



Volume 61 | Issue 2

Article 9

12-1-2018

Pearcey's "Love thy body: Answering hard questions about life and sexuality" (critical book review)

Joseph Baumstarck Jr.
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

The Christian Librarian is the official publication of the Association of Christian Librarians (ACL). To learn more about ACL and its products and services please visit [//www.acl.org/](http://www.acl.org/)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Baumstarck, Joseph Jr. (2018) "Pearcey's "Love thy body: Answering hard questions about life and sexuality" (critical book review)," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 61 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl/vol61/iss2/9>

This Critical Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *The Christian Librarian* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

Critical Reviews



Pearcey, Nancy R. (2018). *Love thy body: Answering hard questions about life and sexuality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. 335 pp. \$22.99. ISBN 9780801075728

In *Love Thy Body*, Nancy Pearcey joins a raucous discussion and adds one more book to an already crowded field. The important question is whether she adds anything new to the discussion. The answer is an unqualified yes! Many others have written about abortion, euthanasia, gender, marriage, and sexuality. In contrast to most of these other books Pearcey takes a holistic view.

Her main thesis is that all these issues are related and that most people address these issues from one of two viewpoints. Either people accept a two-story view of these issues which separates the individual into a material body and a non-material mind/spirit/psychic portion or people accept a unified view of person.

In the first view, Pearcey argues that one of the two parts, or stories as she refers to them, is given ascendancy. Since the Enlightenment the material world initially became prominent, and recently has been accepted as the only “real” entity. Pearcey argues that instead of this view resulting in a high regard for the body under the resulting Personhood Theory exactly the opposite has happened. Since the material world lends itself well to the scientific method extensive studies and manipulations of the material world have occurred. Since the body is matter and is accessible to the scientific method it too has been extensively studied and manipulated. Since the second story of non-material mind/spirit/soul is not readily accessible to scientific study it has been discarded as either non-existent or immaterial. Pearcey argues that even Christians have accepted this two-story view. Although Christians generally believe that the spirit or soul is a real entity it cannot be studied and manipulated in the same ways the body can be. Here Pearcey misses an opportunity to make her case more convincingly by not addressing the tremendous advances made in physical medicine over the last few centuries versus the little progress that has been made in actually treating mental illness over the same period of time. Two-story Christians have tacitly accepted a Platonic and dualistic version of personhood which allows manipulation of the first-story body with no effect on the second-story spirit or soul. In this view the early church emphasis, which has extended into the modern church through the Enlightenment, on the holiness of spirit and the degraded nature of body has meant that anything done to the body does not affect the spirit. Thus, concepts of personhood which are a creation of the mind/

spirit are independent of the material body. This allows two-story people to see unborn babies as just material lumps of tissue, male and female bodies as malleable to medical manipulation making gender fluid, sexuality as simply a physical act with no consequences for the spirit, and marriage as just a legal entity.

In contrast, those accepting the holistic view of personhood, which Pearcey equates with Scriptural Christianity, see the body/mind/spirit as an integrated whole. Whatever happens to the body also effects the mind/spirit and has eternal consequences. In the introduction Pearcey argues that this was the view accepted by many Christians until the dualistic philosophies espoused by some of the church fathers influenced Enlightenment thinkers to more radically separate these originally unified aspects of person into their respective stories. Pearcey argues that those accepting the unified view of personhood see God's creation as a special event for humans in which God used His breath to animate matter. This act made the body a creation of God and something which is good. This view argues that separation between these aspects of person is not possible and that the two-story model has been used to negate the goodness of God's unified creation – humanity.

Pearcey further points out that these views are not just philosophical differences which have little impact on the world we live in, but that these philosophies have a tremendous impact. Values are changed based on which of these views an individual accepts. At an even more significant level the view accepted by those in society with the power to impose their wills effects everyone. Pearcey points out that in *Roe v. Wade* and in the *Obergefell* decision the United States Supreme Court sided with the two-story model and forced this model onto everyone. Despite honest religious objections to the myriad issues which are affected by these two decisions all citizens are forced to accommodate their beliefs to these legally binding decisions. She argues that contrary to popular belief the unified Christian approach is actually the view which affirms human rights and dignity while the two-story view destroys them. This destruction of human rights and dignity results in a regression toward an ancient non-Christian world in which the exposure of children – usually girls, a lack of medical care for the poor and other undesirables, and an overall lack of respect for persons becomes the new norm.

A further disintegration occurs in the abortion debate. Although almost everyone on both sides of the issue agrees today that the unborn baby is human in every sense of the word, this is not enough under a two-story view of personhood to qualify for any rights. In a two-story view, status as a human does not equate to any protection at all. Personhood is required for protection. Pearcey correctly points out that although the humanity of the unborn child from conception is clearly not in doubt and can be verified using the scientific method there is no comparable way to delineate personhood. This inability to clearly delineate personhood results in

arbitrary decisions which no one agrees on and effects not only unborn children, but disabled people, physically ill and injured persons, the elderly, those with mental illness, and on a slippery slope even those seen as inconvenient or too expensive for society. Any attempt to draw a line at where personhood, and thus legal protection, is acquired follows an arbitrary decision making process that no one is happy with and that changes constantly.

Pearcey makes her points well in seven chapters and an introduction. The introduction and chapter one discuss her concept of a two-story view of personhood and the history of its adaptation. Chapters two and three discuss the issues of abortion, euthanasia, and the care of those unable to take care of themselves. Chapter four discusses sexual morality followed by chapters five and six which discuss same-sex relationships and the transgender realm. Pearcey uses the final chapter to demonstrate how decisions made in the first six chapters affect society as a whole and discusses the logical consequences of maintaining a two-story view of personhood. The end notes provide a good engagement with the adequate primary, secondary, and Scriptural resources Pearcey utilized, but lack some in their engagement with more academic ethical, philosophical, and religious texts. A bibliography would have been a useful addition for those wishing to engage this subject in more depth. A thirteen-page study guide included at the end of the text is too superficial for academic work, too academic for general audiences, lacks interesting questions, and provides little value.

This work is geared toward a general audience and would be appropriate for church groups, general discussion groups, public library book clubs, and students from high school through undergraduate level. The general audiences this book is geared toward limits significantly the engagement with academic sources that would make Pearcey's arguments more convincing, make the book appropriate for graduate level students, and engage those who make decisions in society in opposition to Pearcey's assertions. On the positive side this book is unique in the holistic way in which it engages these pertinent cultural issues and demonstrates their interrelatedness. Pearcey does an adequate job of grounding her unified view of personhood in Scripture. Negatively it offers little in the way of suggestions for those interested in engaging in societal change which would lead to the results she advocates. Other than a general sense that evangelical work toward Christianizing society should occur little is provided that charts a path by which any of these changes can be implemented.

Pearcey is currently a professor of apologetics at Houston Baptist University where she is also a scholar in residence. She is the author of several books addressing science and religion, living a Christian life in society, and other ethical issues. She writes as a popular author for several widely-circulated publications and is a noted evangelical Protestant speaker. Pearcey has a BA from Iowa State University, a MA in Biblical

Studies from Covenant Theological Seminary, and has completed additional non-degree study at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Canada. Although her credentials as an academic are limited as a secular scholar her frequent meaningful engagement with the secular academic world negates some of this liability. Her extensive involvement with evangelical Protestant circles makes her a valid Christian voice in these debates. Although Pearcey is a noted Intelligent Design proponent this voice is muted in *Love Thy Body*.

Reviewer

Joseph Baumstarck, Jr., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary