ON BEING HUMAN

Toward a Biblical Understanding

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1: THE INTEGRITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Bodies, Souls and Theological Games

Are you a Creationist or a Traducianist? If you don't understand that question don't worry. It only means that you have a blessed ignorance of some of the more sterile byways of Christian theology.

Creationism and Traducianism are the technical theological terms that identify the two sides in a classic debate that went on for centuries among Christian theologians over the origin of the individual human soul. Is the individual soul propagated by the same reproductive processes as the body - the Traducianist view - or is each individual soul separately created by God and united with a body which is reproduced by the bodily reproductive processes - the Creationist view?

It is not at all clear where this debate leads, but there always have been, and presumably always will be, theologians who delight in displaying their skill in abstract exercises of reasoning that lead nowhere. Theologians have their own kind of games where the play is all that really matters.

But this particular game is only possible because it has long been regarded as an essential feature of Christian orthodoxy to believe that the human person consists of two distinct elements, a body, which is the inferior, material element, and a soul, which is the higher, spiritual element. The body is mortal while the soul is immortal.

If the Creationism/Traducianism debate is just a theological game this two component theory of the human person is no game but a teaching with important implications for our daily living. While there have been numerous variations on the theme the basic features remain the same.

Some have complicated the matter further by proposing three components instead of two - body, soul and spirit. A further refinement of this view proposes that the unregenerate person is to be seen as only having a body and a soul while in regeneration a spirit is added. However, since the basic issue for our present purpose remains the same, we will confine our discussion to the more classic view that the human person consists of just two components, body and soul.

These two components are regarded as united in one person and yet as being distinct and separable from each other. The body is material while the soul is immaterial and spiritual. Consequently, while the body can be identified by the bodily senses the soul cannot. It remains always beyond the reach of the bodily senses. As the spiritual part of man the soul is regarded as that part with which the image of God is identified. The soul, as the superior of the two components, ought to control the body. While the body cannot live without the soul the soul is quite capable of maintaining an independent existence without the body.

Indeed, the body has often been regarded as a limitation on the soul. Calvin saw the body as "the prison of the soul" which weighs it down and "greatly limits its perception". He argued that the soul could only attain its true spirituality when it is loosed from the fetters of the body "no longer subject to a tyranny of the body".

Calvin's view at this point is especially interesting because he certainly did not despise the body. He was not an ascetic who saw spirituality in terms of the supression of bodily functions and desires. Yet his acceptance of the two component theory of human nature led him to see the activities of the body,

though valid, as being on a lower plane than the activities of the soul. For this reason bodily activities on his view ought always to be subordinate to the requirements of the soul, which is the higher part of man.

It has not been difficult for theologians to cite Scriptures in support of this two component theory of the human person. Scripture contains numerous passages where some kind of distinction is made between body and soul. Examples are: "Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul" - Matthew 10:28. "And it came about as her soul was departing (for she died)" - Genesis 35:18.

However, while passages such as these would certainly be compatible with a two component theory of the human person, they do not require such a theory. They will fit just as well a quite different view of the human person.

The mere fact that the human person is described in the Scriptures in terms of body and soul does not require us to conclude that the writer sees these as two distinct components of a person. If it did, then those who want three components would have an unanswerable argument since Scripture not only speaks of body and soul but also of "spirit, soul and body" - I Thessalonians 5:23 - and of "the division of soul and spirit" - Hebrews 4:12.

The problem then is that we could not stop with just three components since Scripture also has passages such as: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind". Must we therefore speak of five components to the human person - body, soul, spirit, heart and mind?

In fact, the more closely we look at the way Scripture describes humanity the less credible the two component theory appears.

Souls, Lusts and Corpses

Right at the beginning of Scripture we are told that God "formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" - Genesis 2:7. It is important to notice what this passage says and what it does not say. It does not say that God first formed a body and then breathed into it. It says that what he formed from the dust of the earth was "man" (Heb. adam). So far it was "man" but "man" without life. Then notice that, when God breathed into this lifeless "man", he did not receive a soul. When the "breath of life" was breathed into him by God he "became a living soul" (Heb. nephesh).

There is no hint of a two component view of humanity here. The first man did not come alive by adding a soul component to the body. The breath of life from God was breathed into "the man" (not into a man's body) so that the "man" became a living soul. Soul is man and man is soul.

As we move on through Scripture we find a repeated identification of "soul" with body such as to make it impossible to regard "soul" as a separate entity, substance, essence or component distinct from the body. We find that a corpse, a dead body, is described as a "soul" - Leviticus 19:28; 21:1; 22:4, Numbers 5:2; 6:11 (our English translation in these passages translates the Hebrew "nephesh", which is elsewhere translated "soul", by words such as "dead", "dead person", "corpse".) The two component theory of Christian tradition regards death as a separation of soul and body so that a corpse is a body without the soul. It is clear that in biblical thought it is possible to regard the corpse as being the soul.

Then we find Scripture speaking of the food we eat as being for the satisfaction of the needs of the "soul" - Psalms 78:18 (Heb. "nephesh" English

translation: "desire", "lust") Matthew 6:25 (Grk. "psuche" English translation: "life"). We also find a man telling his soul to eat and drink food and wine - Luke 12:19. In these cases again "soul" is clearly identified with body.

In Genesis 9:4, and again in Deuteronomy 12:23, we are told that the blood is the "soul" of a man (English translation usually "life"). In biblical thought the blood is the soul and we all know that the blood is very much a part of the body.

The more we explore the biblical text the more clearly we are compelled to conclude that the two component theory of the human person is an unbiblical idea that has been read into Scripture in the Christian tradition. It forms no part of the biblical message about humanity. Its presence in Christian teaching is due to the infection of pagan Greek philosophy.

But what about those passages that talk about the soul continuing after the death of the body? Why did Jesus say not to be worried about those who can kill only the body but to "fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell" - Matthew 10:28?

These passages say no more than that the human person does not cease to exist when the body perishes. They are not inconsistent with a two component theory but they are equally consistent with the biblical usage which speaks of "soul" as the person and not just one component of the person. The death of the body means the end of this present bodily mode of existence but the person continues to exist in another mode of existence.

Yet it is clear that the bodily mode of existence is consistently regarded in Scripture as the normal mode of human existence. Anything else is abnormal and the hope of the person who is temporarily existing in any other mode of existence can only be a return to the bodily mode.

But what about those passages that speak of the soul within the person? Do not these require us to see the soul as a distinct component or part of the person? We have an example of this kind of passage in Psalm 42: "Why are you in despair, O my soul, and why have you been disturbed within me".

