional traumas if not also physical ones (genital & genitally acquired diseases, & pregnancy).

No, the Bible doesn't say love drives out fear. Love in the form of lust drives out caution & in this sense can be said to drive out fear when fear should not be driven out. What the Bible does say is that "Mature love [Lat., "perfecta charitas"] throws out fear" (1Jn.4.18): "Love" in this verse is used perfectly, ie love-as-it-should-be-from-&-in-God-in-Christ-in-community.

The claim that teaching kids fear will damage them has little to be said for it (something, but little). The fact that not teaching them fear may lead to their permanent injury of body or spirit, & even death, has much to be said for it....Ditto for guilt & shame.

But AIDS has an objective good to be said for it, in addition to the subjective good of scaring about, & thus reducing, genital activity outside of marriage. It's this: AIDS, first in black Africa & then elsewhere, unless a cure is found within fifteen years, will be a significant population-containing force. As you know, the Gaia Hypothesis includes the shutoff principle that life, in its own interest, is self-limiting. Eg, when a species overprocreates, something(s) happen to contain or even reduce the mass. Currently, our species is producing at a rate fast approaching the biosphere's point of no return, the point of irreversible damage (eg, 30 million in Mexico City by the year 2000). Ergo, it's the spiritual-ecological-moral-political right thing to be using our influence to limit the number of genital partners (instead of supinely assuming, as many do, Margaret Mead's style of serial marriage [a change of partners as one reaches each new adult lifestage]). PRAYER: Lord, AIDS is doing more harm than good. We thank you for the good, & we pray for a cure because of the evil.

6 *Aren't you expecting too much of fear as a depressant of genital activity--especially too much among teens, who live in the present with little thought of past or future?*

In our eudemonistic-narcisstic culture, in which "the selling of sex" conjoins with the selling of thousands of goods & hundreds of services, it would indeed be expecting too much of fear were one to expect fear alone to curtail roving genitals. But where the moral will is weak & the sex urge overwhelms fear, chemistry may come to the rescue. Reverse aphrodisiacs (chemical coolants of libido) are in the labs (though not yet on the shelves) & could move (with FDA approval) quickly to the market if there were sufficient demand for it....As a contraceptive pill depresses the incidence of conception, a contracoital pill would depress the genital urge & could be carried by both sexes to be popped into the mouth in situations of temptation--to last not more than a few hours, till the emotional drive abates. Comparable dissuasive chemicals are now being sold to depress the urges for nicotine & alcohol. And while I oppose condom distribution in the public schools, I would favor school-availability of contracoital pills. (I'm also for contrabirth pills, abortifacients, but they're for after the damage is done: contracoital pills would be two intervention-stages earlier, as prophylactic to the children [preventing the whole string of coital-postcoital horrors: emotional pretzeling, STDs including AIDS, zygote-killing, fetus-killing, interpersonal-educational-social consequences].) What have contracoital pills going for them? Intelligence & compassion. What will they have going against them? Superstition, tradition, sentimentality, bad religion (which is any religion fighting against intelligence &/or compassion.) Of course one shouldn't use unnecessary chemical crutches; but the contracoital pill would be a first line of defense for the willless & a second line of defense for the weakwilled. But would the willless have even the will to take the pill? The willless are swept along by the crowd, so positive social sanctions for pill-use would control them.

Add this to what I've said about the weakness of futurism. I know of no futurist who's factored in a contracoital pill. It's far from inevitable that the future will see an increase in multiple sexual partners. I've mentioned two controls in addition to the training of the will: fear of AIDS, & esthotropic (feeling-changing) chemistry. I'm not insulting humanity; I'm resisting those who insult needed crutches (as I needed them after a knee operation).

7 *How can controlling be helpful in the splitness we see all around us?*

Are you presuming that the splitness is beyond control? It's the endproduct of a long series of decisions, & various interventions are possible at various points along the series. I fear, however, that the context of your question reveals it's not a question but a statement in interrogative form, viz Splitness cannot be controlled. I reject the statement's pessimism bordering on cynicism, both (it seems) rooted in romanticism. Am I being unromantic? Not by any authentic understanding

of "the romantic," which is (to use one of several useful metaphors) a bridge between the spiritual & the physical. I'm primarily concerned about the spiritual & more concerned about the romantic than about the physical; & these two facts free me for plain talk about the physical, which is in continuum with the romantic & the spiritual. Now let's have a look, in this context, at....

