

CHAPTER VI DISCERNING LIFE: EMBODIMENT, SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY ³⁰⁴

The Meaning Of Our Enfleshment

James Nelson begins his book *Embodiment* with the statement that "Christian faith ought to take embodiment seriously", supporting this by quotation of John 1:14 which speaks of the embodiment of God in Christ.³⁰⁵ My preference is for the term "enfleshment" because it delineates the nature of the body. This is important because the issues related to our taking our bodies seriously gather round what the New Testament calls "flesh", a particular type of body. As Paul engages in his extended discussion of the significance of the resurrection in I Corinthians 15, he makes it clear that the resurrected body will not be the same as the physical, earthly, flesh and blood, perishable body (rejected as inappropriate to full expression of spiritual life). The resurrection body will be spiritual, like that of the man of heaven, not the man of dust.³⁰⁶

Most important for us is that Jesus became flesh and that we live out the span of our lives within a fleshly body. This fleshly body is a biological and psychological organism. It would seem that we must describe it this way for the development of the human psyche as observed by psychology in the last hundred years is intimately related to the biological organism and to the immanent conditions of life, though there are also transcendent elements to the psyche. Sexuality is one of the most mysterious, powerful, and sometimes troublesome aspects of this enfleshed existence.

While the church today is seeking to struggle with enfleshment and sexuality in new ways which transcend its inherited dualism, the modern world is also beginning to struggle with the transcendent and spiritual in human existence. J.B. Rhine's work in the 1950s popularized ESP.³⁰⁷ Some psychologies have been influenced by Eastern thought so that transcendent elements in the psyche are recognized.³⁰⁸ Carl Jung in 1933 published a book entitled *Modern Man In Search of a Soul* containing a series of articles previously published. In an article originally entitled "The Significance of Psychotherapy for Pastoral Care", but translated into English as "Psychotherapists or Clergy",³⁰⁹ he debates whether clergy can still deal with the "meaning" issues and spiritual dimensions of life, citing a survey he took testing whether "people in spiritual distress prefer nowadays to consult the doctor rather than the clergyman." The vote, even by clergy and their relatives, was in favor of the psychiatrist, one clergyman commenting, "Theology has nothing to do with the treatment of human beings." Jung raised the question of whether the

304. Much of this chapter was previously published as "Sexuality and Spirituality" in *Studies in Formative Spirituality*, May, 1988, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 169ff.

305. James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1978, p. 8.

306. This description by Paul is probably influenced by contemporary Midrashim of the creation narratives in Gen. 1-3 where the man of Gen. 1 was regarded as the heavenly man and the man of Gen. 2-3 was the earthly man, the man of dust. Philo of Alexandria clearly interpreted these narratives this way.

307. J.B. Rhine, *The Reach of the Mind*, New York: William Sloane Associates, 1947.

308. Edward E. Sampson, *Ego At The Threshold*, New York: a Delta BookDell, 1975.

309. C.G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, trans. by W.S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, n.d., originally published in German in 1933, pp. 221ff.

clergy can join the psychotherapist, moving beyond the transmitted form of their religious traditions, to deal with the meaning and healing of human existence. He challenged Christians to become imitators of Christ, not by copying his life, but by living our lives as truly as Christ lived his without regard for the conventions of the Pharisees. Ira Progoff, well-known for his development of journaling techniques, influenced by Jung and biological evolutionists, speaks of the evolution of protoplasm with the psyche as "the organ of meaning and direction in human life."³¹⁰ When evolution created the organic psyche it provided "an instrument with which the entire organic process of life could one day transcend itself."³¹¹ Many of the old religious symbols seem no longer to function well for modern humanity. The possibility of the spiritual evolution of humanity lies in the depths of the psyche.

