

Embracing Masculinity

James B. Nelson

Is there not something good, important, *and distinctive* about the experience of maleness itself? Something that can produce an energy which is not oppressive but rather creative and life-giving — and recognizably male? A “deep masculine” that men can find in themselves and justly celebrate? ... And, what is the place, if any, of that age-old emblem of manhood, the male genitals? Let us look at masculinity through this particular lens.

— Eugene Monick

PHALLUS

In his suggestive book *Phallos: Sacred Image of the Masculine*, Eugene Monick explores the psychic and religious dimensions of the male experience of his phallus, his erect penis.¹ Every male, he asserts, directly knows the meanings of erection: strength, hardness, determination, sinew, straightforwardness, penetration. Because erection is not fully under a man's conscious control, because the penis seems to decide on its own when, where, and with whom it wants erection and action, the phallus seems to be an appropriate metaphor for the masculine unconscious.

From time immemorial it has fascinated men. Numerous ancient expressions of phallic art and worship are well known, from the common representations on ancient Greek pottery, to the huge erection of the Cerne giant (carved in the first century B.C. by the Celts into a chalk hill in Dorset, England), to the modern-day Hindu cult of Shiva, where the phallus is an image of divinity.² Beyond such outward evidences of religious veneration, men of every time and place have known a religious

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Yet, as with other experiences of the holy, males feel ambivalent about the phallus. Erections must be hidden from general view. They are an embarrassment when they occur publicly. Men joke about erections with each other but cannot speak seriously. The secret is exposed only with another person in intimacy or when a male permits himself to experience his potency alone. If the mystery is exposed publicly, somehow the sacred has been profaned.

Men also experience the *solar phallus*.⁵ Solar (from the sun) means enlightenment. A man's erect penis represents to him all that stands tall. It is proud. The solar experience of erection puts a man in touch with the excitement of strenuous achievement. It is the Jacob's ladder and the mountain climb, which rise above the earthy and the earthly. It is the satisfaction of straining to go farther intellectually, physically, and socially. Solar phallus is transcendence. It is the church steeples and skyscrapers that men are inclined to build. Solar phallus represents what most men would like to have noted in their obituaries. In Carl Jung's thinking, solar phallus is the very substance of masculinity. It is, he believed, *logos*, which transforms thought into word, just as *eros* (which he called feminine) transforms feeling into relatedness. I believe Jung misled us with his bifurcations of masculine and feminine principles, unfortunately grounding them in common gender stereotypes. Nevertheless, *logos* is an important part of the male experience both represented and invited by the solar phallus.

In Roman mythology, Priapus is the god of fertility. His ugliness and an enormous penis is the painful clinical condition known as priapism. Priapism is the erection, independent of sexual desire, of the sexual organs. Hence, the name. It is only a part. Were it not, it would be painful and the fact is too frequently so. It gives vital energy, but the experience of the patient

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As with the earthy phallus, there is a shadow side to the experience of the solar phallus, too. It is the patriarchal oppression of those who do not "measure up." It is proving one's worth through institutional accomplishments. It is the illusion of strength and power that comes from position. It is the use of technical knowledge to dominate. It is political power which defends its ideological purity at virtually any price and then prides itself on standing tall in the saddle. It is addiction to the notion that bigger is better. The distortions of solar phallus are legion. Yet without its integrated positive energy, a man lacks direction and movement. Without the urge to extend himself, he is content with the mediocre. Without the experience of the wholly other, life loses its self-transcendence.

Thus far I have agreed in broad outline with Monick's significant analysis: the importance of both the earthy and the solar phallus, their integration, and the dangers of their shadow sides. Here, however, Monick stops. He believes that phallus, the erect penis, is *the* sacred image of the masculine. That seems to be enough. But it is not. Left there, I fear we are left with priapism.

In Roman mythology Priapus, son of Dionysus and Aphrodite, was the god of fertility. His usual representations were marked both by grotesque ugliness and an enormous erection. In human sexual disorders, priapism is the painful clinical condition of an erection that will not go down. Priapus and priapism are symbolic of the idolatry of the half-truth. Phallus, the erection, indeed is a vital part of the male's experience of his sexual organs. Hence, it is usually a vital part of his spirituality. But it is only part. Were it the whole thing, his sexuality and his spirituality would be painful and bizarre, both to himself and to others. That this in fact is too frequently the case is difficult to deny. Our phallic experience gives vital energy, both earthy and solar. But we also need the affirmative experience of the *penis*.

PENIS

In our daily lives, almost all men are genitally soft by far the greater share of the time. Genitally speaking, penis rather than phallus is our awareness, insofar as we are aware at all. (For economy in words, I will use "penis" for the organ in its flaccid, unaroused state.) We are genitally limp most of our waking moments, and while erections come frequently during sleep we are seldom aware of them.

Psychically, the experiences of phallus and of penis seem very different. An erection during waking hours claims my attention. Frequently I choose not to act upon its aroused urgency, and sometimes in embarrassment I hide its evidence. But its claims on my psychic awareness have

an undeniable phallic imperiousness. The penis is different. Most of the time I am unaware of it. It is just there, part of me, functioning in my occasional need to urinate, but most often invisible from my conscious awareness, much as an internal organ. But when I am conscious of it in dressing or undressing, I am aware of its difference from phallus. Penis is considerably smaller. It is wrinkled. There is even something comical about the contrast (as a man's wife or lover occasionally might tell him). It has a relaxed humility. In its external existence it seems vulnerable, and with the testicles it needs jockstrap protection during the body's vigorous athletics.

In spite of the quantitative dominance of penis time, men tend to undervalue penis and overvalue phallus. Part of that, indeed, simply stems from conscious awareness. When the phallus is present, it demands our attention. The penis does not. Part of the difference, however, is a matter of intentional valuation. We have been taught and have learned to value phallic meanings in patriarchy: bigger is better (in bodily height, in paychecks, in the size of one's corporation or farm); hardness is superior to softness (in one's muscles, in one's facts, in one's foreign policy positions); upness is better than downness (in one's career path, in one's computer, in one's approach to life's problems). In "a man's world," small, soft, and down pale beside big, hard, and up.

