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## Teaching Sexuality on the Catholics & Cultures Website: A Refreshing Turn toward the Longue Durée

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MARC ROSCOE LOUSTAU

## Teaching Sexuality on the Catholics & Cultures Website: A Refreshing Turn toward the *Longue Durée*



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## INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of a movement for including sexuality in religious studies and theology curricula scholars have embraced a variety of methods and frameworks, but one popular approach is to organize classroom instruction about sexuality around discussions about “current issues.”<sup>1</sup> The rationale is that in contemporary North American societies sexuality has an almost inherent relationship with a particular realm of politics centered on government policy, legislation, and judicial decision-making. Indeed, advocates of teaching about sexuality in the religious studies and theology classroom often comment that the prevalence of political debates, legislative actions, and judicial decisions in the daily news cycle makes sexuality a necessary part of their teaching. Students at American universities already hear every day about Supreme Court decisions, bills passed or rejected, and policies implemented by the executive branch. In the words of American Protestant theologians Kate Ott and Darryl Stephens,

Complicating discussion of sexuality within a religion or theological classroom are curricular silences that contrast sharply with public debate about religion and sexuality in U.S. media and politics...Students may talk a lot about sexuality, but are they engaging the topic critically with the disciplinary tools of religious studies and theology?<sup>2</sup>

Dealing with sexuality in relation to “current issues” will equip students to be better at what they already do, including consuming news and talking about hot-button controversies with others in their community.

When I speak of a current issues approach, I also have in mind several examples of

- 1 For instance, Kate Ott describes a series of classroom exercises designed to foster creative and symbolic expression of personal experience. One exercise uses a creative medium to depict a timeline of participants' sexuality. “They were encouraged to use visual art, poetry, prayer, songs, or a movie clip playlist.” Kate Ott, “Inviting Perspective Transformation: Sexual History Awareness for Professional Formation,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 20 (April 2017): 120, <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12374>.
- 2 Kate Ott and Darryl Stephens, “Embodied Learning: Teaching Sexuality and Religion to a Changing Student Body,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 20 (April 2017): 111, <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12373>.

courses in Christian theological ethics that I took in graduate school. These syllabi exemplify the current issues approach that, in my view, the Catholics & Cultures website should be commended for variously complicating, questioning, relativizing, elaborating, and developing. Typically, the current issues approach takes up sexuality-related topics casuistically. In a course on Christian ethics, for instance, there would be a multi-week unit on abortion featuring readings that exemplify and advocate a range of stances on the legality of terminating a pregnancy. The unit on abortion would be followed by units on any number of the sexuality-related current issues that I listed above: same-sex marriage, prostitution, the use of new reproductive health care technologies, genital alteration in children, and the Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal. Students would be introduced to differing perspectives by studying specific pieces of legislation, cases in which government representatives prosecuted individuals for violating existing laws, and historical and contemporary judicial decisions.

The current issues approach seemed to appeal partly as instructors gained greater awareness of and a desire to respond to sexuality's role in constituting America's "culture wars." Pedagogical reflections on sexuality in the religious studies and theology classroom often emerge from an awareness that sex is at the very heart of the United States' bitterly fractured politics. Instructors are very aware that they lead discussions about the between biological sex and social roles ascribed to men and women amid a recent history of contested and bitter debate that has largely pitted "traditionalists" against "progressives." Advocates of these points of view are only finding new and mutual ways to exclude each other. Whether instructors pin this divide to the post-1960s "sexual liberation" or a longer historical timeline that begins with the early 20th century women's suffrage movement, almost everyone agrees that classroom discussions about sexuality inevitably refer back the unraveling of a Christian consensus about sexuality and gender roles that has led to a starkly divided American national politics and pushed sex to the center of left-right public debate.

Like many religious studies and theological scholars, the Catholics & Cultures website often treats sexuality as a stand in or index for socially-situated actors'

attitudes toward change in general.<sup>3</sup> But in my exegetical analysis of the C&C website's content, I will also highlight how the site takes a refreshing approach that consistently encourages students to make sense of sexuality-related topics in relation to long-term and deep structural social transformations like urbanization, nation building, and the changing role of lay leaders. The site's pedagogy suggests that cultures change in the mode that the famous Annales School of history and social science once called "the *longue durée*." The Annales School famously used the term *longue durée* to convey the broad, slow sweep of history, as distinct from "events time," which focuses on phenomena and occurrences that are of the moment and immediately observable.<sup>4</sup> When discussing practices that reveal important cultural changes, the Catholics & Cultures program highlights the context provided by long-term structural change without overshadowing the importance of events like legislation, judicial decisions, and policy shifts—the bread-and-butter of events time's short-term time scale on which a great deal of contemporary religious studies and theology classroom conversations dwell.