Kenneth Pelletier, Asst. Clinical Professor at the Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute and Department of Psychiatry, U. of California School of Medicine, has been for some time engaged in an attempt to formulate a science of consciousness which would include the breadth of modern research and experience. He comments that:

The pressing need for a more comprehensive interpretation of man and his universe is evident in the sorcery of Castaneda's Don Juan, the metaphysical implications of quantum physics and consciousness research, and in applications of meditation and biofeedback in the healing professions. Each day it is clear that medical researchers and practitioners need to abandon artificial distinctions between mind, body and environment.³¹²

Robert Assagioli in *Psychosynthesis* posits the existence of a "higher self"³¹³. Those doing work with multiple personalities frequently discover a personality called the "Inner Self-Helper, a personality with a great deal of wisdom which may have an awareness of transcending the person's life-time.³¹⁴ With the development of techniques for revival of those who are near death, there has arisen a body of experience indicating survival on another level of existence when physical death occurs,³¹⁵ an experience, however, to which others previously bore witness.³¹⁶

While some of science and psychology is rediscovering the spiritual dimensions of life within biological and psychological existence, the church is struggling with its inherited antiflesh dualism. Where the psychobiological organism is regarded negatively (or it is assumed that somehow it can be transcended within this life, attaining some pure stage of spirituality or goodness), this has been to the detriment of exploring the full potential and meaning of our enfleshed existence and has frequently driven underground aspects of our humanity where they might function destructively. The church's exploration of flesh and sexuality must also explore the nature of the authority of our traditional anthropological and psychological views and the role of the Spirit as a guide to new understandings of human existence beyond the traditions.³¹⁷

310. Ira Progoff, *Depth Psychology and Modern Man*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959, p. 246..

311. Progoff, p. 260.

312. Kenneth R. Pelletire, *Toward A Science of Consciousness*, New York: Dell Publishing Co., a Delta Book, 1978, p. 26.

313. Roberto Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques*, New York: Penguin Books, 1965

314. Richard P. Kluft, guest ed., "Multiple Personality Disorder", *Psychiatric Annals*, January 1984, Vol. 14, No. 1.

315. Kenneth Ring, *Heading Toward Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984.

316. Jung had a similar experience following a heart attack. See C.J. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Recorded and Edited by Aniela Jaffe, translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston, Rev. Ed., New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1965, pp. 289ff.

317. John 14:26 and 16:12 speak of the Spirit in this way.

Christian attitudes have frequently been influenced by two sources, Hellenism and Apocalyptic Judaism. Hellenism regarded the body as the prison of the soul and Apocalyptic Judaism regarded flesh as the enemy of the spirit. This resulted in Judaism moving away from the affirmation of the fleshly body in the resurrection. When one died one survived as a disembodied soul, going on a journey until one found one's place in Sheol (see II Esdras 7). This was a place of meaningful and rewarded existence. When the resurrection from the dead finally occurred, the body one would receive was seen as "spiritual", "like the angels", or in some literature one would continue one's existence as a soul with no body (see the book of Jubilees). Holding these attitudes, enfleshed existence was merely to be tolerated, if not subdued, and ultimately to be escaped. Whatever came out of the impulses and drives of the flesh was regarded as bad. These views are reflected in much of the New Testament, for example the Pauline antithesis of flesh and spirit. One of the most significant summons to a rethinking of the dualistic elements of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, in the light of the biblical view of God and Christ as creator, is the "creation spirituality" advocated by Matthew Fox.³¹⁸ Old Testament scholars also are re-exploring the creation traditions.³¹⁹

If we are enfleshed, Then there must be some meaning in it, some intention of God in it. Consequently flesh and spirit are interrelated, at least in this life. Our spirituality must be worked out in the flesh and our biological and psychological existence must be worked out in the spirit. Such interrelationship must then provide us with a God-intended (not accidental) opportunity. The issues posed by the flesh cannot be explained away as a result of the Fall. Sexuality, as a key and problematic aspect of our enfleshment, gives us an opportunity to explore this.

Sexuality

Sex may be merely a biological act brought about by urge and opportunity, without reflection. Yet consciousness, reflection and exploration of meaning are what raises human existence beyond the biological level. When examined reflectively and viewed in dimensions which include but transcend the biological, sex becomes sexuality. Sexuality is part of our "fatedness". By the time we come to consciously reflect, our sexuality (biological and psychological) has been pretty well determined. We then need to understand who and what we are, accept our gifts and problems, and engage in processes which explore and transform us.

Biosocial Sexuality.

