EROS AND AGAPE

in the

SEXUAL ETHICS OF HELMUT THIELICKE

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Introduction

Helmut Thielicke, Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the University of Hamburg, has written numerous books on Christian thought and life. His four volume work on theological ethics is a major contribution for our concern to live as Christians in the 20th century. These four volumes have been described as "...the most extensive study of theological and social ethics ever written on Reformation soil."¹ Thielicke has been called by the Journal of the American Academy of Religion "...the most thorough Protestant ethicist of our time, with wit, finesse, versatility, and depth."

Thielicke makes wide use of research from various academic disciplines in coming to his conclusions about the contours of responsible Christian living. John W. Doberstein, the translator of Thielicke's Theological Ethics, comments about the scope, for example, of Thielicke's ethics of sex:

"I think it is safe to say that at the present time there is available no other single study which covers this whole area, including its thorny and 'boundary line' problems, from the point of view of biblical theology, particularly abiblically Christian anthropology. Its great value lies in its confrontation of the subject with the whole complex of relevant factors, biblical historical, social and cultural, medical, psychological, and legal. It addresses itself as a responsible social ethics to ministers, sociologists, physicians, psychiatrists, and jurists, as well as to the general reader."²
Thielicke, then, must be seen as a major figure in the field of personal and social ethics. He has written on the theological foundations of ethics, politics, sociology, economics, law, art, and sex in his four volumes of ethical reflection. In this thesis I will concentrate on Thielicke's sexual ethics. Specifically, I will focus on Thielicke's understanding of love in his ethics of sex.

Much misunderstanding and confusion exists within and outside the church about love and human sexuality. Fear, anxiety, and perversion are more common than a healthy appreciation and practice of love and sexuality. Thielicke has many helpful things to say about man as a sexual being who lives with other men and before his God. Concentrating on Thielicke's sexual ethics, then, should provide valuable insight and direction for Christians who want to live responsible lives as male and female.
Chapter one: Eros and Agape Today and Yesterday

A. The Sexual and Anthropological Crisis

When Helmut Thielicke begins to write his views on sexual ethics, he immediately points to a crisis. He talks about a crisis in the ethics of sex because of a deeper crisis in anthropology. Thielicke maintains that the fundamental crisis in the view of man in much of 20th century thought is to see man in a functional way. Man's wholeness as a body-person has been ignored, lost, or discounted. Man, therefore, is treated as a biological "thing" who performs a function; a factor of production; a means to an end. Man's uniqueness and value as a person who lives before God and his neighbor are lost. This has tragic consequences in the world of work, education, government, and also in human sexual relationships.

When man's biological existence is isolated and severed from his full personhood, he becomes and can be treated as a sexual functionary-- one who performs a biological act. This tragic reduction of sexuality to a biological function radically calls into question the Biblical creational order and mandate of one man
and one woman becoming one flesh. With such a biological reductionism we can become "one flesh" with any number of partners. In principle, then, there would exist a complete interchangeability of marriage partners. With the increasing divorce rate in many 20th century societies, we realize that not only in principle but in practice man is acting out this interchangeability. What has been called "serial polygamy" is becoming more the norm than the exception in today's marriages.

The problem behind the problem, then, seems to be our lack of awareness and understanding of the wholeness of a human being as a body-person. A person's uniqueness is located in his personhood. When personhood is ignored or reduced to the biological, then any sex partner will do i.e. will be functional. Here we are touching on the root crisis in anthropology and specifically in human sexual relationships.¹

B. Eros and Agape Defined

What should be the Christian community's response to this drift into sexual chaos that Thielicke describes? A detailed analysis of Helmut Thielicke's sexual ethics will provide some helpful direction. Since World War II, Thielicke has been struggling with what Christian thought and life should be in the 20th century.
"Helmut Thielicke emerged from the air raid shelters of Germany as one of the most compelling voices of the resistance movement within the Christian church. He was able to address the judgement and mercy of God relevantly to both the perpetrators and the victims of Nazism and World War II. In an endless stream of sermons, speeches, essays, newspaper articles, and radio talks, this modern prophet deflated the proud, comforted the broken, inspired the hopeless, and challenged the bewildered and the skeptical in his own distinctive style."

My intention is not to summarize every aspect of Thielicke's sexual ethics, but to concentrate on his understanding of love as the fundamental reality for human sexuality. Thielicke begins his ethics of sex by defining the concept of love using the Greek terms eros and agape. He discusses eros by using Plato's eros myth in Phaedrus and Symposium. Thielicke points out that Plato talks about two types of eros. The first type is a blind, passion-driven force which concentrates on the beautiful body of another person. The second type is an eros guided by reason. Eros led by reason doesn't mean that eros has lost its ecstatic, erotic character. But it does allow eros to concentrate on more than the other's body. This eros recognizes the symbolic dimension of a person's beauty which transcends that particular person. It directs our eyes to the
"idea of beauty" in another person. The lower level of eros only allows participation in the impulse and desire dimension of another individual. Eros guided by reason wants to relate to the whole person. Reasoned eros, then, allows us to get beyond hormones and feelings of passion to the person as person. Furthermore, eros led by reason can finally take a person to the point where he grasps beauty in itself and experiences an "ecstatic vision". At this point all the ephemeral qualities of beauty have dropped away. We now encounter beauty in its timeless fulness.³

Plato, according to Thielicke, also writes about the aspect of eros that seeks completion. The striving for the final vision of "the beautiful" indicates an "erotic defect" in human nature that desires fulfillment. This striving after completion is seen as a need for self-fulfillment. Eros, then, has an "egocentric tendency" in which a person completes himself as he strives toward a vision of "the beautiful". Self-fulfillment is realized in the midst of this process.⁴

Thielicke now turns away from Greek thought. He observes that when dealing with the New Testament view
of love we are not talking about abstract notions of beauty which have independent existence in a world of ideas. God's love for man is a "nevertheless" kind of love. God in Christ doesn't love us because we are worthy but because of his free decision to love. God loves us as people in his image who can live in relationship with him. God's agape brings out in man his creational potential. It liberates man to come into his own. Therefore, in our agape-love for the other, we don't love because the person is worthy of our love but despite his worthiness. It is this unconditional kind of love that frees another to be the kind of person he was created to be. In agape we see the other person, even our enemy, as a child of God full of creation-dignity. Therefore our love does not depend on the person's importance to me but on his importance for God--a person created and called to live in fellowship with his Creator.  

Furthermore, Thielicke maintains that agape is "not at man's disposal." It is not "inherent in his nature." Agape is God-given. It must be received and then passed on. "He who does not receive it cannot pass it on, and he who does not pass it on loses what he has received." Thielicke adds to this idea that agape has a very different motive than eros. In eros the "worth" of the other person is the object. In agape the "authentic being" of the other person is in the forefront.
C. The Interpenetration of Eros and Agape

When eros and agape are defined, we could easily conclude that they have little if anything to do with each other. One is receiving, the other is giving; one is self-fulfilling, the other is self-giving. Thielicke faults Anders Nygren's classic work on Eros and Agape with failing to show how these two dimensions of love interconnect. He charges that Nygren has thoroughly defined two "ideal-types" but makes no effort to demonstrate how they relate to each other. Specifically, Thielicke wants to show how eros and agape "intersect" in sexual relationships. He writes that the sex relationship or "community" always occurs between two people who are much more than biological organisms. They are persons. In sexual encounter two human beings have a personal relationship, therefore, agape can't be excluded. A person's "...real being can never be a mere means to an end for me... a mere instrument of sexual ecstasy..." 8 The other person is a "neighbor" not a prostitute. Agape must be present in which we seek the other's welfare and respect him/her as God's image bearer. Agape is integral to a genuine sexual relationship. 9

On the other hand, not any neighbor will do. The character of a marriage and sexual relationship calls
for selection; selection based on physical, emotional, intellectual, social affinity. This process of selecting "a neighbor" brings eros into the picture in a central way.

