

Book examines Christian intimacy

A Sense of Sexuality: Christian Love and Intimacy, by Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead; Image, Doubleday (New York, 1990); 311 pages; \$9.95.

By David and Julianne Palma
Guest contributors

If you believe Madison Avenue, sex without commitment is the only way to live. If you turn to Christian teachings on sexuality, you are caught between the historical view of sex as evil and the modern view which exalts sexuality almost to mysticism.

The Whiteheads try to show us that all three views distort the reality of human sexuality. Written with great sensitivity and wisdom, their book voices what God's people have long known in their hearts: sexuality is a gift from God.

The authors state that in writing their book they are answering a call "to help heal Christian prejudices against the body." (p. 19). They seem well aware of the enormity of their task, but approach it with honesty and gentleness. Because of the breadth of their subject, many sections are somewhat sketchy, but their style is very readable.

They do excellent work in revealing

the historical and philosophical roots of the hierarchical church's attitude toward sexuality. While they do remind the reader that viewing the body as evil is a frankly heretical position, they do not attack the traditional church's position.

In examining St. Augustine's influence, for example, they cite his own admission that he had an addictive disorder. And they bemoan the fact that his became the virtually uncontested voice on the subject of sexuality for 1,600 years.

"For centuries the Church's official teaching portrayed marriage as 'a remedy for concupiscence.' This understanding crafted by Augustine at the end of the fourth century, argues that marriage exists as a haven for the lustful ... the reformulation of Church law in the 1970s officially dropped this demeaning definition of marriage." (p. 16)

Much of the Whiteheads' effort is directed toward redefining other terms relating to sexuality. They struggle with a vocabulary burdened with negative connotations. Some of their new analogies and images may be startling, or even disturbing, to some readers. Their intent is not to shock, but to add clarity to the discus-

sion.

Parts I and IV, "The Possibilities" and "The Hope" respectively, emphasize the Whiteheads' overall optimism. The style here gets a little rhapsodic and visionary, and it is in these sections where the most theology is covered.

The middle sections, "Pleasure and Passion" and "The Arenas of Intimacy," are the best part of the book. The style is more direct and the material more concrete. Here the authors deal beautifully with some sensitive subjects.

Readers expecting definitive answers or resolutions of age-long tensions will be disappointed, however. The Whiteheads do not assume the role of authorities, merely of voices speaking from the lived experience of "the body Christian."

They openly admit the limitations to their knowledge in the areas of celibacy, and living single. For these sections they rely on the stories and experiences of friends. Despite their honesty about their limitations, the section "The Gay and Lesbian Experience" is much too brief.

Each chapter ends with reflective exercises and an extensive list of additional resources. The range of this bibliography is very wide, including secular as well as religious voices, both male and female, celibate, single and married.

This book is relevant to all people who are in relationship, be it friendship, employment, marriage, because as the Whiteheads show us, we are created as sexual beings. Their stated objective is "to draw out and make public the sense of the faithful about Christians and their sexuality." They are eminently successful in achieving this objective.

Deacon David Palma serves as pastoral associate at St. Gregory/St. Anne's Church. Julianne teaches English at Our Lady of Mercy High School in Brighton.

Scholarships presented

PENFIELD — Six young women were presented with scholarships at the Dante Ball on Saturday, Sept. 19, at Midvale Country Club, 2387 Baird Road.

This annual event is sponsored by the the Italian Women's Club of Rochester. The Dante Ball has offered scholarships since 1923.

This year's five recipients are Christina Falbo and Michele F. Lipani, both of Greece; Lisa McCombs of Rochester, Sara Beth Trombino of Lyons, and Suzanne DeMarco of Lockport. A special one-time Mary Proia Scholarship went to Bonita J. VanCampen of Fairport.

Contest deadline nears

ROCHESTER — Que Pasa? Rochester is sponsoring a Spanish language poetry contest focusing on the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' landing.

The contest will run through Oct. 5.

For details, watch Que Pasa? Rochester on Friday, Oct. 2, at 6 p.m. on WXXI-TV (Channel 21, cable channel 4).

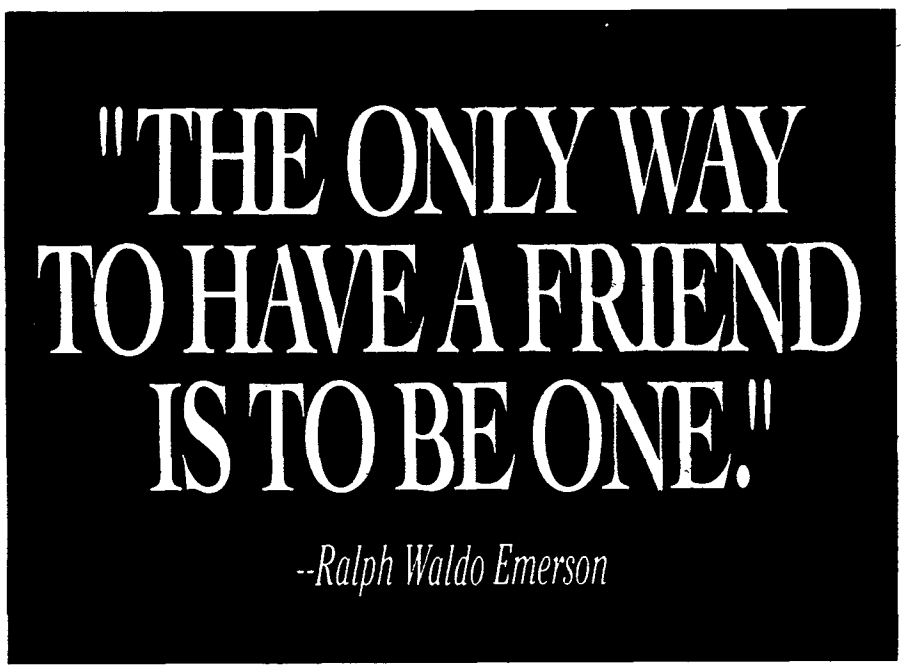
Annual K-9 Walk set

ROCHESTER — The third annual K-9 Walk for Jerry's Kids is set for Saturday, Sept. 26, at Seneca Park.

Teams will raise money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association by taking a three-mile walk around the park, beginning at 9 a.m.

Walkers and their dogs can enter the Pedigree Pentathlon, an Olympic-style, canine obstacle course competition.

Call 716/424-6560.



-Ralph Waldo Emerson

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