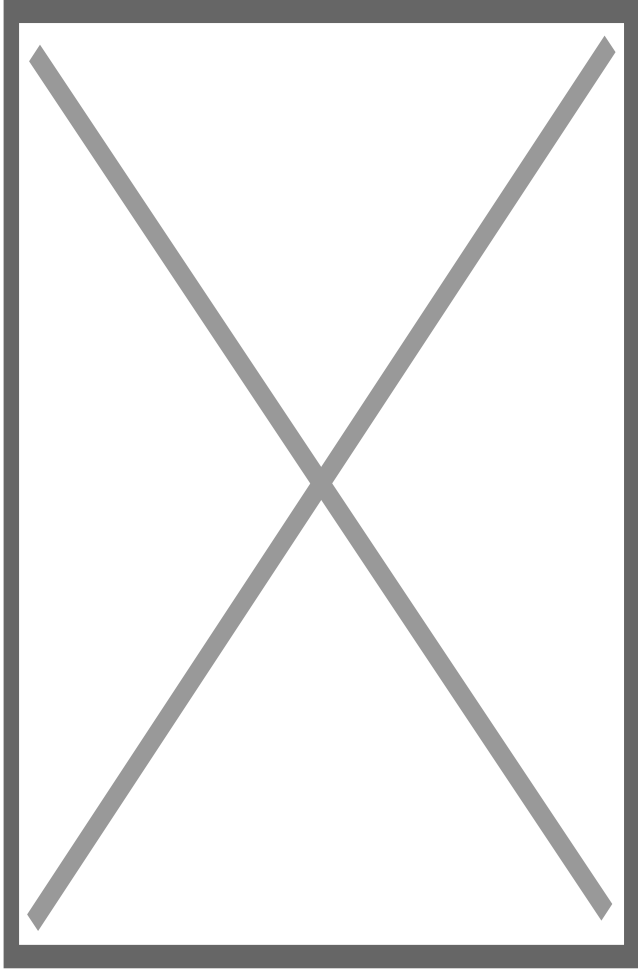


Another PR gift from the CDF

By [Amy Frykholm](#)

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In Review



Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics

Margaret A. Farley
Continuum

Margaret Farley's *Just Love: A Framework for a Christian Sexual Ethics* is [at #16](#) on the current Amazon sales list. When is the last time a sane, scholarly, carefully argued and theologically rich book of sexual ethics ranked that high?

I don't know, but I can't imagine it was recent. (Four out of the top five on the Amazon list are versions of *Fifty Shades of Gray*. If only those readers would open up Farley!) To make matters even stranger, the book is six years old and used mostly in seminaries and at religious institutions.

The flurry of interest was provoked by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. On Monday, [the Vatican body released a document](#) criticizing the book, barring Catholic institutions from using it and accusing Farley of “confusing the faithful.” The CDF objects specifically to three areas of argument: Farley’s treatment of masturbation, divorce and homosexuality.

The CDF just handed Farley and her publisher, Continuum, an opportunity to bring a fairly obscure set of ideas to a wider audience. By now, it’s a predictable result. As Jamie Manson [points out](#), the same thing happened when the CDF censured Roger Haight’s [*Jesus Symbol of God*](#) and Elizabeth Johnson’s [*Quest for the Living God*](#). “Roman Catholic bishops,” Manson notes, “have a knack for garnering public interest in some of the most groundbreaking theological and ethical texts being written today.”

What sets Farley’s work apart is her acknowledgement that we are in an era when old sexual norms and certainties have given way to a new fluidity. She specifically engages the biological sciences as well as theological and philosophical resources. This is, of course, terrifying to those who had a lot to gain from the old system.

But Farley does not see it that way: she sees an opportunity to think deeply about the foundations of new understandings. At the heart of this, she sees the potential for a flourishing of justice. The idea of justice flourishing in our most intimate human relationships is radical, prophetic and beautiful—perhaps just in the way that the prophets of the Hebrew Bible looked carefully at their own historical moments and then opened on them a window to the kingdom of God.