"...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." Eros and agape, therefore, inter-penetrate each other. They are very much tied up together in human relationships. In the sexual relationship this interconnection takes on an even higher degree of intensity and immediacy.

D. The Actualization of Eros

When we focus on eros, we realize that within human sexuality there is a central driving force which Thielicke calls the libido. He defines this sex impulse as "...the desire, accompanied by pleasure and the urge to consummate this pleasure in ecstasy, for psychophysical union with another human being." Characteristic of the pleasure and ecstasy involved in the sex impulse is its transitory, temporary nature. "For pleasure and ecstasy are excitements that rise and fall in definite and steep curves." There is no prolonging the orgasmic climax of sexual union. The short-lived nature of
libido's sexual ecstasy is qualitatively different from the life-long character of relationship shaped by agape. This doesn't mean that libido is necessarily sinful. But it must find its place within the agape-fellowship of husband and wife. Only then does libido have the stability and permanence that it needs.14

In an attempt, however, to integrate the sex impulse with the total personal relationship, Thielicke warns us that we should not think of libido as solely self-seeking and egoistic. Then, libido becomes a threatening force that we must keep in check and "domesticate" with "higher" personal virtues. This approach would give us a view of man where the mental and moral ride herd on the sensual and instinctive. Thielicke rejects this dualistic notion of man. He insists that man is a "psychophysical unity" and that the sex impulse has a creational place within man's totality. At this point a critical question emerges.

"Now, if we keep in view this unity of man (it is the unity of body and soul before God), then this means that we must ask to what extent the libido itself (and not merely that "higher self" which really does not exist at all) moves toward real communication, toward serving the other person, and hence"to what extent it seeks much more than mere "self"-satisfaction."15

In sexual intercourse one is looking for and needs response from the other to find any real pleasure and fulfillment for one's self. Some degree of two-way
participation is required if either partner is to be sexually satisfied. Without this inter-involvement, sexual intercourse "...degenerates into a kind of disguised masturbation and accordingly remains unfulfilled." This need for co-operation and mutual service is further demanded by the difference in sexual make-up of male and female. The man is ready for orgasm relatively quickly, the female moves toward climax only after prolonged preparation. When a man rushes into orgasm to release the built-up sexual impulse, he finds that the woman is often left far behind, unable to respond and participate. This out-of-phase situation in turn leaves the man feeling less than satisfied. Sperm is released but orgasmic ecstasy is not experienced. The sex impulse itself, then, has a built-in demand to seek the other's fulfillment and not just one's own satisfaction.

"The human libido cannot desire only itself when it desires itself; it must take the other person into account. It must affirm the other person and it cannot only desire him. The libido must have in it a 'diaconic' element, an element of serving love, if it is not to be left by itself and cheated of its own goal."

Once we have recognized the service aspect to the sex impulse, we are opened up to realize that this reality is a "sign" of what the total sexual relationship
is to be. Concern for the other emerges as total concern for the total welfare of a person, including his or her sexual happiness. So agape makes its presence felt even at the elemental level of our sexual impulse. Agape helps to actualize libido within eros.

"Agape takes hold of a tendency which is built into the creaturely sex nature of man in the form of a sign, a challenge, and transforms it into a motive. It gives meaning and purpose to what instinct may do ignorantly and relates it to the whole of human existence and community for which man was created. In this way the sex community which is determined by agape also has its effect upon the physical elements of the relationship."

The effect of agape on sexual relations is illustrated clearly in counseling situations where there are problems in sexual intercourse. Often it is discovered that the problem is not poor technique but poor communication. Sexual relations do not blossom where there is no communication of self-giving love. Agape is the required foundation and atmosphere in which sexual intercourse becomes a joy rather than a function and a chore. Agape transforms eros in human sexuality into an experience of joyful self-giving and self-giving joy.

Thielicke adds, however, that the penetration of eros by agape in human sexuality does not mean that
eros is less than fully human and, therefore, needs elevation by agape. Human sexuality is clearly distinguishable from the sex impulse in animals. Animals are bound by instinct governed by hormone cycles. This creates an automatic character to animal copulation. There is no decision involved. In contrast to the animals, man has the task and the freedom to decide what he will do with his sex impulse. Decision implies risk, meaning, values. In other words, man's sex impulse is distinctly human. Human sexuality is personal and responsible, not functional and animalistic. 20

Further confirmation of the humanness in man's sexuality is the fact that eros does not require the specifically sexual relationship to be preserved and to grow. There are many examples of the energy in eros being sublimated and transformed into another form of human activity. The poet, artist, and priest can experience the power of eros in creative activity and service. A man and a woman can have an erotic relationship which does not need to end in sexual intercourse. 21

The sexual nature of man, then, is fully human. It should also be actualized. In sexual relations there is a sense in which a person "comes into his own". As new aspects of his personhood emerge through sexual love, man becomes more fully the person God has created him to be. Thielicke believes this is even more true.
for the woman than for the man. A woman's "essential image" comes out in sexual intercourse. To be woman is to be "...lover, companion, and mother." Even unmarried women find their vocational fulfillment in some sublimated and transformed way in which wifehood and motherhood are central. "...the wife gives her 'self' when she gives herself sexually. She holds nothing back and precisely in doing this she comes to her self-realization." The man is not so totally defined by his sexual relationship with his wife. He finds deep self-realization also in his vocation outside the home. Man is not "...so deeply stamped and molded by his sexual experience as is the case with the woman."

Thielicke anticipates the protests which this idea will generate, so he attempts to support his views with some observations. He is quick to point out that these situations are not normative or necessarily just, but they do or may point to an underlying distinction between male and female sexuality. Thielicke observes, for instance, that we talk about the seduction of a girl in a much more serious way than the seduction of a man. "...to seduce a girl means to bring her to self-abandonment..." This deep giving of the self is not in view when a man is seduced. Secondly, the double standard of morality
may reflect a difference in male, female sexuality. Even though the male may have numerous sexual experiences before marriage, he wants his future wife to be a virgin. Historical and cultural reasons notwithstanding, Thielicke suggests part of the explanation for this widespread feeling is rooted in the physiological structure of the sex organs themselves.

"...whereas the woman receives something into herself, the male sex organ is directed outward, away from himself; it discharges. The receiving of something is contrasted with being relieved of something. From a purely physiological point of view, the woman receives something from the sexual encounter (and the medical men point out that this is important even though conception does not take place), whereas the man discharges and thus rids himself of something. The extraordinary force of the symbolism of this disparate physical structure can hardly be evaded." 26

Thirdly, in female sexuality there is an "...innate tendency toward monogamy..." 27 This is not true for the male. The woman is marked, stamped, possessed by the first man with whom she has sexual intercourse. The connection between the physical and personal is so strong in female sexuality that everything in her being desires to belong to the first man who has penetrated her both physically and emotionally. Sexual problems like frigidity in women have often been traced back to unhappy and broken experiences in a woman's first sexual act. There is little suggestion that the male
is so profoundly marked by sexual relationships.
"...it doesn't seem to touch him at the core of his personality..." 28 In this sense man's sexual nature has a polygamous rather than a monogamous tendency.

Thielicke presents these ideas as "phenomenological observations" that may be pointing to genuine ontological difference between the male and female sex nature. In fact, Thielicke doesn't hesitate to talk about, for instance, the "metaphysical background" of man's polygamous nature. He sees in man a "...life urge to exploit the stimulative value of every kind of change..." 29 This would include sex partners. Thielicke is quick to point out, however, that this trend towards polygamy in male sexuality is viewing man in isolation.

