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Hate the Sin But Love the Sinner. Sin? What Sin??

John F. Russell, J.D.

(This is a greatly abbreviated adaptation from a chapter in Dr. Russell's current book-length manuscript on the homosexual issue in all the major religious denominations in the United States. In gathering material for the book, Dr. Russell, who has been a professional scholar on organized homosexual activities for over two decades, has interviewed literally hundreds of religious and lay officials of all denominations along with numerous gay activists. In addition, he has researched well over 10,000 articles, publications, and news items on the subject. The material presented here barely penetrates even this single aspect of the multifaceted scope of the total problem realized by the religious and lay communities, homosexual and heterosexual alike.)

The present article reflects some points in the views of at least a score of individuals, most of whom are taking a position opposed to church tradition and teaching on the issue of homosexuality. The points expressed in this short presentation might be considered as headnotes since they merely open the doors to the considerable in-depth thoughts and studies of the individuals concerned. Moreover, it is well to keep in mind that this article has not exhausted the list of Catholic

theologians and others who have expressed their scholarly and otherwise knowledgeable views on the matter and the impact that the various avenues of approach will have on church, society, and especially the individual.)

The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* describes the homosexual act as a "grave transgression of the divine will."

Right?

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, speaking through its *Principles to Guide Confessors in Questions of Homosexuality*, says that homosexual practices are a "grave violation of the law of God."

Right?

And the most recent expression by the Roman Catholic Church on the subject, the "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics," tells the faithful that "no pastoral method can be employed which would give moral justification to these acts" [i.e., homosexual genital acts].

Right?

Thus it would appear that the Catholic Church holds homosexual genital conduct to be serious sin, a grave violation of God's law. The point seems simple enough. No question.

Then why has Cardinal Krol,

Archbishop of Philadelphia, seen fit to say that today there are those who call themselves Catholic who are attempting to have accepted many things which are opposed to God's law, one of those things being the homosexual relationship and lifestyle?

Why has the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, speaking with the approval of Pope Paul VI, found it necessary to say that there are those who now judge indulgently, and even excuse completely, homosexual relations under some circumstances? This indulgence, said the Sacred Congregation, is in "opposition to the constant teaching of the Magisterium."

Why did Cardinal Medeiros, Archbishop of Boston, in his 1976 Lenten Pastoral, have to include the "justification of homosexual relations" as a modern idiom which has deformed the "delicacy with which Sacred Scripture draws its teaching about sexuality?"

What prompted Msgr. George A. Kelly¹ to write that:

"Catholic moral theology has fallen to such a low estate that opinions about homosexuality dispensed at the popular level frequently have little relationship to what the magisterium teaches. Because bishops seem unable to restore the required unity between the two, Catholic pastor and Catholic homosexual are readily confused, neither knowing what the Catholic faith essentially requires of them in the present climate of gay activism."²

What confusion? Who are these persons to whom Cardinal Krol directs his accusation? And who are those judging indulgently and excusing completely homosexual activity in a given situation?

Are they among the highly vocal group of sincere Catholic religious and lay persons, some of whom hold seriously that the Catholic Church has for centuries misinterpreted the Scriptures regarding homosexuality? Are they those who charge, in effect, that the Catholic Church has long been in the forefront of those who have persecuted the homosexual without just cause or moral reason? Do they include those who look at history philosophically and ponder academically whether the Church is correct in all her theories on sex, whether in all cases the rigid standards of the Church apply?

One very outspoken priest is the Jesuit, Rev. John J. McNeill, an author and professor of moral theology at Woodstock College.³ One of McNeill's principal contentions, which he has held repeatedly, is that the sin for which God destroyed Sodom was not overt homosexual activity but, rather, *inhospitality*.⁴

"If there is any myth that lies at the very source of Western Christian society's condemnation and persecution of the homosexual, it is the myth of Sodom and Gomorrah. . . . Western society has assumed for centuries that it was clearly revealed in Scripture . . . that homosexuality is contrary to the will of God . . .

"As a result of this interpretation of Genesis a whole legal tradition sprang up which is still operative today. . . ."

The Church, he said, erred in her interpretation of the biblical circumstances which caused the destruction of the cities of the plains approximately 19 centuries before the birth of Christ. Because she erred and compounded the erroneous belief through her teaching and great influence down the centuries, McNeill saw the Catholic Church's attitude toward the homosexual as "another example of structural social injustice."

