

Chapter II
THEOLOGICAL RESOURCES FOR RESPONSIBLE
SEXUAL RELATING FROM THE THOUGHT
OF REINHOLD NIEBUHR

Introduction

This chapter will develop some insights and understandings which will be useful to Christians concerned about relating sexually in a free and responsible way. These thoughts hopefully will be helpful to those who also wish to enable younger persons to discover and deal with their own sexuality in a free and responsible way.

The starting point of this effort is not sexuality as such, but human existence in general. Human sexuality is human, involved in all of what it means to be human. It is not an evil to be denied or avoided, nor is it autonomous, a law of its own. Neither is it a "magic" ingredient, cementing relationships like Elmer's Glue-All, or Crazy Glue. This chapter will describe an interpretation of human existence which helps give a realistic place to sexuality in human life. The insights of one theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, will be used and applied to the problems of relating to persons in a sexual way.

Niebuhr never addressed himself specifically to the problem of sex but gave it passing mention in several places

in his masterpiece, The Nature and Destiny of Man.¹ His specific thoughts are usually more bound by the "natural fact of sex differentiation"² and cultural inertia, than by the possibilities enabled by the freedom of the human spirit. Yet Niebuhr's profound understanding of human existence in general can lead to an equally profound understanding of the place of sexuality in human life.

Reinhold Niebuhr's ethic as it is principally laid out in The Nature and Destiny of Man is based on two presuppositions about the nature of human life: The first is that the human spirit is capable of transcending itself to perceive both its freedom in that self-transcendence and its finitude in its contingent, individual life.³ The second is that human life is a unity--of "body and soul,"⁴ of "God-likeness and creatureliness."⁵

To present the first in quick summary, human self-transcendence is able to perceive seemingly unlimited possibilities for the self, as well as to stand outside of its life and perceive patterns of meaning. This capacity manifests itself, in part, in the search for ever better ways to interpret its history. The self also realizes its contingent, particular, limited existence, especially in

¹Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (1941; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964).

²Ibid., I, 282.

³Ibid., I, 55, 1-3.

⁴Ibid., I, 136.

⁵Ibid., I, 150.

contemplating death. This two-fold perception results in a profound anxiety. The attempts to deny, avoid, protect, and escape from the self's finitude lead it to assert itself in pride (of power, knowledge, and virtue), or sensuality (drunkenness, "luxurious and extravagant living,"⁶ or excesses of sexual expression).

The Human Self as a Unity

To assert the unity of the self in its finite particularity, natural impulses and urges, rationality, spirit and soul, is to make an important statement about human limitations and freedom.

On the one hand, it is to say that the "animal impulses" in human life are no longer "pure." In fact, no biological fact, no animal impulse remains the same when it is incorporated into the human psyche.⁷ The special, unique characteristic of human existence is the ability of the self "to transcend all the natural, social and rational coherences through which it is provisionally defined and expressed."⁸ This capacity is the basis of the radical freedom of the self.⁹ The self is free of all the

⁶Ibid., I, 234.

⁷Ibid., I, 40.

⁸Gordon Harland, The Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 63.

⁹Ibid., p. 17.

"structures and coherences of the world"¹⁰ including even all of its own functions with which it retains an intimate relation.¹¹ The self even stands above reason, able to view it from its stance beyond reason.¹² Our creativity is due to the fact that we are not bound by any social, natural, communal, or rational cohesion, and can stand outside and beyond them.¹³

On the other hand, to say that human existence is a unity is to set in tension with this radical freedom, human finitude: life is insecure and full of natural contingency, ignorance, and limitation.¹⁴ Bodies have natural functions which malfunction or are imperfect and at best, limit life. The self is physically and emotionally vulnerable. The mind has limits of understanding. The human being is a "frail, limited creature, subject to every natural and historical contingency."¹⁵

¹⁰Harland, p. 67, citing Charles W. Kegley and Robert Bretall (eds.) Reinhold Niebuhr (Library of Living Theology, 2; New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 17.

¹¹Harland, p. 88.

¹²Reinhold Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 17.

¹³Harland, p. 68, citing Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian Realism and Political Problems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 6.

¹⁴Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 178-79.

¹⁵Harland, p. 77.

