

wrong in the elementary bios relationship, the physiology and technique of the sexual relationship. This too can threaten and undermine the person-relationship. Hence there are many marriage crises which are not primarily the province of the pastoral counselor, but rather the gynecologist or the neurologist or the psychotherapist. The subject matter dealt with by van de Velde therefore has its importance also from the standpoint of a theological anthropology which puts the emphasis upon the whole man; and it is an indication of a lack of openness to the whole realm of created life and vitality to regard van de Velde from this quarter with the reserve of prudery.

The difficulty, however, is that the total intention of van de Velde's books creates the fatal impression that in the sexual area it is all more or less *only* a problem of techniques and that all that it requires to stabilize a marriage is to give the partners erotic training in order to develop their ability to function properly. Therefore, what lies behind it may again be that functional idea of man in which the personal concept of *community* in marriage has no place. In view of this inadequacy, we ought to recommend with praise theological and medical works in our generation which stress the wholeness of man and the interconnection of bios and person, especially in the realm of sex, but also within the framework of an expanded medical anthropology.⁶

2. THE TERMS EROS AND AGAPE

When the totality of the person is engaged in the sex community it will not be sufficient to regard *eros* as being the only thing that establishes communication. It must be admitted—contrary to a slander not infrequently expressed—that *eros* positively does not direct itself only to the erotic function. Undoubtedly it also addresses itself to the other person's being, at any rate if we assume that the term is being used in its Platonic sense. The only question is whether I can see the whole person if I do not see him in his relationship to God and therefore as the bearer of an "alien dignity." If I am blind to this dimension, then I can give the other person only a partial dignity insofar as I estimate his importance "for me"—even if this includes far more than his mere *functional* importance for me!—but not insofar as I see in him his importance "for God."

⁶ Here the works of Otto A. Piper and Theodor Bovet are especially recommended. Cf. also R. Siebeck, V. v. Weizsäcker, P. Christian, and H. Gödan.
⁷ See *THE I*, index, "Dignitas aliena."

It is obvious what the result of this distinction must mean in the context of human communication. For even though there are stages in human relationships in which the other person's importance "for me" decreases, my regard for him will remain as long as in my consciousness I realize that he means something "for God," that he was "bought with a price." Correspondingly, communication between the partners will be preserved where this insight is present. And yet the reverse is also true: if this communication with the other person depends only upon the importance which he has "for me," then there is always a certain tendency that causes the other's being to recede behind his function, in order to benefit, complement, and stimulate me, and then, when these functions diminish or disappear, I also tend to write him off in reality. At this point the *agape* relationship acquires its relevance, for it allows the other person to appear, not merely in his being, his "being as he is," but rather in his "being before God." Whereas the English word "love" has many connotations, ranging all the way from calf love to married love and the feeling of sympathy to the love of Francis of Assisi and Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, the Greek language differentiates more precisely and helpfully.

Anders Nygren, in his two-volume book *Eros and Agape*, has assembled an immense body of material for the diagnosis of these two terms. When Nygren interprets *eros* as meaning the longing of the soul upward, for example toward the beautiful or the idea of the beautiful, and *agape* as self-giving, self-sacrificing love, love that is directed downward, this may well be a proper characterization of the *ideal types* of these two forms of love. However, the problem of their relationships to each other really begins with the question of how they fit together and are dialectically interconnected with each other. Thus, for example, *agape* never directs itself to an abstract concept of one's neighbor, but always to another person, whether I stand in an *eros* relationship to him, in the broadest sense of a mental, physical, or generally sympathetic kind of relationship, or whether I am indifferent to him, or even whether he evokes dislike or hatred in me. *Agape* can realize itself only in the framework of these interhuman media, and depending upon *which* medium is present, it acquires other tasks and also other tones. Its form changes according to whether it is practiced with respect to "enemies" (Matt. 5:44) or "friends" (Matt. 5:46; John 15:13), a "stranger" (Luke 10:34) or one's "wife" (Eph. 5:25). Hence *agape* cannot be defined at all without taking into account the concrete medium to which it happens to be attached. It there-

fore cannot be defined apart from the given, or not given, kind of *eros* through which the specific interhuman relation is determined. This indicates the limitations of the view that concerns itself with defining only the ideal type, a view with which Nygren is essentially satisfied and which in our own approach to the theology of sexuality we shall seek to break away from.