Again, passages like this would be quite consistent with a two component theory of human nature but they do not require that theory. Generally appearing in poetic passages they reflect the recognition that there is more to the human person than can be perceived in the bodily senses. There are thoughts and emotions that are kept hidden within the human person. We can read into this, if we wish, the idea that these hidden thoughts and emotions are locked up in a component of the person that is separate from the body but to do this we will have to read the idea into the biblical text. It is no part of the text as it stands and it would contradict the general usage of the biblical terms involved.

The picture that emerges from a comprehensive study of what the Bible has to say about humanity is that the human person is a single, indivisible entity. All attempts to divide the person into component parts, whether two or three, are out of step with the view of man presented to us in the Scriptures.

At the same time it is important to recognize that the body/soul dichotomy has been used in Christian theology as a defence against attacks on two important elements of Christian teaching that are fully in harmony with the Scriptures. One of these is the teaching that a human person is more than the sum of bodily functions; that there is a depth and richness to human existence that is not penetrated by a mere analysis of the bodily functions. The other is that human existence does not end when the body perishes; that the perishing of the body is merely the end, or better, the interruption, of the bodily mode of existence and that the person continues to exist even though the bodily

mode of existence is suspended.

It is better to speak of the bodily existence as interrupted or suspended rather than ended since the Scriptures focus our attention on the resurrection when all people will resume the bodily mode of existence.

Because the two component theory of human nature has been used as a defence against attacks on these two important elements of Christian teaching it has often been thought that this theory is essential to maintain these elements of Christian teaching. But there is no need at all to postulate a soul distinct from the body in order to recognize both that man is more than the sum of his bodily functions and that his existence continues, in a different mode, after the body perishes. The two component theory with its body/soul dichotomy simply will not withstand critical examination in the light of Scripture. It is a corrupting intrusion of pagon philosophy in Christian thought and a serious hindrance to the experience of the full richness of the gospel.

It has led to a whole range of false distinctions in human life. The distinctions, sometimes carried to the point of antithesis, of "physical" and "mental" illnesses, of "spiritual" benefits and "material" benefits, of food for the body and the more important "food" for the soul, of saving the soul and caring for the body, of preaching the gospel and social concern, of mind and body are all a settled part of the pattern of thought and living for many Christians. Their daily priorities, their career choices, their social and recreational activities, their reading habits, their biblical exegesis, their dietary preferences, and, very often, their guilt complexes are shaped by these distinctions which are taken as axiomatic. Yet each one of these distinctions is possible only on the basis of the unbiblical two component theory of human nature as a body/soul dichotomy. How much distortion must there be in human living that is guided by such a range of false distinctions.

The whole pattern of life changes if we reject this false dichotomy and accept the integrity of the human person. However, before we explore this further we need to look a little more closely at what was just said about humanity being more than the sum of bodily functions.

The Image of God

Returning to the creation narrative as it appears in Genesis 1 we read: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" - Genesis 1:27.

The biblical text here does not say that God imprinted his image on man or imparted his image to man. It says that God created man, in the wholeness of his humanity, in the image of God. Humanity, male and female, is the image of God.

All the discussions over what it is in the human person that is the image of God, therefore, miss the point. The image is not something possessed by the human person. It is not some particular quality of human existence or some component of the human person, whether it be a soul, a self-conscious reason, or a moral sense. It is the whole human person that is God's image.

This is a very direct way of saying that humanity exists only in relation to God. Just as an image has meaning only in relation to what it is imaging so being human has meaning only in relation to God.

In other words, human personality does not exist by itself. It exists only in relation to God. It is futile to try to understand the human person in himself or herself because the human person always and only exists as a creature in relation to God. For this reason all attempts to define areas of human life

as secular are attempts to promote a massive lie. No area of human life can be isolated from the God-relationship because human life, at its very core, is the God-relationship. Human being and existence is defined by the relationship to God.

For this reason we miss the point when we insist that the God-relationship must have first priority in our life and when we say that all other activities must take second place to loving and serving God. Such an approach implies that there are other activities and other relationships that have a valid existence apart from the God-relationship.

The God-relationship is not merely the most important of the relationships of human life. It is the central directing relationship in relation to which alone all others have meaning. Loving God is not merely the most important love of our life. It is the love without which there is no other love. Serving God is not merely the service that should have first call on our time. All we do is either serving God or serving God-substitutes.

Jesus made this point clear when he answered the question: "Which is the great commandment in the law?" His reply was: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...and a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself" - Matthew 22:36-39. In these words of Jesus love for neighbour is not a second command of secondary importance alongside the command of love for God. It is the reflection of love for God ("like it").

John also makes it clear that love is one, originating in God, who is love. Love for neighbour, if it is real and not a sham, can only exist as the expression in human life of this one God-originating love. Because God loved us we love God and, in loving God we love our neighbour - I John 4:7-11,19-21.

In the biblical view religion is not, and cannot be, a dimension of human life. It is the very heart and soul of life. The God-relationship is the single integrating principle that integrates all the activities of human life. It is true that there are certain kinds of human activities, cultic activities, where religion is given explicit expression but religion remains just as much the directing principle, though implicit, in all other human activities. Activities outside cultic activities are just as much religious activities, even though religious faith is not made explicit in them, as in cultic activities.

Harvesting crops, commercial activities, social intercourse, eating, politics, going to the toilet are all religious activities in which we serve God, or if in sin we turn from God then a God-substitute, just as much as by cultic activities such as prayer, preaching, singing hymns and sacraments - Leviticus 19:9,10,36; 19:32-34; Deuteronomy 14:21; 17:14-20; 23:13,14. These activities are not regarded in Scripture as just activities necessary to maintain this lower earthly life that are on a lower order to cultic activities. They are seen as ways of serving God of the same rank as cultic activities. They do not obtain their religious character by associating prayer or other cultic activities with them. They are in their own right activities of a religious character.

In harmony with this when Paul urges us to offer our "living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1) he is not urging us to suppress our bodies and our bodily activities to subordinate them to the higher activities of a "soul" but to serve God in the whole of our bodily life with all its many varied possibilities.

In harmony with this view of humanity, sin in Scripture is not a moral or an intellectual issue but a religious issue that concerns man's relation to God.

Sin is not merely an act, or a series of acts, but a fixed attitude, a stance, a position that humanity adopts toward God. Because human life is religious at the very core, governed and controlled in every area by the central God-relationship, sin inevitably affects every part of human life and reveals itself in every human act.

