



GAY CATHOLICS IN BRITAIN

THE STORY OF QUEST, 1973-83

by Michael Stephens



Foreword by REV MICHAEL HOLLINGS

A WORD ABOUT WORDS

Some readers are sure to object to the use of the word 'gay' as a synonym for 'homosexual' both in the title and the text of this booklet. Maybe they find, as an otherwise well-disposed priest does, that "the word grates". Or they may resent what Mr. Daniel Counihan, in the Catholic Herald, considered a "simple misuse of vocabulary": "a human condition which must be the cause of real pain and suffering to those afflicted with it ... should never be characterised as 'gay'."

Mr. Counihan was on surer ground in noting that "it is homosexuals, their publications and their organisations - including one called 'Gay Christian' - who have adopted the word to proclaim their particularity." For homosexual people, as they have emerged more assertively and self-confidently into the public life of the community in recent years, have sensibly rejected such pejorative labels as 'queer' or 'bent' and, initially in the U.S.A. (who knows originally when and how?), have adopted 'gay' as a preferable alternative. Like it or not, the usage - increasingly taken up by the communications media, and not any longer always excused by italics or quotation marks - is now widely established throughout the English-speaking world.

In any case, it is not necessarily inappropriate, even in its more conventional sense. A Finnish member of QUEST - the group whose story is told in these pages - wrote after taking part in its first annual residential conference: "During the memorable weekend I felt perfectly at home because English Gay Catholics seem to be such cheerful, encouraging and inspiring people."

Cheerful, encouraging, inspiring - gay, in fact. Let us keep it that way.

M.S.

GAY CATHOLICS IN BRITAIN

The human sciences have now substantiated virtually as fact that a small proportion (perhaps between 5-10%) of the population of any society at any time has, without individual choice, a sexual and erotic attraction towards people of the same sex.

The Roman Catholic Church, leading a general Christian tradition, pronounces any sexual activity between members of the same sex as 'intrinsically disordered' so that it 'may not be approved'.

This means that, to be virtuous, Catholic men and women who are homosexual must refrain from any sexual activity throughout their lives, in the way that all Christians refrain - if they can - from any other 'sin'. They are poised, as it were, 'twixt the Devil and the Holy See, in an inevitable tension between their active sexual drives and their religious aspirations.

The dilemma is real, but is it absolute? Is there any prospect of the Church drawing closer to the sciences in its understanding of the nature of humankind, and of re-interpreting its moral teaching in the light of fresh insights? Could not the experience of homosexual Catholics themselves contribute to these fresh insights? Would the Church listen, or continue only to judge?

This booklet provides a short account of some of the things that have happened since a handful of British Catholics started meeting together - ten years ago - to discuss questions like these.

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by Michael Stephens

(Chairman, 1975-8 and 1979-83)



FOREWORD

When I was ordained priest, I had little or no idea of the quite extraordinary variety of work which I might be asked to undertake, or of the demands in human and spiritual terms which would be made. The vicar-general who appointed me to go and work in Soho in 1950 said bluntly to me that he was sending me to Soho because I had been in the army so I would not be scandalised by the then open prostitution in the streets. He also said that, as many of the prostitutes were Italian, I would be able to talk to them in Italian since I had done my training in Rome!

I took to it as a duck takes to water, but having taken to the Soho pond I found that the denizens of the pond were of a greater mixture than I had contemplated: a whole range of people who were alienated, at odds with the Church and society, even on the run from the law. Here was a strangely mixed tapestry of men and women, created by God, for whom Jesus Christ came in his love. Yet so very often they were ignored, despised or rejected by those who claimed to be living and working for the Jesus who had come for the poor, to set captives at liberty and to preach the good news. And I was among them!

So I gradually came to be interested in and concerned about those who did not quite fit into the pattern of respectable church living. As a priest of the Catholic Church, I was deeply hurt by the kind of rejection suffered by those who had been divorced, those who were prostitutes, those who were cold-shouldered because of their race or religion, those who were 'outlawed' by the Church because they were homosexual.

It has always seemed to me that Jesus Christ was wonderfully positive in his approach to people. Always he was helping them forward, helping them into being more themselves, helping them to be accepted within society. But, and this interests me, he did not always succeed; and what he was trying to do often caused hostility.

The grouping of gay Catholics has been bound to be a difficult stumbling block for some other Catholics and for the clergy in general. And this is one of the reasons why I am so glad to be able to write a little piece for this booklet. From the beginning of their coming together in frustration to see what they could do to help and forward the situation of gay Catholics, the 'caucus' has grown. But from that caucus there has always been an atmosphere of integrity and level-headed leadership. They knew from the outset that there would be difficulty and opposition, condemnation and rejection, to say nothing of a widespread non-response and ignoring of their existence. Nevertheless, they have continued calmly and with considerable courage.

It is not easy to know how to conduct a campaign in such a way as to win not a victory but a recognition, an understanding and an acceptance. I think anyone who reads this honest assessment of ten years work should be moved by it and commend those who have been behind it. Until they came together, it was very difficult for Catholics who were homosexual to be in contact with others with a similar background, except by chance; and this focus has been a source of deep healing for a number of people I know. There is so much which is mysterious in God's creation, in his ways of gathering a pattern of love and service from every source. And so I hope that the publication of this history will be another step forward in the way of love of God, where those who do not understand or feel alienated will be able to accept the glorious if motley crowd which gets up and shuffles ahead when Jesus says: 'Take up your cross and follow me'.

MICHAEL HOLLINGS

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OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Early in the summer of 1973, a young Welsh Catholic in London who had been - inwardly and alone - agonising over the conflicting demands of his homosexual urges and the teaching of his church, plucked up the courage to consult a priest. At the local presbytery he was met by the curate, not many years out of the seminary. Talk was easy while tentative, until the main matter at issue was introduced. It quickly became plain that the priest was wholly unfamiliar with the subject and pastorally quite unprepared to guide and counsel any homosexual people. His eventual recourse to a textbook on ethics yielded no illumination, and the young man left in a mood of anger and frustration: anger that the Church, in its long training of priests, apparently left them ignorant of this particular aspect of human experience; and frustration because his summoned-up effort to talk openly with a priest had had no reward.

Still in this mood, he placed an advertisement in the personal column of Gay News, the fortnightly journal for homosexual readers: "Will any Catholic interested in meeting to discuss the Church's attitude to homosexuality please write to Box ..." With the publication of this notice, he unwittingly planted a seed whose sapling - ten years later - has established firm roots in the soil of Catholic Britain.

Seventeen replies were received, all but two of them from the London area (where Gay News was, in those days, much more easily obtainable than in other places), and all from men. On 6th November 1973, nine of the respondents assembled in London for the inaugural meeting of what the convenor chose at the time to call the Catholic Gay Caucus.

Four initial objectives had been proposed for the group in the convening letter, each suggested as the main topic for separate meetings:

1. Discussion within the group about the attitude of the Church towards homosexuality (personal views and problems etc.).
2. Education of the clergy by personal contact and correspondence.
3. Education of Catholic press (by letters under the group name, not allowing outbursts of 'anti-gay' to go unanswered).
4. Allowing clergy to use the group name as a means of publicising 'pro-gay' literature but who are afraid to put their own names for fear of recrimination.

The first topic proved an effective one for an opening meeting since, given the opportunity to talk about his own experience, each began to get to know something about the others. Prayers at the outset and a glass or two of wine as the evening progressed established that atmosphere of serious sociability which has marked the group's meetings ever since. And there was no reluctance when the meeting ended in agreeing a second one two weeks later.

Some time later it was decided, in pursuit of the second initial objective, that each person present should send - not as an individual but as a member of the group - a letter based on an agreed text to individual priests with whom they already had some contact, formal or informal. The intent was to negotiate conversations through which the experiences of the individual group members might be reviewed in the light of the priest's own training and pastoral work as a step towards more mutual understanding. The talks were also expected to secure from each priest some answer to these four specific questions: had the priest ever been approached for help and counsel by a homosexual Catholic and, if so, was this an occasional or a comparatively frequent event? what was the priest's personal understanding of the Church's moral teaching in relation to homosexuality? how would he counsel a homosexual Catholic to conduct his life? and lastly, had he discussed the pastoral care of homosexual people with other clergy and was it a matter that had been raised during his seminary training?

The group, which was soon to abandon the description 'caucus' and call itself the Gay Catholic Group, had now drawn up a programme both of periodic meetings together for discussion, and for individual action in the meantime. At this stage it made no deliberate effort to expand. A few newcomers were introduced and a few of the original respondents fell away, but for the first year or so it was at most a persisting ten or so members who were involved. Meetings were held informally in private homes in different parts of London at roughly monthly intervals. At some of these a priest or other concerned person was invited to initiate discussion. No records were kept, no structure was required. But a growing sense of purpose and of commitment to what came to be seen as substantial tasks ahead shaped the small band into a more and more self-accepting, mutually trusting team of faithful Catholics with a shared but substantial conviction that, where homosexual people were concerned, the Church had not yet got it all quite right.

In the autumn of 1974 a paper was prepared (with some hope of publication in the Catholic press) which reviewed the group's findings both in its own discussions and in the conversations with individual priests. For the purposes of record it seems appropriate to cite this document at some length.

It first referred to the divergence of pastoral opinion that had been revealed by a report in the Catholic Herald, under the headline 'Homosexuals need Compassion', of the views of one priest, and of the quite contrary views of another, published subsequently in its correspondence columns. This, the review commented:

particularly interested a group of homosexual Catholic laymen who have been meeting periodically in London to exchange views on the problems they have encountered because of the formal conflict that exists between the Church's moral teaching and their own uninvited disposition towards members of the same sex. The polarity between the view expressed by Fr. Hollings on the one hand and Fr. Whatmore on the other is well substantiated in the experience of this group, whose concern it is that, by the accident of 'clerical roulette', some homosexual Catholics today are being fostered within the arms of the Church while others are being thrust to its fringes, if not beyond.

At the outset of these meetings it became clear that, while each member of the group could name several other homosexual Catholics who had totally abandoned their religion on this one account, none of themselves had taken this decisive step - as yet. Neither, however, had any fully resolved the central problem: that of reconciling the practice of their religion and the practice of their sexuality. What seemed to them to be demanded by the Church, in principle, was a life of total sexual abstinence, and, in consequence, a life of incomplete and impoverished personal relationships. Thus, without either the vocation or the sacramental compensations of celibacy by vow, they were - they are - denied the full intimacies of shared and loving companionship that are, within the sacrament of marriage, blessed.

The partial resolutions of this problem were discovered within the group to take one of four main forms. Some, while still professing their faith and regularly attending Mass, had been so discouraged, by their experience in the confessional, from the sacrament of penance, that they had long been deprived of the spiritual benefits of Holy Communion. Others, from a similar experience, had habitually ignored the confessional and continued in conscience to receive Holy Communion. Others, again, had taken advantage of the opportunities for choice of church that city dwelling can provide, to go in for confessional 'shopping around' until they had gained the ear of a sympathetic priest ready, in the knowledge of their circumstances, to enable them to enjoy the benefits of Holy Communion without prejudice to their apparent natures.

And still others had settled for the performance of an annual ritual penance and Communion while otherwise withdrawing from religious practices.

While in essence the third of these 'solutions' seemed the most complete, it was evidently not accessible to all who might need it and seemed to be to a large extent vitiated by the element of chance involved. So it was decided that, as an immediate next stage in the group's sincere exploration towards a more generally satisfactory solution, the members would make individual approaches - outside the confessional - to priests known formally or personally to them ... A number of conversations have since been held with individual members of the clergy in the dioceses of Westminster, Southwark, Arundel & Brighton, and Portsmouth.

It can be reported, first, that rather more than half the priests approached made themselves, or one of their colleagues, readily and promptly available for the desired discussions; a quarter either ignored the approach altogether, or fended it off, at least for the time being, on grounds of their more immediate preoccupations; and the remainder made partial but positive responses by letter without these yet having led to face-to-face talks.

Common to the responses of all the priests interviewed was the welcome given to the initiative that had brought the group into being,... general support for its intentions, and offers of further help. This response appeared to have been prompted as much on account of the opportunity implied for serious dialogue between clergy and laity on a pastoral matter evidently not at all adequately confronted either in seminary training or in diocesan conference, as on account of the occasion presented for personal counselling and instruction. Few of the priests consulted seemed to have much understanding of the potential capacity of homosexual adults to achieve mature, stable, and indeed moral and Christian relationships - perhaps because they had been mainly confronted by penitents obliged to repudiate what they had been conditioned within the Church to regard as utterly sinful aspects of their natures. Thus they regard promiscuity as the predominant characteristic of homosexual practice, rightly condemning it, but without recognising that the apparent unacceptability of permanent homosexual relationships directly contributes to this condition of occasional (and often desperate) selfish sexual encounters. Similarly, pederasty is mistakenly regarded as a general characteristic of this type of sexuality, and the perversion of the young as its intrinsic concomitant.

Apart from the general welcome, for different reasons, given to the intentions of the group, there was very little else in common in the responses of priests encountered. Significant perhaps - though this could have been an accident of the inevitably random sampling - was the almost equal division between priests who see it as their function to press the moral teaching of the Church in absolute terms on all occasions, public and private, irrespective of person..., and those who, while acting similarly as public preachers, as private confessors interpret their function rather to mediate the relationship between the individual and God with far fuller regard to distinction of personality, character and experience ... Priests in the first category generally expect the homosexual Catholic to frustrate himself, while priests in the second are more ready to help him to refine his self-expressions.

These opposite emphases, under another aspect, seem to reflect a pre-occupation on the one hand with the eradication of absolute vice, and on the other with the cultivation of relative virtues. Thus a man who acknowledges acts of physical sexual intimacy with another man ... even though such acts are exclusive to one companionship of many years' duration, can in the Catholic Church today be the recipient of precisely the same admonition* as may be due to another who has

*Or a more severe one: some priests have insisted on an undertaking to break off any continuing relationship as a condition of absolution.

secured a fleeting and greedy orgasm with an anonymous stranger at a furtive rendezvous. On the other hand the same man can be advised, in the words of one priest approached by a member of the group that, 'according to Genesis, the earthly Paradise and the Grace of God were lost because man gave way to and acted on a combination of disloyalty, selfishness and greed; hence anything of that kind is to be avoided.' Thus, while in the former case, he is still obliged to deny an intrinsic part of himself, in the latter the same man can be taught to cultivate in himself the qualities of loyalty, unselfishness and generosity, and in conscience to judge whichever of his actions deflect him from such standards ...

Some contact had already been made with the Catholic Herald, and a copy of the Catholic Gay Group's review was made available to the paper. Early in January 1975, in a full double-column report on 'Pastoral care of homosexuals', Peter Nolan - one of the Herald's staff correspondents, later to become its editor - described "how the Christian Churches have begun to adopt a new and more compassionate approach to 'gay' individuals."