Fr. McNeill's position regarding the fall of Sodom has been severely criticized by Msgr. Kelly.

"While it is customary to dismiss these Old Testament legalisms as time-conditioned Jewish mores rather than divine moralisms, the early Christian Church itself did not look gently on homosexual practices, in part because these were expressions of late Graeco-Roman licentiousness, which among the upper classes included pederasty."⁵

Kelly emphasized that the "city of Sodom was destroyed because the sin of the Sodomites was homosexuality." This, he wrote, is the interpretation of Genesis 19 reached by the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, *The Jerusalem Bible*, and *Genesis* in the *Anchor Bible*.

As for the *seeming* denouncements against homosexuality by St. Paul in the New Testament, McNeill has claimed that Paul

understood homosexual practices as a "sign of alienation from God." In this light, according to the Jesuit, the saint was referring to homosexual activities in the same light as the Old Testament, that being idolatry. In McNeill's opinion, St. Paul was not aware of the distinction between the morally-neutral condition of homosexuality and the homosexual genital act. Moreover, it is McNeill's view that St. Paul failed to distinguish sharply between custom and nature. As a result, as McNeill sees it, Paul's pronouncements on homosexuality have been given a faulty interpretation, attributing to St. Paul a knowledge he did not possess.

Again Msgr. Kelly has taken strong issue with McNeill. The monsignor referred to the Swiss Protestant theologian, Klaus Bockmuhl, who has objected to the "reduction of theology to 'mere anthropology'" and who wrote that

"Anyone who looks at First Corinthians 6 without the prejudice that permits the fantastic exegetical somersaults we have been discussing will discover that in the New Testament the law is for the *good* of man. How can it then be compassionate to eliminate it?"

Fr. McNeill has been quoted as saying that perhaps the homosexual element of society can bring the heterosexual community to a greater understanding of themselves as persons. Given its freedom, he said, the homosexual community could help lead so-

ciety to a greater understanding of love between equal human beings.

On occasion the National Federation of Priests Councils has been concerned with the various facets of the subject of homosexuality. At its convention in Denver in March, 1972, the Federation passed a resolution which, according to one priest official, would strain church doctrine.⁶ The resolution proclaimed that the Catholic Church's concern for and ministry to the homosexual was, for all intents and purposes, non-existent in the United States. Moreover, charged the resolution, priests who work with and minister to homosexuals are stigmatized so severely that it serves to discourage other priests who would like to become involved in such ministry. Two years later, meeting in San Francisco, NFPC deplored the absence of a "contemporary theological investigation" on homosexuality.

Probably the most active Catholic order in matters relative to a ministry for the homosexual is the Salvatorians—the Society of the Divine Savior. Since late 1973 the Salvatorians have had a Gay Ministry Task Force headed by Brother Grant-Michael Fitzgerald. This Task Force has viewed the Bishops' *Guide* for confessors as being "at best inaccurate and insensitive; at its worst, . . . a misrepresentation of data and a cavalier disrespect for human lives and dignity."⁷ Moreover, the Task Force has asked,

"Does heterosexuality exhaust the possibilities of human sexual expression?"

The Salvatorian national ministry to the homosexual community, promoted through its Task Force, performs its work of *educating* priests, brothers, and nuns "into a full understanding of anti-gay fears" by lectures, mailings, workshops, and other methods of communication. The Task Force has issued theses on "homophobia," the myths of homosexuality, status of the Brian McNaught case,⁸ human nature and homosexuality, homosexuals in Sweden, male homosexuals and foster care, and male homosexuals in general. In addition, the Task Force developed a 40-page "guideline for extending a Christian ministry to homosexuals." The Salvatorians sought to have this guideline issued under the auspices of the NFPC but the Federation refused on the grounds that the document "lacked a theological rationale for departing from the traditional Catholic approach to gay people." Saying that the thrust of the paper was intended to be "solely pastoral" rather than theological, Brother Grant-Michael announced that the Salvatorians would distribute the document on their own. Msgr. Kelly, describing the publication as "equivalently condoning homosexuality," later wrote that issuance of the document by the Salvatorians was inexcusable.

