

ONLY SEX CAN BE "TOTAL" ----- ELLIOTT #1915

This is the INTRODUCTION to an early-'85 course I was asked to teach: "Sexuality and Christian Faith."

Variouly, societies understate sex, hit it about right, or--as "the West," on this eve of 1985 (29Dec84)--overstate it and overheat it. This thinksheet (as its title reveals), instead of trying to shrink or cool sex, widens and deepens and heightens it: the cure for sex-obsession is MORE SEX, and the cure works either way: (1) MORE SEX in the sense of excessive genital activity leads to less sex, for boredom sets in, and after that, revulsion: how many people I've counseled who've "blown it"! (2) MORE SEX in the sense of widening, deepening, and heightening the contexts in which sex is viewed cures sex-obsession by increasing the psychic dimension of sexual pleasure and one's responsiveness to the responsibilities of one's life vis-a-vis persons, all life, and the Source of life. To put it in a short sentence, the Puritans had more fun and "better sex." So even did the Victorians (though that's arguable). The reason I can't get too worked up about sex questions is that it's so largely self-correcting: the rewards and punishments are close in on the behavior, and there are no painless sex-trips (you've got your choice of pains in your pursuit of pleasure, and I'd worry and feel envious only if libertines could get away with pleasure without paying up--which, thank God, they can't, so I can relax and "be good")....

DEFINITIONS: "Sex," *narrowly*, is genital activity in the interest of pleasure and/or procreation; it's "having sex," an expression that centers in "coitus" (Latin, "coming together," i.e., sexual intercourse). *Broadly*, "sex" means (1) which of the two you are, (2) in biology, one of several modes of reproduction, (3) (Web.NCD7) "the sum of the structural, functional, and behavioral peculiarities" of m/f (male/female) beings." So what's "sexuality?" It's the fact of being a sexual being + the consciousness thereof (inclusive of the unconscious, preconscious, and social dimensions of which of the two you are): it's your being, and knowing yourself to be, "split" (Greek root *schiz*, same as Latin root *sec-o* ("cut")) off from the other ½ of humanity. Further, the longer word is strongly connotative of erotic heat, "sexiness" (in itself neither good nor bad). Again, whether or not you speak of the sex instinct depends on whether you think we humans have instincts: I don't, though we have needs and hungers and, you might say, "drives" toward both. Again: from the standpoint of the individual organism, sex is not a need but only a hunger--a hunger that can be intensified by "sexual arousal," thus the verb to "sex up." (Folks who say they "need" sex are deluded (however they got that way) and deluding (whether or not they intend to deceive): sex as "need" is propaganda for "having sex," propaganda especially effective-destructive in a permissive culture.)

....Now for some points to display the truth of this thinksheet's title:

1. This course is not just on sex(uality) but on that "and Christian Faith," sexuality in biblical perspective, through Christian eyes. An easy-to-remember way to put this is CREATION, COVENANT, CONSUMMATION. These 3 "C"s are one way to put the biblical way of seeing the world, life, and the future--on which see the next thinksheet, "The Bible and Sex."

2. Mary Calderone of SIECUS, in a sex lecture to Vassar frosh, had this to say about sex and (the dominant word of this thinksheet) totality (Feb/64 REDBOOK): "Only within the self-sought marriage bond can two people create for themselves the security of peace and solitude and time--lifetime--by which they can accomplish that which is pivotal and central to all else--namely, total communion." After a period of saying sex is natural (during which I shocked her by denying it), so "premarital sex" is to be expected, she turned (in this speech) against early sex: one should become an adult (min.age, 21) before having sex, because "speeding up of the process may produce such dislocations that what the person MIGHT have become at 21 may now be impossible to achieve." Man/woman is "the primary relationship" and easily damaged; if we give up on this "our fundamental polarity," we are "lost."

OVER

3. But tragically, Calderone's "total communion" is, though unwittingly, a cheat: she means to leave God and society out, with a result now (more than a score of years later) visible in millions of smashed relationships that intended to be "total" (not to mention those intending something less). Just before the passage I quoted, she says "there are a number of words that I have not used and that I do not intend to use, such words as ideals, morals, sacred." Pathetically, she then proceeds to load into the man/woman relationship all that these words point to. The inevitable consequence is that those who buy her, and enter a relationship with "total communion" as the summum bonum, become victims of IFD: such overexpectation of a human relationship ("idealism") leads straight to "frustration," which leads to "disappointment," despair, divorce. Mary set up those Vassar students for big trouble. In contrast, Christian marriage aims at the glory of God, not a glorious relationship: it's not overheated with sacred overexpectation, for the sacred is invested in God, the primary relation, relativizing the man/woman relationship while also consecrating it to the true totality that leaves nothing out, least of all life's Source and Destiny.

4. In this thinksheet's title, "sex" means heterosexual spirit/psyche/mind/body mutuality, reciprocity, communion 1:1 (i.e., between only two partners). Bisexuality is, in a sense, more than "one flesh"; and homosexuality is (Barth) "semi-sex." But because, today, wholeness is the "in" value (conjoint with integration, maturity, self-fulfilment), all sex-interpreters try to claim wholeness/totality for their positions. Let's look at some good typical works:

CONSERVATIVE: (1) Homosexuality is "only a one-dimensional relation and thereby a denial of sexual differentiation in its fundamental purpose, a denial of the order of the order of Creation, and denial of fulfillment through duality in unity. It is necessarily devoid of the full inter-personalization that God intends."--168, **CHRISTIAN: CELEBRATE YOUR SEXUALITY** (Revell/74), a theology of sexuality, by sociologist Dwight H. Small. (2) Fuller Seminary's Don Williams, **THE BOND THAT BREAKS: WILL HOMOSEXUALITY SPLIT THE CHURCH?** (BIM/78), begins with revelation, not (bio-psycho-socio-) observation. Gn. 1 is order, Gn.2 is freedom, and Gn.1-3 is purpose; gender is static, these are dynamic, learned, and therefore matters of choice and responsibility: gender identity (how you see yourself), gender role (how you behave), sex preference (how you feel toward each sex). Only the heterosexual role can honor the divine order and purpose and use freedom to the glory of God. (3) Karl Barth, **CHURCH DOGMATICS** (T&T Clark/61, III.4.156), sees bi- and homo-sex. as "lofty movement(s) to escape" God's will and homo-sex. as "semi-sexual." P.159: both deny "fellow-humanity" and--as embodying the myth that one individual, alone, can be whole--are guilty of hybris, pride.

MODERATE: Helmut Thielicke, **THE ETHICS OF SEX** (Harper/64), 5: M/F is "a polarity constitutive of man as such," but a homo Christian who is incapable of continence can have homo sex if ethically, confessing that it's an imperfect alignment with creation, and committing him/herself to not going public (285).

RADICAL: Jn.J. McNeill, **THE CHURCH AND THE HOMOSEXUAL** (Pocket/76/78), uses his Jesuitical skill in trying to convince us that homosex. **BETTER** honors God and humanity! Sexual identity is cultural-human, not creational-divine; and sexual behavior is to be judged not legalistically and structurally but relationally and personalistically. Love's form is nothing, its content everything. (2) **HUMAN SEXUALITY** (UCP/77), Edward A. Powers. (3) **Geo.A. Edwards, GAY/LESBIAN LIBERATION: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE** (Pilgrim/84), 99, rejects Paul on homosex. as on patriarchy.