Sexuality since Freud has become as area for scientific investigation. A great deal of literature dealing with its biological and psychological aspects, together with the impact of social conditioning, has been published. It has been clear for some time that the possession of two X chromosomes produces a genetic female and the presence of a Y with an X produces a male. Whereas the fetus before the sixth week can develop in a female or male direction, developing male or female organs from the same tissues, by about the sixth week testes are formed in the male, producing prenatal androgens and influencing further male development. By the sixth month ovaries are present in the female. Differentiation as a complete male then requires the presence of both a Y chromosome and androgen while differentiation as a complete

318. Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, Santa Fe, NM: Bear and Co., 1983.
Matthew Fox, ed., *Western Spirituality: Historical Roots, Ecumenical Routes*, Santa Fe, NM: Bear and Co., 1981.

319. Bernhard Anderson, ed, *Creation In The Old Testament*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984.
Helen A. Kenik, "Toward A Biblical Basis for Creation Theology", in Matthew Fox, ed., *Western Spirituality: Historical Roots, Ecumenical Routes*, pp. 27ff.

female requires the presence of two X chromosomes and the absence of androgen. Thus the human organism begins with the potential for maleness and femaleness and is differentiated by genetic and endocrinological instruction. If a person who is a genetic male is not exposed to prenatal androgen, he is born with female external genitals and is usually raised as a female. However, he/she has no ovaries. Prenatal androgen seems also to influence a differentiation of the hypothalamus in the brain which will control the release of gonadal hormones after puberty.³²⁰ Though there is evidence that prenatal hormonal manipulation can affect homosexual development in animals and that this can be changed by hypothalamic surgery, there is little evidence that this is so in humans.³²¹

The biological system is so complex and the human organism is generally not available for the same sort of examination done on animals that we may yet have much to discover in this area. It would seem to be reasonable to understand that there are genetic and hormonal effects on prenatal sexual development and hormonal influences on pubertal and post-pubertal developments of at least external sexual and body characteristics. The way in which the complex neurological system of the human allows for social learning from the environment and modification of instinctual drives would affirm the significant role of environment and the sexual "labeling" or identity confusion that comes from it.

Archetypal Sexuality.

Although sexuality is frequently approached merely in biosocial terms, Carl Jung has pointed out that it is possible to observe archetypal elements inherited in the human psyche which are sexual: masculine and feminine. Archetypes are structures of the psyche imprinted through the experience of human existence, constituting the collective unconscious in contrast to the personal unconscious, to be experienced in projections and symbols (Jung was interested in the symbols preserved in myths and those cast forth by dreams and active imagination). Jung wrote:

The collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual.³²²

Jung named the masculine archetype that inhabited the psyche of the female the *animus* and the female archetype that inhabited the male, the *anima*: Latin words for spirit or mind, made feminine or masculine by their ending.

Jung divided the developmental process of a person into two stages and called it "individuation". By this he meant a process of moving from what we first became by the socialization process to the realization and fulfillment of what is within our psyche, including the integration of our unconscious with our conscious in such a way that the "self", an archetype of wholeness, might be realized. The first stage of life, up to mid-life, is primarily absorbed in developmental tasks, ego development, and the process of establishing oneself in vocation, marriage, etc.. With the second half of life one's energies may turn towards the unconscious if these other tasks are somewhat satisfied, and then, consciously or unconsciously, the inner archetypal dynamics from the unconscious become a major aspect of life. This is the human spiritual journey.

320. Jacquelynne E. Parsons, "Psychosexual Neutrality: Is Anatomy Destine?", in J.E. Parsons,ed., *The Psychobiology of Sex Differences and Sex Roles*, Washington: Hemisphere Publ Corp., 1980, pp. 3ff.

321. Heino F.L. Meyer-Bahlburg, "Homosexual Orientation in Women and Men: A Hormonal Basis?", in J. E. Parsons, ed., *The Psychobiology of Sex Differences and Sex Roles*, p. 124.

322. Quoted in Wallace B. Clift, *Jung and Christianity: The Challenge of Reconciliation*, New York: Crossroad, 1985, p. 18, from Jung, *Collected Works*, VIII, p. 158.

