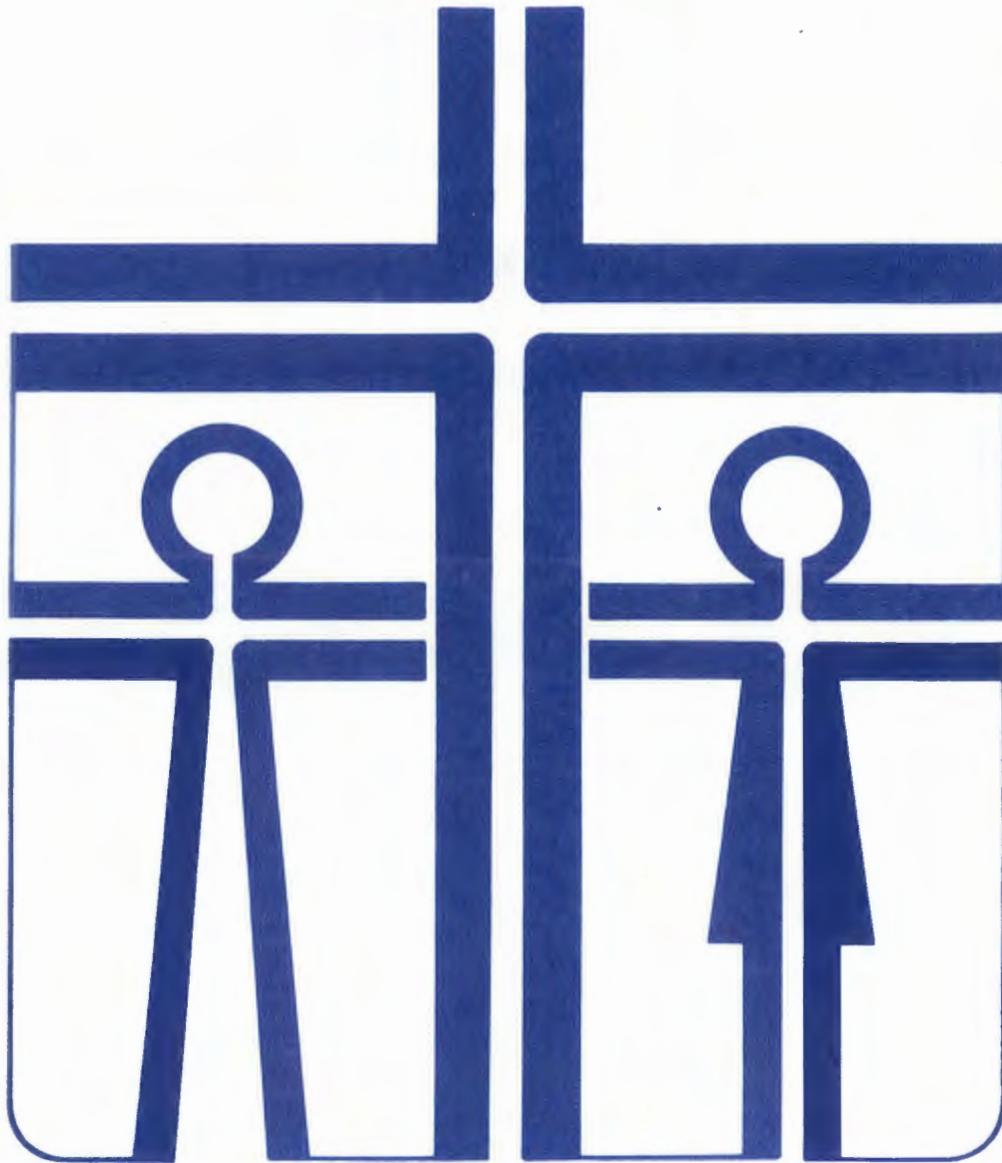


Human Sexuality:

A Theological Perspective



A Report of the
Commission on Theology and Church Relations of
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
as prepared by its Social Concerns Committee
September 1981

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Introduction

It is necessary that the church, in its concern for the lives of human beings created by the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, should address itself to the issues of human sexuality and offer guidance to all who seek to understand our identity as sexual beings. Few characteristics so deeply stamp our selfhood as our maleness and femaleness. In fact, it is quite impossible for us to know ourselves as God's good creation without a recognition of our identity as sexual beings. Nor is it possible to perceive this identity rightly without remembering what Jesus Christ did to redeem us from the power of sin and its effect on our lives as sexual beings.

As we address the problems of human sexuality which involve questions related to the meaning of human self-giving, faithfulness in human relationships, and the relationship between men and women, we do so in the confidence that the Holy Spirit helps us to use the gift of sexuality in ways pleasing to our Creator. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations therefore presents this report on human sexuality as prepared by its Social Concerns Committee with the prayer that it will assist the church in its consideration of this important aspect of our lives.¹

The purposes of this study will be (1) to place the order of marriage within the larger framework of human sexuality as God's creation; (2) to discuss the purposes or ends which marriage serves, as these are taught in the Scriptures and understood in the history of the church; and (3) to discuss, in the light of these purposes, certain problems or "issues" which must

¹The need for a study on the issues of human sexuality was expressed in a resolution placed before the 1973 convention of the Synod. Since this resolution (Res. 2-34, "To Study Issues of Human Sexuality") was not acted upon because of lack of time, it was referred to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations by the Board of Directors. In response to this referral the CTCR asked its Social Concerns Committee to study the issue of human sexuality. Resolution 2-34 reads as follows:

"WHEREAS, Holy Scripture both commends to mankind the blessings of sexual behavior and warns against its abuse; and

"WHEREAS, There is need for study on the issues of human sexuality; therefore be it

Resolved, That a study on human sexuality be made by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations; and be it further

Resolved, That the Commission share results of said study with the membership of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as a resource for study and discussion."

inevitably engage the attention of those who think about human sexuality. While the Commission recognizes that not all problems in the area of human sexuality are addressed in this report, it is hoped that the affirmations stated at the end of the study will provide guidance for Christians as they seek to order their lives as sexual beings in ways which will honor both God and their neighbor.

I. Man as Male and Female

Robert Farrar Capon has written:

Suppose I wrote a book called *The Sexual Life of a Nun*. You know what people would think. They would be curious—or shocked. They would expect to find it either a big joke or a compilation of a slightly prurient propaganda. How many would be able to see that, on the real meaning of the word *sexual*, it is a perfectly proper title? For a nun's life of course is utterly sexual. She thinks as a woman, prays as a woman, reacts as a woman and commits herself as a woman. No monk, no celibate, ever embraced his life for her kind of reasons. He couldn't if he wanted to. Of course she omits, as an offering to God, one particular expression of her sexuality; but it is only one out of a hundred. The sexual congress she does not attend is not life's most important meeting, all the marriage manuals to the contrary notwithstanding.²

Capon's point, made in fairly amusing fashion, is an important one. A study of human sexuality from the standpoint of Christian theology cannot begin with a discussion of marriage. Rather, it must begin with the creation of man as male and female, with what Karl Barth called "being-in-fellow-humanity."³

This is, after all, where the Scriptures begin. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created *him*; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27; italics added). The suggestion here is that it is impossible to come to know the significance of our humanity without reference to the sexual differentiation between male and female. To be human simply *is* to exist in this male-female duality.⁴ Consequently, it

²Robert Farrar Capon, *Bed and Board: Plain Talk About Marriage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 49.

³Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. A. T. Mackay *et al.* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), vol. 3, part 4, pp. 116–240.

⁴This Scriptural assertion implies that the subject of human sexuality includes much more than the male/female relationship in marriage. While it has been necessary to limit this study to a basic discussion of the male/female duality as it pertains to marriage and certain other problems, such as homosexuality, the Commission recognizes that more could and needs to be said about how our creation as sexual beings affects a whole variety of relationships such as between parents and children, friends of the same sex as well as friends of the opposite sex, male and female colleagues, employers and employees, and many other personal encounters between the sexes.

will be insufficient to say that God has created two kinds of human beings, male and female. Rather, we should say that God has created human beings for fellowship and that the male-female polarity is a basic form of this fellowship. To stress that human beings are created for community as male *and* female necessarily involves an equally firm insistence that they are male *or* female.⁵ We are created not for life in isolation but for community, a community which binds those who are different. We are not simply "persons," however important that claim may on occasion be as a protest against inequities.