The Catholics & Cultures website does not ally itself with any particular theoretical school or perspective, and I do not claim to reveal any such hidden or implicit allegiance. My point is rather to use this comparison with a particular theoretical approach as a heuristic device to highlight certain features, tendencies, and habits within the site's material. By calling attention to these tendencies, we can better see how the site offers a refreshing alternative to commonplace ways of imagining and enacting the pedagogy of sexuality in the religious studies and theology classroom. We can therefore also understand one of the many other contributions the site is making to contemporary religious studies and theology pedagogy.

- 3 See, for instance, Marie Griffith's argument that American Christians' views regarding sex came to stand in for attitudes toward change and modern ideas in general. R. Marie Griffith, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 5.
- 4 Historian Ferdinand Braudel imagined deep structures to be like geographic formations: "Such general collective human interaction with physical nature forms an extremely slow-moving, almost imperceptible temporality—a structure perhaps, but a structure subject to historical mutation." Dale Tomich, "The Order of Historical Time: The *Longue Durée* and Micro-History," *Almanack* 2 (2011): 38-52, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2236-463320110204>. Still, my goal is to use the distinction between *longue durée* and events time as a heuristic device to clarify certain features of the C&C website.

A related subplot of this article is my attempt to highlight the C&C website's effort to destabilize the culture war narrative that informs religious studies and theology pedagogical reflection about sexuality. The Catholics & Cultures website takes a similarly third-way approach—neither directly opposing nor obviously confirming—to the culture wars framework. Triangulation is the site's primary tool. For instance, when the C&C website compares discussions about sexuality, it sets up a three-way comparison with the United States and another Catholic community. In the page about Guam, responses to the sexual abuse crisis are compared implicitly to the United States and explicitly to Ireland. In his book, *Emergent Forms of Life and the Anthropological Voice*, Michael M. J. Fischer argues that by creating a triangulated comparison between three distinct cultures, anthropologists can avoid the tendency to divide the world into polarized good-bad moral options, a tendency that is often invited by dualistic comparison between a home or familiar culture and a foreign or unfamiliar one.<sup>5</sup> The C&C site uses triangulation to encourage instructors to move beyond the expectation that discussions about sexuality will divide students into opposed culture war-style factions.

In the first section, I will provide an overview of the categories and concepts the C&C website uses to discuss sexuality: informants' responses about issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, and the sexual abuse crisis typically fall in the section titled, "Marriage, Family, and Gender Roles." After this introduction, I move through three sections that present my exegetical analysis highlighting the C&C website's "longue durée" perspective. Instead of simply challenging the conventions of religious studies and theology instruction, I argue that the C&C website uses its focus on deep structural transformations like urbanization, nation building, and the rise of lay leadership to variously complicate, question, relativize, elaborate, and develop the current issues approach. Intertwined with this exegesis are my observations about the website's triangulation of the culture wars framework.

## BEYOND THE NULL CURRICULUM

The C&C website has no distinct and named section on sexuality; the site deals with

5 Michael M. J. Fischer, *Emergent Forms of Life and the Anthropological Voice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003): 5-7

sexuality most often in the subsection on “Family, Marriage, and Gender Roles” located in the “Practices and Values” section. However, this categorization should not lead to the conclusion that sexuality is a “null curriculum” on the C&C site. Originally developed by educational theorist Elliot Eisner in the mid-1980s, the null curriculum is the inverse of the topics that instructors explicitly state on course documents like syllabi.<sup>6</sup> Students still learn something about null curricular topics based on their absence. For instance, because religious studies and theology classrooms are incubators for critique and exposure, the absence of some topics sends the message that these topics are not fit for such treatment. Ott and Stephens write that their goal, as advocates for teaching sexuality in the religious studies and theology classroom, is to better equip faculty, “to move sexuality education from the null curriculum to the explicit curriculum in a responsible, pedagogically-effective way.”<sup>7</sup>