"For the fact is that the man 'exists' as such only because there is such a thing as 'woman': that is to say, he simply cannot leave out of consideration her existence and therefore her sex nature. And since the woman cannot live polygamously without damage to the very substance of her nature, the man cannot do so either." 30

Manhood or masculinity, therefore, is a "relational term" and loses its meaning and substance isolated and abstracted from "feminine existence". When the total male-female relationship is held in view, then, polygamy
is "...not in conformity with the masculine nature, but rather a denial of it."\(^{31}\)

Besides this anthropological understanding of male sexuality, Thielicke also shows how the penetration of eros by agape leads a male to monogamy despite his "life urge." Agape means we live for the other and accept the other-- her sex nature included. "If for the woman not to be the sole wife of her husband means to wound her, then agape demands that this wound must not be inflicted upon her."\(^{32}\) We are to respect and honor the uniqueness of our sex partner. Therefore, we channel our sexual drives in a way that will build a relationship not threaten it. The one flesh character of marriage calls for monogamy in which trusting love can flourish.

E. Eros and the Creation-Redemption Order

Thielicke believes that marriage is an order of creation. When Thielicke refers to marriage as an order of creation he means that the man-woman relationship was a "constituent part of the things that were created..."\(^{33}\) In contrast to societal structures like the state, which Thielicke calls an "order of history", marriage was established before the Fall and is therefore a "real" order of creation. This idea provides the
theological foundation for seeing marriage as a "positive fulfillment of life" rather than a necessary evil. Individual eros finds its place within the creation order. The creation account of man as male and female called to be "one flesh" allows for a positive, integrated understanding of the creational goodness of man as body and as sexual.34

Thielicke also sees the order of redemption as providing legitimation of his sexual ethics. He doesn’t think the idea of creation-order is sufficient, in itself, to do this. The effects of the Fall are to deep and real to simply recapture a pre-Fall state of marriage and sex. The creationally given eros, distorted by the Fall, shows up in our society as almost a duty of fullest possible sexual self-realization. Individual eros and its fulfillment, therefore, tends to dominate husband-wife relationships. This creates tremendous instability in a marriage as witnessed by our ever increasing divorce rate.

Thielicke maintains that eros was given by God to grow and develop. But the development of eros is tied in to the development of the whole person. With growth in personhood comes growth in individuality. Here lies the blessing but also the challenge and possible threat to marriage. In marriage two people with highly developed
and differentiated personalities, including the eros dimension, need to work at complementation, integration, and accommodation. This is an on-going task. It appears, however, that many couples are not prepared and/or willing to make the effort. So the creational intent of development in individuality is full of rich diversity, but also contains a potentially destructive force in a marriage relationship.³⁵

Growth in individuality in a marriage, therefore, must be honored and nurtured. But at the same time this process must be led by redemptive love. It is agape that allows for self-giving and accommodation. Agape allows us to replace the question of "What do I get out of this?" with "Where and when must I serve?" In a marriage this is an indispensable question and attitude if, not only the growth of the two individuals, but the wealth of the total relationship is to be realized. Agape, redemptive love, must lead and permeate the growth of the created but fallen structure of human sexuality. In this way individual eros will come into its own but not at the expense of growth in the marriage relationship itself.³⁶

F. Eros in the Old and New Testaments

Thielicke states that personal eros was not emphasized in the Old Testament. The focus was on the
tribe, the community. Marriage was seen as a social institution within that structure. In fact, Thielicke maintains that the creational intent of male-female relationships is hardly recognizable in Old Testament law and life. Before the Fall the one flesh partnership of male and female is central. In Israelite practice, however, we find "patriarchal supremacy." The man may have more than one wife. He can easily divorce his wife. She does not have this right. The wife is seen as an object of purchase who is bought from the father with a bride-price. She then becomes the property of her husband.

Thielicke sees strong cultural influences, especially Arabian, in Israel's legal and cultural practices. He does recognize that personal eros did emerge as a man and woman entered into an actual marriage. The Song of Songs, Isaac's love for Rebecca, Jacob's courtship of Rachel testify to this fact. But this eros dimension did not alter the legal and social foundation of marriage in Old Testament times. Individual eros, particularly of women, was kept in the background legally in actual everyday life. Marriages were arranged by the parents or brothers of the woman. Freedom to marry whom she wanted, or not to marry at all was not given to her. It seems "everybody" became
married in the Old Testament. Furthermore, we don't hear in the Old Testament about separation and unhappy marriages. Marriage meant more than two individuals coming into a relationship. It also meant that two families, clans, or tribes came into a relationship. Within this type of legal, social, and emotional climate, therefore, individual eros was kept tightly in place if not submerged.  

According to Thielicke, the picture doesn't change much when we move to the New Testament. He states that in the New Testament marriage is presented as a good gift of God's grace but eros is seldom mentioned. When eros is discussed, it is done in a negative way. Eros is under suspicion as a drive that must be "domesticated" by marriage. Paul's most detailed account of marriage in I Corinthians 7 could not be said to present marriage and human sexuality in a creationally good light. Rather we find sexual life presented as an unfortunate hindrance to full devotion to the Lord. Paul would like to see Christians unmarried as he was. But if you can't control yourself sexually, then you better marry.
Chapter Two: Critique of Thielicke's Understanding of Eros and Creation Order

Evaluating and criticizing a theologian of Helmut Thielicke's stature is a difficult and somewhat intimidating task. It would be easy to isolate a point here and there and fabricate an extended critique. Thielicke's breadth and depth as a thinker and writer must be honored and respected. I do have some reservations, however, about Thielicke's approach in his ethics of sex. I will concentrate on the points that I believe to be the most central to his thought. This critique, however, must be seen in the context of my genuine appreciation for much that Thielicke has written.

A. Creation Order, Sin, and Eschatology

Thielicke self-consciously bases his sexual ethics on the order of creation. But I wish that this foundation in Thielicke's approach were more solid. He calls marriage an order of creation, but is quick to add a number of qualifications which call the creational givenness of marriage and human sexuality into question. (cf. pp.18,19) To understand why Thielicke takes this approach we must understand that his sexual ethics is part of his theological ethics. Thielicke makes
this point repeatedly. In his theological ethics we find the reason why Thielicke has difficulty with a full appreciation of marriage and sexuality being rooted in the creation order.

The question of creation and creation order is not a peripheral question for Thielicke. He explains that the "positive intention" behind his entire ethical writings is to "...give a Christian interpretation of human and historical reality in general, and to do this in a comprehensive and systematic way." The orders of creation are a central focus of this interpretation of reality. But already in the Preface to Vol. I of his ethics Thielicke makes clear that he doesn't feel at ease with creation orders as "structures of reality." He feels that in the last analysis the world with its orders is essentially an "objectification of my own Babylonian heart." Sin has permeated creation so thoroughly that the orders themselves are radically distorted.

"This statement has momentous consequences for theology's doctrine of the orders, which accordingly can no longer be conceived as a doctrine of the orders of creation, much less in terms of natural law."

Thielicke is intensely afraid of minimizing the effects
of sin and thus undermining the need for Christ's death. He is also afraid of introducing any scholastic idea of natural law into theology and ethics where man with his unaided reason can discover the structure of reality and truth. This idea also would undercut the necessity and value of salvation in Christ who is the Way, Life, and Truth. It is obvious, then, that to do justice to Thielicke's views on sexual ethics we must look closely at his theological ethics. Specifically for our discussion, we will focus on Thielicke's understanding of the orders of creation.

Thielicke believes that Luther was on the right track when he subsumed creation-orders under the doctrine of justification. In fact the idea of the orders of creation can be seen as a "by-product" of Luther's idea of justification. With Luther, Thielicke wants to root the orders of creation in justification. He believes that if we don't do this it is inevitable that the various spheres of life will be ripped away from Christ's lordship. The process of secularization will take its full course. Thielicke is deathly afraid of autonomous spheres of life which are not subject to ethics and "religion". He rejects the idea of autonomous spheres with "inherent laws". Thielicke mentions
that the Nazi government used this notion to insist that the church in Germany stay out of politics.\textsuperscript{4}

What, then, is Thielicke's view of the orders of creation? Again, to answer this question we should understand Thielicke's view of ethics. He sees his entire ethical approach as rooted in eschatology. The believer stands in the tension of the already and not yet of the kingdom of God.

