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Men wearing green or white vestments wear red or violet zucchettos while facing forward

Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, is seen in a file photo as he joins Pope Francis for a Mass at the end of the first session of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops on synodality in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Oct. 29, 2023. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)



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The Vatican's doctrine chief said the sometimes-graphic book on sexuality and spirituality that he published 25 years ago is "a book of my youth that I certainly

would not write now."

In comments to church news websites Crux and InfoVaticana Jan. 8, Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández addressed controversy surrounding his 1998 book, "La pasión mística: espiritualidad y sensualidad" ("Mystical Passion: Spirituality and Sensuality").

The 90-page book, circulated among journalists and posted online in early January, contained a chapter detailing the differences between male and female orgasms -- and how one can find God's love in either -- while another chapter was titled "God in the partner's orgasm."

The cardinal wrote that if mystics can obtain sensual experiences of the presence of God, then "he can also make himself present when two human beings love each other and reach orgasm; and that orgasm, lived in the presence of God, can also be a sublime act of worship of God."

In the book, Fernández also discussed ways of seeking and experiencing God's love, but he wrote that the "joyful experience of divine love" does not necessarily free one from "psychological weaknesses."

"It does not mean, for example, that a homosexual will necessarily cease being one," he continued.

Fernández told the two websites that he wrote the book after speaking with young couples "who wanted to better understand the spiritual meaning of their relationships," but after the book was released, he feared it "could be misinterpreted."

"I dismissed it shortly after it was published and never allowed its reprinting," he told InfoVaticana. He also said he later wrote "much more serious" books on mysticism, such as "The Healing Force of Mysticism" and "The Transforming Force of Mysticism."

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"I do not think it is a good thing it is being disseminated now," he added.

Fernández was named prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith in July 2023 and was made a cardinal in September.

Shortly after his nomination to prefect another book published by then-Fr. Fernández in 1995, "Heal Me with Your Mouth. The Art of Kissing," recounting the experiences of young people kissing, also began circulating online.

Neither book appears in the list of Cardinal Fernández's publications provided by the Vatican when he was named prefect of the dicastery in 2023.

In "Mystical Passion," the cardinal graphically described how each gender develops different attitudes toward sex based on their biological experience of intercourse.

He wrote that by being more receptive to affection in sex, women are "more open to the religious experience," and that when men only try to be dominant, they "cannot fully experience the richness of love."

A mystical experience of God, for a man or a woman, "is enjoyed in depending completely on the loving God, in 'letting yourself be loved' by him confidently," he said. "This is precisely the great spiritual step."