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A THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR CHRISTIAN SEX EDUCATION

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GRAND RAPIDS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR CHRISTIAN SEX EDUCATION

SUBMITTED IN A PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

PROGRAM INTRODUCTION THE 501


BY

S. H. (your name)

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

APRIL 2011

Note: usually an Outline or Table of Contents page is not required; however, this is the format used if your professor requires such. An ABSTRACT (on a separate page) is also optional, unless stipulated.

Note: page numbers start after title page in upper right corner 

OUTLINE

(or TABLE OF CONTENTS with page numbers)

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 - 1. Ethical standards
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 - A. The goal of sex education
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Headings are helpful in a longer paper. Main headings should be in caps; after that, use italics to set off sub-headings. Chapter designations are generally not required except in case of very long papers or theses

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Evangelicals continue to promote abstinence-only sex education in public schools. Critics of such programs question whether teenagers have the ability to voluntarily abstain. They question the wisdom of neglecting to provide reliable contraception when sexual activity is an undeniably common choice among that population. Many studies have measured the long-term significance of the two most common approaches to sex education. These conversations typically adopt a strong utilitarian ethic, leading proponents of both perspectives to conclude that the right approach is the one that most consistently reduces teen sexual activity, sexually transmitted infections, and unplanned pregnancies.

The present study examines the ethical and theological basis for Evangelicalism's support of abstinence-only sex education programs. We will ask the question, "On what basis do Christians teach Biblical virtues and sexual ethics to nonbelievers who reject their religious premises?" How this question is answered ought to radically influence the Church's response. We will evaluate the current cultural situation and the proposed solutions to the problem of teen sexual activity. We will address the inadequacy of these solutions to provide the theological conclusion that the Church can and should advocate for nonbelievers to abstain from all extra-marital sexual activity by appealing to Natural Law and by bearing witness to God's redemptive purposes for His creation.

A THEOLOGICAL APPROACH TO SEX EDUCATION

Several economic phenomena in the last one hundred years have necessitated educating adolescents about their sexuality. The industrial and post-industrial economies impacted adolescents significantly. As the American economy shifted from agriculture to manufacturing, the role of children in the workforce changed dramatically.¹ Carrie Miles argues that families no longer depended on many children to guarantee economic stability.² This, over time, allowed the traditional nuclear family model to dissolve. Sex and procreation were divorced.³ Therefore, Miles notes, “The sexual revolution, rising rates of abortions, and declining birth rates are the results, not the cause, of the breakdown of the traditional family. The adherence to traditional family institutions reflects a failure to address the underlying causes. Therefore, simply addressing the symptoms of divorce does not address the results of the curse described in Genesis 3.”

Scripture references should be spelled out like this when used as part of a sentence. However, use standard abbreviations when used as a parenthetical citation (Gen.3:1-15). You do not need to footnote Bible citations or include the Bible in your Bibliography

During the Great Depression, adolescents were systematically removed from the workforce and over the next fifty years the marriageable age continued to rise.⁵ The establishment of this prolonged period of incubation between sexual maturity and marriage was marked with a rise in teen sexual activity. This has accelerated the spread of sexually transmitted infections and increased the number of unplanned pregnancies involving teen mothers. The combination of the

¹ Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager: A New History of the American Adolescent Experience*. (New York: Perennial, 1999), 124, 234-235.

² Carrie A. Miles, *The Redemption of Love: Rescuing Marriage and Sexuality from the Economics of a Fallen World*. (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 127.

³ Miles, *The Redemption of Love*, 129.

⁴ Miles, *The Redemption of Love*, 13.

⁵ Hine, 287, 292.

Footnotes should follow a short line between the last line of text and the first footnote. Indent the first line of each footnote. Insert one line between each footnote. Follow this example for listing author's name, title, publication info and page numbers. Rather than “ibid” to refer to previous citation, use the shortened form of author/title, as shown here (Miles, *The Redemption of Love*)

dissolution of family norms, the removal of teens from the work place, and the resultant increase of teen sexual

(Note: several pages have purposely been omitted here to condense paper for review).....

...necessary for the healthy continuance of society.⁶ Following a very similar pattern, Heimbach references the sociological conclusions of Unwin, “Without exception...if a social group limited sex to marriage, and especially to lifelong monogamous marriage, it would always prosper.”⁷

Therefore, growing sociological data appears to establish a case for abstinence and monogamy—

one which is further supported by the following data:

Hartwig has strongly argued that abstinence and monogamy are insufficient to ensure a healthy society. He argues that chastity and abstinence are insufficient to ensure a healthy society. He proposes a drastically different interpretation of the sociological and anthropological data:

Longer quotes (exceeding 40 words) should be set off as “block quotes”—indented and single spaced, omitting quotation marks. But avoid stringing together too many long quotations!