One example of the way this unity of freedom and finitude is expressed is in the most "Platonic" of relationships, where the relating is on an "intellectual" level. But even this highly "spiritual" relationship must take place via the limited and contingent means of language, meaning, writing, understanding. And if meanings and understanding meet, this miracle is due less to the power of rationality than to the power of the self to transcend itself. In fact, Niebuhr's analysis convincingly shows that reason is the servant of self-interest also. Reason, imagination, creativity--all are involved in self-transcendence, but all are transcended by this capacity. It is the ability, in part, to "empathize," to "walk in another's shoes."

Another implication of this unity of the self is that the human sex impulse is not "purely animal." It is no longer bound by the natural necessity to serve only as a procreational vehicle, but is freed by its association with the free human spirit. The force of the sexual impulse

reaches up into the highest pinnacles of human spirituality; and the insecurity of man in the heights of his freedom reaches down to the sex impulse as an instrument of compensation and as an avenue of escape.¹⁶

Anxiety

The position of human existence between radical

¹⁶Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 236.

freedom and contingency is hardly a secure position. The human is

a child of nature, subject to its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses, and confined within the brevity of the years. . . .¹⁷

Thus human life is "perilously insecure," existing at the junction of nature and transcendence over nature, of necessity and freedom. While indeterminately free in spirit, the self does not possess within itself the basis of its own life. The self seeks to overcome this insecurity by trampling on other life, destroying "the harmony of creation," the relatedness of life to life.¹⁸

Human life exists in the paradoxical situation of finiteness and freedom, limited and limitless, free and bound. The human self responds with anxiety.¹⁹ We as persons are anxious to "realize the indeterminate possibilities" of freedom and at the same time anxious to overcome or hide the contingencies of a creaturely existence.²⁰ We are anxious because our life is limited and dependent and yet not so limited that we do not realize this limitedness. We are also anxious because we do not know the limits to our possibilities.²¹

¹⁷Ibid., I, 3.

¹⁸Harland, p. 77.

¹⁹Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 182.

²⁰Harland, p. 78.

²¹Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 183.

Niebuhr calls this inclination, this desire to seek security at the expense of other life or to hide contingency, sin.²² This inclination is universal and a contradiction to essential human nature.²³ The contradictory aspect is related to the source of the norm agape, lying as it does in essential human nature.²⁴ This universal, inevitable inclination (sin) should be distinguished from the specific actions or manifestations (sins) which arise from this first or primary sin.

Sin as Pride and Sensuality

The human response to anxiety is a combination of both pride and sensuality. As Niebuhr puts it,

Man falls into pride, when he seeks to raise his contingent existence to unconditioned significance; he falls into sensuality, when he seeks to escape from his unlimited possibilities of freedom, from the perils and responsibilities of self-determination, by immersing himself into a "mutable good," by losing himself in some natural vitality.²⁵

Pride can also be identified as the "destruction of life's harmony by the self's attempt to center life around

²²Niebuhr, Ibid., I, 182.

²³Harland, p. 79, citing Reinhold Niebuhr, Discerning the Signs of the Times (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 38; also Niebuhr, Self, p. 18; Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 241ff.

²⁴This will be developed later in this chapter.

²⁵Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 186.

itself." Sensuality is the "destruction of harmony within the self" by too heavily identifying with and devoting oneself to impulses within the self which are due only partial concern.²⁶ Thus sin is seen to be both alienation and disharmony--within the self and between the self and others.

Both pride and sensuality result from the human attempt to escape from the ambiguity of being both finite and free. At first glance the two responses may seem to be alternatives. Yet in one sense sensuality is an extension of pride. Here sensuality is "an extension of self-love to the point where it defeats its own ends."²⁷ Pride and sensuality are alike in that they both are centered on oneself, one's own existence. Yet in one, the self seeks to hide finiteness and in the other, the self seeks to hide freedom.²⁸

Pride and sensuality can indeed coincide and become entangled in each other. For example, pride can be expressed as a grasp for power and the guarantee of security for oneself. But power can be a "sense" experience akin to the thrill of flying, racing, or mountain-climbing, and so on.

Sensuality is, in a general sense, the inordinate love for all creaturely and mutable values which results

²⁶Ibid., I, 228. ²⁷Ibid., I, 240.

²⁸Ibid., I, 179.

from the primal love of self, rather than love of God."²⁹
 Not that "creature comforts" are evil in and of themselves,
 but if they are too valued and arise from too great a love
 for oneself, they must then be confronted as sensuality.

