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The topic of this issue is sex. A reaction to that pronouncement may be that there is already too much writing on sex and that there is nothing new that can be said. Actually, sex is one of the few topics where in recent years there has been a great deal of new information and discussion. Some people might agree that there is more discussion of sex than ever before but most of it is not fit for public display. That is a question in the essay that follows.

Perhaps it may seem that at this moment it is more important to talk about politics than sex. But the two are intertwined and inseparable. Sometimes the connection remains mostly hidden but this year it is blatantly obvious. The political divide between men and women has never been so great. Unfortunately, the significance of the fact that the United States is finally going to elect its first woman president is lost amid this year's circus. People give many reasons for disliking Hilary Clinton but almost no one admits that they simply hate the idea of a woman president.

Donald Trump is obviously running on his masculine dominance though it gets described in other ways. He wishes to continue the U.S. policy of defending presidential manhood (Obama has failed this test). In recently revealed British documents of conversations between George W. Bush and Tony Blair on going to war in Iraq, Bush's clinching argument was that Blair should show some *cojones*. Trump's whole adulthood shows plenty of that although even he apparently went too far in saying he wished he could date his daughter because she is so hot.

Anyone who writes anything about sex is vulnerable to revealing his or her ignorance of how the world works and what is going on today. Writing on the subject tends to veer either toward embarrassing revelations about oneself or toward telling everyone else to stop what they are doing. What are heralded as exciting and breathless accounts of sexual intimacy grow boring very quickly. On the other side, Henry Mencken defined a Puritan as one who fears that someone somewhere is enjoying himself. One can best avoid grossness of detail on one side and prissy condemnations on the other side by concentrating on the language that we use in trying to address sexual questions.

SEX, LANGUAGE AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

By Gabriel Moran

The Catholic Church's official view of sex is widely treated today as a guilt-inducing scold or as material for late night comedians. However, what is still on the books and is insisted upon by church leaders for over a billion people deserves serious treatment. Perhaps most older people have made up their own minds about these teachings and most younger people have never bought into church teaching on the subject. But even the fact that the teaching is ridiculed is a sign that there is something important still there. After seeing a play that consisted of altar boys telling tales of clerical misconduct, I said to my companion: I can't decide whether this play means that the Catholic Church is in its death throes or whether the Catholic Church is still one of the few institutions that are powerful enough to generate passionate attack.

Catholic Church leaders are hardly alone in not knowing how to talk about sex but they do not seem much interested in learning or in trying to make a few useful distinctions. Many of our words for sexual activity were invented in the 19th century. How did anyone before that time talk about such things? For the most part they didn't or they assumed that anything different from what they knew was obviously a sickness or a sin. One example is the term homosexual, a clumsy half Greek and half Latin word invented in 1870. Before that there were no heterosexuals or homosexuals. There were just normal people (like us) and perverts, sickos or queers. Despite what is regularly asserted, the Bible does not condemn homosexuality; the authors could not condemn it because they did not have either the idea or the word. The Bible literally says nothing about homosexuality.

The first problem of language is the word sex itself. One can mean almost anything by "sex," whose basic meaning is found in biology. "Sex" directly refers to whether an animal is male or female. Sex is not a problematic term in biology. But when the word is applied to human beings – animals who are not only animals – things get complicated.

A half century ago a newly fashioned word, gender, borrowed from the world of grammar, was introduced to distinguish biological sex from a social role. I doubt that at the time anyone foresaw that a distinction between sex and gender would many decades later generate a somewhat weird discussion of public bathrooms. People who have unimaginative views on sex get impatient with such discussions but these new questions are actually revealing how little the human race still understands about sexual diversity and the existing range of sexual practices. Pope Francis' recent comments on trans-gender showed that he does not understand the difference between the terms sex and gender.