In order, then, to secure a preliminary orientation, we define the differing motives of *eros* and *agape* in the form of two theses. First, in *eros* the *worth* of the other person is the object; in *agape* the *authentic being* [*Eigentlichkeit*] of the other person is the object. Secondly, in this connection sexual community represents the point at which these two strivings intersect. We shall explain what we mean by these two theses in what follows. But this requires that we take a brief glance at what Plato understands by *eros*.

In the *Phaedrus* as well as the *Symposium* Plato introduces an *eros* myth. In the *Phaedrus* he distinguishes between a desirous, unreasonable *eros* and an *eros* guided by reason. The unreasonable *eros* arises when the blind and irrational desires are directed exclusively to beautiful bodies. This kind of *eros* then remains on the level of the act of momentary physical possession. The beauty of the other person is only a means to kindle passion and satisfy it. Thus the other person does not enter into consideration at all as a "human being," that is, as a bearer of values which transcend him (for example, as a symbol of the beautiful). Moreover, he is not even intended to be such. On the contrary, in our line of reasoning and quite in line with Platonic thought, one can say that he is thought of merely as an interchangeable means, which I need in order to stimulate the erotic feeling.

Now, it would be quite wrong to think of *reasonable eros*—the correlate of its irrational variant—as being a kind of domesticated, unecstatic, well-mannered *eros*. For it too is thoroughly ecstatic. But this ecstasy is a completely different state of "being beside oneself." That is to say, it is aroused by the fact that what is loved in the other person is the idea of beauty and that therefore the other person is regarded as a symbol, and relationship is established with that which transcends him. But then, since the reason is likewise directed to the Ideas—for example, the idea of the beautiful—the reason plays its part in the erotic movement thus defined. Consequently, it is by no means the case that the erotically excited "nerves" must assert themselves and prevail against the reason in order to give expression to their impulse. The erotic act is not, as it were, bowdlerized and moralized by the fact that reason participates in it, or better, is

capable of participating in it; it is rather made fuller and weightier by the fact that reason is present in it. Perhaps it can be expressed this way: since man is essentially a bearer of reason, his real self is present in the erotic act, whereas in the lower form of *eros* his real self is excluded, because in the erotic act he is employing only part of himself, namely, the area of impulse and desire. He delegates, as it were, only certain organs, and thus only his partial self, to deal with his erotic needs. In this idea of the reasonable *eros* Plato is undoubtedly concerned to humanize the erotic act. His aim is to fill it with human content, for he is concerned that the *whole* man should be engaged in it.

Then this reasonable *eros* actually does have an upward-striving tendency. And, as the conversation of Socrates with Diotima in the *Symposium* shows, this ascent passes through three states.⁸ At the lowest stage the love of one form (or body) leads one to "recognize that the beauty in every form is one and the same." At the second stage appears the beauty of the other person's mind (*to en tais psychais kallos*), which "improves" me when I come into contact with it, which produces, as it were, a personal and ethical communication. The third stage leads one up to the beauty of the sciences (*epistemon kallos*). Thus beauty becomes increasingly formless and bodiless, more immediate and more independent of the forms and bodies in which it incarnates itself. So it is understandable that toward the end of this last stage beauty "in itself" is suddenly (*exaiphnes*) perceived and the ecstatic vision (*theoria*) occurs. This idea of the beautiful is everlasting, imperishable, and unchangeable (*to aei on*). All other beauty—beauty that is bound to form, to a young body, and therefore subject to "growing and decaying, waxing and waning"—is beauty only because it participates in the idea of beauty itself.