When the Scriptures deal with human beings as man and woman, created to realize not themselves but their fellowship as a harmonious union of those who are different, they view man and woman as *embodied* creatures. Men and women are not mere persons who meet in a purely spiritual union. On the contrary, the body has its own integrity. What we do in our bodies is done by *us*; there is no inner, purely spiritual self which remains untouched by our physical commitments (1 Cor. 6:18). We are, quite simply, created as embodied creatures: as male and female. Thus we do not find in the other simply an image of ourselves, an alter ego; rather, the fellowship for which we are created is a fellowship of those who are different and who yet are joined in a personal community of love.

There is a further reason why we must begin not with marriage but with the creation of man as male and female. Not every human being need enter the order of marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-7). Celibacy is also in accordance with the will of God. Despite the justifiable polemic of the Reformers against the view of medieval Christendom which institutionalized celibacy as a way of life more acceptable to God than the marital union of husband and wife, we cannot allow that polemic to determine everything we say about the fellowship of man and woman. The church today must certainly make clear to its people that marriage is ordained by God and sanctified by Him and that, indeed, the fellowship of man and woman is ordered toward the physical union which stands at its center and is the most intimate form of this fellowship. Nevertheless, the church must also assure those who do not enter the order of marriage that they also please God.

⁵In general cf. Barth, pp. 149—168.

No human being can escape existing within, or in opposition to, the male-female distinction as the fundamental form of fellow-humanity. However, not every human being need marry.⁶ We remain free to enter with God's blessing into the order of marriage and there to live out our obedience to Him. We are also free, however, while granting the inestimable importance of marriage as a sign and realization of our creation for fellow-humanity, to live out our commitment to our fellows in the unmarried state. We may expect that marriage will remain the norm, but we must make room for Jesus' own recognition that there may be some who "have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:12), that is, some who have chosen to forego marriage in order to live out their vocations in service to the Lord. And we recognize that some who do not choose the single state may, nevertheless, live such a life. They too exist within the duality of male and female. They too live as male and female.

The Christian community needs to be sensitive to the needs of all single persons in its midst, including those who for various reasons are unable to marry or who may have lost their spouse through death or divorce. Many unmarried persons bear the burden of loneliness and feel "left out" of the life and activities of their congregations and sometimes are given the impression, intentionally or unintentionally, that they have a less-privileged status. The Christian community must assure all those who are unmarried that their situation is in no way inferior to the state of those who are married. Rather, they too, apart from the earthly institution of marriage, have been called to be members of God's family and to devote themselves to the work of Christian service (Eph. 4:12). To them may even belong opportunities for well doing which are not open to those who have the responsibilities of married life. In a spirit of mutual encouragement, married and unmarried alike must make it their aim to help each other secure their "undivided devotion to the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:35).

A further reason why marriage cannot be made a necessity

⁶It is true that in the days of the Old Testament the unmarried state was regarded with disfavor. This was because of the Israelite stress on procreation as the continuation of the people, the seed of Abraham, from whom the Promised One was to come. We, however, who are of the new Israel and who confess that the Promised One has indeed come to His people, stand under no such necessity. (Our discussion here follows Barth, pp. 149—168.) The barren and the fruitful, the married and the unmarried are alike members of a new fellowship and family (Gal. 3:28).

lies in the fact that, despite its immeasurable importance for our lives, it remains an earthly order. This is made unmistakably clear not only by Jesus' words in Mark 12:25, where He says that in the resurrection there is no more marrying, but also by St. Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 7. In this chapter the apostle does not demonstrate a negative attitude toward sexuality as such, though this is often alleged.⁷ His advice to the Corinthian Christians must be seen together with his statement in v. 31: "The form of this world is passing away." Because the end-time has entered our history in the person of Jesus Christ, no earthly reality such as marriage can be institutionalized as a necessary form of obedience to God; that is to say, marriage is not an institution which everyone must enter. Paul suggests that those who are unmarried may be better able to devote themselves to the work of the Lord, free of earthly cares and responsibilities which marriage brings. As Paul himself recognizes, however, this is true only of those to whom such a gift is given (v. 7). For others it might be true that only within marriage could they give themselves with a glad heart to the doing of God's will. While marriage is limited to earthly life, as a divine institution it can be pronounced good and entered with a good conscience (Gen. 2:24-25).

⁷For a brief but helpful discussion of this chapter cf. Stephen Sapp, *Sexuality, the Bible, and Science* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 68-73.

II. Marriage and Its Purposes

The earthly estate of marriage is a divine institution. It is therefore subject to certain divine requirements which remain in effect until the close of this age regardless of the social customs, civil laws, or ecclesiastical rites which may come to surround it. That God Himself established marriage and pronounced it good also means that He created it *for* the good of humanity. He is at work in marriage to accomplish His purposes. In marriage God intends to provide for (1) the relation of man and woman in mutual love (Gen. 2:18); (2) the procreation of children (Gen. 1:28); and (3) the partial remedy for sinful lust (1 Cor. 7:2). Both the fourth and sixth commandments presume and support these purposes of marriage in human life.

A. Marriage

Marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman entered into by mutual consent. It is ordinarily expected that this consent and commitment will be public, that marriage is not a merely personal decision but one which concerns all those who are now to treat this man and woman as husband and wife. Although marriage derives its validity from the commitment of a man and woman to a permanent sharing of their lives, the institution of marriage will normally be circumscribed by various civil laws imposed by society. Even though the legal restrictions with which our society surrounds marriage do not belong to the essence of marriage,⁸ there is good reason to believe that they will ordinarily serve human well-being—a

⁸While "mutual consent" constitutes the essence of marriage, there are certain conditions set forth in the Scriptures under which proper consent cannot be given—e. g., *married persons* cannot give consent. Martin Chemnitz dealt with this question in the following way: "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder." But in order that it should be such an indissoluble bond and inseparable union, it is necessary that it be a divine union, that is, that it not be in conflict with the teaching of the Word of God about the essence of marriage. . . . For instance, if there is an impediment in the degrees either of consanguinity or of affinity which God in His own Word strictly prohibited; if a person had another lawful wife beforehand; if the consent was not freely and expressly given; if the kind of error with respect to the person entered in which happened to Jacob with Leah; if a person's nature is simply not fit for marriage, etc. . . . Moreover, they do not separate a marriage that has been divinely joined, *but show that it is not a lawful or divine union*" (*Examination of the Council of Trent, Part II*, trans. Fred Kramer [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979], pp. 738 f.; italics ours).

purpose for which God has established civil authority (Rom. 13:4a). Such restrictions serve the important social function of safeguarding rights of the spouse and children. More important still, they may encourage thoughtful, reflective commitment and thus protect the interest not only of society but also of those who think they are in love. Unjustified disregard for the legal requirements which have been established by the state concerning marriage violates God's command for obedience to the authorities He has placed over us.

The essence of marriage does not consist in legal requirements nor in ecclesiastical ceremonies. To say otherwise would be to retract the Biblical emphasis on marriage as a worldly or earthly institution. Not the pronouncement of a minister but the consent of the partners belongs to the essence of marriage. Indeed, not until the fourth century A. D. is there even evidence of priestly prayer and blessing in connection with the marriage of Christians. It was felt to be entirely a secular act, though, of course, one carried out—like all acts—“in the Lord.”⁹ To say that marriage is not primarily an ecclesiastical matter is not to say that it is autonomous, however. Marriage remains a divine institution given by God to His creatures to nourish their common life together and to preserve human life toward the final goal of all creation.

While recognizing that marriage as a divinely ordained earthly estate can be legitimately contracted in the civil realm, Christian couples will ordinarily desire to make their vows in a public worship service. In such a context they are able to hear what the Word of God teaches concerning the sanctity of the marriage bond and to permit fellow Christians to join them and their families in asking God's blessings on their life together. For such couples the ecclesiastical marriage rite is not the church's way of making sacred something otherwise profane. Rather, the church's act of consecration signifies that marriage is holy because it is God-ordained and that it can be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:5).

⁹For a discussion of the beginning of ecclesiastical participation in marriage cf. E. Schillebeeckx, O. P., *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), pp. 244 ff. As a human institution a wedding rite will normally provide (1) a reverent context for announcement of the consent which is of the essence of marriage, (2) for the giving of thanks and praise to God for the institution of marriage, and (3) for the prayers of the congregation that the marriage will be a God-pleasing and fruitful one.

Sexual intercourse engaged in outside of the marriage relationship is forbidden by the Scriptures and must be condemned by the church (Gen. 2:24; 1 Thess. 4:2-5; cf. Gal. 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:16-20).¹⁰ This, of course, includes all casual sexual relations, which are accepted practice in our society, and arrangements whereby couples live together without being married. Even when the partners feel themselves united by a deep bond of love and intend to be married at some point in the future ("engagement"), the same judgment must be made.¹¹ Where there is no commitment to a complete, lifelong sharing of life in marriage, sexual relations are contrary to God's will.