A major Jungian archetype is the shadow which represents the unintegrated and autonomous nature of the subconscious, frequently the cause of feelings, thoughts and actions against the value system of the conscious. Jung felt that the *anima* in man and the *animus* in woman was a personification of the unconscious, a bridge to the unconscious, and thus embodied much of the shadow. It is natural to expect that a contrasexual image would draw out much of what we have not consciously come to terms with. Jung's first contact with the *anima* came when in the process of writing down his experiences with his imagination he suddenly found himself being addressed by a woman from within whose approach to him often was experienced as negative, shadowlike.³²³

Jung and his early disciples identified what in their society was stereotypically masculine and feminine with the *animus* and *anima*. This meant that whatever aspects of the psyche society had not allowed to the man or woman became symbolized by the contrasexual figure within the psyche. Some modern Jungians contest this and see the psyche of both man and woman as containing both the *anima* and *animus* and that both men and women need to discover the feminine and masculine elements within themselves. This is particularly important when the roles of the sexes are no longer so clearly defined and women may need to discover their *anima* and men their *animus*.³²⁴

Thus Jung bears witness to the fullness of the archetypal structure of the human psyche. Like the Jungian personality types which help us to appreciate different styles of perception and reasoning, so Jung's view of sexuality calls us to greater appreciation of human variety and less stereotyping. This is part of our calling as Christians, to go beyond the stereotypes and discover the fullness of what it is to be human, for in Christ there is no male or female (Gal. 3:28).

The fullness of the potentials of the psyche and the varied developments of the biosocial organism then attest to the great variety which is possible in human sexuality.³²⁵ Maleness and femaleness cannot be fitted into socially stereotyped styles, but are rather expressed over a broad spectrum. Though we may be called upon to be or behave certain ways because of our biosocial sexual identifications, we need to come to loving acceptance of our own place in the spectrum. Moreover, the fullness of the psyche, not bounded by our identification, calls to us for discovery and development.

Attitude to Sexual Feelings.

Besides understanding the nature, origin and variety of sexuality it becomes important to say something of the sexual urge itself. There was a great deal of anxiety about sexuality in Intertestamental Judaism in spite of what has been said about a "healthy" attitude to sex in the Old Testament. The lustful glance was a deep ethical concern amongst Jews of Jesus' time. This is even reflected in the New Testament in the

323 C.J. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, pp. 185ff.

This personification of the archetypes is partially intuitive, but Jung also advocates this as a conscious process: The essential thing is to differentiate oneself from these unconscious contents by personifying them, and at the same time to bring them into relationship with consciousness. That is the technique for stripping them of their power. It is not too difficult to personify them, as they always possess a certain degree of autonomy, a separate identity of their own. Their autonomy is a most uncomfortable thing to reconcile oneself to, and yet the very fact that the unconscious presents itself in that way gives us the best means of handling it.

C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 187.

324. John A. Sanford, *The Invisible Partners: How The Male and Female in each of Us Affects our Relationships*, New York: Paulist Press, 1980, pp. 105ff.

325. An interesting phenomenon is the existence of male and female persons within the psyche of multiple personalities -- and sometimes personalities who claim to be neither male or female.

Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is said to have equated the lustful glance with adultery (Matt. 5:27ff). In a passage attributed to Paul in I Corinthians, but likely a later addition, women are to be kept veiled "because of the angels" (11:10). Behind this is the development in Jewish mythology of the story of the intercourse of angels with women in Gen. 6. Judaism had identified this as part of the origin of evil in the world, in punishment for which God sent the flood and imprisoned the angels in the underworld (expressed in I Peter 3:19). The argument in I Cor. is that if angels could not resist the attraction of women, both they and human males who are present at worship are in trouble. Therefore women should be veiled in worship. Paul's own attitude to sex is reflected when he says:

It is well for a man not to touch a woman. But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.³²⁶

This solution to sexuality, essentially avoidance, is still one practiced in many areas of the modern world. Women are protected and men are protected from women. Thus feelings are not excited. The modern western world has begun to deal with sexuality much more openly, partially the inheritance of Freud and sexual research and partially the breakdown of familial and societal controls. Thus we are confronted with sex in a more frontal fashion- so to speak. The controls and the ability to handle feelings now need to be developed as part of the person. And yet there is the heritage of guilt related to sexuality which is partially due to religious traditions but also due to the fact that we live in a period of sexual transition in which we have not yet fully come to terms with the reality of sexual feelings. Christians have special problems with this because of the negative attitude to sexuality within the Christian tradition. One of the most frequent experiences of the therapist in counseling is the need to help the person accept the normalcy of their sexuality and defuse past sexual experiences so that they can deal with sexuality in realistic ways, discovering that what they have acted out is often related to broader issues.

