Chapter III

A DIALOG ON THE THEOLOGY OF SEX EDUCATION

In Chapter I, two curricula for sex education in the church were described. The Methodist course attempted to set forth its theological ground for its plan. The Unitarian one did not identify explicitly its theological stance. In Chapter II, my own attempt at a theology of sexuality was developed. There are three positions, then, on sexuality. One presented a paper which largely represents its informing theology. One made no statement of its underlying theological views. And one made no statement about a desirable method for education for human sexuality.

A true dialog would seem to be impossible under these conditions. Nevertheless, I will try to construct a conversation between the ideas on sexuality represented here.

Before beginning the dialog itself, it would be helpful to make clear some important similarities and differences between the two programs.

Similarities and Differences of the Programs

The similarities between the two curricula are not surprising for two liberal church-related programs.

Both courses value "love for another,"

"intimacy,"[1] concern and "caring for one another."[2] Building communication skills is an integral emphasis of both courses, though it is done in the Methodist course with specific exercises as well as in the methodology of discussion and sharing groups. Interaction and dialog among participants is emphasized in the Unitarian methodology, though the emphasis is much stronger.

Both courses are concerned that sexuality be integrated "into the total personality of the individual,"[3] that it be understood as "a factor of the whole person."[4]

These two emphases are important to the development of the communication of feeling as well as touching styles and meanings,[5] also highly valued by the two programs.

The goodness of sexuality is affirmed by both

---

[1]Task Group on Sex Education in the Christian Faith, Guidelines (Los Angeles: Family Ministry Department, Southern California-Arizona Conference, United Methodist Church, 1971?), Section B, p. 3.

[2]deryck calderwood [sic] "Femininity and Masculinity," About Your Sexuality (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 2.

[3]calderwood, "About the Program," p. 4.

[4]Task Group, Guidelines, p. 6, goal 2.

[5]calderwood, "Making Out," p. 1; Task Group on Sex Education in the Christian Faith, Sexuality Plus (Los Angeles: Family Ministry Department, Southern California-Arizona Conference, United Methodist Church, 1973), "Session III," p. 2.

courses[6] while they also recognize the possibility that sex may be "misused" or the good subverted by certain "factors."[7]

Sex education must be "reality oriented."[8] Primarily this means that accuracy of information is necessary and that there should be enough information that a relatively complete picture is presented.

Responsible decision-making[9] and self-determination[10] are grounded in accurate and complete information. Both courses seek to develop the sense of responsibility for one's own life within one's own value framework. This is the most pervasive purpose of both efforts.

Another similarity is the encouraging of reflection upon "cultural patterns of exploitation" of masculine/feminine stereotypes and sexual role expectations.[11]

Finally, both courses include plans for parent sessions.

---

[6]Task Group, Guidelines, p. 6, goal 1; calderwood, "About the Program," p. 2.

[7]Task Group, Guidelines, p. 6, goal 1; calderwood, "Masturbation," p. 1; "Love Making."

[8]calderwood, "About the Program," p. 11; Task Group, Guidelines, A, pp. 2-3.

[9]calderwood, "About the Program," pp. 4, 6, et passim; Task Group, Guidelines, B, p. 7, goal 6.

[10]Task Group, Guidelines, A, p. 3.

[11]calderwood, "Femininity and Masculinity," p. 1; Task Group, Guidelines, B, p. 6, goal 7.

The differences between the two courses are considerable. One difference is simply in the amount of provided resources. The Unitarian effort is the more ambitious, including much original audio-visual material (recordings and film-strips). The amount of resource material in part grows out of the difference in methodology. To produce a "structured experience in sex education" requires fewer materials to cover essentially the same ground of a less-structured design which is dependent upon the differing needs of different groups.

The Unitarian course tries to represent as full a range of positive options for sexual behavior as possible, providing for as much information as may be desired. The Methodist writers, in contrast, assume in at least one place[12] that same-sex, same-age relationships, for instance, are but a "stage" towards maturity, not a true alternative. Information about contraception, love-making, masturbation and making out is either not given or is de-emphasized.[13]

Explicitly theological language is simply not present in the Unitarian material. It is adequately provided in the background to the Methodist course; actual course resources in general lack this kind of depth,

---

[12]Task Group, Sexuality, "Session III," p. 1.