Sensuality is, in another way, one more attempt
 (however unsuccessful) to "solve the problem of finiteness
 and freedom" by hiding human freedom and becoming lost in
 one or more of the "vitalities" or penultimate values of the
 world. That is why sensuality is "never the mere expression
 of natural impulse" in human life--animal instincts never
 have this dimension of "hidden agenda" or ulterior motive
 behind them.³⁰

"Sensuality" as Niebuhr uses the term, is techni-
 cally correct³¹ though, of course, he expands the meaning.
 Yet lately the word has begun to take on more positive mean-
 ings as bodily pleasure and sex have become more explicitly
 approved for public discussion. Therefore I would like to
 distinguish this technical usage from the more desirable
 sensitivity to the senses. This sensitivity, instead of

²⁹Ibid., I, 232.

³⁰Ibid., I, 179.

³¹Cf. Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Ed. (Cleveland: World, 1958) and Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, 2d Ed. Unabridged (Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1961). Other terms were considered for this paper, such as voluptuousness, carnality, but seemed not to carry the same connotation of devotion to the body and senses. Despair and sense idolatry were both partly accurate and in opposite senses, but not inclusive enough to capture Niebuhr's full meaning.

being associated with the destruction of harmony, is rather more related to the restoration of harmony: the maintaining of a balance of nature, mind, spirit, not the denial of the body. One can be sensitive to sense experience, to one's sexual needs, and not raise them to a position of idolatry, or lose one's freedom and transcendence. To live is to exist in the position of tempting idolatries at every turn: the denial of sexual need, the loss of oneself in its gratification, the idolizing even of balance!

Sensuality is of special interest in reflection about sexuality. Sex may be the "most obvious occasion" for the expression of sensuality but sex is not in any sense "essentially sinful."³² But once the "original harmony" of nature is broken by human self-concern, the sexual impulse is a "particularly effective" means for "both the assertion of the self and the flight from the self."³³

In sex, sensuality is seen to be "another and final form of self-love." It is an effort to escape this selfishness "by the deification of another," and finally, through a "plunge into unconsciousness," the escape from the futility of both idolatries.³⁴

In sex, as in other parts of human life, possibilities are compounded by corruptions. This amazing passage

³²Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 239.

³³Ibid., I, 236-37.

³⁴Ibid., I, 239.

puts the situation, which approaches paradox, in its most profound way:

The sexual act thus becomes, in human life, a drama in which the domination of one life over the desires of another and the self-abnegation of the same life in favour of another are in bewildering conflict, and also in baffling intermixture. Furthermore these corruptions are completely interlaced and compounded with a creative discovery of the self through its giving of itself to another. Thus the climax of sexual union is also a climax of creativity and sinfulness.³⁵

Niebuhr seems to imply that sexual passion is a unique form of sensuality: it "may, by the very power it develops in the spiritual confusion of human sin . . . serve as an anodyne" just like drunkenness. It is in this case a "flight . . . to nothingness."

The ego, having found the worship both of self and of the other abortive, may use the passion of sex, without reference to self and the other, as a form of escape from the tension of life.³⁶

Though the special power "sexual passion" seems to have is not clearly identified, its uniqueness, one would expect, is due to the fact of its physiological power (unaided by drugs, for instance) coupled with its close association with the spirit of the self, in a way that drunkenness and extravagance in clothes and food do not share.

Sin does not necessarily follow from human finitude, but rather seems inevitable due to the human response to finitude, as the forms of sin were outlined above. And so sex itself is not necessarily sinful but, given our response

³⁵Ibid., I, 236.

³⁶Ibid., I, 237.

to creaturely vulnerability, we will only rarely share moments of, shall we say, "agape intercourse."³⁷ There will always be some element of sin in our sexual relating, just as in all our other relating.

Agape as Normative Principle

In sexual relating, as in other human relating, there is a principle which alone is able to provide ultimate guidance for our relating. Due to the height of human self-transcendence and radical freedom, there is nothing in time, nature, human reason, or any other contingency, which can serve as this kind of ultimate principle. The human spirit is simply too free to be able to make its own finiteness its own end. "The self is too great to be contained within itself in its smallness."³⁸ The term "norm" as an ethical principle is something by which actions are judged and to which they must try to conform. But it should be remembered that human understanding and formulation of even this transcendent norm is limited! The importance of human dialog is illustrated even in our search for the best understanding of this principle.

This one ultimate norm, transcending history and

³⁷See the discussion below on the relation of agape and mutuality.

³⁸Reinhold Niebuhr, Faith and History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 174, cited in Harland, p. 16.

finite existence, able to do justice to the height of human transcendence, is "an action in which regard for the self is completely eliminated"³⁹ or "the perfection of sacrificial love."⁴⁰ Yet it is not attainable in history, nor is it within the grasp of the resources of human abilities.