Of the many relationships of *eros* implied in these stages we mention only two because they are important for our theme. First, *eros* relates itself to the worth of the other person—whether this worth or value that incarnates itself in the other person be beauty or virtue (*agathon*) or goodness (*arete*). Second, *eros* strives to complete itself by means of this worth. The myth of the spherical man introduced by Aristophanes,⁹ but especially the section in which Socrates speaks of what he learned from the wise Diotima, make this point. If *eros* shows desire, this indicates that it lacks something. "We love only that which we do not have and what we lack"; for "who in all the world would desire that which he already has?"

This is why Socrates "demythologizes" *Eros* a bit. That is, he denies him divine character and makes him a daemon, an intermediate being.

⁸ See *Symposium*, 210 ff.; English trans. in *The Dialogues of Plato*, by B. Jowett (Oxford University Press, 1891), I, 580 ff. (Trans.)

⁹ *Symposium* 190; *ibid.*, p. 559. (Trans.)

The gods are perfect. And this is precisely the reason why they do not have this erotic defect; they do not have that need to complete themselves which Aristophanes defined in his myth of the original man as the really basic tendency of *eros*. So *Eros* is an intermediate power, an in-between power (*metaxu*). He lies in an intermediate zone between wisdom and ignorance, between beauty and ugliness. And because man himself dwells in this "mean," and the gods live in immortal completeness, *eros* is a specifically "human" passion and it is wrongly considered to be a divine passion. The gods cannot love because they have everything. (As Fr. Hebel says, they "have no fate but they ordain fate.")

So, because *eros* is determined by the fact that it dwells in this intermediate state, it is always self-love. It is never pure surrender in the sense of giving oneself away, but it always has in it the element of monopolizing, of fulfilling oneself, and appropriating. (Cf. the verses on *Eros* in Goethe's "*Urworten, orphisch*" ["Words of Ancient Wisdom, Orphic"]¹⁰.) When we say that *eros* has an egocentric tendency, we do so only with the understanding that we must assume that, depending upon the stage of purification it has gone through, *eros* is capable of reaching a very sublime form of *amor sui*. For the higher form of *eros* is, after all, love of the "better" self, the self that strives to complete itself through the highest values and finally to attain the vision of the Ideas. So when we say that this is a kind of spiritual *amor sui*, this does not imply any moral disparagement. On the contrary, this is only to state that it has in it an *inversio in me ipsum*, which as such is regarded either as being completely meta-ethical (as is, for example, the *amour de soi-même* in contrast with *amour propre* in Rousseau) or as a "turning in upon my self" which strives for the ethical triumph of the higher, authentic self over the lower self (in the same sense in which Augustine's idea of self-love is doubtless to be understood).¹¹

Now, when we proceed to deal with the concept of *agape*, we enter into completely different territory.

The very fact that the New Testament never uses the term to mean love for ideas, norms, and values, and thus for "the" good and "the" beautiful, would inevitably strike us as being different in atmosphere if we came to it from the Greek way of thinking. But it becomes intelligible as soon as

¹⁰ Prose trans. in *The Penguin Book of German Verse*, ed. by Leonard Foster (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1959), pp. 230 f.:

"That is not withheld! He swoops from heaven, whither he had risen from ancient wastes, he flutters to us with airy wings and hovers all through the spring day round our heads and breasts, sometimes he seems to retreat, but returns from his retreating; then there comes joy in suffering, so sweet and tremulous. Many a heart tends to diffusion, but it is the noblest that gives itself to the One." (Trans.)

¹¹ Cf. *The I*, §1713.

we remember that in New Testament thought there are no norms and values in the sense of autonomous qualities alongside of, and apart from, their personification in God. For biblical thinking it is impossible (though the heretical attempt to do so occurs again and again in the history of theology) to conceive that there can be such a thing as a given and knowable system of values in which God is then incorporated as the apex of the value hierarchy, the "Idea of ideas."

Then, too, we are struck by the fact that, in contrast with the *eros* world, the term *agape* is used, not only for the love of men for one another, but primarily for the love of God for men (John 3:16). The very fact that "the idea of a "love of God," that God is the Subject of loving, is conceivable at all shows that here we are on a completely different level of thinking. We have seen why it is that the gods of Plato cannot love in the real sense of the word.