"It is a field of pastoral care," Nolan wrote, "which has up to now been publicly ignored by the Church, but many Christian Churches and some Catholic priests have recently begun to examine the problems of the homosexual man or woman in society." He referred to studies already published by the Society of Friends and the Unitarians in Britain, and by the Lutheran Bishops' Synod in Sweden; to the recent decision by the Church of England to set up a working party; and to the pastoral opinions of several Catholic priests, among them Fr. Fabian Cowper who was at the time Catholic chaplain to the University of York. "Fr. Fabian," Nolan reported, "is one of a number of priests who have addressed a group of 'gay' Catholics, formed after an advertisement was put in Gay News", and he went on to quote extensively from the group's review paper, and from its concluding paragraph which had explained that:

The Catholic Gay Group ... is only in the earliest stages of its exploration of the present predicament of the homosexual person within the Church. Its members have no wish to jump to conclusions on first impressions. Nor would they wish their fellow Catholics, clergy or laity, or anybody else, to jump to conclusions about them and their motives ... Therefore let it be emphasised unambiguously that, in setting out to investigate as thoroughly as they can the prospect of reconciling 'the practice of their religion and the practice of their sexuality', they would be prepared, if needs must, to sacrifice the latter to the former. But recognising that sexuality is an integral part of personality, and that God is Love, they are anxious to bring their distinctive capacities for loving to His service without impediment. This does not mean, however, that they subscribe to the idea of homosexuality as an alternative life-style, a form of personal relations available to anyone as a matter of open choice. It has certainly not been a matter of open choice for them; nor, if it had been, would they have preferred it. 'Gay' as a synonym for homosexual is an expression of hope rather than a statement of fact."

The Catholic Herald report made the group's existence and objectives publicly known for the first time. And the moment was apt. By the beginning of 1975 the members individually had developed, through their association, sufficient self-assurance as confessedly homosexual and Catholic people to be ready to move out of the shadows to which they had earlier felt themselves confined and into the open, to witness and offer support to others in the Church like themselves, who were as yet isolated and without help. They were now in contact, too, with a number of informed and sympathetic priests who were both willing and able, through this group, to make their good counsel more readily accessible to those in need of it. And their collective assessment of opinion within the Church, with their definition of their own stance, had cleared the ground for more positive action ahead. They felt equipped both to expand and to move forward.

NAME, ADDRESS AND NUMBER

By midsummer 1975 the group had registered just over fifty members, most of them still from the greater London area and all but one male. Private homes could no longer easily accommodate full meetings, and it was the group's good fortune that two of its newer members had recently moved into a basement flat in Bayswater. Until they had completed furnishing, their carpeted, floor-cushioned but otherwise largely bare living-room provided space for gatherings of twenty or thirty; and it was at one of these that Fr. Michael Hollings first talked with the group.

Fr. Hollings has already been referred to, though obliquely, as the more open-minded of the two priests whose contrary views had been reflected in the pages of the Catholic Herald. Earlier, in 1972, he had contributed to a series of booklets commissioned by the St. Thomas More Centre for Pastoral Liturgy, one concerning The pastoral care of homosexuals. The booklet carried an 'imprimatur', as had the earlier and more substantial study of Morality and the homosexual: a Catholic approach to a moral problem by Fr. Michael Buckley, published in 1959. In a foreword to Dr. Buckley's book, the Archbishop of Liverpool (the Most Rev. Dr. John Heenan) had remarked that, "it would be trite to call the appearance of this book timely since a pastoral guide to the treatment of the homosexual is so obviously urgent and indispensable." and he concluded that, "A careful reading of this book will enable the pastor of souls to co-operate more fully with the delicate operations of the Divine Physician". From that careful reading, the pastor will have learned from Dr. Buckley that:

Homosexuality is an unnatural condition, and the homosexual is generally in varying degrees responsible for its origin, and even more for its expressions in homosexual practices. But where there is responsibility there is also hope ... Religion and all it has to offer is one of the most effective factors in the homosexual's rehabilitation. The priest, no longer deterred by the false claim that homosexuality is essentially a medical or psychiatric problem, must enter the field and spread the trust. He must assist the homosexual to beg God's healing and elevating Grace so that he may take his rightful place in Christian society.

Ten years or so later, Fr. Hollings depicted for the Catholic pastor a far more challenging role than that of assisting the homosexual person "to beg":

The first and most fundamental thing is that you should accept each one as real and human and a person and likeable and lovable. Each will vary: there are those who arrive in tears and despair; those who are resolute not to fall into the same pattern again; those who brazen the whole thing out; and, more frequently today, the individuals who accept the situation quite calmly and are not upset, but see it as a way of life and believe in the mercy and love of God who has made them as they are. If you are to help, each one will need from you a real warmth, sympathy and understanding ... Blankness, hardness, shutting off and shutting out - these are disastrous ...

All too often, the severity of approach and the lack of hope of a pastor kills ... the possibility of spiritual growth, and drives the person, who wants a way out and has plucked up courage to ask for it, back whence he came."

In a concluding section of the booklet, "Where to turn for help", Fr. Hollings notes that:

There are also, as a comparatively new growth, a series of homosexual societies or organisations. The difficulty about these from the point of view of the priest counsellor is that they take for granted the homosexual state and by and large work

for the happiness and development of awareness among homosexuals, by, as it were, bringing them together within homosexuality, providing a friendly atmosphere, providing a meeting place, and so on. To suggest or recommend them would shock priests and heterosexual people generally, at least, I say this from my own background and my small knowledge. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that they do good in their own way, help to prevent suicide and despair, and in some cases provide a firm base from which either a stable relationship develops, or a constructive growth towards identity and even a heterosexual future.

In 1972, the homosexual societies to which Fr. Hollings referred were, in Britain, for the most part entirely secular, and to that extent perhaps rather more suspect to the clergy. But the following year, as if by a process of spontaneous spiritual combustion, saw the formation not only of the Catholic Gay Group, but also of the Friends Homosexual Fellowship, the Jewish Gay Group and the Methodist (later ecumenical, and now defunct) open church group. These groups added a new dimension to the scene, for they were concerned not so much with bringing homosexual people together "within homosexuality" as within the content of their own faith. And pastors like Fr. Hollings welcomed opportunities to meet with them to assess their motives and their credibility, and to offer them good counsel and practical help.

Across the road from the Bayswater flat where the Catholic Gay Group was meeting stands the Church of St. Mary of the Angels, well provided with several spacious parish rooms. Evidently encouraged by his encounter with the group, and aware - for the meeting at which he spoke had been very well attended - of its need for space, it was Fr. Hollings who persuaded a priest at St. Mary's, Fr. William Dempsey, to offer the group houseroom for future occasions. The two members of the parish invited this priest to the next gathering in their flat, and by May the parish rooms of St. Mary's had become the group's regular meeting place in London. The most immediate practical problem arising from its emergence and expansion had been graciously resolved.

It was with Fr. Dempsey, informally, that the prospect of obtaining notice for the group in the Westminster Diocesan Directory was first raised by one or two of its leading members. He was firmly of the opinion that, if this were ever to be achieved, some more generally acceptable title for the group would need to be found. A similar thought had occurred to members as far back as March 1974, when a letter sent to those absent from an early meeting had recorded that "there is a feeling that Catholic Gay Caucus may in some respects not be the best permanent name for the group and its public purposes." The later substitution of 'group' for 'caucus' had not been intended as a direct response on this point, and the topic had since been left in abeyance.

There is no clear recollection from those who took part in the discussion about re-naming the group, nor any minute of the event, to indicate at whose suggestion, and how, the eventual choice was made. But the first informational news-sheet, distributed to members in June 1975, records as its first item: "At the meeting held at St. Mary's on Sunday 11th May it was decided to change the name from 'Catholic Gay Group' to 'Quest': a group for Catholic homosexuals (Quest for short)." With its emphasis not so much on the composition of the group but on its pursuit, the title has well stood the test of time, and what may have seemed at the time to be almost a casual choice has proved to be something of an inspired one. The only change that was made almost at once was the substitution in the explanatory sub-title of 'homosexual Catholics' for 'Catholic homosexuals': "Adjectives qualify nouns", it was argued, and "we are Catholics who happen to be homosexual rather than homosexuals who happen to be Catholic".

The group now had both a name and - for its principal London meetings - an address; for postal communications and enquiries, the domestic address of its secretary was published wherever opportunity allowed. 'Secretary' - because during this period, with the

general approval of the members, a small central committee had been composed from amongst the founding, or very early members, under the chairmanship of the original convenor, to direct the group's development.

The membership continued to expand. The midsummer figure had doubled to a hundred by the autumn, and, although still very largely male and London-orientated, there were now members in such centres as Glasgow, Manchester, York, Nottingham, Birmingham, Brighton, Bath and Dublin and elsewhere; and the group had the ready support of a dozen or more priests. The main practical tasks for the committee, therefore, were to ensure that every member was kept in touch with news and information, and that, as far as possible, social opportunities were created so that they could meet together informally. Discussions with guest speakers at now regular monthly meetings at St. Mary's were central to the programme, but, although there were opportunities for informal talk over coffee afterwards, it was recognised that for many apprehensive and shy newcomers an initial plunge into a large and inevitably somewhat formal meeting was not the best introduction to QUEST and its opportunities. Members who had the facilities, therefore, were encouraged to be 'at home' to others whenever they could - a practice which had started more or less spontaneously some time before - and so to provide, additionally, a smaller and more sociable environment in which to welcome newcomers. Such events now occurred in different areas of London four or five times each month, and by the autumn the social part of these evenings was quite frequently preceded by the celebration of a house Mass, the celebrant normally making himself available for private consultation beforehand. In this way a number of members were helped to return - perhaps after years of withdrawal - to the sacraments, and to a fuller life within the Church.

Mention has already been made of the development of an informational news-sheet distributed to all members. Initially its function was to provide a calendar of future events, with a few items of other news incorporated. But as the events were still largely London-based, its appeal to members in other parts of the country was limited. Its potential, however, as an instrument for bringing even the most isolated member into some sort of contact with others was quickly apparent, and the second sheet - covering the two months of August and September - announced that, "Plans are in hand to produce a QUEST Newsletter which will not only carry the sort of local information included in this news-sheet but also other reading matter that it is hoped will be of interest and help to gay Catholics anywhere in the country (or abroad for that matter)". With a letterhead, specially designed by a member, across the top of its first page, issue number one of the Newsletter appeared towards the end of September 1975. Unsophisticated in form - a variable number of sheets typed, usually by the editor, and duplicated in quantity - it has been published bi-monthly ever since.

Even though the duplicating was usually achieved without charge, the paper and postage required for the Newsletter emphasised the need for some central funds, and an annual subscription was introduced, members outside the London area paying half the full rate. The resulting income also enabled QUEST to offer travelling expenses and a token fee to visiting speakers, and to meet other small administrative costs that were inevitably incurred as it developed its services to its members and its task within the Catholic community.

Now that it was responsible, among other things, for the stewardship of money contributed by the members, the committee - which had been set up somewhat informally with the sanction of only those members present at a particular meeting - was concerned that its composition and its authority to act on behalf of the group should be more precisely determined. In the second news-sheet it announced that it had "endeavoured to work and plan in what is hoped are the best interests of all QUEST members" but that "the time has surely come to establish a more generally agreed policy

and organisation for the whole group. This is why thought is now being given ... to the arrangements for an Annual General Meeting later in the year at which these matters can be openly discussed and agreed decisions taken." The AGM took place in London at the end of November 1975 with fifty or so members - including a good proportion from other places - taking part. It elected three executive officers (chairman, secretary and treasurer) by show of hands, only one candidate having been nominated for each post; and four members from a list of seven nominations by secret ballot. Brief reports from the retiring officers were accepted by the meeting, which was then addressed by an already closely associated member of QUEST, Fr. Norman Brown of Westminster Cathedral, standing in at very short notice for Bishop B. C. Butler (prevented by sudden new commitments resulting from the death of Cardinal Heenan). Fr. Norman took as his theme the words of Eliza Doolittle: "Don't talk of love - show me!", a cry, he suggested, that was now being made to the Church. As reported in the minutes of the meeting, "Fr. Norman remarked that in the past it was the moral theologians who had had most to say about sexuality. This made it comparatively easy to pass exams but he doubted if it helped very much in pastoral work because it tended to isolate one aspect of man from the rest. The way of Christ is the complete fulfilment of human beings, including sexuality. He believed that QUEST was not only assisting its members to become more complete as Christians, but that it could also help the clergy in their pastoral work and, even more, help seminarians in the course of their studies." The meeting responded warmly to Fr. Norman's rallying remarks, little suspecting how the kind of moral theology he had misgivings about would very shortly re-assert itself from the precincts of the Vatican.

The AGM minutes also record that, "on a procedural point, a member objected that inadequate advance public notice had been given about the method of nominating candidates for election, and a motion was moved and seconded that further nominations should be allowed from the floor. This was defeated on a show of hands" - but it did illustrate the need for some clear-cut rules and regulations to be formulated, and in response the incoming chairman, at the close of the meeting, gave his assurance that one of the first endeavours of the newly elected committee would be to draft and submit to members a formal constitution to regulate the development of the group. The promised draft was distributed to all members within three weeks of the AGM. It was discussed, amended and agreed at the next meeting (7th January 1976), and a copy of the document was sent out with the February Newsletter.

The constitution, after defining the purposes of QUEST (see below), distinguished two categories of members: full membership, open to any lay Catholic desiring to promote the group's given purposes; and honorary (non-paying, non-voting) membership, open to any member of the Christian clergy and to any non-Catholic lay person similarly desiring to promote those purposes. While thus welcoming the support of the clergy, Catholic and otherwise, and of non-Catholic lay people, the group had determined that the direction and management of its affairs should be the responsibility of the Catholic lay members only. Given the perceived attitude of most of the Catholic clergy - at least at that time - to the matters of greatest concern to QUEST, this regulation was seen to be crucial and, though it has been challenged since, it has not been amended.

The constitution also set out straightforward rules with regard to the regulation of subscription levels; the composition, election and duration in membership of the committee; and the procedure for any amendment. More generally important, it provided an explicit statement of the group's purposes:

- (a) to associate lay men and women who are seeking ways of reconciling the full practice of their Catholic faith with the full expression of their homosexual natures in loving Christian relationships; and to provide opportunities for them to meet together for study, discussion, worship and social activities.

- (b) to establish and extend a dialogue between homosexual Catholics and members of the clergy through which the insights and experience of each may gradually be interwoven so as to achieve better mutual understanding both of the moral teachings of the Church and of the characteristics of its homosexual members.
- (c) to seek wider opportunities - in the Catholic press and elsewhere - to promote fuller and more public discussion of the moral, spiritual, physiological and psychological issues involved.
- (d) to provide a point of contact for any homosexual Catholic in need of reassurance and support, who may both gain from and contribute to the purposes of the association.

