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# Religious Celibacy, Coerced Asexuality, and Catholic Nunhood: A Comparative Study of *The Runner Stumbles* and *Agnes of God*

**Abstract.** The representations of Catholic nuns in American theatre often rely on familiar tropes, portraying them either as devout, selfless caregivers or as harsh, ruler-wielding nun teachers. However, the portrayal of sexually repressed nuns on stage, as well as the scholarly analyses of sexual repression embedded within these characters, remains significantly underexplored. The present study seeks to address this gap by critically examining these portrayals and their broader implications within the context of religious and psychological narratives. The study investigates the effects of religious celibacy and coerced asexuality among Catholic nuns as depicted in Milan Stitt's *The Runner Stumbles* (1976) and John Pielmeier's *Agnes of God* (1982). This study integrates Karen Horney's psychoanalytical framework with Richard Sipe's insights on religious celibacy to explore the complexities of human sexuality. It emphasises the adverse effects of enforced sexual abstinence on individual sexual identity, as portrayed in the selected plays. The study also examines the portrayals of sanctuary molestation, the resulting trauma, and the deliberate coping strategies employed by Catholic nuns in the plays as they strive to recover from the trauma of victimization.

**Keywords:** Catholic nunhood, religious celibacy, sanctuary molestation, coerced sexuality, sexual repression, American theatre