

sexuality  
and  
the human  
community

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## TO THE CHURCHES—FOREWORD

In November of 1966 the Council on Church and Society, The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, took an action to launch a study on "sexuality and the human community." Subsequently, the Council named a Task Force to do the study under the direction of the Rev. J. C. Wynn, Ed.D. At the conclusion of its work, which was begun October 13, 1967, the Task Force Report was prepared by the Rev. Richard S. Unsworth. (The members of the Task Force are listed at the end of the report.)

The Task Force report on the study of sexuality and the human community was received and studied by the Council on Church and Society in November of 1969. In 1970, the Council concluded its study and took appropriate action to direct that the report of the Task Force be transmitted to the 182d General Assembly (1970) with a request that the General Assembly receive the report, direct that it be published, and recommend it to the churches for study and appropriate action. After adding the phrase "this action is not to be construed as an endorsement of the report," the 182d General Assembly (1970) approved the request by a vote of 485 affirmative, 259 negative.

Additionally, a motion made from the floor, approved by a vote of 356 affirmative, 347 negative, directed that a statement of belief incorporated in the motion be included in any publication of the report of the Task Force; and, that an Appendix to the Paper, which had been added by a minority group of the Council on Church and Society, should likewise be included in any publication of the Task Force report.

Also, the General Assembly requested the Department of Church and Society to provide further Biblical rationale to assist in the study of the report.

Furthermore, the 182d General Assembly (1970) considered and approved statements and recommendations in related areas of education, research, and legislation.

This book, therefore, includes materials authorized for publication by the 182d General Assembly (1970). In addition, in the Appendix there is a guide for studying and using the material prepared by the General Division of Church Educational Services of the Board of Christian Education.

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**A Task Force Study Document**

*Introduction*

In 1966, the Council on Church and Society of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, formed a committee to study the Christian concept of sexuality in the human community and to provide the church with a report of its endeavors. Sexuality as we understand the term refers to our entire experience as persons who are created male and female and not exclusively to coital behavior. The report that follows is a brief résumé of the reflections and conclusions of that committee after more than a year of meetings, discussions, and papers.

The assignment given was this:

To explore the mystery of sexuality in a broad range of human experience; to identify and analyze the forces that enhance or inhibit the realization of sexual values; and to evaluate the church's role and responsibility in interpreting the meaning of sexuality and in bringing a Christian ethical view to bear upon its expression in human relationships.

Our task is to speak *to* rather than *for* the church in fulfilling this mandate. Speaking to the church is no guarantee of immunity, however, from the mounting pressures in our society both for and against discussion of changing patterns of sexual behavior. We proceed in this task, not because our answers are final; but because we believe God is Lord of the present and its changes, the past and its values, and the future and its hope. Indeed, the redemptive possibilities of the present age may possibly be found more readily in the changes that unnerve us than in the continuities that comfort us.

Ours is a modest proposal, and one that we recognize may be obsolete almost before the ink is dry. Both sexual attitudes and patterns of sexual conduct are changing in our culture at an accelerating rate, so our report can only be a comment on a rapidly passing scene. The knowledge explosion affects the disciplines which underlie our report and its conclusions, and that fact also serves to underscore the *pro tempore* character of our report.

The work of our committee encompassed a wide range of problems and considerations about human sexuality. The popular media and the presence of new contraceptive techniques have given the impression that the single issue is that of coital behavior. We do not think that is the case, and we have tried to reflect a broader appropriation of the concept of human sexuality both in the work we did and in the report we now submit. We dealt with questions of sexuality in family relationships, male and female sex-

uality, masturbation, dating, homosexuality, contraception, abortion, artificial insemination, as well as with questions which involved coital behavior more directly: *viz.* premarital, marital, and extramarital sexual activity and the sexual behavior of single adult persons.

In dealing with these many questions, we frequently surprised ourselves by discovering the degree of restlessness we shared with what we understood to be the conventional morality of the church. In certain areas of our consideration, such as homosexuality, abortion, and the sexual behavior of single adult persons, we concluded that taboos and prohibitions often play a larger role in the thinking of Christians than does careful ethical reflection in the light of the gospel. As one of our number asked, "Has not Protestantism fostered false impressions and false information about sexuality? We should resolve to correct those errors of which we are aware."

Our abiding concern has been with the development (1) of ethical considerations which can refine and strengthen the teaching of the church on matters of sex, and (2) of ethical guidelines which help Christians make responsible decisions about their own sexual behavior and about the attitudes of the community on sexual matters.

In the course of these developments, we turned repeatedly to the theological issues and questions of Biblical tradition which have informed the church's view of human sexuality through the ages.

We also found ourselves relying heavily on the social and behavioral sciences. Insights from psychology and psychiatry about the workings of sex influenced us to think often with criteria of psychological health in mind. The vocation of the church has always included the "cure of souls." It is to the benefit of that vocation that psychology, "the science of souls," has been so productive in recent decades. The accumulation of empirical data about sexual conduct, pioneered in the Kinsey report, has contributed measurably to our perception of the meaning of sexual expression to various groups of persons in the society. Studies of psychosexual development have made possible far greater understanding of the different meanings that one's own sexuality and sexual conduct may have at different stages in the life cycle. And psychiatry has now accumulated a great deal of helpful insight about the pathology of guilt and its relation to sexual experience.

This scientific probing of the mystery of sexuality has had, on the whole, the beneficial effect of attacking the myths and taboos which have surrounded some aspects of sex, and lifting the shroud of guilt and shame which has inhibited the proper realization of our sexual nature. These developments in psychology and psychi-

atry are to be received with gratitude by a church committed to the realization of the "responsible freedom of the new life in Christ."<sup>1</sup>

The insights of sociologists, anthropologists and demographers have also had a bearing on our discussions. We frequently found ourselves challenging the conventional wisdom of the Christian community concerning sexuality, only to find that those conventions were too often the culture-bound wisdom of a part of the community: to wit, the white, Protestant, and middle-class part. But the Christian community encompasses a wide diversity of racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, and therefore a wide variety of assessments of sexuality and sexual behavior. The polygamy that is permitted among some African Christians would be unthinkable among the Protestants of Geneva; and the cloistering restrictions upon women in some Latin countries would be altogether unacceptable to most American teenagers. This sobering fact of social and cultural pluralism within the church made it difficult to achieve many generalizations about the appropriateness of specific forms of sexual behavior.

### *Biblical and Theological Foundations*

Our theological procedure has been Biblical, and has relied heavily on covenantal thinking. We have taken serious account of the current debates in ethics within the Protestant and Roman Catholic communions of the church. Three approaches to ethical thinking appeared recurrently in our discussions. They might be designated by the terms, "orders of creation," "covenantal ethics," and "situation ethics." While we tried as far as possible to benefit from the insights and criticisms derivative of each of these methods, we found the covenantal framework the most congenial and, in our estimation, the most adequate to the Biblical heritage, the experience of the church, and the insights of contemporary secular thought.

The theme of the Confession of 1967, "In Jesus Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself," is the theme which pervaded our discussions about human sexuality and which, we hope, has most directly influenced our conclusions. While acknowledging the many ways that sexual behavior can be abusive and alienating, we tried to express its proper role in human experience in terms of growth and reconciliation. This emphasis also seemed most adequately expressed in the language of the covenant, where love, faithfulness, healing, and hope dominate.

Confession of 1967, II, 4, d.

Particularly in view of the explosively growing population, and of the radical improvement in contraceptive technology, we stressed the relational and celebrational aspects of sexual activity at least as much as the procreative. The purpose of our Lord in coming that we might "have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10) surely must include an appreciation of our sexual nature as one avenue for realizing that promise, whether or not a procreative purpose is served at the same time. It is through human relationships, including their sexual dimensions, that God often speaks his redemptive word to this world. We have been very wary of secular or religious statements which ascribe saving significance to sexual engagements. Yet we are deeply sensitive to the fact that sexual activity has its role in the saving activity of God.

One widely accepted theological approach to the realm of human sexuality is to treat it in terms of the orders of creation. While we do not think that sexuality can be understood apart from its place in the ordering of creation, we have encountered two reservations about theological reflection which lean too exclusively on this approach. One is the fact that the church, when reflecting on God's work of ordering creation has often been tempted to see its task in reflecting on sexuality as one of ordering, too. The emphasis then becomes one of restraint, prohibition, legalism, and the definition of limits.<sup>2</sup> All of that may be necessary, but it does not attend to the equally Christian calling to glorify God by the joyful celebration of and delight in our sexuality. The attempts by some theologians to encourage Christians to appreciate the fact that our sexuality can be fun as well as functional has thrown some of our fellow faithful into paroxysms of fear and guilt.

A second reservation about the "orders of creation" approach to understanding sexuality concerns the emphasis we have found on marriage and the family as the exclusive model for ordering all sexual activity. By understanding sexuality primarily in terms of its place in the orders of creation, we emphasize its procreative function still, admitting the relational functions of sexual expression but subordinating them to those concerned with child-bearing and nurture. We feel that Roman Catholicism may have suffered in its understanding of sexuality by emphasizing the religious superiority of the virginal estate. But Protestantism has, in reaction, suffered from an equally single-minded preoccupation with marriage and the family. Our theologians have given first place to

<sup>2</sup>It need not work out this way, to be sure. In Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, Part IV., for example, the orders of creation become limits in a positive sense. The task of special ethics, then, is one of disciplining man's freedom within these limits. The limitation of being divided into two sexes becomes for humankind one sphere of God's affirmation of his creatures. The boundary lines of creation function as a definition of human possibility, rather than a defense against it.



the moral norms which function well in support of marriage and the family, and by their silence have left the impression that the single estate is a deficient one, requiring more explanation and apology than guidance. So, less by intent than by omission, Protestantism has left the unmarried in the shadow of an ethical structure designed to serve another manner of life than theirs.

This has meant that the church has made less pertinent ethical statements than it might have to the not yet married, to those who are single by vocational choice or statistical accident, to the homosexual, to the widowed, the divorced, and the many others who do not live in the "normal" estate of marriage.

We have tried, as befits Presbyterians, to articulate a position which is consistent with the view of man and his destiny found in the Bible. Recognizing that the worldly circumstance in which our ancestors found themselves may have called for a sexual ethic appropriate and adequate to that circumstance, we have not found in that fact alone a warrant for duplicating their ethic in the often different circumstance of our own life. We are obligated to ask in our day, as Biblical man asked in his, how God is speaking to our time about sexual relationship. Theology is a dynamic science capable of new insight and interpretation relative to changing cultures.

We can find no systematic ethical guidance for our time from a method of Biblical interpretation which relies solely on the laws or stories of the Bible.<sup>3</sup> Understood in their historical context, however, these laws and stories provide us with useful insight into the pattern of God's redemptive and reconciling activity in all ages, whose design it is to enable us to "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Eph. 4:15).