"Ethics has its place, therefore, precisely in the field of tension between the old and the new aeons, not in the old, nor in the new alone."\textsuperscript{5}

"The theme of ethics is this walking between two worlds."\textsuperscript{6}

"Theological ethics is eschatalogical or it is nothing."\textsuperscript{7}

"Ethics is normatively determined by this (Christ's) postponement."

So for Thielicke ethics is possible and necessary because Christ has yet to come in the end-time. In the meantime, the orders of this world must still be "respected".

Yet because of the temporary character of this world the orders are seen as "emergency" or "interim" measures. For Thielicke the orders are totally embedded in a fallen creation and therefore are in the process of
passing away. Occasionally Thielicke seems to recognize that the various spheres of reality contain independent, inherent law which governs the functioning of a particular sphere. But he quickly and consistently qualifies this idea. The orders of creation with their laws are only part of a temporary situation which are finally "strange and alien" to the kingdom of God.  

This type of thinking makes itself felt when Thielicke writes about marriage as an order of creation. He does call marriage a "real" order of creation but immediately insists that the "actual form it took was drawn into the Fall." Thielicke does not allow room for the possibility that the created structure of marriage and human sexuality might still be intact, even though any individual marriage might be moving in a sinful rather than a God-serving direction.

B. Creation Order and Natural Law

Thielicke expands on his view of the orders of creation when he engages in an extended critique of the Roman Catholic view of natural law. He makes comments which suggest that "eternal laws" are actually products, not of God's creating activity, but of man's encounter with a sinful world. Man, states Thielicke, only raises the question of eternal laws when his own situation is
filled with suffering and injustice. "...the question of right arises out of the longing for liberation from wrong." Thielicke, then, sees eternal law in Greek and Roman thought as a negation of a negation. Doesn't man come up with some kind of "eternal law" by "...negating obvious elements of wrong and perversions of power?" But Thielicke questions whether universal and eternal law is really discovered in this way. In fact, he states that it is not possible to work back to eternal law and order of being by way of negation. The effects of sin are too radical to ascribe any validity to this human rational process. Not only man's sinfulness but the sin-ridden nature of the world itself makes it impossible to find eternal norms and an order of being. Thielicke does acknowledge a certain "heuristic significance" in talking about "natural law." It creates an impulse in men to seek after the good and to resist those who don't recognize an authority or norms higher than themselves. But finally this attempt is futile. Man cannot know or do the good.

"For in the fallen world it is impossible not merely to do the good, but even to know what is good. The good is beyond our knowing not merely because our cognitive function has been reduced but primarily because this good is not objectively at hand in 'this aeon'. This aeon, being incompatible with the will of God, can no longer produce the good from within itself."
Now it has become even clearer that for Thielicke we can not speak of anything in the creation, including human sexuality, as good. Sin has so thoroughly destroyed man and man's world that a dimension of life like eros cannot possibly be seen as creationally good.

C. Creation Order and the Reformation Viewpoint

The fullest exposition of Thielicke's view on the creation orders is found in a chapter entitled, "This World' and Its Orders." He has rejected the natural law idea of Roman Catholic theology. Now Thielicke attempts to develop the Reformation position. He maintains that biblical and Reformation thought doesn't view the world as a "bearer of a created order" but as an "aeon between the fall and the judgement." This aeon is "characterized totally by the fall."15 "In every part of its structure and in every expression of its life, the world is 'world-after-the-fall'."16 Furthermore, Thielicke posits the complete "unity of man and cosmos." What the world is, man is. What man is, the world is. The world is "permeated by sin", therefore, man is permeated by sin. Man fell away from God, therefore, the world is a fallen world. Fallenness and guilt characterize both man and the world.17

With this view of man and the world, it is easy to see why Thielicke believes the orders of creation and
history are finally "...orders of the divine patience given because of our 'hardness of heart'."

18 The orders of reality are "emergency orders" given to take care of a fallen creation until the Last Day. The orders were not created to be "good by nature." "These orders are rather the structural form of fallen existence."19

When Thielicke, then, calls marriage with its eros dimension an "order of creation", we must understand this in the context of his entire theological position. He definitely does not want to regard the eros dimension of life as structurally still intact with the possibility, however, of taking a sinful direction. Rather Thielicke insists that the total fabric of human life is completely saturated by sin. Nothing remains of man and his world that could be called in its essence good.

D. Creation Order and the Reformational Viewpoint

I find Thielicke's view of the orders of creation and history pessimistic, and not necessarily biblical or Reformed. He seems to have little awareness or appreciation for the Reformed idea of creation-law i.e. the normative structuring principle that grounds and conditions each dimension of creation. In Thielicke's thought law is reduced consistently to mean Biblical commandments. His extended discussion on law and gospel in Vol. I (pp.51-146), for example, is highly
revealing. Thielicke struggles with the question of how God's law has a place any longer in a believer's life who has been saved by grace. In one hundred pages of discussion, nowhere do we find the suggestion that God's law is broader than God's commandments in the Scripture. But this understanding, in my opinion, is exactly what Thielicke's theological and sexual ethics needs. The Calvinistic wing of Reformed theology has often stressed the idea that God's law is broader, more comprehensive than the commandment-law found in the Bible. God's law is part of God's Word which is an all-encompassing reality. God's Word is THE connecting link between God and his creation. It includes the written Word, the Bible; Jesus Christ the Word incarnate; and also the creation reveals God's Word. God's written Word makes it clear that there is a Word for man in the creation. (cf. Psalms 33:6-9; 147:17-19; 148:8; 2 Peter 3:5-7; Hebrews 11:3) God's creation-Word structures, upholds, directs the whole cosmos including man, animals, plants, and matter. God has built into the creation, laws that direct the total functioning of his creation. Man's task is to walk in those creationally good ways of God.²⁰

This view of creation-Word, creation-law, creation-order does not ignore the reality of the Fall. Man
did rebel against God. Man did begin to serve the creation and himself rather than the Creator. But the reality of sin does not necessarily mean that God's creation-Word has been obliterated as Thielicke seems to believe. In fact the Scripture makes it clear that God's reign over his creation endures forever. (Ps. 145:13; Isa.40:8) Man's sin doesn't eliminate God's creating, structuring, maintaining Word. God's Word continues to call man and the entire creation to love and to serve him. The good news of the written Word of God is that this loving service is possible. In Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, man can be restored once again to love for God and neighbor and to all that this means for every aspect of man's functioning in God's creation.21

In disagreement with Thielicke, then, I do not find a necessary tension, dialectic, dichotomy, between creation and redemption, law and gospel. God's grace in Christ renews and re-directs our heart so that we can live before him and in his creation with obedient faith and faithful obedience. God's law-Word stands forever. In Christ a man can now serve God freely. Free to be led by God's law-Word, our lives and God's creation can experience a new measure of peace and justice. There is a "fundamental unity", then, between
God's Word for creation and God's Word for redemption. God's Word has always been, "I am your covenant King, love me and serve." In Christ this obedient service is now possible.

Along with this theological reflection on God's creation-Word which constitutes the orders of creation, I want to summarize a Reformed philosophical understanding of law and creation order. I will use the framework of the Dutch philosopher Hermann Dooyeweerd. It is significant that Dooyeweerd's entire philosophical system is called "De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee" (The Philosophy of the Law-Idea). It is clear from the start that this philosophy sees God's law as a foundational concept in its theorizing. In fact a three-word summary of Dooyeweerd's entire philosophy could be God-Law-Cosmos. Law is seen as the "boundary" between God and his creation. God has "...placed his entire creation under law." God's law includes all of the "...Divine ordinances and norms which have their origin in the Sovereign Will of the Creator and apply to the creation." All of these God-given laws constitute a "cosmic law order." There is a law of logic, law of gravity, law of faith, law of beauty, etc. These laws or norms form a "...constant foundational structure of empirical reality."
"The cosmic law order is not subject to human arbitrariness; it is determined by God, who from the very beginning subjected His creation to His laws. This law order is not invented by science but is only discovered by it."25

Dooyeweerd's approach, however, is not another form of the natural law idea. He is not talking about "substance" in reality that is ordered in hierarchical fashion and which can be known with unaided reason. Dooyeweerd insists that reality does not have any independent existence and is not self-sufficient.