The distinction between sex as a biological characteristic and gender as a social category has been so helpful that it seems incredible that the distinction had not previously been made. For example, in political discussions of equality, it is much more accurate to talk about gender equality than sex equality. Males and females are not equal (nor unequal) but payment to women and men for the same work should be equal. The term sex would best be used only for the restricted purposes of biology. And at the least, the adjective sexual provides more flexibility than the noun sex. "Sexual" describes characteristics that

are primarily attributed to the male or female but whether these characteristics are exclusive to either sex depends on extensive study.

Another helpful invention of language a half century ago was “sexual orientation.” The term’s significance is not immediately obvious but the term is indispensable for describing how a person’s sexual desires are stimulated. The term was introduced to establish the fact of homosexual identity. Unfortunately people seem to assume that only gays and lesbians have a “sexual orientation.” Just as courses called “gender studies” are unfortunately bracketed as referring only to women, so “homosexual orientation” does not make sense unless there is “heterosexual orientation.”

It seems incredible now that until the middle of the 20th century “homosexual” meant both sexual acts between people of the same sex and people whose orientation is gay or lesbian. Alfred Kinsey, an early student of human sexuality, found that 40 % of men have engaged in sexual acts with other men. Of course, the lack of clarity for what is meant by “sexual acts” may inflate that figure. But it is clear that many heterosexual men engage in same-sex activities and their behavior should not be described as “homosexual.” Much of the behavior in our outrageous prison system is often described as homosexual and some of it is; but more of it is better described as heterosexual rape.

The language used for sexual and gender matters shows the human race’s talking about something while at the same time hiding whatever they are talking about. Sometimes there is no knowledge of how to describe something; at other times there is a deliberate attempt to cover up what people are embarrassed about. A famous example is Bill Clinton’s statement “I did not have sexual relations with that woman.”

The Clinton sex scandal broke in the morning and he had all day to prepare what he would say in his first interview that evening. He obviously chose his words very carefully. I guessed exactly what he was hiding when he said “I did not have sexual relations with that woman.” Jim Lehrer, the interviewer, was perhaps too delicate of speech to follow up Clinton’s answer with a more precise question, such as: “Yes, Mr. President, but did she Most people think that Clinton lied – or more precisely most older people think he lied. A survey showed that most younger people thought he was telling the truth in denying that he had sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky. For them, oral sex does not come under the heading of “sexual relations.”

Bill Clinton’s actual and rumored escapades may have ushered in a new era of sexual speech. More likely it was not Bill Clinton but the Internet that in recent years suddenly made public what had been said and shown only in private. The Internet was certainly a condition if not the major cause of an avalanche of sexual material being available. What up to the 1960s could get you arrested is now routinely available in every family’s living room even without a credit card.

The Republican platform of 2016 contains a dire warning that pornography is a “public health problem that is destroying the life of millions” (no word on guns), a warning that perhaps bears examination. “Pornography” is one of the few sexual words that have a

long history. No doubt pornography has been around for centuries but even compared to a few decades ago, “pornography” does not refer to the same thing.

The golden age of pornography is said to be the 1970s. At that moment, laws of censorship were still in place but were being pushed to the limit. Pornographers had to use some skill in getting around the laws while staying out of jail. They were continuing a tradition going back to the 1940s when mainstream film makers had to use their imagination to circumvent the Hays Code which had the powerful backing of the Catholic Church. An example of the code’s long list of rules was, “Passion should be so treated that these scenes do not stimulate the lower and base element.”

When practically all censorship disappeared, pornographers were let loose to show anything they wanted but that was not good news for the quality of movies. Hollywood annually produces 10,000 porn films and 500 mainstream films. It is estimated that almost one third of Internet activity is pornography. That says a lot about the viewing public but is it a sign of the success or failure of pornography. One reason that there is so much pornography is that it is so boring. The film makers have to keep churning out the stuff because no one cares about quality and no one looks twice at the material. Makers of pornography have either forgotten or never knew what is erotic. Not much imagination is shown in ninety minute films that are produced in two hours. You would think the producers would just show a little effort in their work instead of repeatedly making the same movie. The pornography business is actually not doing well financially.