Penis is undervalued, also, because we so commonly identify male energy and true masculinity with the vitality of young manhood. Infant males and little boys have frequent erections, but true phallus — the heroic sword raised on high — is the property of young manhood. As age comes upon a man, hardness changes and modifies. It is less apparent, less urgent, less the signature of his body. Phallus bears intimations of life and vigor, while penis bears intimations of mortality. Fearing mortality, men tend to reject the qualities of penis and project them upon women, who are then seen to be small, soft, and vulnerable, qualities inferior to the phallic standard. Wrinkles, so typical of penis, are not permitted in women if they are to retain their womanly attraction.⁶

But the undervaluing of penis and the overvaluing of phallus take their toll. The price is paid by all who suffer because of patriarchy, for this spiritual body dynamic, while hardly the sole cause of such oppression, surely contributes to it. But oppressors themselves are also oppressed in the process. So what is the price paid by men? One cost we must look at is the deprivation of a significant kind of masculine spiritual energy and power.

The history of Western spirituality reveals two traditional paths to the presence of God: the *Via Positiva* and the *Via Negativa*, the positive way and the negative way.⁷ The former is a way of affirmation, of

thanksgiving; of the sacred fullness a way of emptying sinking into not-ness. One way needs the other. Of one to the other, the male experience of phallus, while the female of penis. And in most of our culture, penis is underclaimed, undervalued.

Consider some Christian mystic. The mystic is quiet, not active. It is the darkness. It appears to be adding nothing and a letting go into God." It is love God mind representations. "God is a being is nothingness.

All such models of penis, not his phallus. Of the engorging flaccidity is a letting go. It just hangs around.

Sinking, emptying, that we do not to our tears the trusting ourselves. It means abandoning of meaning we and emptying of genitals'. Without times.

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thanksgiving, of ecstasy. It is the way of light, the way of being filled by the sacred fullness and rising to the divine height. The Via Negativa is a way of emptying and being emptied. It is the way of darkness. It is sinking into nothingness and into the sacred depths. In spirituality, each way needs the other for balance and completion. The overdevelopment of one to the detriment of the other brings distortion. I believe that in the male experience the Via Positiva has profound associations with the phallus, while the Via Negativa correspondingly is connected to the penis. And in most men it is the latter which remains underrecognized, underclaimed, underaffirmed.

Consider some aspects of the Via Negativa as expressed by a great Christian mystic who knew this way, Meister Eckhart (1260–1327). It is quiet, not active: "Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness." It is the darkness more than the light: "The ground of the soul is dark." It appears to be less rather than more: "God is not found in the soul by adding anything but by a process of subtraction." It is a deep sinking and a letting go: "We are to sink eternally from letting go to letting go into God." It is the abandoning of focus and attention: "One should love God mindlessly, without mind or mental activities or images or representations." It is the paradox of nothingness embracing something: "God is a being beyond being and a nothingness beyond being. . . . God is nothingness. And yet God is something."⁸

All such modes of the Via Negativa are a man's experiences of his penis, not his phallus. Think of sinking and emptying. The penis is empty of the engorging blood that brings hard excitement to the phallus. Its flaccidity is a letting go of all urgency. It has nowhere to go. It just is. It just hangs and sinks between the legs.

Sinking, emptying, is a way of spirituality.⁹ It means trusting God that we do not need to *do*, that our *being* is enough. It means yielding to our tears that keep coming and coming once they begin. It means trusting ourselves to the darkness of sleep, so like the darkness of death. It means abandoning our own achievements and resting in the depths of meaning we do not create. Men often resist these things. But sinking and emptying are as necessary to the spirit's rhythms as they are to the genitals'. Without periods of genital rest, a man lacks phallic capacity. Without times of retreat to the desert, there is no energy for greening.

Or consider darkness, another theme of the Via Negativa. It seems related to the cosmic womb of our origins, and it has its own energy. Rainer Maria Rilke writes, "You darkness, that I come from/I love you more than all the fires that fence in the world . . . and it is possible a great energy is moving near me/I have faith in nights."¹⁰ But most men are less at home in the darkness than in the light. We are heirs of the

Enlightenment, a male-oriented rational movement that sought to shed light on everything. Our psyches seem to link darkness with death, and fear of death is characteristic of the patriarchal society. Starhawk, speaking of the holiness of darkness, maintains that the dark is "all that we are afraid of, all that we don't want to see — fear, anger, sex, grief, death, the unknown."¹¹

The penis, in contrast to the phallus, is a creature of the dark. It is resting. Asleep. Usually we are unaware of its presence, but we are conscious of the presence of the phallus, just as we are aware of the presence of light. Taught to prize light and fear the dark, we have also been taught to prize the phallic virtues and to fear the meanings of penis. Its quiescence seems symbolic of death, its limpness the reminder of male-dreaded impotence, and fears of death and impotence are the cause of much destruction. But without the darkness there is no growth, no mystery, no receptivity, no deep creativity. Without the gentle dark, light becomes harsh.

MASCULINE ENERGY: BEYOND ANDROGYN

For a variety of reasons, men have come to believe that phallus is the emblem of masculinity, the signature of true maleness. But this is only partly true, and partial truths taken as the whole truth become both demonic and self-destructive. A man's penis is as genuinely his reality as is his phallus, and just as important to his male humanity. Spiritually, the *Via Negativa* is as vital to him as the *Via Positiva*. It may also be the case that men's overvaluation of phallus, and the undervaluation of penis, is one important reason for our confusions about gender identities and the notion of androgyny.

The concept of androgyny has been commonplace for some years.¹² Most simply put, it denotes the integration within a single person of traits traditionally identified by gender stereotypes as masculine and as feminine. Thus, androgynous people characterize themselves both as strongly self-reliant, assertive, and independent, and as strongly understanding, affectionate, and compassionate. Androgyny is an appealing alternative to the oppressiveness of gender role stereotypes. It goes beyond the false dualism of the belief that there are certain inherent personality traits of the male and of the female. It moves us beyond oppressive gender expectations into the possibility of a more genuinely human liberation for each and for all.