Because the God-relationship is the central integrating principle of human life, sin, by which humanity has rejected that relationship shatters the integrity of human personality in a thousand ways by destroying the focus of human life turning humanity away from its one point of rest in God and setting it adrift on a shoreless sea of falsehood where, unless it is turned back to its God, it must ever wander restlessly in search of a place of rest and find none.

Finding a New Way of Living

Our exploration of the biblical text so far has led us to some important conclusions about being human:

1. The human person is an indivisible whole whose whole life in this world is a bodily mode of existence, the normal mode for all human existence. There is no place for any kind of dichotomy that sees the human person as a union of two distinct and separable components, body and soul. There are no activities of the human person in this world that are not bodily activities.

2. While all human existence in this world is a bodily existence, human life is not merely the sum of observable bodily activities and functions. All human acts and functions are focused in and directed by the religious relationship as the heart and core of human life. The focal point of human life which gives meaning and being to the human person is the relationship with God.

3. The central religious relationship of human existence is expressed in all the activities of the bodily existence of the human person in this world. All human acts, explicitly or implicitly, are religious acts.

In the light of this understanding of our humanity questions about the relative importance of saving souls or healing bodies, preaching the gospel or social concern, are meaningless. They presume a dichotomy in the human personality that does not exist. They presume the existence of a soul as the more important part of man to which the body is subservient and therefore regard salvation as concerned primarily with this soul part. They fail to recognize that the gospel is about the restoration of the integrity of human life by restoring the relationship of love to God as the central directing relationship of the whole of human existence.

Similarly all the other distinctions that we mentioned earlier such as "spiritual/material", "physical/mental", "body/mind", based on the same false presumption about the nature of the human person are meaningless. Even worse than meaningless they are a falsehood.

But it is not easy for us to work without these kinds of false distinctions implicit in our thinking or to stop asking the wrong kinds of questions based on these distinctions. We have become so accustomed to them, and they are so much part and parcel of our cultural heritage, that they are an entrenched part of our world view. We will have to work hard at developing a new way of living free of these falsehoods.

We need to work hard, for example, at developing a new understanding of human illness free of the false division into "physical" and "mental" illnesses with the intermediate category of psychosomatic illnesses. All illness is a malfunction in the bodily life of the human person. At the same time it appears

clear that not all malfunctions are of the same kind. Some have such a dominant physical/chemical factor that we have been able to identify this factor and provide appropriate treatment on that basis. Others do not appear to have such a dominant physical/chemical factor. These should not be then easily lumped together in a category of "mental" or "psychosomatic" illnesses. Neither should we simply persist in trying to identify the physical/chemical factor in these cases. What we need to do is to identify much more specifically the other factors in the bodily existence of the human person that can produce malfunctions of various kinds. It is likely that we will need to identify more than two or three basic kinds of illness.

We will also have to work hard at developing an understanding of the religiousness of all those activities that we have been accustomed to call "secular": To see eating and drinking as a way of expressing our love for God, not by means of accompanying words of grace, but by the act of eating and drinking itself; to know how a commercial career can be as rich an experience of serving God as a career in theology; to experience a visit to the toilet as an act as holy as prayer.

All this will not be easy because we live in a secularized world; a world where God and religion have been confined, by the common consent of society, to a well-defined corner of life. But it is the only way ahead for us if we are to be faithful to the gospel and if we are to experience something of the fullness of our humanity for which Christ has set us free.

2: HUMANITY IS RELATIONSHIPS

It is interesting that people who confess their belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ could be as negative in their attitudes to being human as Christians commonly are.

We talk, and act, as though our bodily human existence is an irritating limitation on our fulfillment. We speak, and sing, of our longing to be free of this irksome bodily existence. We set our hope on a future existence where we will escape this tiresome humanity of ours to enter a blissful, ethereal world of softly floating spirits. And we do all this in the name of Christian faith and piety.

Yet, as long as we do this we betray our failure to understand the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That event is the great divine affirmation of humanity. In that event God affirmed the glory of being human in all the fullness of the bodily human existence.

When Jesus Christ rose it was not an ethereal spirit that rose but a human being. He did not leave his human body in the grave. It was specifically the human body that rose never to perish. God the Son came to earth to share our bodily existence, not just for a period of thirty odd years, but forever.

And, according to the Scriptures, the hope of those who believe in Jesus is not the finding of eternal bliss in some other immaterial mode of existence. Our hope is the resurrection of the body so that we may continue our human, bodily existence in the likeness of Christ's glorious body.

We, of all people, should be affirming the goodness of being human. This affirmation should come through loud and clear in all our words and acts. We should be proclaiming in unmistakable terms to the world that to be human is wonderful.

To say this does not overlook the reality of the sin that brings sorrow and pain to our human existence at the present time. Sin is no part of being human. Sin is the denial of our humanity by denying the very heart of our humanity, the relationship with God. We can only affirm our humanity as we affirm the relationship with God but it is a hollow affirmation of the human relationship with God that does not embrace an affirmation of the glory of being human.

Jesus Christ did not come to deliver us from our humanity. He came to rescue our humanity from sin so that we are free to be fully human.

I BELONG TO YOU, YOU BELONG TO ME

Humanity means relationships. Human relationships are not merely possibilities. They are essential to being human. We do not exist except in relationship to other humans. At the very centre of human life is the God-relationship and inseparably bound to this are the relationships with our fellow humans.

In the biblical creation narrative we are told that, having created a single human individual, God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone" - Genesis 2:18. Only after there were two human individuals inseparably related to each other - "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" - was God able to look at all he had made and say it was "very good".

According to Jesus, the second great command for human life, paralleling the first command of love for God, is: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" - Matthew 22:39. Love means a relationship. It means a relationship of acceptance in self-giving. It means a relationship with an unbreakable bond.

A relationship based on love can never be a temporary relationship of convenience. It lasts as long as love lasts. And when love dies, human life dies for human life is rooted in God who is love.

Speaking to those who believe in Christ Paul says: "All of us, in union with Christ, form one body, and as parts of it we belong to each other" - Romans 12:5. We are as closely related as the various parts of the human body are related. We belong together so that we cannot exist alone but only in relation to one another.

Looking back into the Old Testament we read how, because Noah "found favour in the eyes of the Lord", his whole family was saved from the flood - Genesis 6:6-8; 7:1. We read that the evil of Ham involves his son Canaan and Canaan's descendants - Genesis 9:20-27. We read of the Lord agreeing to save the whole city of Sodom if ten righteous persons could be found among its citizens - Genesis 18:20-33.

We read of Israel's defeat at Ai because of the sinful act of one person and the removal of the problem by removing not just that one person but his whole family - Joshua 7. We hear men such as Ezra and Daniel speaking of the sins of their community as their own sins even though the sinful acts had not been their individual acts - Ezra 9, Daniel 9:1-19.