By the middle of January 1976, therefore, QUEST had acquired not only its name, a regular means of keeping in touch with its members through the Newsletter, and some modest central resources; it now also had an internal structure, approved by its enlarged membership to safeguard its development and determine its policies. But if, in the process, it had seemed somewhat inward-looking - more pre-occupied with organisation than operation - it could, and did, now nail its colours confidently to its mast in defining its purposes, and was ready to face what outside challenges the future might bring. It had only a few moments to wait.

ETHICS AND TACTICS

The promulgation in mid-January 1976 of a 'Declaration on certain questions concerning sexual ethics', issued with the Pope's approval by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, had been quite unheralded and caused considerable surprise. It may have been, as the Catholic Herald reported, that the document was "originally intended for a limited circulation to bishops and theologians, but that, as a result of its being leaked unofficially to the Italian press ... it was then released for general publication." This may explain why, although said to be intended "to draw the attention of the faithful in present day circumstances to certain errors and modes of behaviour which they must guard against", it is presented in a style more suited to the intelligence of the trained mind than to the understanding of the faithful in general. What in the former context might seem laconic and axiomatic, in the latter appeared harsh and dismissive on each of its main topics: pre-marital sex, homosexual relations and masturbation. To homosexual Catholics in Britain, and especially to those who had begun - in QUEST - to find more pastoral support within the Church, the Declaration came as the shock of cold water after a warm shower.

Inevitably the first media reports highlighted the sharper, more dogmatic - and publicly more controversial - parts of the Declaration, those in fact that re-stated traditional teaching with a marked emphasis. But there was no escaping its uncompromising reiteration of the conclusion that:

According to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality. In Sacred Scripture they are condemned as a serious depravity and even presented as the sad consequence of rejecting God. This judgment does not of course permit us to conclude that all those who suffer from this anomaly are personally responsible for it, but it does attest the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of.

Published at a moment when the ink was barely dry on the page of QUEST's Constitution, which identified as its primary purpose that of associating men and women "seeking ways of reconciling the full practice of their Catholic faith with the full expression of their homosexual nature in loving Christian relationships", the Declaration seemed to call a direct halt to the seeking. It was a challenge to which the leaders of QUEST had to make prompt response: to shut up or to talk back. They decided at a committee meeting already scheduled for late January, to talk back; firstly to their fellow members, many of whom were already profoundly dispirited, in the hope of bringing them some reassurance; and secondly to the Church in Britain as represented by its bishops.

For the former of these responses, the Newsletter was at hand, and in the issue published in the first week of February the editor looked squarely at the Declaration:

The Sacred Congregation finds it 'particularly opportune to recall the following words of Scripture: Man looks at appearances but God looks at the heart'. The Declaration, despite papal 'approval', is an instrument of man and not an ex cathedra utterance of the Vicar of Christ. Avowedly it looks at appearances - but certainly not closely enough.

The editorial noted the Declaration's reference to:

'the distinction that is drawn, and it seems with some reason, between homosexuals whose tendency comes from a false education, from a lack of normal sexual development, from habit, from bad example, or from other similar causes, and is

transitory or at least not incurable; and homosexuals who are definitively such because of some kind of innate instinct or pathological constitution judged to be incurable.'

And continued:

Ecclesiastical recognition of this particular distinction, deriving as it does from empirical study of comparatively recent date, if not exactly a landmark is at least a stepping-stone from which the Church may move on to recognise that any account of the 'moral order' that claims to be objective must take full account of the facts.

Had it not been for the recognition of the Church's ignorance of certain facts, manifest to homosexual Catholics in the attitudes of far too many priests, QUEST would never have been necessary. The Declaration, therefore, far from putting an end to our QUEST, confirms its necessity. If that was ever in doubt before 15th January those doubts have been dramatically dispelled. There is ahead a great deal of patient and courageous work to be done - and if any member of QUEST, or any other homosexual Catholic, determines in conscience that in face of the Declaration he must leave the Church, that work will take so much longer to accomplish. We live not only for ourselves but for generations to come ... There must now be neither a turning back nor a turning away.

Having shared its thoughts with, and, it was to be hoped, provided some reassurance to, its members at large, QUEST proceeded to address the Catholic diocesan bishops throughout England and Wales.* The decision to do so was made at the regular London monthly meeting on 4th February, at which the members present also approved - with some amendment - the text of the proposed letter. This was despatched the following day, the chairman explaining that he was writing at the members' request, "urgently to convey their astonishment and deep Christian concern both as to the matter and the manner of its (the Declaration's) presentation." After stating the principal purposes of the group, the letter - incorporating a few quotations from the Declaration itself - continued:

We do indeed share the conviction of the 'people of our time ... that the human person's dignity and vocation demand that they should discover, by the light of their own intelligence, the values innate in their nature' and 'that they should ceaselessly develop these values and realize them in their lives, in order to achieve an even greater development.' And we do indeed accept the teaching of the Church that 'in moral matters man cannot make value judgments according to his personal whim.' But we emphatically do not accept that the judgment of Scripture attests 'to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered'; we do not accept that a more lenient judgment of 'homosexual relations between certain people' is 'in opposition to ... the moral sense of the Christian people' - indeed we claim to be fully a part of the Christian people and therefore active contributors to its moral sense; and we are quite unmoved by the dogmatic assertion that 'according to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality'.

What we now read seems to us in faith and in fact to be so far removed from the cardinal injunction of our Lord that we should love one another, that we are at pains to detect in the Declaration any real reflection of the scripturally evident sympathy and sensitivity of Christ towards mankind. Thus we are dismayed that the Church which, for love of Him, we try to serve, should seem to be guided so much more by a spirit of compunction than of compassion.

*The approach was advisedly limited to these two countries because of the unreformed legal position of homosexual adults still then obtaining in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

We must, therefore, and with due respect, affirm to you our deep-seated conviction that in seeking to live fully within the Church in a manner appropriate to our homosexual natures we are doing nothing intrinsically contradictory to the teachings of Christ. And we beg you, through the authority vested in you, to lend your full support to those members of your diocesan clergy who, in the discharge of their pastoral responsibilities, are happily sensitive to our particularity; to encourage a deeper understanding of the homosexual condition in the instruction of seminarians; and to foster in those of your priests who are ignorant and therefore fearful of this condition a wise curiosity and a genuine concern.

Perhaps because, in the urgency of the moment and from the lack of experience of the actors, the letter was couched so much more in the style of a press release than of a direct and personal communication, it drew very little response from its recipients, and none to the specific requests with which it had concluded. Even as a press release - and its text was simultaneously released to the media - the letter passed unattended: the Declaration, in three weeks, had ceased to be news and was becoming history. For all that, if they had indeed read it, the letter had incidentally informed all the members of the Catholic hierarchy of QUEST's existence and purposes; and that could be no bad thing.

From the bishops QUEST now turned its attention more specifically towards the parish priests. Its experience had already suggested that a great many of them, though they would be familiar with, and apt to reiterate, the Church's teaching about homosexual acts, had acquired little understanding of the condition that might prompt such acts nor of the human beings who might be prompted to engage in them. In accordance with its second declared purpose, therefore, QUEST proceeded to mobilise its resources to cultivate the soil from which most pastoral counselling springs: the local presbytery.

It had, several months earlier, attempted to revive and extend the type of face-to-face discussions with priests that had been undertaken in the very early days. But the response of newer members to this task had been negligible - quite understandably, a good many were still working out their own reconciliation within the Church and were as yet unready to enter into direct dialogue with a priest on behalf of the group. It fell back to the central committee, therefore, to develop an alternative plan. After discussion with Fr. Ronald Salmon, another priest long associated with the group, (who was soon to urge at a general meeting that "progressive thinking in the Church generally comes from below. A frontal attack won't get you anywhere. Only the hundred per cent support of members ... will be sufficient for your purposes"), it was decided that a concentrated localised survey of the attitude and opinion of priests in some part of a single diocese should be undertaken as a pilot scheme, and that for this purpose an educational study kit for priests should be designed. A working party of half-a-dozen volunteer members was set up to undertake this task, and its recommendations were accepted by the central committee at the end of May (1976). The study kit was to comprise an introductory comment by a parish priest on the value or otherwise of the Declaration as a guide in the pastoral care of homosexual people; a question-and-answer section that would convey basic educational information both about homosexuality and about traditional and contemporary Christian attitudes; an anthology of useful and suggestive quotations from a range of primarily Catholic writers on the subject; and a bibliography to encourage further reading. It would also incorporate an overall impression of what contemporary seminarians were currently being taught on the subject.

Once assembled, it was intended that the kit should be exposed to all priests already associated with QUEST, for their critical comment, and - after any resulting amendment - reproduced for the purposes of the proposed localised survey. The survey was to be initiated by a letter to every priest in the pilot area, enclosing the four-part questionnaire that had been used in the original (1974) enquiry, and including an offer to provide a copy to each respondent requesting it. They, too, would be invited to comment critically on its

utility to them in their pastoral work and, if the resulting evidence was that the kit was welcome and useful, there would be good grounds for seeking to persuade an appropriate firm to publish and market the material and so make it more readily available to both priests and public at large.

Though the bishops had been informed that it was 'in business', and plans had been made to extend QUEST's dialogue with priests throughout the country, there was little sign within the Church of any pastoral response or reaction to the Declaration on sexual ethics. It was all very well for The Tablet to argue, as it had done in January (when it also published the full text of the Declaration) that:

Boundaries of moral and pastoral theology become blurred when the indisputable ideals of Christian morality are, as here, trenchantly expressed but are accompanied by views and warnings about deviations upon premises and in terms that many Catholic specialists would judge to be inapplicable or inadequate ... The pity of it is that the essential gospel message of love of God and our neighbours thus comes into disregard ... The caring, working Church ... today is no longer content to slam the door on people with categorical prohibitions especially in the areas of their affective life, but is concerned rather to show how their experience can be a way, even through many vagaries, to a deeper appreciation of the gospel of love ... This document does nothing of the kind. It could be taken as a direct rebuttal of every advance in the field of counselling within the Catholic community."

But where within that community was there any practical manifestation of such concern? QUEST looked once again towards its cohort of honorary members in the Catholic priesthood to give a lead. Early in August it was decided, at a London meeting, to request them to make a joint representation to the National Conference of Priests, due to assemble for its annual meeting within a matter of weeks. Though several of the members approached in this way demurred - some in the belief that the Conference was an ineffective and unrepresentative body, and others for more personal reasons - a letter over the signature of ten priests was addressed, almost on the eve of the Conference, to its Chairman. All the signatories had seen the text, in a draft prepared with the particular help of Fr. Andrew Beer, who had contributed a stimulating article on homosexuality and pastoral care - also mentioning QUEST - to the previous month's issue of the Clergy Review. "We," they wrote:

the undersigned members of the Catholic clergy, are concerned at this time to urge upon our colleagues and our superiors that fuller consideration be given within the Church to the particular need and predicaments of those of its members who are, by nature rather than by choice, homosexual.

It is not long since the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith insisted, in the 'Declaration on certain questions concerning sexual ethics', that such persons be 'treated with understanding and judged with prudence'; and it is our sense that we are, as pastors, generally deficient in our understanding of homosexuality and therefore incapable of prudent judgment, that leads us now to press our concern upon the National Conference...

We do not suggest that there are any easy responses to the issues raised, either in terms of moral or pastoral theology, but we are agreed in the view that the Church must urgently begin to make a positive approach towards a response, and be seen to be so doing. It is our sincere hope, therefore, that the National Conference will, at its forthcoming meeting, take a firm initiative in this direction and offer a constructive proposal for the subsequent consideration of the Bishops.

Long before the date at which this letter was sent, the full Conference agenda had already been determined, so there could be little real expectation of any significant discussion or resolution in response. What, in the event, happened was later reported to

QUEST by Fr. Thomas Curtis-Hayward, one of its signatories and also at the time a member of the Conference's steering committee:

The clergy letter and names of subscribers were on the Conference notice-board from the beginning.

I was given the task of speaking to the motion 'that this Conference, being only too well aware that it has been unable to deal with all the areas in which injustice exists, nevertheless wishes to put on record its concern for all such examples of injustice.' I used my five minutes as proposer to put the case for homosexuals, stressing the need for priests to be more understanding, better informed, less reluctant, and more ready for dialogue over the points at issue. The proposition was passed but naturally the various examples of injustice spoken for do not come under the cover of a conference resolution explicitly. Nevertheless it was an opportunity for publicity which has given the press an occasion to use the material. There was no discussion on the matters under this proposition as time did not permit it, but I am sure the message will get around."

Another signatory, and member of the steering committee, Fr. Michael Hollings, wrote a little later: "I think we came to a good 'compromise' about it and it really was not too bad a placing on the bill of fare ... The report goes to all bishops and all priests, so it will get some airing." And, he urged, "if you want another 'bash' next year, please begin now - and preferably formulate a motion to be put to the Conference. And get it in before Christmas!"

GOING PUBLIC

One of the inevitable effects of the publicity given to the Vatican Declaration was to confirm the impression, already widespread throughout the gay community, that there was no welcome within the Church for the homosexual person. The phrase 'intrinsically disordered' was seized upon by those already hostile to religion, and added yet another stripe to the wounds of those Catholics who already felt themselves rejected by Christian people. It had been in response to this appearance of rejection that, some years earlier in the U.S.A., a protestant minister (Rev. Troy Perry) had founded a distinct Metropolitan Community Church principally in order to provide Christian fellowship and reassurance to gay outcasts from the established churches. The M.C.C. had already spread across both the Atlantic and the Pacific and had opened its doors in a few Australian and British centres. It did not lack congregations, and, though its challenge was virtually ignored by those churches whose posture had originally inspired it, its alternative appeal could not be overlooked by groups like QUEST. In fact, QUEST's founding members had, from the outset, specifically rejected any idea of a gay church and had seen it as part of their task both to adhere to their own church and to recall to it such homosexual Catholics as had already despaired and deserted. Ecclesiastical authority, by its clumsy and cold pronouncement, had now made that task the more difficult. "What prospects of success are there," Gay News asked, "for Roman Catholic gays who wish to change the Church's position? In all honesty, they must admit that there are no prospects."

To accomplish anything at all in this direction, QUEST needed not only to make its existence and purposes more widely known and understood throughout the Catholic and the gay community, but also to reproduce in centres away from London the opportunities for fellowship and good counsel that it had by now well established in the London area. As new members continued slowly to enrol, a careful watch was kept at the centre on their geographical whereabouts so that, as soon as a cluster living in reasonable proximity to a particular place was spotted, those members were invited to a meeting in their own neighbourhood to explore the possibilities of creating a regional branch.