[13]"All concerns" which are brought up in small groups, though, "are dealt with." Personal conversation with Lois Seifert, a leader in the Task Force, July 1, 1974.

especially in the "Celebrations."

Another difference, related to methodological differences, is the adult-youth ratio in the course sessions themselves. The Methodist course recommends, ideally, that there be one adult "faculty" member for every three youth.[14] The Unitarian plan recommends a man-woman (not necessarily married) team lead a group of eight to twelve, though just one person can be effective.[15]

While both courses emphasize parental sessions, the Methodists suggest some joint parent-youth participation.[16] The Unitarians provide plans for the most extensive adult course (eight sessions) as well as a one-session introduction to the material.[17]

Full-time participation and advance registration are required for participants in the Methodist course. The attempt apparently is to concentrate the experience in a sort of semi-"cultural island," away from most pressures and influences of normal life. The Unitarians, on the other hand, spread out participation over weeks, spending as much time on each area as necessary. The door is always open for youth to leave if their needs are not being met, and for

---

[14]Task Group, Guidelines, B, p. 5.

[15]calderwood, "About the Program," pp. ix, 21, 23.

[16]Task Group, Sexuality, "Options," 19, 27, 29.

[17]calderwood, "About the Program," pp. 33-40.

them to bring others.[18] Possibly the assumption here is that a more lasting effect will come with the continuous interaction with the culture in which the participants find themselves.

The Dialog

In the following dialog, several issues which are important to sex education in a Christian context will be focussed upon in conversation with the position developed in the preceding chapter.

The integration of sexual behavior into the total personality is a major area of agreement between the three positions. The most important argument of the preceding chapter is just that: sexual behavior is a part of our total self, in all its glory and limitedness. Sex is not something apart from the rest of one's being. Though it would be easy to argue that western Christianity has been especially dualistic in sexual matters,[19] it would be evading the more significant lack of harmony I have tried to illumine. This disharmony between the parts, the urges and desires of the self is deeper than can be blamed on "tradition." The disharmony is implied even in the way the

---

[18] Calderwood, "About the Program," p. x.

[19] See especially William G. Cole, Sex in Christianity and Psychoanalysis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

concept is discussed. "Integration of sexuality into the total personality"[20] or "understanding of sexuality as an integral part of God's gift"[21] both seem to imply that the integration is somehow incomplete or problematic. The emphasis upon sex as an expression of one's total self is an important step to acceptance of responsibility for one's own sexual behavior. Sex is no longer somehow fearfully uncontrollable, with its own rules, indeed a "mind" of its own.

Of course, a necessary supporting assumption, which both courses make, is that sexuality is good "as a part of creation"[22] or "a positive and enriching force in life."[23] The Methodist course qualifies its statement with the phrase "except when it is misused," but there is little explicit expansion of the meaning of "misuse." McCallister suggests "self-indulgence," "extensive experimenting with premarital sex," and "sex crimes." Problems of "personal worth, the frustrations of daily life, and the anxieties that make the soul of a person itch"[24] are problems that apparently would tempt one to misuse sexual energies. Only in certain options is it suggested that sexual status-seeking,

---

[20] Calderwood, "About the Program," p. 4.

[21] Task Group, Guidelines, B, p. 7.

[22] Ibid., p. 3.

[23] Calderwood, "About the Program," p. 2.

[24] Task Group, Guidelines, A, p. 3.

selfishness, lack of care and responsibility for another are misuses.

In the Unitarian material, "misuse" is much more vague. There are (rare) phrases like "less desirable behaviors" used to avoid guilt associated with masturbation.[25] Or, "factors which, when present, destroy those possibilities" for "deeper and meaningful relations" that love making can offer.[26]

There are abuses of our sexuality, especially due to its incorporation into our total self. As I argued in the preceding chapter, the integration of sexual expression into the total personality does widen the possibilities for misuse due to "the insecurity of man in the heights of his freedom."[27] For just as sexual behavior can express one's total personhood in an intimate, committed relationship, so it can express one's demonic insecurities and failures, as rape may show.

The abuses are abuses, though, and not something inherent in the forces of sexuality. That is, sexual behavior can and is used by the self in its anxieties, and uncertainties, as McCallister implied. The Methodist course has a number of options which require participants to

---

[25] calderwood, "Masturbation," p. 1.

[26] calderwood, "Love Making," p. 8.