This normative principle "stands on the edge of history and not in history. . . . it represents an ultimate and not an immediate possibility."⁴¹ "No action or decision can simply conform to agape"--"even our best efforts and achievements" fall under judgment.⁴²

Agape as norm is not heteronomously imposed upon human nature from without. Indeed it is even present in human nature itself. The principle of agape as found in our nature is simply this:

The self is bound to destroy itself by seeking itself too narrowly, . . . it must forget itself to realize itself, but . . . this self-forgetfulness can not be induced by the calculation that a more ultimate form of self-realization will flow from the forgetfulness.⁴³

In other words, the self "destroys itself by seeking itself too immediately."⁴⁴

Yet the experience of agape is felt in a more direct way: somehow, no matter how alienated we are from others in

³⁹Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 287.

⁴⁰Ibid., I, 68f.

⁴¹Ibid., I, 298.

⁴²Harland, p. 12.

⁴³Niebuhr, Self, p. 232.

⁴⁴Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 174, cited in Harland, pp. 16-17.

the broadest possible sense, we are not able to regard the misery of our condition as "normal." Furthermore, every effort we make to give this condition the appearance of normality "betrays something of the frenzy of an uneasy conscience." Thus we see the contrast, the conflict, between what we are and some (even dimly) perceived feeling of what we ought to be.⁴⁵

This "ought" perceived by all in some way is, according to Niebuhr, the claim of our "essential nature,"⁴⁶ experienced more as a lack than a possession.⁴⁷ This lack is "apprehended by virtue of the self's capacity for self-transcendence," and consequently the ought is experienced as an unfulfilled law, yet the ought of the self's essential nature is perceived "only in a fragmentary and distorted" version.⁴⁸

Our essential nature, Niebuhr seems to say, is one of harmony--of heart, mind; self, neighbor; self, God. Yet even though this is perceived as a law of our own nature, we know that we do not do anything with all our heart, soul, mind, strength, much less anything truly in harmony with everyone else and God.⁴⁹

⁴⁵Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 265.

⁴⁶Harland, p. 15. ⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 17, 20.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 17.

⁴⁹Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 286, 292.

In summary, agape is a norm built into human existence which serves as a transcendent principle worthy of guiding and judging human activity. Agape is sacrificial concern and action, placing others' welfare over one's own. It is the only norm worthy of serving as such, since it alone is sufficiently transcendent to be beyond human possibility of attainment. Yet the norm is built into human existence, because of the seemingly contradictory truth that the self loses itself when it tries too hard to find itself, it destroys itself when it serves only itself. Thus a transcendent norm is needed.

Though this ultimate norm is historically unattainable, it is approachable, for just as humanity is limited in its achievements, so is it limited in knowledge of its limits. Thus mutuality and justice are posited as provisional norms of love in history.

The Provisional Norm of Mutuality

The primary context for sexual relating is in a couple setting. Most of what follows I feel is applicable to same-sex as well as opposite-sex relationships. The most important fact of human sexual relating is simply that it is human in its fullest sense: between person and person in their completeness, in their unity of nature and spirit. Sex is inherently personal, whether it be "sport-fucking" or deeply intimate communication, whether it be light touching

or a deep embrace.

The most important issue is not so much to whom one relates or what the specific expression is, from society's standpoint. For example, what might be labeled "promiscuity" could have several different meanings as behavior, though the "objective facts" of each situation might remain the same. The issue is rather the relationships involved and what a particular sexual expression means. Thus I am not going to say in what situations coitus is valid as a general rule for all. Yet, since relationships are so important, hopefully what is said is of some guidance to those who wish it.

In the realm of the one-to-one relationship, Niebuhr posits the provisional norm of agape, mutuality. The relationship between agape and mutuality is one of transcendence, similar to that between agape and justice. As Niebuhr put it, "sacrificial love (agape) completes the incompleteness of mutual love (eros)."⁵⁰ The relationship is "thoroughly dialectical": agape "clarifies the historical possibilities and limitations of mutuality and it contradicts all our achievements of love and justice insofar as they contain an admixture of sin."⁵¹

Mutuality is, quite simply, a relationship advantageous to each person involved, based upon principles of

⁵⁰Ibid., II, 82.