The concept seems appealing theologically. Nicolas Berdyaev, the Russian philosopher-theologian, pressed the idea in 1919, long before its currency in social psychology. There is, he declared, a fundamental androgyny of the human being created in the image of God, an androgyny

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that the gender roles of the world have not destroyed. "In fact, 'in the beginning' it is neither man nor woman who bears the divine similitude. In the beginning it is only the androgyne . . . who bears it. The differentiation of the sexes is a consequence of the fall of Adam." Now, estranged from our essence, we have a compelling desire to recover our lost unity through recovery of the lost principle. "It is by means of this femininity that the male-human can once again be integrated to the androgynous source of his nature, just as it is in God that the lover meets with the beloved, because it is in God that personality is rooted. And personality in God, in its original state, is androgynous."¹³

Berdyaev was ahead of his time. Most later male theologians of this century have not seriously raised the androgynous theme but rather have emphasized the need of gender complementarity. Karl Barth is typical.¹⁴ He believes that our humanity, created in the image of God, is "fellow-humanity." We are incomplete by ourselves. Men and women come into their fullness only in intimate relation to persons of the opposite sex. Barth's position rests on the assumption that by nature the personalities and qualities of the two sexes are essentially different and that each needs the other for completion. There is no androgyny. Barth draws a clear conclusion from this concerning homosexuality: it is perversion and idolatry. One who seeks same-sex union is narcissistically seeking the self. It is a quest for self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency, but such aims can never be realized because the two sexes are fundamentally necessary for each other. While I find Barth's emphasis on the *social* nature of our true humanity commendable, his notion of gender complementarity is deeply flawed. It rests on the uncritical use of gender stereotypes, and it particularly oppresses gays and lesbians, all who are female (because those stereotypes do), and all who are single (among the latter, Jesus included). The notion of gender complementarity is a giant step backward from androgyny.

Androgyny is an ancient theme, prevalent in classical mythology. In Christian thought it was present far earlier than Berdyaev. Yet I believe his was the first clear statement of the essential androgyny of *both* sexes. Earlier versions, blatantly patriarchal, found only the male androgynous. Woman was made necessary as a differentiated sexual being only because man had lost his state of perfection and needed her feminine principle for his human completion. She, however, remained half human.

Nevertheless, androgyny as a theological concept, even in Berdyaev's promising way, runs into some of the same problems as are present in current social psychology. One problem is both definitional and practical. Does the concept mean that both "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics somehow essentially (by nature or by God's design) ex-

ist together in every individual, and thus they should be developed and expressed? This seems to be the most common understanding. In the psychological literature sometimes it is labeled "monoandrogynism," to distinguish it from variations of the theme. But this can be oppressive in its own way. Now each person has two sets of gender traits to learn and incorporate instead of one. Now everyone is expected to acquire thoroughly both "instrumental/agentive" ("masculine") and "expressive/nurturant" ("feminine") characteristics in equal amounts, a standard that would seem to double the pressure that people traditionally have felt.

Even more basically, another problem is that androgyny is based on the assumption that there are, indeed, two distinct and primordial sets of personality characteristics — one "masculine," the other "feminine." Even if we assume that each sex is capable of developing both sets of traits, the definition itself perpetuates the very problem it had hoped to overcome. It still locates one constellation of qualities essentially and dominantly in men and the other constellation essentially and dominantly in women. Jung's psychological thought exemplifies this, as do those who draw upon him, for example, in speaking of the male's need to develop "his latent feminine side." In fact, there is a built-in obsolescence to this concept. For if each sex stopped adhering only to its primary characteristics, and if the two gender stereotypes subsequently became less distinct from each other, androgyny in the current sense would lose its meaning.

One way out of the conceptual difficulty is simply to envision the complete transcendence of gender-role traits (sometimes called the "polyandrous" possibility). Here, personality traits are seen as having no connection at all with biological sex. Each individual is viewed as different from every other individual, for each has unique interests and capacities. In many ways this vision is promising. It frees individuals to be who they uniquely are. However, there remains a problem. The notion of gender-role transcendence, while it honors uniqueness, does not hold up any vision of inclusiveness or relative balance in personal qualities. A given individual could still be as one-sided, even though the rigid linkage between certain traits and one's biological sex had been severed.

Nevertheless, an important question still remains. Is there anything *distinctive* to the experience of one's own biological sex that grounds us in the development of a more whole personality, a personhood richer than its specific gender stereotype? More particularly, is there anything in the male body experience that enables him to transcend the traditional cultural images of masculinity?

If that is the case, it is difficult to see why the call to more inclusive personhood would be fundamentally oppressive. If as a man I were called

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upon to acquire feminine qualities *in addition to my natural masculinity*, that would be one thing. I might be capable of doing that, but it would feel much like learning a second language as an adult, adding another linguistic capability to my native tongue. Even if through years of study and practice I become somewhat proficient, my second language would always be that — a second language, added on, requiring additional effort. My strong inclination would always be to see the world primarily through the images of the language of my birth. On the other hand, were I "naturally bilingual" — born into a bilingual family and society, schooled in the images of both from my earliest days — the inclusiveness of languages would not feel like a burden. It would feel natural.

My illustration admittedly suffers, because languages are thoroughly social inventions and learnings. Our bodies are not. While they have many social, learned meanings attached to them, they also have a biological givenness. My point, however, is this: We have been given "bilingual bodies." Even if one language has been developed more than the other, the second language is not foreign to us. It is not something we need to add on. It is just as originally part of us as the language with which, by accident of circumstances, we have become more familiar.