A Republican war on pornography is not likely to succeed. They could lessen the amount of pornography by calling for higher quality in pornography (some Republican lawmakers would surely like better pornography although they would not say so publically). The repressed world of the 1950s is no model for eroticism. But pity the young people of today who are overwhelmed by a sea of sex talk and crude imagery before they can begin to figure out their own interests and imaginations.

Pornography is closely connected to the practice called masturbation. That word was invented in the 19th century as a pseudo-scientific term. I never actually heard the word throughout my childhood although its condemnation was the center piece of every church retreat and mission for boys. After a few days of drowsy response to the preacher, all ears were attentive when the big topic arrived. Everyone knew what was being roundly condemned as a grievous sin although the preacher never quite said what he was talking about. Every adolescent boy in the congregation could have supplied one of a dozen names for the activity.

In the Vatican’s 1975 document on homosexuality, masturbation is named as a violation of natural law because it “contradicts the finality of the faculty.” Every act of masturbation is said to be a mortal sin qualifying you for hell. That statement is just plain cruel to every adolescent trying to figure out what is happening in his or her body. The statement is a painful example of the inability of Catholic Church leaders to come to terms with the fact that sexual activity has a range of human meanings that are separate from generating babies.

There have been sects that equated the “spilling of seed” with murder. They reasoned that if “semen” (seed) is the beginning of life then any interruption of the life process is murder. In our enlightened age, we have come to understand that the woman has a part in the production of a baby (a brilliant discovery) so the “beginning of life” is said to be fertilization. But it is not known when during pregnancy a baby comes into existence (which was acknowledged in Catholic Church teaching until the mid-twentieth century) and I doubt that there ever will be agreement. But Catholic Church teaching should be clear that sexual self-pleasuring is not an interruption of the life process, and abortion in the earliest stage of pregnancy is not murder.

The young desperately need guidance but who is going to provide it? The need is for education but there is not even a proper name for that. A century ago there was invented something called “sex education.” The name is not very revealing. “Sex ed” has been the name of a course or a curriculum unit in the public schools. A school subject differs from a “sexual education” that should begin in infancy and continue into old age. “Sex ed” has passionate supporters but also severe critics, not only right-wing opponents of anything including the word sex, but some thoughtful and open-minded people.

Of course, “sex” is just one of those things that are so important in life that we bury it in a school course for children. The “sexuality educator” in a public school is asked to do all the educating that should be done by a range of society’s institutions starting with the family. The school teachers do the best they can but they often restrict discussion to biological facts in an attempt to avoid controversy. That can provide an antiseptic and distorted view of human sexuality. If the “sex ed” teacher tries to do something closer to reality, the classroom can be embarrassing and the teacher can be in trouble.

“Sex” is not the name for a course in school; it is an aspect of everything in a school and elsewhere. The children need help but so do all the schoolteachers as well as the parents of the children. Opponents and attackers of “sex education” should just stop and admit that we first have to agree on some better terms in which to talk about human sexuality. That might be a first step toward intelligent debates about everyone’s need for sexual education and society’s need for some regulations. We might start by responding calmly and truthfully to the questions of six-year olds and maybe then they would be better prepared for adolescence which now seems to extend from ages seven to thirty.

AN AWAKENING: STRONG BUT NOT RUDE

By Anthony J. Fasano

It's late June and you have just landed in Naples, Italy, after an all-night vigil with Irish Pilgrims at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes...Ave, Ave Maria, sung hundreds of times. A priest had invited...cajoled Brother Anthony into joining the procession and prayers. You would have preferred to go to bed.

