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the joyful experience of men and women living a loving, sexually active life together. They will experience anticipation of their physical union, prolonged enjoyment through restraint in meeting each other's mood and timing, and feel joy in each other for some time after intimacy. Unfortunately, not all couples maintain the experience of such intimacy.

It is difficult to see how those voluntarily committed to celibacy could achieve the same understanding as a couple living together of the meaning of sexual activity in human life. Of course, it cannot be denied that celibacy can bring other advantages or that there may be benefits in the Church having some celibate clergy.

An example of how the Church has allowed itself to become locked into a mechanical and seemingly contradictory position on sex can be seen from the implications of the 'Ethical and Religious Dictates for Catholic Health Care Services' issued by the National Conference of Bishops (USA) in November 1994. It states,

41. Homologous fertilization (that is, any technique used to achieve conception by use of gametes of the two spouses joined in marriage) is prohibited when it separates procreation from the marital act in its unitive significance (e.g. any technique used to achieve extra-corporal conception).

Thus, in cases in which there is difficulty in getting sperm to penetrate beyond the cervix, it is said that the directive would permit the use of a condom, provided it had a hole to enable some ejaculate to escape during intercourse and possibly lead to fertilization. The whole reason for the condom in such cases is to trap the ejaculate so that it may subsequently be injected to achieve conception. A hole, therefore, would hardly facilitate accomplishment of the primary purpose as enunciated by the Church. Furthermore, it would seem incongruous for a group of bishops to sit down and formulate a detailed dictate to this effect.

A newspaper reported another odd application of this teaching that includes a ban on contraception. Although evidence has not been found to verify the story, nor has a refutation of it been discovered, even though the story has had wide circulation. European missionary nuns, in danger of being raped during conflict in an African country, are said to have requested permission to take the contraceptive pill to guard against becoming pregnant. The local bishop is said to have denied their request on the grounds that it was against the Church's teaching to artificially interfere with conception. One can only wonder at the bishop's reasoning and at why the nuns felt any need to seek his permission.

The Church's position on contraception may have made sense at an earlier time. Then, for instance, infant and child mortality was high; the requirements of formal education for children were negligible or non-existent; the labour of children was most useful or even necessary for family support; and there seemed to be no limit to the number of people the earth could accommodate. It makes little or no sense now. Population growth threatens the capacity of the earth to support the number of people who will shortly inhabit the planet. Childhood labour is generally and appropriately outlawed, at least in developed countries. Adequate education for living in the contemporary world can take until a child turns eighteen years or much older. The expectation of life at birth is considerably over seventy years. Furthermore, couples in the child-bearing ages tend to ignore the hierarchy's teaching in the interests of their marital stability, their obligations to existing children and their capacity to fulfil demands on them as individuals, parents, workers and citizens. For some couples, the teaching causes stress, unhappiness and/or financial hardship. For some it can occasion marital breakdown.

The reality for young couples in many countries today entails twenty years or much more of responsibility for the education and