

“Identity, Sexuality and the Gospel: A Better Story for our Schools”

Stanton L. Jones, Wheaton College; Paper delivered to TISCA, November 24, 2018, St. Ebbe’s Church, Oxford

I. Introduction (Deuteronomy 6:1-9; 10:12-13)

We seek to assist Christian parents and students, and to bear witness to nonbelievers to all that is good, true and beautiful for their good and the common good.

C. S. Lewis, “Learning in Wartime,” “Most of all, perhaps, we need intimate knowledge of past... to remind us that the basic assumptions have been quite different in different periods... [and become] in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age.”

II. Goals:

- A. better understand the “spirit of the times” which has displaced the traditional Christian stance on sexuality and sexual ethics;
- B. cast a Christian vision of sexuality that is positive, comprehensive and compelling;
- C. outline a model of character development.

III. The First Sexual Revolution:

- A. Greco-Roman culture
- B. The revolutionary vision of the Gospel
 1. every person was created in the image of God
 2. the person as a whole being: body, mind, and spirit; bodies a good creation; a temple
 3. sexual intercourse had transcendent meaning in its creation of a one flesh union

IV. The Second (Counter) Revolution

- A. Causes: 1) vision of the universe as a mechanistic, empty, indifferent and infinite;
2) vision of the person as necessarily and properly autonomous and free
- B. Untethered echoes of sexuality as connected to the core of their being, and that in some way consent and authenticity are foundational moral guides.
- C. Slogans of the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s (Glynn Harrison¹):
“... freedom for the sake of authenticity and becoming your true self.... [W]hen you have expressed the inner realities truly, authentically, you work with the grain of *who you really are*. Expressing your inner self in this way, being who we really are, is about being fully human. It is your moral duty.”
“For centuries, traditional morality [i.e., Christianity] had us – all of us – in its suffocating grip.... We are breaking free from the shackles of bigotry and removing ourselves from under the dead hand of tradition. Our time has come. A time to be ourselves. A time to be who we truly are. A time to celebrate love where we find it. A time for the human spirit to flourish again.”

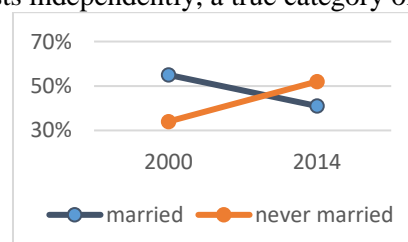
V. Identity: “I Gotta Be Me”

- A. The *Confessions* of St. Augustine of Hippo
Patricia Hampl: “He [Augustine] makes the central, paradoxical discovery of autobiography: memory is not in the service of the past; it is the future that commands its presence. Yet how bizarre the truncated modern notion of ‘seeking a self’ would seem to Augustine. Autobiography for him does not seek a self, nor even for its own salvation. For Augustine, the memory work of autobiography creates a self as the right instrument to seek meaning. The purpose is praise. If God, the source, the creator, is found, what else is there to do but praise?”²
- B. Kwame Appiah: “identities come, first, with labels and ideas about why and to whom they should be applied. Second, your identity shapes your thoughts about how you should behave; and, third, it affects the way people treat you.”³
Today, young people self-create or construct identities through the superficial examination of their inner sexual yearnings, appetites, and instincts. The result? Fragile identities. Presumption of *essentialism*: self constructed identity is a reflection of a reality that exists independently, a true category of nature.

VI. Testing the Results of the Sexual Revolution:

Are people:

- having more sex?
- happier in their intimate relationships?
- happier overall, and
- are children flourishing as a result?⁴



C.S. Lewis: “The Christian and the Materialist hold different beliefs about the universe. They can’t both be right. The one who is wrong will act in a way which simply doesn’t fit the real universe.”

Self-created Identities?

VII. “The Better Story” will be 1) grounded in the Gospel and a biblical worldview, 2) realistic, 3) provide a solid rationale for the constraints of the Christian sexual ethic, and 4) inspiring.

A. The Ultimate Reality: God as a Trinity; God is Love

“since God the Father has eternally loved his Son, it is entirely characteristic of him to turn and create others that he might also love them.... The father has always enjoyed loving *another*, and so the act of creation by which he creates others to love seems utterly appropriate for him. Thus Jesus Christ, God the Son, is the Logic, the blueprint for creation. He is the one eternally loved by the Father; creation is about the extension of that love outward so that it might be enjoyed by others. The fountain of love brimmed over.”⁵

B. Our Purpose and Calling: Humanity Made in God’s Image

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them ‘be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Gen 1:27-28).

C. The Image, Relationality and Sexuality:

D. Sexual Intercourse: A Life-Uniting Act (Gen. 2:23-25; Matt. 19: 4-6; Mark 10:1-12; 1 Cor. 6)

The Nature of the Marital Union

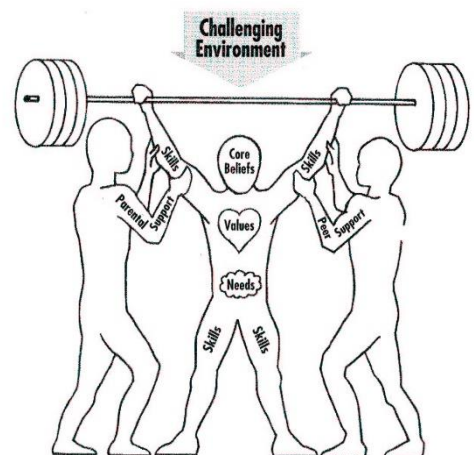
“One” can mean _____ :

E. Manifesting God’s Image Properly in Marriage and in Singleness

VIII. Putting It Together The Image, Identity and Sexual Ethics

IX. Sex Education That Is Christian: Formation of Character

- A. Needs
- B. Beliefs
- C. Values
- D. Skills
- E. Supports



¹ Glynn Harrison, *A Better Story: God, Sex & Human Flourishing* (London: InterVarsity Press [UK], 2017); quotes p. 15, 51.

² Patricia Hampl, “Introduction,” in St. Augustine, *The Confessions* (translated by Maria Boulding; Vintage Books 1998); p. xxiv.

³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2018); quote p. 12.

⁴ I follow and summarize here the empirical argument of Harrison, *A Better Story*.

⁵ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012); p. 47.