"Nothing exists by itself or for itself. Everything exists in a coherence with other things. And every aspect of reality points beyond itself toward the other aspects of reality. The creation does not contain any resting point in itself, but it points beyond itself toward the Creator."26

Furthermore, a major thrust to all of Dooyeweerd's writing is to critique autonomous rationality which has torn itself away from God, God's Word, and the need for radical renewal of the heart in Jesus Christ. Dooyeweerd believes the Roman Catholic view of natural law and its knowability is under the influence of the Greek idea of substance and reason. He has no interest in adopting this "metaphysical" and rationalistic approach.

It is not within the scope of this paper to develop the ontology and epistemology of Dooyeweerd. My interest has been to indicate that there is a viable alternative to the Lutheran anti-creational stance of Thielicke
and to the metaphysical rationalism of the Roman Catholic natural law position. Even from this brief and extremely incomplete overview of Dooyeweerd's view of cosmic law-order, we can readily sense the significant difference between Thielicke and Dooyeweerd's thinking on creation and law. I feel strongly that Thielicke's reflection on human sexuality and his entire ethical system would benefit immensely from a perspective grounded in an understanding and appreciation of cosmic law order. He would then have solid creational underpinnings for his phenomenological and empirical investigations into God-given reality. With Thielicke's somewhat strong anti-law Lutheranism, we can never really be sure that what we conclude is any more than a temporary insight by a "totally corrupt" heart about a "totally corrupt" creation. Thielicke's thought, for example, reflects an unresolved tension when he writes on eros. He wants to regard eros as a positive, creationally good gift of God. Yet with his view of the orders of creation, eros too must be seen as part of this totally fallen creation. How can we explain this apparent contradiction?

E. Eros and Dualism

When we meet what appears to be an inner contradiction in Thielicke's thought as on eros, we need to
remember once again Thielicke's claim that his sexual ethics grows out of his theological ethics. Is the unresolved tension we find in his ideas about eros a reflection of an unresolved tension in his total theological approach. In Vol. I of his *Theological Ethics* we soon find the background for the apparent contradiction surrounding eros. Thielicke, for instance, insists that law and gospel must be "...strictly differentiated and carefully set forth in their dialectical opposition to one another." 27

"Theologically, the majesty and pre-eminence of the Gospel can be assured only if it is not confused with the Law." 28

Thielicke maintains, then, that there must be a radical distinction between law and gospel. To turn the law into gospel brings a false security in which we fulfill the law and, therefore, remain in fellowship with God. To turn the gospel into law brings an anxiety filled life of obedience to law in order to be certain of my salvation. Thielicke forcefully asserts that the dialectical, utterly historical tension between law and gospel must be maintained. Law and gospel are qualitatively different from each other. Maintaining this law-gospel antithesis in Thielicke's judgement is the "...criterion by which to test the legitimacy of a theology." 29
For Thielicke the ultimate ground for the law-gospel dialectical tension and opposition is in God himself. Thielicke speaks of a "dualistic tendency" in God's nature. It is a conflict and tension between holiness and love, judgement and grace. This dualism in God is "...in principle irresolvable..." There is no "...ultimate point of reference or monon in which this dualism would be dissolved." Thus in God and in God's world there is a fundamental, non-reducible dualism between love and judgement, law and gospel. Thielicke attacks all monistic world views as one-sided and, as in Hegel, "deeply unchristian."

Against this background of Thielicke's dualistic theological approach, it is not difficult to understand why his sexual ethics would reflect dualisms and dialectical tensions. In fact, for Thielicke dialectical opposition is the nature of reality. So when he writes on a topic like eros we could expect a dialectical tension. This is what we find. On the one hand, Thielicke writes about eros in positive, even normative detail. He calls marriage with its eros dimension an order of creation. But at the same time, Thielicke writes about eros in a negative, suspicious way as something which can easily get out
of control and as a potential source of marital conf-
lict since it too is part of the fallen order or 
creation. The dialectical tension that Thielicke sees 
in God, in the law and gospel, he also sees in a 
dimension of the world such as eros. In this sense, 
then, there is a consistency between Thielicke's 
theological and sexual ethics.*

F. Eros and Universal Law

There is another related aspect to Thielicke's 
theology which allows him to write about eros in 
positive, descriptive, and even normative detail. 
In talking about various dimensions of the law, Thielicke, 
in a very guarded way, agrees that "...the commandments 
of God- for whatever purpose they may be used- do in 
fact have significance outside of faith." He even 
speaks of the law as being "universally valid." Laws 
like respect for parents, telling the truth, respecting 
human life should be kept by all men whether or not 
they are in fellowship with the God of these laws. Thielicke speaks of law in the political realm as 
"...equally valid for both Christians and pagans..." In political law God "...shows himself to be the one

*In the previous section I have indicated why I cannot subscribe to Thielicke's dialectical, dualistic approach. In particular see pp. 31, 32.
who by his Word upholds all things, including political reality..."\textsuperscript{36} Thielicke writes that the "absolute validity" of the commandments is made clear when we read that "...God will not send another flood, that he will not destroy the human race physically..."\textsuperscript{37} The function of the law here is to preserve physical existence. So the law and the structures of reality that it gives rise to have a universal significance.

When Thielicke speaks, however, about the law as universally valid, he, at the same time, pointedly reminds us that the law of God is also "...the will of God as altered by the fallen world."\textsuperscript{38} God's laws as they show up in structures of reality are "...a kind of objectification of man's creaturely and fallen nature. But at the same time they are also a representation of God's gracious and patient will."\textsuperscript{39} The orders of creation and history are totally permeated by sin but nevertheless they are the structures of reality we in fact have. Thielicke insists, then, that Christians must "...inquire concerning the shape of the social, political, and economic structures in which we must live and act."\textsuperscript{40} We must investigate reality realizing that we share "...a secular existence within the orders..." with all men.\textsuperscript{41}
This type of thinking permits Thielicke, then, to undertake a detailed account of eros using all the available psychological, sociological, and medical literature. He simply asserts the sinfulness of a life-dimension like eros and then proceeds to describe in detail the nature of eros as we encounter it in this fallen world. Once again there is a degree of consistency between Thielicke's theological approach and his view of eros. As pointed out earlier, however, it is Thielicke's theological approach that I cannot agree with. First of all, Thielicke continues to reduce the idea of law to mean God's commandments in the Bible rather than the all-embracing structure for the creation which upholds and directs the entire cosmos. Not only does he reduce the concept of law but he can't conceive of law undistorted by the reality of sin. So now Thielicke simply has to accept this conclusion about law and sin as the state of affairs. Once he does this, the possibility of re-structuring and reforming a given aspect of the creation becomes remote if not in principle impossible. He has accepted sin as an integral and necessary part of a life dimension like eros. Eros in its essence, therefore, must be permeated with sin.
In contrast to Thielicke's approach, I would make a strong distinction between the God-given structure for the creation i.e. God's law-Word and the two different directions that any aspect of the creation might take. I see the eros dimension, then, as a creationally good part of human life that is structurally intact, and not in its essence sinful. On the other hand, depending finally on a person's heart commitment, eros will be part of a life direction in service to God or in disobedience to God. Thielicke has failed to make this distinction between structure and direction and, therefore, the orders of creation including marriage can only be seen as "structural forms of fallen existence." As mentioned previously, Thielicke needs to realize that God's law-Word stands forever. In particular God's law-structure for eros has not been obliterated in the Fall. Eros, like any other dimension of human life, can take a sinful direction but the possibility of eros taking a direction at all is rooted in the fact that God maintains his structuring law-Word for human eros. Man's sin does not destroy God's creation-Law for eros.
Chapter three: Evaluation of Agape and Eros in Thielicke's Sexual Ethics