Spirituality

Traditional spirituality has often approached the body in terms of purgation or mortification, though interestingly enough still retaining sexual and marital images for mystical union with God. If we take seriously our enfleshment, then our spirituality in this life is to be worked out in the body and in the world. However, if we take seriously our soul, then we need to approach spirituality in such a way as to recognize that life is also preparation for what transcends it. Thus we are in need of a spirituality which takes flesh and world seriously, while transcending them. An approach to this will be suggested at the conclusion of this section.

Sexuality and Community

Our approach to sexuality affects the ability of men and women to work together in their common life and mission. In the revolutionary days of early Christianity there seems to be clear indications of a change in not only the spiritual but the social status of woman. The Gospels evidence Jesus' association with women that seemed unconventional even to Jesus' disciples (e.g. John 4:27). Paul, in spite of views about women expressed in I Cor. 11, 14 and I Timothy (which should be viewed as later additions to Paul's letters), had a number of women associated with him in ministry (see Rom. 16).

³²⁶ I Cor. 7:1-9.

This change in the status of women, where they participated extensively in the common life and mission of early Christianity, must have meant that the Christians either came from the "less religious" segments of society that were less hung up on sexuality, or that in the call of men and women to mission together they found new ways to handle their sexual feelings. Jesus not only had women who were intimately involved in his ministry, but provided for his ministry (Luke 8:1-3). He also had extensive contact with the women who made sex their business. It is difficult to imagine that Jesus had no sexual feelings for at least some of them. Though Paul does not have much appreciation for sexual feelings (I Cor. 7 where he speaks of it as "burning" and claims that he has the gift of celibacy), his involvement of women in his ministry and his comment that in Christ there is no male or female (Gal. 3:28) would seem to indicate an appreciation for sexuality in the broader sense.

It is interesting that what at first glance seems to be a rejection of sexuality in Paul and Jesus, in their view that the coming end of the world would see persons existing in non-sexual spiritual bodies, like that of the angels,³²⁷ may be seen as an understanding of the ultimate value of what is in women as well as men. Then biological sexuality, as well as its accompanying social roles, will pass away so that each person will be valued in themselves. Jesus' reply to the Sadducees in Mark 12:18ff, concerning who of the seven husbands who preceded a woman into death would have her in the afterlife , really means that she is no longer property and is now her own person ("when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven").

Raymond Brown, in his *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, a study of the history of the Johannine community, devotes an appendix to the "Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel".³²⁸ The Johannine community, because its life and mission continued to be affected more by the Christian experience than ecclesial tradition or contemporary culture, continued the involvement of women patterned after the ministry of Jesus long after other segments of the early church were moving in a more conservative sociological direction. The latter is evidenced in the additions to Paul's letters and in Matthew. It is interesting that in Matthew the story of Jesus' birth is even told from the perspective of the father, not the mother as in Luke, and in I Timothy (a Pauline letter to which later additions were made) women are seen as sexually dangerous and unstable(e.g. 3:9-12 where it is advised that only widows sixty and over be enrolled in the widows group as workers for younger widows "grow wanton" and "desire to marry").

The understanding of the Gospel embodied in much of the New Testament speaks of men and women called into a common community to engage in common ministry and mission, though each endowed with various and differing gifts. The history of the later church, in the last quarter of the first century, indicates what happens when the church ceases to deal with this common gift and calling to both men and women. Our day has seen movements for the liberation of women and the entrance of women into ministry in a new way. Though men and women have been thrust together into more intimate circumstances, it may be questioned as to whether we have explored our sexuality so that we may use the opportunity for intimacy and ministry and for getting to know the dimensions of human existence represented in "the other half" of humanity. If we are afraid of our sexuality or if it only drives us into bed, we have lost something precious.

³²⁷ I Cor. 7, 15; Mark 12:18ff representing a view held in Jewish Apocalyptic. Such a view could represent that in the end men and women become equal because their roles are no longer determined by their biology.

³²⁸. Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times*, New York: Paulist Press, 1979, pp. 183ff.