Wherever we look in Scripture the same message comes through loud and clear. Humanity exists only in a community. Each human person has an individuality that cannot be reduced to the individuality of any other person but it is an individuality that exists and can be fulfilled only in relation with other individuals.

The actions of the individual never affect the individual alone. It always affects also those with whom the individual is related. A disturbance in the bond of relationship produces a disturbance in each individual in that relationship.

We cannot escape this situation by denying the relationships of our humanity. To do this is to deny our own humanity. God created us beings-in-relation. Christ has redeemed us as beings-in-relation.

YES, NO OR MAYBE

I do not create relationships between myself and other human individuals. These relationships are the indispensable condition of my humanity. My actions are actions that either affirm these relationships or deny them.

The call to each of us is a call to act in ways that affirm the relationships with one another that belong to our humanity. This is not a call that we are justified in neglecting in order to foster our relationship with God. I cannot develop my relationship with God while I neglect the development of my human relationships. The two go together. "If someone says he loves God, and hates his brother, he is a liar" - I John 4:20. The nature of my human relationships reveal the nature of my relationship with God. A healthy relationship with God will reveal itself in expanding and enriching relationships with my fellow humans.

To act in ways that affirm our relationships with one another requires acceptance and faithfulness. It requires that I accept all my fellow humans without exception and that I be faithful to all my fellow humans.

Acceptance is more than toleration. When I tolerate a person I accept the presence of that person in the face of an adverse judgment about the person. I have not accepted the person but only his or her presence. I accept the

person's presence but will feel happier if he or she was not present. In this situation I am not enriched by the person but merely put up with him or her.

Toleration breeds a Pharisaical spirit. The more I succeed in acting with toleration toward those I dislike and disapprove of the more noble I feel. See how charitable I am toward these people who don't deserve my charity. If I did what I feel like doing I'd throw them out but here I am showing all this wonderful Christian forebearance by tolerating them, accepting their presence that untidily clutters up my life.

Toleration denies both my own humanity and the humanity of my neighbour whom I tolerate. The only valid humanity-affirming basis for relating to my neighbour is love. "You shall love your neighbour as yourself".

This command of love on the lips of our Lord is not part of a legal system backed by threat of punishment for transgression. In the light of the gospel no command of Scripture can be seen this way.

The command of love, like all the other commands of Scripture that hang on it, is the divine revelation of the meaning of the freedom with which Christ has set us free, the freedom to be fully, richly human. It comes to us as a call to live in the freedom we have been given.

In the light of this command an authentic relationship with my neighbour, any and every neighbour, can only be based on an acceptance of my neighbour. I must accept him or her without reserve. I must make no condition to my acceptance. I must not say; "I will accept you provided you change your unacceptable behaviour and conform to my principles of right behaviour". Or, "I will accept you provided that while you are in my company you respect my rules for living". I must accept my neighbours, each one of them, receiving them with open arms as they are.

"Accept one another...just as Christ accepted you" - Romans 15:7. "Love your enemies...and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and unkind." - Luke 6:35. Christ accepted you without demanding anything of you as a condition of his acceptance. If you are to enjoy the freedom he has given you to be human you will accept one another in the same way.

This is a great problem for us. We deceive ourselves so often that we are doing what the Scriptures say because we are relating to our own select circle of people whom we accept. We may even develop great relationships within this select circle. But this very circle within which we relate becomes a device for avoiding sharing relationships with people who are not acceptable to us. Like the Pharisees, we are ready to welcome everyone if only they will come into our circle. As a result the development of our humanity and our experience of the freedom of the gospel remains stunted.

Even if we make our circle as open as possible we can never develop fruitful human relationships while we expect people to come into our circle to find acceptance. Our love must reach out in acceptance to our neighbours where they are. We must be ready to enter into their circles in order to relate to them.

Along with this universal acceptance, the affirmation of our humanity requires <u>faithfulness</u> in our human relationships. Since any humanity-affirming relationship must be based on love it can never be based on the advantage I gain from it and abandoned as soon as I cease to gain advantage from it.

Love is self-giving and relationships of love, which are the only real relationships, will mean the giving of myself to my neighbour. In the process of

this self-giving I will get hurt. That is the price of loving in a sinful world. But, if I do not pay that price, I will not experience the richness of being human. I will always remain stunted.

Similarly, if I break off a relationship because I have been deeply hurt or because I am not getting any benefit out of it that I can see, I am denying my own humanity. I am not merely hurting the person with whom I break. I am destroying myself. I am shrivelling the potential for my own development as a human being. "Love is patient...it is not self-seeking...it always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perserveres" - I Corinthians 13:4-7.

HUSBANDS, WIVES, PARENTS AND OTHERS

It is important also that we recognize that there are different kinds of human relationships. To be fully human we must relate in love to all our neighbours without exception but we will not relate to them all in the same way. A man ought to accept all women but he ought not to accept them all in the way he accepts his wife!

Scripture speaks of the relationship of husband and wife, of parents and children, of masters and slaves, of employers and employees, of rulers and subjects, of friend and friend, to name just some of the relationships mentioned in Scripture. There is no reason to suppose that the possibilities for human relationships are exhausted by those that are mentioned in Scripture. Neither is there any reason for regarding those relationships that are mentioned in Scripture as having a special God-ordained status that does not apply to other kinds of human relationships.

Nor does Scripture give us any basis for regarding one kind of relationship as being more important or more valuable in itself than another kind of relationship. It provides us with no basis for developing a hierarchy of relationships.

The popular idea that the family, and especially the nuclear family, is the basic unit of society has no foundation in Scripture. This is not to say that the family is not seen in Scripture as important. But it is not given the special place as the cornerstone of society that it has been given in much modern Christian thought.

What Scripture does, without any attempt to rank them in importance or to arrange them in a hierarchial order, is to show us quite clearly that love for our neighbour is fulfilled in a variety of relationships each of which has its own distinctive structure.

We may see the importance of making clear distinctions between the different kinds of relationships perhaps most clearly by the way in which Scripture treats marriage and the family. It is clear that, of all human relationships, none are more closely intertwined than these two. The intertwining is so close that many people fail to make any distinction between them. Yet Scripture quite sharply distinguishes marriage and the family, recognizing that they have quite different structures.

The parties in a marriage relationship are husband and wife. Others have supportive and sanctioning roles in relation to marriage but the marriage relationship itself is between man and woman in a husband/wife relationship. The structure of this relationship gives leadership to the husband. In a healthy marriage relationship the husband leads and the wife recognizes the leadership role of the husband in that relationship - Ephesians 5:22-33.

