

# Just Good Sex for Everyone: Sexuality as a Theopolitical Value and Universal Human Right

*Savannah Moix*

Philosophy

*Faculty advisor: Clayton Crockett*

Good sex is not all about personal pleasure, procreation, and procuring a unitary bond between partners, contrary to longstanding doctrines and inflated cultural norms that have consistently dictated how humans should go about expressing sexuality. According to feminist theologians Grace Jantzen and Mary Hunt, in their respective essays, “Good Sex Beyond Private Pleasure” and “Just Good Sex: Feminist Catholicism and Human Rights,” a need for both global awareness and social change is integral to the way in which sexuality is conducted and perceived throughout the world. This “theopolitical” focus, to quote Hunt, entails “concern for meaning and value that incorporates religious insight and claims about the divine, as well a concrete praxis for social change” (Hunt 158).

Western feminists, specifically, must adopt a theopolitical sense of religion, politics, and sexuality so as to fulfill more than private, compulsory pleasures. By creating a new interreligious discourse about the universal connection of global human rights to sexual expression, feminists, consumers, and adherents to justice can “remember how we gained the right to our intimate pleasures” and,

---

thus create new public policy that is conducive to women (Jantzen 14). That is, Jantzen and Hunt seek to establish a feminism that is wider in its scope, unlike the narrow scope of shallow Western feminism, as well as imaginatively constructed, thus in line with the values of love and justice that so many religions (Christianity especially) claim to adhere to and practice.

Jantzen states that British colonialism and its hegemonic aspirations set a precedent of what constituted as good (Christianized) sex (and adversely, bad sex) by means of “projecting the colonized people as the perverse Other” and imposing these sexual definitions upon the peoples of African, Asian, and American countries (Jantzen 9). The inhabitants of these non-European countries were popularly depicted as sexually insatiable, promiscuous, and nonmonogamous among European opinion. Consequently, non-Europeans were theorized and recognized to be religiously benighted. Good sex consisted of female chastity, monogamy, and the goal of motherhood – all indicative of societal, religious, and human progress (Jantzen 8). The idea of attaining “progress of civilization” among the British and European publics served as a twofold justification: (1) the brutality of colonization (including the slave trades) and (2) European practices and prohibitions of sexual conduct. As a result of these justifications and indoctrinations concocted by Europeans in power, Western notions of sexuality, and consequently, feminism, are highly idealized and narrow in scope.

Western feminism has made great efforts in celebrating sexual pleasure, freedom, and control. Each wave has brought along with it a liberatory effort to emerge from patriarchal institutions such as compulsory motherhood and heterosexism; what it has not done is

---

extend the discourse of sexuality to the public sphere, meaning the global sphere of public policy (Jantzen 10). Regarding sexuality as merely a private matter that is deeply centralized in personal pleasure does not combat the economic and political blockades that impede women (and feminists) from fully realizing the sexual exploitations that are imposed upon the poor of Western societies, as well as the poor women and children of lesser-developed countries. Jantzen offers the example of female prostitution in both Western and non-Western countries to demonstrate sexual injustices justified by a fixated focus on and goal for compulsory pleasure:

If good sex is constructed simply as pleasurable sex, then what could be objectionable about sexual adventure or tourism, at least in situations where women (and men) voluntarily offer themselves for the sexual pleasure of wealthy Westerners? . . . Feminists have, of course, been aware of the evils of sex tourism, but again there is less awareness of how the changing ideals of good sex play into the hands of those who would promote or participate in these practices. (Jantzen 12)

The lack of public attention and change in the abuses and consequences of prostitution lead to even more concerns. How “voluntary” is the act of selling oneself and what motivations or insurmountable challenges gives prostitution an ounce of beneficial credence? Additionally, questions concerning child prostitution and cases of AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases among prostitutes and their clientele are not addressed by the ironically restrictive role of self-pleasure in the definition of good sex (Jantzen 12). A push for new public policy and sexual discussion will spread these concerns and further inspire the feminist cause to fight for the rights and desires of all women, everywhere.