It is time to move beyond the usual meanings of androgyny. The vision for men is not to develop "feminine" energies (or for women to develop "masculine" energies). Rather, the vision for men is the fullest development of our *masculine* energies. But the issue is *fullness*. We are not talking only of phallic qualities. Penis is vulnerable, soft, receptive. Penis represents and invites the spirituality of the Via Negativa. But a penis is not "feminine" — it is as authentically masculine as is phallus. It bears qualities rooted in the fullness of the male's sexual experience, in the fullness of his body affirmation. So we who are men are simply invited to develop the masculine more richly. To speak this way is not to play word games. Linguistic sleight-of-hand tricks are abstractions. Incarnational reflection does not thrive on abstractions, but tries to represent bodily realities honestly.

Finally, it is important to recognize that each dimension of the male genital experience involves the other. Each of us experiences only one body, though in our experience there is the conjunction of apparent opposites. Paradoxically, the opposites are only apparently so. Each is implied by and contained within the other. Penis is always potentially phallus. The soft receptivity of penis implies relationality. But phallus is aroused as the genital aspects of relationship are anticipated or fantasized. So, also, the hard energy of phallus literally bears the signs of gentleness. The lover is amazed at the velvety texture and softness of the head of the man's rock-hard erection. Men know the vulnerability of their testicles

and shield them from harm even during arousal and lovemaking. Indeed, male vulnerability is most present exactly at the spot where colloquial language locates male courage: "He has balls."¹⁵

Such is the marvelous conjunction of apparent opposites in the male's sexual body, a wholeness inviting him to richness of personhood. It is at the same time the bodily experienced invitation to richness of spirituality through the apparent opposites of Via Positiva and Via Negativa. Such is the golden ball of legend, representing connectedness and radiant energy.

POWER AND SIZE

One of the central issues in spirituality is *power*.¹⁶ It is evident whenever personal beings are present to each other. Men's lives — and the lives of all those affected by patriarchy — have been dominated by one particular perception of power. It is *unilateral* power. It is also called zero-sum power, or the power of a closed energy system, inasmuch as it carries with it the assumption that there is only a limited quantity of power available, so that the more one person gets the less is available to the other. Unilateral power is nonmutual and nonrelational. Its purpose is to produce the largest possible effect on another, while being least affected by the other. Its ideal is control.

"In this view," writes Bernard Loomer, "Our size or stature is measured by the strength of our unilateral power. Our sense of self-value is correlative to our place on the scale of inequality."¹⁷ But the sense of self one has in this understanding is nonrelational, self-contained. It is the traditional masculine ideal of the Lone Ranger. The aim is to move toward maximum self-sufficiency. Dependency on others is weakness. But this kind of power, in reducing mutuality, produces estrangement among people. We are deadened to our interdependence and to the mystery of each other. This is unmodified phallic power.

Christianity has often embraced this view of power in its views of God. At such times it has seen God as omniscient, omnipotent, and controlling the world by divine fiat. This theology was built upon the same sexual dualism that split spirit from body. Spirit was seen as eternal, complete, and changeless, while body was temporal, incomplete, and changeable. God had unilateral power. "He" was perfect in his completeness and unaffected by those "below."

At the same time Christian theology embraced this unilateral understanding of power as applied to God, it had problems. The gospel message was quite clear that among people this was "worldly" power. Because such power was one-way and controlling, it seemed to be the antithesis of love. When Jesus renounced the power of the world, it

was this kind of power love as similarly one-way agape — a one-way discern for oneself. It was to emulate. A one-sided power. One extreme was the loss of eros and the goodness with self-love — such and unilateral love.

There is, however, another way both to produce and to influence others and power. It is generative power. Instead of [power being] a shared power can generate of power, mystery is affirmed. However, is not the power re genitals and the whole.

These distinctions correspond. Traditional androgyny takes a fixed notion of the relation of the feminine (the them in one person). However, of gender roles are deficient attack because it suggests sufficient autonomy. The suggests the urge to do influenced by them. The another to achieve a balance is understanding that be rity. The "feminine" fear interdependence. Such authentic power.

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power.¹⁶ It is evident whenever. Men's lives — and the have been dominated by one central power. It is also called energy system, inasmuch as only a limited quantity of gets the less is available to and nonrelational. Its purpose is another, while being least

"Our size or stature is measure. Our sense of self-value is quality."¹⁷ But the sense of self is self-contained. It is the center. The aim is to move toward others is weakness. But produces estrangement among friends and to the mystery of power.

of power in its views of God. omnipotent, and controlling built upon the same sexual as seen as eternal, complete, incomplete, and changeable. act in his completeness and

priced this unilateral understanding had problems. The gospel of this was "worldly" power. controlling, it seemed to be the power of the world, it

was this kind of power he forsook. Thus, in Christianity a view of love as similarly one-way arose. It was the traditional interpretation of agape — a one-way divine love, a concern for the other with no concern for oneself. It was this kind of love that Christians were told to emulate. A one-sided love became the compensation for a one-sided power. One extreme was designed to offset a contrary extreme. The loss of eros and the goodness of the erotic, the confusion of selfishness with self-love — such were the prices exacted by unilateral power and unilateral love.

There is, however, another understanding of power. "This is the ability both to produce and to undergo an effect. It is the capacity both to influence others and to be influenced by others."¹⁸ This is relational power. It is generative power, the power of an open energy system. Instead of [power being] a fixed, limited amount, the assumption is that shared power can generate more power. People are enhanced by this kind of power, mystery is affirmed, interdependence is celebrated. This, however, is not the power represented by the penis, but by the whole of the genitals and the whole of the body.

These distinctions concerning power bear on the problem of androgyny. Traditional androgyny begins with a combinationist assumption. It takes a fixed notion of the masculine (the active agent) and a fixed notion of the feminine (the receiving, nurturing one) and tries to combine them in one person. However, in regard to power, both understandings of gender roles are deficient. The "feminine" principle has been under attack because it suggests a neurotic dependence on others and lack of sufficient autonomy. The "masculine" has been under attack because it suggests the urge to dominate others without being at the same time influenced by them. The point is that both are faulty. Adding one to another to achieve a balance is not the solution. Rather, the solution is understanding that both are definitions marred by fear and insecurity. The "feminine" fears self-dependence, while the "masculine" fears interdependence. Such fear is born of insecurity. It is the absence of authentic power.

