

A Moral Center

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There is a mistake, a misperception, a failed understanding that has hurt our society and country deeply. Our politics, our media, and our culture are too often divided into two separate camps, neither of which trust each other. In one camp are those who believe society's woes stem from irresponsible policies and in the other are those who believe that they come from irresponsible behavior. One focuses on the personal, the other on the societal.

In the real world, people in both camps know that there is truth in the other side. When there is an opportunity to have real conversation and not just a shouting match, you will hear just that being said. In public debate however, each side gets worried that it will look like the other side has "won" and they push out further to either extreme.

There does exist however, what I call a "moral center." It is in this radical center that we find common ground and indeed, what most of us really believe. That belief recognizes that healthy communities, societies and countries are based in "responsible behavior, responsible policies," not just one or the other.

No place is this tension more real and the need for a radical center more clear than when it comes to sex. Sex has become a commodity. A product to be chopped up, doled out, mass produced and sold. As I write, a 22 year-old young woman has offered up her

virginity in an online auction run through a Nevada brothel. The bids have now hit 3.7 million dollars. This of course, is small change compared to the money major TV networks now make selling sex during primetime.

There is a strong cultural force that encourages us to look at everything as a commodity- including our relationships, our bodies, and our values. And everyone is for sale. The real enemy here isn't sex, but when we turn all values into market values, gutting the world of genuine love, caring, compassion, connection, and commitment for what will sell on a TV show or Ebay.

My faith teaches that sex has meaning, it has value. Making the choice to engage or not engage in sexual activities has consequences. Those consequences are personal and societal. But my faith also teaches that it is not sex that is the problem, it is failing to value sex that is the problem.

“Sexual freedom” is never free. It is always paid for.

*Jim Wallis is a bestselling author, public theologian, speaker, preacher, and international commentator on religion and public life, faith, and politics. His latest book is *The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith & Politics in a Post-Religious Right America* (HarperOne, 2008). His previous book, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (Harper Collins, 2005), was on *The New York Times* bestseller list for four months. He is President and Chief Executive Officer of *Sojourners*, where he is editor-in-chief of *Sojourners* magazine and his columns appear in major newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and both *Time* and *Newsweek* online.*