Christian spirituality is really about relationship and its possibilities. Many intimate relationships, even sometimes between persons of the same sex, involve sexual feelings. Relationship in depth is not really possible if we ignore our affective life. Another issue pointed out by Jungian psychology is that we project our *anima/us* upon persons of the other sex to whom we are drawn, or by whom we are repulsed. Handling our sexuality involves appreciating our projections and the persons who draw them out, but also demythologizing them lest they draw us into inappropriate and destructive types of relationships.

Libido

Freud's idea of the *libido* is that it is primarily sexual. Jung, objecting to Freud's interpretation of the psyche and its development in primarily sexual terms, saw the *libido* as undifferentiated energy which moves as between opposites within the psyche, seeking compensation, balance and creativity.³²⁹ This energy, empowered by the archetype of the self, moves toward the development and integration of the various poles within the psyche. Much of the literature of mysticism speaks of the energy of love towards God and others as productive of Christian spirituality and mystical experience.

Gerald May, psychiatrist on the staff of the Shalem Institute in Washington, D.C., has for some time been exploring views of the psyche and the nature of neurological activity that will correlate with the mystical experience. In 1982 he published his *Will and Spirit*, subtitled *A Contemplative Psychology*. In this volume he has a chapter on "Energy: The Unifying Force" and a section on "Energy and Sexuality". He portrays the libido in somewhat Jungian terms, but also influenced by contemplative experience. The libido is the basic life-force, a root energy which differentiates itself in association with idea-thought complexes, memories and mental images that in turn differentiate the energy into identifiable emotions. He relates the story of a Roman Catholic nun who experienced this "energy-transmutation" in a time of contemplative prayer. ³³⁰ May then relates this to sexuality:

The notion of energy-transmutation allows us to understand how sexuality and spirituality are related at a level far more deep than can be ascertained even by their striking symbolic and experiential similarities. From the standpoint of human contemplative experience, sexual and spiritual phenomena do indeed seem to originate from the common energy source of all experience -- the basic life-force that we have chosen to call spirit. Spirit, then, comprises all energy and its manifestations at the most fundamental level and in the purest form. Sexuality, as we experience it, is constituted of all those expressions of spirit that are directed toward creating.

If people repress or stifle sexuality out of fear or guilt -- even in the guise of trying to be holy -- they will most likely also repress and stifle other expressions of creative living energy and wind up feeling and being only partially involved in the process of life. Likewise, spirituality can also be stifled and repressed and often has been in recent generations in our culture.³³¹

329. Jung records an interesting debate between Freud and himself over the understanding of the libido. Freud said to Jung, "My dear Jung, promise me never to abandon the sexual theory. That is the most essential thing of all. You see, we must make a dogma of it, an unshakable bulwark." To which Jung replied, "A bulwark -- against what?" "Against the black tide of mud -- of occultism." Jung comments that by "occultism" Freud seemed to mean everything that philosophy, religion, and the rising science of parapsychology had learned about the psyche. Jung understood this as Freud's asking him to erect a barrier against the "eruption of unconscious religious factors."

Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, pp. 150ff.

330. Gerald G. May, *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982. The chapter on energy begins p. 172.

331. Gerald May, *Will and Spirit*, pp. 190-191.

May is right about the effect of repressed sexuality and emotionality on the energy available for the rest of life and the need for the availability of creative energy for relationship with God and persons. The author of the 14th cent. *Cloud of Unknowing* speaks of God as existing in a cloud of unknowing, God's ontological difference from us, and the need to place a cloud of forgetting beneath us, laying aside all attempts to describe and understand. The cloud then can only be pierced by love.

He may be well loved, but he may not be thought of. He may be reached and held close by means of love, but by means of thought never. You are to step above it (the cloud of forgetting) with great courage and with determination, and with a devout and pleasant stirring of love, and you are to try to pierce that darkness (the cloud of unknowing) which is above you. You are to strike that thick cloud of unknowing with a sharp dart of longing love ... 332

Sexuality and Acceptance

The heart of the Christian Gospel, and therefore of spirituality, is that God accepts us as we are. So accepted, we may be accepting of others. This is love. God's love enables our love. The greatest problem with love is the difficulty most persons have appropriating it. One does not have to counsel many to discover that it may take years of therapy before some persons can accept themselves and the love of another. For some this never happens. Just as important as being willing to receive love is developing the courage and the conviction that one's love will be received. In a sense, one's measures one's own worth not just by whether one is loved, but whether one's love is worth receiving. It is tragic never to have been loved, but it is doubly tragic never to have been allowed to love.