Because marriage is not essentially a legal or ecclesiastical matter, it is possible, however, for a man and woman to give themselves physically to each other, affirming to each other and to the public their consent to share their future lives in a permanent union, recognizing that their union might be fruitful and to do this without a public ceremony. Such a relationship in reality constitutes marriage (common-law marriage)¹² and cannot be called fornication. While not a violation of the Sixth Commandment, such a way of proceeding may involve an element of deceit in that it implies that the individuals involved are living in a single state, a condition which does not in fact exist and which may cause offense to some. Moreover, this relationship sets aside the regular societal safeguards which have been established for the protection of the rights and interests of all the parties involved, and in some states it is a violation of the legal requirements for marriage.¹³

Christians hold to the principle that the Fourth Comand-

¹⁰The Greek term *porneia* is used in the Scriptures (Septuagint and the New Testament) to include the whole range of sexual immorality, i. e. fornication (Matt. 15:19; Acts 15:20, 29; 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:18; Gen. 38:24; Lev. 18). *Porneia* is sometimes used in the narrower sense of marital infidelity or adultery (Matt. 5:32; 15:19; 19:9; Lev. 20:10-11). The Scriptures categorically condemn every form of fornication as sin against God (Lev. 18; 20:10-11; 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 18; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5).

¹¹The nature of commitment in the sequence of engagement and marriage is a twofold one: The promises involved in engagement (betrothal) are made with a view to the pledges given as part of the marriage ceremony, where the promise to live together as one flesh is given in public.

¹²The usual requirements for a valid common-law marriage recognized as legally binding in some states are: (1) an agreement presently to be husband and wife; (2) living together as husband and wife; and (3) holding each other out as husband and wife.

¹³At the present time approximately a third of the U.S.A. states legally recognize common-law marriages.

ment ("Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth") must also be applied to the estate of marriage. Accordingly, the blessing of parents will ordinarily be sought. Christian couples, in keeping with the Fourth Commandment's injunction that parents in all things be honored and held in high esteem by their children, will already have sought the blessing of their parents on their union prior to the marriage ceremony. Such couples will therefore recognize the appropriateness of inviting parents to declare their blessings upon their union. Christians recognize that God's blessings follow when those desiring to enter marriage seek the advice and consent of parents on decisions of importance to a wider circle of persons than themselves alone. God's order of things concerning the family and civil order should not be disparaged or ignored. "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution . . ." (1 Peter 2:13a)

B. The Purposes of Marriage

1. Mutual Love: The Relational Purpose of Marriage

The Bible, despite its quite natural preoccupation with other concerns, is not oblivious to the awesome human significance of the encounter between a man and a woman who give themselves fully to each other in a "one flesh" union of love.¹⁴ The relation between husband and wife has a significance and meaning in and of itself, distinct from any other purposes (such as procreation) which their union may serve.

This relational aspect of marriage is emphasized in Genesis 2. The beasts of the field, the birds of the air, every living creature has been called forth by the creative Word of God. And then, as the pinnacle of this creation, the man has been formed from the dust of the ground. Obedient to his Creator, he names the animals, placing each in its appropriate role beneath himself. But, we read, "For the man there was not found a helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:20). No answer to the loneliness of the

¹⁴The frankly erotic quality of the Song of Songs is not a frequently mentioned topic within the church. Yet it could and should be. Consider the following comment of Stephen Sapp: "Although God neither appears nor is mentioned in it (which makes it 'secular' for us), for the sages he is not absent from the Song, nor are his love and concern for his creatures unmanifested in it. Rather they are clearly shown in the enjoyment and pleasure (given by God to man in the creation) which the lovers find in each other and in their surroundings" (*Sexuality, the Bible, and Science*, p. 26).

man had yet been given. God himself had not yet announced His good pleasure. Against the background of all the stately cadences in chapter 1 which had pronounced the various aspects of creation "very good," we hear now a different divine utterance. It is "not good"—not good that the man should be alone.

God therefore provides the woman as helpmeet. This means not primarily one who will help the man as an assistant in his work. Rather, the woman is "a helping being, in which, as soon as he sees it, he may recognize himself."¹⁵ She is the mirror in which the man will come to know himself as man. The man and woman have been created toward fellowship, and neither can come to know the self rightly apart from the other. The woman is given to the man in order that neither of them may be alone, that together they may know themselves in relation to one who is other than self.¹⁶

Having created the woman, God brings her to the man, and he in turn responds with those words which we have read rather too solemnly: "At last!" At last, here is one who is "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." This is an expression of "joyous astonishment."¹⁷ It is Romeo's "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!"—uttered when he catches sight of Juliet.¹⁸ The predicament of the man's loneliness—his "aloneness"—has been discerned and overcome by God's creative Word. A relation has been established in which one may come to know oneself and the other in a fellowship of love.

The union of husband and wife extends to the most intimate sharing in the act of sexual intercourse. The complete physical sharing of husband and wife is characterized by relaxation, enjoyment, and freedom from guilt. Decisions relative to this physical sharing should be made by husband and wife after prayerful discussion, as they keep in mind always that mutual enjoyment of God's beautiful gift is the goal they both seek (1 Thess. 4:4-5; 1 Cor. 7:5). Couples need to remember that their

¹⁵C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, trans. James Martin (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n. d., reprinted by Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 86.

¹⁶ It is clear that Gen. 2:18-25 has reference not only to marriage but to the broader male-female duality. Here, however, we use it primarily to refer to marriage itself as the center of the male-female relation. That this is justified, v. 24 makes evident.

¹⁷ Keil-Delitzsch, p. 90.

¹⁸ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, I, v. 45.

physical commitments are *personal* commitments. The act of intercourse is described in the Bible as an act of knowing: "Adam knew Eve his wife" (Gen. 4:1). This is no mere euphemism; or, if it is, it has an uncanny aptness. In the intimate sharing of the sexual act, a union in which the self is naked before the other, a unique knowing takes place. This is not knowledge *about* sex. It is knowledge of the self and the other as sexual beings united with one another in this most intimate union of giving and receiving.¹⁹ The man and the woman, two different beings, while retaining (even accenting) their differences, nevertheless become one. The knowledge of that fellowship—like the knowledge of that fellowship in which God "knows" those who are His—can never be fully communicated apart from the experience of the union itself. It can only be said that in this union the partners come to know themselves even as they know the other. They know themselves only "in relation" to each other.

It is, of course, possible to forget that we are here talking of mutual *love* and to imagine that nothing more than a satisfaction of sexual appetite is involved. Clearly, however, though we might settle for no more than that, to do so would be to fall short of the personal relationship for which God has created us. The satisfaction of appetite alone, apart from any commitment of love, has not yet risen from the animal to the human, personal sphere.²⁰

To view our sexuality in the context of a personal relationship of mutual love and commitment in marriage helps us to evaluate the practice of masturbation. Quite clearly, chronic masturbation falls short of the Creator's intention for our use of the gift of sexuality, namely, that our sexual drives should be oriented toward communion with another person in the mutual love and commitment of marriage. By its very nature masturbation separates sexual satisfaction from the giving and receiving of sexual intercourse in the marital union and is symptomatic of the tendency of human beings to turn in upon themselves for the satisfaction of their desires.

In childhood, masturbation may often be a form of

¹⁹Cf. Helmut Thielicke's fine discussion (*The Ethics of Sex*, trans. John W. Doberstein [New York: Harper and Row, 1964], pp. 66 ff.) of the distinction between sexual knowledge and knowledge about sex.

²⁰Thielicke, pp. 20–26.

temporary experimentation. However, children of God are warned against the voluntary indulgence of sexual fantasies as endangering faith and spiritual life. Such inordinate desires are clearly called sin by our Lord (Matt. 5:28). As the child grows and matures, youthful lusts and fantasies (2 Tim. 2:22) are left behind.

For those who are troubled by guilt and who seek God's help in overcoming problems in this area, pastors and Christian counselors need to stand ready to offer Christ's forgiveness, remind them of the power of the Holy Spirit to help them lead "a chaste and decent life in word and deed," and hold before them the joys of remaining faithful to what God's Word teaches about His intention for the good gift of sexuality.