A. Eros and Agape: Expanded and Revised

Along with my serious reservations about Thielicke's view of eros and the creation order, I want to evaluate his understanding of eros and agape itself. Thielicke gives an excellent analysis of the interconnection of eros and agape. He provides an outstanding, even if at times questionable, experiential and theoretical description of the deep subtleties of the unfolding and actualization of eros. But his initial definition of eros and agape leaves much to be desired. Also Thielicke's understanding of eros and agape in the Old and New Testaments needs balance and elaboration. Thielicke resorts to Plato for content to the concept of eros.¹ I see this attempt as one of the weakest places in Thielicke's ethics of sex. It is true that Thielicke mentions at the end of this section that Greek thought is abstract and not rooted in an idea of a personal God. But in the meantime he has already expounded on the Greek view of eros and makes little effort to critique this position. This is disappointing in light of his concern to think and write in Christian perspective. Furthermore, Thielicke's description of agape, though helpful, is quite brief. Thielicke's material on eros and agape, then, needs some correction and expansion.
B. Eros and Agape in the Old Testament

A basic place to begin a fuller understanding of eros, agape is in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary*. Articles by Gottfried Quell and Ethelbert Stauffer on "agape" (including also phileo and eros) provide some useful philological and theological insight. In the Old Testament the word אֶֽרֶס is used almost exclusively to talk about God's love or man's love. It is used to cover the whole range of love from love of God (Dt.6:5) to sexual intercourse (Hos.3:1). In the Old Testament love is understood as a "...spontaneous feeling which impels to self-giving..."², "...an inexplicable power of soul given in the inward person..."³, a "...feeling which wells up from personality..."⁴ Whether directed to God, a lover, a parent, or friend the Old Testament writers use the one word אֶֽרֶס for the eros-agape dimension of life. It is seen as a powerful force that drives man to relate to God and to other men. Sexual love, for example, is treated as very real, "natural", and earthly in the Old Testament. It is not to be a cause for embarrassment and secrecy. Sexual love is so much a part of life that the Old Testament writers can become poetic about its power and rightness. We find this particularly in the Song of Solomon.⁵ Love for God also receives much attention in the Old Testament. God "circumcizes the heart" of Israel so that his people will love him with their whole heart— the core of their existence (Dt.30:6) Love for God is a "...deeply inward and finally God-given experience."⁶
With Thielicke, the Kittel article does agree that the word love in the Old Testament is often couched in legal, ethical and covenantal terms. But nevertheless Quell wants to maintain that the legal and covenantal dimensions of love assume the deep heart-relatedness of God for his people and Israel for their God. Even when Israel rejects the legal, ethical and covenantal forms of God's love, God still comes in love to seek Israel. The prophet Hosea captures the "nevertheless" kind of love which God shows to his people. God's heart-involvement with Israel is so strong that he is prepared to love Israel even as a "whore". God's heart is "turned over" within him; his "compassions are kindled." He should give up Israel; God threatens to give up Israel. But he will not. God has loved Israel from a youth and has taken her in his arms. He can't let Israel go now. (Hos. 11:1,3,8,9). It is possible here to see the "irrational" eros-dimension as well as agape shaping God's attachment to his "beloved bride", Israel.  

This Kittel material provides a necessary complement to Thielicke's somewhat one-sided stress on the legal, institutional, character of love in the Old
Testament. I don't think the emphasis found in the Kittel article contradicts Thielicke's conclusions on love in the Old Testament. Thielicke doesn't deny that personal eros, for example, played a genuine part in Old Testament husband-wife relationships. He does, however, emphasize the legal and social context of sexual love as a tightly controlled situation, especially for woman. The Kittel article, on the other hand, attempts to uncover the core reality of love according to Old Testament thought and practice. Kittel and Thielicke can be complementary rather than contradictory at this point. But Thielicke does tend to overstate the institutional and legal dimension of human sexuality, and, therefore, underplay the inner dynamic of the Old Testament conception and experience of love. The shepherd's love for the Shulammite maiden in the Song of Songs, for example, cannot be reduced to social and legal terms. Thielicke is aware of this, but, at times, his overemphasis of one dimension gives an unbalanced understanding of the total picture.

C. Eros and Agape in Greek Culture

Thielicke's description of eros in Greek thought is also in need of elaboration. He only deals with
Plato's view. An expanded account of the Greek view in general will deepen our understanding of the context in which Plato wrote, and also why the New Testament writers resisted using the term eros. EROS was the Greek god who represented all the sensual pleasure a mortal could hope to obtain. This god had a powerful grip on the lives of men. To be caught up in eros is "intoxication" which "...puts an end to all reflection, which sets all the senses in a frenzy."8

"All the forces of heaven and earth are forces of second rank compared with the one and only supreme power of eros. No choice is left, nor will, nor freedom, to the man who is seized by its tyrannical omnipotence, and he finds supreme bliss in being mastered by it."9

Eros so enraptures a person's life that it functions as his religion. Going to the Greek temple for sexual intercourse with a temple prostitute was a supreme erotic-religious act.10

It is in this context that Plato wrote his views on what eros is and ought to be. In Phaedrus and in the Symposium, Plato spiritualizes eros to avoid the sensual, orgiastic thrust of the word that was prevalent throughout Greek Culture. Thielicke provides a good summary of Plato's thinking.(cf. pp. 2-4) Plato was
not alone, however, in de-sensualizing eros. Aristotle sees eros as a "cosmic function" with a "power of attraction" that is responsible for holding together the order of existence. A 2nd century Platonist, Maximus of Tyre, defines eros as personal liberation. Plotinus sees eros as "...the impulsion of the soul beyond the world of sense and reason..." At this point man is "beyond all limitations". Eros as a word, then, underwent transformation of meaning in the works of some philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. But the Greek idea of eros containing an inner drive toward transcendence was not re-interpreted. 11

"The eros which celebrated its orgies in the social life of the time, which was on the look-out for piquant adventures in the myths of the gods, and which led to adventures in the temples, was developed humanistically by Maximus and sublimated mystically by Plotinus. Nevertheless it is the same eros, the natural impulse to the transcending of one's own life. Hence the original form of erotic religion is sensual intoxication and the supreme form ecstasy." 12

It is interesting and significant to realize, furthermore, that in the Greek world the word agape was seldom used. "Its etymology is uncertain, and its meaning weak and variable." 13 When it was used, agape had a wide range of meanings like to receive, greet, honor; to be satisfied; to prefer. Often agape served as an occasional synonym for eros or phileo to add variety to a writer's work.
"...whereas eros consistently engages the thinking of poets and philosophers from Homer to Plotinus, agape hardly ever emerges as a subject of radical deliberation. It is indeed striking that the substantive agape is almost completely lacking in pre-biblical Greek."14

D. 

Agape in the New Testament

Part of the genius of the New Testament writers is that they took a word like agape to express the deepest and highest expressions of love that God or man can make. As indicated, in Greek literature the use of agape was sparse, and its meaning vague and highly variable. Jesus and the New Testament writers fill agape with meaning. Agape-love is the fulfillment of all the law and the prophets. It is the quintessence of love for God.

"To love God is to exist for Him as a slave for his lord (cf. Lk.17:7ff.). It is to listen faithfully and obediently to His orders, to place oneself under His lordship, to value above all else the realization of this lordship (cf. Mt.6:33). It also means, however, to base one's whole being on God, to cling to Him with unreserved confidence, to leave with Him all care or final responsibility, to live by His hand. It is to hate and despise all that does not serve God nor come from Him, to break with all other ties, to cut away all that hinders (Mt. 5:29f.), to snap all bonds except that which binds to God alone."15
Jesus also radicalized the meaning of agape for the neighbor. The neighbor is now not only the people of the covenant community, as in much of Jewish thought, but anyone who needs us and whose needs we can meet. Good Samaritan love becomes normative for everyone who professes to belong to Jesus Christ. Jesus doesn't talk about agape as some kind of superficial emotionalism but as genuine concern and decisive readiness to put yourself at the disposal of another person—regardless of the cost in time, money, and energy.