The C&C website advances this goal of responsibly and effectively shifting sexuality from the null to explicit curriculum. The front page of the “Family, Marriage & Gender Roles” subsection frames this topic as an opportunity to organize a wide-ranging classroom discussion about roles and responsibilities in different cultures. In addition to the roles and responsibilities of spouses, nuclear family members, adult children and elderly parents, and the divorced, the C&C website asks: “What the place of homosexual and transgender persons is in the Church and in society.”<sup>8</sup> The C&C website also agrees that aspects of family life can stand in for debates about social change. Official Church teaching has come to focus on the family, according to the author, “particularly as cultural norms in some countries have shifted toward greater acceptance of divorce, non-marital heterosexual relations and homosexual relations, and as the number of single-parent households has risen significantly.”<sup>9</sup> The C&C website understands “gender roles” to be a broad category that should allow faculty and students to create wide-ranging classroom

6 Eliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1985). David J. Flinders, Nel Noddings, and Stephen J. Thornton, “The Null Curriculum: Its Theoretical Basis and Practical Implications,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1986): 33-42

7 Ott and Stephens, “Embodied Learning,” 109.

8 “Family, Marriage & Gender Roles,” Catholics & Cultures, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/practices-values/family-marriage-gender-roles>.

9 “Family, Marriage & Gender Roles.”



conversations. The subsection's front page signals this goal by encouraging instructors to use the site's materials so that students pay attention to "both men's and women's roles as they are assigned or negotiated in a culture."<sup>10</sup>

Sexuality is not confined to pages about family, marriage, and gender roles. The C&C website recognizes that sexuality, because it stands in for transformation more broadly, is often on informants' minds even when they are speaking about other areas of life. On the C&C website's page about lay confraternities in Spain, the author notes that these groups provide year-round fellowship for members. Spanish lay confraternities are traditional groups, recognized by the diocese, that carry out specific responsibilities on important religious holidays. These groups are not shielded from debates about sexuality through which Spanish Catholics consider and confront broader social changes. Spain's increasing tolerance for divorce, remarriage, and homosexuality can be measured, according to the C&C website, by the groups' formal and informal membership procedures. "Occasionally there have been scandals that have led to expulsions, but these are rare and traumatic for the members if they happen. Members said that divorced and remarried or openly gay members are not expelled, but would likely not achieve high positions in the organization."<sup>11</sup> Changes affecting the institution of the family are felt just as strongly in the life of a lay confraternity, because participation is a matter of "family tradition" and "family loyalty to a particular brotherhood is often very important."<sup>12</sup>

There are numerous other cases in which the C&C website explicitly names sexuality-related topics while also folding them into pages that deal with other themes. For instance, the page about "Worship" in Ireland includes a note about the profound impact of the sexual abuse scandal on all aspects of Irish Catholicism. The Church has even limited parishioners' ability to use cameras in a church in case children might be photographed; this restriction affected the C&C researcher's own ability to provide a visual record of contemporary Irish Catholic worship.<sup>13</sup>

10 "Family, Marriage & Gender Roles."

11 "Family, Marriage & Gender Roles."

12 "Family, Marriage & Gender Roles."

13 Thomas M. Landy, "Modern Irish Mass Missing Reverence, Intimacy, and Parishioners," Catholics & Cultures, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/ireland/worship>.





All in all, the C&C website fully acknowledges the role of sexuality in constituting and transforming culture. The C&C website's information will aid instructors in transforming a null curriculum into an explicit topic of conversation in religious studies and theology classrooms.

Barrel-chested *costaleros* take on the role of carrying the *pasos*, or floats, in Spain's Semana Santa processions. Gender roles in confraternities are often exaggerated. Photo by Thomas M. Landy/[catholicsandcultures.org](http://catholicsandcultures.org).

## DENMARK AND NORWAY: SEXUALITY IN NATIONAL UNITY CULTURES

Norway's Catholics grapple with sexual mores within the range of possibilities offered by a national "unity culture." The C&C website's introductory page about Norwegian Catholicism describes Norway's pervasive and deep structural shift towards a "unity culture" over the course of the 19th century. The architects of this nation-building project sought to gather together locally and regionally distinct communities into a single cultural entity defined by several shared institutions: "one church, the Church of Norway, one king, one language, one culture."<sup>14</sup> Norwegian Lutherans' attitudes toward religious practice and the role of the Church of Norway in everyday life sets the tone for Catholics, too. Catholics

14 Thomas M. Landy, "Introduction: A Single Parish in Norway among Most Diverse in World," Catholics & Cultures, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/norway-single-parish-serves-17800-multi-ethnic-catholics-bergen>.