[27] Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (1941; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), I, 236.

consider problem areas and the values they hold.[28] Yet the way abuses and misuses are dealt with is ultimately shallow, since it lacks a clear understanding of where the abuses come from. The Unitarians' lack of dealing with abuses and their origin means that the choice of a sexual expression is also shallow, since the negative, "abuse" dimension is unexplored.

Another important consequence of the position of Chapter II is the centrality of communication. Because we as humans are limited in our perceptions of the other, we must rely on communication (indeed revelation[29]) by the other of who he or she is. The interests, concerns, characteristics, likes, preferences of that person are communicated primarily through word but also through gesture and behavior. As was also developed in the last chapter, our uniqueness as humans and our finitude cause conflicting needs and interests. The demands of agape through mutuality and justice are fulfilled at least in part by negotiation and compromise, where each person's needs and interests are taken seriously. This process only happens through communication. Both courses try to help develop better communication in young persons, one through specific exercises and

---

[28]Task Group, Sexuality, "Options" 1, 2, 14, 24, 25, 15, 22, 23, 11-13.

[29]See Reinhold Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955).

activities, the other more through its total methodology.

Communication of personhood is not only verbal, however. It occurs through other symbols, especially touch. This idea is developed in the Unitarian unit on Making Out. Actual touching games are used, as well as touching situations read to the class, to stimulate questions and consideration of the issues involved in touching relationships. Both courses use touching continuums for reflection on the meaning of touching acts. The Methodist plan seems to encourage a more static view of the relation between touch and stages of relationship by requiring that the stages of relating and acts of touching be interfiled.[30] While this can be valid on an average basis, it does not sufficiently recognize or encourage the necessity for touching expressions to be "owned" by each unique person. After all, one expression or style might communicate one thing to one person and quite a different thing to another. This is, in part, what the freedom of the human spirit means.

The Unitarian materials seem to do well in affirming the finiteness of life as manifested in the concrete, specific expressions of our bodily existence. The Methodist material, on the other hand, seems to nearly ignore completely the very human, specific side of sexuality. Certainly, there is the mildly explicit childbirth film "The

---

[30]Task Group, Sexuality, "Session III," p. 2.

Rose." But it is a "love poem" for the mother from the father and its sentimental effect is heightened by the reading (before showing) of the sweet poem that goes with it. This is supposed to "humanize" reproduction, but simply reddens the "rose"-colored lense through which sexual realities are viewed. (The death rate to mothers from pregnancy-related causes could be mentioned and discussed as a partial remedy.) The de-emphasis of V.D., love-making, homosexuality, contraception, and making out carries the price of at least ignoring the finiteness of sexuality and at worst suggesting that sexuality is best when it is most "Platonic." At the very least it indicates a certain reluctance toward explicit discussion of specific sexual concerns of young persons.

It is interesting that the Methodists, who have indicated more abuses associated with sexuality, almost ignore the specifics of sexual relating, the finiteness and the human response to finiteness and limitedness which is at the core of the abuses. The Unitarians, who are very comfortable with the specific expressions of a finite existence, give little consideration to the abuses which persons use to cope (however badly) with that finitude. It would seem that the one emphasizes too heavily the human spirit and the other the human body. Yet both claim that sexuality is part of the total personality.

Responsible decision-making, a goal shared by both

programs, grows directly out of the integration of sexuality into personhood. Responsibility cannot be avoided by invoking "instinct" or "animal urges" as a dodge. Not only is one responsible for one's sexual actions, but included in this burden is the task of making one's sexuality truly expressive of one's total personhood.

Responsibility is a two-sided concern. The first involves reflection about how one chooses to express one's sexuality. The second deals with how one relates to another. The first attempts to increase harmony within oneself; the second attempts to increase harmony between the self and others.

The central concern of responsible decision-making is how to act so that needs are met and persons fulfilled. This is essentially mutual love and justice (depending on the context), love expressed in light of the realities of limited existence, such as conflicting needs, desires, and interests. On the one hand, honest relating requires self-determination of one's own identity, values, needs, interests, and modes of expression. On the other hand, honest relating requires loving respect for the freedom, dignity, and equality of the person one is relating to. It also requires sensitivity and skill in communication.