But these two people, who function as husband and wife in the marriage relationship, usually have children to whom they also relate in the family

relationship. In this family relationship they are not relating as husband and wife but, according to the Scriptures, as parents, father and mother. And here, in the family relationship, leadership does not belong to the father but to the parents, father and mother jointly. The notion that the father is the head of the family is a completely unbiblical notion that violates the clear teaching of Scripture about the structure of the family relationship.

Always, in the family relationship, Scripture gives leadership to the parents jointly without any kind of precedence being given to one parent over the other. "Honour your father and your mother". "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mother's teaching." "My son, observe the commandment of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother." "Children, obey your parents in the Lord" - Exodus 20:12, Proberbs 1:8; 6:20, Ephesians 6:1.

The word of the father is not the law of the family but the joint word of the father and mother. Father has no precedence over mother in the family and no right, in case of difference, to insist on his word prevailing over hers. It is presumed that their joint word will be one word but it is never even hinted that a difference that may arise between father and mother is to be resolved by recourse to the superior authority of the father.

How many human lives have been warped in Christian families by the acceptance of the pagan notion that makes the father the authority figure and the mother the caring figure in the family. Such a notion can only be sustained by ignoring God's Word.

In spite of the close intertwining of marriage and the family, therefore, Scripture requires that we sharply distinguish them as two distinct kinds of relationships with two quite distinct structures.

This also alerts us that the same people relate to each other in more than one way. No one relationship is exclusive even between two people. A, who relates to B as husband in the marriage relationship, relates to B in a different way in the family. In the marriage relationship he relates to her as the one who is responsible to give the lead but in the family relationship he relates to her as a fellow parent who shares joint leadership.

If they are both members of a church he will relate to her in a still different way in this relationship. As members of the State they will have a different kind of relationship again. It could well be that, in the State relationship, B is a member of the government while A is not, in which case, in this relationship A, who is the leader in the marriage relationship, becomes subject to the leadership of B.

Great damage is done to human lives by the failure to recognize what Scripture teaches us so plainly about human relationships. We relate to one another in a variety of ways each of which has its own distinctive structure and none of which can ever be an exclusive life-encompassing relationship.

Because of this failure we have devout Christian people destroying their lives because they think it a Christian duty for husbands to lead their wives in all life's relationships and for wives to submit to this leading. And we have church leaders wearing themselves, and their members, out in futile activities trying to cater for all the life's needs of their members.

A closely related question is the limitation of human authorities. Since all human authority is an authority within the structured relationships of human life it is valid only within the structure of these relationships. Since no relationship embraces all human life, no authority has jurisdiction over all human life. Each authority is valid only within the limits of a particular relationship.

The authority of parents over their children does not extend beyond the limits of the family relationship. And the family relationship, like any other relationship, is not an exclusive relationship. Children, too, have other kinds of relationships in which the authority of parents has no competence.

This was made clear in the Mosaic Law when a parent who thought a son worthy of death was required to submit the matter to the civil authorities for judgment. Here a parent and child stood side by side as fellow citizens in the civil relationship - Deuteronomy 21:18-21.

Similarly, the authority of the government in the State does not extend beyond the State relationship. King Uzziah found this out to his cost - II Chronicles 26:18-23. For this reason Peter and John refused to obey an order of the State - Acts 5:27-29. (While the Sanhedrin, the authority in this case, had other functions, in this particular matter it was clearly functioning as an agency of the State with powers of imprisonment.)

THIS IS WHAT LIFE IS ABOUT

Human life is relationships. We can exist as human beings only in relationships with other human beings. When we fail to affirm these relationships and place restrictions on them we restrict the potential for the development of our own humanity and the humanity of others. To live freely in the freedom Christ has given us means opening ourselves for relationships of love with all our fellow humans.

These relationships will be of different kinds. We will not relate to all people in the same way nor will we relate to the same people all the time in the same way. Faithfulness in our relationships with people means being faithful within the structure of the particular kind of relationship involved.

Just as we can be destructive of our humanity by shutting ourselves off from our neighbours so we may equally destroy our relationships with our neighbour by making too many demands of a particular kind of relationship, expecting it to carry more than it is designed to carry. Developing healthy, humanity-affirming relationships requires that we recognize the diversity of relationships and the limitations of each kind of relationship.

3: THE WORLDINESS OF BEING HUMAN

"If you died with Christ to the basic principles of the world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!'" - Colossians 2:20,21.

Nowhere does the enslavement of Christians to the world show itself more clearly than when we are trying to flee from the world. Nothing could betray the spirit of a corrupt world more than the negativism that has characterized so many of our attitudes to the world. Any attempt to build piety around a series of prohibitions, Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!, reflects the very spirit of the evil world.

CREATED FOR THE WORLD

To be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ we must accept the worldliness of our humanity. We must abandon all one-sidedly negative attitudes to the world recognizing that worldliness belongs to the goodness of our humanity. God created us for this world. To lose our worldliness is to lose our humanity.

Since Christ's redemption does not destroy our humanity but redeems it he does not take away our worldliness. He liberates us from a corrupt, introverted worldliness so that we are free to serve God in the fullness of our worldly existence.

Worldliness is not just something of which we are capable. Much less is it a corruption of our humanity. It is characteristic of our humanity as God created us. To be human is to be worldly. To deny our worldliness is to deny our humanity.

In the creation narrative of Genesis 1, and again in Genesis 2, we read how God created man, male and female, for this earthly world. God bound human life to this world as a life that can exist and find fulfillment only in relation to this earthly creation.

"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.'" - Genesis 1:27-29.

According to this text, God binds man, male and female, to this earthly creation to fill, subdue and rule it and to obtain life sustaining food from it. The newly created pair are to find the purpose of their existence in working with this world and are to be sustained by this world. This situation is not a probation to see whether they are worthy of promotion to a higher world. Much less is it a curse. Their association with this earthly creation is God's blessing on them.

The impression is strengthened further in Genesis 2 where we read that "The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground" - Genesis 2:7. Man is not an other worldly being sent into this world to rule it and live from it. He belongs to it in the most basic way; by a creative act of God he is formed from it. And, once again we read that human life is to be fulfilled by cultivating and caring for this earthly world from which humanity has come - Genesis 2:15.

Clearly the relationship with this earthly world is basic to the humanity that God created.

None of this is changed by the fall of humanity into sin. When God expelled the man from the garden of Eden we read that it was "to cultivate the soil from which he had been formed" - Genesis 3:23.