From listening to Jesus talk about the Good Samaritan we learn that agape for the neighbor means doing what the moment demands. We don't waste words on the duties of others and the guilt of others for not doing something. We do what has to be done.

The good news of the gospel is that agape-love is possible. Jesus creates a new heart in the one who believes in him. Out of this renewed heart, self-giving love can take shape. "Jesus brings forgiveness of sins, and in those who experience it a new and overflowing love is released."16 "...the agape of God is shed abroad in our hearts and is thus the decisive reality in our existence."17

Paul and the other New Testament writers unfold
and expand on the concept of agape which Jesus initiated. They everywhere announce that, in love, God sent Jesus to redeem a people for himself. By the regenerating power of God's Spirit we have been released from sin and are now free to serve with love. (Gal. 5:13) God's hand of love does not let go of us. (Rom. 8:28ff.) With this confidence we move out to love the neighbor.

"Brotherly love is the only relevant and forward-looking attitude in this time of decision between the cross and the telos. It stands under the sign of the cross. It is a readiness for service and sacrifice, for forgiveness and consideration, for help and sympathy, for lifting up the fallen and restoring the broken, in a fellowship which owes its very existence to the mercy of God and the sacrificial death of Christ." 18

For Paul faith and hope are crucial but agape is the heart of life and death and life eternal. (I Cor. 13) "With love the power of the future aeon already breaks into the present form of the world. As for Jesus, so for Paul, agape is the only vital force which has a future in this aeon of death. " 19

E. The Agape-Eros Reversal

In the New Testament, then, the word and reality of agape have come into their own. In Greek literature and thought it was an ignored term with ambiguous meaning. In the New Testament agape becomes THE unifying
thread which ties the total gospel message together. On the other hand, the exact reverse has happened when we consider the use of the word eros in Greek and New Testament literature. Eros had center stage in Greek culture. Precisely because of the pre-occupation with the sensual understanding of eros in Greek culture, the New Testament writers living in this Graeco-Roman culture shied away from not only the term but the reality of eros. As Thielicke points out, this reaction tended to be an overreaction so it was difficult if not impossible for Paul, Peter, James, John, et. al. to speak of eros, in terms of human sexuality, in a positive way. Eros as a creationally good dimension of life had been so abused by their Greek and Roman culture, that the New Testament usually deals with sexuality in a suspicious even hostile way. Thielicke possibly overstates the negative attitude toward eros in the New Testament. The New Testament view of marriage is positive in most instances. Thielicke notes this point as well. But the fact remains that the word eros does not appear in the New Testament— anywhere. We simply do not find a developed, affirming view of eros in the gospels and epistles. But this doesn't mean that we must run to Plato, as Thielicke does, for content to the eros-dimension
of life. Of course, when Thielicke writes on the interconnection of eros and agape, and the actualization of eros, he does provide much valuable content for the term eros as it focuses on human sexuality. In all fairness, this is Thielicke's major concern. But his reliance on Plato for an understanding of eros in general is disappointing and not necessary. The abstract, speculative and rationalistic orientation of Plato's philosophy and therefore his view of eros is not acceptable from a Christian perspective.

F. Eros in Christian Perspective

It is understandable, however, why Thielicke relies on Plato. Not only in the New Testament but elsewhere in Christian circles, it is difficult to find serious reflection on eros from a distinctly Christian vantage point. A classic book by the Roman Catholic, M.C. D'Arcy, entitled The Mind and Heart of Love deals with eros and agape at a highly literary and serious level. But as the discussion unfolds the influence of Platonic and Aristotelian categories of understanding clearly permeate this book. We could have expected this approach since D'Arcy makes it clear in his Preface that Aristotle's philosophy has been highly influential in his thinking. D'Arcy forthrightly states that, "In the development
of the ideas in this book the passages from Aristotle are, then, a landmark." Nygren's book on Agape and Eros has little good to say about eros. Eros, according to Nygren, has its origin in Greek culture and, therefore, can not be Christianized. Nygren is critical of all attempts to synthesize and merge eros with agape. We won't receive any help from Nygren on a Christian understanding of eros. Lewis Smedes has written on eros and agape from a Calvinistic Reformed perspective in Sex for Christians and Love Within Limits. The first book, however, deals with the human sexuality dimension of eros almost exclusively. We found a good account of this aspect of eros in Thielicke. The second book deals with agape on the basis of I Corinthians 13. Once again there is scant information on eros in general.* We are more sympathetic with Thielicke's use of Plato after surveying the available literature. It would appear that eros in Christian perspective is somewhat of an untouchable or at least ignored subject.

Christians like Thielicke and Smedes have been dealing with the sexual dimension of eros but not with what I would call the self-love, need-fulfillment dimension of eros. People have been writing, however, on a theme like man in the image of God for a long time

* see quote on p. 54, however
time. We don't need to follow Plato transcendentally into the world of ideas. We can stay rooted in the created giveness of being in God's image. As human beings we have been created for relationship—with God and other people. We have God-given needs to know another person well, not only for his sake, but to fulfill our own personal and social needs. We also have a deep need to know God well. We are restless until we rest in God, the Origin of our existence. This need-satisfaction I see as part of eros and is utterly human and creationally good.

Man in the image of God also implies that we have self worth. We may love our self. In the love commandment it is assumed that we will love our self. Self-love does not need to mean proud rebellion against God. Rather it can mean thankful response to God for the remarkable body-person that he has made us to be. Surely as people created in God's image and re-created in Jesus Christ, we may feel good about ourselves. We can pursue experiences and obtain material goods that help us grow as a person. Eros has been described as the "driving power for personal growth." I see this urge for personal growth and self-realization, then, as part of human eros which in turn is part of self-love.
The non-sexual aspects of eros, therefore, do not need to be ignored for fear of unleashing self-centered need fulfillment or sinful self-love. Like anything else in God's good creation, the eros dimension of life is subject to distortion.

"Eros is a good love, not an evil one. It is a gift of God built into our creaturely incompleteness, driving us to seek what is good and true and beautiful, and to create communion with others. It stretches us beyond the confines of our own egos."

"It is the creative power in all that lives and grows, all that brings color, vigor, and explosive joy to human life."

Eros, including libido, need satisfaction, and self-realization, is a God-given human drive or power existing in the fabric of our humanity. It seeks completeness and union. Eros has been defined as the "psychic drive to union." Eros is the power that moves us beyond ourselves to seek union and communion with others.
CONCLUSION

A. A Final Question About Eros and Agape

After dealing at length with the theme of eros and agape in Thielicke and others, it occurs to me that we may have the wrong understanding of the relationship between agape and eros. Have we inherited a distinction that in fact is not a distinction? Should we say agape and eros or agape-eros? Is not God's love for man and man's love for God and neighbor one reality with many rich and varied expressions? It seems, for example, that God's love for man is both self-sacrificing agape but also need-fulfillment eros. God desires fellowship with his people and is "broken-hearted" when we go our own way. Or in the case of man, we find that we reach out in love to another person to satisfy the eros-need of human fellowship. But at the same time our intention is to build up the other person in self-giving agape. Is not agape-eros, then, one love reality with various diverse and meaningful expressions. The unity of agape-eros seems to be affirmed in the Old Testament, as mentioned earlier, in the use of $\mathbb{Y} \mathbb{Y}$ for all of the God-man expressions of love regardless of the specific content.
In rejecting Thielicke's use of Plato to talk about eros, therefore, possibly we have not gone far enough. Maybe we need to reject the entire formulation "eros and agape" as a product of Greek and Scholastic rationalism. Has not the Greek-Scholastic dualism of "body and soul" given rise to the dualism of "eros and agape" where eros belongs to the body and agape resides in the soul? Rather we should see man as a body-person who loves... loves God, neighbor and himself. There is no way to neatly dissect and label the complex motivations of man as he loves God, his neighbor and himself. In many cases agape-eros is present in each concrete situation where love is expressed. I believe that Thielicke is pointing to this fact when he writes on the interpenetration of agape and eros in human sexuality. On the other hand, Thielicke's approach to eros and agape tends to be formulated in a dualistic context. Thielicke speaks forcefully of man as "individual totality" who exists in a fundamental unity before God and the neighbor.¹ But soon he states that man's totality resolves itself into "being" and "function."² Once he has made this fundamental split in man, Thielicke then states that agape is directed towards the "authentic being" of a person while eros is directed towards the
worth or function of a person. Also he writes that
God loves in man the "image of God" which is "buried"
inside of man. This image is the "real", authentic
man. "God does not love the dust in which the pearl
lies, but he loves the pearl lying in the dust." In
an attempt, then, to distinguish eros and agape Thielicke
uses language that suggests a two-layer, "pearl" and
"dust" kind of anthropology where authentic being is
on top and man as function is below. Agape then is
attached to authentic being and eros to man as function.
Once Thielicke makes this division it is difficult to
see how agape would influence or lead man's functioning
or how eros is ever part of man's authentic being.
Thielicke talks about the "interpenetration" of agape
and eros but his fundamental distinction of agape-being
and eros-function leads us in a dualistic direction
rather than into an integrated, wholistic understanding.