The earliest meeting of this kind was held in Sheffield in mid-January 1976, when - as the February Newsletter reported - "the first non-metropolitan branch of QUEST ... (was) formed, in the north of England. Names of all listed members of QUEST in the north have been made available ... to the convenor of the northern group, and members should by now have received direct information about plans for future regional meetings." In the record of the meeting it was reported that:

We met under the shadow of the Vatican's recent document on sexual ethics which, not surprisingly, featured prominently in the discussions. It was generally agreed, however, that the document, being merely a restatement of the traditional attitude of the Church, had not affected our determination to promote the objectives of QUEST, except perhaps to strengthen it.

Consideration was given to future meetings of the branch, and it was decided that a meeting would be held each month,... and that once a quarter a meeting of all northerly members would be called ... Future meetings should be held in other towns and cities when possible so as to share the burden of travelling and to promote QUEST activities in other parts of the north. It was unanimously felt that a retreat should be organised for all northern members to take place in the late summer.

Tea was served ... followed by a further discussion about future action. It was decided that approaches would be made to individual priests in Leeds and that an informal approach to the Bishop of Leeds* would be made in the near future. At the

*At this date Sheffield was within the Leeds diocese

conclusion of this discussion anyone wishing to make their confession or speak privately to our priest was invited to go to the Chapel.

The meeting had been small in number - "five men and one lady" - but it immediately reflected the style and characteristics common to gatherings of QUEST members elsewhere: discussion and forward planning, refreshment and social encounter, and opportunity for spiritual nourishment; thus it had established good foundations for future development. Both the chairman and secretary of QUEST travelled to Sheffield to take part in the first quarterly meeting of northern members early in May, which provided an opportunity informally to share some of the experiences of the London-oriented group with its counterpart in the north. "We have a long way to go yet," the convenor wrote a few days later, "and ... the main problem is that of publicity of QUEST's activities in the north." How much more this was to prove a problem for branches based outside London than for the headquarters group was coming to be recognised.

The obvious objectives were to make the group's existence publicly known wherever branches were formed; to establish at the same time what it existed for; and to provide a ready postal or telephone contact point for enquirers. It was essential, too, to be able to do this specifically under the eye of the gay Catholic population which could be expected to respond most readily to the news, and preferably to offer them a more local address for reference than that of the headquarters secretary in London. In smaller, less anonymous cities, however, this was much more difficult to achieve than in the impersonal and cosmopolitan context of the capital city, for reasons that highlighted precisely the personal problem that QUEST was ambitious to resolve for its members. To make public a home address or its telephone number renders an individual that much less of a private person in the community than he might prefer to remain, and to do this in a context where the knowledge could cause personal embarrassment, social hostility, or distress to others, requires a degree of self-acceptance and self-assurance that many gay people - and, amongst them, perhaps more especially gay Catholics, - find it very hard to attain in face of the pressures of public prejudice and traditional Christian attitudes. And if, for a Catholic, it takes considerable moral courage to accept that you are gay, it takes a substantial political conviction to acknowledge it to others. Relatives, friends, employers would be unlikely to recognise a London address or 'phone number published in a national daily or weekly journal, but in smaller centres - take Sheffield as an example - a parent, a manager or secretary, a fellow member of the sporting or social club, could that much more readily spot a familiar number - telephone or street - when browsing through the local evening news on the homeward-bound bus.

If, that is, the local newspaper would accept an advertisement from QUEST in the first place. The problem of spreading information locally was compounded by the widespread reluctance of editors - on pretext of not offending their readers - to publish notice of any group or society involving homosexual people. So the readiest and probably most effective outlet for information in a particular neighbourhood was frequently denied as a matter of editorial policy. In some cities, the emergence of 'gay switchboards' seemed to offer some alternative; yet approaches to them tended to meet resistance for different, and in a sense opposite reasons. Their main objective was to provide a type of talking local encyclopaedia in support of the needs, aspirations and life-styles of their particular clients - the whereabouts of gay bars and clubs, and of relevant legal or medical advice; details of flat-sharing offers and of other accommodation or employment opportunities in the neighbourhood; and sometimes just a friendly and encouraging voice to respond to an isolated, lonely and distressed caller who had never before talked to anyone else about being gay. But suggest to them that they should register and pass on particulars about a Catholic organisation, active locally for at least some of the same purposes, and a barrier of suspicion was raised. For Catholics, surely, would only echo what in its starkest simplicity was known to be the traditional Christian response to an active homosexual life: stop it. No gay switchboard would want to direct any relevant enquirer towards that sort of social contact or pastoral advice.

Parish clergy, on the other hand, proved generally as reluctant to refer homosexual men and women to QUEST for the opposite reason, that the association might weaken their resistance to sexual temptation, deter them from their recommended prayers to the Virgin to find them a good Catholic girl for life, or otherwise cause them to question the wisdom of the Church's teaching. QUEST was therefore at risk of rejection both by the Church and by the gay community, since it appeared not to identify itself sufficiently with either; and it required the persevering endeavours of such members as were individually willing to come more out into the open, to cultivate both priests and switchboard managers (not to mention newspaper editors) before such local outlets could be engaged to handle the information QUEST was rightly concerned to spread.

Despite (or because of) these handicaps, by the spring of 1977, QUEST's Sheffield convenor was in touch with (only) 48 members, including seven priests, spread across an area extending from Liverpool to Leicester and from Lancaster to Newcastle. It was an unwieldy territory to provide for, but the arrangement of quarterly meetings in different geographical centres at least provided occasional opportunities for members to encounter QUEST as a human society and not just as an idea on paper. Meantime a second regional branch, Solent QUEST based on Southampton, had been formed similarly to serve members distributed across the central southern counties and coast of England. And by the summer of 1977, the pattern of membership enabled exploratory regional meetings to be held, with the participation of two members of the central committee, in Stoke-on-Trent and Liverpool. The meeting in Liverpool was attended by the northern regional convenor from Sheffield, and the opening up shortly afterwards of a Merseyside and a Stoke branch happily reduced the original vast area of his responsibilities.

Although, thanks to a regular fortnightly mention in the 'religious groups' section of the Gay News directory and to occasional references in the Catholic press, new members continued to join, QUEST - after two years' public existence - was still scarcely known within the community of the Church in general, and was still beyond the reach of many Catholic men and women to whom it could bring particular benefit. Some more substantial national manifestation was needed.

In his report to the second AGM at the end of November 1976 - a meeting that was privileged to hear a deeply thoughtful address by Bishop Butler on the theme of 'ecstatic love' - the chairman had reflected briefly on QUEST's public responsibilities:

Society in general (and this includes our fellow Catholics) is, to say the least, embarrassed by homosexuality and even resentful of it. The history of Judaeo-Christian culture has given it no acceptable houseroom, and the resulting feeling of alienation that homosexual people experience has made many of them careless of the civilities that ought to govern all social relationships. We can therefore neither expect nor deserve spontaneous acceptance: we must live so as to earn it. If one casual word of ours, or one public deed reinforces the prevalent stereotype of homosexual conduct, we have at once contributed to the defeat of our own best objectives. But it is here, in fact, that our greatest opportunity lies. For as members of QUEST, we are first and foremost Catholics, yet also homosexual. It should follow that we have no particular shame in being what we are, though we may need to be ashamed of what we do - on that account as on any other. Our duties and responsibilities are those of all Catholics: to offer ourselves and our experiences in the presence of Christ and in the company of the faithful for the triumph of truth over falsehood and for the love of God and our neighbours.

It was with such thoughts in mind that, the following summer, arrangements began to be made for a public meeting to be held on Catholic premises in London later in 1977.

Much of QUEST's effort during the summer and autumn was directed towards the organisation of an open symposium on 'The Homosexual Catholic', which eventually took place in the Cathedral Hall, Westminster on 26th November. The ground preparation

provided an opportunity for every member of the group to play a part: each, for example, was sent two copies of a printed handbill to be displayed at suitable venues in his neighbourhood; and two or three books of tickets for a raffle (prize - a winter week in Rome for two), set up to raise some of the extra funds needed to defray the costs of the event. Once again, all the diocesan bishops were circularised with notice of the proposed meeting: "We feel confident", the QUEST spokesman wrote, "that the occasion will be of value not only to our fellow Catholics who are homosexually-orientated but also to members of the clergy who may have responsibilities for counselling them. It is on this account that I am writing to you now, in the hope that you may be willing, in a future letter ad clerum, to mention the event to the clergy of your own diocese so that those concerned may be encouraged to participate." Advertisements of the meeting were placed in the Catholic press, whose editors, together with those of the secular daily and weekly press and of the religious programmes of national and local radio and television, were invited to attend or send a representative to cover the event. And the Cathedral bookshop was persuaded to staff a table in the Hall at which relevant publications could be purchased.

After some introductory remarks from the chair the proceedings first took the form of an 'any questions' session, questions having been provided in advance by some of those attending in response to an invitation sent with their programme of admission to the conference. The panel consisted of Fr. John Ashton, S. J., Lecturer in New Testament Studies at Heythrop College; Ruth Anne Henderson, lately a Catholic counsellor for 'Friend' in the northwest; D. Timothy Potts, lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Leeds; and Fr. Andrew Beer, a parish priest. "What, if any, are the causes of homosexual tendencies?" "Do we have a divine right to be gay?" "Isn't it time for homosexuals to stop the tendency to identify themselves as a group - or almost a race - apart?" "Supposing a Catholic meets a friend, both being homosexual, should they continue friendship?" "Is sensuality part of sexuality? When does bodily contact as a means of communication become sensuality?" - these were among the questions raised and discussed by the panel with energy, sincerity and wit; and, judging by the hum of talk throughout the hall during lunch (buffet trays and wine bar), the session prompted much immediate and informal debate. In the afternoon, the assembly re-formed into more specific discussion groups, each chaired by one of the panellists or by a senior member of QUEST; and, after tea, re-united for a concluding session followed by a celebration of the Eucharist. "The fact that two-thirds of the 200 or so people present had apparently had no previous formal connection with QUEST gave particular satisfaction," the Newsletter later commented, "as also the fact that the vast majority of those who had assembled at 11 a.m. were still present at 5 p.m. when the concluding Mass, presided over by Fr. Norman Brown of the Cathedral clergy, was concelebrated by five other priests."

"Regret was expressed by one participant at the close of the symposium," The Tablet reported, "that the official view of the Church was not represented." In fact, of course, the whole event had been planned against the background of the well-known 'official' view. It was of much more consequence that a parish priest could openly advise a questioner from a public platform that, "If in all good faith you do not see your actions as sinful you should not mention them in the confessional" - which is not the same as a Gay News headline declared: "Don't confess you're gay" - says Catholic priest!

For QUEST, the Westminster event proved very rewarding. Several members wrote afterwards to say that they had personally been much encouraged and sustained by it; quite a number of those present took out membership on the spot, while over the months ahead many more referred on their application forms to the symposium as their source of first information about the group. And, to cite The Tablet again, the fact "that the symposium was permitted to take place in the Cathedral Hall was received as recognition that homosexuals exist and that their position in the Church is a matter for discussion and concern".

The annual dinner for members which took place the same evening in a west London restaurant with an excellent cabaret, brought a long day to a lively conclusion.

RESOLUTION AND RESPONSE

"If you want another 'bash' next year, please begin now." Fr. Hollings' advice, following the 1976 meeting of the National Conference of Priests, had been promptly taken up and all the priests associated with QUEST had been invited by letter in November that year, "to consider whether there is any action you could take in conjunction with your diocesan colleagues to achieve the submission to the NCP of an appropriate resolution for fuller discussion at the 1977 meeting. Though it would probably be impolitic", the letter continued, "if different delegations separately proposed an identically worded resolution, you may like to take the following suggestion, drafted by a member of the clergy, into consideration:

'This Conference urges the bishops to set up a working-party to examine the Church's pastoral approach to the question of homosexuality and to consider the moral, spiritual and psychological issues involved, with a view to forming a more enlightened attitude within the Church towards the difficulties faced by homosexual Catholics.'

At the end of January, Fr. Beer wrote to say that "the junior clergy of this diocese" (Arundel & Brighton) "had a meeting today with their delegates to next autumn's session of the NCP. I put forward the QUEST proposal, and there was considerable discussion. A number of those present thought the proposal should end at the word 'involved', feeling that the last phrase might be considered as pre-ordaining the findings of any working-party. I think there's some sense in that. Thus amended, the resolution was passed almost unanimously and will now go forward formally to the NCP. Similar moves, not known to QUEST, may well have come also from other dioceses. In the event, Resolution 9 of the Conference was identical in wording to the QUEST proposal, omitting the final 'pre-ordaining' phrase. It was passed, after discussion, by 56 votes to 6, with three abstentions.

Some anxiety had been expressed by one or two priests that pressure on the bishops to say anything publicly on the subject of homosexuality might, in the group's interests, be counter-productive - "Demands for public statements to Rome", one wrote, "produced *Humanae Vitae*, and we do not wish something like that to happen." To this, QUEST's chairman had replied, "It is curious how, since we were first encouraged ... to activate those members of the clergy who have associated themselves with our endeavours, to approach the NCP, we have benefitted much from an initiation by those same clergy into the (for us) mysteries of ecclesiastical politics ... I assure you that we are now much more sensitive to the risks we may be running and, now that we have already embarked on this second round as far as the NCP is concerned, we must hope that we shall not have innocently promoted an untoward reaction from the bishops ... We are concerned," the letter continued, "that no reasonable opportunity should be missed to ensure that this complex issue is kept on the agenda of the Church, and the setting up of a comprehensive and broad-based working-party by the Bishops would, we feel, guarantee more active research, enquiry and dialogue. Providing the study is both thorough and open ... I cannot believe," the writer concluded, "that we would have anything to fear from its conclusions and recommendations."

Bishops have not often spoken out on these issues, and it was reassuring to read later an account - conveyed to QUEST by a Merseyside member as a front-page press cutting from the *Catholic Pictorial* - of what Bishop Augustine Harris, then auxiliary bishop of Liverpool, had said on the subject of homosexuality and the Church's teaching. The Newsletter reprinted the *Pictorial's* report:

His comments come in the wake of a bitter row over a homosexual advertisement which appeared in a local arts magazine. The decision to publish the advert for a social club for homosexual and bisexual women prompted a Sefton councillor to seek a ban on the 'Arts Alive' Merseyside magazine in public libraries. Bishop Harris was among several church leaders and school head teachers asked to support a counter-move, a request Bishop Harris decided to deal with by a letter to the local Southport press. 'I do not wish to comment on the issue of censorship,' he wrote. 'My sole purpose in writing is because I have been asked to clarify the general attitude of the Christian church to homosexuals.'