Another outspoken priest is Rev. Henry Fehren," a diocesan

priest in rural Minnesota and a professor at Morehead College. Writing in the September, 1972 issue of *U. S. Catholic*, Fehren said that the church "has forced on many Christian homosexuals an uncalled for sense of shame."¹⁰ Like Fr. McNeill, Fehren charged that the church's unbending condemnation of homosexual acts as seriously immoral has been based on "misinterpretation of stray biblical texts written for another age and culture, and on a vague, unproved 'natural law.'" Recognizing that homosexuals, like heterosexuals, must exercise restraint under conditions harmful to either party to the sex act, Fehren held that homosexuals should otherwise be free, with no "judgment of moral guilt on our part," to satisfy his or her sex drive and appetite.

This approach would not appeal to the Rev. Christopher J. O'Toole, former superior general of the Holy Cross Fathers. Writing in an early 1973 issue of the *National Catholic Register*, Fr. O'Toole said that

"To say that a homosexual, in the full acceptance of the word, can continue his attitude and practice and, at the same time, remain a Catholic is a contradiction."¹¹

Fehren saw the church's policy towards homosexuality inextricably woven in with the

"fascination of celibate churchmen for legislating in detail sexual morality and their excessive zeal for condemning as mortal sin even slight sexual pleasure outside the procreative act . . ."

The homosexual, said Fr. Fehren, has found little help or comfort from his church. He is denied the "slightest sexual pleasure" and resents the "overly pious admonishment" to restrain himself by saying three *Hail Marys* each night.

Citing the Book of Wisdom to the effect that God loves the homosexual, Fehren wrote that accepting the divine command to love homosexuals includes accepting their lifestyle so that it is no longer "a love that dare not speak its name." Homosexual love, in Fehren's view, can be as "noble, beautiful and holy as heterosexual love."

Again, it isn't likely that Fr. O'Toole would agree. In his *National Catholic Register* article, O'Toole held that if the homosexual male or female had gone beyond the homosexual condition by participating in homosexual activities, "then it is a mockery to speak of maintaining this identity and, at the same time, remain an authentic Catholic."

Among the suggestions that Fr. Fehren had for priests called upon to counsel the homosexual who comes for "help, advice, direction and spiritual comfort" is to tell that homosexual to do his best to forgive heterosexuals "when they are stupid and intolerant about the way God has created you."

Gary Chamberlain, writing in the March-April, 1975 issue of *The Critic*,¹² severely criticized the Catholic Church for its "inhuman and inhumane treatment of the homosexual."¹³ He said

that the attitude of the Catholic heterosexual to fear and be anxious about the homosexual "pervert" has grown out of myths which "the Church helped perpetuate and is doing little to alleviate."

Fr. Tom Oddo, C.S.C., speaking at Stonehill College to the 1974 New England Clergy Institute on pastoral counselling, told his audience that while there are irresponsible homosexual relationships, just as there are irresponsible heterosexual relationships, there are also some gay relationships which are sacred.

"there are . . . life-styles within the gay community where a genuine and deep sense of love exists, and I feel that they are very beautiful and sacred."¹⁴

Rev. Paul Shanley, a diocesan priest in Boston, has wondered publicly whether Catholicism breeds the violent mentality that insists on beating up a "fag" as a service to God.¹⁵ Concerned with some of the things that have been done in the "name of Christ and patriotism," Shanley said that the persons of sexual orientation other than heterosexual are victims of "Christians in their mad dash for heaven."¹⁶

In 1973 Shanley said that a growing number of priests no longer are willing to accept the idea that homosexual activity is sinful and they are beginning to speak out in defense of gay people.

Fr. Shanley periodically conducts a continuing seminar on the

"Changing Norms of Sexuality." The seminar, which falls within Fr. Shanley's ministry, is conducted on the outskirts of Boston and is programmed to cover "the various social-psychological aspects of being homosexual, the major personal and social problems confronting alternate life styles, the community setting, and the general and specialized resources available for providing professional help."

One theory offered by some who criticize the traditional position of the Church on the issue of homosexuality looks at the cultures in their historical aspects and asks how the individuals relate to one another. Fr. Gregory Baum, O.S.A.,¹⁷ a professor at St. Michael's College in Toronto, noted that the traditional position of the Catholic Church has always been to reject homosexuality as an unnatural vice, notwithstanding that Jesus never spoke about the subject.¹⁸ Baum, speaking in light of historic cultures—"human nature in various cultures"—asked, "Are we certain that homosexuality in men and women is against nature?" This Augustinian priest suspects that the conventional arguments against homosexuality "were not so much based on a sound concept of nature as summoned forth by God's call, as on a refusal to take a look at the foundations of our culture."