Young families extend out the door for the English Mass at St. Paul Catholic Church in Bergen, Norway. Photo by Thomas M. Landy/[catholicsandcultures.org](http://catholicsandcultures.org).

generally follow the practice of keeping quiet about one's faith: "When you scratch under the surface, Norwegians do believe in God. It's just that they seem to be deeply uncomfortable talking about God."<sup>15</sup> Other values embraced by both born-and-raised Norwegians and immigrants alike include modesty, privacy, egalitarianism, and tolerance. Tolerance and privacy dictate that overt practices that suggest religious fervor spark confusion. Whereas the norm for the Church of Norway, is to visit four times in one's life—for baptism, confirmation, marriage and one's funeral – "one man reported that his conversion to Catholicism met no hostility, but sometimes puzzlement."<sup>16</sup>

The Norwegian national cultural values of reservedness and modesty also shape the range of possibilities for engaging topics related to sexuality. Norwegian Catholics do not seem to voice negative opinions or offer judgments as much as they express reservations and worries. According to the C&C website, they worry about both the Church's teachings and Norwegian cultural attitudes toward divorce and same-sex marriage: "Even though some said that they found the Church's conception of marriage to be too idealized or rigid, interviewees repeatedly said that even if

15 Landy, "A Single Parish."

16 Landy, "A Single Parish."





divorce is sometimes necessary, most people ‘give up too easily’ on marriages.”<sup>17</sup> The &C website then contrasts this Norwegian approach to the conventional “culture war” style that Americans use to handle this topic:

Yet even those who sought to distance themselves from some Norwegian family and gender norms never spoke in terms of culture wars. One Mexican-born Catholic said that she was struck how much Norwegians welcomed and prioritized children, more than other countries she knew in Europe. Indeed, by many measures of educational and social wellbeing, children are quite well cared for in Norway.

By highlighting this difference, the C&C website seems to want to relativize students’ expectations that sexuality should constitute a “culture war” in which society is divided into two opposing opinion-groups. The C&C website suggests that the culture war is itself a cultural attitude, one that is relative to contemporary American society. Although the emergence of the American “culture wars” about sexuality-related issues plays a significant role shaping religious studies and theology instructors’ event-oriented pedagogy, the Catholics & Cultures website takes pains to highlight alternative approaches to the same topics and the cultural themes that inform these approaches.

The national cultural value of privacy serves a similar purpose in the C&C country profile about Denmark. Danish Catholics express and embrace the virtue of privacy by maintaining a cozy (*hygge*) atmosphere in church services as well as in everyday interactions. According to the author, the Mass in Danish has this distinctively Danish feel that emerges from the desire to, “keep things friendly, nice, and ordered in regard to relationships and conversation.”<sup>18</sup> Privacy and conviviality prevail especially when it comes to issues of sexuality that constitute the American culture wars. The C&C website notes that the Church’s official representatives do make an effort to communicate and explain the reasons for the Church’s stance on the issues that constitute the American culture wars, including same-sex marriage

17 Landy, “A Single Parish.”

18 Thomas M. Landy, “Denmark’s ‘Hygge’ Worship Style Emphasizes Simplicity and Tranquility,” Catholics & Cultures, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/denmark/worship>.



and family reproductive practices. Both priests and laypeople seem to engage the Church's teachings so as to convey their feeling for Danish culture's everyday interactive norms:

At the same time, priests and catechists know that Catholics often differ from the Church on sexual issues. That disagreement does not seem to take the form of protest. Given the privacy of Danes, one person described the situation as, "Don't ask, don't tell."

There is another implicit contrast with expectations born of the American culture wars. Dramatic public protests characterized both liberal and conservative Catholics' contributions to the American culture wars. When Catholics in New York City disagreed with ecclesiastical officials' approach to conveying the Church's stance on using contraceptive technologies, it led to some of the most dramatic and controversial protests of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>19</sup> There is also an implicit pedagogical message in this comment, a recommendation that students and teachers recognize the diversity of possible responses to disagreements about sexuality. More deeply, the C&C website calls on students to recognize that cultural norms like privacy and comfort are as much a part of the global Church's life as those values that underwrote the polarization of the American culture wars.