In attempting now to say what *agape* is on the positive side, we can only note several central points. We shall define it with reference to the significance the *eros-agape* relationship has for the sexual relationship.

1. The love of God is above all the love which loves that which is like it. It loves in man the *imago Dei*.¹² And this tendency of the love of God evidences its real character precisely in the fact that it addresses itself to fallen man, who, so to speak, no longer has any worth (in the *eros* sense) and thus is no longer worth loving. God loves in him the buried image of himself. He loves him *nevertheless*. God does not love the dust in which the pearl lies, but he loves the pearl lying in the dust. The parable of the Prodigal Son shows how the Father's gaze penetrates beneath the grubby surface and sees the real person. This real, authentic man, this *imago Dei*, is not the image we show to others; it is the image the Father has of us.¹³

2. This real being of man is not an ontically producible attribute, such as the reason, for example.¹⁴ For, as Goethe said, the reason can also serve to make man "even more beastly than any beast." Luther declared that if we were to see the *imago Dei* in ontic qualities, we should have to describe the devil as the most perfect image, since he possesses all these qualities in superlative form.¹⁵ The real being of man therefore does not consist in a sum of attributes, but rather in a relationship. That is to say that this man was created in order to live in fellowship with his Father and not merely to develop himself as a mere entelechy. And he retains this dignity of fellowship with God even when he loses his ontic qualities, when he becomes, as Pascal said, a "king with a broken scepter and

¹² Cf. *The I*, §837 ff.

¹³ Cf. *The I*, §§817-820, 842.

¹⁴ Cf. *The I*, §800 ff.

¹⁵ Cf. *The I*, §808.

decayed purple," when one can no longer tell by looking at the returning son that he is the son of this Father.

3. Because God's *agape*, as it took on historical form in Christ, and the *agape* practiced by men in imitation of God directs itself to this authentic being in the other person, it has a liberating effect. (This effect of liberation can be seen in Jesus' loving association with sinners, the people who are not "worth" loving.) It performs the function of a photographic developer which brings out the latent image. *Agape* is not a response to a "loveworthiness" which is already there; it is rather the creative cause that produces this "loveworthiness." Nor is trust, which is nourished by this *agape*, a reaction to a trustworthiness already demonstrated; it rather initially elicits this trustworthiness. God does not love us because we are valuable and worthy; we are worthy because God loves us. This describes again the creative significance of *agape*.

4. In this connection we should repeat the statement made at the beginning, namely, that the real being of the person to which *agape* directs itself is not its immanent being, but rather its "alien dignity," the fact that it stands in relationship to God and thus is under his protection. Therefore the person, thus understood as being in "relationship," remains intact even when the immanent attributes and the ability to perform functions disappear. Thus understood, the value of a person lies in a totally different level from that of his utility value. Hence there can never be any question of a "life that is not worth being allowed to live" (and all the consequences of this notion). And hence a community like that of marriage cannot simply cease to exist when the importance of the other person for me (say his importance in fulfilling myself in the *eros* sense) diminishes or disappears and he fails functionally. *Agape* discerns in him other, abiding elements.

5. On this basis—and only on this basis—can we understand how it is possible to love our enemies.¹⁶ In *agape* I no longer identify the other person with the opposition in which he stands to me; nor do I identify him with his functions, which he directs upon me. I see in him the child of God (and hence the relationship that constitutes the real being of his person), and therefore I see him in a dimension which transcends his functions. When—to take an instance of what is meant by the Sermon on the Mount—I am delivered over to the enemy of my faith and I suffer because of him, then God's sorrow for his erring child becomes my sorrow. And this is what creates the bond of *agape* with one's enemy. The sin of the elder brother who remained at home was that he could neither rejoice nor sorrow with his father, in short, that he had no *agape*.¹⁷

¹⁶ Cf. *ThE* I, §455.

¹⁷ Luke 15:25 ff.: cf. Thielicke *The Warring Father* trans. by John W.