Our task, in speaking to particular problems as well as in addressing the total phenomenon of sexuality, has been one of understanding God's revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, in whose maturity as man we are to find a model for our own. In him we find one who has overcome alienation from God, is open to the world, is accepting of himself, and establishes communion with his fellowmen through responses of tenderness and strength, of love and service. The church has always attested his full humanity. Therefore, one cannot imagine that he was unaware of his own sexuality, and there is no evidence that he denied this aspect of his humanity in the manner of some of his later followers. The morality of his relationship with others was enviably positive, rooted as it

<sup>3</sup>We would find it intolerable, for example, to base our treatment of fornication on the death penalties imposed in Deuteronomy 22, or to exclude eunuchs and bastards from "the assembly of the Lord," as prescribed in Deuteronomy 23.

was in concern for their well-being rather than in anxiety about his own purity.<sup>4</sup> He kept faith with his brothers and sisters, and in so doing deepened the roots of hope for all of us. He lived in the integrity of God's covenant with Israel to be their God, and he became the messenger of a new covenant which has bound us into the destiny of the people God loves and chooses and frees.

One of the important conclusions we draw from God's revelation in Christ is that our sexuality is an instrument of God's reconciling activity. The God who would overcome our alienation from himself and from each other has invested human sexuality with far more than procreative significance. It is truly a vehicle of the spirit and a means of communion. It is also true that our sexual endowments can be, and often are, turned to self-serving and uncharitable purposes. Thus, sexual gestures are not intrinsically moral or immoral. They derive their moral significance from the reconciling or the alienating purposes they serve.

The New Testament contains no record of Jesus' teachings concerning most matters of sexual behavior. It would be proper to assume that his concern for particular expressions of human sexuality would have been based on the way they might serve or injure human communion, whether with God or with other persons. Indeed, our Lord condemned more strongly those who misused each other, grinding down the poor, climbing over others' rights and the like, than he did the sexually miscreant.<sup>5</sup>

To emphasize the purpose of sexual activity in serving human relationships well or poorly is to throw the weight of concern on the motives and consequences of that activity. It is not, however, to say that our sexuality is morally neutral. Sexuality is one of the definitions of the power of our being as persons. Like all powers, it has some moral significance even when it is not used. Power withheld may be a most ethically meaningful form of power. We suppose that is the case with the assumed celibacy of Jesus, whom one can easily imagine foregoing marriage in deference to the claims of his vocation as the bearer of a new covenant.

As the messenger of the new covenant, Jesus threw open to all mankind the promise of God's creating, forgiving, and healing love. The promise of God to bestow the power of his spirit on all who are in the covenant with him becomes a universal promise in Jesus. Knowing that, we have been constrained to interpret the

<sup>4</sup> A notable example is Jesus' response to the woman who anointed him while he was at table with one of the Pharisees. (Luke 7:36 *et seq.*)

<sup>5</sup> Helmut Thielicke observes that, "Jesus dealt with the sensual sinners incomparably more leniently than with the sinners who committed the sins of the spirit and cupidity." *The Ethic of Sex*, Harper and Row, New York, 1964, p. 278-279.

meaning of sexual behavior in the light of that covenant promise. Such a covenant has had the effect of keeping hope alive among us as well as establishing our confidence in God's provident care in our present-day affairs. We have had great concern, therefore, to keep alert to the fact of the covenant when dealing with the ethical significance of various forms of sexual behavior.

We regard as contrary to the covenant all those actions which destroy community and cause persons to lose hope, to erode their practical confidence in the providence of God, and to lose respect for their own integrity as persons. Clearly, such actions are not susceptible of being catalogued, for sexual gestures which may in one instance cause deep guilt and shame, whether warranted or not, may in another context be vehicles of celebrating a joyous and creative communion between two persons.

By the same token, those sexual expressions which build up communion between persons, establish a hopeful outlook on the future, minister in a healing way to the fears, hurts and anxieties of persons and confirm to them the fact that they are truly loved, are actions which can confirm the covenant Jesus announced.

A true understanding of this covenant, which is both described and promised in the Scriptures, gives rise to productive insights into the ethical concerns of human sexuality. The covenant is a link between our spiritual past and our future. Understanding and participating in the covenant helps us evolve a style of life which is consistent with our past and appropriate both to the times in which God is now speaking to us and to the future which he is opening before us. By calling to mind the loving intent of God toward his creatures, "I will be your God and you shall be my people," it frees us from a faithless captivity to the cultural patterns of the past while at the same time encouraging us to preserve the human values which informed those patterns. We are thus left to examine the new patterns of sexual behavior which emerge in each new era with spiritual clarity and cultural detachment, and to affirm or criticize those patterns on the basis of the way they serve or deny the reconciling work of the Holy Spirit among us.

### *Christian Goals of Interpersonal Relationship*

We believe that the revelation in Jesus Christ and the covenant into which he has drawn us both offer some definition of the goals of interpersonal relationships. While no list of phrases or adjectives could be exhaustive, those goals are at least the following:

Interpersonal relationships should enhance rather than limit the spiritual freedom of the individuals involved.

They should be vehicles for expressing that love which is commended in the New Testament—a compassionate and consistent concern for the well-being of the other.

They should provide for the upbuilding of the creative potential of persons who are called to the task of stewardship of God's world.

They should occasion that joy in his situation which is one of man's chief means of glorifying his Creator.

They should open to persons that flow of grace which will enable them to bear their burdens without despair.

These are some of the goals which should inform any judgments we make about the specifics of sexual relationship. A glance can be adulterous and alienating; or it can be tender and reassuring. A physical intimacy can be charged with hostility; or it can affirm and liberate those who share it. The goals of interpersonal relationship we have described can be pursued or frustrated across the whole range of ways that men and women relate to each other. Our hope is to see the thinking and the teaching of Christian community rest more on goals such as these, and less on the attempt to describe sexual acts as intrinsically good or bad.

### **Specific Issues and Problems**

#### **1. *Education in Human Sexuality for Children and Adolescents***

An examination of the educational literature available through the major Protestant denominations shows that there is already widespread and effective concern, on the part of Christian educators, to express a positive and appreciative attitude toward human sexuality, rather than one preoccupied with its dangers and pitfalls. The most systematic attempt to evaluate church programs of sex education that has come to our attention is John H. Phillips' *Sex Education in Major Protestant Denominations*, a report prepared for and published by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, Department of Educational Development, New York, in 1968. The Phillips report is not without its criticisms of church sex education programs, but he sees a distinctly positive and realistic view of human sexuality informing the programs of the eight denominations he studied. We support the general direction being taken in this educational material. Indeed, it is a refreshing change from the materials which portrayed sex as an unruly instinct, the threat of man's undoing, which required regulation more than it deserved celebration.

We urge a continuous review and rewriting of such materials to take maximum advantage of the new insights and developments

being produced by the social and behavioral sciences and medicine, as well as by theologians and ethicists especially concerned with human sexuality.

The commercial corruptions of sex in our culture and the drum-fire of erotic stimuli on our children cause us grave concern. We consider it a matter of the highest importance in the Christian formation of children that they be equipped with a realistic understanding and appreciation of their own and others' sexuality. Part of the equipping of the saints in our time must be the establishment of such a degree of internal freedom and self-acceptance that false and degrading appeals to our capacity for sexual response will not be taken seriously by the young. We are convinced that the only effective means for creating such a spiritual condition in children and young people is through the presentation of the Christian life as including a view of sex which rests on neither dread nor divinization. Christian nurture should enable us to rejoice in this gift and know realistically the difference between its use and its abuse.

In addition to pursuing its own task of Christian nurture and attitude formation, the church has a positive interest, which it must recognize, in programs of sex education in the schools. Civic groups and professionals, such as the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States and the National Council on Family Relations, are constantly developing materials to assist local groups in the establishment of sex education programs in churches and public and private schools. Local school boards and community groups have also interested themselves in providing better information and understanding about human sexuality to their students, sometimes against considerable opposition from those who harbor grave reservations about any sex education that takes place outside the family.

While the Christian community cannot abdicate the task of value formation, it can and should cooperate with the school and agencies like the Sex Information and Educational Council of the United States, in the development of programs designed to provide accurate information in an affirmative context. The church should not, either by inaction or by opposition to such programs, support a conspiracy of silence about sex in the schools. To impose official silence on these questions only leaves to the school yard and locker room what could be better addressed in the classroom.

Our hope is that Christians will participate in the formulation of sex education programs in the schools and, by their participation, will help establish in these programs a healthy, informed and affirmative view of human sexuality of the sort reflected throughout this report. Questions of interpersonal relationship and social responsibility will and do arise in the schools. They cannot be

ruled out of existence by being ruled out of order. Therefore, it seems in the best interest of the church to share with others the task of shaping and supporting sex education in the schools.

As a first step toward fulfilling that social responsibility, the church has an obligation and an opportunity to affect attitudes toward and perceptions of sex in the family. Since the pre-school years are at least as critical as the school years for the formation of sexual attitudes—much more so in the view of many—the feelings about sex which are conveyed in the family should be of great concern to the church. A church community has an unusual opportunity to encourage open discussion of sexuality in family groups, where children, young people, and adults can have opportunity to gain an understanding of each other's experiences and hopes, and can discuss openly the meaning of a Christian style of life for questions of sexual behavior. Such discussions in the context of Christian community could have a salutary effect for the communication of positive sexual attitudes which should characterize the Christian family.

## 2. *Masturbation*

Masturbation, which is generally defined as erotic self-stimulation to the point of orgasm, has long been the object of stern moral strictures in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In Jewish teaching, it was viewed as an extension of the sin of Onan (Gen. 38:9). It is instructive to look at the story of Onan and see how our tradition interpreted it in such a way as to arouse feelings of guilt about masturbation. Onan, under the mandate to perform the Levirate obligation to provide his dead brother's widow with offspring performed *coitus interruptus*, spilling his semen on the ground rather than providing his sister-in-law with a child he knew would not be considered his own. Although the sin of Onan was, in fact, that of disobeying his father's command as well as the traditional Levirate obligation, the religiously scrupulous interpreters of this passage extended the sin to any form of improper emission of generative seed. Thus in both Jewish and Christian traditions, there has developed the notion that any form of sexual activity which "wasted the seed" is sinful. This has been extended variously to include masturbation, *coitus interruptus*, intercourse in any other than the female-supine male-prone position, and contraception.

We find no evidence for any theological, psychological or medical strictures against masturbation *per se*. The medical myths concerning the ominous consequences that might follow masturbation (diminished intelligence, aggravated acne, impotence in normal intercourse, etc.) have long since been dispelled. On the contrary,

there is nearly unanimous medical opinion that no physical harm to the body is produced even by frequent masturbation.<sup>6</sup> There is even some argument for the positive values of masturbation in relieving sexual tension and attendant physical discomfort in the pelvic region, in contributing to psychosexual development, and in providing a satisfactory alternative form of sexual gratification to single persons or to married persons during periods of separation, where intercourse would be inappropriate or impossible.

The problems associated with masturbation are, in our opinion, extrinsic rather than intrinsic to the act. Guilt feelings aroused in connection with masturbatory experience are induced either religiously or culturally. Masturbation can also be a form of acting-out behavior in socially withdrawn or psychologically disturbed persons, but here too, it must be seen as symptomatic rather than causal.