The very core of sin in this Genesis narrative is the desire to break away from the tie with the earthly world in order to be like God. In pronouncing judgment on Adam's sin God reminds him very forcibly that he belongs inescapably to this world: "You are dust" - Genesis 2:19. It is in this world, and not by escape from it, that human blessedness, fulfillment and life is found.

Again, after the judgment of the flood, God reaffirms the relation between this earthly world and the human family he saved from the flood. As they entered on their new life they received the divine benediction: "God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.'" - Genesis 9:1-6.

It is human sin that attempts to break the bond between humanity and the earthly creation. God's judgment on that sin brings a curse on the creation - Genesis 3:17,18 - and leads to its destruction in the flood. Yet, God's grace preserves the bond between humanity and the earthly creation and in doing so preserves humanity itself.

It is important to recognize that, in the Genesis narrative of creation, fall into sin, and consequent judgment, the bond between humanity and the earthly creation is never seen as a limitation or a restriction on humanity. It is always represented as God's blessing, a blessing that God's grace preserves in spite of human sin that repudiates the blessing. The curse that sin brings is not that humanity is bound to this world but that this world comes under a divine curse.

Later Scripture sees this curse on the earthly creation culminating in its fiery destruction. This destruction of the earth is to coincide with the final judgment of destruction on unbelieving humanity. To the very end the whole earthly creation and humanity remain inseparably bound together.

"The present heaven and earth by his word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men...the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." - II Peter 3:7-10.

But this final judgment on a cursed world does not lead human life into another unearthly, ethereal kind of world as our final home. The new humanity in Christ is to find eternal rest in "new heavens and a new earth where righteousness is at home" - II Peter 3:13.

We are reminded here at once of the heavens and earth that God created according to the narrative of Genesis 1. We are also reminded how that earthly world was placed under a curse because of human sin so that we must now struggle with a cursed world. Peter, in this very graphic passage, writing against this background takes us to the final climax when this cursed world eventually disappears to be replaced by a new world without curse. This new world, like the old, is an earthly world with all the earthly, material characteristics that alone can provide an environment in which human life can be fulfilled. Nothing is lost but the curse.

THE WORLD IS GOOD, THE WORLD IS BAD

It is in this life that we must understand the references of the New Testament writers to the believer's relationship with the world. It is unfortunate

that the treatment of this subject among Christians has so often suffered from a distorting one-sidedness that places undue emphasis on the negative statements of Scripture. The New Testament writers make some very positive statements about the believer's relationship to the world.

Paul, in fact, reserves one of his strongest condemnations for the kind of teaching that calls for a restriction on our involvement with this earthly world. He describes this kind of teaching as it appeared in his day as a falling away from the faith through demonic deception - I Timothy 4:-1-3. He goes on to tell us that "Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude." - I Timothy 4:4. All that belongs to this earthly creation is richly supplied by God for our enjoyment - I Timothy 6:17

There is no place at all here for an asceticism that refuses to enjoy the rich fulness of our world. There is no place for that spurious kind of spirituality, not uncommon among the pagans, but also found among Christians, that supposes we can get nearer to God by reducing to a minimum our involvement with this world. If we reject this world we will weaken our contact with God and not strengthen it.

We hear our Lord himself saying that the meek "will inherit the earth" - Matthew 5:5. Paul, writing to the Romans, tells us that God's promise to believers is not eventual escape from this world into a heavenly realm, but the inheritance of this world - Romans 4:13. Indeed, Paul goes so far as to say that already now "the world" belongs to us - I Corinthians 3:21-23.

It is very clear that salvation in Christ does not sever our connection with this world. On the contrary, it strengthens and confirms that connection. Our humanity will not be fulfilled by escaping from this world to find our bliss in the contemplation of God in some mythical, heavenly realm of pure spirit. The gospel leads us to a very positive affirmation of the world.

Yet, there are passages that warn the believer very strongly against association with the world. These too we must take seriously. We are warned not to love "the world" since "all that is in the world...is not from the Father, but is from the world" - I John 2:16.

We are told that "friendship with the world is hatred toward God" - James 4:4. Jesus said to his disciples: "You are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" - John 15:19.

How are we to understand these passages in the light of the possitive approach to the world that we find elsewhere in Scripture. It is not difficult if only we keep in mind the inseparable relationship between humanity and the world. "The world" is not, and never can be, the earthly creation apart from humanity. It is always the earthly creation including humanity, and, sometimes, indeed, almost synonymous with humanity. But yet, in these cases, it is humanity as inseparably related to this earthly creation that is in view.

Humanity in alienation from God secularizes the world treating it as though it is self-sufficient. Worldly life is organized as though it exists and can be understood and developed in independence of God. The world is corrupted in the service of idols bringing God's curse.

It is this corrupted, evil world turned in on itself that we are warned against and that is hostile to faith. This evil world is not to be identified with the earthly creation. It is not involvement with the earthly that is characteristic of this evil world but living as though the earthly is independent of the heavenly.

The kind of piety that calls for a reduced involvement with earthly affairs so as to concentrate on "spiritual" activities is, therefore, not a response of faith to the Word of God but a surrender to this evil world that is not of the Father. It is built on the lie, which is the very heart of the evil world, that the world of earthly affairs is, by nature, separate from the spiritual, heavenly world.

Christ does not redeem us from our relationship to the earthly creation. That would not be the redemption of our humanity but its denial. Christ liberates us from slavery to a corrupt world in which the earthly relationships are turned in on themselves and cut off from the relationship to God, setting us free to serve God in all the rich fulness of earthly affairs under Christ as Lord.

There is, therefore, a worldliness for us to forsake and a worldliness for us to affirm. We are to forsake the worldliness that detaches earthly affairs from their heavenly connection so that they are treated as self-sufficient, secular affairs. But we are to do this, not by fleeing from the world, but by embracing it with enthusiasm as the sphere in which, in the service of God, our redeemed humanity is fulfilled. Redeemed human life is not to be fulfilled in a flight to an immaterial heaven but in the context of this earthly world.

The retreat of Christians from the world is a denial of the gospel. The gospel calls not for flight from the world but for living in faith in the world; living in the liberty Christ has given us as worldly creatures showing something of what this world ought to be, a world in which all creation praises God singing for joy under the hands of men and women working with it in believing response to God's word.

In politics, and economics, and philosophy, and psychology, and medicine and science, in the arts, in dance and drama, and every other area of this world's affairs the corrupting influence of human alienation from God is seen. The tragedy is that we whom Christ has set free have so withdrawn ourselves into our pious ghettos that little is seen of the liberation of Christ in the world.

