

## Sex: Is the Church a Kill-joy?

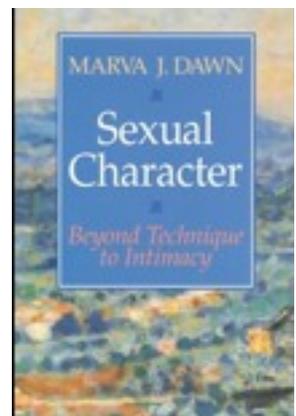
Let's begin by defining terms.

Hands up if you are engaging in sex right now? [...]

We feel funny about a question like that because we've been made to think something that's not true - that 'sex' is physical arousal and the actions involved with it.

Today's dominant culture has reduced the meaning of sex to sexual acts so that to 'Have sex' or even to 'Make love' means sexual intercourse.

Marva Dawn, in her very helpful book called 'Sexual Character – Beyond Technique to Intimacy' makes a clear distinction between genital sexuality and social sexuality, saying that today's sexual behaviour, and the pain that so often goes with it, is grounded in society's confusion of the two and our failure to live faithfully according to God's design in relation to each of them.



Let's look at this more closely.

Genital sexuality is a delightful gift of God as we see in Genesis 2 where God creates man and woman as physically complementary to each other; and, when they have sufficiently matured through their upbringing with mum and dad, specifically designed to leave that family and come together to make their own new family in the one-flesh sexual union of marriage.

They partner with God to create the next generation of humanity with new eternal souls by the extraordinary gift of conception, pregnancy and birth.

Drawn to one another in love and life-long exclusive commitment, the family trinity of father and mother and the children who proceed from their sexual union profoundly image the divine trinity of God the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit who proceeds from them.



I find the cartoons of Michael Leunig particularly honest and expressive – the work of a contemporary prophet – and appreciate his portraits of the quiet joy of God's gift of...

- man-woman love and marriage ...

- and the loving couple blessed with children...

Social sexuality by contrast is the whole complex of being given to us as either femaleness or maleness in addition to genital sexuality – and an even more foundational gift of God.

That's shown in Genesis 1 where, as the culmination of God's creating and ordering of the world, we are uniquely made male and female in his image – whether we're married or not.

This gives us profound sameness as joint members of humanity, and equally profound difference as either men or women, to mirror and model God's own multi-person community.

Men are not from Mars and women are not from Venus but we are very different – and in that comes the whole dynamic of social sexuality, quite apart from any genital activity, and we bring our children up accordingly, most people knowing it's quite wrong to engage children in genital activity but it's quite right and necessary to form their social sexuality.

Dawn writes:

How I relate to everyone else in the world in every human interaction depends on the way in which my social sexuality has been formed. I write, teach, buy groceries, or talk with someone on an airplane out of my social sexuality. Also, in my own unique personality, in social situations I express a woman's affection in many ways – hugs, touches, kisses, words – but these are carefully chosen to be fully loving and honorable, thoroughly reserving all expressions of genital sexuality for one and only one person, my husband (11).

Of course God's good work in creation is protected throughout the bible such as by the Ten Commandments which include:

- Honour your father and mother.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not cover your neighbour's wife,

and by Jesus' and the apostles' continual support of marriage and sexual purity.

But isn't it precisely this that's the killjoy?

What about sexual activity outside of marriage and before marriage?

After all everyone's doing it, aren't they?



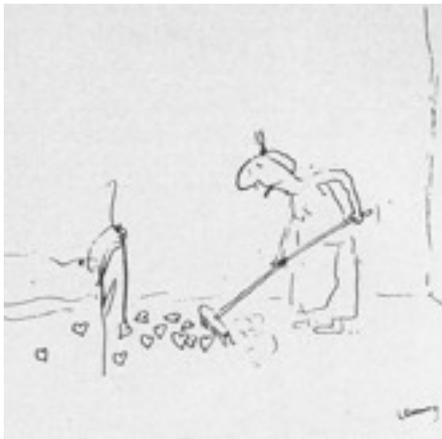
Well, since the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s many people are indeed engaging in genital sex outside of marriage – and this expectation now pervades our culture, pushed along by the media and secularized education.