Self-determination in the development of one's own personhood, one's values and expressions, is a shared goal of both programs. The Unitarian course, however, most

consistently follows its stated goal, by making the very structure of the plan dependent upon development of this skill. It could be argued that there is not a sufficient feeling in this material for the social forces one must respect in determining oneself. The emphasis upon individuality in this course can be carried too far, perhaps. After all, individual self-determination is a goal many adults find difficult to attain. There is good reason. Human existence is simply not that free, to be able to be truly and completely self-determined. The resentment that could develop from seeing all social and cultural forces as evil, enslaving ones is mis-directed and can lead to a strong idealism that simply is not "reality-oriented."

The Methodist course has more social input and encourages some of the same kind of social criticism. But it is dangerously close to simple upholding of social taboo and norm in the specifics of sexual behavior. There must be consideration of clear and specific theological and ethical justifications for criticism, something only partially offered in two options (15, 25). Self-determination is simply not valued highly enough to allow admission of all the options (even in principle). Participation by students in planning is limited, mostly by the structured design. The number of adult leaders could have two effects. It could increase the participation in discussions in small groups, while limiting the number of opinions. Or it could

give the impression that this subject is too important or delicate to trust young people to arrive at their own judgments.

A possible advantage of the Methodist way is in the way it lightens the burden of decision-making, which can be tremendously heavy, especially for the inexperienced. Yet lack of complete information can increase such burdens. This is a greater danger, in my estimation. It is almost a commonplace in education that things one is not ready to learn will simply be ignored, or stored for future reference. It should also be remembered that the Methodist course is designed for high school students. The Unitarian course is aimed at junior highs.

Both courses want decision-making to be based on "reality." But their notions of reality are different. "Reality" for the Unitarian writers is heavily dependent upon scientific survey of what is, with the transcendent dimension limited to consideration of human values. (Niebuhr once criticized a similar viewpoint for seeming to accept the common cold as "normal," since everyone has had it.[31]) "Reality" for the Methodist writers has a much richer transcendent dimension. It includes values and illuminative or revelatory experiences which, while not

---

[31]Harland, p. 63, citing Niebuhr's reference in "Sex Standards in America," Christianity and Crisis, XIII (May 24, 1948), 65.

scientifically verifiable, are just as determinative for life. Once again, the contrast between the two courses is interesting. The behavior realities of the Unitarian course are much richer in scope, while it is the Methodist view which has the more inclusive concept of reality. It could be said that both courses limit human possibility too much. The one does so by emphasizing what is at the expense of what could be, the other by limiting the options for consideration.

One of the ways sexual behavior, especially masturbation or "self-pollution," has been controlled socially in the past was to vividly describe the dire consequences of that behavior. To control "promiscuity," the fear of pregnancy and V.D. (not to mention burning in hell!) was constantly encouraged.

The issue of consequences has not died; it has just changed direction. The Unitarian course asserts, on the one hand, "There are no automatic, inevitable physical or psychological consequences of any form of sexual behavior, but rather a wide range of possible outcomes."[32] In contrast, McCallister insists, "Christian sexuality is against the mentality that believes man can make of sex

---

[32]calderwood, "About the Program," p. 2.

anything he desires and still be free from consequences."[33] Of course, the former does acknowledge that there might be some kind of consequences, but they are not automatically determined. The latter is not specific about the kind of consequences envisioned.

Yet the issue is real. One of the important points of my position is that the consequences of sexual acts are not automatic. Sexual relating in its broadest sense is a part of life and is not automatically limited by marriage or other commitments. Embracing and/or kissing is a common expression of caring, even in certain churches ("kiss of peace" for instance). Even those who would reserve these expressions for marriage share them with family. It seems obvious that the consequences as well as meanings of these two experiences are wide-ranging. There is also a wide range of consequences of that more intimate sexual expression, coitus. For instance, with coitus can come a wide range of personal feelings, ranging from severe guilt and shame to the ecstasy of a kind of holy experience of the self and/or the other. Physical consequences can range from frustration and congestion from lack of orgasm, to complete relaxation following orgasm, to soreness the next day from over-exertion! Pregnancy may or may not occur. It is in

---

[33]Task Group, Guidelines, A, p. 4, paraphrased from Ross Snyder, "The Ministry of Meaning," Risk, I (June-December; Geneva: Department of Youth Ministry, World Council of Churches, 1965), 158.

the realm of meaning, feeling, and values that is of most immediate concern here.