We must repent of our unfaithfulness in this. We are not called by the gospel to a crusade to transform the world. We are called to live in the world by faith. This means living in reliance on the faithfulness of the Word God has spoken about ourselves and our world.

Living in faith will not tolerate the false separation of faith from worldly affairs. As we live in faith we will move into every area of worldly affairs in believing response to God's Word. We will show the meaning of redemption throughout the full range of human life in this world by living in that full range of life as free people in Christ.

A believing relation to the world is not distinguished from the unbelieving by the degree of involvement with the earthly but by the guiding principle for this involvement. An unbelieving involvement finds its guiding principle within earthly things themselves apart from the Word of God. A believing involvement finds its guiding principle in the Word of God.

4: THE SEXUALITY OF OUR HUMANITY

A fourth basic element of being human is sexuality. It is as inseparable from our humanity as religion, community and worldliness. It is also the area where the Christian tradition is coming under some of the sharpest criticism in our day.

Christianity, it is said, promotes sexism, and in the popular thought of our day sexism is a major evil along with racism, genocide and rape. Christianity, also, it is said, is responsible for repressing human sexuality, making people ashamed of their sexuality. Sex is wonderful and people need complete freedom to express their sexuality.

It is easy to make sweeping charges like this and easy to find evidence to support them in the actions and teaching of Christians. It is just as easy for Christians to sweep these charges aside as the attacks of unbelievers on the Christian faith.

However, if we are going to communicate with our age we must do better than this. We must honestly face the sort of criticism that is made and take a good hard look at our beliefs and attitudes in the light of Scripture. If we find that these are in harmony with Scripture then we can go ahead with confidence regardless of what the world around us thinks. But if our beliefs and attitudes about sexuality are not in harmony with Scripture then we had better change those beliefs and attitudes and change them quickly.

The problem in this area, as in so many others, is that we come to the Scriptures with a load of assumptions, presuppositions, prejudices, and entrenched ideas that make it difficult for us to submit ourselves to the Word of God that speaks in the Scriptures. We already think we have the answers before coming to the Scriptures and come to the Scriptures only for confirmation of what we already know.

MALE AND FEMALE

"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" - Genesis 1:27. "The Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a partner who will be a match for him'" - Genesis 2:18.

It is very clear in the creation narrative that humanity is not male. Maleness alone is not just an incomplete humanity, it cannot qualify for a place in the good creation of God. Humanity exists only as male and female, female and male.

Any idea of male domination and female subordination is completely absent from the creation narrative. In this respect we should not be misled by the standard translations of Genesis 2:18 that makes the female a "help" for the male. While this is not an inaccurate translation it can be quite misleading owing to the connotations of assistant or aide that we tend to give to "help". The Hebrew word ('ezer) carries with it no idea of subordination. Its most common use in the Old Testament is to describe God as man's "help" where any idea of subordination is clearly impossible - e.g. Psalm 33:20; 21:2; 146:5.

The idea is that of one who provides strength and support. The female therefore is needed to give man necessary strength and support. The qualification that she is to be the kind of help that will be a match for the male ("fit" "meet") makes it clear that she is seen as a full partner of the male who stands on an equal footing with him, sharing fully in the experience of being human. Male and female are two complementary kinds of humanity.

As male and female appear in this way side by side as a partnership of equals in the creation narrative it is no surprise to find the same situation being described in relation to redeemed humanity. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" - Galatians 3:28.

In redeemed humanity male has no prededence over female nor female over male. The distinction of male and female remains but it is not, as in a sinful world, made the basis for any distinction of persons. People are not classified and rated by sex.

Nowhere, in fact, does Scripture speak of a subordination of female to male. Nowhere does it put forward the idea of a natural male leadership role. Such an idea is entirely without biblical foundation.

It is true that there are passages of Scripture that have been used to support this idea of a natural male leadership and a natural female subordination. But a close look at these Scriptures indicates that they do not in any way modify the clear teaching of the rest of Scripture that male and female are to be seen simply as two complementary kinds of humanity.

There is I Timothy 2:8-15 where Paul is speaking about problems of behaviour that, in that particular situation, were appearing as specific problems for either men or women. It is when we read verse 12 that the question of a man/woman relationship first appears. "I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man". Paul goes on to support his directive by a typically Pauline appeal to the Old Testament.

The key question here is: Is Paul referring to male/female relationships in general or is he referring specifically to the husband/wife relationship of marriage. Only the context can decide since the Greek words used, aner/gune, can equally well mean either man/woman or husband/wife.

In this case the context leads us quite clearly to conclude that Paul is referring to husband/wife: "I do not allow a wife to teach or exercise authority over a husband".

Wherever aner/gune appear together as subject and object of the same sentence, as they do here, it is safe to assume that they mean husband/wife unless there are contrary indications in the context. In this case, not only are there no contrary indications in the context, but there are other strong indicators that we should read husband/wife. (RSV is particularly misleading here when it translates "I forbid no woman to teach or to have authority over men". The Greek is quite clearly singular "man"/"husband" not plural "men".)

First, the reference in Paul's supporting argument to the bearing of children (verse 15) could only refer, in Paul's thought, to a married woman.

Secondly, his supporting argument is based not on a man/woman generalization but on a reference to a specific husband/wife relationship, that of Adam and Eve. It is quite out of place here to read Paul as saying that women in general are deceived more readily than men. He is making use of the specific instance of Eve's deception to support his case.

Thirdly, and perhaps most decisively, Paul's theme is authority, and as a biblical writer, he could only speak of authority between human persons within a specific relationship. He could not speak of an absolute authority that one person has over another person in every conceivable relationship. Only the Lord has this kind of absolute authority. Any idea that any human person can have this authority over another is completely foreign to biblical thought.

Human authority can only be authority within a specific relationship. When Paul in this passage, therefore, speaks of an issue as an issue of authority between two people he can only be doing so in connection with a specific relationship.

We conclude, therefore, that Paul is talking in this passage, not about man and woman but about husband and wife. He is dealing with a specific problem that occurred in the marriage relationship amongst members of the Christian community at that time. Wives, failing to recognize the leadership role that the husband has in the marriage relationship, were trying to direct and dominate their husbands in the marriage relationship. Paul is calling wives back to a recognition of the leadership structure of marriage.

It should also be noted in passing that Paul is not to be understood as calling for "silence" in the sense that wives should never speak unless they are spoken to. The word he uses has the basic idea of rest and calm. He is not inviting wives to be seen and not heard but to exchange a contentious, nagging attitude for one of quiet restfulness.