We all know the story:

- the in-your-face sexual performances in entertainment;
- expectations of casual sexual intercourse and fixation on sexual perfection;
- high levels of teenage sexual activity;
- increasing levels of sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, abortions, domestic violence and marriage breakdowns;
- the sexual abuse of children by those entrusted with their care;
- and an explosion in the use of pornography which dishonors the image of God in people by treating them as sexual objects to be consumed. [Struthers, 19]

So much is sacrificed for having sex beyond the boundaries of marriage.

And is this a place of joy?

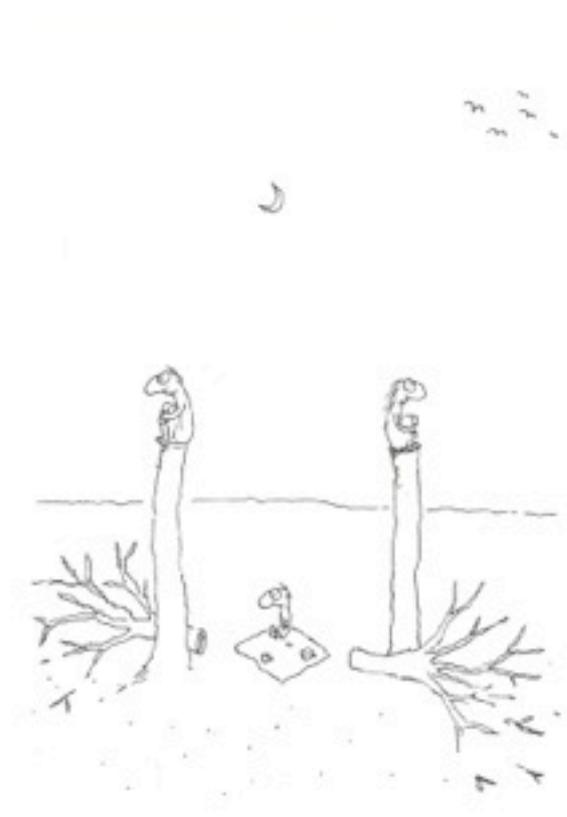
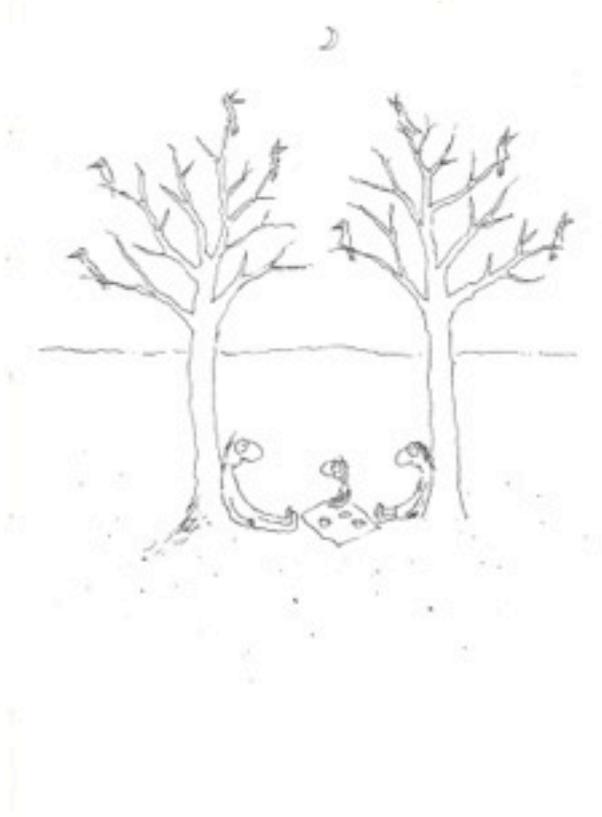


Leunig doesn't think so as these cartoons portray...