The satisfaction of sexual appetite does not necessarily involve a personal relationship at all. At that level the man, for example, need not be concerned with woman as woman, as a personal being who calls him to fellowship, but simply with her physiological functions and capacities. And at that level it is quite understandable that people should regard their partners as essentially interchangeable. C. S. Lewis has described the situation quite well:

We use a most unfortunate idiom when we say, of a lustful man prowling the streets, that he "wants a woman." Strictly speaking, a woman is just what he does not want. He wants a pleasure for which a woman happens to be the necessary piece of apparatus.²¹

When the church condemns such a casual approach to sexual encounters as contrary to the will of God, it does more than take recourse in some special "religious" insight. It calls people back to a realization of the human, personal significance of the sexual act. A society in which casual sexual encounters and divorce prevail is on its way to viewing sexual partners as interchangeable. Its tendency is to dehumanize people and treat them solely in terms of their sexual functions, abstracting such functions from any content of personal significance.

The relationship of mutual love, one of the purposes for the fulfillment of which the Creator ordains marriage, is something very different. "Eros makes a man really want, not a woman,

²¹C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1960), pp. 134 f.

but one particular woman. In some mysterious but quite indisputable fashion the lover desires the Beloved herself, not the pleasure she can give."²² And, indeed, lovers—however fickle they may prove to be at some future moment—are genuinely captivated by one another. They will quite naturally swear fidelity to each other. They rightly recognize the immense human and personal significance of the encounter with the beloved. It is this mutual love, implanted by the Creator in His creatures, with its original tendency toward permanent commitment, which marriage institutionalizes and seeks to make permanent.²³ Thus does the Creator continue today to deal with the predicament of "aloneness" within the human creation. He continues to give men and women to each other in the one-flesh union of marriage.

2. Children: The Procreative Purpose of Marriage

Men and women are called out of their loneliness into the fellowship of marriage. Yet, their union might now turn wholly inward and become a purely self-serving one. This is not to be. The union of the man and woman who in their embrace have excluded all third parties is to be a fruitful union. They are privileged to give life to future generations.

The Biblical injunction to "be fruitful and multiply" is to be understood as a blessing as well as a command. It is one of God's good gifts to His people, for procreation is an actual sharing in God's ongoing creative activity. We may even speak of the blessing as a kind of natural promise embedded within the creation: a sign and manifestation of the truth that genuine love is life-giving and fruitful. Hence, in the Christian tradition the child has been regarded as a blessing from God (Ps. 127:3-5; 128:3). A willingness to give birth involves a willingness to align ourselves—in wonder, humility, and hope—with that blessing embedded in the order of creation itself.

The child reveals to the parents "the depth of their carnal unity. He partakes of both. He is both one and the other, and he

²²Ibid., p. 135.

²³We have, of course, described marriage as we in our culture ordinarily experience it. It is equally possible that it might not be preceded by mutual love (e.g., marriages might be arranged by parents), but the institution of marriage would still be ordered toward such a relationship of mutual love, and we would expect it to give rise to this love.

is this at the same time.”²⁴ In marriage two different and separate individuals are united without having their individuality obliterated. As a result of God’s creative power at work through their union the child incarnates—makes physical and represents in the flesh—the mystery of this union. With the birth of a child, husband and wife come to share a common work. The birth of their child is the public manifestation that this union of husband and wife is not one which turns inward, concentrating solely upon itself. Theirs is the task of raising the child up to become a mature and responsible member of the human family. Moreover, Christian parents have reason to look upon the birth of a child from their union as an occasion to have this child brought into the divine family and to nourish it as it grows to spiritual maturity. They have God’s promise that He desires to have their child become an heir of eternal life and a member of His household through Holy Baptism. Theirs is the high privilege of joining in the common work of raising a child up in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whose forgiveness enables us to live together in unselfish love toward each other.

Couples may, of course, remain childless either voluntarily or involuntarily. From the Christian perspective, *involuntary* childlessness need stand under no special stigma. While couples who are involuntarily childless can find great comfort knowing that the Child Jesus has come among us and that all Christians are members of the one family He has created, nevertheless it is still true that a childless couple may sorrow greatly at their inability to bear children. This is perfectly understandable, since one of the natural purposes of marriage has failed to come to fruition in their union. We need not gloss over that fact. Indeed, we do well to share their sorrow where we can.

However, we ought not characterize their union as “incomplete.” To do so would be to take back all that was said concerning the relational purposes of marriage. It would be to forget the profound significance of the one-flesh union. That union of husband and wife has a full and sufficient meaning in itself, and the joining of a man and woman in marriage should not be envisaged merely as a means of reproduction. Furthermore, husband and wife, even when childless, can still engage in

²⁴Robert Mehl, *Society and Love: Ethical Problems of Family Life*, trans. James H. Farley (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 46.

a common work. Their union need not turn inward solely upon itself. They can permit the absence of children itself to be creative and fruitful in new ways in their shared life. To be sure, it will take greater thought for them to find some other work in which their oneness may incarnate itself, but it is possible for them to do so. And, of course, they may seek to adopt children. It would be hard to find anywhere in our lives a more exact paradigm of *agape* (self-giving love) than the love which will move people to become parents or to provide foster care for those children who for a variety of reasons are without a family to provide for them. To offer such love is a special blessing and opportunity available to the childless couple.

In view of the Biblical command and the blessing to "be fruitful and multiply," it is to be expected that marriage will not ordinarily be *voluntarily* childless. But, in the absence of Scriptural prohibition, there need be no objection to contraception within a marital union which is, as a whole, fruitful.²⁵ Moreover, once we grant the appropriateness of contraception, we will also recognize that sterilization may under some circumstances be an acceptable form of contraception. Because of its relatively permanent nature, sterilization is perhaps less desirable than less-far-reaching forms of contraception. However, there should be no moral objection to it, especially for couples who already have children and who now seek to devote themselves to the rearing of those children, for those who have been advised by a physician that the birth of another child

²⁵The case of contraception has been the cause of considerable disagreement within Christendom. The position and the problems of the Roman Catholic Church with respect to this matter have been well publicized, though perhaps not well understood. The teaching of Pope Paul VI in *Humanae vitae* itself largely a rearticulation of the traditional Catholic position, is that "each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life" (*Humanae vitae* [New York: Paulist Press, 1968, par. 11]). (We might note that, technically, an encyclical is *not* held to be infallible teaching. From the Catholic perspective the pope here speaks, of course, with great authority, but he does not utter infallible teaching.) Catholic teaching recognizes both the relational and the procreative purposes of marriage and affirms that both are to be fulfilled within marriage. Its position on birth control derives from its insistence that no single *act* of sexual intercourse can seek to enhance one of these purposes (the relational) while deliberately frustrating the realization of the other (the procreative). It is not enough, according to this teaching, for the marital union of husband and wife as a whole to be fruitful. Rather, every act of intercourse must place no artificial impediment in the way of fruitfulness. From what the Scriptures say about the threefold purpose of marriage, we could judge that such a viewpoint isolates the sexual act from its human, personal context and focuses too narrowly on the procreative function apart from the personal context. This is, in fact, a judgment shared by many contemporary Roman Catholic moral theologians.

would be hazardous to the health of the mother, or for those who for reasons of age, physical disability, or illness are not able to care for additional children. Indeed, there may be special circumstances which would persuade a Christian husband and wife that it would be more responsible and helpful to all concerned, under God, not to have children. Whatever the particular circumstances, Christians dare not take lightly decisions in this area of their life together. They should examine their motives thoroughly and honestly and take care lest their decisions be informed by a desire merely to satisfy selfish interests.

With respect to voluntary childlessness in general, we should say that while there may be special reasons which would persuade a Christian husband and wife to limit the size of their family, they should remember at all times how easy it is for them simply to permit their union to turn inward and refuse to take up the task of sharing in God's creative activity. Certainly Christians will not give as a reason for childlessness the sorry state of the world and the fear of bringing a child into such a world. We are not to forget the natural promise embedded in the fruitfulness of marriage. To bear and rear children can be done, finally, as an act of faith and hope in the God who has promised to supply us with all that we "need to support this body and life."

3. Restraint of Sin: The Healing Purpose of Marriage

Marriage as we experience it is not an idyllic order set in an unfallen world. There is nothing sinful about our sexuality *per se*, but our sexuality, like all aspects of our lives, has been disordered as a result of sin. Appetite uncontrolled by mutual love constantly threatens to break out in disruptive ways in our lives. Love itself can become a god to be pursued at all costs, even at the cost of broken promises and unfaithfulness to those to whom we have committed ourselves. Because sin permeates the whole of our lives, it threatens to distort our sexual experience.