Just as wholeness for either a man or a woman is not some combination of the masculine and the feminine, so also authentic relational power is not a neat combination of the active and the receptive. Relational power understands that the capacity to absorb the influence of another without losing the self's own center is as truly a quality of power as is the strength of exerting influence on another.

Loomer calls this kind of strength "size," the capacity to become large enough to make room for another within the self without losing the self's own integrity or freedom.

The world of the individual who can be influenced by another without losing his or her identity or freedom is larger than the world of the individual who fears being influenced. . . . The stature of the individual who can let another exist in his or her own creative freedom is larger than the size of the individual who insists that others must conform to his own purposes and understandings."¹⁹

Sexual experience always involves power. The experience of phallus without penis is unilateral power. The colloquial male ideal of the phallus is "two feet long, made of steel, and lasts all night." Phallus can handle multiple orgasms (or partners) without being reduced to flaccidity. The phallic perception of woman is as the receptacle for phallic power and emission. The ideal: affect without being affected.

In contrast, the man who affirms his whole sexuality knows that both phallus and penis are one. They are different but interdependent qualities of one male reality. Each at the same time is the other. In spite of the myth of phallic unaffectedness, men know that they are not made of steel, nor do they last all night. Phallus not only delivers effect but is also very much affected. In intercourse it is changed, transformed into penis. "Transformed" is a good word. Sometimes we use the language of death and resurrection about the male genital experience, but it is time to reassess that imagery. It can be highly misleading, even destructive. Yet I fear that the image is fairly common in the male psyche. It suggests that phallus is alive and then, when spent, dies. Penis, then, is the death from which phallus is raised once again. But this interpretation implies a very unilateral understanding of power. Only the phallus has power, the penis does not. Further, the suggestion is that, at least in the heterosexual experience, the woman is somehow associated with "reducing" the phallus to flaccidity. Thus once again we make, even if unconsciously, the connection between woman and passivity. Now the woman somehow is responsible for the man's passivity, his loss of power and agency. But with the language of death and resurrection the psychic connections become more vicious. Now the phallus dies, and the connection is established between the woman and death. And death is assumed to be the enemy.

But when the phallus becomes penis it does not die. There is simply a change to another form of its life. When the phallus becomes penis it does not lose its power, except when that power is understood unilaterally. Rather, the penis has a different kind of power. It is now the man's genital sexuality expressing its capacity to absorb change. What was once hard and imperious is now soft and gentle. In both dimensions the man is experiencing his masculine power, and both are aspects of relational power. True power is mutuality, making claims and absorbing influence. It is different from the "mutuality" of external relatedness, which trades

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When a man so und power, and when he un ality. The same is true . . . However, "the wisdom quality precisely in ter ist fantasy says not or . . . It does not matter th the actual size of the ual functioning and th one thing: too large an persist. Pubescent boys record holders are hon earlier, Freud continues envy is a persistent phe it persists in the surrept locker room.

In contrast to such we Loomer's description:

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in force, compromise, and accommodation. It understands the paradox that the greatest influence often consists in being influenced, in enabling another to make the largest impact on oneself.

When a man so understands his sexuality he better understands true power, and when he understands power he better understands his sexuality. The same is true of size, for size and power are intimately related. However, "the wisdom of the world" about male genital size measures quality precisely in terms of quantity. Bigger is better. The masculinist fantasy says not only "made of steel" but also "two feet long." It does not matter that sexologists and sexual therapists tell us that the actual size of the male organ is quite irrelevant to effectual sexual functioning and the quality of lovemaking — irrelevant except for one thing: too large an organ causes problems. Still, myth and fantasy persist. Pubescent boys still measure themselves and each other. The record holders are honored in the neighborhood gang. And, as noted earlier, Freud continues to be debunked in his contention that penis envy is a persistent phenomenon of the woman's unconscious; rather, it persists in the surreptitious, glancing comparisons made in the men's locker room.

In contrast to such worldly wisdom about size as quantitative, consider Loomer's description:

By *size* I mean the stature of a person's soul, the range and depth of his [or her] love, his [or her] capacity for relationships. I mean the volume of life you can take into your being and still maintain your integrity and individuality, the intensity and variety of outlook you can entertain in the unity of your being without feeling defensive or insecure. I mean the strength of your spirit to encourage others to become freer in the development of their diversity and uniqueness. I mean the power to sustain more complex and enriching tensions. I mean the magnanimity of concern to provide conditions that enable others to increase in stature.²⁰

When a man understands this meaning of size, his genital sexuality is less anxiously, more graciously celebrated. And when that is true, he also better understands the true meaning of size as a criterion of genuine power.

If the themes of death and resurrection can be misleading when applied to penis and phallus, surely they have valid and profound meanings for our sexual and bodily lives more generally. The resurrection of the body in our experience means that mind and body no longer make war on each other, each trying to control or dominate the other. Now I can feel that I *am* my body, and that does not in any way contradict the fact that I am my mind or spirit. Death separates. Resurrection and life

reunite. To be raised to life is to discover that I am one person. Body and mind are no longer felt to be distinct.

We usually have such an experience now and then. Most likely it is temporary, soon forgotten, for we have lived much of our lives with dualistic self-understandings and dualistic perceptions of reality at large. So body and mind fall apart again, each competing with the other for the prize of being me. Death sets in once more. But resurrections occur, and in those moments I know myself to be one. When that happens, the experience of oneness with myself brings with it the strong sense of connectedness with the rest of the world. I feel connected to — more than separated from — the people, creatures, and things among whom I live. They have their own identities, yet they also become part of me and I of them. My resurrection is that world's resurrection as I know that world.²¹ The same applies to a man's genital perception. Resurrection occurs when penis and phallus are one, neither competing for the honor of being the man. When that happens there is true power — and authentic size.