- the emotional impact of casualness with sex...

- the fracturing brought by emotional separation...





- the suffering of children as stable homes disintegrate...



- the callousness with which children are treated if they get in the road of sex...



- the hollowness of sex as a commodity...

- the confusion of young people trying to make sense of this mess...



The news this week brought the terrible story of a young man in the US who murdered several other young people as an act of retribution because he did not get the sexual partners he wanted nor the relationships to satisfy his loneliness.

Absolutely the opposite of joy there.

Dawn says,

Basically, the assumption in our society is that genital sexual expression is the 'be-all-and-end-all' of human existence. Persons deserve sexual pleasure, they must have it, and – no matter what – they will have it.

What results? On the one hand, peer pressure teaches teenagers that they must 'score' on the first date. On the other hand, men express confusion about how to court a woman without it being perceived as harassment. Singles are ridiculed if they remain virgins; others wonder how to ask the right questions so they won't risk having sex with an unsafe partner... all while a US feature on 'Sexual Desire' begins with the large-print caption, 'Whether it's dull appetite or ravenous hunger, millions of Americans are unhappy with their intimate lives.' (6f)

Yet despite the stark evidence that the Sexual Revolution has not delivered on its promises, and that it has terrible consequences, it continues to be justified – even though that means sacrificing sound thinking and honesty as well.

How else can it be illegal to cheat on your tax return but not on your life's most intimate friend and your own most solemn promise?

How else can it be illegal for me to punch another person in the face but not to deeply hurt my own child's happiness by destroying her parent's marriage?

How else can it be illegal for a woman to kill a baby possum but not her unborn child?

But people deny these contradictions, excuse them away, or make up new rules just for sex – and label those who challenge them 'Killjoys'!

So what is really going on? And how can we live well as God's redeemed children?

Let's have a short interlude and watch this video clip...

[Preview of 'The Story of Sex' video clip available at <http://vimeo.com/35208299>]

In reality, society's obsession with sex is closely related to God's true plan for men and women.

Our Lord isn't opposed to sex, don't forget – he invented it in the first place – but he is deeply opposed to false belief – and sex has become society's false belief because it has abandoned trust in the one true God and has forfeited the joy which comes from faithfulness to him.

Peter Kreeft, a Roman Catholic theologian, says this:

Put simply, sex is for most people a search for love, or even a substitute for love, rather than an expression of love.

People turn to sex because they've stopped looking for love in the one place it can truly be found – in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And our society feeds off and promotes this addictive search because addicts have little sales resistance and sex sells very well. [*The God Who Loves You*, 180]

Kreeft goes on:

We are hard-wired for becoming one with God; that's why we are so thrilled at becoming one with each other. That's why self-forgetfulness, the transcendence of egotism, and the loss of control in sexual orgasm is so mysteriously fulfilling. It's not just the purely physical sensation; it's the mystical meaning... Religion is not a pale substitute for sex but sex a pale substitute for real religion; because as Aquinas says, "No person can live without joy; that's why a person deprived of spiritual joy goes over to carnal pleasures." The origin of the Sexual Revolution is religious. That's why its demands are so non-negotiable.

But when you have the real thing you are freed from addiction to its image. When you have a love (agape) relationship with God you are freed from addiction to love (eros) relationships with creatures. And only then, only when we do not so desperately need them, we can enjoy and appreciate creatures freely. The alcoholic is not free to appreciate alcohol, and the sexaholic is not free to appreciate sex.

