

Statement by Mercy Sister Margaret A. Farley

| Jun. 4, 2012

I have received the official Notification from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, published in Rome, June 4, 2012. By it, I understand that my book, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, has been judged to contain positions that are not in conformity with the hierarchical teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

I appreciate the efforts made by the Congregation and its consultants, over several years, to evaluate positions articulated in that book, and I do not dispute the judgment that some of the positions contained within it are not in accord with current official Catholic teaching. In the end, I can only clarify that the book was not intended to be an expression of current official Catholic teaching, nor was it aimed specifically against this teaching. It is of a different genre altogether.

Through its historical explorations of general and particular Christian sexual ethical principles, and its consideration of similar principles across many religious traditions, this book offers contemporary interpretations of traditional meanings for the human body, gender, and sexuality. It aims to take account of both traditional and present-day scientific, philosophical, theological, and biblical resources. It takes seriously, also, human experience in the realm of sexuality—experience that can be either affirmative or negative, constructive or destructive.

Ultimately, in this book I propose a framework for sexual ethics that uses criteria of justice in evaluating true and faithful sexual relationships and activities. In doing so, I offer not only ideals for human sexual relations, but also some absolute requirements.

Growing out of my work as a professor of Christian Ethics at Yale University Divinity School, this book was designed to help people, especially Christians but also others, to think through their questions about human sexuality. It suggests the importance of moving from what frequently functions as a taboo morality to a morality and sexual ethics based on the discernment of what counts as wise, truthful, and recognizably just loves.

Although my responses to some particular sexual ethical questions do depart from some traditional Christian responses, I have tried to show that they nonetheless reflect a deep coherence with the central aims and insights of these theological and moral traditions. Whether through interpretation of biblical texts, or through an attempt to understand “concrete reality” (an approach at the heart of “natural law?”), the fact that Christians (and others) have achieved new knowledge and deeper understanding of human embodiment and sexuality seems to require that we at least examine the possibility of development in sexual ethics. This is what my book, *Just Love*, is about.

Again, I appreciate the work that the members of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith have done. I only regret that in reporting my positions on select “Specific Problems” in sexual ethics, the Notification does not also consider my arguments for these positions. Nor does it render my positions in terms of the complex theoretical and practical contexts to which they are a response. Hence, I fear the Notification—while clear in its conclusions—misrepresents (perhaps unwittingly) the aims of my work and the nature of it as a proposal that

might be in service of, not against, the church and its faithful people.

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