**control.** If you're concerned about overcontrol, I too am. The so-called sexual revolution's upside is that a lot of folks got freed up from overcontrol; it's downside was & is (1) that some of those flipped all the way over into undercontrol, & (2) millions who were never overcontrolled have grown up in a cultural atmosphere of undercontrol....Now, genital activity is animal, & genital control is a possibility for human animals (ie, us). For us, "sexuality" includes not just genital activity & psychogenital fantasy but also, & necessarily if we are to be truly human, the control of both. Being against both overcontrol & undercontrol, I'm for appropriate control. Every decision is both situational for the participant(s) & contextual (in the "worlds" in which the situation exists). My situation-definition is that what our culture now faces is genital undercontrol as the major problem & overcontrol as a minor problem. Of course in some cases therapists face, overcontrol is the operative problem. But one can hardly make the case that our sick society is more sickened by genital overcontrol than by genital undercontrol--& the social consequences of that undercontrol are horrendous for marriage, family, private-&-public physical-&-mental health. The infamous political propagandist-spinner Lee Atwater, on his deathbed, got around to repenting of his cynical (eg, "Willie Horton") crimes against honor, & said, "America today is a spiritual vacuum and has a tumor in its heart." Jimmy Carter when President was laughed & groaned at for speaking of our "spiritual malaise." Some political pundits & cultural analysts are saying that morality has sunk so low that the voters won't put into office anyone who refuses to lie to them. We face massive malignancies--spiritual vacuum (which a host of addictions try & fail to fill), moral flaccidity, poverty of body-mind-will, racism, crime, homelessness, systemic & social violence (eg, all aspects of the Rodney King event). In this light, I confess to some impatience with a lot of talk-about & action-with genitals when they can be neatly (though not easily) tucked into marriage & forgotten about in the world beyond marriage. You know what Papa Freud said about being stuck at the genital level; it's one place where he was right on.

8 *That "neatly tucked in" gets me! Isn't it judgmental, maybe even arrogant, to offer your marriage as a universal model?*

It won't wash logically for you to say that Loree & I are exceptions (with the implication that our genital pattern can't model for the general society). If something's good, as you admit our marriage is, what bearing do statistics have on it? Are values subject to voting? If you admit our pattern is (as you say) "beautiful and commendable," why not (1) give attention to fostering the internal (psychospiritual) & external (social) conditions that foster it, & why not (2) commend it to others (as you plainly do not do, as you're "nonjudgmental" about sexual lifestyles--value-free, no-fault, that sort of thing)? In your long written response to #2584 you've said not a word about any of the fostering conditions, certainly not about the central one, viz piety, devotion to God. But you ask whether "sexual lifestyles" other than ours "when placed on a ladder are less worthy of the blessings of divine energy."...."Ladder" is your figure, not mine: in #2584.2 I listed the sexual spectrum horizontally, nonjudgmentally, objectively. You are right that Jesus commands us "to love one another and to give up judgment [in the sense of condemnation]." But we are to discern between what advances & what cripples human life; & it's natural, even obligatory, when we've found something good (as Loree & I, our sexual pattern), to recommend it, without a condemnatory spirit toward those in other sexual patterns. There are no painless sextrips, & Loree & I believe ours is the least painful & most fulfilling ("(6). The faithful spouse: no genital contact outside marriage."). Do you object to our promoting it & supporting it with biblical & other evidence of its value? Shouldn't we share what we've found good & preach what we believe best? This is the **comparative**-ethics (worst/worse/bad//good/better/best) mode: the equally important mode is that of **absolute** ethics (right/wrong; eg, we believe that adultery is wrong-evil-sinful--

but that spiritual-ethical-moral maturity will not let this mode swamp the other). As permissivism is the antihuman extreme of comparative ethics, legalism is the anti-human extreme of absolute ethics (& such novels as Hawthorne's *THE SCARLET LETTER* & D.H. Lawrence's *LADY CHATTERLY'S LOVER* have rightly eroded sexual legalism). Neither ethical mode is sufficient for all the exigencies of humanity's complex decisional matrix. That is why ethical maturity rejects both circles & insists on the ellipse (each mode being one of the two foci). I should spell this out through the use of two oft-heard sayings, both dangerous:

**"It's God will."** In the particular decisional situation, is that a given or a conclusion? We should be cautious about both. In another context, Perot keeps saying "It's that simple," a salesman's trick to obscure complexity. We should (1) seek God's will & (2) apply the hermeneutics of suspicion to any assertion thereof, including our own. God wants to guide us, but our best efforts to be open to his guidance can bring us only to certitude (assurance), never to certainty.

