

Sexuality and the Sacred

(introduction for SoF 'Religion and Sex' conference roundtable discussion)

I believe that both religion and sexuality are what the ancient Greeks called 'daimonic'. This is not what we today understand by 'demonic'. 'Daimonic' relates to the fundamental life-energy we all share. Depending how we use that energy, that gift, and how it is used on us, both religion and sexuality can be either life-enhancing or destructive. The ancient Greeks added little prefixes to the word 'daimonic' to express this. If religion or sexuality is life-enhancing, then it is *eudaimonic*. If religion or sexuality is destructive, then it is *kakadaimonic*. We see this, in both religion and sexuality, in different ways in history and today. In both, as Deuteronomy (30:15) puts it, God sets before us a moment-by-moment choice between life and death, between *eudaimonia* and *kakadaimonia*.

In brief, three aspects of Christian spirituality seem, to me, most significant for *eudaimonic*, life-enhancing, sexuality. Let's begin with sheer **delight**. Delight is seen, at the beginning of the Bible, in the story of Creation, in which God is repeatedly said to see his/her creation as 'good', in all its materiality: as a blessed reality in which different facets of human gender come into being 'in the image of God'. God in other words delights in all that we are. This delight in sexuality is also seen in Jesus, who is celebratory, endorsing marital relations, constant in his use of touch for healing, and profoundly welcoming of the sensual, as in his anointing with oil by a 'dubious' woman. For this is related to **wholeness of being**, a second key aspect of a life-enhancing Christian spirituality of sex. A central aim of religion is to aid us to wholeness of being: into depth, healing, reconciliation and purpose. Life-enhancing sexuality is a key feature of this. Finally, but also most importantly, Christian spirituality sees life-enhancing sexuality as a significant gateway into **love**. For, unlike some modern western approaches, Christians do not see sexuality as about individual expression as such. Rather, for Christians, sexuality is one of those vital human means of becoming more self-giving, both with a possible partner and in connection to the wider body of life and people. Sexuality, in many senses, is thus a gift and a gateway for deeper relationship rather than either a curse, a matter of personal satisfaction, a possession or even a human right.

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