What does Christ have to do with this? Everything. For Christ alone gives us intimacy with God. Therefore Christ alone is the answer to the Sexual Revolution. [132-3]

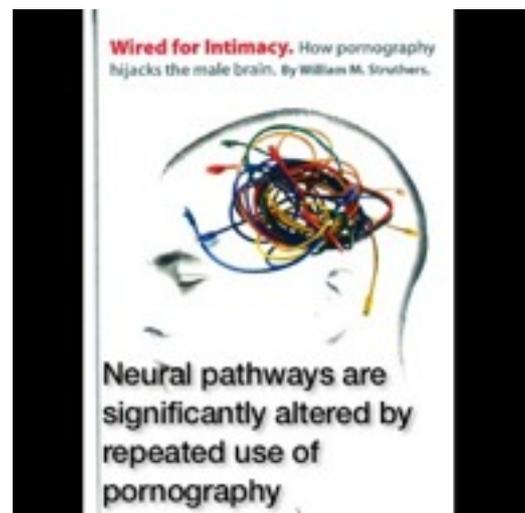
That takes some thinking about but it is all very good news.

And it's backed up by what science knows about the way our brains are molded by beliefs and behaviours over time.

In his book, *Wired for Intimacy – How pornography hijacks the male brain*, neuroscientist William Struthers shows that neural pathways in men are significantly altered by repeated use of pornography, severely impairing their ability to relate properly to women.



Struthers provides a useful chart of healthy and unhealthy behaviours along what he calls 'the 'journey toward either sanctification or depravity'.



Path to holiness	Path to depravity
Caring	Using
Sharing with someone	Doing to someone
Honoring	Shameful
Biblical boundaries	Has no limits
Involves all of the person	Is visual and genital
Responsible habits	Irresponsible risks
Humanises	Objectifies

Both Struthers and Dawn focus on the deep need for healthy development of sexual character as young people grow and indeed throughout all adult life – just as the Book of Proverbs works at this, and as the New Testament takes us into the holy life of Christ.

Dawn says...

Each time a person chooses sexual faithfulness, that choice reinforces that kind of character. Each time someone allows themselves to view pornographic materials, traits of exploitation are fostered. Whenever a person uses sexually explicit language, she promotes vices of immodesty and hardens herself against the mystery and beauty of God's design for sexuality (35).

Learning to live a godly sexual life, then, is not 'because we have to' but because our Lord gives us a vision of his beautiful design and leads us in sexual faithfulness himself.

As Paul says:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17), and again, You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-24).

So married people,

- recognize the God-created nature of marriage and its purpose – as a place to find great joy in being God's servants to one another and, if God grants it, to your children and grandchildren;
- live out your promise to be faithful until death, giving each other the security that your union does not depend on exual attractiveness or prowess (Dawn, 56);
- keep up a wider group of friends, especially of your own sex because too often we load up marriage with expectations it cannot fulfil;
- and cherish your marriage, for it's a temporary state, but also a sign of Christ's eternal marriage to all his people.

Single people and you who are single again,

- know that God is pleased with the way you are – St Paul said it was better for him to remain single for his service to the Lord – and that you too bear the image of God as a man or woman;
- remember that Jesus, who was chaste and single all his life, is your spiritual lover and spouse;
- and make sure you have the companionship you need in order to know and be known by others who share your faith.

Young people,

- as you grow in independence and maturity also keep growing a sound Christian sexual character;
- be happy in your maleness or femaleness but learn to live it God's way, sure that our Lord comes with you on your dates not to lessen your joy but to deepen it;
- let your sexual engagement with the person you begin to love follow rather than lead the flowering of your relationship;
- and remember that sexual intercourse is the seal on marriage, not an experiment leading up to it.

And you who've had or are having a different relationship journey,

- hear our Lord's compassion for those who crossed the boundaries in his time – and know he has the same deep love and grace for you today.

And for all of us,

- let's deal kindly with one another; this is a confusing age and none of us are without sin in regard to it;
- let's be open to people's need for friendship and healthy intimacy, building up an alternative and sexually safe community here;
- and let's remember that the essence of the church is that Christ has married us despite our impurity and sin, and now leads us from darkness into light and from misery into joy.

Jesus says in John 15:

I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love... I've told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be in you, and that your joy may be full. (Peterson, The Message)

And the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds safe in Jesus Christ our Lord.