JESUS AS SEXUAL MAN AND MAN OF POWER

Jesus as the Christ has been desexualized by most Christian piety throughout the ages. Sexual dualism has kept its sturdy grip, and incarnation, the real presence of God in human flesh, has been a scandal too great for most of the church to believe. A spiritualized God, acting in proper taste, simply would not do that sort of thing. Docetism, the belief that, in Jesus, God was not really humanly enfleshed but only appeared to be, was early declared a heresy by the church, but it still is very much alive. And about the most effective way of denying Jesus' full humanity has been to deny (outright or by embarrassed silence) his sexuality. Some of the early Christian Gnostics (who abhorred the flesh) represent the extreme. They could not even bring themselves to believe that Jesus needed to eat; he took food with his followers from time to time so as not to alarm them. The thought of Jesus engaged in digestion, defecation, and urination would have appalled them. To the present-day Gnostics of whatever stripe, of course, the thought of Jesus' sexual arousal, erection, and orgasm is at best exceedingly poor taste and at worst blasphemous.

Just as popular piety has been aghast at the thought, theologians for the most part have simply avoided the issue of Jesus' sexuality other than to affirm his celibacy. Only rarely have they faced the question directly. William Phipps, one of the rare ones, has come to the conclusion that Jesus was probably married at one time.²² Phipps finds no biblical evidence for Jesus' virginity, but rather finds a picture of Jesus as fully immersed in sexuality-affirming Jewish culture, a culture which in fact

rejected celibacy in both the first and second centuries (as attested by those years about which we know — happened to conclude, is not the product of Christianity's later contact

I believe the case for Jesus' marriage, surely there would be no question whether or not Jesus' marriage is, and investigation with greater seriousness. Those who call ourselves Christian are called Truly Human, we shall be. If our image of another is to be authentic, we will do the same with

Actually, some of the best work pressed the question of Jesus' sexuality. Lawrence and others have done so in a way that is provided by a distinguished scholar of *Christ in Renaissance Art* observes that for a millennium his divinity was disregarded by theology and glorified by the on his divinity. Then came the glories of humanity.

Now devout Christians strip the drapery from the figure

In many hundreds of years past the mid-16th century, the sex, or the touching, the action. . . . And the emphasis of the mystical Man of God overlooked for half a millennium

In the great cathedrals hung with herself deliberately spreads her gaze at his genitals in wonder, gazing intently at Jesus' until still others Jesus' genitals are by St. Anne, and by himself crucifixion, the adult Jesus hand cups his genitals in Christ is protruding with

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rejected celibacy in both theory and practice. Jesus, who was hardly pic-
 tured as an ascetic by the Gospels, probably married sometime during
 those years about which we have no information (between ages twelve
 and thirty). Before his public ministry began, something — we do not
 know what — happened to his wife. The idea of a celibate savior, Phipps
 concludes, is not the product of the apostolic age but rather grew out of
 Christianity's later contact with the dualism of Hellenistic Greece.

I believe the case for Jesus' marriage is highly debatable. Had it hap-
 pened, surely there would have been some apostolic mention of it. But
 whether or not Jesus married is not really the crux of the issue. His sex-
 uality is, and investigations like that of Phipps help us to take the issue
 with greater seriousness. The question is not an esoteric one. If we who
 call ourselves Christian are unsure of the full humanity of him whom we
 call Truly Human, we shall be unsure of what full humanity means for
 us. If our image of authentic personhood in Jesus denigrates sexuality,
 we will do the same within ourselves.

Actually, some of the "secular theologians" have most effectively
 pressed the question of Jesus' sexuality. Nikos Kazantzakis and D.H.
 Lawrence have done so in literature. A particularly interesting inquiry
 is provided by a distinguished art historian, Leo Steinberg, in *The Sex-
 uality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*.²³ Steinberg
 observes that for a millennium of Christian history Jesus' sexuality was
 disregarded by theology and art, which focused virtually all attention
 on his divinity. Then came the Renaissance and the rediscovery of the
 glories of humanity.

Now devout Christian painters from Flanders to Florence removed
 the drapery from the figure of Jesus and purposely exposed his genitals.

In many hundreds of pious religious works, from before 1400 to
 past the mid-16th century, the ostensive unveiling of the Child's
 sex, or the touching, protecting or presentation of it, is the main
 action. . . . And the emphasis recurs in images of the dead Christ, or
 of the mystical Man of Sorrows. . . . All of which has been tactfully
 overlooked for half a millennium.²⁴

In the great cathedrals hung paintings of the Holy Family in which Mary
 herself deliberately spreads the infant's thighs so that the pious might
 gaze at his genitals in wonder. In other paintings the Magi are depicted
 gazing intently at Jesus' uncovered loins as if expecting revelation. In
 still others Jesus' genitals are being touched and fondled by his mother,
 by St. Anne, and by himself. So also in the paintings of the passion and
 crucifixion, the adult Jesus is depicted as thoroughly sexual. In some, his
 hand cups his genitals in death. In others the loincloth of the suffering
 Christ is protruding with an unmistakable erection.

Steinberg gives several interpretations of this Renaissance art. For one thing, it proved to the believer that Jesus' chastity was real and valid. Sexual abstinence without potency is an empty lesson. Abstinence is meaningful only if it is in combination with a vigorous sexuality. "Virginity, after all, constitutes a victory over concupiscence only where the susceptibility to its power is at least possible."²⁵ Further, the shamelessness of exposing the infant Jesus' genitals for the admiration of others points back to our original innocence and points forward to our redemption from sin and shame, as the incarnation promises. His open adult sexuality depicted in the passion art promises our redemption.

Delivered from sin and shame, the freedom of Christ's sexual member bespeaks that aboriginal innocence which in Adam was lost. We may say that Michelangelo's naked Christs — on the cross, dead, or risen — are, like the naked Christ Child, not shameful, but literally and profoundly "shame-less."²⁶

And, most fundamentally, the focus on the bodily sexuality of Jesus demonstrated the thoroughness, the completeness of the incarnation, God's choice to embody divinity in humanity. "Therefore, to profess that God once embodied [God]self in human nature is to confess that the eternal, there and then, became mortal and sexual. Thus understood, the evidence of Christ's sexual member serves as the pledge of God's humankind."²⁷

We have long known how deeply the Renaissance was committed to the goodness and beauty of the human body. Now we know how radically incarnational its theology was, at least as depicted through the world of art. A half millennium has elapsed since the Renaissance artists made their bold statements about the Christ's sexuality, and most people have chosen not to notice the obvious in their art. Such is the "modern oblivion" about the issue. We continue in that oblivion to our profound deprivation.