Bishop Harris listed his points as follows:

1. Homosexuality is neither moral nor immoral. It is a state or condition just as heterosexuality is a state or condition.
2. The causes of the homosexual condition are varied and uncertain but in general terms they are no reflection on the morality of homosexuals whether they be men or women.
3. According to traditional teaching, deliberate physical sexual acts between homosexual persons are morally unjustifiable. However, such deliberate sexual acts cannot be presumed to be the outcome of all or even most meetings between homosexuals. It appears reasonable that persons with similar outlooks will tend to seek one another's company. There may be moral dangers in such associations but this is not necessarily so.
4. The percentage of homosexuals in the community is substantial. Throughout history they have made a notable contribution to the arts. Culture owes much to their imaginative gifts.
5. In 1975*, a statement issued by the Vatican repeated the traditional teaching that deliberate homosexual acts are morally unjustifiable but also called for the homosexual to be treated with understanding. Neither hasty condemnation nor insensitive ridicule are acceptable attitudes towards those who are 'different'.

It is not known whether the Sefton council did, in the event, ban the offending magazine from its public libraries or not, or whether such an implicit plea for Christian tolerance prevailed. What is known is that the resolution passed by the National Conference of Priests was taken up subsequently by the Bishops' Conference which deputed its Social Welfare Commission to carry out the desired study. And the President of the Commission was - Bishop Augustine Harris.

"This working-party," one of the priests who took part in the NCP discussion had declared, "would need homosexuals on it to give credibility." The Secretary of the Commission notified QUEST officially in March 1978 of the task it was undertaking and indicated that it would be approaching the group for its thoughts and views. QUEST, perhaps inattentively, awaited a further formal approach - which it expected would provide the terms of reference for the enquiry, and specific questions for comment - before offering any opinions to the Commission. Writing a year later to a northern QUEST member whose substantial and private paper on 'the pastoral care of homosexual Catholics', originally prepared for his own bishop, had been made available to the Commission, the President commented - with reference to QUEST - that, "I think there has been some breakdown in communications". It was not unreasonable to suggest, as the northern member had done, "that the Commission had not made a serious attempt to obtain any official evidence from QUEST, and that, QUEST being the only organisation for homosexual Catholics, this did not augur well for the Commission having sought evidence from other informed sources". It became known later that the priest who had been authorised by the national executive of the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council to call together a working-party on the subject to make an official submission from CMAC

*Published in the UK in January 1976

to the Social Welfare Commission, had been protesting in August 1978 that, "I have not yet formed this working-party as I would like the Commission, in the light of the various submissions made to date, to formulate a more specific brief to which we could work." If such a brief was ever formulated, it never reached QUEST.

It was surprising, in these circumstances, that when the booklet, An introduction to the pastoral care of homosexual people, was eventually published in the name of the Catholic Social Welfare Commission (in December 1979), QUEST was able to give it a warm welcome 'for the informed insights and sensitive leads it offers', and to acknowledge that the authors 'have acquainted themselves perceptively with the experience and ambitions of homosexual people.' A large part of the explanation is that the Commission's work had been considerably reinforced in its final stages by the report of a comparable working-party that, as the Catholic Herald revealed (April 1978), had been convened by the bishops of the Westminster diocese to provide them privately with some advice on the development of pastoral support for homosexual people.

QUEST was immediately invited to be represented on this working-party, whose chairman drew up at the outset not only a clear agenda but also a plan of procedure designed 'to facilitate this work without endless committee meetings: "Each member of the working-party is requested to submit a paper dealing with those areas of the problem in which they have some specific contribution in knowledge or skill, while being free also to comment on the other issues; copies will be made of these papers and circulated to all members for further comment; the papers and comments will then be arranged in logical order and re-circulated; we should then be in a position to meet for a protracted session - perhaps residential - to complete the report." In the preparation of its paper, QUEST was able to draw on the varied opinions and experiences of a number of its members during the summer of 1978, and from these to deduce and to represent a broadly agreed view. The paper eventually submitted argued that:

there is a gulf between current secular and clerical understanding of the likely real nature of sexuality in its different forms;

the distinction between (non-moral) sexual disposition and (moral) sexual behaviour is sufficiently disregarded as to inhibit the open acknowledgment of varieties of sexual disposition within both clergy and laity;

effective pastoral care, especially when this is provided on the initiative of the clergy, needs to be better informed in both the above aspects; and

present pastoral practice within the Church tends in general towards the judgmental depersonalisation of the homosexual penitent rather than towards their self-realisation and growth.

The paper proceeded to depict "the Church as a society that energetically supports and sustains two primary educational and vocational endeavours: the priesthood and family life," and observed that:

What is at present most lacking within the Church, and what should perhaps be the ultimate objective of pastoral care in relation to homosexuality - is the perception and support of a vocation that is proper for those who are called neither to marriage nor to the single state (either as priests, religious or laymen). In its absence, the integration of sexuality and personality is severely frustrated, and, allowed no commitment of that sexuality either to a husband or wife, nor to the all-embracing service of the Church, such people are driven towards negativity and promiscuity, caught within the vicious circle of self-expression and self-rejection which is stultifying to personal growth and inhibiting to the cultivation of charity.

In conclusion, QUEST offered the opinion that:

Homosexual Catholics, in principle, ask neither more nor less of their Church than that they should be openly encouraged and supported in their ambitions to commit themselves to another in a loving relationship intended to be continuing, mutually life-enhancing, and therefore capable of releasing energies of insight, service and dedication that so far are substantially latent within the community. The physical and moral aspects of such relationships should, in a sense be seen as secondary matters rather than public issues, in the same way as the physical and moral aspects of heterosexual relationships are generally removed from the public gaze and mediated through sensitive private contacts with confessors. What is here being represented is the predicament of a comparatively small but by no means insubstantial proportion of the membership of every Church community, whose spiritual and social ambitions are in no way essentially separated from those of their fellow-members, but who are - or at least feel themselves to be - set apart from full participation in the life of that community because they are presently obliged to wear some kind of disguise, to press some kind of pretence, and so to live dishonestly (however complete their personal lives may be) amongst their fellows.

The Westminster working-party followed the procedure originally suggested and the members met together only once, for an all-day session in January 1979. The chairman subsequently produced their report, which was made available to the bishops in March. And it was this report, skilfully blended with the Social Welfare Commission's own, that was published at the end of the year.

ROOTS AND BRANCHES

Although QUEST was satisfied with the part it had played in promoting the resolution of the National Conference of Priests, and gratified that - to some extent, at least - its experience had been officially drawn upon by those prompted to make a pastoral response, there had been other more practical matters to engage its attention during this period as well. In his report to the fourth AGM (December 1978), the chairman acknowledged that, after the encouraging impact of the Westminster symposium, the national committee had seriously considered arranging a similar event to take place a year later:

But other counsels prevailed as we reflected on the concentration of effort that had been required over the six months prior to the symposium, to some extent at the cost of effort in other directions. So 1977/8 was decreed as a year for consolidation, improved organisation, expanded service to members and stabilised development.

The report itemised three particular moves made to implement this policy:

- the decision to centralise our administration and records in a single office in London (a room made available in a member's flat) and to use its address as the principal national contact point ... This is, however, only a first step and it must be our future ambition to rent premises that are more readily accessible to callers both in person and by telephone, as soon as funds allow and regular staffing can be assured.

- regular advertising at normal commercial rates in the Catholic press (in the The Tablet and the Catholic Herald; the Universe refused): "there is no doubt that its effect has been to stimulate a larger number of enquiries and, through these, to increase membership. The re-worded and well-printed information leaflet has no doubt also improved our public image."

(Copies of the leaflet, the secretary's accompanying report recorded, were sent to the press, switchboards, counselling services, Catholic social organisations, student gay societies, and other interested bodies.)

- the meeting in Birmingham ... attended by convenors, potential convenors and certain other of QUEST's local branches in the midlands, the north, the north-west, the south and the south-west, together with the four* executive officers of the national committee."

The Birmingham meeting, the report continued:

provided an opportunity for sharing experiences, discussing common problems, and devising a development plan that will not only guide and sustain further expansion of local endeavours but also ensure that QUEST is seen to have the same public image wherever it appears on the national scene.

This last comment, on QUEST's public image, pointed up a matter of particular concern to the national committee, following an enterprise in the Brighton area which had gone awry. One member, fired by the Westminster symposium, had gone home to Brighton determined to establish a branch there. He had not waited, however, for

*Under the provisions of the constitution, the new executive post of deputy chairman had been agreed by the previous AGM, "so that we should have an additional executive officer who would not only deputise as necessary for the chairman, but who could take responsibilities for the development of particular new strategies: and in the first instance for the extension of regional activities."

information about other members in the region who needed to be drawn together to discuss the proposal, nor sought any advice on tried procedures; and his early notification of his plans to the diocesan headquarters had, in the committee's view, been somewhat inappropriate both in timing and in presentation. A meeting to clarify the position was called in Brighton in mid-January 1978, after which the chairman (who had been present) wrote to the self-selected local convenor:

It would be - don't you agree - confusing and perhaps in the end counter-productive if QUEST were to present itself as one sort of organisation from the centre and as another locally. And this is why it seems to us (the committee) important to have opportunity to comment on local plans before they are acted upon - we need stimulus from local groups, but reference too ... I am thinking primarily of QUEST's developing relationship with the organised Church. Suppose mention of us arises in the context of a Bishops' Conference for example: it would be damaging to our endeavours if two bishops, because of different approaches at the local level, seemed to be talking about two different organisations. They might then tend to dismiss us as an uncoordinated pressure group ... rather than as united advocates of a consistent policy. That, I feel, would do us no good at all.

The Brighton enterprise was allowed to subside, and, though it was taken up again some time later under different leadership, the town has never yet established itself as a viable regional centre as far as QUEST is concerned.

A salutary warning had been delivered from this experience. To start a regional group, make its existence publicly known, create expectations, and then - for lack either of effective leadership or adequate active local support - to see it wither away, was to create confusion, disappointment and perhaps even hostility amongst those it was intended to serve. Better not to build at all on a particular site, it was felt, than to lay new foundations in the sand.

Such thoughts were much in mind at a sequence of exploratory meetings with local members, both the chairman and the deputy chairman being present, which were held during February in Bristol, Birmingham, Edinburgh (with Glasgow members also present) and Nottingham. Each of these meetings resulted in a sufficient assurance from the members present of continuing support for a regional group, and the identification of a potential convenor to lead it. No firm commitments were asked, no final decisions taken, and it was then left to those on the spot to determine any further developments. At intervals during the next twelve months or so, regional groups with locally based activities were established in each of the five centres indicated; and all QUEST's English regions (now seven in number) were represented at the first meeting of regional convenors with the four national executive officers, held in Birmingham in mid-September 1978.

Not surprisingly in the circumstances, the meeting's initial concern was to discuss "procedures for starting local groups". The minutes record agreement that:

as soon as it was apparent from the national register of members that there was either a minimum of 4 members enrolled in a single town or city or a minimum of 6 members enrolled within a radius of 40 miles or so from such a centre, efforts to start a local group should be set in process. It was essential that a suitable convenor, supported by two other committed members, should be identified at an initial exploratory meeting held in the area, at which a member of the national executive (usually the deputy chairman) would be present to advise. The services of a priest within the area (or a priest willing to serve the area from outside) should also be obtained. The Mass and the Sacraments were central to the life of QUEST wherever

it was active, and since one of its principal endeavours was to reconcile lapsed homosexual Catholics with the Church, this provision was essential. Once such baselines had been established, the way was in principle secured for attracting and supporting new members through local effort.

The meeting agreed on the initial provision of financial support for newly established groups - a grant from central funds "intended primarily to support local advertisement and, through it, recruitment of new members (and therefore additional funds)"; recommended the abolition of the existing "administratively cumbersome and largely impractical" system, whereby a third of the annual subscription of each regional group member had been refunded to the group, and prescribed an alternative system of expense claims (anticipated by annual budgetary forecasting) under specific categories of expenditure; recognised the importance of "publicly announceable local contact points", noting the use of P. O. Box numbers by both the Sheffield and Solent groups, as well as "the greater advantage of telephone contacts, particularly when the contact was also a full (i.e. Catholic) member"; and resolved that the dates and locations of all regional group meetings should be regularly notified to the editor of Quest-Link*, so that information about QUEST events nation-wide was available to all members - any of whom would be welcome at any of these events if they happened to be in the neighbourhood.

The general thrust of the meeting was to create conditions enabling regional groups, once established, to develop very much through local initiatives against a background of national support. Some concern was expressed that this decentralisation might produce situations in which local actions were out of accord with national policy, and:

The meeting agreed that this possibility, though realistic, ought to be manageable so long as local convenors were kept regularly in touch with the national committee: they should ex officio be regarded as members of that committee and therefore recipient of its minutes, with access to its meetings as occasion and opportunity allowed ...

By and large, local groups were seen to be agents for the recruitment and support of members, through their own initiatives, but otherwise as extensions of a national effort, controlled by national policy - to which their deliberations should contribute - in matters which affected, for example approaches to diocesan bishops and clergy, association with other national/regional groups etc. In short, any endeavour that could be replicated in other areas was probably a matter for reference in the light of national policy; purely local sustaining endeavours were a matter for independent local initiatives.

What was emerging from this meeting was a clearer sense that, given the development of regional and local branches, QUEST's essential and continuing task of offering encouragement and support to individual gay Catholics needing both reassurance and reconciliation was more and more the responsibility of its members in general, while their regularly elected representatives on the national committee developed policies and strategies of a more political and diplomatic kind, pursuing QUEST's interests as a national organisation in the public domain, and calling on the regional members for support in implementing these policies.

*This additional newsletter, distributed to members only, and carrying news, views and information largely about QUEST affairs, was to begin bi-monthly publication (thus replacing the 'Calendar' previously appended to the Newsletter) shortly after this meeting, at the beginning of October 1978.

PASTORAL SYMPHONY

The National Pastoral Congress in Liverpool (May 1980) was an event that naturally claimed the attention of QUEST. It had been formally invited, a year ahead of the national event, to send a representative to a consultative meeting of Catholic organisations within the Westminster diocese; and, in its own turn, had approached the Congress organisers in the hope that one or two of those engaged in the planning might speak at a meeting of QUEST members. This prospect passed unfulfilled, and, as working papers for the Congress gradually became available, it seemed unlikely that matters of most concern to QUEST would find any place on the agenda. The publication in December 1979 of the Catholic Social Welfare Commission's Introduction to the pastoral care of homosexual people, however, changed this perspective.

QUEST as has already been noted, warmly and publicly welcomed this pamphlet and commended its unidentified authors:

They recognise the existence of much misunderstanding - 'which frequently comes from religious people' - and that 'ostracism of and discrimination against the homosexual can frequently result in many people who are practising Christians being unwilling to admit that they are homosexual.' They acknowledge the important but often disregarded, distinction between sexual disposition and sexual activity ('Homosexuality ... is morally neutral and the invert homosexual, like the heterosexual, cannot be held responsible for his tendencies'); and, by their admirably predominant emphasis on love and friendship ... they transcend (though they do not ignore) the traditional theological, and often pastoral, preoccupation with the objective morality of homosexual acts. 'Pastoral care does not consist simply in the rigid and automatic application of objective moral norms. It considers the individual in his actual situation, with all his strengths and weaknesses. The decision of conscience, determining what should be done and what avoided, can only be made after prudent consideration of the real situation as well as the moral norm.'