Since masturbation is often one of the earliest pleasurable sexual experiences which is identifiably genital, we consider it essential that the church, through its teachings and through the attitudes it encourages in Christian homes, contribute to a healthy understanding of this experience which will be free of guilt and shame. The ethical significance of masturbation depends entirely on the context in which it takes place. Therefore, we can see no objection to it when it occurs as a normal developmental experience or as a deliberately chosen alternative to inappropriate heterosexual activity. We can see valid ethical questions raised about masturbatory practices which become or which inhibit normal heterosexual development. In most instances, however, we believe that masturbation is morally neutral and psychologically benign.

### 3. *Dating*

The heterosexual experience of younger adolescents is governed by the pattern of dating which has evolved in the last half century. Two things are striking about that pattern in contrast to what had preceded it: (1) it is a form of courtship only incidentally related to marriage; and (2) it is carried on largely in isolation from the older generation.

Dating begins earlier now than it did in the youth of today's parents, a fact that follows in part from changing social patterns and pressures, but also in part from the earlier physical development that goes with better diet and health. This combination of psychological force-feeding and earlier pubescence has led to a dating pattern in which young adolescents find themselves cast into

<sup>6</sup>This is the conclusion arrived at in the "Symposium on Masturbation" in *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality*, Vol. I, No. 3, November 1967.

the rituals of courtship before they have begun to think about marriage, and often before they are emotionally mature enough to understand their own or others' sexual feelings. The result is, too often, a separation of the physical from the emotional aspects of experiencing one's sexuality. Such a separation tends to inhibit the development of responsible and healthy attitudes toward heterosexual relationships.

The isolation of dating experience from contact with older persons also represents a new departure in our century. Not only has the practice of chaperonage largely disappeared, there has developed a sense of prestige that attaches to the parents when their children begin independent dating. Many of the young find themselves being pushed early into dating by parents who worry that their children might not be popular. Then, having been sent off with appropriate parental admonitions, they are left to their own and their peer group's resources to weave an acceptable ethical pattern for themselves. Not surprisingly, many young adolescents manage this badly, with results that perplex and sometimes anger their elders.

These dating patterns sometimes lead to early experiences of sexual intercourse badly out of phase with developing emotional maturity. Aside from undesirable psychological effects, such early sexual contacts have led to an increased incidence of venereal disease and out-of-wedlock pregnancy among this group.

There are several responsibilities which churches can assume in addressing the problems associated with existing dating patterns. One is to take an increasingly active role in developing effective sex education for this age group, a task that will be the more difficult because of the widely varied levels of emotional maturity and sophistication about sexual matters that are to be found among early adolescents. The differences are in some instances developmental and in others cultural, reflecting vastly different dating patterns in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

A second responsibility is even more directly an expression of the church's vocation. It is that of developing new means of cultivating the inner life of young adolescents. Sensitivity to feelings, regard for personal integrity, alertness to questions of value, and the ability to imagine the meaning and future consequences of present actions, are all qualities of inner life which bear directly on the capacity of young people to handle dating experiences well and to profit from them. A ministry to young persons should be designed to enhance these qualities.

Third, the church still has an opportunity, almost unique among the institutions of our culture, to encourage better communication and interaction between the generations of the family. A well con-



ceived special ministry to young adolescents should not obscure the need for continued development of openness and sharing of values and experiences within the family and across its generational lines.

Finally, the church has a critical function to perform in opposing the commercial and social pressures which work toward increasingly early and intense dating patterns. There are commercial advantages to be gained from the development of the "youth market," and there are psychological advantages that seem to accrue to many parents by the sexual attractiveness and success of their early adolescent children. The church can, through its preaching and teaching ministries, make a contribution to countering these false advantages and reducing the pressures that emanate from them.

As the church confronts these responsibilities to young people, it should remember that its primary task is that of developing stronger ethical and spiritual resources by which adolescents can govern their own behavior.

#### 4. *Male and Female Homosexuality*

In the course of a normal pattern of growth, there are many factors which influence the shaping of one's sexual identity. God created us male and female, but the process of creation is not finished, either chemically or psychologically, at birth. There is a development process which continues through childhood and adolescence, the end of which is the establishment of a comfortable identity with one's given sexuality, including an acceptance of those features of the opposite sex which coexist with the given sexuality in all of us.

While it is not a universal phenomenon, the great majority of persons of both sexes encounter, at some point in this learning process, some form of homosexual feelings or experiences. That is, they experience some degree of sexual pleasure with and attraction toward a person of their own sex.

In some persons' development process, these homosexual feelings and experiences become fixed as the definition of their sexual identity, either wholly or in part. The roots of this condition may be in part chemical, in part psychological. In such persons, there may develop a need to find sexual relationship and gratification exclusively with another person of the same sex. Or such a person may develop occasional homosexual relationships which exist alongside an otherwise heterosexual behavior pattern.

So far in the history of our culture, both church and society have tended to deal with this pattern of sexual conduct almost exclusively by taboos, condemnatory attitudes, and repressive legislation. The essentially negative attitudes of church and society to-

ward the phenomenon of homosexuality has often resulted in aggravated suffering and grievous injustice for homosexual persons. The taboos attached to the phenomenon have led society to treat homosexuals as criminals. Such responses have had the effect of inhibiting the possibility of change in homosexual persons who are unhappy with their state of affairs, but who hesitate to approach anyone for help because of the fear attached to any open acknowledgement of their circumstance.

The ethical reflections and personal attitudes of the Christian community should be such that homosexual persons will not be made to feel that their sexual preference is in irresolvable conflict with their membership in the Christian fellowship. Toward that end, the following ethical considerations might be kept in mind:

1. There is a difference between homosexuality as a condition of personal existence and homosexuality as explicit homosexual behavior.<sup>7</sup>

2. The condemnation of homosexuality found in St. Paul's writings<sup>8</sup> are given in the context of lists of antisocial and personally destructive forms of conduct which characterize "the unrighteous." It is not singled out as more heinous than other sins, but is discussed with other forms of behavior which betoken man's refusal to accept his creatureliness.<sup>9</sup>

3. The contexts in which Paul's condemnations appear suggest that he objected to the element of disregard for the neighbor more than he did to acts in themselves. Thus, prostitution does not call into question responsible heterosexuality. Perhaps pederasty, homosexual prostitution, and similar neighbor-disregarding forms of behavior ought not to overshadow our entire response to the human condition of homosexuality.<sup>10</sup>

4. St. Paul treats sexual sins as one set of symptoms of the universal experience of apostasy. No one is exempt from the experience of alienation from God, neither the homosexual nor the heterosexual person. Therefore, presumably both are eligible for

<sup>7</sup> *Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, John MacQuarrie, Ed. Westminster Press, 1967, p. 152.

<sup>8</sup> Notably Rom. 1:26 *et seq.* and I Cor. 6:9 *et seq.*

<sup>9</sup> *The Ethics of Sex*, Helmut Thielicke, Harper & Row, 1964, p. 278 *et seq.*; see also the exegesis of Rom. 1:18 by John Knox, *The Interpreters' Bible*, Vol. 9, p. 395.

<sup>10</sup> *Sex and Love in the Bible*, William Graham Cole, Association Press, gives a sketch of the sexual attitudes and customs of the ancient world, to which St. Paul was responding in his writing. Cole's description makes clear that the early church was struggling against odds to preserve a sensitivity to covenantal relationships between persons in a world which had commercialized every form of sexual liaison.

the experience of reconciliation to which all men are invited in Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Since the state of knowledge about homosexuality is far from fully developed in our society, we urge the church to support further and more adequate research into this phase of human sexual behavior and to participate actively in the theological and ethical reflection on the matter which may be prompted by the new insights resulting from such research. We also urge that Christians in all those vocations which might include care for and counsel with homosexuals give attention in their initial or continuing professional training to the need for a fuller understanding of homosexuality and its processes, so that the desire for change can be more effectively elicited and encouraged.

If the function of sexual differentiation is best understood in terms of a covenant relationship which encourages both mutual personal fulfillment and the freedom to establish a family, then homosexual behavior is essentially incomplete in character. It is therefore important to guard against the development of fixed homosexual patterns during childhood and adolescence, by developing in children and young people an understanding of homosexuality, including their own feelings or experiences with it. One function of such an understanding is to spare young people from thinking they are destined to homosexuality because of some developmentally normal experience.

It should be a concern of the church to re-examine the various unisexual institutional structures of our society (schools, Penal Institutions, Military, etc.) to see where they may, knowingly or unwittingly, contribute to the formation or continuation of the very homosexual patterns we have for so long condemned. Separate men's and women's schools and colleges, for example, may create pressures of a homosexual sort by merely perpetuating their traditions of separate education. In the penal system, by contrast, heterosexual contact is often deliberately refused to a prisoner as part of his punishment. It is not unknown for homosexual assaults among prisoners to be encouraged as part of the punitive pattern.

Overcrowded conditions, underpaid and undertrained staff, and skeletal budgets for rehabilitation programs are common afflictions of the American penal system. Recent investigations of prison conditions in Arkansas<sup>12</sup> and Rikers Island, New York,<sup>13</sup> have in-

<sup>11</sup> *Theology of the New Testament*, R. Bultmann, Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1951. Vol. 1, p. 250 *et passim*.

<sup>12</sup> *The New York Times*, July 12, 1969, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> *The New York Times*, December 23, 1969, pp. 1 and 39.

cluded charges of sodomy. It is not surprising, but neither is it tolerable, that poor prison conditions and isolation from heterosexual contact would give rise to homosexual assaults.

The church has a more than passing obligation to look sharply at such institutional phenomena in our culture and to support, for example, in penal institutions, the development of such practices as conjugal visitation rights for prisoners, furlough in the community, family as well as vocational rehabilitation, etc.

Another concern of the church on this topic is that of developing an awareness among parents and young people of the possible psychological pain that can follow from being the object of homosexual advances by adult persons committed to this pattern.

To the latter end, some enlightened legal measures governing the overt and public behavior of homosexual persons can properly be supported by Christians. It is our opinion, however, that laws which make a felony of homosexual acts privately committed by consenting adults are morally unsupportable, contribute nothing to the public welfare, and inhibit rather than permit changes in behavior by homosexual persons. To overturn such laws would also eliminate the need for those surveillance practices which can become more odious than the so-called crime under scrutiny.

##### 5. *Contraception*

In any view of Christian family life, the exercise of responsible parenthood is one of the highest obligations. This includes the obligation to choose thoughtfully the time and circumstances into which children will be born. A view of parenthood which assumes that responsibility only begins after the child has been born is one which leaves altogether out of account the fact that God has put into our hands increasingly more effective and exact knowledge of the process of conception, including its control. This knowledge extends not only to contraception, but to problems of sterility as well.

We agree with the statement of the General Assembly Committee on "Responsible Marriage and Parenthood" in 1962, (*Minutes*, 1962, Part I, p. 220.) which pointed out both the responsibility of the marriage partners to each other, and their joint responsibility to the larger community in the matter of restraint of conception. "The husband and wife ... must mutually agree to procreation, and to the economic and social alterations it will bring within their own family. They are not only responsible to the community for one another, but should conception occur, they are also responsible for any person brought into existence ... The couple become responsible not only to the smaller community of

their own family, but also to the whole society—the larger community. Restraint in regard to procreation is responsibility to the needs and conditions of the world around us.”<sup>14</sup>

In the years since that report was issued, there has been increasing awareness and concern about population growth. Responsible estimates now suggest that the present world population of 3.5 billion could easily be doubled early in the next century, unless serious efforts are undertaken immediately and on a massive scale to regulate the birth rate everywhere in the world. The failure to address that urgent task has brought serious scholars to forecast rising civil and international strife and large scale famines as the population increase overtakes our practical mastery of food supply and distribution problems.