When we consider the experience of sexual fantasies and feelings which are often involuntary as over against the morals and values of societal or religious traditions, it becomes apparent that our sexuality often poses the greatest problem for relationship with God, self and others. The Gospel of Matthew, so beloved within the church, has often been used to represent Jesus' attitude toward impure feelings. The way Jesus' sayings are cast in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew presents Jesus as issuing commands against feelings, including lust, and calling for perfection as God is perfect. It is here that the saying "if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out" occurs. "It is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell." (Matt. 5:27-30) Applied to this context, the offending "member" is one's sexual organ.

Can God only accept our perfection, our holiness, or can he/she accept us with the humanity and sexuality with which we were created? Did the first century Pharisee advocate the stoning of an adulteress to hide the horror at his own feelings or, as in 20th century Iran, does a pregnant unwed woman have no value beyond her sexual sin and so was strangled by her brother? Why do we withdraw from a victim of rape? Why are so many homophobic?

Perhaps it is at the point of our sexuality that we must test grace.

Exploring Our Wholeness and God's.

The *anima/us* in Jungian psychology represents the contrasexual parts of our psyche to which we need to relate to discover our wholeness and to bring to God and others the totality of our gifts. If we take Genesis

332. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Introductory Commentary and Translation by Ira Progoff, New York: Julian Press, 1957, chpt. IV, 3-4.

1 seriously, that we are made in the image of God, male and female, that which is expressed in both maleness and femaleness is a part of God. Thus the exploration of our wholeness is in a way an exploration of God. As Jung indicates in *Answer to Job*,³³³ in Judaeo-Christian history the development of a place for the feminine (Wisdom in Judaism and Mary in Christianity) is significant. We may not wish to see this precisely as Jung did, namely, God becoming conscious of his feminine side, but rather as the Judaeo-Christian tradition becoming conscious of what always was in God. Frequently in Judaeo-Christian history this has been suppressed, but it is there. Jung is particularly concerned about Protestantism, though he was a Protestant, because it has so often been an intellectual and masculine religion.

Mysticism has pointed out that the God whom we worship is beyond terms and concepts. The structures by which God is named are really in our mind: from our experience, culture and the collective unconscious. "Female" and "male" are such structures. Really both the fullness of the person and the fullness of God transcends naming. Perhaps the best that we can do is to keep our naming as inclusive and tentative as possible that our spiritual lives not be limited. Yet the names and images must be pursued. As Jung says:

The images of the unconscious place a great responsibility on a man. Failure to understand them, or a shrinking of ethical responsibility, deprives him of his wholeness and imposes a painful fragmentariness on his life.³³⁴

The Present and Future of Sex-uality

In this life we are fleshly and sexual. Though at least the sex part of our sex-uality will not follow the soul beyond the period of its biological enfleshment, sexuality in its broader sense, masculine and feminine as expressing the wholeness of the person, will. Yet even the sex part of our sexuality cannot be merely accidental, only a means of procreation until we no longer need to biologically propagate. We must be able to affirm the way we were created. To do this means the development of a theology which does not see creation merely as fallen and in need of redemption, which provides for the meaningfulness of present human biological existence as well as preparing us for some detachment from this life and our spiritual destiny beyond it. In other words, we need a theology which deals with the present and future of sex-uality. Much of this has been implied in what was written previously. It is fitting, however, to conclude with the helpful paradigm provided by the Dominican Meister Eckart (1260-1327). Matthew Fox sees Eckart as a primary witness to "creation spirituality", a type of spirituality which Fox advocates over against "fall-redemption" spirituality which has profoundly influenced the church since Augustine. Fall-redemption spirituality presupposed the evil and fallen nature of creation which only has value in its redemption, not in itself. Creation spirituality begins from the perspective that creation is God's and it is good, even apart from redemption.³³⁵

Though Eckart was often accused of being a Pantheist, he was really a Panentheist, the difference being that the Pantheist believes that all *is* God and the Panentheist believes that God is *in* all. Thus he begins with an affirmation of creation and humanity made in the image of God, loved by God. Yet creation and

333. C. J. Jung, *Answer to Job*, transl. by R.F.C. Hull, Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press, 1973.

