

*Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought.* A Study Commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America. New York: Paulist, 1977. 322 pp. \$8.50.

This volume is the fruit of a study by the Committee on the Study of Human Sexuality which was commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America. The Board of the Society voted to "receive" and arrange for its publication, but by this action it implied neither the approval nor disapproval by the Society or its Board of Directors. The procedure is intended as a service to the Society's members and other interested persons.

The report is well planned and executed. The first section deals with "The Bible and Human Sexuality," the second with "Christian Tradition and Human Sexuality," the third with "The Empirical Sciences and Human Sexuality," the fourth with "Toward a Theology of Human Sexuality," and the last with "Pastoral Guidelines for Human Sexuality." All the parts of the study contribute to the last section. As the committee says, "It is this moral and pastoral perspective that has determined the principal focus of our work" (p. 240).

While the conclusions of the report are not radical in comparison with what writers in general say today, they must surely be considered such with reference to the Catholic context. While individual Catholic writers have deviated in various ways from the normative Catholic position, this is the first time that a Committee of such an important society has deviated in so wide-ranging a manner from the official position. The report differs from the official position not only regarding contraception, but also concerning sterilization, artificial insemination, child-free marriage, masturbation, and homosexuality. The basic criterion used to evaluate how a Catholic should relate to these is whether they foster creative growth toward integration. The focus is on the personal and interpersonal values rather than on the act itself.

While various views on each issue are presented objectively and answers are not simply "yes" or "no" but always based on the criterion mentioned above, what is significant is that the report does not find the more liberal position regarding these issues incompatible with the criterion. Thus, the report allows the responsible use of artificial contraception, sterilization, and artificial insemination (including by donor). It expresses caution in the use of the intrauterine device and morning-after pill because of questions concerning their relation to abortion. A child-free marriage can be responsible, and common law marriage especially for the elderly can be creative and integrative. While rejecting the extreme views that homosexual acts are intrinsically evil or that they are essentially good and natural, the report allows for the position that while such are wrong they may be the lesser of two evils. This would be the case where fidelity to one partner obtains in a mature homosexual relationship and when sexual acts are judged in terms of relational values. Regarding masturbation, the report concludes, "To condemn every act of masturbation harshly as mortal sin or to dismiss it lightly as of no moral consequence fails to do justice to the symptomatic nature of masturbation capable of many meanings" (p. 228). The underlying cause of such activity should be determined, since masturbation may only be a symptom, as in the case of compensatory or pathological masturbation. Masturbation for medical reasons, such as in obtaining semen for fertility

testing or for diagnosing certain venereal infections, is allowed as well as its use "to obtain reasonable relief from excessive sexual tension or to preserve fidelity" (p. 227). The report is sympathetic to adolescent masturbation but urges support and direction in fostering growth and interrelationship with others.

Perhaps what is most significant in this report is the approach or the criterion on which it bases its evaluation of the different sexual activities. The official Catholic position begins with natural law and fixed rules and laws emphasizing the act, whereas this report begins with personal values and interpersonal relationships. This leads to a radical difference in results. The former's position is predictably negative in regard to such possibilities as in-vitro fertilization, but the latter is more open. This openness is such a dominant feature of the report that even when it disapproves it does not condemn.

Another difference of approach is the weight that this report gives to the findings of the empirical sciences which the official Catholic position neglects. These two factors, the criterion and the regard for findings of the empirical sciences, are the cause for the significant differences in the two positions.

The conservatives in the church will be disconcerted with the openness and the advanced positions taken in this book. While the report was not approved by the Society, the fact that it arranged for its publication would surely bring it into contention with the hierarchy. It is an important theological society, and while the committee is careful in stating that they see their "efforts as contributing not to dissent but rather development of Church teaching" (p. 240), their involvement with the report will surely be considered as dissent by the hierarchy.

Unfortunately, the report does not deal with other aspects of human sexuality, such as divorce, abortion, or genetic engineering.

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Keel, Othmar, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst: Eine neue Deutung der Majestätsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 und 10 und Sach 4*. Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 84/85. Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977. 410 pp. 257 figs. 5 pls. DM 134.—

The greatest value of this book does not lie in the number of new ideas advocated, but in the full presentation of all pertinent material which sheds light on the subjects under discussion. The author not only takes into account the views and findings of previous commentators on these subjects but has collected a tremendous amount of comparative material from the ancient Near East to support his views. The 257 line drawings, of which two thirds were made by the author's wife Hildi Leu, enhance the value of the book, since it allows the reader to check the author's reasonings, arguments, and claims without having to engage in a time-consuming search for publications where pictures of certain discussed objects or monuments may be found. Authors dealing with biblical subjects can learn on this point from Keel, who together with his publisher deserves our gratitude.

The book is concerned with four subject matters of which the first one,