Christian teaching has therefore stressed that the Creator graciously uses marriage as an order by which He preserves human life and disciplines human beings as He works out His plan to make them a part of that redeemed community which He is preparing in His Son. This point has crystallized itself in

many people's minds in the words of St. Paul's injunction that "it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (1 Cor. 7:9). Or, as Paul writes a few verses earlier in that same chapter, "because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband" (v. 2).

Sexual appetites need to be controlled and disciplined. Marriage functions under God's ordinance to domesticate our passion and channel it in ways which, to some extent, bring it back into accord with the Creator's order. Within marriage sexual passion is committed to fidelity even if conditions should change for the worse and fidelity seem less attractive than it once did. Marriage becomes then, under God's goodness, a place of remedy. Our untameable appetites and romantic impulses are here brought down from their lofty pretensions to earth and bound to the good of one other person. Lovers are quick to promise faithfulness, and, as we have said, they are right to do so. To keep those promises is more difficult. Marriage as an institution is used by God to foster and enrich our commitment to the needs of others, to teach us the extent to which love must be committed if it is truly to be love. There may be, it is true, marriages in which such contented commitment never fully develops. Even then, however, a kind of healing can take place when there is steadfast determination to honor the Creator and the partner He has given.

Precisely because marriage is intended to help us control our sexual desires, there can be no such thing as a trial marriage. Continued commitment to a marital union is not to depend on what our desires and wishes may be at any given time. Instead, the institution of marriage and the commitment to which it binds us should serve to discipline and shape our desires. These desires, permeated by sin, need to be controlled. Marriage is not simply to be evaluated by our wishes. These wishes must also be shaped by marriage.

It is all too easy to misunderstand the teaching that "it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion." This can come to sound like a recommendation to do with one man or woman what we would really like to do with many—and to think that in so doing we act correctly. With such a view marriage becomes an essentially self-serving device. But those who can find no more than this in Paul's advice have not yet begun to penetrate to this deeper concern. Marriage is not a restraint of sin merely

in the sense that it permits each person to satisfy his instincts in a socially approved context. It is a restraint of sin—a place of remedy—in that it provides the possibility for husband and wife to serve the needs of each other. In their sinful condition the husband and wife are able to serve each other's passionate needs and to offer their loving support to one another. By so complementing one another, husband and wife join in the task of bringing their lives into accord with the divine intention for human desire.²⁶

Within marriage passion is also ordered toward the procreation and rearing of children. We should not overlook the sense in which not only the marital union itself but also the family is a place designed to help us in our weakness. Gabriel Marcel has written that "a family is not created or maintained as an entity without the exercise of a fundamental generosity. . . ."²⁷ To give birth, jointly to nourish and sustain that life to which they have given birth—all this is the common work of husband and wife. And it is an act of self-spending which can only be compared to a gift. It implies a certain fundamental generosity, a willingness to spend one's time and energy, one's person, in nourishing and sustaining a new life. Thus the family is not only an institution in which parents raise their children to maturity. It is also a place in which God is at work shaping and molding the parents themselves. The family as an institution will not flourish unless the self-interested impulses of the parents are controlled and, sometimes, broken. In this way, too, marriage is a place of healing, shaping its participants for a life in common and providing them with a place where they can delight in the acts of self-giving which all genuine community requires.

²⁶We must, in this connection, add the observation that many marital unions offer healing in quite another, almost paradoxical, sense. Serious illness may afflict one of the partners; or professional responsibilities may make it necessary for one of the spouses to be absent from home for longer periods of time. Such situations call for the discipline of continence. That is to say, personal fulfillment is found at a moral and spiritual level quite apart from the opportunity of partners in marriage giving themselves to each other in sexual intercourse. Experiences of this kind fall under the category of bearing one's cross of discipleship. No less than the power of the Holy Spirit is available to married partners under circumstances of this kind. In fact, they have been given the specific promise: "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

²⁷Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*, trans. Emma Crauford (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), p. 87.

Real healing takes place in marriage not merely when sin is restrained, but when husband and wife love each other as Christ loved them and “gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:2). That is to say, sin is not only curbed, but it is *forgiven* in the name of Christ and so is daily removed as the destructive force which separates people from each other. Christian couples need to remember that the controlling principle of the new life in God’s redeemed community works genuine healing also in the marital union and in the family circle: “. . . and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).

III. Some Problems

Against the background of this discussion of marriage and its purposes we may proceed to comment briefly on a few issues connected with marriage and sexuality. Our intention here is not to discuss fully all relevant issues, such as, for example, the problems of pornography or abortion, but instead to deal with some of the problems most frequently mentioned in requests to the Synod.²⁸ It should be noted that we have chosen to concentrate first on a positive development of the order of marriage and its purposes. No discussion of particular problems, however urgent they may appear to be, is likely to be helpful if carried out in isolation from a developed theological understanding of sexuality. Furthermore, it ought to be obvious that no brief discussion of the problems taken up can be exhaustive or fully adequate. It will be enough to point out the direction in which the analysis above leads with respect to certain issues.

A. Divorce and Remarriage

In response to the questioning of some Pharisees, Jesus was Himself prompted to discuss the issue of divorce (Matt. 19:3-9; cf. Matt. 5:31 f.). In so doing He appeals to the primal will of the Creator that a man and woman who have become one flesh are not to be "put asunder." Although the law of Moses had allowed divorce, this was due to the hardness of the sinful human heart (Deut. 24:1-4). But "from the beginning it was not so," and Jesus appeals to that primal ordinance in order to demonstrate what marriage ought to be and to convict those who fall short of what it is meant to be.

It is for our purposes most important to recognize the seriousness with which all traditional Christian teaching has regarded divorce. C. S. Lewis has made use of the "one flesh" imagery to provide a simple explanation of this common Christian teaching.

²⁸With respect to abortion, the official position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is that "since abortion takes a human life, abortion is not a moral option, except as a tragically unavoidable byproduct of medical procedures necessary to prevent the death of another human being, viz., the mother . . ." (1979 Resolution 3-02A, "To State Position on Abortion"). This issue is not treated in this study, since the CTCR and its Social Concerns Committee are in the process of preparing a new report on abortion. When completed, it will be made available to the members of the Synod for study and guidance.

All [Christian churches] regard divorce as something like cutting up a living body, as a kind of surgical operation. Some of them think the operation so violent that it cannot be done at all [Catholic teaching on indissolubility]; others admit it as a desperate remedy in extreme cases. They are all agreed that it is more like having both your legs cut off than it is like dissolving a business partnership or even deserting a regiment. What they all disagree with is the modern view that it is a simple readjustment of partners. . . .²⁹

We can see that the retention of this traditional view is no mere traditionalism but, on the contrary, takes seriously the will of God for marriage, as well as the needs of our human nature. We remind ourselves of some of the implications of the three purposes of marriage developed above. Consider first marriage as a union in mutual love. The promises lovers make are not foolhardy. They answer to some of the deepest needs of human beings: the need never to be left entirely alone, whatever the future may bring; the need to be sure that, whatever uncertainties the future may hold, these two people can at least say that theirs will be a future together; the need to be able to give themselves entirely and completely to another—to be naked before the other, and to be so in complete trust and confidence; the need to know that their person, not just their functions, is valued, and that they are not interchangeable with any other partner. The order of marriage instituted by God answers to these deep human needs. It gives rise to a set of hopes and expectations which ought not be disappointed, not only because we have a commandment to the contrary, but because to disappoint them is to fail in a fundamental human commitment answering to an equally fundamental human need.

When we consider the child who is the fruit of marriage, we may also come to realize the enormous seriousness of divorce. It is fairly common to hear people say in connection with divorce that they fear especially for the children. This statement, though it may ordinarily refer only to the disruption and uncertainty which divorce brings to the life of the child, may also point to an even deeper reality. If the child is the sign of the unity—indeed more, the incarnation of the unity—of this man

²⁹C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 82.

and woman who now propose to rupture their oneness, then of course we must fear for the child. What event could be more calculated to disturb the child at the very center of his personal identity? Parents are not merely a cause and children an effect which can easily be separated. Here again we must remember that our commitments in the flesh are personal commitments. The child's personhood, his sense of identity is involved. To tear the marriage asunder is in some sense to do the same to the child.

Moreover, Christian parents need to remember their commitments to their children are also spiritual commitments. Husband and wife who have joined themselves in the one-flesh union of marriage (Eph. 5:31) are committed to fulfill their parental duty by bringing up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4 KJV). It goes without saying that the task of bearing a credible witness to the Lord's instruction regarding the permanency of marriage and the meaning of the self-giving love which makes marriage work (Eph. 5:21 ff.) is made more difficult for divorced parents.