Nevertheless, the affirmation of Jesus' sexuality raises difficult problems of another sort, precisely because he was male. The maleness of that one believed to be Christ has been used in countless ways as an instrument of patriarchal oppression. It has been used to "prove" the maleness of God, to outlaw women from ministry, to keep men in control. I agree fully with the protest against this oppressive theological misuse of Jesus' maleness, and I stand with those feminist women and men who despair over the church's tortured slowness in being redeemed on this matter. The central issue at stake is not Jesus' maleness but his *humanity*, to which his full human sexuality is crucial testimony. Indeed, Jesus' life, teachings, and the circumstances of his death all were remarkable protests against patriarchy.²⁸

My concern at this point is to help men deal creatively with the ways are manifold, and there are only a few of them. I am concerned with the power of relational power — a power that is also an invitation to a full presence in his power, and

Jesus stands as central to the Renaissance artists saw in the phallus and penis, and "profoundly shame-less." Jesus taught the spirituality of the phallus, which is evident from the Gospel. Jesus' sexual-spiritual hope and

For human beings Jesus' ways that far transcend the cultural age and culture than the Christ might well have been and he was male. This does not certify as normative human sexuality also happen to be male cannot be authentic masculinity for the symbolism of Jesus' genital sexuality by Renaissance artists. I see the wholeness, of creative masculinity from both oppressiveness and are Christian also find in their own female sexuality and Jesus embodies a sexual-spiritual understandings of androgyny.

I have argued that the notion of "combinationist" assumption of line traits and a fixed notion of contention that these functions be combined in any one in which I see several problems with the claim that we are called upon to be different from the one that sees the combinationist problem (in which I see an underlying dualism). I believe that the two sets of functions, each other, the assumption

of this Renaissance art. For one, Jesus' chastity was real and valid. An empty lesson. Abstinence is not with a vigorous sexuality. "Virtue is only where the sinner is." Further, the shamelessness for the admiration of others points forward to our redemption promises. His open adult life promises our redemption.

dom of Christ's sexual memory which in Adam was lost. We find it — on the cross, dead, or alive, not shameful, but literally

the bodily sexuality of Jesus. The completeness of the incarnation, the humanity. "Therefore, to profess the human nature is to confess that Jesus is male and sexual. Thus understood, Jesus serves as the pledge of God's

Renaissance was committed to the body. Now we know how radical at least as depicted through the art since the Renaissance artists celebrated Jesus' sexuality, and most people admired their art. Such is the "modern" that oblivion to our profound

sexuality raises difficult problems as male. The maleness of that is countless ways as an instrument used to "prove" the maleness to keep men in control. I agree with the theological misuse of Jesus' women and men who despair of being redeemed on this matter. Jesus but his *humanity*, to which we cling. Indeed, Jesus' life, teaching, all were remarkable protests

My concern at this point, however, is a different one: How can Jesus help men deal creatively with their own male sexuality? I believe that the ways are manifold, and what I have tried to suggest in this chapter are only a few of them. He stands as teacher, embodiment, and releaser of relational power — a judgment on our phallic unilateral power, but also an invitation to a full-bodied life-giving mutuality. His sexuality was present in his power, and his power was present in his healing sexuality.

Jesus stands as central symbol of the sexuality-spirituality dialectic. Renaissance artists saw in him the full and unified genitality of both phallus and penis, and portrayed him (to repeat Steinberg's words) "profoundly shame-less." Correspondingly, he strikingly embodied and taught the spirituality of both the Via Positiva and the Via Negativa, as is evident from the Gospel accounts. He stands for us as symbol of our sexual-spiritual hope and possibility.

For human beings Jesus stands as clue to our authentic humanity in ways that far transcend the categories of sex and gender. In a less patriarchal age and culture than his, the person recognized as the paradigmatic Christ might well have been female. Yet Jesus was a first-century Jew, and he was male. This does not mean that through him maleness was certified as normative humanity. It does mean, however, that we who also happen to be male can find clues in him toward a richer and more authentic masculinity for ourselves. As a male I see this in the symbolism of Jesus' genital sexuality and the phallus-penis dialectic portrayed by Renaissance artists. I see in Jesus a compelling picture of male sexual wholeness, of creative masculinity, and of the redemption of manhood from both oppressiveness and superficiality. Yet countless women who are Christian also find in Jesus the intimate connection between their own female sexuality and spirituality. I suspect this is the case because Jesus embodies a sexual-spiritual reality that moves beyond our current understandings of androgyny.

I have argued that the notion of androgyny typically operates with a "combinationist" assumption. It begins with a fixed notion of masculine traits and a fixed notion of feminine traits. Then it moves to the contention that these fundamentally different qualities can and should be combined in any one individual regardless of biological sex. We have seen several problems with this concept. One of the major ones is the claim that we are called upon to develop a side of our personalities different from the one that seems rooted in our own particular bodies. The combinationist problem (in whatever form it occurs) is always grounded in an underlying dualism. Regarding androgyny, the dualism lies in the belief that the two sets of gender qualities are *essentially* different from each other, the assumption that authentic masculinity and authentic fem-

inity are mutual opposites. From this assumption it follows that, in developing "the feminine" in himself, a man will add a different "something" on to that which is essentially himself. For example, he must acquire vulnerability and receptivity, qualities supposedly not natural to one with a male organ; to one equipped biologically to penetrate rather than to receive. I have suggested that men have encouraged this gender dualism through a one-sided definition of the masculine, a definition that magnifies the meanings of the phallus and neglects the reality of the penis.