The question, wrote Baum, is whether the homosexual orientation is such that it enables the

partners to grow in a strong mutual friendship and thus become "more truly human." Can the homosexual couple become so integrated in their lives that they manifest the humanism to which all mankind is summoned by God? This, says Fr. Baum, is the crucial question. If the homosexual can live that kind of life, then homosexual love "is not contrary to the human nature."

For those who are constitutively homosexual, and who allow for the necessary mutuality in their relationships, Baum argues that they should "acknowledge themselves as such before God, accept their sexual inclination as their calling, and explore the meaning of this inclination for the Christian life."

Fr. O'Toole, in his 1973 article, wrote,

"... any counseling which would indicate that the homosexual style of life, as such, is compatible with authentic Christianity is doing a grave disservice to the person concerned, as well as the Church and the entire Mystical Body of Christ."

Another priest, Fr. Peter E. Fink, S.J., has asked, "What mission does the Church have toward gay people?"¹⁹

Where homosexuals are concerned, Fink sees in the Catholic Church a "history of neglect and condemnation, a history which has scarred individuals mercilessly and has caused far too many to drift from the Church and her sacraments with the sense of being unwanted, and a history

which has not brought judgment against society at large for its injustice toward gay people, but rather has contributed its own share to that injustice."

The prime mission of the church to the homosexual, said this Jesuit priest, is to "help him love and accept himself, to teach him that God loves and accepts him in the way a sacramental Church must, by showing him that the human beings who form the Church and preach the Word do love and accept him as he is."

Fr. O'Toole wrote that it is legerdemain to suggest that the religious problem of homosexuals can be resolved by "integrating it into a Catholic way of life, so that one can continue the 'gay' style of life and, at the same time, rest comfortably in the arms of the Church."²⁰

In the late 1960's, Rev. Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., of Holland, a very controversial priest to say the least, was quoted as reportedly saying that "homosexuality is good for those who are not responsive to the opposite sex, because it thus at least makes it possible for them to experience sexual activity."²¹

Fr. O'Toole may have had this very point in mind when he said,

"... if anyone is to do a genuine service to homosexuals who wish to be Catholics in doctrine and morals, he should make every possible effort to put into clear focus the obvious reasons for the differences of sexes."²²

Can a particular homosexual liaison perhaps be such that under some circumstances, and for the emotional well-being of the individual, it ought to be accepted morally rather than risk the possible consequences of non-acceptance?

In 1968, Fr. Charles Curran, then teaching moral theology at Catholic University of America and currently a professor of theology at that institution, publicly introduced what has become known as his "theory of compromise." As a panel member at a seminar sponsored jointly by the Academy of Religion and Mental Health and the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States, Curran reportedly said that "homosexuality is not absolutely and always a very grave sin."²³ Further, he stated, still speaking of homosexuality, "It may be the only way such a person can find a warm, meaningful human relationship . . . It is a case where we may have to compromise with the ideal."

Eight years later, Fr. Curran discussed his theory of compromise with Richard Rashke, Washington (D. C.) correspondent for the *National Catholic Reporter*.²⁴ Under the theory, a particular action perceived in one sense as a social sin is viewed in a second sense as not being objectively wrong if it is the "only viable alternative for the individual."

Translated to the homosexual lifestyle, the theory of compromise under given circumstances compares a *permanent, stable ho-*

mosexual union somewhat favorably with heterosexual marriage. If the homosexual finds in his conscience that he cannot remain celibate, i.e., abstain from genital sexual activity, that there is absolutely no possibility of his entering into sexual relations with a woman (or, in the case of a lesbian, with a man), that it is highly undesirable to be promiscuous in matters of sex, and that there genuinely appears to be no possibility of reversing this sexual inclination, but that he or she, as the case may be, would desire a permanent relationship somewhat akin to heterosexual marriage, then it is not objectively wrong in the moral sense for the homosexual to settle into a *permanent* holy union with another homosexual of like intent.

Fr. John F. Harvey, O.S.F.S., author of the chapter on homosexuality in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* and one of the most knowledgeable, and compassionate, theologians on the subject of homosexuality, holds that before one can judge the homosexual from a moral viewpoint, three aspects must be examined. First, the *condition* of homosexuality must be distinguished from the homosexual genital act; the condition by itself is not sinful. Secondly, the objective morality of the homosexual act must be considered; it is morally wrong. And thirdly, the very important question that must be answered is whether the individual, who engaged in the homosexual act, did in fact act sinfully. Did he freely

consent to engage in a sinful act? Was he responsible for his actions? Fr. Harvey has said that in some instances the homosexual individual doesn't know whether he or she has actually given consent to effect the homosexual desires.