Some of the considerations and consequences were outlined in Chapter II.[34] There is evidence in the literature today that on a personal level, it is indeed possible for some persons to relate to several other persons on varying levels of intimacy, including genital contact. It also appears that this can occur in the context of more than one marital relationship, or a combination of marital and non-marital relationships. The quality of such relationships can even be described as open, honest, caring, committed, and long-term or permanent. Fidelity as "sticking by" one's partner, dialog, and commitment can be most important parts of a marital relationship without sexual exclusivity. So much for foreseeable possibilities. Yet, guilt, dishonesty, lack of respect, jealousy, psychic and career destruction, divorce and even murder have been and are also possible consequences of sexual non-exclusivity. The meanings of the act differ widely. Sexual intercourse can be for some a high liturgical expression of a deeply-felt mutual commitment and union. For others it is avoided totally as the same kind of high expression of commitment to ministry. This is what it means for sexuality to be an expression of one's personhood.

---

[34]See pp. 15-20, 23.

The issue becomes critical, however, when the social consequences of marriage relationships not based on sexual exclusivity are considered. Further study needs to be done on the function, both socially and in the Christian world-view, of the act of sexual intercourse itself. Does it indeed possess a special power, either symbolically or otherwise, that justifies its special treatment, its reservation for marriage-type relationships? What would be the social consequences of removing the connection between coitus and marriage as a social norm? Is there another act, or concept, that would be capable of providing symbolic or ritual significance for relationships of fidelity and commitment?

Some consideration has been made of such questions, but that would rightly be the subject of another dissertation. The bibliography reflects my familiarity with some of the work and views in this matter.

What is important here is that sexuality can not be made anything we desire without heed to consequences. Sexuality as an expression of the total personality carries very important consequences. Increased personal responsibility for one's behavior and its meaning, increased sensitivity to a greater part of the other's personhood, increased possibilities for expression of personal caring and nurturing, increased risk of vulnerability and hurt with attendant possibility for growth--these are some of the

consequences of what I call personalizing and "humanizing" sexuality. Kirkendall and Libby suggest, from another viewpoint, some of the kinds of very important consequences that can come with this kind of sexual expression:

> Certainly the emphasis on interpersonal relationships diverts attention from the act to its consequences, but once in this position, one finds oneself in a situation which is anything but permissive. The outcome of relationships seems to be governed by principles which are unvarying and which cannot be repealed. The fiats of parents or the edicts of deans can be tempered, but there is no averting the consequences to a relationship of dishonesty, lack of self-discipline, and lack of respect for the rights of others. If one wishes warm, accepting interpersonal relationships with others, these practices are self-defeating, and no one, regardless of his position of authority, can alter this fact. Proclamations and injunctions will be of no avail. There is no permissiveness here![35]

Conclusion

So what should education for human sexuality be? Sexuality is perhaps the most physical manifestation of the differentiation, the uniqueness of each of us. If harmony is a sort of built-in norm for us, our task is two-fold, as would be agreed by both sets of writers. We must develop who we are as total persons in as much harmony with ourselves as possible, and learn how to relate to others in as responsible a way as possible. What is specifically sexual in this relationship-education is that it is done in the

---

[35]Lester A. Kirkendall and Roger W. Libby, "Sex and Interpersonal Relationships," in Carlfred B. Broderick and Jessie Bernard (eds.) The Individual, Sex, and Society (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 126.

context of specific sexual expressions of ourselves and our relationships.

What is Christian sex education, then? Once again, both sets of writers are generally in agreement. Church sex education stands in a unique position to address the issues in as wholistic a way as possible. Value questions are more easily integrated with what is learned. As McCallister says, Christian sex education can deal with the whole person "in the face of the full range of reality."[36]

Most specifically, the best sex education for a church would seem to me to be a combination of these two courses. The methodology of the Unitarian course is excellent for developing relationship skills, while some of the exercises from the Methodist course would be helpful in sharpening them in a self-conscious way. The methodology and content should emphasize both the sense of belonging to a community with a tradition, and the sense of distance and criticism from that community. The resources of the Unitarian course provide the kind of explicit material that could be of most help in honest, "reality-oriented" decision-making. Marital status of the leaders is not as important as their skill in relating honestly, openly, and realistically with others. The environment and leaders must emphasize the balance between the freedom of the Christian, the joy of

---

[36]Task Group, Guidelines, A, p. 4.

life, the responsibilities of loving, and the realism of Reinhold Niebuhr!