The Catholic Herald's columnist, John Carey, was probably accurate in suggesting that the report "will please neither the conservatives nor the radical gay groups": the former because its restatement of traditional Catholic teaching was 'cautious', and the latter because its reassessment of Christian moral tradition "does not go as far ... as did the Anglican Board for Social Responsibility's working party or the Methodist Division of Social Responsibility both of whom also published reports earlier this year," saying, "albeit with qualifications that homosexual acts were morally justifiable in certain circumstances." Harry Coen was more discerning, in a detailed commentary on the report in Gay News. "In many ways it is an extraordinary document," he wrote, "bearing all the hallmarks of aiming to be progressive while toeing the Vatican line on sexual ethics ... It is a particularly Catholic habit to walk tightropes of this kind, and the pamphlet does so with impressive confidence." Referring more specifically to the particular pastoral guidelines offered in the pamphlet, Coen continued:

By emphasizing the gap between the ideal and the real, the guidelines leave the way open to individual pastors to decide just how far they may go in accepting gays who will renounce neither their faith nor their lovers. And while this may seem bizarre to non-Catholics - and downright insulting to non-Christian gay liberationists who reject the 'disorder' theory - in practice it could be a giant step forward for those progressive priests who accept that gays are no more disordered than anyone else.

It is certainly as far as an official publication from the English and Welsh hierarchy can go without inviting unthinkable confrontation with Rome ...

But Catholic priests are reminded forcefully that they have a duty to their gay parishioners, and the pamphlet takes pains to dispel hoary old myths about both gay women and gay men. It urges understanding and implicitly marks the first realistic attempt to come to terms with the real issues which confront gays in modern society and in the Church.

"It has a detachment, sagacity, charity and a realistic approach which is characteristic of Catholic counselling at its best," commented *The Tablet*. "The report does not lean heavily on authoritative 'statements' whether they be ecclesiastical or from the medical profession. It is commonsensical and candid; it has the patience of an ancient institution."

In his preface to the pamphlet, the episcopal president of the Social Welfare Commission, Bishop Harris of Middlesbrough, had urged "serious and sensitive study" of its content, and QUEST now made it its business to activate such study as widely as it could.* For this purpose, the National Pastoral Congress - despite the apparent limitations of its agenda - offered an obvious occasion.

In a background paper forwarded to the General Secretary of the Congress early in March 1980, QUEST argued that:

The subject of the pamphlet recently published by the Catholic Social Welfare Commission ... is obviously germane in principle to the business of the National Pastoral Congress, though it may - at first sight - be thought too narrow in scope or too limited in application to warrant attention in this context. It is on this account that QUEST ... is concerned to suggest to delegates that some aspects of the subject bear directly on at least two of the main themes of the conference agenda

The paper then set out a number of direct quotations from both the pamphlet and from Congress papers, in order to substantiate the assertion made, in relation to the two themes of 'Family and Society' and 'Justice'. In a final section, after quoting again from the pamphlet - "Reasonable estimates suggest that between 4 and 5% of the total population are exclusively homosexual" - the QUEST paper concluded its key argument thus:

It may well be the case, therefore, that within the outreach of the National Pastoral Congress there are, in England and Wales, as many as 200 000 homosexual men and women. Since each has, or has had, two parents as well as (most likely) brothers and sisters, the number of people involved in that outreach could amount to one million - not including pastors and teachers. The predicament of the homosexual Catholic is in no way a matter of marginal concern.

In the event, it was the persistence of individual delegates, and particularly of two or three QUEST members who were present at the Congress as diocesan representatives, that brought the subject into the arena. Two of these (from Southwark and Liverpool) were not only entered in the same Sector, that on Family and Society but were together in the same small discussion group (of fourteen people in all) considering one aspect of the Topic 'Individuals with Special Needs'. Their endeavour is instructive. One of them reported afterwards in the Newsletter that they had as their main task "the analysis of the needs of mentally and physically handicapped people."

*Because of a considerable overlap in content and purpose between the pamphlet and its own study kit - now in the final stages of editorial completion - QUEST decided to suspend its further development for the time being, and to concentrate on promoting the Commission's document.

There was little chance to discuss the homosexual issue and whatever was said met with polite silence within the group. By the evening, however, when the discussion groups met together at Topic level, Tony Gibbings (chairman of the particular group) was able to say: "Many feelings are expressed before mentally handicapped people and homosexuals ... what happens to people with special needs is that they become isolated, put aside, not so much because they have a problem but because we have a problem ..."

Next day, when time pressures made it evident that no further consideration of homosexuality was likely within the discussion groups, one of the QUEST members

adopted the restricted objective of drawing attention to, and quoting extracts from, the Social Welfare Commission's pamphlet on pastoral care and proposed that the Congress should recommend its study. No objection was raised to this and when the groups met at Topic level, Tony Gibbings' presentation of the resolution on homosexual people was accepted without demur by the 70 or so people who were present.

In accordance with Congress procedure, the reports of the individual Topic groups had finally to be approved by a full meeting of the Sectors (each having a total of some 300 members); but before this the Topic groups had to meet again to approve their own report as written. The chairman of the Topic group on Individuals with Special Needs was Nicholas Coote, Secretary of the Social Welfare Commission. Visiting the small discussion group at an earlier stage he had advised that any recommendation about homosexual people should be kept distinct from any made about the mentally ill - a distinction energetically supported by the QUEST member from the Liverpool delegation. The same member now proposed an addition to the resolution as conveyed in the chairman's report, which, after commending the Commission's pamphlet on pastoral care, urged that it "ought to be studied widely". The suggested addition was the phrase, "in view of the lack of understanding, prejudice and discrimination against this hitherto voiceless minority group". This provoked - for the first time in the discussions - some debate, one delegate arguing that the homosexual issue was being given "a grossly disproportionate amount of space", and another that the suggested addition to the resolution would be the very thing the press would get hold of to discredit the Congress. The amended resolution was, however, approved by the majority of the Topic members, and was later carried by the full Sector meeting "by a substantial show of hands." Thus it found a place in the official record of the Congress.

In the Sector concerned with Justice, the Topic group considering Human Rights and Social Justice at Home included discrimination against homosexuals in its agenda. As another delegate - an honorary member of QUEST, noted afterwards, "It is significant that the group dealing with the rights of the gay person lacked the advantage of having any gay man or woman in the group". Nevertheless after much fuller discussion than had occurred in the Family and Society Sector, the group included in its report its "most pressing recommendation" that "continuing dialogue, study and positive pastoral support along the lines of the Catholic Social Welfare Commission's document be actively pursued at all levels of the Church. A continuing re-evaluation of attitudes is essential."

If the National Pastoral Congress's recorded recognition of the needs and interests of homosexual people in the Church seemed to mark a measure of some achievement, disappointment was to follow. In September The Easter People, the Bishops' Message in the light of the Congress, was fully discussed at a quarterly meeting of the northern QUEST group in Bradford (where they were joined by members of the national executive committee and regional convenors, who were holding a concurrent weekend conference at the University). The Newsletter subsequently reported:

It was natural that QUEST members, recalling the recognition that had been given to their concerns by the Congress itself, should look for some similar mark of recognition in the Bishops' Message. Disappointingly there is none.

The Bishops' Conference has never, in fact, given any formal or public indication of its response to the report prepared at its behest by its Social Welfare Commission. But the Newsletter's comment prompted one of its members, Bishop Butler, to write

I am sorry that The Easter People carries no direct reference by the Bishops to the rights and needs of homosexuals. But may I suggest that the document from the Social Welfare Commission, on which you commented favourably at an earlier date, can be taken as an indication of the Bishops' attitude. That document made certain distinctions which I continue to regard as important but I think it represents a growth in understanding.

It was precisely to encourage just such a growth in understanding that QUEST saw it as one of its main responsibilities to promote wider study of the pastoral care pamphlet. As the chairman had acknowledged in a letter to Bishop Harris at the time of its publication:

As a group, whatever our private ambitions may be, we are sanguine enough not to expect that such a document from such a source will overtly challenge traditional teaching. Indeed, we could only expect the teaching to be modified in the light of the greater wisdom and experience of the community of the Church as a whole. What your guidelines will achieve, if they are conscientiously followed, is an enlargement of that wisdom and experience within the Church from which other things may flow.

In pursuit of its policy, QUEST was as much concerned to make the "Bishops' attitude" as reflected in the 'guidelines' pamphlet known within the gay community as it was to encourage the pamphlet's study within the Church community. Early in 1980 it bought a quarter-page advertisement in Gay News to declare "News for gay Roman Catholics". Quoting the pamphlet, the advertisement announced that "Your priests are now publicly being told that, 'As a group that has suffered more than its share of oppression and contempt, the homosexual community has particular claim upon the concern of the Church.' QUEST", it went on, "continues to urge and argue this claim within the Church with increasing support and in more and more places. Come and join us."

In March QUEST proposed, in a letter sent to all the area bishops in the Westminster diocese, the holding, it was hoped during Gay Pride Week in late June, "of a public service in Westminster Cathedral ... that set out specifically to attract the attention and engage the participation of homosexual people and so provide a timely opportunity to convey to them, with reason and understanding, the refreshing spirit of the 'guidelines'."

The Westminster bishops, at the next meeting of their Council for Diocesan Affairs at the end of the month, "discussed at great length the suggestion of a Catholic participation in Gay Pride Week ... They feel that in the absence of a sensitive understanding amongst the Catholic community and many of the clergy of the difficulties experienced by homosexual people, a major Catholic participation ... might well be counter-productive ... It is their pastoral judgment that (this) would in fact harm rather than help the process of heightening the Catholic community's awareness."

Awareness is usually best achieved through witness, and it was in the hope of providing a serviceable instrument to promote widespread discussion that, early in 1981 and following consultations with the regional convenors, the national committee began

laying plans for "a series of public meetings centering on a scripted presentation of some Catholic responses to questions about homosexuality". The notion was that the "scripted presentation" - which in due course emerged in the form of a one-act play, commissioned from one of QUEST's own members - could be transferred from place to place, be presented either by a touring cast or by members of the various regional groups, and be supported by a local panel of Catholics able to answer questions and stimulate debate. "The thrust of the effort", the committee agreed, "was towards the Catholic community", and at the outset the London, Bristol, Merseyside and Nottingham groups promised their support, with Sheffield shortly following suit.

Gate 13, "a comedy-tragedy-thriller-fantasy", was presented in the Manning Hall, London University Union, on 28th November 1981 before an audience of sixty or so. It was critically reviewed in the following issue of the Catholic Herald:

Gate 13 is supposedly the gate through which Catholics enter Heaven - unluckily for some - because depending on what attitude the gate-keepers have, homosexuals may be turned away. It is a spurious and unhelpful plot ... There is much that could be written sensitively and performed in a dramatic way about the dilemmas homosexuals face, the agonies they bear and the prejudice and cruelty they endure. But this play does not succeed ... It merely restates the prejudices using tired stereotypical characterisation ... It is meant to contribute to the serious and sensitive study of issues raised by the Catholic Social Welfare Commission's report on the pastoral care of homosexual people. The play will need many improvements in production, presentation and, above all, script, if it is to do so.

While still recovering from this severe assault on their efforts, the author, actors and promoters of Gate 13 found some consolation in the review contributed to the Newsletter. The play, it explained:

invites us - and particularly the general Catholic public - to consider whether a practising gay, non-practising Catholic young man is likely to get into Heaven. David had stopped receiving the sacraments and going to Mass after being refused absolution by a priest who would have given it only on condition that David leave Garry, with whom he shares a youthfully stable and actively homosexual friendship characterised, it would seem, by loving affection scarcely if at all distinguishable from that enjoyed in a happy married life. Victim of a queer-bashing assault by drunkards, David dies in Garry's arms and makes his sub-celestial (or purgatorial or extra-infernal: the location is more mythical than symbolic) way to Gate 13, where Roman Catholics are vetted before they board paradise.

Curial efficiency has seen to it that David's case is well documented and his arrival is by no means unexpected: Father John, an experienced receptionist somewhat preoccupied with crosswords but full of kindly remarks; Sister Frances, offering a cup of tea and lots of loosely liberal views; and Father Thomas, unused to formalities at the desk but unswerving in his allegiance to the Vatican declaration on sexual ethics - they have established their doctrinal positions as they discuss David's approach ... It is no less easy for Father Thomas to argue on grounds of intrinsic disorder personified in David that he is a total security risk at any level of the Church, militant or triumphant, than it is for Sister Frances to contend in terms of the love he had for Garry that David can confidently go forward to his reward in Christ. A special merit of the author's approach is an absence of special or specious pleading for David: no fine lack of formal culpability, no neat hint of material triviality, and no arrogant suggestion of invincible ignorance are allowed to be advanced on his behalf. It is left to Father John, in a concluding parable that contrasts legalism with law, to come as close as one decently and reverentially can to declaring that God's decision to admit or to turn away David can do no more than serve to express David's integrity or lack of it ...

Discussion, no less valuable than occurred after the production in the Manning Hall, ought to be taking place in the parishes to which homosexual men and women belong; prejudice and fear and hostility need to be articulated before they can be dispelled.

Though it would be condescending to suggest that a play considered so inadequate by a (presumably) professional newspaper critic could yet be suitably promoted in parish halls, QUEST, in reviewing its plans, was properly concerned to evaluate the first experience of its production less strictly on artistic and technical grounds (as in the case of the first review) and more sympathetically in terms of its exposition and educational potential (as in the case of the second). Had it not been for the fact that, due to new engagements, two of the four principals of the prospective touring cast had to withdraw; and that, after further consideration of the demands that local presentation would make on their limited human resources, the regional groups it had been hoped to involve had meantime come forward with hesitant second thoughts; it is likely that further performances and discussions would have been arranged. The play had certainly not been driven out of court by the unsympathetic Herald critic, and an alternative plan to record a studio-based performance on to a cassette, which could then be made available to prompt parish discussion, was subsequently adopted. The first product, however, was not entirely acceptable on technical grounds that would prompt distractions on public playback, and a revised production of the cassette was expected. By now, however, the creative and missionary spirit of the begetters of the play was flagging, and so - though there is yet opportunity for revival - this particular good intention foundered. Perhaps it should have been called Gate 14.

FAITH AND WORKS

At the end of November 1981 QUEST had, to the nearest ten, 370 enrolled members. During the autumn the membership records had been subjected to a careful scrutiny. The count of full members (250) was checked against evidence of subscription renewal or initial payment for the financial year that had begun on 1st April. At the same time a letter was sent to all listed honorary members, who had no subscriptions to renew (though many offered regular donations), asking for assurance that they still wished their membership to stand. 120 replied in the affirmative, 80 of whom were Catholic priests, 10 Anglican priests and 30 non-Catholic lay members. Only ten of the full members were women.