This would be your first night, really on your own, no one knowing you, although the black suit, the white shirt and the black tie [no Brother's stock for you!] might have led some observant Catholic to realize that you were no usual tourist. You, in fact, were quite like a celibate monk. It has been 13 years since you willingly discharged semen, an action giving you some kind of pleasure, forbidden and not without feelings of shame. The 13 year “moratorium” came about in a reddition [a Brothers’ term for a private conference] with Brother Luke Prior, Visitor General. Somehow Brother Luke had you reveal “something you want to tell me” – it was a “stiffie” sometimes leading to that discharge.

All the inner fears, doubts and confusions were safely tucked away by the promise of Brother Luke. If you, a 15-year-old boy, gave up the “impure” thoughts and actions, Brother Luke would have a Mass said for you. Could anything be more wonderful and enticing? Now you were really special!

And so you did what you promised, that is, until this cool crisp Neapolitan air brought you to be with her. A woman about your age, slender and attractive, you had met on the plane. You both looked kind of deeply at each other. But now she needed your jacket to get warm. Sure, you thought, that's what a Christian Brother would do. Somehow, the gift of a jacket brought her and you together, snuggling against the now cold breeze. So you necked and then the discharge came, really good. Somehow blocking the shame you would feel later on. So she needed company going to her hotel. Oh, Oh, now what?

Now what indeed. You could handle the necking. You had learned that in the eight-grade coming of age, “spin the bottle.” But now you were, in baseball terms, getting to second and third base, with home plate coming into clear view. Really scared ...have gone too far.. Brother Luke's Mass was forgotten. And you were face to face with an excited woman getting ready for a night of ...what? You didn't know. So you did what any other man-boy Brother would do. You simply beat a hasty, really fast, retreat .You gave the puzzled lady a rapid, gentle kiss goodnight. You were on your way back to the safety of celibate world, in this case a single room in a nearby 5-star hotel.

The genie was out of the bottle, the monk was over the monastery wall...you really couldn't go back. God, Nature, your own body were pushing you out into a whole new world of love, intimacy, caring and sometimes bliss, and fear, longing, and the agony of seeing a partner suffering. An awakening Sharp, but not rude...the Beginning of your own Sexual Odyssey.

My personal journey, in sexual matters, may echo that of some readers: from Altar Boy, Boy Scout, Junior Novice, Brother Scholastic, and Brother Teacher, to “alien” in exile, husband, widower, new husband, Pop Pop (to nine girls and eight boys) and now in the limbo of “separated” but not divorced. All the while, trying to “do no harm,” “to do kindness,” and seeking wisdom from whatever appeared in my ken.

And so it was that I arrived in the province of Madhya Pradesh, India, to see the erotic sculpture of temples of Khajuraho. A visit to this website may surprise you: graphic

depictions of multiple sexual acts and positions among men, women, animals and gods and goddesses. In my visit to the site I saw mothers explaining the sculptures to their children who roamed freely in many parts of the temple. The erotic temples are a UNESCO world heritage site.

Let me say simply there is no easy explanation for these temples; I dare not try, but it is often stated that the Temples are stone depictions of postures and positions, as offered in the *Kama Sutra*, a text in the Indian religious tradition. It is often termed the first sex manual. *Kama* means sexual delight, and *sutra* means text.

If a document of Vatican II speaks of the “truth” in other religious traditions, is there anything “true” about the *Kama Sutra* on a Sacred Shrine? And what to make of the Tantric Buddhist text, *Hevajra Tantra*, which demands that the novice have sexual intercourse with 8 Yoginis, that is, female Bodhisattvas, on the night of his canonical initiation? And what about the Mahayana and Tantric Buddhist traditions which present the “Buddha, the Awakened One” as a woman?

And if as the critical reporter in the film, “Philomena,” demands “Why did God give the delight of sexual pleasure only to punish it?” I think I know where I am going on my own sexual journey, trying “to do no harm” while at the same time trying “to give and taste sexual delight,” the *Kama* in that *Sutra*.