Another passage that has caused problems is I Corinthians 14:34 where women are told that they should be silent in the church. In this case the issue is not the place of women in the church but order in church relationships. We should see this clearly if we consider this particular passage in the context of the whole chapter which from beginning to end is concerned with matters of order in the church relationship.

This is further made clear by a careful examination of this passage itself. The reason given for women being silent is that "they are not permitted to speak". This does not refer to a universal divine prohibition on women speaking in church. Paul never uses this way of speaking of a divine sanction. He does not appeal to his Apostolic authority as he does in the passage we just looked at in Timothy. He is clearly referring to a situation where, within the structure of the church relationship, speaking was not permitted. Exactly why this ruling was in force we do not know. No doubt there was good reason for the ruling in the particular situation. It is in such a situation that Paul calls for the submission of women "just as also the Law says". This appeal to the Law refers to the submission that he calls for and not to the silence. The Law gives no hint of a prohibition on women speaking in the church or in any other situation. It does, however, teach very clearly that all, men and women alike, should submit to the appropriate authority within all the various communal relationships of human life.

Paul is here simply calling the Christian women of his day to respect the authority of those who govern the church by remaining silent in a situation where those authorities called for silence. He places no restriction on women, or anyone else, speaking in the church or in any other place where this is in harmony with good order. His concern is not the place of women in the church but order in the church.

Another passage that has sometimes been used to suggest female dependence is I Peter 3:7 where Peter refers to the wife in the marriage relationship as "the weaker vessel". Yet the rest of the verse should make it very clear that he is not in any way suggesting by the use of this term female inferiority or subordination since he calls for the husband to give honour to the wife. His call is not for the husband to "bestow honour" on the wife (RSV) as though the husband is to elevate the wife to a position of honour by his action. Rather his call is for the husband to acknowledge the honour that the wife has as joint heir with him of the grace of life. She is a figure of honour not by the gift of her husband but in her own right as a person.

It is in this context that Peter calls for husbands to cohabit with their wives, according to knowledge, that is, knowledge of the norms for marriage. The husband is to take special care to observe and uphold these norms in the marriage because of the comparative weakness of the wife which means that she is particularly vulnerable to being abused by the husband in the marriage relationship.

Peter does not identify this weakness. He may have in mind the wife's lack brute strength or he may have in mind the social weakness of women in his day. Either way the issue is simply the vulnerability of the wife to abuse in the marriage relationship, calling for a special warning to Christian husbands not to abuse their position of strength.

So we see that in these particular passages, as in the rest of Scripture, there is no suggestion of a subordination of one sex to the other. This idea has been introduced into Christian thought from another source and needs to be thoroughly rooted out. Male and female in Scripture represent simply two complementary kinds of human beings which together constitute humanity.

It is also completely without Scriptural foundation to use this male/female distinction of Scripture as validation for the male/female stereotypes of our society. It is a misuse of biblical authority to appeal to the biblical male/female distinction as giving divine authority to the stereotypes that are imposed by society.

There is no foundation in Scripture, for example, for the stereotype of the male as dominant and aggressive and the female as soft and submissive. Neither is there any foundation for the stereotype of the male as logical with the emotions firmly controlled and the female as emotional and pleasantly irrational.

These stereotypes, along with a host of others, can do immense damage to people whose personalities simply do not fit the stereotyped pattern. They should have no place in Christian thought. Male and female come in all kinds of personality patterns. If we would be true to the Scriptures we will encourage the development of these personalities without trying to force people into artificial male/female stereotypes. We will not rate a person's maleness or femaleness by the extent of conformity to the stereotype.

SEX, MARRIAGE AND NORMS

Male and female in Scripture is the basis for the most intimate of all human relationships, the marriage relationship. In this connection Scripture's chief concern is to emphasise the importance of faithfulness in this relationship. It condemns all unfaithfulness and speaks out especially against unfaithfulness that shows itself in promiscuity, casual sexual relationships in which there is no pledge of troth. It is of course saying only what it says of all human relationships, that human relationships are only meaningful where there is faithfulness, but it applies this principle with some force to the specific circumstances of marriage.

While Scripture is strong on the question of faithfulness in the sexual relationship, it knows nothing of the many taboos with which we have so often surrounded this subject.

It knows nothing, for example, of the rigid taboos that we impose on bodily contact both between the sexes and between persons of the same sex. David and Jonathan would be treated with suspicion, to say the least, in many Christian circles today if it were known that they were in the habit of not only speaking of their love for each other but kissing each other. Yet this type of

open expression and contact is treated in Scripture as perfectly normal behaviour - I Samuel 20:17,41.

Scripture also knows nothing of our taboos on "unnatural" sexual acts. The definition of "unnatural" is itself difficult. Not so long ago most Christians classified masturbation as an unnatural act. Yet, today, we find the Christian medical fellowship, NSW, though still making use of the idea of "unnatural" acts to condemn some kinds of sexual behaviour, referring to masturbation as "normal". The same body also approves the use of contraceptives. Yet there are others who would condemn their use as "unnatural". All this attempt to decide on the rightness or wrongness of a sexual act by appeal to its "naturalness" or "unnaturalness" is quite unbiblical. We need a much better criterion than this.

Another quite unbiblical notion that persists in the thinking of some Christians is the idea of the sublimation of sexual energy. Scripture knows of individuals who are able to keep their sexual drive under control but it knows nothing of the sublimation of sexual energy. On the contrary, for those whose sexual drive is too strong for control, Scripture says, not "sublimate your sexual energy in other activities", but "let them marry; for it is better to marry than burn" - I Corinthians 7:8,9.

The simple fact is that there is a simplicity, an openness and a realism about the biblical treatment of human sexuality that is very much lacking in a great deal of our traditional Christian morality.

In a world where the taboos and restrictions that have long surrounded human sexuality in the name of Christian morality are giving way to a situation where there are no recognized norms except the insistence that every person must have freedom to do as he or she likes provided others are not visibly injured, we, as Christians need to do a lot of serious re-evaluating.

We must do more than react to what others are saying and doing. We must cease trying to prop up our traditional formulations and develop positive guidelines for human sexuality led by our Christian faith.

In this re-evaluation we need to begin, not with our traditional morality, but with the Word of God. We need to deliberately set aside our inherited morality that has been shaped and reshaped by a variety of influences, and listen afresh for the leading of the Word of God to find the norms that can provide for a fruitful expression of human sexuality for each human person in this generation.

Only as we do this will we be able to give the leadership that our age cries out for. Only as we do this will we be able to speak to our age with an authentic and credible voice. Only as we do this will we find a fruitful expression of our own sexuality that is basic to our humanity.