In the December issue, the editor of Quest-Link provided a geographical breakdown of membership distribution, showing that the vast majority (310) were resident in England, 30 in Scotland, 10 in Wales, 10 in the Republic of Ireland and 10 in other countries abroad. Within England, there were 100 members living in London postal districts, 90 elsewhere in the south-east, 50 in the south-west, 40 in the north-west, and 30 in the north-east (Leicester being taken as the central point of the four divisions).

Given the probable size of the gay Catholic population, the total number of full members was not very impressive, though it has to be appreciated that a proportion year by year having resolved the personal problems that induced them to join QUEST in the first place, no longer see a need for continuing in membership and so do not renew. The evidence is that the number of those who fall away in the year is matched by a somewhat greater number of new membership enrolments, so that the trend overall is upward. It was appreciated nonetheless that the statistics gave no cause for complacency but rather a challenge for greater effort to enlarge the range of QUEST's outreach in the community.

Thus far initial access to QUEST had been either through direct word-of-mouth contact with individual members, referral by clergy, or written response to a P.O. Box number; and enquiry by letter - the main approach - was dependent on knowledge of the exact address, in other words on regular advertising and other forms of public information. From the evidence of letters received, it was recognised that for many gay Catholics a decision to write in to QUEST in the first place was not an easy one, involving - as it had to if any reply was to be effected - identification by name and address. For some, writing a letter of enquiry to an unfamiliar Catholic organisation was the hesitant start to a process of 'coming out', a stage in the growth of self acceptance and self-assurance; for others, it was a tentative first step along the road of re-connection with the Church that had been long-abandoned, a moment of self-acknowledgment that 'the hound of heaven' was still in pursuit. No wonder quite a number of these correspondents mentioned that they had known of QUEST's existence for some time, yet had so far hesitated to get in touch. But how many more were still hesitant, and reluctant to reveal themselves, however deep their need and longing for what QUEST might offer them?

Of course the process would be a great deal easier for many such people if it could be activated by a 'phone call. No obligation then to give away identity in order to discover more about QUEST's purposes; no need to wait apprehensively for the letter in reply; and an opportunity, moreover, to talk directly and in confidence to another human being about the tensions and apparent contradictions of living and loving as a gay Catholic. The theoretical case for providing a telephone contact was well appreciated by the national committee, but the practical means to this end were by no means simple to set up, and there was a sensible hesitation about embarking on a project of this kind without some reasonable assurance in anticipation that it would prove possible to sustain it long-term. Not only faith would be required but works as well.

Hesitancy about taking on more than could be realistically managed and maintained was overtaken, however, by the sense of urgency conveyed by an Anglican priest and a Catholic layman at a QUEST meeting in London in February 1980. Both speakers were voluntary members of the capital's Gay Switchboard, and their account of their experiences left the meeting in no doubt not only that there was need for a QUEST-operated switchboard but also for the advance preparation and training of all would-be volunteers. Although there was clearly some scepticism in the minds of the speakers about the nature of the messages a Catholic group might want to convey to telephone callers, they left the meeting with promises of further help and advice and with an emphatic assurance that a switchboard that was open for as little as one evening a week would be infinitely better than no switchboard at all.

At its March meeting the national committee took up the challenge as a matter of urgency, and subsequently identified three development tasks: to find suitable accommodation in central or near central London as a base for the switchboard; to assess the probable installation and running costs and make provision for additional funding; and to recruit and train suitable volunteers from amongst the London-region membership. It was hoped that a telephone enquiry service could be inaugurated at the beginning of the New Year (1981).

The August issue of Quest-Link invited members in the greater London area "who have some experience of 'switchboard' service or of personal counselling and who may be willing to give some time to QUEST's future endeavours in this field" to a meeting the following month to discuss practical developments. Ten members responded, and eight attended the meeting. Their interest and practical experience proved sufficient to warrant a signal to proceed, and after two further meetings, by early December the working group had taken a number of material decisions and established a range of consultative contacts with other relevant organisations. The records of these meetings establish that:

- It was recognised that the primary aim of the intended service is to give greater effect to the purposes of QUEST as declared in its constitution, particularly 'to provide a point of contact for any homosexual Catholic in need of reassurance and support'. This is to be done by setting up (in addition to a postal address) a telephone contact point staffed at regular times each week by volunteer lay members of QUEST who are practised in, or who will be tutored in, the necessary skills. Experience of QUEST's postbag over the years, and of the telephone contact service run by ACCEPTANCE (Australia)* suggested that callers would for the most part be seeking contact in the first instance with fellow lay Catholics rather than with priests. It is thought desirable, however, that a priest should be in attendance whenever the phone is 'open', for immediate referral when appropriate.
- It was agreed that, at the outset, the service shall operate for 4 hours a night on the three weekend nights, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, probably from 7 - 11 p.m. This is to be regarded as the minimum operational level, and will be extended as soon as practicable.
- It was agreed that the volunteers work in pairs (one experienced member of the group had contributed a paper which included the warning that "whilst a telephone is being manned, there should always be another person available to consult with an objective third party to what can sometimes be a very intense one-to-one phone call") and that it is reasonable to expect them to undertake a full evening shift once a fortnight as a general rule.

*ACCEPTANCE (Australia) is the equivalent Catholic group to QUEST (Great Britain).

- It was recognised that the service under discussion was principally a front-line operation, with the potential of extending contacts, providing sympathetic support and offering further opportunities for follow-on. Though it would involve some general counselling of an informal kind, there was a sense in which full counselling would, in appropriate situations, be provided separately in support by experts to whom referrals could be made. The development of a panel of relevant (Catholic?) experts - medical, legal, pastoral, clinical etc. - is therefore as urgent as the recruitment and training of switchboard volunteers.
- Note was taken of the likelihood that more immediate, open and anonymous access to QUEST by telephone will attract other callers besides those gay Catholics (laymen or priests) it is principally designed to serve. These may include parents of gay Catholics who are ignorant or troubled; priests seeking information and pastoral support; members of the public wanting information about Catholic teaching and attitudes; lonely people, gay, Catholic or otherwise; Catholics hostile to homosexuality; etc. Easy access to reference materials, and some training in making responses to specific requests for information or to arguments advanced by callers, must also be provided, therefore, to switchboard volunteers ... It was further noted that, in this particular area of enquiry, it was not so much individual response as response by QUEST that was required or should be given.

All these preparatory decisions were endorsed by the national executive committee at its meeting in mid-December when it also agreed to the appointment of a member of the working group as director of the service, and to make him, *ex officio*, a member of the committee. From now on, the director - with the support of a small administrative group - was entrusted with responsibility for the further development of the service and for the establishment and maintenance of its standard of activity. To avoid operational delays, he was to refer, when necessary, directly to the chairman. The national committee, at the same time, undertook responsibility for financing and accommodating the switchboard, which, by now, was being commonly referred to as QUEST's Linkline.

Consultative contacts had already been made with the Albany Trust and the Gay Legal Advice group (GLAD), and renewed with Gay Switchboard (whose operation had also been carefully observed in action). Further consultations now took place at the Tavistock Clinic, and with such as the Gay Teenage Group, the Gay Bereavement Group, Parents Enquiry, the Samaritans, London Friend, and the medical counsellors of the Gay Alcoholics Group. Invaluable advice was also obtained from two of QUEST's earliest honorary members, Fr. Norman Brown and Fr. Ronald Salmon; and from Gabrielle Ryves, a Catholic psychiatrist and counsellor. By the end of January, a total of nearly 40 lay members of QUEST in the greater London area had shown themselves willing to volunteer as switchboard operators or, if they could not regularly guarantee giving one evening a fortnight for such duties, to serve as reserves or to provide clerical support.

By the beginning of March the director of Linkline was able to report to the national committee that 19 volunteers and two priests had registered for the first of a series of three training and study days which took place between mid-March and late June. The hope was that all the volunteers would attend the full session of the three study days, but this was only partially achieved. The training plan was based on the notion of 'sharing'. Linkline called upon no professional experts for assistance, but drew rather on the expertise of a range of men and women working in voluntary counselling organisations who came and shared their experience. So the volunteer trainees, through listening, questioning and discussion, were themselves drawn into this process of sharing - a process that was enhanced by the sharing in morning prayer at the start, and the celebration of the Eucharist at the finish of each training day. Speakers on these occasions represented many different aspects of the lives of members of the gay community and so could convey information about and insights into the background and experiences out of which calls to

the switchboard might come. They ranged from directly personal problems such as loneliness, gay bereavement, and alcoholism; through studies of bisexuality, of heterosexually married gay people, transvestites and transsexuals, and of sexual health; to consideration of the special concerns of gay teenagers, lesbians, gay seminarians, priests and religious, and the parents of gay children. Role-playing techniques were used to provide the volunteers with a simulated experience both of presenting a situation as over a telephone and of responding to it from the switchboard; and, at a deeper level, they were challenged to consider the strength and reality of their own Catholic faith and the moral foundations of their lives as gay people. By the end of the three-part training session, some of the initial volunteers, facing up to the kind of demands that switchboard service would be likely to make on them personally, had dropped out or withdrawn to give the matter more thought - one sign of the effectiveness of what has come to be considered by those qualified to judge as one of the best training programmes available (as it continues to be) for an operational switchboard of this kind. By the end of June 1981, Linkline had 14 trained volunteers, and 10 priests willing to be in occasional attendance at the switchboard. It had also received a most reassuring testimonial from one of the Sisters at the south London convent and school where the training days had been held:

I have been very struck by your friendliness and openness, not only with me when I've opened the door to see you in, as I have for quite a number of you, but also by your friendliness to each other. You come in, you welcome each other you seem genuinely pleased to see each other, and I sense a tremendous feeling of friendliness within the group. You are so obviously glad to be together.

With this friendliness towards each other, I can't help but think that something of this spirit will come across to those who phone you on Linkline. They will feel that the person on the other end cares for them, is concerned for them, and this should be a great asset in your work, for impressions over the phone are very powerful either to help or hinder people from approaching. The message, the atmosphere which comes over the phone to the caller tells him what the receiver is like. This friendliness, this happiness I sense among you, will reach the caller and reassure him.

As yet, however, QUEST had found no suitable operational base for the service.

This was not due to lack of effort. During the late spring and throughout the summer continuing enquiries had been carried out. The cost of leasing a very modest office at a commercial rental in near-central London, estimated at a minimum of £1500 a year, was far beyond QUEST's current resources; several London-based Catholic organisations were approached, as well as religious houses, in the hope that one of them at least might have an underused room to spare, and for a more manageable rental. It quickly became clear however, that any such available roomspace was already being taken up for operational purposes in preparation for the Pope's visit to Britain the following summer. At one point a parish priest in west London, in prompt response to an appeal, reported in the Catholic Herald, for "an empty attic in some London presbytery or an unused parish room", offered the considerable though not exclusive facilities of his little-used presbytery dining-room. The good priest subsequently developed doubts about the motivation of the Linkline, however, and the offer was withdrawn despite the assurances QUEST provided. Two other distinct possibilities opened up and then, for quite different reasons, receded. Meantime, as Linkline's director was to report retrospectively to the national committee in November, "the delay in finding accommodation seems to have dampened the enthusiasm of some of the initial volunteers".

Meeting at the beginning of September, the committee confronted two alternatives, each of them disagreeable for different reasons, and agreed that, "if no inexpensive accommodation were found very shortly, the choice was between major expenditure on commercial premises or the abandonment of the project." Then the miracle, or at least the answer to prayer, occurred. QUEST received not one offer of accommodation but two.

Fr. Hollings suggested that he might squeeze Linkline into some shared accommodation in his Bayswater presbytery; and a Catholic organisation based within walking distance of the Earls Court underground came forward, after a long interval, with the option on exclusive use of a good-sized upperfloor room in its own house. Two disagreeable choices had suddenly been displaced by two agreeable ones, and for practical operational reasons it was the second offer that was taken up.

The October Newsletter announced that:

Friday 6th November 1981 is the date on which ... QUEST's own switchboard will open at a new head office and communications centre in Earls Court, London.

After many months of searching, praying, planning and training, we have - in the Linkline - reached what it was predicted in the chairman's report to the 1980 AGM, will subsequently be seen as quite the most important landmark in QUEST's history ... a service that will at last give more of those many hurt and hesitant gay Catholics whom we have not yet reached easier and anonymous access to us and to that sharing of experience that enriches every life.

On the evening of Friday 23rd October, in the church of St. Mary of the Angels, Fr. Michael Hollings was joined by several other priests in concelebrating a Mass both in thanksgiving and in further spiritual preparation for the opening of Linkline. Some fifty members of QUEST took part and joined in the social that followed in one of the parish rooms. Exactly two weeks later, one of the volunteers picked up a ringing telephone receiver and for the first time spoke the friendly words that have been uttered hundreds of times since: "QUEST-Linkline. Can I help you?"

KEEPING COMPANY

Liaison with other organised groups of gay people having comparable concerns to QUEST's own has been a part of its programme from very early days. The first informal news-sheet (June 1975) records that "we have made contact with the recently formed Gay Methodists, who have since decided to expand their group to take in all denominations and renamed themselves The Open Church"; and also that "the Open Church and Quaker group have suggested we unite with them for a social evening". This particular project did not in fact materialise, but by the end of the year it had been decided that "liaison with other religious gay groups ... should be the separate responsibility of a member of the committee." This continues to be the case. However, in his report to the sixth AGM (November 1980), the secretary noted that, "In the past QUEST has been criticised by other groups for being insular, uninterested and non-supportive of their efforts to achieve human rights and social justice for all gay people", and cited the comment of the committee member currently responsible for liaison: "Working together with other gay groups should play an important part in our activities as Catholics at both local and national level. Indeed the National Pastoral Congress urged us as Christians to do everything together except what conscience forces us to do apart." From without there were voices implying that QUEST was somewhat half-hearted about its relations with other groups; and from within the inference that it was too scrupulous in its connections with these groups. What are the facts of the matter?

The emergence in the United States, in the wake of the 'Stonewall riot' in 1969, of the Gay Liberation movement brought the fact of homosexuality, the existence of gay people in significant numbers, and their experiences of both social and moral oppression, out on to the public agenda. Equal rights and justice for homosexual people was the theme; their liberation from the oppressive atmosphere of a predominantly heterosexual society the purpose. It was in this climate and at this time that a range of organisations and groups for gay people, in different contexts but with a cause in common, began to spring up in Britain also - and amongst them was QUEST.