Msgr. Kelly, in considering whether the overt homosexual life-style can be considered a morally acceptable form of behavior, has been concerned with the blurring which has occasioned the distinction between moral theology and pastoral theology, the latter being a "shepherding" approach.²⁵

This blurring—a fuzziness—is, to Kelly, the direction in which a number of Catholic theologians are proceeding; a direction which has failed to distinguish between moral theology and shepherding. Quoting Fr. Harvey, the monsignor wrote:

"pastoral *ad hoc* solutions which ignore the objective immorality of homosexual acts would reduce our sexual ethics to personalistic shambles."

In the pastoral approach, wrote Kelly, the priest-counselor or confessor may decide that the homosexual is subjectively absolved and blameless, and thus encourage him to receive the Holy Eucharist; and the priest may lead the penitent "through the shoals of troubled waters" and recommend him to the mercy of God; but that priest cannot consent to the rightness of sodomy, regardless of organized pressure on him to do so.

Returning now to Curran's theory of compromise, some actions—oversimplified—are objectively wrong and the willing participant has erred or sinned subjectively. In other instances of the same type of action, while the act itself is still objectively wrong, the participant may not have freely engaged in the act, i.e., he or she may not have been morally responsible for the act, and thus would be subjectively blameless.

From those two instances, a third arises—the same action but in this case the act is not objectively wrong and the actor is not subjectively sinful. It is this third instance which reflects Fr. Curran's position on irreversible, i.e., "constitutional homosexuals."²⁶ To Father Curran, where the irreversible homosexual is concerned, the act itself is *not* objectively wrong and the homosexual, though participating intentionally and willingly, is *not* subjectively sinful in the act.

There should be no doubt whatsoever that the possibility of this third category poses a superhuman problem for the priest-confessor who seeks to determine whether the individual to whom he is ministering is indeed an irreversible homosexual. Has this person searched his conscience until he was utterly exhausted and found that genital relations with one of the opposite sex would be absolutely traumatic? Is sexual abstinence totally out of the question? Is there no possibility that

sexual reorientation might be effected? At what point in the priest's examination of the homosexual's life pattern and direction can the clergyman say to himself, "By the grace of God, I am satisfied beyond all reasonable doubt that this individual has searched all avenues that would lead him from the homosexual lifestyle, and that none was open to him. If his (or her) life is to be filled with a meaningful, constructive, and stable relationship, blessed by responsible love, it will be through the homosexual way since the celibate and heterosexual lifestyles are beyond reach and fully out of the question."

Some priests, heterosexual or homosexual, for one reason or another prefer not to be identified when they support the homosexual cause. The NFPC has referred to the severe reproach suffered by priests interested or performing in a ministry to the homosexual community. An example of desired anonymity was reflected in the recent series on homosexuality and the church by the *National Catholic Reporter*. In one of the articles in the series, an *anonymous heterosexual* priest was quoted as saying that he believes "homosexuality is good, a gift of God, something to be proud of, something sacred, something to rejoice in."²⁷

Brother William Modlin, C.S.C., reportedly told the Council on Religion and the Homosexual at its first national convention in New York City in 1971 that "The Catholic Church offers the

homosexual the choice between the hell of total continence and the hell of eternal damnation."²⁸ The Church, he said, was using the "pain of serious sin" as a way of trying to force complete sexual abstinence on several million persons.

The voices of protest are not all male. One of the most serious and concerned voices comes from Sister Jeannine Gramick, S.S.N.D., a chaplain and co-founder of the Baltimore chapter of Dignity. In her opinion, the sex of the beloved is immaterial; it really doesn't matter if the lovers are female/female, male/male, or male/female. "It's the quality of the relationship," she said, "that makes a difference, that makes the relationship a healthy one or a moral one."²⁹ The key word here is "quality." Sister Jeannine's standards for the quality of the relationship are very high and satisfaction of her standards would have to face the test of what she calls "responsible unselfish love." In her words,

"A responsible relationship is one which exhibits a consistent pattern of concern and consideration for the other person. It is honest, yet compassionate, challenging the other to root out human frailties, accepting with gratitude the challenges put forth by the other person. It is not jealous or possessive, but secure in the liberating love of the other and in the knowledge that this relationship is characterized by a special physical bond. It is a commitment to love, to cherish, to be sensitive to the needs and feelings of the other. It is a desire to grow human-

ly together, to share joys and hardships. It enables both persons to love God in a deeper way and to be generous in service to the community. Such a relationship is mutual and is properly expressed in a sexual and genital manner."