## GUAM: THE RISE OF LAY CATHOLIC ASSOCIATIONS

The C&C website does not ignore the current issues and recent events that are often the main fodder of religious studies and theology classroom conversations about sexuality. Country descriptions often situate recent events as a factor influencing informants' preoccupations and concerns. The website then juxtaposes the context set by contemporary events in relation to urbanization, nation building, and other deep structural transformations. The C&C website's page about Guam illustrates this decision to render contemporary events as one context among others for understanding cultural change. On the Guam front page, there are several standard articles highlighted with clickable images.<sup>20</sup> Below these highlighted pages is

19 See Anthony Michael Petro, *After the Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, and American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

20 "Guam," Catholics & Cultures, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/guam>.



a page under the heading “See All” and set off by a bullet point: “Unraveling: Sex abuse, the Neos, and a Year of Reparation in Guam.” That page’s opening paragraph describes a series of contemporary events in Guam’s Catholic Church that, transposed to an American diocese with American ecclesiastical officials, could frame a typical classroom discussion about the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. An archbishop was under canonical investigation along with fourteen priests for a raft of abuse allegations; the archbishop was placed on leave; lay Catholics marched and protested; Guam’s Church faced millions in legal claims; the Vatican eventually stripped the archbishop of his position and forbid him from returning to Guam.<sup>21</sup>

After this description, the site presents the crisis in Guam’s Church in relation to a broader structural transformation that began in the early 20th century but has increased apace in the post-Vatican II period: the rise of global and lay Catholic movements. The C&C website states that, “The crisis is linked to, or perhaps parallels, a separate crisis over the ascendance of the Neocatechumenal Way,” which stands alongside the Cursillo movement, Focolare, and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal as one of the most popular global lay movements.<sup>22</sup> The C&C website uses its description of the sexual abuse crisis in Guam’s Catholic Church as an opportunity to highlight the cultural specificity and diversity of this global phenomenon: “To a degree difficult for an outsider to understand, the crisis over the Neos seemed to have caused nearly as much upheaval and dissension as the one over abuse.”<sup>23</sup> In Guam, the Neocatechumenal Way adopted a highly counter-cultural approach encouraging participants to openly flout widely-held local cultural norms. Against social norms like humility and privacy, the Neocatechumenal Way promoted a public ritual of the confession of sins. Where some might have felt it appropriate for individuals to deal with their own sins, the C&C website writes

21 Thomas M. Landy, “Unraveling: Sex Abuse, the Neos, and a Year of Reparation in Guam,” Catholics & Cultures, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/guam-unraveling-sex-abuse-neos-and-year-reparation>.

22 Landy, “Unraveling.” For a history of one such movement, the Cursillo movement, see Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *The Cursillo Movement in America: Catholics, Protestants, and Fourth-Day Spirituality* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

23 Landy, “Unraveling.”



about a backlash against Neocatechumenal Way participants who wear their sin like a badge.<sup>24</sup>

However, the C&C website does not shy away from noting commonalities across these contexts. American Catholics are familiar with the role that lay Catholic movements have played in creating bridges between Catholics and Charismatic, Pentecostal, and Evangelical Christians. In the United States, practices like the public confession of sins are strongly associated with the latter traditions, and beginning in the mid-20th century Catholics adopted these Protestant forms as a way to “renew” or “revitalize” the Church.<sup>25</sup> American and Guamanian Catholics make the same associations between lay Catholic movements and Protestantism. The C&C website notes that Guamanian Catholics call the Neocatechumenal Way’s confession practice a “born-again” habit.<sup>26</sup> In Guam, the sexual abuse crisis has become a referendum on the deep structural transformation of growing lay authority within the Church, a change that is strongly associated with the growing popularity of global lay Catholic movements. Despite and perhaps because many American Catholic college students have grown up in contexts where the presence of lay Catholic movements is a familiar and natural part of the religious environment, the C&C website encourages these readers to patiently attend to the local cultural context that shapes perceptions of these movements. This kind of awareness helps students see both the similarities and the differences between their understanding of how lay Catholic movements operate in and influence local Catholic communities.