The Church cannot propose as authoritative a teaching that is inconsistent with the best information at hand about humanity.⁹ [Instead, he asserts later,] ...A Christian sexual ethic is first and foremost one which enables human beings to flourish and achieve excellence with respect to one dimension of their lives, sexuality. A Christian ethic cannot be genuinely Christian if it proposes norms which undermine the well-being and flourishing God intends for us to enjoy.¹⁰

Unfortunately, Hartwig does not apply explicit teaching of Scriptures to the question of sexuality, enabling God’s intention of our enjoyment to be defined by our own interpretation of

⁶ Boyd, *A Shared Morality*, 114.

⁷ Heimbach, 347.

⁸ Michael Hartwig, *The Poetics of Intimacy & the Problem of Sexual Abstinence*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000), 74.

⁹ Hartwig, 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 121.

well-being.¹¹ Riley, arguing via Natural Law for the necessity of traditional chastity for the preservation of society, agrees that restriction of “genital contact to husband and wife” is not a satisfactory definition of chastity, “Fidelity, therefore, did not suffice. It had to be inspired by a self-sacrificing love of the kind Christ had shown in climbing Calvary.”¹² Consequently, Natural Law does not provide a fully formed Christian ethic. When the Scriptures are rejected as the authoritative interpretation of the world, humans can draw contradictory inferences. To summarize, Natural Law supports monogamous heterosexuality and this is confirmed by Scripture.

Why Christian Sex Education Needs Natural Law

As we noted above, Natural Law provides the theoretical foundation for addressing an unbelieving population with a moral argument. Natural Law not only justifies this project as worthwhile, it also makes such an effort possible by providing a framework for conversation with others’ presuppositions. Hollinger notes that Christians can only address unbelievers by appealing “to a remnant of God’s design that is often still embedded in the hearts and minds of even fallen humanity. To be sure, this type of Natural Law approach has its own difficulties” but the possibility remains open.¹³ Boyd describes this as being “bilingual, at times speaking the language of Zion, which undergirds the specifics of our ethics, and at times also speaking a broader language that is not dependent on the particularities of biblical faith.”¹⁴

¹¹ Hartwig, 160, suggests that were “Ken” to pursue a brief sexual relationship with “Robert” during his long-term committed relationship with “George”, “it’s possible that it might not have any real impact on his and George’s relationship. [Since] Robert is a jerk, and Ken would soon find that out.”

¹² Patrick Riley, *Civilizing Sex: On Chastity and the Common Good*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 178-179.

¹³ Dennis P. Hollinger, *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 254.

CONCLUSION

In this study we have recognized the ongoing debate over how best to educate teenagers so they can avoid STIs and unplanned pregnancies. We briefly described comprehensive and abstinence only educational models, concluding the ethical basis for each was insufficient and/or unclear. We then considered the possibility of Natural Law theory as an explanation of how the Church can teach an ethic of abstinence, monogamy, and fidelity to unbelievers. Because Natural Law remains operative in the world, we concluded that the Church can and should advocate for nonbelievers to abstain from all extra-marital sexual activity by appealing to Natural Law and thereby bearing witness to God's redemptive purposes for His creation.

Our present study is deficient in several ways. First, we did not consider the ramifications of the noetic effects of the Fall on a human's awareness of the Natural Law or the prevenient role of common grace.¹⁵ Second, Natural Law theory tends to eliminate the possibility of redemption outside of the Church. Within the model of Creation, Fall, and Redemption, Christians are able to further articulate the redemptive purposes of inviting unbelievers to submit to God via Natural Law. Thirdly, having claimed that current proponents of abstinence-only sex education programs have not sufficiently articulated their theological motivation, this study should provide an argument identifying how the influence of Natural law would affect abstinence-only programs' goals and methods. These deficiencies aside, Natural Law provides a promising re-articulation and clarification of why Christians would be involved in sex education and how such involvement is even possible.

This concluding sentence provides a good summary of the paper and its thesis.

¹⁴ Hollinger, *Choosing the Good*, 254.

¹⁵ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 181, notes that for Aquinas, the only solution to enduring disobedience to the Natural Law is divine grace, a point that should nuance our understanding of Natural Law's relationship to the unbeliever. Rejection of God's revealed will has required His gracious intervention since the beginning.

This is an excellent bibliography: it cites credible sources—both academic journal articles and books—rather than spurious websites.

Note the format: titles of books and journals are italicized. Titles of journal articles are set in quote marks. If derived from a database, include database name.

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Note that the second and subsequent lines of each citation are indented (just the opposite from your footnotes, where only the first line is indented). Citations are single spaced, and set apart from each other by double spacing.