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Raymond F. Collins. *Sexual Ethics and the New Testament: Behavior and Belief*. Companion to the New Testament Series. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000. Pp. xvi + 200. \$17.95 (Paper).

[1] The "Decree on Priestly Formation" from the Second Vatican Council asserts that the scientific exposition of moral theology "should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching." A recent volume of the *Companion to the New Testament Series* clearly facilitates this objective. In this volume Raymond F. Collins, a biblical scholar who taught at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium from 1970-1993 and is currently professor of New Testament at the Catholic University of America, explores the New Testament writings on sexual ethics. Through the historical-critical method for which the Catholic University of Leuven is known, Collins brings to light possible meanings of the texts in light of the historical, cultural, and literary contexts in which they were written. In so doing, while by no means developing a contemporary sexual ethic, he provides insight into how these teachings may or may not be interpreted to facilitate Christian ethicists in their task.

[2] The text is divided into eleven chapters and explores twenty-one of the books of the New Testament that have something to say about sexual ethics. Collins divides the New Testament's treatment of this issue according to Jesus' teachings about human sexuality (chaps. 1-5), authentic Pauline Letters that address specific concerns on sexual mores within the early Christian communities (chaps. 6-8), Paul's disciples who penned the Pauline pseudepigrapha (chap. 9), and the other New Testament books that have a tenuous relationship with Paul (chap. 10). Collins concludes by highlighting significant insights of his study for sexual ethics.

[3] The focus of Jesus' teachings on sexual ethics, as detailed in the Gospels and Paul's Letters, is on adultery (chaps. 1 and 3), divorce (chap. 2), and other sexual improprieties (e.g. child abuse, masturbation, fornication, and lustful glances) (chaps. 4 and 5). Jesus' treatment of these issues is as much concerned with social justice as sexual mores. For instance, with the exception of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11), the focus of the encounters between Jesus and women in the Gospels is on gender and Jesus' compassion on those who are considered to be of a low social status because of their gender. In the case of the

adulterous woman, Jesus willingly forgives the sin of adultery that is not to be repeated. This theme of social justice is reflected in Jesus' teachings on divorce and adultery as well. Jesus posits parity between men and women regarding sexual behavior, a novel and radical concept at this time. An essential message of Jesus' teaching on sexual ethics could be summed up in the fourth Gospel. That is, "an appreciation of human relationships and the awesome demand to love as Jesus has loved us" (22). Even Jesus' "hard-sayings" on sexual ethics (e.g. Mark 9:43) must be interpreted correctly. They are not to be taken literally but reflect Jesus' hyperbolic use of language. The point is that certain sexual sins are considered abhorrent in Jesus' time and should be avoided. An important insight gleaned from Collins' treatment of Jesus on sexual sins is that these sins are no greater than any other types of sins in the Gospels. This insight challenges many Christian perspectives that often place greater importance on sexual ethical issues than questions of social justice, for example.

[4] The second series of essays investigate Paul's teachings on sex that are frequently directed to specific questions and struggles in the early Christian communities. While Paul's letters may take a rather harsh view on sexual improprieties, sometimes suggesting expulsion from the community, this stance must be seen in light of Paul's eschatology and the expectation of the imminent parousia. Overall, Collins describes Paul as a "realist" and a "pragmatic pastor" on sexual matters. Particularly insightful for contemporary sexual ethics is Collins' treatment of Paul's anthropology and the call to holiness. Pauline Christian anthropology perceives of the person as embodied existence grounded in relationships called to holiness and destined for resurrection. Paul's sexual ethics is developed in light of these insights and the historical-cultural situation in which he was writing. In particular, the Greco-Roman dualism and accepted sexual mores pose a particular challenge to early Christian communities to which Paul is responding. In comparison to Paul's Letters, the Pauline pseudepigrapha and other texts that have some relation to Paul are less explicit on their sexual teachings and are treated rather briefly in the latter chapters.

[5] In the final chapter, rather than offering a synthesis of the New Testament teaching on sexual ethics, Collins offers reflections on recurring scriptural motifs, guidelines for critically reading the New Testament, and the implications of those guidelines for using Scripture as a source for formulating a Christian sexual ethic. The dominant motif is that Christians must live out their sexuality distinct from how others do so. Both the love commandment and the call to holiness of the New Testament facilitate this objective. Another important motif that Collins affirms, and confirms what many Christian ethicists assert regarding the relationship between Scripture and Christian ethics, is that Scripture is largely concerned with parenesis, not normative ethics. It exhorts the Christian to avoid sexual immorality. What constitutes sexual immorality is not always clear due to difficulties in interpreting the New Testament and applying those interpretations to contemporary ethical issues given our knowledge and understanding of the human person. For example, it is virtually impossible to determine the precise meaning of the Greek terms *arsenokoitai* ("sodomites") and *malakoi* ("male prostitutes") due to their infrequent use in the New Testament. In addition, the distinction between homosexual acts and homosexual orientation of which Paul was unaware further limits the normative conclusions we can draw from Scripture on the issue of homosexuality.

[6] Collins clear writing style, use of the historical critical method, and investigation and analysis of contemporaneous written sources to facilitate interpreting New Testament

teachings on sexual ethics makes it an invaluable complimentary text for a course in Christian sexual ethics. In this text, Collins has faithfully responded to the call of Vatican II by facilitating Christian ethicists in developing a Christian sexual ethic.

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