**"It all depends on the situation."** "All"? Surely there are situations in which, for the ethically mature person, nothing depends on the situation: all the determinants are internal to the decider, who acts on the basis of ultimate sanctions, with no calculations of personal consequences vis-a-vis the situation. ("Not my will but thine be done" led to the Cross.) Situation(al) ethics, as it's developed in the 1/3rd c. since Fletcher coined the phrase, has become a pop-cultural excuse for permissivism, ie for behavior disdainful of absolute ethics. Swamped by sentimentalized compassion, many clergy have out of hand rejected traditional behavioral limits as though they were only superstitious tabus instead of funded behavioral wisdom. We all know what shipwreck some of them have made of their own lives, & how pathetic their efforts to be "with it," to be "relevant." (By contrast, the NT attitude is this: When in doubt, be against it. And the historic baptismal formula warns us to be against "sin, death, & the devil." Be transformed, not conformed [Ro.12.2].)

Finally, the control word in this question of yours is "judgmental," a word paradoxically heavy laden with judgment....Consider these important distinctions: (1) One can hold something to be best without considering its alternatives bad. (2) "Best" can mean either "best for me/us" (with the possibility that something else may be best for someone else) or "best for humanity." We believe that our lifestyle is best for humanity. (3) The reasons for considering something best may include both that it has something important the competition does not have & that the competition has some aspect one considers bad (as eg I consider bad the black-African custom of female circumcision): judgment, in the sense of discrimination, is inherent in choosing. Is one who chooses open marriage being "judgmental"? Of course: open marriage is a judgment against uptight (closed-marriage) sex, & the open-marriage couples I've known have been arrogant in their judgmentalness.

9 *Doesn't the voice of the majority have some obligation to an open space for the voice of the minority to also be a holy voice?*

My view is that Jesus' was the only holy voice in history, though many others in all the human traditions have said things I personally consider of sacred worth....Are you speaking of a specific minority? Eg, me (I'm certainly in the sexual minority!)? If you mean that all voices are to be respected, I agree: respect for persons is implicit in imago dei, their being made "in the image of God." But if you mean everybody's opinion is to be respected, that is sentimental & dangerous nonsense (eg, I have no respect for what Hitler in *MEIN KAMPF* has to say about the Jews). I do very much like your metaphor, "obligation to an open space." Every human being should have inwardly an open space, a receptivity, for every other human being; & the best putting of that truth is in an expression for which our Lord Jesus was unique: "Love your enemies." But here we face again the question of limits. The UCC calls upon our churches to be "open and affirming" of gays: I say open, but not affirming. I was born with defective eyes one of which has now gone blind. Am I to "affirm" my defect? Of course not: I openly accept it. I accept, am open to, gays as sexual defectives. (Their biosexuality, & my eyes, did not reach full development.) But I won't go along with their bio-equality claim as warrant for their "alternative lifestyle" claim (though of course they should have full civil rights). (I speak of those too defective to transit to



heterosexuality. The % of such is unknown.)

10 No matter what you say, sex will never submit to confinement within the spouse-spouse relationship of the nuclear family.

Madonna is a widescreen example of sexual confinement, viz confinement to the orgasmic potential of the individual. As such, it is (1) a mere extension of pubescent autoeroticism (ie, retarded development) & (2) antifamily (ie, irresponsibility).....I believe (1) that new forms of the extended family must emerge to overcome the impoverishments of the nuclear family & (2) that sexual mores & the new extended families are nonconcomitant (ie, the fact of experimenting toward the optimal form of the extended family does not necessitate experimentation toward a new sexual ethic) & (3) that marital faithfulness, in the light of past communal experiments, will be a + in experiments toward the optimal extended family.

Look't the torques now being put on the word "family," which in the first seven meanings in the new Random House Dictionary includes bio-parents (both) & their offspring....One metaphor twist **lengthens** the word. As "families" (first seven meanings) decline & fail, the word's being appropriated for any multifunction grouping (as the office party may be "one big happy family"). Even "extended family" is now being stretched from meaning a bio-tribe to meaning people living together no matter the presence or absence of bio-relationship. Am I objecting? No, but clear thinking will keep verbal torques in mind....The other metaphor twist **shortens** the word. Are Murphy Brown & her baby a "family"? Yes, according to this shortening: a family is child(ren) + only one parent (the one-parent family existing by death, divorce, or intention [eg, a prominent newscaster getting herself pregnant to have a baby, but wanting no husband]). Such "families" are defective: bio-normality is parents + child[ren]....To see the Madonna mentality at work, try "The Nuclear Family Goes Boom!," Claudia Wallis, TIME, Fall/92. The article supinely accepts what history will record as a sick aberration.