We therefore urge the church to support all reasonable measures to include the dissemination of birth control information and materials in our public health policies and programs to support the establishment by public or private agencies of birth control clinics, and to share our increased experience with contraceptive technology with other nations as they may seek it.

More specifically, we consider it imperative that any person in our society who is possessed of the physical capability to reproduce human life be equipped with knowledge of the contraceptive process, its techniques and its social, psychological, and moral importance. Although we doubt that our society would be ready to accept the notion, we nonetheless would favor making legally possible the general availability of contraceptive devices and equipment to persons who desire them. In the case of female contraceptives of all sorts, it is understood that these should be dispensed with the consultation and guidance of a physician, since a physician would normally be trained to counsel a woman about which of the many different devices or preparations would be most suited to her situation.

We consciously include, in the above recommendation, the availability of contraceptives to unmarried persons. We recognize that the folkways of nonmarital sexual conduct are changing in our society, and that many single persons are establishing sexual relationships some of which anticipate marriage and some of which do not. This change may reflect the improvement in contraceptive technique, although there is some evidence which would suggest that most women seeking contraceptive pills and devices do so after rather than before the establishment of a sexual relationship. The case is unproven that a more widespread availability of con-

<sup>14</sup>“Responsible Marriage and Parenthood”, Adopted by the 174th General Assembly, May 1962. The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., p. 48.

traceptives would have the effect of encouraging more intensive and earlier sexual exploration by young people, or that it would heighten the incidence of sexual promiscuity among single adults. The changes we are noting here are equally probably the consequence of factors which create alienation of the young from the larger community and press them to search for spiritual meanings and personal satisfactions of life in more intimate relationships. Without implying approval of these changing folkways, the church can acknowledge the fact of the change and support the desire of all persons to exercise contraceptive responsibility.

The desirability of this stand is made clearer by considering the opposite option, which is now associated with the churches: *viz.*, opposition to the dispensing of contraceptive materials to all persons, as with the Roman Catholic Church, or to all but married persons, as with the majority of Protestant communions. This has put the heavier burden on women, since there is virtually no regulation of the distribution of male contraceptives but extensive regulation governing female contraceptives. This is in part a matter of the medical competence required for proper advice on female contraceptives. But it also reflects our society's questionable attitude toward the comparative moral competences of men and women to make the right and responsible judgments concerning their sexual behavior.

Further, the present opposition to making available contraceptives to unmarried persons has no demonstrable deterrent effect on non-marital intercourse. By making it difficult for unmarried women to acquire contraceptive aid (it remains easy for men), we appeal by implication to the fear of pregnancy as a major moral resource in deciding about the character of sexual expression in nonmarital relationships, an appeal which is markedly out of harmony with the affirmative moral concerns the church finds in her gospel to be the basic material of a Christian ethic.

Forthcoming technological developments in contraception will require thoughtful ethical reflection on the part of the religious communities. Already the line between contraception and abortion has been made less clear by the development of devices like the intrauterine device (IUD) and chemical preparations designed to inhibit the implantation of a fertilized ovum (the "morning after pill"). Other preparations promise to change the chemical environment in which sperm and ovum meet so that fertilization will be prevented. Still other questions will be raised by the development of contraceptive capabilities on a large scale, such as preparations suitable for inoculation or sub-cutaneous implantation. As the bewildering array of possibilities increases, so does the need for discriminating ethical reflection which will guide society to choose

those means of population control which best respect the rights of persons and the integrity of God's creation, at the same time that they meet effectively the urgent need to slow the world's population growth rate. This we regard as an essential contemporary exercise of the stewardship given at our creation.

## 6. *Abortion*

In various human societies, primitive and modern, abortion has been utilized as a common means of birth control. In some, its use has been restricted to therapeutic situations where abortion is resorted to only as a means of preserving the life and health of the mother.

The extremely conservative attitude towards abortion which has prevailed in both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches during the last century has, in general, been based on the attitude that human life exists from the instant of the penetration of an ovum by a sperm, and that the cellular, foetal, and embryonic life that proceed from that moment all have equal spiritual status and deserve equal legal and moral protection.

A careful examination of the Judaeo-Christian tradition on the matter of abortion reveals that this attitude, while old, has not always prevailed, nor did it even enjoy status as the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church until 1869 (except for a three-year period between the promulgation and the revocation of a papal bull *Effraenatum* in the 16th century.)<sup>15</sup> Various theological and hermeneutic traditions have concluded that no "person" exists in the form of nascent life until after forty days, or after eighty days, or after the birth process begins, or after one day following birth, or in the case of premature infants after thirty days follow-birth. St. Augustine taught, in the 5th century, that an ensouled human life was present after the foetus had quickened (thus after eighty days), even though Tertullian and St. Gregory of Nyssa had earlier held the position that the soul entered the body at conception.

The continuing view of most rabbinical teachings during the post-Biblical era has been that abortion, while a grave proceeding, is not specifically forbidden in the Bible or the Talmud. Indeed, Exodus 21:22 and other instances of the Old Testament laws concerning homicide suggest that the foetus is not to be regarded as a person, but as a part of (or property of) the mother, and that foeticide is not homicide.

<sup>15</sup> *Birth Control in Jewish Law*, David M. Feldman. New York University Press, 1968, p. 269.

With few exceptions, the structure of civil law in the United States reflects the most conservative interpretation of the meaning of abortion, permitting it only under circumstances which seem clearly to involve a choice between the life of the mother and the life of the child, in which instance the attending physician is permitted to favor the life of the mother. In a few cases, states have passed more liberal legislation embodying the recommendations of the American Medical Association. These permit exceptions to the normal prohibition against abortion only in cases where pregnancy threatens the health or life of the mother, where there is medical evidence that the infant may be born with incapacitating physical deformity or mental deficiency, and where a pregnancy resulting from rape or incest may constitute a threat to the mental or physical health of the mother.

The main positions concerning abortion in our society are three:

1. Abortion should be permitted only when the mother's life is clearly endangered, and even then must be regarded as justifiable homicide, no matter what stage of development the pregnancy has reached. This is the position taken by the Roman Catholic Church and by the report of the General Assembly Committee on Responsible Marriage and Parenthood of 1962.

2. Abortion should be permitted under more liberally conceived conditions, such as those outlined by the American Law Institute and adopted by the American Medical Association in 1967. In this position, the question of when a human life with protected rights is involved is not formally faced, although the practical tendency of hospital abortion committees and of physicians performing abortions is to make a distinction between the problem of termination of pregnancy in the first trimester and the problems presented in subsequent trimesters, dealing with the latter more conservatively. It should be noted that there are specific medical reasons for that conservatism, aside from any philosophical or theological ones.

3. Abortion should be permitted at any stage and for any reason decided upon by a woman in consultation with her physician. This position also is not ordinarily accompanied by any explicit address to the question of when, in the development of a pregnancy, there is a human life with rights to be protected, although it clearly presumes the ancient Jewish assertion that a "person" does not exist until after birth. Justification of this position, therefore, rests on an assertion of the bodily rights of the woman, who should not be compelled to carry to term a pregnancy she does not want.



Our committee takes the position that the first alternative rests on a substantialist theological conception about the entry of a soul into a body which is without Biblical support and has neither philosophical warrant nor any wide currency today, except in some Roman Catholic theological circles. The Roman Catholic requirement (Canon 747) that all living foetuses be baptized in order that, having been denied life in this world, they be not denied eternal salvation as well, is one that we submit would have little appeal to or support by the theologians of our tradition. Furthermore, this first alternative perpetuates a punitive attitude toward sexual activity and one of its possible consequences which does not represent the affirmative regard for sex to which we are committed.

The second of these alternatives is also unsupportable in our estimation. As a form of liberalization of abortion practice, it relieves society and the medical profession of some of the responsibilities they have had to assume in the past for permitting tragedies which could easily have been avoided. But the American Law Institute recommendations adopted by the American Medical Association perpetuate the assumption that abortion is justifiable homicide. Those recommendations only extend the conditions under which it may be committed. There are several problems it does not address at all.

It does nothing to resolve the foeticide/homicide question, thereby effecting none of the attitude changes which might be desirable.

By continuing to assume that abortion is a medico-legal problem, it confines the freedom of moral discretion of the woman and the therapeutic discretion of the physician. It leaves the law as the final moral arbiter of what is proper medical practice.

It does not deal with the problem of the bodily rights of the woman, and does not grant her the right not to bear an unwanted child.

It does not allow for consideration of the emotional, social, or economic welfare of other members of a family into which an unwanted child will be born. The majority of women seeking abortions are those with families of multiple children who wish to limit their family's size.

It does nothing to affect the problem of illegal abortions, a major socio-medical disease, which leaves an important moral and medical problem to be solved by criminals, quack practitioners, and a handful of reputable physicians who are willing to risk their practice and their reputation to perform this procedure at the edge or outside of the presently prescribed boundaries.

It does nothing to relieve the burden which the present structure of laws and practice puts on the poor and on those who are unsophisticated about the ways of medicine and the law. Far more abortions are performed in private than in public hospitals in our country, and medically safe illegal abortions are only available to those who can afford their considerable cost. Further, the procedure for qualifying for a legal therapeutic abortion is complex and expensive, often involving consultations with several psychiatrists and other physicians. Legal abortions outside the United States also involve prohibitive expense.

The liberalization proposals advanced by the American Medical Association do nothing to insure the right of all children to be born as wanted children. Since child abuse is a major problem in pediatric medicine, this lack is serious from both a medical and a moral standpoint.

Our committee's position is that abortion should be taken out of the realm of the law altogether and be made a matter of the careful ethical decision of a woman, her physician and her pastor or other counselor.<sup>16</sup> In the later stages of pregnancy, serious consideration must be given to the competing claims of the developing fetus as well as to the increased risk to the life of the mother in surgical abortion.

We would underscore the need for discriminating counsel about the ethical aspects of a decision for abortion, especially in view of the potential panic associated with many unwanted pregnancies. Ample opportunity must be provided to consider both the alternative means of resolving problem pregnancies and the possible effects of a contemplated abortion on both parties to the conception and on other family members. And since some unwanted pregnancies are established accidentally and others by "intentional accident," the psychological and ethical significance of the conception needs to be understood as well.

In any case we do not think that abortion should be relied upon as a means of limiting family size. Contraceptive procedures are more desirable for many and obvious reasons. But when through misinformation, miscalculation, technical failure, or other reasons, contraception fails and an unwanted pregnancy is established, we

<sup>16</sup>In November 1968, the American Public Health Association adopted a resolution calling for the repeal of restrictive laws on abortion so that pregnant women may have abortions performed by qualified practitioners of medicine and osteopathy. The resolution is based on a belief in the right of individuals to decide the number and spacing of their children, and recognition that contraceptives are not always obtainable, used, or, if used, always effective.

do not think it either compassionate or just to insist that available help be withheld.