334. C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 193.

335. Matthew Fox, ed., *Western Spirituality: Historical Roots, Ecumenical Routes*, Santa Fe, NM: Bear and Company, 1981. Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, Santa Fe, NM: Bear and Company, 1983.

, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1980.

humanity in itself are nothing without depending on the love of God. The purpose for which Christ came was not to redeem us from original sin, but to remind us of the preciousness of our soul to God and call us to the God on whom our existence and destiny depend. This happens by our realization that creation, in spite of its value, is "nothing" and that we need to surrender power, images, and preconceptions so that the God who is beyond yet in all may break through to us. This is called "letting go", which is also a "letting be", a deepening reverence for all creation. "There where the creature ends, God begins to be. God does not ask anything of you other than that you go out of yourself according to your mode as creature and that you let God be God in you."³³⁶ Then:

God and this humble man are entirely one and not two; for what God works, he also works, and what God wills, he also wills, and what God is, he also is: one life and one being... under these circumstances this man is a divine being, a divine being is this man, for here the kiss is exchanged between the unity of God and the humble man.³³⁷

What Eckart describes is not a static state of perfection, but that we are part of a "divine process of giving birth continually to God". As Eckart states: "To become like Christ means that the Father is birthing his Son in the soul and the soul as the Son."³³⁸ This birthing then results in a return to creation from the perspective of God's breakthrough into the soul. This return is characterized by compassion which takes priority over rapture:

We should abandon raptures sometimes for the sake of a better love which is to perform a loving ministry of work where it is most needed, whether spiritually or physically. As I have often said: Were a person in so great a rapture as St. Paul once experienced, and he learned of a sick person who needed a cup of soup from him, I consider it far better that you leave your rapture out of love and serve the needy person with what is a bigger love by far.³³⁹

The paradigm provided by Eckart roots us in the meaningfulness and goodness of creation, our enfleshment and sexuality. Yet it makes us realize that to find the meaning and source of this creation we must move beyond it, letting go and letting be so that the God who has created it and in whom it lives may break through. When we are not merely God's creation, but the dynamic of God's life is born in us, then we may come back to all creation, including ourselves, in new and compassionate ways.

This is the possibility of the "present" of sex-uality. God has made our sexuality and it is good. Creation is God's and s/he is present in all of it. But there is the danger of forgetting that God is in it and that without God it becomes "nothing". "Nothing" does not mean that it has no value without God for it fulfills a biological value. However, separated from its meaning in God, it points to nothing but itself. It is only sex. It is only maleness and femaleness. Thus we need to "let it be" on its own and to "let it go" from us so that for a moment in time we stand both without it and with deep respect of it. Then we become aware of distinctions: ourselves apart from sexuality and sexual labels, God as the source of creation and sexuality, and of sexuality itself. This amounts to a mystical experience of God and self as transcendent. Moving beyond sexuality, God may break through and be birthed within it and us. Now sexuality is not only what good it is in itself, but it may serve God. Moreover, we can no longer lose ourselves or God in our sexual

³³⁶ Eckart in Matthew Fox, ed., *Western Spirituality: Historical Roots, Ecumenical Routes*, p. 229.

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 235.

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 236.

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 240

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concerns. We have become conscious in a new way. In touch with God and self we come back to created existence with compassion.

As to the future, we have already let go and let be. We have been freed from creation to come back to it a new way. It is as if we have died and come back. Anyone who has been near death knows how this experience transforms life. Life now has a dimension which transcends our creatureliness. We might say that we know that we are and have a soul. Sexuality broadens into a vision of the depth and inclusiveness of the soul; and our creaturely sexuality, both gift and limit, is transcended. We affirm our enfleshed life but also at times long for the dimensions of our "unfleshed" future where the relationships for which we hunger, now complicated (besides enabled) by our flesh, become more possible. As Jesus implied in his comments on the woman who had seven husbands, in the afterlife it would not be an issue who would have her. Their biological limits would be transcended in new possibilities of spiritual, interpersonal relationship.