

A THEOLOGICAL CONVERSATION WITH TWO SEX EDUCATION  
PROGRAMS FOR THE CHURCH

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by  
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## ABSTRACT

The two courses used for this work are the Unitarian (calderwood, 1971) and the Southern California United Methodist (Task Force, 1973). The first chapter describes the courses and highlights implicit and explicit theological presuppositions.

The second chapter applies Reinhold Niebuhr's ethical system to sexual behavior. Sexuality as incorporated into the unity of the human self participates in all the aspects of selfhood, and is an expression of it. As such it must not be separately considered as a special case of human behavior, but rather is under the same demand of agape as all other acts. Mutuality and justice are the provisional norms of agape for human life.

Chapter three discusses similarities and differences between the courses. A dialog is constructed among the positions of the courses and that of chapter two. Areas of agreement are integration of sexual behavior into the total personality, and the goodness of sexuality. Misuses and problems lack serious consideration in the courses, particularly the Unitarian. Specific expressions are acknowledged and dealt with in the Unitarian, much less in the Methodist course. Responsible decision-making must include more input than is indicated in either course. The issue of consequences of sexual behaviors is more complex than

acknowledged by either; some issues are illustrated. The best church sex education would be a combination of the best characteristics of both of these courses.

## PREFACE

This work will analyze the sex education curriculum resources provided for two groups of churches: United Methodist, and Unitarian Universalist. Analysis will be concerned primarily with the theological presuppositions (explicit or implied) upon which the programs are based. The analysis will include an overview of the actual plans and supporting documents, with enough detail to indicate important consequences of, or contradictions to these presuppositions. My position will be developed from certain theological insights of Reinhold Niebuhr. The dialog of the final chapter will include important similarities and differences in the programs and consideration of the consistency of each program's approach with its purposes and presuppositions as I see them.

An interest in human sexuality has provided an interesting focal point for my theological training over the past few years. Several papers on sexual ethics, concepts of sexuality, and history of marriage ceremonies have been written. They have added color and present interest to sometimes dull and "academic" discussions. But they have also provided a very practical, timely point of view from which to investigate the implications of such subjects as soteriology, ethical decision-making, educational

methodology and the nature of human existence and selfhood. Obviously, these studies have informed my formulation of the questions asked of sex education and my approach to the following dialog. However, the positions studied and readings which have informed my thinking to this point will not be directly used or acknowledged.

When a Christian asks about the place of sex in the life of a believer, many questions can arise, ranging from the unnecessarily troubling to those so profound as to go to the very roots of the faith itself. For example, the former seems well-represented by, Are certain positions for coitus "Christian" (or "unnatural," "perverted")? Or, How many times can one make love and still be Christian? Examples of the latter category might include, Is the "wholeness" promised in the faith a present reality? If so, in what way: How is sexual behavior changed if one is made whole? Is indeed everything permitted? Or is coitus prohibited or limited by love of things of the spirit?

When a Christian is concerned about communicating to younger members of the community of faith not only the "facts" of sexuality but also its place in one's life, other kinds of questions arise. What is the purpose of sex education? How is the subject best explained and integrated into Christian education? What is the best way to enable meaningful exploration of the issues by those participating in sex education in the church?



A major purpose for this paper is to attempt to justify the use of a particular program or methodology based on values and ethical norms developed from a particular viewpoint. The purpose of the dialog is not to presume final or universal judgment, but to show to those who might share many of these values the relative merit of these two programs for their needs.