Now the connection to be named is that between Christology and these gender issues. Like our struggle in recent decades to understand gender issues through the concept of androgyny, the Christological concepts that have dominated the centuries of Christian thought and piety have also been combinationist and dualistic. They have largely maintained that divinity and humanity are two essentially opposite realities somehow brought into perfect combination in one unique person. And when that occurred in Jesus it was a miracle and was not to be repeated.

But at least two major problems resulted from these prevailing Christologies. First, divinity dominated humanity to the point that Jesus' humanity became an illusion. Countless Christians believed that Jesus Christ was actually God disguised as a human being. It was the Superman/Clark Kent image. Jesus was the celestial visitor from outer space who lived for a time on earth disguised as one of us, did feats of superhuman power, and then returned to his glorious home in the skies.²⁹

The second problem stemmed from the first. The ordinary believer found it difficult to understand and internalize such a meaning. Since this Christ event was defined by the church as unique, by definition it was also out of the range of daily human experience. It was utterly removed from the humanity people knew to be their own. Hence, the Christic miracle became a formula, to be accepted by faith and mediated by churchly sacraments for the believer's salvation.

Both of these Christological problems have significant connections to the gender issues before us. The divinity that seemed to dominate and squeeze out Jesus' humanity was largely a phallic definition of the divine. It was an understanding of God's power that was heavily unilateral and one-directional. It was a zero-sum perception that magnified divine power at the expense of human power. Suspicious of the relational mutuality of a human Jesus and a divine God, tradition perceived both power and love as one-way streets. So also the masculine side of the androgyny formula has been equally phallic and one-sided. Just as divine and human were seen as opposites, likewise the masculine qualities and the feminine.

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I believe that Jesu . . . different from other . . . the Christic reality (. . . His self-understanding . . . did not aim to control . . . release and share it amo . . . having two natures, one . . . Rather, he possessed the . . . and fully open in mutua . . . that even John's Gospel, . . . Christ, maintains that al . . . message of the presence o . . . and daughters of God. T . . . truly divine are, indeed, c . . . God we embrace that wh . . . but that which makes us

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assumption it follows that, in order to add a different "something," he must be something supposedly not natural to himself. For example, he must be something supposedly not natural to himself. For example, he must be something supposedly not natural to himself. For example, he must be something supposedly not natural to himself.

at between Christology and the last cent decades to understand androgyny, the Christological con- Christian thought and piety. They have largely maintained essentially opposite realities in one unique person. And this and was not to be repeated. Isolated from these prevailing understandings of humanity to the point that less Christians believed that Jesus was a human being. It was the celestial visitor from outer space who, as one of us, did feats of power to his glorious home in the

first. The ordinary believer cannot realize such a meaning. Since Jesus is as unique, by definition, as his experience. It was utterly impossible to be their own. Hence, the faith accepted by faith and mediated revelation.

the significant connections to Christ that seemed to dominate and the phallic definition of the divine that was heavily unilateral. The option that magnified divine qualities of the relational mutilation perceived both power and the masculine side of the androgyny. Just as divine and human qualities and the feminine.

The Christological formula became abstract and confusing because it was removed from ordinary human experience. The same has been true with the androgyny formula. When a man is called to develop "his feminine side" but at the same time has been taught that this feminine side is foreign to his own male bodily experience — defined as phallus — a man finds himself striving to develop qualities that seem strange to his own biological sexuality. Some sort of miracle seems necessary if the two opposites are to be combined.

But what if the realities — both Christological and sexual — are significantly different from these accepted formulas? What if the connections are essentially more intimate than we have supposed? How might that look?

I believe that Jesus did not understand himself to be ontologically different from other human beings. Nor did he intend to monopolize the Christic reality (the intimate communion of divine and human). His self-understanding and his mission were precisely the opposite. He did not aim to control and hoard the Christic possibility, but rather to release and share it among and with everyone. His uniqueness lay not in having two natures, one divine and one human, miraculously combined. Rather, he possessed the same human nature we all have, but remarkably and fully open in mutuality with God's loving power. We might recall that even John's Gospel, which contains an exalted view of Jesus as the Christ, maintains that all who believe in him (all who are open to his message of the presence of God) are given the power to become the sons and daughters of God. The authentically human and the presence of the truly divine are, indeed, closer than we had imagined. When we embrace God we embrace that which is not foreign to our own human essence but that which makes us more truly human.

The same principle holds for our sexuality. Women are tracing for themselves the meanings of the richly conjunctive sexual-spiritual reality in Christ. No man can do that for women, nor should he try. We who are male have plenty to do for ourselves in this regard. But now the connections seem to be clearer than before.

Jesus remains the paradigmatic Christ-bearer of Christian faith and life. He embodied the divine-human communion with a fullness that awes, compels, judges, challenges, comforts, and attracts us. He is also the Christ-bearer, the one who lays bare and open that Christic possibility for us all.

And now it seems clearer that this Christic possibility is intimately connected with our sexual wholeness. What is it to be a man? To be fully masculine is one of the two ways given to humanity of being fully human. To be fully masculine does not mean embracing something of

gender foreignness, strange to our own male bodily experience. Rather, it means embracing the fullness of the revelation that comes through our male bodies. There is good phallic energy in us which we can claim and celebrate. It is the earthy phallus: deep, moist, and sensuous, primitive and powerful. The phallic energy in us is also solar: penetrating, thrusting, achieving, and with the desire for self-transcendence. Equally important *and equally male*, there is good penile energy in us. It is soft, vulnerable, and receptive. It is a peaceful power. It knows that size is not merely quantitative; more truly it is that strength of mutuality which can be enriched by other life without losing its own center.

The orgasmic sexual experience brings its own revelation. The hard and explosive phallic achievement becomes in an instant the soft, vulnerable tears of the penis. Both are fully male. Both are deeply grounded in a man's bodily reality. Both dimensions of life are fully present when a man is most human. And to be fully human is to know the Christ — not as supernatural invader but as that reality truest to our own natures, and as that reality which intimately connects us with everyone and everything else.

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