Thirdly, marriage can scarcely function as a place of remedy or healing if we refuse its constraints and reject its disciplines. In marriage God would have us learn what commitment to another person involves. He offers no guarantees that such commitment will always be easy or pleasant. There is only one sure way to protect ourselves against the cost of commitment to others, and that—to make no such commitment at all, whether in marriage or in other ways—is to tread the destructive path of disobedience and rebellion against the Creator (Rom. 1:24-32). Marriage cannot function in accord with its God-ordained purpose if it is given up whenever our desires and wishes encourage us to do so or if we merely resign ourselves fatalistically to a deteriorating relationship. There is another alternative. If, in prayer and hope, we recommit ourselves to what we have promised, those desires and wishes may be transformed and marriage will fulfill its task of healing.

God is at work in history gathering a faithful community. In marriage we are given some taste of what such fidelity involves and requires. We are given an opportunity to be faithful to one person as God has been faithful to us all. This is the principle articulated in the passage which perhaps more than any other has shaped Christian thinking about marriage,

Eph. 5:31-32: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. . . ." This is the pattern of love which ought to permeate marriage. It is the only kind of love which can answer to our deepest needs. It must be a love which is willing to go as far as Christ did in His commitment to His people, a love which so commits itself to the good of the beloved that nothing short of death can break the bond of its commitment.

It remains true, of course, that ours is a world distorted by sin. Marriages are broken daily, and our personal relationships are often characterized by something less than a Christlike fidelity. In response to this the church in its public teaching must hold up and bear witness to the need for fidelity in marriage. Yet the church must face the fact that divorce has become a prevalent practice in our society. According to the Scriptures, fornication is the only ground for divorce (Matt. 5:32; 19:9).³⁰ The act of fornication by a partner in marriage breaks the unity of the marriage. In this situation the individual offended may have the right to secure a divorce. However, this does not mean that he or she must or should exercise this right. In some cases forgiveness can save the marriage.

The divorce of Christian pastors must be taken with utmost seriousness. It is difficult to see how the church can maintain the integrity of its witness—especially in an age where divorce is prevalent—if it permits pastors who have divorced their wives for less than Biblical reasons to continue in the office of the public ministry. Generally a pastor who has been divorced, except in cases of unchastity or desertion on the part of his wife, ought not to remain in office nor be reinstated in the office of pastor. However, it is possible that under very exceptional circumstances a former pastor may by the grace of

³⁰Traditionally theologians in our Synod have noted that, while there is only one Scriptural ground for divorce, viz., fornication, there are cases in which Christians may suffer "malicious desertion." Dr. John H. C. Fritz, in his *Pastoral Theology*, states on the basis of 1 Cor. 7:15 that malicious desertion occurs when a spouse deserts the other party "with the manifest intention of not returning to the abandoned spouse, and will not by any means be persuaded to return." Such desertion, rather than a cause for divorce, Fritz says, "is in itself divorce" and constitutes the dissolution of the marriage (p. 181). In a forthcoming report on "Divorce and Remarriage" the Commission will give this matter more detailed attention as it seeks to offer guidance to pastors and congregations as they deal with problems such as this in their ministry of pastoral care.

God come to the point of being in a position to be reconsidered as a person qualified to be entrusted once more with the powers of the pastoral office.³¹

It is equally true that in the application of this teaching to individual cases pastors may confront marriages which cannot be preserved, even after long and serious attempts to do so. The conflict between the Creator's primal ordinance and the brokenness of human life in a world characterized by our "hardness of heart" will continue until the end of the age. In such circumstances the pastor is called on to deal with the brokenness of human life in a sinful world while at the same time seeking ways to affirm the Creator's will for marriage. These can only be occasions for sorrow, repentance, and reaffirmation of God's never-failing commitment to us.

A person who has obtained a divorce for unscriptural reasons may under certain circumstances, with repentance as the primary prerequisite, remarry. The absence of hope for a reconciliation is also a consideration, and there may be other pastoral concerns as well.

Those who are seeking a divorce for a reason other than that allowed by the Scriptures need to be warned against the danger of "planned repentance." Since genuine sorrow over one's sin against God and faith in the forgiveness of Christ belong to the essence of repentance, it goes without saying that to proceed premeditatively in doing that which one knows to be contrary to God's will, with the intention of becoming contrite later, makes it impossible for faith and the Holy Spirit to remain in the heart (2 Sam. 11; 1 John 1:8; 3:9; 5:18). To proceed in securing a divorce with the full knowledge that such an action is contrary to God's will with the intention of becoming repentant at some point in the future is, therefore, to enter into great spiritual peril.³²

³¹Cf. the article by Martin H. Scharlemann, "The Pastoral Office and Divorce, Remarriage, Moral Deviation," *Concordia Journal* 6 (July 1980): 141-150.

³²In his discussion of penitence in the Smalcald Articles Luther writes: "It is therefore necessary to know and to teach that when holy people, aside from the fact that they still possess and feel original sin and daily repent and strive against it, fall into open sin (as David fell into adultery, murder, and blasphemy), faith and the Spirit have departed from them. This is so because the Holy Spirit does not permit sin to rule and gain the upper hand in such a way that sin is committed, but the Holy Spirit represses and restrains it so that it does not do what it wishes. If sin does what it wishes, the Holy Spirit and faith are not present, for St. John says, 'No one born of God commits sin; he cannot sin.' Yet it is also true, as the same St. John writes, 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us'" (Smalcald Articles III, iii, 43-45).

B. Headship Within Marriage

The principle which determines how husbands and wives are to conduct themselves toward each other within the order of marriage is that of mutual service (Eph. 5:21). Their attitude toward each other's assigned role is to be shaped by their recollection of the self-giving love of Christ for the church (Eph. 5:2). "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). As the church's Head devoted Himself totally to the needs of His church, so the husband is to devote himself to the needs of his wife. And as the church yields itself completely to the love, care, and direction of the Lord, so the wife is to yield herself to her husband.

The apostle's exhortation that husbands and wives "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21) must not be interpreted to mean that there ceases to be hierarchy within marriage. The call to mutual service presupposes that an ordered relationship between husband and wife exists. Under the principle of mutual service, however, hierarchy within marriage is viewed not as a political relationship of the ruler over the ruled but as an arrangement whereby the welfare of the other may be served.

The Christian husband will therefore understand that the position of headship has been entrusted to him for the exercise of sacrificial love toward his wife. Mindful of Christ's willingness to suffer death for His beloved, the church, the husband will seek to bind his wife to himself by love and gentleness. The Christian wife will understand that, in requiring that she be subject to her husband, God has put her in a position of supporting her husband in his responsibility to care for those who belong to his household. Such a relationship, which cannot be equated simply with obedience, carries with it the honor of accepting a role which the Son of God Himself assumed before His Father (1 Cor. 15:28).³³

Where mutual service of the kind we find in the life and

³³In the New Testament the term *hypotassō* ("to be subject") is not a condescending term. Luke chooses *hypotassō* to describe Jesus' loving subordination of Himself to His parents (Luke 2:51). In this verse the word carries with it a twofold nuance. On the one hand, it presupposes that a hierarchy of relationships exists within the created order (e.g., Col. 3:18—4:1). The term also denotes a readiness to surrender one's own will in service to others.

work of Christ prevails within the hierarchy of marriage, permanence of the marriage bond is assured.

To understand something of the sense in which hierarchy in marriage is to be recommended we should distinguish two sorts of hierarchies: of function and of merit.³⁴ Hierarchies of function occur when those who are different are nevertheless united in an organic unity which is more than a contractual association. Thus, for example, we might consider the relation of parent and child. The parent's legitimate authority over the child is not based simply on the fact that the parent knows more and has more experience than the child. If these were the only considerations, we could equally well assign children to other adults (or to some kind of state-run organization) for their rearing. But the family is a fellowship, a community. And the members of such an organic unity have different roles to play in the life of the whole (Eph. 6:1-4; 1 Peter 3:1-7). (We may think of Paul's reference to the church as Christ's body having many members.) Hence, in a hierarchy of function a kind of inequality of authority exists. Yet, we would scarcely conclude from this that one member of the union (the parent) was of greater value or "worth more" than another (the child). In referring to this hierarchy of function we are saying nothing more than that in their common life together some must lead and others follow if the character of the union is to be maintained and their common life sustained.