Dr. James Nelson, professor of Christian Ethics
at United Theological Seminary, Minneapolis, makes some
helpful comments about the fundamental unity of love.
He believes that distinctions between epithymia, philia,
eros and agape can be useful but "...are misused when
they are interpreted as signifying four different and
separable loves. Rather they appropriately point to
different dimensions of the rich unity of love--dimensions which can be disjoined only at the expense of serious distortion."^ Nelson is sharply critical of Nygren and others who have formulated a fundamental antithesis between agape and eros.

"Sadly enough, this divorce between agape and eros has been affirmed in one way or another by numerous contemporary Christian thinkers, even folk of widely differing theological outlooks. The results have been several. Human emotions, desires, and sexual feelings have remained unintegrated into Christian understanding of selfhood. The manner in which our sexuality underlies and informs all of loving has been left unappreciated and unclarified. The positive functions of both desire and self-love have been misunderstood and denigrated. And countless Christians have been deprived of constructive guidance and burdened with needless guilt."^ Nelson insists, then, that "The different dimensions of love need each other for love's wholeness."^ In an attempt to indicate how the various dimensions of love hold together, Nelson writes:

"Agape is not another kind of love. Nor is it, as Tillich rightly notes, a dimension strictly comparable to the other three dimensions of our loving. It is the transformative quality essential to any true expression of any of love's modes. If we define Christian love as agape or self-giving alone--without elements of desire, attraction, self-fulfillment, receiving--we are describing a love which is both impoverished and impoverishing. But the other elements of love without agape are ultimately self-destructive. Agape present with sexual desire, erotic aspiration, and mutuality releases these from self-centeredness and possessiveness into a relationship that is humanly enriching and creative. It does not annihilate or replace the other modes of our loving. It undergirds and transforms."^
To say that agape-eros is one love does not mean, therefore, that there is no distinction between agape and eros. Man in the image of God was made to love God and neighbor. Man to be man must love—open up his life to God and to the neighbor. If we call this agape-love, then, we can see how agape is the all-encompassing reality of life that should drive and lead every dimension of life including eros. In this sense, we could talk about agapeic-politics in which agape-love is realized as justice. Agape-love in economics becomes stewardship, in ethics agape becomes troth or fidelity. In other words, all of human thinking and acting needs to be directed by agape-love. Thielicke speaks to this point when indicating how agape must lead libido. But Thielicke and others often speak of agape as "transforming" eros and the other dimensions of love. I believe that it is more accurate to say that agape, as the all-embracing power and demand of life, gives a God and neighbor-serving direction to each dimension of human functioning. This approach avoids the possible misunderstanding that a dimension of human life like eros is inherently sinful and needs to be radically changed or transformed by agape. Agape, then, is seen as a "divine" addition
which must redeem perverted eros. Rather we should see eros as a creationally good structure in human life which, as a creative power for union and communion, can be led in a good or sinful direction. It is agape that leads eros in a God-pleasing, man-serving direction. With hearts renewed in Jesus Christ this agape-direction is possible.

Agape, then, is at the center of man's existence as a call to love God and neighbor. Eros is a God-created dimension of human life pulsating with psychic energy and drive for union communion. Agape without eros ignores the creational humaness of man in God's image. Eros without agape is raw power than can become destructive. We don't need, therefore, to place agape over against eros in a divine-human tension. We don't need to "reconcile" eros with agape. Agape-eros belong together.
B. Thielicke's Pioneering Effort

In spite of the weaknesses in Helmut Thielicke's theological and sexual ethics, he has provided the evangelical Christian community with an insightful discussion of ethical issues. His thinking on eros and agape has been formulated against the background of a dualistic theological position. His understanding of eros and creation order leaves much to be desired. But Thielicke's work is in many ways a pioneering effort. Evangelical Christianity has not been noted for its grasp and involvement with 20th century ethical concerns. Seen in this light, Thielicke's Theological Ethics represents a major step forward. His reflection on eros and agape must be appreciated as a significant contribution to the evangelical church in the area of sexual responsibility in an age of sexual chaos.
FOOTNOTES

Introduction


Chapter One


4. Ibid., pp. 29,30.

5. Ibid., pp. 31,32.

6. Ibid., p. 33.

7. Ibid., p. 28.

8. Ibid., p. 33.

9. Ibid., pp. 31-33.

10. Ibid., p. 34.

11. Ibid., pp. 33,34.

12. Ibid., p. 35.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., pp. 35-44.

15. Ibid., p. 46.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., p. 48.
18. Ibid., p. 49.
19. Ibid., pp. 50, 51.
20. Ibid., pp. 52-56.
21. Ibid., pp. 56, 57.
22. Ibid., p. 81.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., p. 82.
26. Ibid., p. 83.
27. Ibid., p. 85.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p. 86.
30. Ibid., p. 89.
31. Ibid., p. 90.
32. Ibid., p. 92.
33. Ibid., p. 104.
34. Ibid., pp. 304-316.
36. Ibid., pp. 310-314.
37. Ibid., p. 296.
38. Ibid., p. 105.
40. Ibid., p. 296.
Chapter Two


2. Ibid., p. xxi.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., pp. 6-14.

5. Ibid., p. 43.

6. Ibid., p. 47.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p. 43.


10. Ibid., p. 105.

11. Ibid., p. 397.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., pp. 393-433.


15. Ibid., p. 434.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 439.


21. Ibid.

23. Ibid., p. 32.
24. Ibid., p. 37.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., p. 20.
28. Ibid., p. 96.
29. Ibid., p. 95.
30. Ibid., pp. 97, 98.
31. Ibid., p. 118.
32. Ibid., p. 117.
33. Ibid., p. 259.
34. Ibid., p. 257.
35. Ibid., p. 145.
36. Ibid., p. 148.
37. Ibid., p. 272.
38. Ibid., p. 147.
39. Ibid., p. 440.
40. Ibid. p. xiii.
41. Ibid., p. xv.
Chapter Three


3. Ibid., p. 23.


5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p. 29.

7. Ibid., pp. 31, 32.

8. Ibid., p. 35.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., p. 36.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.


15. Ibid., p. 45.

16. Ibid., p. 47.

17. Ibid. p. 49.

18. Ibid., p. 51.

19. Ibid.


22. Ibid., p. 128.

23. Ibid., p. 129.

24. This definition was obtained in discussion with Dr. James Olthuis, Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto.

Conclusion


2. Ibid., p. 21.

3. Ibid., p. 31.


5. Ibid., p. 110, 111

6. Ibid., p. 112.

7. Ibid., p. 113, 114.

8. I am indebted to Dr. Olthuis for the content of this paragraph.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


_________. "The Word of God and Biblical Authority." unpublished article.