Dr. Herman Van De Spyker, Dutch theologian and sociologist, reportedly told an audience in Los Angeles in 1970 that St. Thomas Aquinas recognized that in some cases sexual relations between men were quite natural.³⁰ Msgr. Kelly would disagree completely with that assertion. In early 1975 he wrote that St. Thomas "held firm ideas on homosexuality."³¹ The saint viewed the sexual deviation as both unnatural and an abomination, one of the gravest of sins.

"Those foul offenses that are against nature should be everywhere and at all times detested and punished, such as were those people of Sodom, which should all nations commit, they should all stand guilty of the same crime, by the law of God which had not made man that they should so abuse one another."

In recent years, within most of the major religious denominations, there have arisen groups which are referred to as "gay caucuses." These organizations are primarily comprised of homosexuals of the particular faith but include in the membership heterosexuals who support the homosexual cause. The rolls include not only laypersons but clergy as well.

One such organization—and, by far, the most active—is called Dignity.

In an April, 1976 issue, the *National Catholic Reporter* referred to Dignity as a fishbone lodged in the throat of the Catholic Church in America. "The institution can't swallow it; and it just won't go away."³²

Dignity refers to itself as "an international organization of gay and concerned Catholics." According to its "Statement of Position and Purpose," Dignity is an organization dedicated to unite gay Catholics and promote the cause of the homosexual community in a responsible manner. This responsibility, the statement goes, is threefold: to the church, to society, and to the individual homosexual. Within this responsibility, Dignity is concerned with spiritual development, education, social involvement, and social events (including recreational). The organization's stated beliefs are:

" . . . that gay Catholics are members of Christ's mystical body, numbered among the people of God. We have an inherent dignity because God created us, Christ died for us, and the Holy Spirit sanctified us in Baptism, making us His Temple, and the channel through which the love of God might become visible. Because of this, it is our right, our privilege, and our duty to live the sacramental life of the Church, so that we might become more powerful instruments of God's love working among all people.

" . . . that gays can express their sexuality in a manner that is consonant with Christ's teaching. We believe that all sexuality should be exercised in an ethically responsible and unselfish way."

As of May, 1976, Dignity had 46 chapters in 22 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Canada. At that time, seven additional chapters were being formed, three of which were in Canada. In addition, Dignity had a chapter-at-large and a national prison ministry. Internationally related, the organization is affiliated with Acceptance (Australia), Quest (England), and Veritas (Sweden). Estimates of Dignity membership range as high as 5,000.

Although Dignity has hundreds of priests and nuns as chaplains throughout its various chapters, its current president is a Catholic layman, Paul Diederich of Boston. The national secretary, however, is a priest, Fr. Tom Oddo, C.S.C.

Dignity chooses to work within the Catholic Church but it has no official standing there.³³ At present, there is no professed desire on the part of Dignity leadership to have the organization taken under the structure of the Church. The leaders prefer to be in an independent position where Dignity, through various unhampered means, can influence the Church regarding her position and teaching on the matter of homosexuality.

Dignity seeks to promote the homosexual cause by various means of communication. It issues a monthly publication bearing the name of the organization, *Dignity*; that publication, multi-paged newsletter in form, is now in its seventh volume.

The publication contains a variety of articles and news items, some of which are regular to the format. There is usually an editorial, religious in nature, with subjects such as "Easter: Rebirth in Him" and "Yes: a Way of Life." Other items include poetry, prison ministry information and news, book reviews, feature articles, news events affecting Catholic gays, and news items from the chapters.

Dignity distributes articles, usually Catholic in nature, written by theologians and others in support of or favorable to the homosexual drive for acceptance in the churches. This has included writings by Fr. Gregory Baum,³⁴ Fr. Peter E. Fink, S.J.,³⁵ Fr. Henry Fehren,³⁶ Rev. Norman Pittenger,³⁷ Gary Chamberlain,³⁸ Sister Jeannine Gramick, S.S.N.D.,³⁹ Brian McNaught,⁴⁰ and Fr. John J. McNeill, S.J.⁴¹

Dignity feels that there is a change occurring in the Catholic Church, a change from the traditional condemnation of the homosexual to one of developing understanding of the gay person, his being, and needs. It has been the experience of gays, says Dignity, to be discouraged by their church. They have faced clergy who are ignorant about the subject of homosexuality and whose ignorance has been hidebound to church tradition. These are the "thou shalt not" clergy. But Dignity has seen hope for the Church by reason of a remarkable change in the clergy to manifest a growing and greater respect for the individual.