A different example may make clear what a hierarchy of merit would involve. If we grant that within the classroom teachers have a legitimate authority, this is no doubt because of the knowledge the teachers have acquired and are able to impart. If, however, after class a teacher with no mechanical ability should walk into the parking lot and find that his car will not start, any one of his students with mechanical aptitude immediately becomes his superior in a new role relationship. Hierarchy here depends precisely on some superiority.

We may note important differences between hierarchies of the two sorts. Hierarchies of function are stable. The roles of super- and subordination do not change. In hierarchies of merit, however, the roles are constantly changing. Hierarchies

³⁴It should be noted that this discussion deals only with subordination of wives to husbands, not of women to men in general. It is far less clear, in fact, whether the Bible anywhere really enjoins the latter. The distinction between the two kinds of hierarchy is taken from Charles Williams, "A Dialogue on Hierarchy," *The Image of the City and Other Essays*, ed. Anne Ridler (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 127 f.

of merit are fluid and in a constant state of change precisely because no one merits superordination in all aspects of life. We can even say that a sort of equality is built into hierarchies of merit in the sense that they involve a constant set of changes. At any given moment not equality but super- and subordination pertain. However, these roles are constantly shifting, and no one is always in authority. Consequently, distinctions which rest upon merit never make one person head of another *per se*. They do so only with respect to certain activities.

It will never be difficult for people to deny the existence of hierarchies of function, for it will always be a little mysterious that they should exist at all. It is difficult to give reasons of the normal sort to justify their existence. We are accustomed to accept as reasons explanations *why*—on the basis of some superior attribute or ability—one person merits headship. Yet just these sorts of reasons are ruled out in discussing hierarchies of function.

The Christian claim that a hierarchy of function—with wife subordinate to husband—is appropriate in marriage proceeds from the Christian view of male and female. Husband and wife are not interchangeable members of a contractual association. They are members of a body, a union. Their personhood is protected not by stressing that both are persons but by emphasizing the difference which is fundamental to the fellowship in which they come to know themselves as man and woman, in which, that is, they realize their identity. Such a union in love cannot come to fruition unless the different roles of husband and wife are recognized. Without a willingness to complement each other in this way, a power struggle must ensue whenever disputed matters arise. Without, that is, a recognition by both husband and wife of legitimate authority within their union, the permanence of that union is endangered. The insight of Ephesians 5 goes deepest after all: Permanence and hierarchy imply each other.

A few qualifications are still in order. It will be helpful to note that several standard objections to hierarchy within marriage fail to touch the position outlined above. It will always be inappropriate to ask for some special reason *why* the man ought to exercise headship over the woman, other than the reason that God ordained the hierarchy which exists in marriage. Any other such reason would almost certainly imply some superior ability or merit on the part of the husband, but that is not the sort of hierarchy involved. Similarly, advocates of the subordination of wives who try to

point to some traits in justification of the husband's headship also miss the point. And finally, it is improper to object that the wife is considered on this account to be of less worth than the husband. Considerations of merit and value are specifically excluded in hierarchies of function. Instead, they proceed solely from the requirements of an organic union in love committed to permanence. Such a union is not dominated by considerations of either authority or merit but rather by mutual service of the kind we find in the ministry of Jesus Christ in our behalf.

The connection between permanence and hierarchy has been looked at in this section largely from the side of the wife. That is, if the permanence of the union is to be certain, she must be willing to recognize the superordinate role of the husband. However, as we have begun to set forth in this section, the implications for the husband's understanding of his role are not less important. In cases of disagreement, how shall he exercise headship? Must he "wield authority as a domestic tyrant"?³⁵ If he is really committed to mutual service and the permanence of this union, his first question ought certainly to be, what are *her* desires, *her* wishes, *her* needs? The distortion which sin brings to human relationships all too often enters in here as well, for this is certainly not the first question husbands always ask themselves. Because the authority which has been entrusted to them can be misused, it is not out of place in Christian teaching to stress that love will seek to treat the other as partner. This should not be misunderstood to mean that marriage is, therefore, a mere contractual association. Rather it is a necessary emphasis in the face of misuse of the concept of hierarchy. Our marriages are lived out in a fallen creation, a fact which must enter into our understanding of what is possible and desirable in marriage.

C. Homosexuality

Homosexuality comes under a categorical prohibition in the Old and New Testaments (Lev. 18:22, 24; 20:13; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-10). Paul writes in Romans 1 of the "dishonor-

³⁵Francis W. Beare, "Ephesians," in *Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 10 (New York: Abingdon, 1953), p. 718.

able passions" to which God gives up those who worship the creature rather than the Creator and says: "Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men . . ." (Rom. 1:26-27). In a discussion of homosexuality one might stop here with the fact of the condemnation uttered in such passages. If we consider homosexuality in the light of the total Biblical context regarding the purpose of marriage and the man-woman duality discussed above, however, we may come to a clearer understanding of why Christian thought has condemned and should continue to condemn homosexual lusts and acts.

The creation of human beings for covenant community finds its original expression in the fellowship of male and female. This fellowship, as we have stressed above, requires a commitment to the integrity of our sexual identity. The fellowship of male and female implies a recognition that we are male and female and that we should not strive to transcend that distinction. The ultimate fellowship for which God is preparing us, of which the man-woman polarity is an intimation, is not a merging of those who are alike into an undifferentiated oneness. It is a harmonious fellowship of those who, though different, are united in love. From this viewpoint we may say that the homosexual relationship approaches too closely the forbidden love of self and minimizes the distinction between lover and beloved. The male-female duality as the created pattern of human fellowship requires of us fidelity to our sexual identity, a willingness to be male *or* female.

Second, and very obviously, a homosexual relationship is nonprocreative, and it is so not merely by choice or accident but because the nature of the relationship itself could under no circumstances be procreative. Some, of course, may regard this as mere biological fact, irrelevant when the possibility of deep affection and love in a homosexual relation is considered. Nevertheless, the Scriptures do not place love in such "splendid isolation." "Mere" biology becomes very important when Christian teaching about human nature takes seriously the fact that we have no personhood except one that is incarnate. Furthermore, when we point to the fact that the homosexual relationship is nonprocreative, we do so against the background of the

significance we found in suggesting that the one-flesh union of a man and woman is ordinarily expected to be fruitful.

Hence, we can say on Christian premises that mutual consent or even genuine affection is not enough to justify a homosexual relationship. The human being is, according to the Scriptures, more than mere freedom to define what he or she will be. There are acts or relationships to which we cannot consent without stepping beyond the limitations our Creator has set for His creatures (Rom. 1:26 ff.). Sexuality provides an excellent example of this truth. Mutual consent alone between partners does not, on the Christian understanding, make heterosexual intercourse permissible. (See Section II above on marriage and its purposes.) Similarly, mutual consent alone, even when joined with affection, cannot justify a homosexual union. An unwillingness to make such affirmations is part of a "flight from creation" which besets the contemporary world and contemporary Christendom. It ought to be resisted in the name of the Redeemer who is also our Creator.

In discussing the sins which follow upon man's refusal to honor God as Creator of all things (Rom. 1:26-32), the apostle Paul singles out the sins of homosexual behavior for special comment. Such behavior comes under God's judgment not because it is any more heinous than the 21 vices listed in 1:29-31, but because it, too, illustrates man's rebellion against his Creator. Like these sins, homosexual behavior is illustrative of how rebellious man turns in upon himself and makes "an agony of the common life that should in God's intent have been a blessing to mankind."³⁶

The apostle's condemnation, however, is not meant to deprive those guilty of these sins the help which God would extend to them. While not minimizing the threat of God's wrath against all forms of enslavement to sin, the church needs to recognize in its efforts to help the homosexual that all people are born in need of deliverance from the effects which sin has imposed on their lives. With this in mind it is important to realize that there are those persons who, apart from any deliberate choice on their part, have a predisposition toward homosexuality and have no desire to enter into a relationship

³⁶Martin H. Franzmann, *Romans* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p. 43.

with a person of the opposite sex.³⁷ In order to offer such persons the compassionate help they need, the church, having condemned all homosexual acts engaged in by such persons or by those of a heterosexual orientation, must stand ready to offer its assistance to those who seek to overcome the temptations which beset them and who desire to remain chaste before God despite their homosexual orientation.

It must be said that a predisposition toward homosexuality is the result of the disordering, corrupting effect of the fall into sin, just as also the predisposition toward any sin is symptomatic of original sin.³⁸ Furthermore, whatever the causes of such a condition may be—e.g., environmental or genetic—homosexual orientation is profoundly “unnatural” without implying that such a person’s sexual orientation is a matter of conscious, deliberate choice. However, this fact cannot be used by the homosexual as an excuse to justify homosexual behavior. As a sinful human being the homosexual is held accountable to God for homosexual thoughts, words, and deeds. Such a person should be counseled to heed the church’s call to repentance, trust in God’s promise of deliverance (Ps. 50:15), and order his/her life in accord with the Creator’s intent.

