

Paul M. Quay, S.J., *The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality*, revised and expanded edition (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2017). 233 pp.

*Review by Edward N. Peters, Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit, MI*

Fr. Paul Quay's slim volume *The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality* first appeared in 1985 and quickly established itself as a minor classic in the field. Unlike many other texts that attempted to explain Church teaching on human sexuality to an unbelieving or at best skeptical world, Quay's quiet monograph responded to those who already believed but wished to be fed by the rich theological insights possessed by the Church in this matter, insights that took for granted but transcended the philosophical and apologetic arguments typically but necessarily brought to bear in this matter by others. The image of Mary, who had chosen the better part and would not be denied, comes to mind. Quay wrote for Mary.

But in this new and expanded edition, Ignatius Press provides a double treasure, not only re-releasing *The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality* but also publishing for the first time a book-length essay by Quay on the spiritual foundations for natural family planning. This essay ("The Meaning of Fertility Awareness") is rich with spiritual and psychological insights every bit as profound as those found in the main title. Only one who has a library of learning within him can write short but compelling books on complex matters, and only one who has long grappled with those complexities can explain them to others simply and clearly. Quay, with laureates in theology and physics, brings these strengths to bear in both of these works.

A splendid introductory essay by Jesuit philosopher Joseph Koterski ably orients readers to both works. Given how simultaneously subtle and startling are Quay's numerous insights into the divine plan for human sexuality and into the use that the Lord makes of cycles in the physical universe, Koterski's introduction should be consulted by all of those coming to Quay's works for the first time and re-read by most of those completing them.

Rather than summarizing Koterski's introduction, let alone Quay's two works, let me instead make a suggestion directly to readers that they approach these two-works-in-one, and perhaps especially the second on fertility awareness, with conscious deliberation, not because they are densely written or heavily footnoted (for they are not), but because Quay's manner of writing on matters such as sexuality and human fertility is so rare these days that the study-techniques one might have developed for other kinds of reading might not serve well here.

Time and again (despite my knowing Quay well during the years that he was composing these two works and hearing him speak of these matters with the graduate students and young academics blessed to be under his spiritual direction at the time), I found myself being able to read no more than a paragraph or two at

a sitting, whereupon I simply had to stop, ponder, pray, and try to talk about the short passage I had just read, if only to appreciate how powerfully Quay had broken open a spiritual or even psychological aspect of human sexuality and fertility that I had scarcely known to have existed, or had explained in simple language yet another wonder of the providence of the Lord. I might even go so far as to say that Quay's works need to be read and simultaneously discussed in a group.

Finally – if I may be permitted another personal observation – I first read *The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality* early in married life, and so I read it again now, after more than three decades in that vocation. The new material in this volume, “The Meaning of Fertility Awareness,” is something that I have come to for the first time, of course, and thus, after our child-bearing and even most of our child-rearing years are behind us. Angela and I accepted, as did most of our friends, the Church's teaching against conjugal contraception largely because we believed that God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, willed it so and had led his Church to proclaim that truth against all worldly voices to the contrary. But now, after a long-overdue second reading of Quay's work on sexuality and a first reading of his great essay on fertility, we experienced – how exactly to put this? – an elation at seeing more deeply how incredibly wondrous indeed is the life that God offers to his sons and daughters in Christian marriage.

If only they had eyes to see it.