are many marriages that are simply matters of convenience, that such sex as goes on within in them is selfish, exploitative, and evil. We know further that there is sexual contact between unmarried couples that is motivated by love and which is pure and on occasions beautiful. This is why we get confused.

Look at it this way. The real essence of immorality, from the biblical standpoint, is for one human being to treat another as a thing and not as a person. To use, to exploit, to manipulate people as though they were inanimate objects is wrong. This is to create what Martin Buber, the great Jewish scholar, calls I-it instead of I-thou relationships. All human situations are involved here—social, political, economic, and educational as well as sexual. I-it relationships mean the abuse of human beings, the deliberate depersonalization and dehumanization of them. In politics this is tyranny or demagoguery; in economics, it is exploitation and mechanization of men; in sex it is to use a person as merely a body for sexual gratification instead of as a fellow creature of God made in his image. There are I-it relations even in marriage and as such they are wrong even if society declares them, by virtue of the marriage, to be right.

From the perspective of the personal dimension, then, the crucial question to be asked about any sexual contact—from holding hands to complete intercourse—is not so much what is done as what is meant. A relatively mild necking session can mean a crude and selfish abuse of a person as a mere object while a more intense type of petting can mean that two human beings are expressing a genuine and deep love for each other. This is why the attempt to set up elaborate rules governing dating behaviour is so silly. Is it all right to hold hands but wrong to pet? Society seems to say so, but then society has only its external concern. It cares little or nothing for any motivation, only for results. And long experience has taught that holding hands is fairly safe, while heavy petting is dangerous, so frequently does it lead to greater intimacies and pregnancy. But as Christians we are very much concerned with inner motivation. We must consider the personal, individual dimension as well as the social. We are interested in the *quality* of interpersonal relationships and not simply in their *quantity* in measuring how far they have gone in physical acts.

Look at it this way. Imagine two people living on a desert island, isolated from society. They have sexual intercourse with each other and there is no social dimension involved at all. Now the all important question becomes, What is the meaning of their relationship? If they are deeply and sincerely in love, using

their sexual activity to say, "I love you," do you seriously suppose that they are guilty of sin in the eyes of God? The church would not say so, for the church has always recognized that people marry each other in their hearts. The actual ceremony simply puts the seal of social and ecclesiastical approval upon their union. In the personal, individual sense, then, what justifies and sanctifies sexuality is not the external marital status of the people before the law but rather what they feel toward each other in their hearts. Measured in such a way, holding hands can be very wrong indeed while intimate sex-play can be right and good.

Unfortunately, however, we cannot ever measure things in one dimension alone. This is the mistake made by so many of our modern rebels. They think that love conquers all, that everything is all right so long as they love each other. And so it would be if they lived on that desert island. But the fact is that they don't. They live in society, which has a legitimate concern for what they do, and they ignore that concern at their peril. One college girl caught in a premature pregnancy and thereby forced into an early marriage told me that when she and her fiancé had first begun sexual intercourse, they thought it was solely their business, that it involved no one but the two of them. "Now," she said, "we have learned that it involved my family and friends, his family and friends, and it involved this child who is going to be born."

Excuse me for breaking in again, but I still don't get the freedom bit. Your point about responsibility is perfectly clear, and I agree thoroughly, but where do you get responsible freedom out of all this?

Simply in the fact that you are, as a Christian, free from outside rules which try to regulate your conduct solely on the basis of external concerns and controls. This sets up a conflict between what you *want* to do and what someone else says you *should* do. You may succeed in suppressing your wants by exerting will power, but the inner struggle remains. Or your impulses may be too strong for your resistance; you compulsively act contrary to the dictates of your conscience and then punish yourself with feelings of guilt. The first is responsible, the second irresponsible, but neither is free. In the one case, you are in bondage to law outside yourself; in the other, you are enslaved by inner drives you cannot resist. Neither of these is what we mean by Christian freedom. That involves inner transformation, a free acceptance

of the law of love, a law which is written in the depths of your being. When you live by that law, there is no bondage and no struggle but spontaneous self-fulfillment. You recognize the difference between I-thou and I-it relationships and you give yourself wholeheartedly to the former because you realize that the latter not only depersonalizes others, but also robs you of your full humanity as well. You are not bound by detailed rules of behaviour, telling you it is "all right" to go so far in expressing affection for a member of the opposite sex and all wrong to go farther. No one outside yourself can tell you that—not really. That is a decision you must make for yourself in each concrete situation. With one person it may be wrong to do anything at all because it would be false and cheap, while with another you may find yourself entering into a gradually deepening intimacy in which you discover yourself in a highly significant way as well as discovering another "thou."

But notice that this freedom is not irresponsible, not capricious and whimsical. Remember that Jesus' parable of the last judgment in Matthew 25 warned us, "Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these my brothers, you have done it to me." In every human encounter, we meet Christ and we are challenged to respond to him as a thou and not as an it.