We also urge Christians to acknowledge and support the work of agencies and organizations which now offer counsel and help to women with problem pregnancies, such as the various Planned Parenthood Associations, Family Service Agencies, and Clergy Consultation Services, as well as those groups which responsibly work for the repeal of abortion laws.

As laws change and hospital abortions become more readily available, we ask that adequate protection be given to those who object to abortion by reason of conscience including physicians, nurses, and prospective mothers.

## 7. *Courtship and Marriage*

a. *Courtship before marriage.* Protestant Christianity has traditionally placed great emphasis on the sanctity of the family, and therefore on the permanence of the marriage bond. It has recognized the need of just divorce laws and has urged a compassionate attitude toward those whose marriages are broken by divorce, in the hope of making them better able to succeed in a subsequent marriage, should one be undertaken.<sup>17</sup>

Behind this emphasis is the conviction that sexual behavior is to be confined to non-coital contact before marriage and to coital exclusively during marriage. Again, Christian theology has urged compassion toward those who have not met such standards, in the hope that they may be helped to understand and abide by them.

These premarital expectations are an outgrowth of the value that has been attached to virginity in the Christian tradition; although Protestantism largely discarded the Roman Catholic attitude toward clerical celibacy it has maintained the norm of virginity before marriage. This reflects at least three factors: (1) the primacy of procreation in the Christian tradition's view of marriage; (2) the influence of Biblical references to fornication;<sup>18</sup> and (3) the value attached to self-restraint as a rehearsal for and a sign of a person's capacity to be faithful in the marriage and

<sup>17</sup> A report "The Marriage of Divorced Persons" was adopted by the 179th General Assembly (1967), *General Assembly Journal*, Part I, 1967, p. 158-183; Action on Proposed Constitutional Changes. *General Assembly Journal*, Part I, 1968, pp. 82-84.

<sup>18</sup> Passages translated from the New Testament as fornication are based on the Greek work *porneia*. Their context, for the most part, is concerned with pagan practices of cultic and commercialized prostitution. Passages translated as adultery are based on the term *moicheia*, and usually referred to sexual intercourse between a man and another man's wife. (See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967/68, Vols. V and VI.

family relationship. It must be added that these expectations were applied in principle to men but in practice to young women. In fact, in some western cultures young men who remained virginal were looked on askance, as having failed to demonstrate their manhood.

Increasingly, the expectation of premarital virginity is not being met either by men or women. This change is not necessarily to be regarded as a sign of the lowering of standards of young people. It follows from a variety of influences. As the pattern of our society changes from the larger family unit and relies more and more exclusively on the immediate family, there is a tendency for courtship patterns to take the form of sequential and increasingly intense monogamous relationships. This pattern has developed along with a steady postponement of the age of economic independence and a steady lowering of the age of the onset of puberty. Thus, the standard of premarital virginity, which once was expected to be maintained during a relatively short period of two to five years, is now more difficult to maintain during the ten or more years that commonly elapse between puberty and marriage in our time.

While we are not competent to comment on the efficacy of any particular form of contraception, the fact remains that inexpensive and efficient means of contraception are increasingly and readily available. Thus, the function of virginity as the main protection against out-of-wedlock pregnancy is in decline.

It is also in decline as a testimony to one's capacity for faithfulness to the marriage bond. To increasingly large numbers of young people, within and without the church, being a virgin at marriage proves nothing by itself. More significant is one's personal maturity and readiness to accept joyously the responsibilities of life together. To put it plainly, fewer and fewer young people are willing to think of a non-virgin as a "fallen" person. That designation, if used at all, would more likely describe a weak or neurotic or promiscuous person whose sexual activity, whether coital or non-coital, is in the service of self rather than in the creation and celebration of meaningful communion with another person.

In our time, a pattern of many intense but short-lived relationships may be a more ominous portent of unfaithfulness than the simple failure to come virginal to the marriage relationship. In fact, our culture could unwittingly erode the capacity for faithfulness in its young by disregarding the emotional and spiritual significance of various forms of sexual behavior, while simplistically maintaining the arbitrary standards of technical virginity. The church's understandable preoccupation up to now with coital ac-

tivity has led to stresses at both extremes that call for correction. On the one hand, there is little medical or psychological evidence that premarital coital experience between persons who subsequently marry is necessarily damaging either to their emotional health or to the personal adjustment, including the sexual adjustment, that they make to each other. On the other hand, there is little evidence that sexual restraints and coital abstinence can be demonstrated as harmful to the person. The pressure for premarital coitus may be rationalized by an appeal that it assures a healthy adjustment in marriage; but a healthy adjustment in marriage depends on much more than this. And the fact that premarital restraint may sometimes be associated with fears or neuroses is a comment on the deficiencies of personal growth rather than proof of the harmfulness of sexual restraint.

In place of the simple, but ineffective and widely disregarded standard of premarital virginity, we would prefer to hear our church speak in favor of the more significant standard of responsibly appropriate behavior. Responsibly appropriate behavior might be defined as sexual expression which is proportional to the depth and maturity of the relationship and to the degree to which it approaches the permanence of the marriage covenant. Such a definition clearly means that sexual promiscuity is neither responsible nor appropriate.

Admittedly such an approach makes difficult the detailed definition of which acts are fitting and which are not. Yet, that difficulty is measurably less than the difficulty of attaching intrinsic definitions to certain acts as "appropriate" and "inappropriate" without regard to the context in which they take place.

The real aim of developing such a Christian ethical sensibility ought to be such realistic awareness of oneself and open sensitivity toward another that it would be possible to understand and admit when a sexual expression is appropriate and when it is not. To be well practiced in the effort to "grow up in every way into Christ" will involve, among other things, candor with oneself when any kind of sexual relationship becomes casual, or exploitive, or manipulative, or an acting out of conflict, or abusive. It is these and similar motives which define a sexual gesture as inappropriate. For the same gesture may be altogether appropriate when it expresses the friendship and delight, the trust and the hope that two people have in each other and their relationship.

To shift attention from our preoccupation with premarital virginity to a concern for responsibly appropriate behavior is not to give either tacit or explicit approval to premarital sexual intercourse. It is rather to stress the need for Christian persons to be

aware, in their courtship experience, of the need for responsible understanding and regulation of their sexual expression at all stages of a relationship. This seems to our committee both a viable and a desirable shift from the present implicit assumption in our society that, in courtship, anything is permitted as long as intromission is avoided.

A concern for the development of a sense of the appropriate in courtship would also provide good preparation for an understanding of sexual conduct in marriage. Since a chief goal of marriage is the perfection of interpersonal relationship, a courtship which has helped a couple develop profound sensitivities to each other, and tenderness in response to each other's needs and desires, can prepare them for a healthy adjustment of their sexual energies in the marriage that follows.

If in the course of such a courtship, a couple has taken a responsible decision to engage in premarital intercourse, the church should not convey to them the impression that their decision is in conflict with their status as members of the body of Christ. If they are Christians, whatever joys and sorrows, doubts and delights, attend the development of their relationship are part of their experience as Christian persons, moving toward marriage, and are elements of human experience as susceptible as any others to that reconciling ministry to which the church is called.

b. *Courtship within marriage.* Courtship is a form of honoring and delighting the other person, with the hope of winning a loving, accepting response in return. A man and a woman may show their care and concern for each other in many ways; by dutifulness, by faithfulness, by offering comfort. Courtship is simply finding words, gestures, and tokens to make explicit what those other forms of caring imply.

Thus, courtship often leads to marriage. The tragedy is that it too often ends there. If one chief purpose of marriage is to "build up communion between persons . . . and confirm to them the fact that they are truly loved,"<sup>19</sup> then clearly courtship has as much place within marriage as before it.

The forms that courtship takes, like the forms of sexual expression which are regarded as permissible, will vary according to their cultural setting. But Christians are more concerned with the love that is conveyed than with the forms of expression which convey it.

The question of what constitutes appropriate sexual behavior between married persons, like the form of courtship, is conditioned

<sup>19</sup> cf. *supra*, page 11

by cultural expectations more than by abstract ethical considerations. Feelings tend to run high about various modes of sexual expression in marriage. But a variety of attitude studies concerning different sexual practices would suggest that these feelings correlate more readily with class or ethnic or other cultural factors than with the religious factor. Matters of taste and feeling are of ethical significance to the degree that they are the material of a caring relationship. But it is these sensitivities, rather than any certain forms of sexual gesture, which should occupy the ethical concern of Christians. The church ought to be able to support an understanding of sex in marriage which asserts that nothing is forbidden except that which offends the sensibilities of one's partner. Sexual intimacy is not a privilege to be claimed, but a gift to be given. It should be seen as an avenue not to power over but to friendship with one's partner.

The Christian affirmation of fidelity in marriage includes more than sexual fidelity. The confinement of sexual activity to the marriage relationship represents a discipline of eroticism's restlessness, the purpose of which is not simply the preservation of one's own moral purity, but the nurture of a truly reciprocal and caring relationship between husband and wife which supports each one's unique worth as a child of God. Such a relationship is one form of the expression of *agape*, that Christian love which seeks the peace and well-being of the other. The caring that characterizes such a relationship extends to every facet of the relationship; the economic, the psychological, the vocational, and many other facets, including the sexual. For marriage partners to confine their sexual activities to their relationship with one another, therefore, is normal to and supportive of the total web of concerns they will have for each other's well-being. Sexual fidelity is important because it both symbolizes and supports the total fidelity of the marriage relationship, which in turn has always been suggestive to Christians of the fidelity of God to his people and of Christ to his church.

We recognize that there may be exceptional circumstances where extramarital sexual activity may not be contrary to the interests of a faithful concern for the well-being of the marriage partner, as might be the case when one partner suffers permanent mental or physical incapacity. But an exception is an exception and not a new rule, so it is difficult to make general judgments about such exceptions. Such judgments finally have to be made by and on the responsibility of the person who takes the exception. Our concern for the church is that it might see the question of marital fidelity in broad enough terms to understand that faithfulness in marriage and coital exclusivity are not synonymous. It is quite possible to be coitally monogamous yet maritally unfaithful. In any case, the church must not leave the Christian who finds himself in an ex-

ceptional circumstance with nothing more reliable than his own rationalizations to fall back upon as an ethical resource.

In our attempt to understand sexual activity in premarital and marital relationships, we have dealt with coital union as one point along a continuum of sexual expression, and in that we have departed from the tendency of the past to focus entire attention on coitus and disregard the ethical significance of many other forms of sexual relationship. We believe that many of our difficulties in evolving a useful and effective Christian ethical reflection on sexual responsibility for our time are rooted in an overestimation of, and an overemphasis upon, coital union.

Indeed, many marriages survive with either minimal or no coital relations. If married persons face circumstances which prevent normal sexual sharing with their partners, there is nothing to suggest that they will incur physical or psychological harm by mutually deciding to practice sexual restraint, even abstinence, in the face of those circumstances.