---

Hunt, a Catholic theologian, voices Jantzen's call for a renewed attention to global issues of sexual exploitation by means of challenging women of faith (Catholicism, in the context of her article) to "bring their religious wisdom to bear on sexuality" (Part III 126). To do this, one must critically analyze and try to reconstruct Catholic policies that justify government-enforced laws that are unjust to women and their sexual expression. Abandoning the Catholic faith and basic Christian teachings will not fix anything; this act would be demonstrative of a concern for the singular, a concern for one's private pleasure and state of being. Overall, Hunt calls for "just good sex" to be a basic human right for all (Hunt 171). She defines just good sex as "sex that is safe, pleasurable, and community building, and conducive of justice" (Hunt 158). Despite Catholicism's doctrinal and dogmatic reputation for being anti-woman and anti-feminism, two of the basic deeds to be fulfilled within the religion, and outside of it, are acts of love and justice – two worthy attributes to possess and enact against oppressive policies and attitudes. However, the reputation, backed by repressive Vatican influence, is more-often-than-not recognized to a much greater extent than the faith's humanitarian goals. Thus, an imaginative sphere and context must be created within both Catholicism and feminism so as to strategically deconstruct the infallibility of patriarchal theology.

The current inhospitable context of oppression has the possibility to become a place in which sexual pleasure would include the following pleasures in addition to erotic fulfillment and physical satisfaction: ". . . knowing that children are fed, . . . creating meaningful work, . . . providing healthcare to all, . . . living in a nuclear-free world, . . . ending violence, . . . stopping racism" (Hunt 172). Hunt includes these globally-minded pleasures in her definition

---

of just good sex so as to not exclude other forms of pleasure from human and female sexuality – a consideration Jantzen would surely appreciate. This imaginative construction of a theopolitical feminism and faith will be just, seriously considered, globally and socially conscious, and “*on women’s terms*” (Hunt 161). In an effort to depict the need for worldwide social change among Catholic policies, Hunt uses the example of women’s inaccessibility to certain contraceptives – an injustice in terms of a woman’s choice, health, and overall well being:

. . . the ban on so-called artificial contraceptives (*Humanae Vitae*) has been seen as a law against the use of certain effective, economical, and, in some places, still unavailable forms of birth control. This results in dangerous conditions for many women. Its equally pernicious impact is a denial of moral agency to women of child-bearing age, in this case women’s ability to make choices about their procreative possibilities. (Hunt 160)

Compulsory motherhood not only hinders women’s health and procreative control; it also excludes other forms of pleasure (children are fed, healthcare is provided, etc.), thus hindering a Catholic woman’s ability and desire to fulfill her obligations of love and kindness through theopolitically-inspired means. Additionally, the ability to partake in a public interreligious discourse for social change is thwarted because of close-minded doctrinal repression. A critically imaginative construction is necessary in order to remain a faithful Catholic (or an adherent to any faith, for that matter) and attain free sexual expression.

---

Religion can pose both an obstacle and an opportunity for good sex. The trick is in actualizing women's pleasures rather than merely identifying their possibilities within religious texts and opinions (Hunt 172). Jantzen and Hunt urge feminists and participants of religion to become aware, mindful of the world, critically deconstructive, loving, and imaginative – all of these voices being necessary in the global conversation regarding sexuality. Just good sex will occur when women have the basic human right to attribute their own interpretations to their own lived-experiences and enjoy sexual pleasure without fearing for another's risk of subjugation.

### **Works Cited**

- Hunt, Mary E. "Just Good Sex: Feminist Catholicism and Human Rights." *Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives from the World's Religions*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2001, pp. 158-73.
- Jantzen, Grace M. "Good Sex: Beyond Private Pleasure." *Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives from the World's Religions*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2001, pp. 3-14.
- "Part III: Reconstruction of Sexualities." *Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives from the World's Religions*. Ed. Patricia Beattie Jung, Mary E. Hunt, and Radhika Balakrishnan. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2001, pp. 125-26.