If, then, you stop short of involvment in the farther reaches of sexual relationships, you do so not fearfully, wanting to go ahead but afraid of possible consequences, torn by conflict within, but rather freely and spontaneously out of your mature ability to live according to what Freud called "the reality principle." This is the recognition that sometimes it is the better part of wisdom to postpone the satisfaction of a present desired good for an even greater good at a later time. The reverse of this is Freud's "pleasure principle" which is characteristic of the infant, whose motto is "I want what I want when I want it—never mind the consequences tomorrow!" That is freedom from responsibility or irresponsibility. Responsible freedom is not so much *from* something, although it is that—freedom from bondage to external law—as it is freedom *for* greater self-fulfillment in love.

But you still haven't told me what I most want to know. For the Christian, how far is it all right to go on a date? I mean of course, with someone you love!

You don't really want to be free, do you? You want *me* to tell you what you should or shouldn't do. But that only puts you in bondage to my judgment. Let's assume for the sake of the

argument that I were to tell you that it is "all right" to go as far as moderate necking, but no farther. Now suppose you have already gone beyond that point and have done it in such a way that you believe it was right. You will at once dismiss me as an old mossback who doesn't know what it means to be young and in love. If you've been "pure" and out of your own conviction have thus far stopped short of the line I have drawn, you will then nod sagely and agree that I am exactly right. Or, let's pretend that I take the other side, and say that you can go just as far as you like, then you will be shocked and horrified if you have been proper, and you will be delighted with this justification if you have already gone pretty far. My statement, whatever it might be, would only confirm or threaten your already preconceived notion. You have got to make up your own mind, in the best light of your own conscience, what your own standards of conduct are going to be, and then do your best to live up to them. No one else can tell you. And face it, you may be wrong. You may decide that it is "all right" to indulge in heavy petting or complete intercourse so long as you are "in love," and then rationalize yourself into believing that you are in fact in that blissful state only to wake up one morning feeling cheap and tawdry, admitting to yourself that you weren't really in love at all. On the other hand, you may become so rigid in your fears of too intimate an involvement as to cut yourself off from all possibilities of a genuinely open and spontaneous relationship with another human being at all.

This is where as Christians we must keep free from sterile legalism on the one hand, remaining always open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and wary of irresponsible selfishness on the other, driven by our own needs so that we are blind to the needs of our neighbors. It is not a simple path to walk. The Pharisees had it easy—the rules are clear and definite. So did the Libertines —there just aren't any rules, you do whatever strikes your fancy. But Jesus never promised that Christianity was easy. He only offered us the truth that sets us free. That is what we mean by the call to responsible freedom or the meaning of sex in the Christian life.

I don't mean to disillusion you, but you have assumed that I can still make a reasoned decision. Many of us are forced to decide long before we are able to think about all the things you've mentioned. What about that?

The Testimony of the Confession of Faith.

The Westminster Confession of Faith has an entire chapter, XXIV, "Of Marriage and Divorce." Significant statements are as follows:

"Marriage is to be between one man and one woman: neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at the same time."

"Section V. Adultery or fornication, committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, and after the divorce to marry another, as if the offending party were dead."

"Section VI. Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments, unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage; . . . and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills and discretion in their own case."

The Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly has the following questions:

"Q. 137. Which is the seventh commandment?

"A. The seventh commandment is, *Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

"Q. 138. What are the duties required in the seventh commandment?

"A. The duties required in the seventh commandment are, chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behavior; and the preservation of it in ourselves and others; watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses; temperance; keeping of chaste company; modesty in apparel, marriage by those that have not the gift of continency; conjugal love, and cohabitation; diligent labor in our callings; shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto.

"Q. 139. What are the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment?

"A. The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks; impudent or light behaviour; immodest apparel; prohibiting of lawful, and dispensing with unlawful marriages; allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews, and resorting to them; entangling vows of single life; undue delay of marriage; having more wives or husbands than one at the same time; unjust divorce or desertion; idleness; gluttony; drunkenness; unchaste company, lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays; and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness either in ourselves or others."

These are the so-called rigid standards which have been the basis of Western civilization's culture and position in regard to marriage which the National Council's publication indicates must be corrected and changed. The testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ in the following Scriptures are significant and are applicable to the National Council of Churches' latest publication, *Called to Responsible Freedom—The Meaning of Sex in the Christian Life.*

The Christian faith is based on forgiveness, so this is not our real problem. We know that man is weak. We know too that it is rather diffcult to reverse your field once you've taken a faulty turn. But the Epistle to the Hebrews would have us continue to run the race, looking to Jesus the author and perfector of our faith, rather than look back in remorse over the times that we stumble. We also know that we are not left to our own resources in this race. God is with us. There is strength beyond our own, insight deeper than our own, guidance broader than our own. With this help, we find ourselves able to be both free and responsible, regardless of what we have been.

Well, I'm not sure you've sold me, but you sure have given me a lot to think about. Do you mind if I mull this over for a bit and talk about it with some other people?

My friend, I would mind very much if you didn't do just exactly that! This little pamphlet doesn't pretend to answer all your questions or to say the last word on the subject. It is intended simply to serve as a springboard for your further thought and discussion from which you can leap into the pool of personal decision. From here on, the matter is between you and the Lord.