Condemnation is slowly being pushed aside as more and more priests are declaring themselves gay (albeit celibate), are speaking out against the historical shameful treatment of homosexuals, are writing about the subject, and are mingling with members of the homosexual community.

"And more and more the Gay Catholic is able to see the image of Christ in his priest. He knows more and more priests in whom he sees a Good Shepherd, one who serves, one who hungers and thirsts for social justice, one who doesn't hesitate to eat and drink with those whom society shuns, a father who loves his children."

At the annual meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, held in Washington, D. C. in November, 1975, Dignity presented a statement to the Bishops' Liaison Committee which, in turn, reported the statement to the full Bishops' conference.

What Dignity respectfully asked was that the Roman Catholic Church address herself to the plight of the Catholic homosexual, a plight that reflected isolation, loneliness, despair, and an eventual turning away from God. The Church, said Dignity, harbored an "unenlightened blanket condemnation," lacked compassion, and denied the sacraments where gay men and women were concerned.

Dignity asked further that the Church re-examine her position on homosexuality.

That was in November, 1975. The setting was the nation's capital. The meeting was the conference of the Catholic bishops in the United States.

Two months later, and without any direct connection to the requests made by Dignity of the American bishops, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, speaking with the concurrence of the Vatican, reiterated in a short summation the Catholic Church's continuing position on the matter of homosexual practices by declaring that, regardless of personal responsibility, "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of"—*neque unquam ullo modo approbari posse*.

Dignity reacted by saying that the declaration reflected a continuing "lack of appreciation for the broad range of human sexual expression among those who follow Christ and live responsible love."

Dignity viewed the declaration as doing "little more than repeat the traditional unenlightened condemnation of homosexual expression based on the presupposition that human sexuality is God-given and moral only in heterosexual marriage for the purpose of procreation."

The organization speaks of the "constitutional," i.e., irreversible, homosexual and maintains that constitutional homosexuality is a natural variation of mammalian sexual behavior. Constitutional homosexuality, says Dignity, "is

intrinsically good when it is expressed in an ethically responsible, unselfish, and Christian manner, as all sexuality must be."

To some, there is always the question of whether the individual who intends to continue living the homosexual lifestyle should be permitted to receive Holy Communion.

In 1973 a priest told a Dignity chapter meeting that the major factor which the modern priest, in his role as confessor, considers about the penitent is "the total orientation of this person's life." Is he trying his best to worship God and be of service to his fellow man? Does one aspect of his life, which might not conform with what is generally accepted as "normal," negate all other aspects of his life which strive for stability and the state of grace?

And what if that one aspect is his or her homosexuality? The priest told the group, primarily consisting of homosexuals, that the probability exists that for some persons the homosexual behavior "patterning" [sic] is so deep that it is just as normal and natural for that individual as heterosexual behavior is for those whose sexual attraction is to the opposite sex.

"If the gay person is striving for the happiness of others and trying to integrate his entire life, if he has this frustration with the Church (he is certainly aware that the Church is there and is certainly seeking the help of Christ in the Church) even if he is involved in selective promiscuity, as long as

that person is searching for a stable relationship and has as his goal the total good of the other person, then I would not refuse him the Sacrament nor absolution."

In this respect, the Bishops' *Guide* advises the priest-confessor that the overt homosexual cannot regularly receive the Holy Eucharist. This dictum is subject, of course, to questions of conscience and responsibility, but by and large the *Guide* presents the Church position applicable to the vast majority of cases.

Msgr. Kelly thought it strange that some priests would make so much ado over the point of homosexuals receiving communion. The monsignor sees no problem unless the one to receive communion continues to indulge himself in homosexual acts and lifestyle, "In that case," said Fr. Kelly, "he seeks privileges not accorded other violators of Catholic morals."