PORNOGRAPHY AND TEENAGERS

By Judith Shulevitz

THE 2016 Republican platform takes such conservative stands on sexual issues that it begs to be made fun of. Particularly easy to lampoon is a plank calling pornography a “public-health crisis that is destroying the life of millions.” How, critics ask, can Republicans say they are concerned about public health when their statement of principles opposes a ban on military-style rifles and supports coal, which could destroy the lives of millions and their descendants by hastening climate change?

But non-Republicans would be foolish to dismiss pornography as a non-issue. Internet pornography is a real problem for the 66 million American parents with children under 18. Parents don’t have to believe that such material is a direct cause of sexual violence to be driven a little crazy by it. It’s bad enough that it’s giving our sons and daughters some very creepy ideas about how they’re supposed to look and act.

It’s easy to spot parents suffering from pornography-based anxiety. They obsess over whether the seventh-grader supposedly writing an essay is actually watching a free gangbang video on PornHub. They experience low self-esteem because they can’t figure out, or even find, a parental-control program that would filter out the gross stuff without restricting their children to just a few approved sites, making it essentially impossible for them to do web searches for their homework. I get angry when I read an advice column telling me to keep a close watch on my child’s online activity, as if an adult could plausibly hover over a teenager long enough to ensure that he never clicks on 4chan.

I was outraged when I asked the school, which my 12-year-old was attending, to help me porn-proof the laptop we'd been advised to buy for him, and the school said no. As it turns out, that was more or less the only answer it could give. There just isn't a good way to keep a curious child from ferreting out graphic imagery.

Regulation hasn't worked. Two bills passed by Congress to restrict minors' access to pornography over the past two decades were struck down by the Supreme Court because they infringed on adults' First Amendment rights. In one of those decisions, Justice Anthony Kennedy suggested that available filtering software should do the trick. (A third bill, the Children's Internet Protection Act, requires schools and libraries to install porn filters on their computers; the court deemed it narrow enough to pass muster.)

It was easier to withhold pornography from children when people had to go to a bookstore, peep-show or movie for their voyeuristic experiences, and clerks and ticket takers could turn children away. On the internet — to paraphrase the famous cartoon — no one knows you're a kid. The global nature of the internet vastly complicates censorship. One suggestion is that pornographers use identifying markers like a special domain name, .xxx, to make their products easier to filter. But even if American producers complied, foreign ones might not. Besides, anyone can copy and republish anything, eliminating the markers.

In addition to making pornography hard to contain, the internet is making it weirder and weirder. Intellectual property theft and the flooding of the market by amateur sex tapes has cut into producers' profits; they can compete with bootleggers and Aunt Fannie and Uncle Bob's home videos only by coming up with more extreme scenarios.

Most experts say that there is no solution that wouldn't backfire or flunk the free-speech test. The best parents can do is teach children to put disturbing material in context. "The key to parenting children around pornography is not to start an arms race with them by trying to block their access," Dannah Boyd, the author of "It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens," wrote in an email. "It's about equipping them with the critical sensibilities to interrogate the kinds of sexualized content that is presented to them regularly," whether by "Game of Thrones" or pornography aggregators.

Contextualizing is a good idea, but we have to do more, because Justice Kennedy was wrong. Filtering software is not up to the job. Left-leaning parents shy away from a cause they identify with right-wing culture warriors, but I challenge any parent to affirm that it's O.K. for her kids to become digital porn consumers at 11, the average age of a child's first encounter.

My generation made fun of Tipper Gore in the 1980s, when she urged music companies to label record covers when the lyrics were obscene. I apologize to Mrs. Gore. She wasn't stopping anyone from making music. She was trying to come up with a good-enough filter. The songs Mrs. Gore objected to seem innocent compared with today's raunchy, shall we say pornified, playlist. As the pornography industry explores the darkest reaches of the human psyche in search of profits, liberals may want to rethink the assumption that only archconservatives would try to stop children from going there, too.