The C&C website also uses triangulation to destabilize readers’ moral judgments about Guamanians’ responses to the sexual abuse crisis. Readers might be tempted to make what Michael M. J. Fischer calls a “polar comparison,” or a comparison between the familiar American and unfamiliar Guamanian response to the sexual abuse crisis.<sup>27</sup> According to Fischer, such dualistic comparisons encourage readers

24 Landy, “Unraveling.”

25 See Thomas Csordas, *Language, Charisma, and Creativity. The Ritual Life of a Religious Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

26 Landy, “Unraveling.”

27 Fischer, *Emergent Forms*, 5-7





In the face of a severe clergy sex abuse scandal in Guam, the new archbishop declared a year of reparation. Photo by Thomas M. Landy/[catholicsandcultures.org](http://catholicsandcultures.org).

to move from comparison to evaluative moral judgment: One case is morally better than the other. This tendency is even stronger when it comes to a topic that has prompted highly moralized responses in the popular press. Perhaps in anticipation of this tendency, the C&C website enacts Fischer's own suggestion. The C&C website compares Guamanian lay Catholics to Irish lay Catholics, adding a third unfamiliar case to create a triangulated comparison that destabilizes the habit of creating simplistic "better/worse" judgments.<sup>28</sup> For Irish Catholics, the sexual abuse scandal violated a cultural value of integrity and amounted to blatant hypocrisy, what the website calls "the most scarlet of sins."<sup>29</sup> Many Irish Catholics left the Church because they wanted nothing to do with hypocritical institutions and officials. In contrast, Guam's Catholics addressed the issue of leaving the Church by adopting a stance of humility that personalized the question. The act of leaving the Church is a matter of one's personal reckoning with God over sin, not a collective judgment about the institution's moral status.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, according to the C&C website, the triangulated comparison between the United States, Ireland, and Guam "points to the difference that culture may play in responses to sexual abuse."<sup>31</sup>

28 Fischer, *Emergent Forms*, 181.

29 Landy, "Unraveling."

30 Another example of triangulation can be found on the C&C website's Nigeria "Family, Marriage & Gender Roles" page: "Modernity and city life also seem to be transforming the family in modest ways, but there are still marked differences between contemporary Igbo and Western or Asian conceptions of the family." Thomas M. Landy, "Family Building in Nigeria Carries on Lineage, Spirit of Ancestors," *Catholics & Cultures*, accessed April 28, 2020, <https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/family-building-nigeria-carries-lineage-spirit-ancestors>.

31 Landy, "Unraveling."

## UGANDA: URBANIZATION AND NATIONAL MARTYRDOM

Sometimes contemporary events' influence on informants' attitudes toward sexuality are noted in a page's footnotes, while the relationship between sexuality and broader demographic transitions is highlighted in the page's main text. This distribution of contemporary events and broad trends is evident on the provocatively-titled page in the section on Marriage, Family, and Gender Roles in Uganda. "In Uganda, polygamy is legal, homosexuality is not."<sup>32</sup> The title highlights the otherness of sexual attitudes in the Ugandan Church, the particular feature of Ugandan life that would seem the strangest to the average American observer. Indeed, based on contemporary laws, the average American observer could expect the reverse to better reflect this person's moral and cultural expectations. The C&C website's first sentence highlights urbanization as the particular broad trend within which changing cultural views about sexuality should be understood: "While extended clans play a role in the lives of families in many ethnic groups in Uganda, urban living has eroded some of these links."<sup>33</sup>

Urbanization is front and center in the site's discussion of sexuality partly because the researcher conducted his short-term fieldwork in Uganda's largest city, Kampala. The C&C website as a whole makes virtues out of practical decisions about the best uses of resources to conduct research. While admitting that sometimes researchers are writing about only a single city or region in a large and diverse country, the pages always highlight the diversity of Catholic practice even in that particular place and context. The Ugandan section, for instance, highlights the relationship between urbanization and cultural attitudes toward sexuality. In theoretical language, the page on Ugandan marriage makes the point that change is never teleologically oriented. In the C&C website's much more accessible and pedagogically-friendly language, the author notes that informants described a departure from traditional ways, "even as traditional expectations endured in other

32 Thomas M. Landy, "In Uganda, Polygamy is Legal, Homosexuality is Not," Catholics & Cultures, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/uganda-polygamy-legal-homosexuality-not>.