As with celibacy, the decision for sexual restraint is not in itself an unhealthy decision. If it comes as the consequence of an unhealthy state of mind, it is the state of mind, rather than the restraint that should be given attention. We feel this is an important observation to make in an era when arbitrary culture pressures to prove one's worth by sexual performance are very great.

c. *Courtship and race.* Since this is also an era when racial consciousness is running excessively high, and since sexual fears and feelings of guilt seem to play an important part in exacerbating interracial tensions, we feel it is important to underscore the fact that any restrictions, legal or conventional, against marriage by persons of different races are without standing in Christian ethical discussion. On the contrary, they represent an arbitrary and alien prohibition against the free association of Christian persons and ought to be opposed on religious grounds. By extension, the same opposition ought to be offered by Christians to those customs and social pressures which discourage interracial dating and courtship. The argument that interracial marriages face especially strong social disapprobation is a reflection on the immaturity of the society, rather than a comment on the ethical status of such relationships.

## 8. *Sterilization*

Sterilization involves the permanent and usually irreversible termination of the power to reproduce.<sup>20</sup> It is therefore a proce-

<sup>20</sup>Dr. P. S. Jhaver, an Indian surgeon, has invented a device known as the "Jhaver clip," which promises easily reversible male sterilization if extensive experiments on men in India are successful.



ture which must rest on the most serious moral reflection, and the right of all the individuals involved must be fully explored before it is undertaken.

Therapeutic sterilization, undertaken when pregnancy would seriously endanger the life of the mother, is a matter for decision by hospital committees on sterilization, the woman involved and her family and physician. The moral right of the woman to care for her own life by insuring against any potential offspring is clear.

Sterilization of convenience involves the voluntary decision of a man or a woman to submit to surgical sterilization as a means of efficient contraception. Hospital committees have the obligation to review such decisions, and attending physicians have the conscientious responsibility of pointing out to the persons involved, the permanence, the medical seriousness and the possible psychological effects of this procedure. With current advances in contraceptive technique, it is probable that this means of contraception will be elected with diminishing frequency. However, in the event of serious hereditary physical or mental deficiencies which could be passed on to future children, or in the circumstance where another pregnancy could clearly endanger the mental or physical health of the mother, a couple might still elect this means of birth control, and do so to their advantage.

Eugenic sterilization is the sterilization of a mentally disordered person, whose disorder is either hereditary (and so would affect future offsprings) or debilitating in such degree that the person could not care for and rear any future offspring. Since eugenic sterilization involves a decision about an individual taken on his or her behalf by the community, it constitutes a heavy moral burden on those who must make the decision. Although the responsibility to the community must be exercised, such decisions should be taken with a certain prejudice in favor of the rights of the individual affected. As with many other decisions which society takes on behalf of the mentally ill, this one puts before the decision-maker the temptation to play God and to prefer unduly the rights of the community.

In the foreseeable future, sterilization for population control may become a more widespread practice. India, faced with explosive population growth and the constant danger of famine, has adopted a program with monetary incentives as well as penalties to encourage the sterilization of men. The object is to limit family size to not more than three children. The decision to sterilize men is made primarily because of the relatively simpler and less dangerous surgical procedure involved.

India's program presumes voluntary sterilization, and to that we see no moral objection. Should the population problem become so

severe as to tempt governments to impose compulsory sterilization, however, a serious bodily right would be infringed upon. It would seem to us more morally acceptable, although still problematical, for public policy to be expressed in the adoption of one or another of the mass contraceptive techniques, now under study, which are reversible, and which regulate rather than destroy the power to reproduce.

Since it can be predicted, without exaggeration, that safe and widespread means of population control may have to be adopted by governments as a means of insuring survival of our human race, there seems to be positive moral warrant for pressing forward the development of mass contraceptive techniques, so that these can be relied upon rather than the more permanent tactic of required sterilization.

### 9. *Artificial insemination*

Artificial insemination is another means of conception control, designed to overcome barriers to natural conception which may be provided by special and peculiar chemical conditions in one partner or the other, or to provide healthy sperm from a donor male, to take the place of the infertile sperm of the husband.

Legal and moral questions have been raised about this process, especially in the case where the sperm of a donor male are used in place of or in addition to those of the husband. The question of eugenic and selective application of the procedure has also been raised, with alarm by some.

It is our opinion that no challenge can properly be lodged against the legal rights, including the right of inheritance, of offspring conceived by means of artificial insemination. When a couple decide to use artificial insemination to establish a pregnancy, the child is bound to its parents by spiritual, psychological, and physical bonds which clearly weigh more heavily in any moral calculation than could the technical fact that artificial means might have been used to introduce the husband's sperm, or the chemical fact that a sperm other than the husband's fertilized the wife's ovum.

We do not therefore see any moral barrier to the process of artificial insemination, either in the instance where artificial means are used to enable the husband's sperm to fertilize the wife's ovum, or in the case where the sperm of a donor male is added. In the latter instance, the physician and the pastor or counselor should explore with both partners the effect of this process on the husband's feelings about himself and about his contemplated offspring. But where there is a maturity of perspective and a thoughtful decision involving both partners, there should be no moral hindrance.

## 10. *Single adult persons*<sup>21</sup>

Early in this report, we observed that the style of Christian reflection on the ethics of sex which relies for its method on an understanding of the "orders of creation" has resulted in marriage and the family becoming the model for ordering all sexual activity. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the paucity of ethical guidance the church has to offer the single adult person. Our standards and teachings about premarital sexual conduct assume that the practices and restraints which are being recommended are justifiable in terms of their value in preparing the couple for successful adjustment to marriage. But what of the person who never marries, or who having been married, is once again single? The conventions of society and those of the church both suggest that such a person must continue in or revert to the standards of conduct appropriate to those who are preparing for marriage.

The inadequacy of this approach as a source of positive guidance and mature understanding of sexual behavior for the single adult should be obvious. And that single adult portion of the population is increasing, counting together the never married and formerly married. Some of those who never marry are homosexual, some have made vocational decisions which preclude marriage, some have hung back from the permanence of the marriage relationship for reasons of fear or lack of self-confidence in heterosexual relationships, but many are simply the victims of circumstance.

Add to the never-married adults all those whose marriages have terminated through divorce, separation, or death, and a significantly large minority of persons are the victims of a "conspiracy of silence" in the church concerning any positive and realistic ethical guidance for their sexual lives.

The number of single persons is growing in our society, primarily as a reflection of the higher survival rate among women past sixty-five years of age. Present demographic projections suggest that the ratio of women over sixty-five to men of comparable age may be as high 1,403 to 1,000 by the year 1980. Current medical research has produced readily accessible forms of hormone therapy which are designed to offset some of the disabilities and discomforts of the aging process, and which have the effect as well, of preserving the capacity for full sexual functioning by men and women well into the sixties and seventies. Is abstinence or sublimation the only advice the church will have to give to single persons? Or, will it be able to explore new forms of male-female relationships and, while affirming the primacy of marriage and the nuclear family as the pattern for heterosexual relationship, be able to condone a plurality of patterns which will make a better place for the unmarried?

<sup>21</sup> *cf. supra* P. 6

Our committee has found itself possessed of more questions than answers in this area of its inquiry. Yet it is persuaded of at least the following:

Sexual expression with the goal of developing a caring relationship is an important aspect of personal existence and cannot be confined to the married and the about-to-be-married.

Interpersonal relationships between men and women can be altogether celibate and still be spiritually and psychologically rewarding. Thus, celibacy is a valid option for those who adopt it voluntarily. Yet we question whether society has the right to impose celibacy or celibate standards on those who do not choose them.

The church has at least the obligation to explore the possibilities of both celibate and non-celibate communal living arrangements as ethically acceptable and personally fulfilling alternatives for unmarried persons. The past experience of the church with spiritual and utopian communes of various sorts ought to provide some help in thinking through the comparable possibilities for our time. It may well be that an increased ratio of women to men, particularly among older persons, calls for such new exploration in our own culture.

The church should take the lead in re-examining and, where appropriate, calling for the revocation of laws governing sexual behavior. Many of them serve no purpose of protecting the welfare of the community and, indeed, seriously infringe upon the rights of persons in their private lives and their intimate personal relationships.

In another part of the legal realm, the church should press serious discussion of those welfare laws which discourage open and responsible marriage relationships and thus contribute to the instability and uncertainty of the life patterns of some single persons. Provisions of the Aid to Dependent Children plan which call for the withdrawal of funds if there is a man in the home, and Social Security provisions which cut off the retirement funds of widows who remarry are both examples of the injustices that now prevail, and that frustrate the possibility of productive relationships for some single persons. Current proposals of government, such as those outlined by President Nixon in 1969, seek to redress these injustices and should be given an attentive hearing in the churches.

### *Conclusion*

Throughout our deliberations, the committee was aware that more was at stake than restating classic Christian concerns and values about sex and sexual behavior. We have been keenly aware that new technological and cultural dimensions of modern life have

provided a radically new spiritual environment in which men and women must understand and use their sexuality. We have been equally impressed with the fact that, as the churches' reflection on these matters has lagged farther and farther behind the new developments, a generation is growing up which takes little notice of what the churches may have said in the past, and looks elsewhere for its understanding of what constitutes mature and healthy perspectives on sex. We think it imperative that the church apply much more flexible and imaginative thought to these problems, since they are so close to the center of one's personal experience and thus to the sources of one's ethical sensitivities.

We have attempted to open the questions that have occurred to us as fully as possible, without standing off from questions because they are puzzling or disturbing. We have developed a point of view on some issues which we are ready to regard as thoroughly responsible Christian thinking. In other instances, we recognize that our suggestions must stand much criticism and examination, and perhaps alteration.

We commend these suggestions to the church, however, as the consequence of sober thought and a serious attempt to be obedient to the gospel. The Confession of 1967 speaks of "man's perennial confusion about the meaning of sex" as one of the sources of his alienation from himself, his neighbor, and God. Our effort, on which this paper reports, has been to overcome some of this confusion and to give some particular suggestions of what might be the meaning of "the responsible freedom of the new life in Christ" as it bears on our nature as male and female children of God.

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other hand he tells the people to practice and observe "whatever they tell you." The apparent ambivalence dissolves, however, when we recognize that Jesus is speaking from the standpoint of a new order of priorities which subordinates the letter of the Law to its spirit (Rom. 7: 6). There is indeed a sense in which the Law and the prophets have come to an end with John the Baptist—and "since then the good news of the Kingdom of God is preached" (Luke 16: 16b RSV); the wine of the gospel cannot be poured into the old skins of the Sinaitic regime (Mark 2: 22). But in another sense Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the prophets (Matt. 5: 17), and the sense in which we are to understand this statement is governed by four considerations:

1. Jesus established an order of priority among the various precepts, placing the principal duties of justice, mercy and honesty above the details of the Law (Matt. 23: 16-33).

2. Imperfections permitted under the old Law because of hardness of heart are to be no more in the Kingdom (Matt. 19: 8); the rule of conduct will be the "law of perfection" in imitation of God's perfection (Matt. 5: 21-48).

3. Since this is a virtually unattainable ideal in man's present condition (Matt. 19: 10-12) Jesus, even as he imposes the "Law of perfection," provides an effective example and the interior strength of the Spirit (John 16: 13; Acts 1: 8) necessary to approximate toward it.