We should stress that the judgment made here is moral and theological, not legal. The question whether homosexual acts between consenting adults should be legally prohibited is one about which Christian citizens may disagree. Not all matters of morality are fit subjects for legislation. Although law does play an educative role and must, therefore, shape moral convictions, questions of morality are especially fit subjects for legal codification when they impinge on the *common* good. Whether homosexual acts privately engaged in damage the common good in such a way that public concern and control are needed is difficult to judge. Even if one felt that such relationships were not a fit subject for legislation, however, the law would still have

³⁷It is not uncommon today to distinguish between the pervert—for whom heterosexuality is natural but who nevertheless engages in homosexual acts—and the invert—who, as far as he knows, has never experienced heterosexual attraction and for whom a homosexual orientation seems perfectly natural.

³⁸For a discussion of the distinction between “propensity” and “behavior” as these terms apply to the question of homosexuality the reader may wish to consult the Lutheran Church in Australia’s 1975 “Statement on Homosexuality,” pages 1–2. This report was distributed to the Synod by the CTCR in April 1975 as “a worthy contribution to the discussion” of this sensitive issue of human sexuality.

a legitimate interest in protecting children from homosexual influence in the years when their sexual identity is formed. At any rate, the judgment of informed Christians may well differ as to precisely where the legal lines ought more properly be drawn.

We cannot conclude without noting that the discussion above suggests that Christian counsel for the homosexual is that he seek to control his sexual orientation at least in the sense that he abstain from homosexual acts. We should not overlook the burden of loneliness which this places upon the homosexual. If the discerning eye of God created woman as the answer to man's loneliness, the homosexual who abstains from the sexual relationship to which he is inclined must feel that there is no "other" to answer to his loneliness. He must be helped to bear that burden, not merely exhorted to struggle nobly against his inclinations. It is right to remember, of course, that Christian counsel to heterosexuals will also often involve asking them to restrain their impulses and refrain from acts to which they are inclined. Finally, we should note again that, while marriage can be said to be the center of the male-female polarity, it is only a created reality. As we stressed above, marriage has limits, and entrance into a marital union is not a necessity. The person of homosexual orientation must be constantly made aware that fellowship in the church and a share in the hope of the heavenly kingdom is also offered to him/her through faith in Christ, whose death has atoned for all sins.

D. Artificial Methods of Reproduction

The words we use reveal more than we suppose about the images which actually shape our thinking. There is wisdom and insight in the reflection of Leon Kass, a contemporary Jewish thinker, about some of the words we use:

Consider the views of life and the world reflected in the following different expressions to describe the process of generating new life. The Hebrews, impressed with the phenomenon of transmission of life from father to son, used a word we translate "begetting" or "siring." The Greeks, impressed with the springing forth of new life in the cyclical processes of generation and decay, called it *genesis*, from a root meaning "to come into

being." (It was the Greek translators who gave this name to the first book of the Hebrew Bible.) The pre-modern, Christian, English-speaking world, impressed with the world as given by a Creator, used the term procreation. We, impressed with the machine and the gross national product (our own work of creation), employ a metaphor of the factory, re-production.³⁹

This is not the place to provide a detailed discussion of the various methods of reproduction which scientists have developed or are developing. The basic premise which emerges from our discussion of sexuality and marriage within a Christian perspective is the joining of mutual love and procreation within the covenant of marriage. Even when we contemplated above the possibility that a husband and wife might—upon serious reflection—have reason to limit the size of their families, we never granted that their procreative capacities might then be used to give birth to children outside of and apart from their one-flesh union.

The joining of mutual love with procreation is an essential element in the mystery of our created humanity.

One can in fact speak here of a mystery without exposing oneself to the charge of tending toward irrational fuzziness; for what is meant by mystery here can be very precisely defined. It is the mysterious, rationally unexplainable bond between the personal act of human communication—which, according to its purpose, is live—and the biological creation of a new life, which constitutes the pledge of this bond.⁴⁰

To make procreation a technical operation (mere reproduction) and to remove it from the context of mutual love is to deprive individuals of their role as persons in God's creative activities. We spoke above of the fact that the child enters the world as a manifestation that such mutual love between a man and a woman is fruitful and creative. That is because the relation of husband and wife here images the deeper mystery of God's own

³⁹Leon Kass, "Making Babies: The New Biology and the 'Old' Morality," *The Public Interest* 26 (Winter 1972): p. 23. Kass' entire article provides a good discussion of artificial methods of reproduction. An excellent discussion by a Christian moralist is Paul Ramsey's *Fabricated Man: The Ethics of Genetic Control* (New Haven: Yale Press, 1970).

⁴⁰Thielicke, p. 252.

creative power. We cannot penetrate the mystery of how God in His love created the world. Yet we can affirm that all things were made through Jesus Christ (who was with the Father in the beginning), that nothing was made without Him, and that God's own creative act is therefore an act of the One who to Himself is love (1 John 4:8, 16). "We procreate new beings like ourselves in the midst of our love for one another, and in this there is a trace of the original mystery by which God created the world because of His love."⁴¹ To sever our acts of procreation from the personal context of mutual love would be to deface the image of God's creativity in our own.

It is in this light that Christians will evaluate various proposed methods of artificial reproduction.⁴² In artificial insemination, for example, it is possible that the donor of the semen may himself be the husband of the woman and that for physical or psychological reasons they are unable to fertilize the woman's ovum in the ordinary way. Here artificial insemination is offered as an aid to procreation within marriage. It is intended not to separate procreation from the context of the loving union of husband and wife. Instead, it is a way of bringing their love to the fruition toward which it is naturally ordered. Even here, however, a word of caution is in order. Artificial insemination may be a way of avoiding underlying psychological problems within a marriage rather than treating them. It may also be a step—even if a justifiable one—toward an attempt to transform the mystery of human procreation in love into a matter of reproductive technology.

We can see this when we note that the procedure does not really accomplish what medicine seeks to do; it does not cure the underlying defect. The physician is, one might say, treating not the defect but the desire of the parents to have a baby. Suppose, however, their desires go further—suppose, for example, they desire a male baby. Is that an end which medicine ought to pursue? We think not. To turn in that direction would be a definite step away from procreation and toward reproduction.

Although the Scriptures do not deal directly with the

⁴¹ Ramsey, *Fabricated Man*, p. 38.

⁴² A section on *in vitro* fertilization has not been included in this report, since the Social Concerns Committee of the CTCR will give attention to this matter in its study of biomedical ethics (cf. 1975 Res. 3-26, "To Provide Assistance Regarding Bioethics").

subject of artificial insemination by a donor other than the husband (AID), it is our opinion that such a practice must be evaluated negatively. Whatever the reasons offered in support of AID, whether eugenic or simply concern that an infertile couple be enabled to have a child, the process of fertilization is removed from the personal context of the one-flesh union of husband and wife in a way that not even their consent can allow.

In a world which has become increasingly technical and depersonalized, the Christian church is called to bear witness to the *human* significance of the bond between male and female, to the purposes which God as Creator and Preserver has implanted in marriage, and to the ways in which such an understanding should shape our lives. To hold up before people once again the human, personal significance of our fundamental fleshly relationship, to explore the mysterious image of God's love in the one-flesh union of husband and wife, and to recognize in wonder and humility the limitations which our creaturely condition places upon us—all this is part of fidelity to that God who has redeemed us, not that we may flee from His creation but that we may cherish it and find in it intimations of His love.

IV. Some Affirmations

We may summarize the chief points of our discussion of human sexuality articulated in this report in the following propositions. We honor God and the neighbor rightly when we—delight in our creation as male and female and affirm our identity as male or female;

—see in our creation as sexual beings an intimation of our creation for fellowship and give thanks for the healing which God offers in marriage;

—regard marriage as a divine, lifelong institution, ordained by God for the good of man and woman;

—respect marriage as the typical, though not necessary, expression of our creation as male and female;

—affirm God's will that sexual intercourse be engaged in only between a man and woman committed to a complete and lifelong sharing of their lives with one another in a marriage covenant not to be broken;

—affirm that the mutual love of husband and wife, while possessing God-given meaning in and of itself, is by divine blessing ordered toward the birth of a child; and

—affirm that this union of mutual love is the only proper context for human procreation.