Obviously, the last word on this matter is yet to be heard. The most recent position statement by the Catholic Church on homosexuality is included in the "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics." But that part of the document which pertains specifically to homosexuality has been sorely criticized by clergy and laity alike for a vagueness that makes interpretation and understanding difficult and speculative. One particularly confusing view that can be assumed from the Declaration is that an individual who might well be a born homosexual—whose sexual tendency is the result of "some

kind of innate instinct"—is nonetheless personally responsible, presumably under pain of serious sin, not to effect his innate personality. There is something highly unreasonable about the direction of that philosophy.

Yet, what is the Church to do? Can she really change her traditional position on the morality of the homosexual act without having to revise her entire moral structure regarding all sexual practices. One affects the other. The Reverend Anthony G. Bosco, Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, reportedly said in 1966 that "once you divorce sex from procreation, we would have to justify homosexuality."⁴² If the Church accepts the homosexual act without moral stigma, is there really any substantial Church defense left that would prevent the chain reaction of the toppling dominoes on matters of sex outside marriage, sex intentionally non-procreative, and finally, abortion?

Is the forceful outspoken questioning of magisterium by church members—priests, nuns, brothers, laity—just a symptom of the times or is it a small sign of revolt in the Church that, if left unattended, will eventually spark the fuse to explode other issues regarding doctrine and authority, some quiet now and poised below the surface but also some seething?

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Catholic Problems at St. John's University in New York City. He is also Director of the Institute of Advanced Catholic Studies at that university.

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3. For a detailed critique of Fr. McNeill's position on homosexuality and homosexuals, see Fr. Harvey's article, "A Critique of John McNeill, S.J. and Gregory Baum, O.S.A.," elsewhere in this current issue of *Linacre*.

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6. "Catholic outreach?" *Advocate* (Los Angeles), April 12, 1972, pp. 1, 11.

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8. Brian McNaught was a columnist and staff writer for the *Michigan Catholic*, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Detroit. He has also been president of the Detroit chapter of Dignity. In July, 1974, his column was dropped; columns of three other writers for the paper had been dropped in June. McNaught claimed that his column had been discontinued because he had been publicly identified as a homosexual. The editor of the *Michigan Catholic*, Mrs. Margaret Cronyn, denied his assertion. The incident came to public attention when McNaught went on a publicized fast in September, 1974. He

ended his fast after he received a letter from Bishops Joseph Imesch and Thomas Gumbleton saying they would work in behalf of rooting out "structures and attitudes that discriminate against the homosexual as a person." McNaught then advised his editor that he would return to work on October 21, five weeks after his fast had started. But it was Mrs. Cronyn's view that McNaught's failure to come to work due to a self-inflicted illness, brought about by the fast, was in fact a termination of his employment with the paper. McNaught never regained his job with the *Michigan Catholic* although he took the matter to his union. He also took the case to the Archdiocese Office of Conciliation which, on January 9, 1975, dismissed his grievance charge as being without merit.

9. Fehren is said to be a pseudonym.

10. Fehren, Fr. Henry, "A Christian Response to Homosexuality," *Gay Community News* (Boston), November 9, 1974, pp. 8-10, cited as a reprint from *U. S. Catholic*, September, 1972. See also, "Priest hits Catholic oppression of Gays," *Advocate* (Los Angeles), November 8, 1972, p. 15.

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29. Rashke, "Dignity 'like a fishbone lodged in church's throat,'" *op. cit.*

30. "13th Century theologian knew some men must love men," *Advocate* (Los Angeles), August 5-18, 1970, p. 8.

31. Kelly, "The political struggle of active homosexuals to gain social acceptance," *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 14.

32. Rashke, "Dignity 'like a fishbone lodged in church's throat,'" *op. cit.*

33. The phrase "within the Catholic Church" may require some clarification. As an organization, Dignity is not subject to administrative or operating control by the Catholic Church. However, the persons who comprise the membership of Dignity are individually members of, and within, the Church. Although Dignity is not an officially chartered or approved organization of the Church, its efforts are directed to those who are in official positions within the Church hierarchy and it is Dignity's desire to work with them, yet independent of them. For example, Dignity has asked the United States Catholic Conference to appoint a committee to study the broad question of homosexuality and its implications. The committee, as suggested by Dignity, would be comprised of "theologians, social scientists and gay persons." The phrase "within the Catholic Church" should not be inferred to mean having a foot inside the door so that official recognition of Dignity as a church organization is a foregone conclusion. Whether Dignity will ever become an official or approved organi-

zation of the Catholic Church is quite speculative and highly dependent on many factors that would first need to be resolved.

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