

adapt to the reality experienced by most people living active sex lives today has brought into question the whole teaching authority of the Church across the breadth of Christian beliefs and practices. It is therefore worth considering this matter in some detail.

As far as my research for this book has been able to determine, the Catholic Church's traditional teaching on sex derives from a standpoint of philosophy, rather than from revelation or from a strictly theological perspective, and is coloured by an asceticism that acknowledges no inherent benefit in pleasure. According to this asceticism, all pleasure is there for a purpose, to ensure the bringing about of an end that would otherwise not occur. The only justification for pleasure in this view is the fulfilment of the purpose it is supposed to effect. Thus, people have pleasure in eating in order to ensure that their bodies are nourished. It could be questioned whether they would starve themselves if eating were not a pleasure. Despite that, it is difficult to see how pleasure could not be inherent in the act of eating, especially for the undernourished and for growing children. Of course the pleasure does not incline everyone to eat only food of appropriate nourishment and sufficient but not excessive quantity.

Pleasure, according to the Church's apparent view as presented by ecclesiastic authorities, merely ensures that a divine purpose is fulfilled. The Church presumably sees no value in pleasure as something beneficial in itself that can help human beings live better and more satisfying lives or even as an aid in maintaining sanity in the face of the stresses most people experience.

In the Church's traditional teaching, the principal purpose of sex, the sexual joining of a man and a woman, is the propagation of the human race. Furthermore, the Church regarded that end alone as necessitating the joining of the sexes. Despite more recent acknowledgment that sexual intercourse also has affective and bonding significance for couples, the Church still seems to imply that

any essential benefit to the two partners apart from conception could be achieved by other means. Following this line of reasoning, the Church has concluded that each and every act of sexual intercourse must be open to the primary purpose of conception, despite the fact that conception will not be a real possibility during a large proportion of most couples' active sex lives. It also begs the question as to why sexual appetite should remain long after fertility has ceased. Apart from partial or total abstinence, the church hierarchy does not approve any use of human ingenuity in sexual relations calculated to space out and/or limit the number of children conceived.

The Church now acknowledges two functions in sexual relations, the unitive function and the procreation function, as already mentioned. It is arbitrary, however, to maintain that men and women may never separate these functions. Nature itself ensures that the procreative function is not operative during most of the menstrual cycle and not at all after menopause, and the rhythm method of fertility control, which the Church approves, deliberately sets out to exploit the separation.

Church authorities have become locked into a quite mechanical assessment of sexual intercourse, which at times seems to be at odds even with the key purpose, the possibility of which they claim is mandatory on all occasions. One may wonder whether that is because the men (it is only men) who formulated the teaching are also charged to be celibate. Although, superficially, it may be thought that celibacy could produce objectivity, as celibate clergy have no vested interest in this matter, it would seem more likely to pose a barrier to understanding. A person who takes a vow in good faith to remain celibate cannot engage in sexual activity without breaching the vow and incurring guilt in doing so. He or she cannot even mentally entertain such activity without at least entering what the Church calls an occasion of sin. Sex under these circumstances becomes something to be fought against. That is quite at odds with