33 Landy, "In Uganda."





ways.”<sup>34</sup> Extended family households are prevalent in urban Uganda. This highlights, according to the C&C website, “both the strength and vulnerability of family structures in contemporary Ugandan life.”<sup>35</sup> The C&C website often juxtaposes ethnographic reporting of informants’ statements and sociological analysis of deep structural changes at play in a particular ethnographic context. In Uganda, rural family structures are both strong and vulnerable, which translates into informants’ reports about the strategic and situational reasoning they employ in their decision-making about whom to marry. The C&C website reports that a young male university graduate and city resident complained that rising urban income levels has led brides’ fathers to make extravagant dowry demands. But the new invention of paying dowries on “installment plans” allows urban men a level of freedom in negotiations with such demanding fathers-in-law.<sup>36</sup>

The C&C website situates Ugandans’ “deep aversion to homosexuality” not in an explanatory framework but rather in the informants’ own reporting and commentary. The author reaches back to Ugandan Catholicism’s collectively-remembered founding narrative of the “Ugandan martyrs” to situate informants’ statements in a particular context of nation building. The martyrs were a group of forty-five men from the Baganda ethnic group whom the King of Buganda killed between 1885 and 1887 amid wider political and religious conflicts in colonial-era Uganda. According to the C&C website’s descriptions of the contemporary events during which Ugandans commemorate the Martyrs, “Their feast is an enormously important national day.”<sup>37</sup> Anthropologist China Scherz’s excellent summary history of Christianity’s profoundly formative role in Ugandan colonial-era political conflicts also provides useful historical information about the Martyrs’ role in Ugandan nation building. Scherz argues that the Martyrs were caught up in conflicts over Protestant and Catholic missionaries’ political activities in Uganda during the period of British protectorate rule over the Kingdom of Uganda. Missionaries were periodically expelled and welcomed back into the kingdom throughout the late

34 Landy, “In Uganda.”

35 Landy, “In Uganda.”

36 Landy, “In Uganda.”

37 Thomas M. Landy, “Ugandan Martyrs’ Feast,” *Catholics & Cultures*, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/uganda/shrines-pilgrimage/martyrs-shrine-feast-namugongo>.



19th century.<sup>38</sup> The martyrs were recent converts and members of the King's court who, during the missionaries' periodic absences, became involved in contests for political influence. Later in the 1890s, British interventions led to civil war between Protestants and Catholics, but years before the political contestation reached this point the King put to death twenty-two Catholic and twenty-two Anglican men.

The C&C website states that both churches have celebrated their dead as a way to highlight their role in crafting a unified Ugandan national identity, but Catholics have been in the forefront of celebrating and honoring the martyrs. Most importantly for my analysis, the site continues, "Accounts of their death repeat that some of the martyrs were killed for their refusal, as Christians, to commit sodomy for the king, or to condone his practice of it." The connection between "contemporary events" and Ugandan Catholics' attitudes toward homosexuality is much less clear. A recent legislative decision outlawing homosexuality appears in a footnote at the bottom of the page that summarizes respondents' statements about marriage, polygamy, homosexuality, and gender and family: "At the time of the interviews," the C&C website states, "the theme [homosexuality] was very much in the news, as the parliament had passed a law giving a life sentence for homosexual acts, and severely punishing those who fail to report a homosexual."

This footnote signals a tendency in the C&C website's handling of important legislative actions and their relationship with cultural change. The emphasis given to such events and pedagogical goals they serve might be reversed in many religious studies and theology syllabi, especially those written by instructors who favor a "contemporary issues" approach to organizing discussions about sexuality. The event to which this footnote refers, a recent parliamentary and legislative action, might take center stage in such curricula, especially if instructors adopt a casuistical approach that teaches students to weigh different arguments in order to make a final moral judgment about an issue. Within the context of an in-class mock debate—a typical classroom tool used to teach students the practice of moral casuistry—sexuality's relationship to long-term processes like post-colonial nation

38 China Scherz, *Having People, Having Heart: Charity, Sustainable Development, and Problems of Dependence in Central Uganda* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 28-35.



building would likely be presented as useful background information, akin to the C&C website's footnote. The C&C website should be commended for complicating rather than directly and simplistically opposing the current issues approach to teaching sexuality. On the site's Uganda country profile, the authors do not dismiss but rather recognize the context provided by legislation and other current issues in shaping respondents' attitudes. But the site highlights the *longue durée*-style deep structural changes that also contextualize Ugandan Catholics' statements, a practice that helps relativize the current issues pedagogical approach.



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