4. The Law of the Kingdom incorporates the twofold commandment of the old Law, to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Mark 12: 28-34); everything is subordinated to this commandment and derived from it. The golden rule of positive charity embodies the Law and the prophets (Matt. 7: 12) for men's dealings with one another.

The conclusion follows that where obedience to a higher principle requires it, the inferior details of the Law must be disregarded. Thus, the twofold commandment is "more important" than the Decalogue, the Decalogue is "more important" than the oral tradition of the Jews and the six hundred and thirteen commandments developed by the Pharisees. However, nowhere in the New Testament is it assumed that the Christian will be unable to keep the Ten Commandments. On the other hand we have to admit that the distinction made by later theologians between the Decalogue and the so-called ceremonial precepts of the Jewish Law is not explicitly found in the New Testament, and therefore we can hardly say more than that the whole lesson of Christ's teaching as given in the gospels could be summarized as the placing of the most important things first.

Jesus himself is thus a legislator in the sense of being the revealer of an already existing hierarchy of values. Without contradicting Moses, Jesus explains and perfects the Mosaic teachings, as when he proclaims that man is greater than the Sabbath (Mark 2: 23-27; John 7: 21ff). Moreover he went beyond the letter of the Law and even opposed it with new norms, e.g., he reversed the prescriptions of the code of cleanliness (Mark 7: 15-23). Such teachings surprised his hearers, for they undercut those of the scribes and revealed an awareness of a unique authority (Mark 1: 22). Moses is superseded, for in the Kingdom there is only one teacher (Matt. 23: 10); men must build their house on the rock of his words (Matt. 7: 24ff); only in this way can they fulfill the will of the Father (Matt. 7: 21ff). Just as the faithful Jews, following the rabbinic teachings, took upon themselves the yoke of the Law, so now one must take up the (lighter) yoke of Christ and learn from him (Matt. 9: 29). Prior to this, man's eternal fate was thought to be determined by his attitude towards the Mosaic Law; from now on it will be settled on the basis of his attitude toward Jesus (Matt. 10: 32f). Here is one greater than Moses (Heb. 8: 6); the new law foretold by the prophets (Acts 3: 24; Jer. 31: 31-34); Ezek. 36: 26) is now promulgated.

In the gospels, then, Christ supersedes Moses, interpreting without abrogating the Mosaic Law, and adding a new commandment, "that you love one another; even as I have loved you" (John 13: 34 RSV). In the Pauline epistles the same truth is expressed subjectively. "Man is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2: 16 RSV), and again, "man is justified by faith apart from works of Law" (Rom. 3: 28 RSV). Paul did not claim "a righteousness of my own, based on Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Phil. 3: 9 RSV). However, while for Paul faith was the instrument (*dia* pisteos), the principle (*ek* pisteos) and the foundation (*en* pistei) of justification, Paul was certainly not an antinomian: "Are we to sin because we are not under the Law but under grace? By no means" (Rom. 6: 15 RSV). In 1 Cor. 5: 7 Paul was explicit on the subject of sexual morality, laying down definite guidelines (1 Cor. 7: 1f) and penalties (1 Cor. 5: 2). He castigates lesbianism and homosexuality (Rom. 1: 26f). He insists (apparently) on monogamy for the Christian (1 Cor. 7: 2) and thus in this instance outstripped the Talmudic law which permitted a man to "marry wives in addition to his first wife, provided only that he possesses the means to maintain them" (Yebamoth 65A). He outstripped it also in forbidding divorce (1 Cor. 7: 10f). While for Paul it is *dia*, *ek* and *en* faith that man is justified, the life the justified man thereafter lives is expected to conform to explicit moral laws, and in the sphere of sex these laws are on the whole more stringent than the Talmudic or the Augustan laws that the Jewish

and Gentile Christians, to whom Paul wrote, had presumably respected before their conversion.<sup>1</sup>

However, apostolic social legislation was not necessarily regarded as permanently binding. The commandments of the Council of Jerusalem to the Gentile Christian communities (Acts 15: 29) soon fell into disuse, as the later injunctions of Paul (noted above) indicate—Paul certainly did not think that Christians would “do well” if they abstained “only” from these things (Act 15: 28 RSV). The New Testament record of the development of social and sexual morality in the Church of the first century seems to indicate that the Church leaders tried to lay down rules of conduct, conformity to which, in their opinion, would befit Christians living in that particular culture. What sort of behavior in this sort of society is best going to bear witness to the presence and spirit of the saving Christ?—this was the fundamental question; and the moral regulations the Church laid upon its members were the concrete answer.

Modern scholarship has thrown into doubt the precise meaning of *porneia*, which AV and RV translated “fornication.” RSV and NEB render it “immorality,” thus begging the question. The many New Testament injunctions, therefore, against “fornication” in AV and RV (e.g., Matt. 6: 32; 19: 9; John 8: 41; 1 Cor. 5: 1, 6: 18; Gal. 5: 19; Col. 3: 5; 1 Thes. 4: 3; etc.) cannot with certainty be construed in the traditional sense as explicitly forbidding all extra-marital intercourse.

The underlying philosophy of sex in the New Testament is expressed in Matt. 19: 3-6, where Jesus is recorded as interpreting Gen. 1: 27, 2: 18 and 21-23, and v. 2 to mean that a husband and wife become “one flesh.” Paul extends this principle to apply to extra-marital relations, “he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her” (1 Cor. 6: 16 RSV). Several difficulties get in the way of utilizing this philosophy as a basis for sexual morality today:

1. It is questionable whether an *ad hominem* argument directed by Jesus to Pharisees can be extracted from its context (the conventions of rabbinic debate) and universalized as being part of revealed truth.

2. Paul’s extension of the “one flesh” principle to extra-marital acts is questionable exegesis on his part and seems to involve the logical absurdity of a Casanova’s being “one flesh” with a multitude of women simultaneously.

<sup>1</sup> F. Prat, *The Theology of St. Paul* (English Edition, Vol. I. Burnes & Oates, Ltd., 1964).



3. Modern psychology makes it difficult to accept the "one flesh" concept at least as it was construed by Paul and by many others in the Christian tradition until recent times.

The considerations outlined in the foregoing sections compel the conclusion that Scripture alone provides an inadequate basis on which to construct a specific sexual morality for today. It does not exclude the possibility that the Christian is bound by legal codes only in the sense that faith in Christ constrains him to respect a hierarchy of values which will be concretized in particular cultures in particular ways, but not necessarily in the same ways in every culture. The call of the gospel is to interior sincerity rather than exterior observance; but at the same time the New Testament as a whole assumes that interior sincerity will result in a measure of exterior observance, the lesser laws always being subordinated to the supreme commandment of love for God and neighbor. The New Testament never deals with the possibility of there being a conflict between the supreme commandment and the Decalogue. Its silence on this possibility could be construed as conviction that no such possibility exists, but such an inference suffers from the weakness attaching to all arguments from silence. All that can quite certainly be asserted in this matter is that the New Testament approves the principle of a hierarchy of values and expects the Christian's conscience to concretize these by prompting appropriate behavior in all the varied situations in which he is called upon to make a choice between better and worse.

[Twenty-two pages later in this Report, in the last paragraph on page 62, the following appears:]

In the first chapter of Romans, the much-maligned and misunderstood paragraph, in which he [Paul] refers to homosexual practice (vv. 26-27) has been regarded by some as clear indication that the Bible knows of no worse "sin" than sodomy; others have seen in it simply the statement of a bigoted man, who to some extent may be overlooked at this point because he merely reflects an ancient and uninformed point of view, or whose very vindictiveness may suggest that he himself was suffering from that "thorn in the flesh"! Both opinions err in extricating these two verses from their total context. Paul's whole intention from 1:18 to 3:20 is to demonstrate the ubiquity of sin—to show that "no human being can be justified in the sight of God." He does not refer to sodomy in isolation; he refers to it, rather, in the context of a whole discussion of the nature and consequences of sin amongst the Gentiles. If it comes as a kind of penultimate climax to his argument (but only *penultimate*, because the climax to this part of his argument has rather to do with the reason (*ratio*) which is "depraved"), it is because sodomy provides in the

context a kind of graphic illustration of the consequence of man's sinful exchange of "the splendor of immortal God for an image shaped like modern man." The results of this exchange, this preference for idolatry which is ultimately self-idolatry, are to be seen (according to Paul) in every aspect of life, not least of all in heterosexual practices, and certainly most of all in the realm of rationality. Homosexual practices are regarded by him (to be sure, not without a certain moralism) as a kind of symptom *and symbol of fallen man's predicament* as the one who has usurped for himself the place of God, who in grasping for the Divine glory has lost his own creaturely glory. But to regard this passage as containing a "special" condemnation of homosexuality more damning than against all else is to miss not only the reference to many other manifestations of sin in the same context but also the theologically important point that homosexuality is here considered a symptom and symbol of *man's predicament*.

[Further copies of this Report at a cost of \$1.00 per copy, are available from: The Ecumenical Institute of Canada, 11 Madison Avenue, Toronto 180, Ontario.]

### **3. A STATEMENT OF THE 182ND GENERAL ASSEMBLY (1970)**

The Council on Church and Society in 1966 provided for the appointment of a Task Force to study the Christian concept of sexuality in the human community. The committee was authorized: "To explore the mystery of sexuality in a broad range of human experience; to identify and analyze the forces that enhance or inhibit the realization of sexual values; and to evaluate the church's role and responsibility in interpreting the meaning of sexuality in human relationships."

The findings of the Task Force are incorporated in a report entitled "Sexuality and the Human Community."

The 182nd General Assembly (1970):

Receives the report "Sexuality and the Human Community," for study; this action is not to be construed as an endorsement of the report.

Directs that it be published.

*Recommends* it to the church for study and appropriate action.

Further: believing that Christian faith affirms sexual being as a God-given dimension of life to be used for the creative intent and purposes of God; and recognizing that the church has a respon-

sibility to speak and act in regard to a wide-spread concern about the state of sexual morality today, the 182nd General Assembly (1970) addresses the church and the society in these areas: (1) education, (2) research, (3) legislation.

### **Education**

Believing that sound wholesome education about human sexuality is an essential part of general education for all persons; knowing that sexuality involves the whole person with particular needs at each level of human development for understanding the meaning of sexuality in human relationships; and noting that education about sexuality, including biological, psychological, social, and moral aspects, is a proper and necessary concern of the home, school, church, and community:

The 182nd General Assembly (1970):

1. Urges: (a) increased attention to these concerns in the development of Christian education materials for children, young people, and adults; (b) that these materials be free of the double standard of a morality which oppresses and stereotypes both men and women; and (c) greater attention to the attitudes toward sex which are conveyed implicitly and explicitly in all other church publications.

2. Calls upon churches to provide opportunities for the discussion of matters of human sexuality especially in settings which engage Christians in discussion across sexual and generational lines. Toward this end, we further recommend the exploration by church groups of the techniques of human relationship training.

3. Commends the efforts of such agencies as the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States, the National Council on Family Relations and other groups which work at the development of responsible and thoughtful programs of sex education for private and public schools.