⁵¹Harland, p. 13.

harmony, coherence, and mutual satisfaction of needs.⁵² The self is dependent upon others for fulfillment, needing to be "drawn out of itself into the life of the other." Mutual love is, on the surface, a satisfactory way of obtaining this, yet if it is only calculation of "reciprocal advantages" the relation eventually will "be corrupted by resentments about the lack of reciprocity in the relationship." No relation can ever be perfectly reciprocal, due to the uniqueness of the persons involved.⁵³

It seems paradoxical but true, that "the highest mutuality is achieved where mutual advantages are not consciously sought."⁵⁴ Mutual love needs constant replenishment "by impulses of grace in which there are no calculations of mutual advantages."⁵⁵ Niebuhr once put the relation between mutual love and agape this way:

It is precisely because mutual love has the root of selfishness in it that it lends itself so readily to a justification of egoism if it does not stand under the scrutiny of the higher ideal of disinterested or sacrificial love. . . . Agape does work as an ideal which constantly reminds us of the alloy of egoism in every mutual relation and saves us from the hypocrisy of believing that we are unselfish when we affirm the interest of another in order that he may affirm our

⁵²Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, II, 81-82; Self, p. 31.

⁵³Niebuhr, Self, p. 31.

⁵⁴Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society (1932; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 265.

⁵⁵Niebuhr, Faith, p. 185, cited in Harland, p. 9.

interest.⁵⁶

Even in such a "simple" setting of one person to one person, the norm of agape transcends human effort.

The Provisional Norm of Justice

The relationship between agape and justice is also a relationship of transcendence. Agape transcends and judges efforts of justice. Agape serves to call into question the imperial claims of competing groups, claims which otherwise would be simply an exercise in balance of power.

In the sexual realm of human existence, the principle of justice is especially applicable to the social expressions of sexual relating. The right to choose one's sexual partner under what circumstances and for what kind of expression are the broad issues usually involved. The problem of justice is illustrated by a movement like the gay liberation movement, where an effort is made for some sort of change in the laws dealing with behavior. It is expressed in the struggle for the right of different races to marry. It is expressed in the movement to make legal any sexual expression between consenting adults in private.

Sexual behavior is not usually a large-group activity, but its effects often have an influence beyond

⁵⁶Reinhold Niebuhr, "Letter to the Editor," Christian Century, L (March 15, 1933), 364, cited in Harland, p. 5.

what is usually assumed. In an area involving more than two persons who share intimate friendship and sexual expression, the issues are more complex and need more rational consideration.⁵⁷

First, the demands of agape obviously apply to all relationships involved, even relationships which are basically peripheral to the ones immediately considered. What are the needs of each concerned and how can each minister sacrificially to them?

Second, the conflicting needs will have to be resolved in the best, most person-affirming way possible. Would one person's involvement with a third person seriously interfere with the other person's needs at this particular time, and how?

Third, the motives need to be examined by each person: Why do I feel the need to express this relationship in a sexual way? Why would I want to block my partner's friendship and/or sexual expression with this third person? All the while, this realization must remain clear: though I try to reflect honestly about my own needs and motives, complete honesty even to myself is impossible, given the indeterminate tendency for self-deception.

Fourth, how will deep involvement with another affect relationships in which I am now involved and may even

⁵⁷Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, II, 248; cf. Harland.

share a kind of covenant?

Finally, the witness to the community of which one is a part needs to be intentionally weighed. We are not in life alone: how will my behavior affect my community? Though, once again, the ability to predict accurately the effect of one's actions is one of those areas denied such a limited existence as ours.

Another area where principles of justice would seem to be involved is in the place of sex in the ordinary organization of human life.

Niebuhr recognizes the sin of "male arrogance" in the attempt to define "the natural law between the sexes." This "natural law" would seem to set "the primary purpose of bisexuality" as that of "procreation." And continuing,

it is not easy to establish a universally valid "law of reason" which will eternally set the bounds for the function of sex in the historic development of human personality. . . . The relation between the sexes is governed . . . by the natural fact of sex differentiation and . . . by the spiritual fact of human freedom.⁵⁸

Yet his interpretation of the "natural facts" in this area seems to be more contingent than most of the rest of his analysis. It is, of course, a "natural fact that the woman bears the child" but does this indeed necessarily bind her to the child, as he says? Does it necessarily "partially" limit "the freedom of her choice in the development of various potentialities of character not related to the

⁵⁸Ibid., I, 282.

vocation of motherhood?"⁵⁹ Is indeed motherhood the "primary function" or "vocation" of woman? The following criticism on rationalistic feminism is valid, of course, in its main thrust, but so is the acknowledged presence of male arrogance!