6. This *agape* is not at man's disposal; nor is it like *eros*, inherent in his nature. It can be bestowed upon him only by God. Man can be empowered to possess *agape* only by allowing himself to receive it from God and so pass it on to his neighbor. He who does not receive it cannot pass it on, and he who does not pass it on loses what he has received.¹⁸

All of these important points together bring out at the same time the characteristic marks that distinguish *agape* from *eros*. Without restating them in detail, we shall now try to show how these two lines—that of *eros* and that of *agape*—intersect in the actual sex community. And here again we shall content ourselves for the present with indicative statements, since we shall have to go back repeatedly and elaborate this relationship on the basis of concrete data.

1. Since the sex community is a connection between two human beings—leaving out of account for the present whether it be a married, and thus a lifelong relationship, or a "free" and passing connection—and since it therefore always has a personal character, the *agape* relationship must always play a part in it. Because the other party is a person, because he has an eternal destiny which he can miss, and because I can be a party to his missing his destiny, I must respect the "alien dignity" within him. His real being can never be a mere means to an end for me, which, in this connection, means a mere instrument of sexual ecstasy, in the same way that prostitution, the extreme development of this attitude, entails the instrumentalizing of a human being. One could also very simply describe this *agape* relationship in the sex community by saying that for me the other person is a "neighbor."¹⁹

2. On the other hand, however, not just any "neighbor" can become my partner in the sex community. In order to become this, he must rather fulfill certain conditions which lift him out in a very specific way from the general classification of "neighbor." Among these conditions are that, apart from certain borderline cases, he belongs to the opposite sex, that his age be in a proper relation to mine, that he be my "type," in physique, character, and mind, to mention only a

¹⁸ Matt. 18: 21 ff.; cf. Thielicke, *The Warring Father*, pp. 93 ff.

¹⁹ Many of our marriage liturgies express this in the words: "that one may

few respects, and thus be in a highly specialized complementary relationship to me. Thus the other person must fulfill the requirement of being the bearer of some very definite values. To this extent the *eros* relationship comes into play here.

Briefly stated, the two aspects can be related to each other as follows: The person to whom I relate myself erotically must be my "neighbor" and hence the object of my *agape*. Otherwise, I dehumanize him. On the other hand, however, not everyone who is my neighbor and therefore stands in *agape* relationship to me can be the object of my *eros*. I cannot, for example, give myself erotically or even marry out of sympathy. Anyone who attempts this enters, not into marriage, but definitely into something *alongside* of marriage. *Sex community* is a special case of *human communication with conditions attached to it*.

We see, therefore, how *agape* and *eros* are both at work in the sex community and how they point to each other. We may expect, however, that the antithetical structure of the two motives will also come into play. And though we can assert with certainty that in *eros* and *agape* the two basic strivings of all human existence find expression, we can also expect that in sex community the mystery of human existence will manifest itself in its most direct and concentrated form.

B. The Libido, Animal and Human

1. THE NATURE OF THE SEX IMPULSE

The sex impulse is the desire, accompanied by pleasure and the urge to consummate this pleasure in ecstasy, for psychophysical union with another human being.

In speaking of the desire for "union" we are already employing a concept of "community" which is central to sexual ethics, although for reasons which will immediately become apparent we still cannot use the term at this point. So we ask what "union" means here, our specific purpose being to learn how this concept is related to that of "community" or union of two persons.

According to our definition, the urge to union is characterized by the following factors:

First, the pleasure and the ecstasy. When we examine these two emotions with regard to their power to produce community, the first thing that strikes us is their fleeting [*punktuelle*] character. They are not continuous, they do not last. For pleasure and ecstasy are excitements that rise and fall in definite and steep curves. Nobody can be excited all the time and even pathological manic states are usually followed by depressions. Ecstasy rises up, as it were, from dead center and falls back into it. Fulfillment is followed by relapse into apathy and then again by reawakened desire:

Thus in desire I hasten to enjoyment,
And in enjoyment pine to feel desire.¹

¹ Goethe, *Faust*, I, 14, trans. by Bayard Taylor (New York: Modern Library, 1950), p. 175 (Trans.)