

Sample Successful Paper Proposal

Abstract

It has been argued that touch, far from being a curious datum of human existence, is so essential to human development and helpful to maintaining adult psychological and physical health that it can be considered a right. This argument's corollary is that, given that we cannot touch without being touched, appropriate touch normally is and should be a source of pleasure to both giver and receiver.

The proposed paper will respond to these theses with a caution: contemporary literature on child sexual abuse points out that abusers of children also, and especially, profess to embrace these beliefs. Neither a simple boundary distinction (do not touch particular persons in particular places) nor a test for intent (do not intend to harm or violate) adequately responds to the challenge posed by this fact. Thus it will argue that an adequate Christian ethic of touch depends on the possibility of developing powerful psychological and theological distinctions between nurturing and violating touch.

The psychological prong of this argument will draw upon extensive contemporary research on child sexual abuse to argue that abusers either pursue an imagined egalitarian mutual love with their victims or use abuse to gain a sense of empowerment over them. In theological terms the root problems are a mis-labeling of the object of love (the good the lover desires); of the object's true needs (the gift the lover offers); and of the union with the beloved (the character of mutual delight). The paper will argue that, theologically, "good touch" is a matter of rightly-ordered love and that a critical, feminist retrieval of love theology yields categories and distinctions that begin to illumine the so-far unordered category of touch between unequals.

Sources

Sources to be drawn up on include the following:

Psychology: Lenore E. Auerbach Walker, ed., *Handbook on Sexual Abuse of Children: Assessment and Treatment Issues*; Jacqui Saradjian, with Helga Hanks, *Women Who Sexually Abuse Children: From Research to Clinical Practice*; Louise Armstrong, "In the Footsteps of Doctor Freud and Down the Proverbial Garden Path," *Feminism & Psychology*; Michele Elliot, ed. *Female Sexual Abuse of Children*; Christine M. Kreklewetz and Caroline C. Piotrowski, "Incest Survivor Mothers: Protecting the Next Generation," *Child Abuse and Neglect*.
Theology and Ethics: Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*; Susan Ross, "Eros and Agape: Some Feminist Reflections," among others; St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine on love, with contemporary critical commentaries; Marie Fortune, Mary Pellauer, and other feminist specialists on theology and abuse; James Nelson, Carter Heyward, Gareth Moore, and other "theologians of embodiment," 1970s and forward.

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PowerPoint capability needed to display charts

Paper Title

The Black and White of Moral Values: The Complex Relationships between Religious Attendance and “Moral Values” among White Evangelicals and African Americans

Proposal

The 2004 presidential elections revealed two dramatic findings for scholars of religious ethics. First, in response to a vague exit poll question, more voters chose “moral values” than any other factor as the most influential factor in their vote. Second, frequency of religious attendance tied with race as the most reliable predictor of vote. Drawing on national survey data, focus group data, and ethnographic interviews among white evangelicals and African Americans, this paper analyzes the complex interrelationships between “moral values” and religious attendance and examines the contrasting content of “moral values” through the lens of race.

Although the conventional wisdom was that “moral values” referred to gay marriage, abortion, and stem cell research, the author’s own analysis of subsequent surveys shows that only about one-fourth of voters overall understand moral values in terms of those hot-button issues. Comparing white evangelicals and African Americans provides an even more dramatic example of the complexity of “moral values.” African Americans and white evangelicals are both highly religious, share key aspects of the Protestant tradition such as an emphasis on biblical theology, and live mostly in the South where they share an intertwined history. Yet, as a result of living on different sides of this history, African Americans’ voting preferences were the opposite of white evangelicals’. Nearly 8 out of 10 evangelicals voted for GOP candidate Bush and a similar margin of African Americans voted for Democratic candidate Kerry. African Americans were the only exception to the strong positive relationship between higher frequency of attendance at religious services and support for Bush. These differences also translated into differences in the content of moral values for these groups, with white evangelicals favoring issues of personal, especially sexual, morality and African Americans emphasizing a broader range of issues such as social justice, a social safety net, and character.

Materials to be drawn upon (edited for reasons of space):

Original analysis of major quantitative national surveys, 2000-6.

Focus Group and ethnographic interview data from field research among white evangelicals and African Americans

Emerson, Michael O. and Christian Smith. 2001. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. Oxford University Press.

Lincoln, C. Eric and Lawrence H. Mamiya. 1990. *The Black church in the African American Experience*. Duke University Press.

Paris, Peter J. 2004. *Virtues and Values: The African and African American Experience*. Augsburg Fortress.

Smith, Christian. 2002. *Christian America? What Evangelicals really want*. University of North Carolina Press.