4. Encourages United Presbyterians to be informed about and participate in the development of sex education programs in the schools, to help establish a healthy, responsible, and affirmative view of human sexuality.

5. Calls for increased opportunities for specialized education for clergymen in all areas of human sexuality.

### **Research**

Noting the extraordinary development and accumulation of new knowledge about rapidly developing events in today's world; and recognizing an essential need to interpret and assess such knowl-

edge for ethical reflection on moral responses in sexual matters; the 182nd General Assembly (1970):

1. Calls special attention to the need for research in sexual ethics.
2. Expresses its special interest in and support of research projects concerning homosexuality such as that now in progress under the aegis of the National Institute of Mental Health.
3. Encourages further research into the means of contraception in the awareness of the radical need for readily available safe, inexpensive, and efficient means of birth control.
4. Encourages further study of abortion.
5. Encourages dialogue with other religious groups on aspects of human sexuality.
6. Calls for a new inquiry into the nature of marriage in the light of the gospel.
7. Requests the Department of Church and Society to provide further Biblical rationale for the report entitled "Sexuality in the Human Community," to be appended to the report when it is distributed in the Church.

#### **Legislation**

Believing that the law should provide for the optimal condition of physical and mental health, and should allow for the optimal exercise of private moral judgment and choices in matters related to the sexual sphere of life; and recognizing that religious convictions held by individuals should not be imposed by law on the secular society; the 182nd General Assembly (1970):

1. Calls for repeal of laws hampering access to contraceptive help and equipment recognizing the need to maintain proper professional control over the prescription and use of dangerous substances.
2. Declares the artificial or induced termination of pregnancy is a matter of the careful ethical decision of the patient, her physician, and her pastor or other counselor and therefore should not be restricted by law, except that it be performed under the direction and control of a properly licensed physician.
3. Urges the establishment of medically sound, easily available, and low cost abortion services; the support and expansion of responsible counseling services on problem pregnancies; and the support for groups working responsibly for repeal of abortion

laws which are not in harmony with Section 2 above.

4. Calls upon judicatories and churches to support and give leadership in movements toward the elimination of laws governing the private sexual behavior of consenting adults.

5. Calls for changes of those Social Security regulations which penalize older persons who marry by the reduction of their pension payments.

6. Calls for changes in those Aid to Dependent Children provisions which withdraw funds if there is a man in the house.

### **A STUDY GUIDE**

The 182d General Assembly (1970) received and recommended to the churches for "study and appropriate action" the report entitled "Sexuality and the Human Community." The assumption underlying these study suggestions is that in various congregations and judicatories Presbyterians will gather to study the report. Sometimes they will be members of sessions, meeting under the guidance of their pastor. Sometimes they will be members of a task force called together for this specific purpose. Sometimes they will be members of ongoing Sunday morning classes. These suggestions have such groups in view.

#### *Guidelines for Group Study*

1. Seek to understand the report on its own terms. You may be strongly tempted to bring in an "expert" to interpret the report—a theologian, a psychiatrist, a professor. If you do, assign him the role

of "observer-commentator." As much as possible, let the report communicate on its own terms.

2. The report can best be studied in groups of not more than ten persons. Each person needs to have his opinions heard and discussed by others.

3. Wherever possible, the groups should include members of both sexes and should cross generational lines.

4. In each group there will be those who want to use the report as a means to self-understanding; there will also be the those who want to use the group to help them to understand the report. In your planning, allow for the possibility of both wants to be satisfied. Don't settle either for a "person centered" group or a "content centered" group.

5. These suggestions are directed to a "leader," though quite obviously they are available to everyone in the group who receives a copy of the report.

### *Objectives*

A wise leader determines in his own mind on an overall objective for any unit of study. If nothing else, this objective serves him as a fixed star by which to steer. He avoids vague objectives such as "to discuss the report" or "to consider the recommendations." He settles for a modest, but *realizable* goal.

Here are some possible objectives for a short-term study group using "Sexuality and the Human Community":

(1) Summarize the guidelines for sexual behavior suggested in the report and test them for consistency with the Biblical and theological assumptions.

(2) Define the task of the churches and their members in affirming and interpreting a Christian concept of sexuality in human relationships. Draw up written recommendations for appropriate action for families, congregations, judicatories and related agencies.

(3) See if a consensus can be reached on one or more of the six legislative recommendations attached to the report by the General Assembly and appropriate action begun.

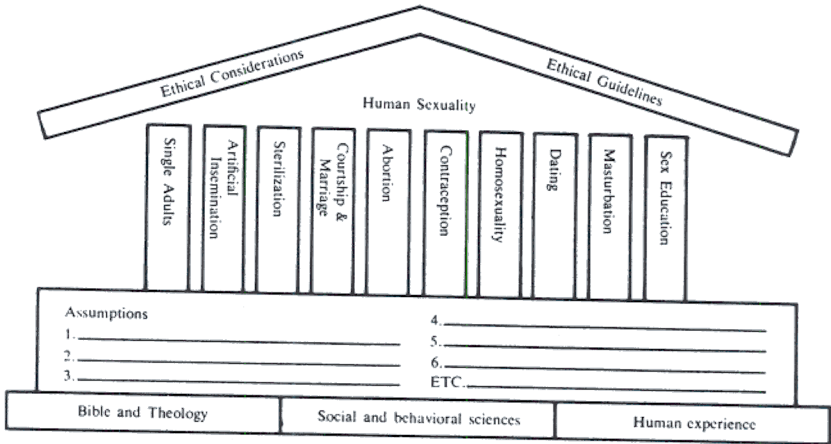
### *Plans for Six Meetings*

On the assumption that most groups, whatever the overall objective, will want to understand what the report says and evaluate its usefulness, here are suggestions for six group sessions. For each session there is (a) a suggested objective, (b) a methodology for involving the group in study, and (c) questions for inquiry and discussion.

SESSION 1

(a) *Make a structural analysis of the report.*

“Sexuality and the Human Community” is based on certain assumptions: some are Biblical and theological; some are drawn from the social and behavioral sciences; some are drawn from human experience. The place of these assumptions in the structure of the report might be represented graphically as follows:



It will be helpful for subsequent sessions if these assumptions are made clear in the first meeting of the group.

(b) *Put the above drawing—or one of your own devising—on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper. Point to the place in the structure of the report occupied by the assumptions.*

Invite the members of the group to look quickly through the introductory paragraphs of the report and the section entitled “Biblical and Theological Foundations” for phrases or sentences that seem to provide clues to basic assumptions. On your drawing, list these words and phrases in the area marked “assumptions.” For example, you might list, “sexual attitudes and patterns of sexual conduct are changing in our culture at an accelerating rate,” “We found ourselves relying heavily on the social and behavioral sciences,” “We have tried . . . to articulate a position which is consistent with the view of man and his destiny found in the Bible,” and “[we relied] heavily upon covenantal thinking.”

Then proceed to raise some of the following questions.

(c) *Questions for inquiry and discussion.*

(c) *Questions for inquiry and discussion*

1. What do you understand to be the relationship of such a list of commandments to the "covenantal ethics" of the report?
2. What function does the report assign to prohibitions?
3. What dangers does the report see in prohibitions?
4. How would you compare the adequacy of a "covenantal ethic" as over against a code of ethics represented by *your* Ten Commandments?
5. Are covenantal ethics and a series of commandments *necessarily* mutually exclusive? Why? Why not?

SESSION 4

(a) *Make a composite picture of our culture from references lifted out of the report. Compare this picture with your own situation.*

From time to time the report makes reference to the culture in which the Church finds itself. One reads phrases such as, "the drum-fire of erotic stimuli on our children," "the expectation of premarital virginity is not being met either by men or women," "sterilization for population control may become a more widespread practice," and "the number of single persons is growing in our society."

One of the keys to an understanding of the report is an appreciation of the view that the authors have of our culture.

(b) *List on the chalkboard the phrases from the paragraph above.* Invite members of the group to suggest other significant statements or phrases. You won't have time to list every significant phrase, but you can list ten or fifteen.

After you have compiled a list, ask the group to respond by a show of hands to this statement about each phrase: "This phrase accurately describes how it is in our community. True? False?"

(c) *Questions for inquiry and discussion*

1. Where does the report most faithfully reflect the situation in your community? Where does it least faithfully reflect your situation?
2. In what ways are relationships between the sexes in your



community markedly different from those implied or described in the report? How do you account for this?

3. How would you compare your community with the rest of American society? Are you typical? Atypical? If so, why? What forces operate to make your situation different from that described in the report?

## SESSION 5

(a) *Evaluate the coverage given by the report to the various age groupings in the society.*

The ten sections of the report that deal with specific issues are arranged in more or less sequential order according to the stages of human growth and development. The first section deals with the education of children; the last section deals with the problem of the single (widowed) adult. It is always helpful to evaluate any statement in terms of its own intent. How adequate was the consideration given each age group by this report?

(b) *Put on the chalkboard a parallel listing of age-group headings such as these:*

*Childhood | pre-adolescence | adolescence | young adult | middle-age | old-age*

Lead the group through the exercise of listing under each heading those concerns or issues that belong to each age grouping. *Masturbation*, for example, might well be listed under each heading; *adultery* would not be listed under each heading.

Ask the group to list under appropriate headings sexual concerns of various age groups that have *not* been dealt with in the report; using the report's concept of covenant love and faith, develop positions on these specific subjects.

(c) *Questions for inquiry and discussion*

1. Does the report reflect more concern for one age group than others? Is the emphasis predominantly upon youth, for example? If more concern is shown for one group than for another, how do you account for this?

2. How adequately has the report dealt with the concerns of your age group?

3. To what questions or issues that were not treated do you

wish the report had addressed itself?

## SESSION 6

(a) *Seek a consensus for action on one or more of the six legislative recommendations of the General Assembly. (See page 48)*

The influence of the League of Women Voters of the United States may be attributed to its practice of not introducing any subject for study that cannot result in some form of legislation. You may want to plan your final session around the six recommendations for legislation listed in the Statement on Sexuality and the Human Community by the 182d General Assembly (1970). See if the group can reach a consensus on one or more areas in which they are willing to take action. Then determine what appropriate action might be.

(b) Place before the group the six legislative recommendations in the Statement by the 182nd General Assembly (1970) which deal with:

Contraceptive help and equipment

Abortions

Laws governing private sexual behavior

Social Security withdrawal upon marriage of the elderly

Changes in Aid to Dependent Children provisions

In advance of the session, consult with the appropriate persons—your state legislators, attorneys, doctors, newspaper reporters, church and society committee members—to discover the status of legislation in these areas. Present to the group (1) the present laws of your state, and (2) any pending legislation.

By informal discussion and straw voting see if you can arrive at a consensus concerning one or more of these recommendations. If a consensus can be reached, determine ways to implement the group's position. Letters to legislators, written recommendations to church judicatories, formation of a task force to press for specific legislation—these and other actions may be appropriate.

(c) *Questions for inquiry and discussion*

1. What does the covenant require of us in terms of public policy and civic responsibility?

2. What is there within the Church presently that impedes responsible social involvement to clarify and support mature and healthy attitudes and practices in the expression of sexuality in human relationships? How can these impediments be overcome?