A rationalistic feminism is undoubtedly inclined to transgress inexorable bounds set by nature. On the other hand any premature fixation of certain historical standards in regard to the family will inevitably tend to reinforce male arrogance and to retard justified efforts on the part of the female to achieve such freedom as is not incompatible with the primary function of motherhood.⁶⁰

Indeed, what are the "inexorable bounds set by nature" and who decides them? What are the limits of nature when they are so intimately associated with the free human spirit?

Finally, Niebuhr assumes monogamy is a "permanent norm." Yet the following passage contains a rather curious judgment on himself. It also provides another insight into the problem of justice in sexual relating.

The freedom . . . of humankind, makes it difficult to set precise standards for all time for any kind of relationship. . . . The sinfulness of man, on the other hand, makes it inevitable that a dominant class, group, and sex should seek to define a relationship, which guarantees its dominance, as permanently normative. There are of course certain permanent norms, such as monogamy, which . . . are maintained not purely by Scriptural authority but by the cumulative experience of the race.⁶¹

His assumption in the last quoted sentence is called into

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., emphasis added.

⁶¹Ibid., I, 282-83.

question by the first two statements. And the invocation of the principle of "cumulative experience of the race" is also interesting, since the race in his estimation has not done so well in other areas of "cumulative experience."

Thus, Niebuhr's thought is seen to be conditioned and limited by his times, just as the present work will undoubtedly prove to be as well. Yet both he and I are concerned to confront contemporary, specific problems in light of our understanding of Christian experience and history.

Two Illustrative Issues: Touch and Integration

The two issues which are described now will serve as illustrations of the application of what has been said. Other applications will become clear as the two courses are confronted.

One of the many ways that selves use to communicate and dialog is touch. Touch is one of the most direct and concrete forms of relating. It is an expression of the self, an expression which, more than any other, uses one's contingent body to communicate with other selves. The unity of the self in its freedom and finite particularity is what makes this possible. The freedom of the human spirit makes continuums ("sexual progressions") of only limited use, as the uniqueness of a given relationship can be expressed in

many ways and with many different meanings. For example, a handshake in one context can be only a formality. In another, it can carry the release of many years of expectation, symbolizing the joining of two persons separated by time, distance, or ideology. The important thing about touch is not that a specific act carry a specific, unchanging meaning. The important thing is that it be in harmony with the self, a genuine expression of the particular self at a particular point in time.

It might be asked why the attempt should be made to integrate sexuality into one's total personality. Furthermore, is there not something "special" that keeps sexuality apart from every other part of one's life? The point of all that has been said here is that human sexuality is a part of human existence, participating in the height of human freedom and subject to the insecurities of the human spirit in its freedom and transcendence. If the principle of agape is a built-in force for harmony and integration, then sexuality is as much in need of harmonization as any other aspect of human life. If there is anything "special" about sexuality, it must be a tradition which has sensed the power of the sexual impulse to engulf the self and compound creativity and sinfulness in a way that no other human activity can do.

The capacity for self-transcendence gives the sexual part of human life its freedom from procreation needs and in

fact is the source of the meaning-structures which societies build for the sex act. Therefore in interpersonal sexual expression, the meaning-content of the experience needs to be acknowledged. Other factors which are often not reflected upon include such things as the tendency for self-deception and dishonest pretension. Reflection needs to be as honest as possible, even while realizing that complete honesty is not possible, even to oneself. Pride-of-virtue is a temptation to those who would seek to escape the dilemmas of sexual expression beyond tradition-determined roles, as well as those who assume their alternative styles are somehow "more responsible." And the sin of pride-of-knowledge perhaps awaits those who would claim the ideology of "open marriage" (for example) as final truth. The sin of pride-of-power is the temptation of those in the majority who would seek to repress "deviant" behavior in favor of safe conformity to the "cumulative experience of the race"!

Human sexual interaction is a confusion of self-interest, sensuality, pride, transcendence, creativity, limited love. There are no easy answers: if tradition is the norm (or even "cumulative experience of the race") then there is the possibility that one will abdicate freedom. Even in this situation of the choice of form over vitality, one cannot escape the same temptations. On the other hand, if alternative styles are risked, the risks of

self-interest, sensuality, pride, and deception would seem somewhat greater, though with the possibility of a new vitality of spirit, creativity, and love.