In the process of their formation and development these different groups were concerned not only to determine their best function within the wider context of the community, profession or church that they belonged to, but also how best to relate to each other in pursuit of the common cause. The members of the original Catholic Gay Group had declared almost at the outset of their endeavour that, whatever their personal ambitions to be able "to bring their distinctive capacities for loving to (God's) service without impediment, this does not mean ... that they subscribe to the idea of homosexuality as an alternative life-style, a form of personal relations available to anyone as a matter of open choice". The gay liberation movement proclaimed loudly that 'gay is good'. In the process of throwing out the conventional moral values of the society they inhabited, they had - if only in populist tones - uttered a new moral judgment of their own. Association with the movement in general, therefore, was bound to be interpreted as identification not only with its objectives but also with its values. For religious gay people, in particular, the question of how to relate to others in the common cause was not a simple one; or, at the very least, the answers were not self-evident. "The slogan 'gay is good' is not one to which the Catholic Gay Group subscribes. It senses that the Church, conversely, teaches (albeit in other words) that 'gay is bad'. The Group's position at the moment" - 1974 - "is simply that, for a number of Catholics, as well as for a number of others, 'gay is'. What about it may be good or bad is the matter of their enquiry."

This has continued to be QUEST's position, and a criterion it has necessarily used in determining what sort of relations it is able and ready to maintain with other gay groups -

both religious and secular. Standing, as it does, astride both the gay community and the community of the Catholic Church, it is seeking to build a more permanent bridgehead between the two, by promoting where it can a better appreciation, each of the other. This also involves it in avoiding, as a group, action liable to cause misunderstanding - and groups, like individuals, are often judged by the company they are seen to keep.

Perhaps this is why QUEST has had a closer association with the Friends Homosexual Fellowship than with any other group. For what the two groups have in common is the over-riding cause of drawing the larger religious bodies of which they are members nearer to fuller understanding of the gay community with which they are also identified. In so doing, their shared ambition is both to make themselves more completely at home amongst their co-religionists and to render the religious societies they belong to more accepting of, and indeed more attractive to, members of the gay community. The FHF states clearly that:

The Friends Homosexual Fellowship was set up because of the isolation and loneliness of homosexual Quakers and their friends who felt there was nowhere within the Religious Society of Friends that they could gain full support and self-respect or be truly themselves ...

The aims are:

- to encourage fellowship, friendship and support between members and, where necessary, to help those who have difficulty either in accepting themselves and others or in being accepted. To this end, the formation of local groups is encouraged;

- to promote a dialogue within the Society of Friends at all levels with a view to achieving a deeper mutual understanding and acceptance;

- to liaise with other groups with similar aims, particularly those with a religious basis.

With such closely comparable aims, QUEST and the FHF have found it easy and congenial to make common cause. Each group has been informally represented, by invitation, at various weekend conferences called by the other; connections have been made between members of both groups at local level; and the FHF was represented in the audience at QUEST's Westminster Symposium (1977).

In the summer of 1980 a joint one-day assembly of members of the two organisations was held at a Friends Meeting House in north London. The Newsletter reported that:

Some fifty people took part in this meeting, at which QUEST members were regrettably outnumbered by FHF members in the proportion of almost 2 to 1 ... The theme chosen for the day was 'Gay Christian groups - benefits and dangers'*, and the morning session was devoted to talks by, and questions to, Mgr. Timothy Firth of the diocese of Westminster and Damaris Parker-Rhodes of the Society of Friends.

*The theme was prompted by a paragraph in the Catholic 'pastoral guidelines' pamphlet on societies specifically for homosexuals: "...There are Christian groups explicitly formed for the encouragement of homosexuals to cope with their difficulties. The goodwill of these societies must not automatically be questioned, especially because their very existence may be due to the insensitivity of the general public. On the other hand, there are obvious dangers."

After an informal picnic lunch, four smaller groups were set up to develop further discussion. To the ear of one eavesdropping on each group in turn, there was almost no end to the number of topics raised during the afternoon in one corner of the building or another, and QUEST members - less accustomed to silence than are the Friends - certainly seemed to make up in voice for what they lacked in number.

No attempt was made ... to draw conclusions from the sharing and exchange of views, but it was manifest that Catholic participants had gained from Friends new insights into the exercise of conscience and the search for deeper personal authenticity, while Friends seemed to derive deeper understanding of Catholic belief in a 'teaching' Church. At one level, the Quaker recognition of corporate, as well as of individual truths, and the Catholic admission of a *sensus fidelium* alongside the Magisterium, offered ready ground for convergence; while at another, the warmth and openness of the day's conversation established much more a sense of things in common than of points of difference.

The other national religious group with which QUEST has developed a continuing, if less coherent, relationship is the Gay Christian Movement. A decision to set up this group was reached by the resolution of an ad hoc conference of some sixty or more homosexual Christians or sympathisers held in London at the beginning of January 1975. Several members of QUEST attended the conference, at which the Friends Homosexual Fellowship, the Open Church, the Metropolitan Community Church and the Campaign for Homosexual Equality were also represented. At the end of the day, a steering group (to which a member of QUEST's executive committee was elected) was set up to plan the future development of what was anticipated as an all-embracing gay Christian movement.

Possibly due to a misunderstanding of the underlying intentions of the meeting's promoters, QUEST had received the impression that "all-embracing" referred to the existing groups and that the "movement" would be an umbrella organisation for keeping them all in regular contact and in co-ordinating when practicable their respective programmes. It whole-heartedly welcomed such a prospect. However, after the steering committee had met again, it became clear that what was in fact in formation was another ecumenical gay Christian group, open to individual membership ("all-embracing") rather than to group representation, and so taking its place alongside rather than above QUEST and the others. Since it had been sponsored largely by Anglican clergy and laity, for whom there was as yet no denominational group corresponding to those already available to Quakers, Methodists and Catholics, the Gay Christian Movement was still positively welcomed; but it seemed not, in the circumstances, to be suited to the co-ordinating role that had been anticipated - at least by QUEST.

At its next meeting QUEST's committee agreed to invite representatives of the other gay Christian groups to meet together to discuss further the idea of organising better and regular liaison between themselves, an initiative that was unanimously approved by its members at their monthly meeting in May (1976). A letter was then sent to Rev. Peter Elers, one of the central figures in the GCM, explaining what had been QUEST's original expectation of the movement's role and continuing:

Our impression is that the GCM is principally an association of gay Anglicans, supported by a few Christians of other denominations, and while we welcome the arrival of an Anglican group on the gay scene, we do not see that it can expect or be expected to function as an 'umbrella' organisation.

The letter then set out QUEST's proposal, which was put at the same time to the other groups

that a Council associating the several religious homosexual groups should be formed. Such a Council might consist of, say, two representatives from each group, and might meet perhaps once every three months with the object of exchanging information and views; planning, jointly, action strategies that might be developed within each group; and arranging inter-group conferences and other activities as may be thought appropriate.

In the event, the proposal received some support from the Friends, was rejected by the secretary of the Open Church, and was ignored by the Gay Christian Movement - which, nevertheless, continued to aspire to the role of a co-ordinating body. Sequences of informal meetings between members of the relevant groups have occurred from time to time through which a useful exchange of information - over and above the regular supply of published newsletters - has taken place; and a more constructive interconnection between representatives of the Gay Christian Movement, the Metropolitan Community Church and QUEST in the months preceding the first Gayfest (Durham 1981) was effective in managing the arrangements for a quiet room, a religious bookstall, a combined information leaflet and an ecumenical act of worship during the festival. Similarly, QUEST, the Friends Homosexual Fellowship and the Gay Christian Movement, through their members in Scotland, had collaborated in sponsoring with the Scottish Homosexual Rights Group a weekend conference on 'Pastoral Approaches to Homosexuality' which took place at Pitlochry in April 1980. Liaison, in other words, has been given effect once an agreed objective has been identified; but there are some who still cherish hopes that an inter-group council, composed of representatives with the capacity to plan strategies rather than merely plot tactics, may yet be formed somewhat along the lines of QUEST's 1976 proposal.

Meanwhile, a possible model for such a council is emerging in a European context. Early in 1982, the French group for religious homosexuals, 'David et Jonathan', took the initiative of proposing an exploratory meeting between all such European groups, with the idea of forming some kind of 'federation' through which they might be offered mutual support and encouragement in the future. QUEST, the only other nationally based Catholic group so far in Europe, had already developed contacts with 'David et Jonathan', and each had been represented by a guest delegate from the other at a national conference or similar event. Invited at the outset to share in the French initiative, QUEST readily agreed, and the exploratory meeting was held in Paris in October. Those present there agreed to recommend to their own national (or in most cases regional) organisations that a further conference should be held, after they had been able to consider the recommendations of the exploratory meeting, for the purpose of making effective decisions that would have the support of the groups represented. This second meeting took place in Strasbourg in June 1983. Under the caption 'French and British gay Catholics lead new European initiative', QUEST's secretary reported in the August Newsletter:

The meeting at Strasbourg ... was remarkably well attended. Those present at the Paris meeting had been busy contacting other national and regional groups in their own countries who they felt would be interested in the project and would wish to be part of any final body. As a result two groups are participating from the U.K., QUEST and G.C.M., though only QUEST was present 'in body'. Three groups from France, one group from Italy, one group from Germany, one group from Switzerland, three groups from Belgium, two groups from Holland and one group from Spain were represented, while various contacts had been established with groups in Portugal, Finland and Sweden. There were in all about thirty-nine people present ... To discover what equivalent groups were doing how they were disseminating information, what their contacts with their different churches were ... how they helped their members and how they reached out to the communities in whose midst they found themselves, was all immensely informative.

Eventually those present formulated their views and 'decisions' into three proposals which were accepted by an overwhelming vote. The final resolutions were as follows:

The gay Christian groups meeting at Strasbourg on 11th/12th June 1983, gave expression to a mutually felt need for exchange and reflection on their common experience as gay Christians. With this in mind they decided to establish a forum for such European gay Christian groups to continue to meet. They resolved that:

1. there should be an annual meeting to which all such gay Christian groups will be invited, the place and date for such a meeting to be decided upon by a majority at the previous meeting;
2. an organising secretariat will be agreed upon annually,
 - a. to organise the next meeting,
 - b. to circulate the proceedings of that meeting to all participating members;
3. all groups are invited to contact other member groups directly to enlist their aid for supportive action at any time, ensuring that they inform the current secretariat of such action at the same time.

The next meeting is to be held at a venue in Holland in the early summer of 1984, for which the Dutch groups meantime are providing the secretariat. QUEST, for its part, has undertaken, on behalf of the Europeans, the responsibility for informing and consulting, through its already established contacts, comparable groups elsewhere in the English-speaking world: in particular the national Catholic associations - 'Dignity' (United States and Canada), 'Acceptance' (Australia) and 'Ascent' (New Zealand).

In all its connections with other groups, QUEST has to balance both its religious and its gay concerns. It has no wish to be isolationist - indeed the religious groups have their own distinct contribution to make to the movement as a whole - yet it must avoid being compromised. Therefore it must be scrupulous. This can even distance it from other religious groups. Although a number of its members also belong to the Gay Christian Movement, and there is a good deal of informal contact and co-operation between members of both groups, especially on a local level, QUEST as a Catholic body cannot formally commit itself in support of a group whose members are already convinced that "it is entirely compatible with the Christian faith not only to love another person of the same sex but also to express that love fully in personal sexual relationship". QUEST will not stand much chance of persuading the Catholic Church to such a point of view - which is undeniably one of its ambitions - if it is identified with Christians who directly contradict rather than question that Church's traditional teaching. Similarly, it has not been prepared to affiliate formally with the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, which adopted a policy strongly in favour of abortion. And it is not yet persuaded that gay Catholics should stand up openly alongside those of their co-religionists who are campaigning for the ordination of women to the priesthood or against clerical celibacy. At the risk of seeming half-hearted or detached about forming alliances or giving active support to other causes in the domains of individual rights and social justice, QUEST has presently preferred to concentrate its internal efforts on the accomplishment of its own agreed objectives and to extend its external support to those activities promoted by others that will also assist its own. Overall, it represents the view of a Catholic priest writing in The Furrow (journal of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth) in September 1979:

It is not homosexuality which is the basis of one's claims to acceptance and human rights; it is the fact that we are all brothers and sisters under the Fatherhood of God.

ONWARDS, OUTWARDS AND UPWARDS

At the end of November 1982, the following letter arrived in QUEST's postbag:

Dear Sir/Madam, Your advertisement for QUEST - for 'homosexual Catholics' appears in one of the churches which I attend. It is erroneous.

1. There is no such creature

- a) Either, a person is a practising Catholic, confirmed, frequenting the Sacraments, praying, fasting, giving alms, performing good works ... and resisting the temptations of the devil, the world and the flesh - tormenting through these may be - and however long lasting, avoiding the occasions of sin
- or
- b) they are sodomites and their iniquities damage the Temple of the Holy Spirit and cry to heaven for vengeance - which they bring on themselves - but not both.

2. There is therefore no need for such a society either within or without the Church.

3. 'My grace is sufficient for you'.

Each person is given grace sufficient for their state in life, and their temptations. It is up to them to use it. Confirmed Catholics are taught to do this.

4. I call upon you in the Name of Jesus Christ to withdraw your advert, and cease temptation.

Yours truly ...

A few weeks later, the convenor of one of QUEST's earliest regional branches wrote to the secretary:

QUEST here ... does not exist! As far as I can tell there is no interest in the organisation either in the few members around or indeed in any of the younger gays ... I also have come to the conclusion that QUEST has now served its purpose - that is in regard to various individuals - and to try to keep it going in its present format is futile. Its battle with the Church hierarchy will, in my opinion, get nowhere while the present incumbent of St. Peter's chair lives ... As for all those 'sympathetic' priests - that's all they are. I have yet to meet one who will stand up in the pulpit and preach for gays in a positive manner to his Sunday congregation. I regret that I can serve no useful function now in QUEST ...

Read together, these two letters - while they should certainly protect QUEST from much complacency about past achievement - illustrate two at least of those concerns that must continue to engage it in the future: maintaining the morale of its own members and increasing understanding of the homosexual person within the community of the Church. There is no available evidence that the woman who wrote the first letter received any reply: presumably this was judged to be an instance when a prayer could prove mightier than a pen. The second, however, touched a more sensitive nerve.

The executive committee had long recognised that the view from London was not the same as the view from other parts of the country. Though the images might all have the same sharpness, the horizons - and so the perspectives - were different. All were to some

extent partial, but put in collection they were much more fully revealing of the lie of the land that had to be cultivated. Much the same is true of people: given a common task to carry out, each individual concerned is likely to take a somewhat different approach, and eventual decisions will be surer when all have been considered collectively. Hence the critical importance of maintaining effective communication between the parts and the whole.

In the summer of 1981 QUEST's deputy chairman took soundings amongst the regional convenors for a 'state of the nation' review that was presented to the executive committee at its October meeting. In subsequent discussion, the committee - taking an overview - noted that:

- probably more than half the membership, by geography or by choice, was not involved in regional activities. The apostolate of the individual member was of paramount importance, and regional activities must be seen as developments from and sustainers of this apostolate;
- members of regional groups seemed to depend over-much on the convenor, who possibly had only one or two main supports, and events tended to be occasions for keeping the group together (inward-looking) rather than for extending QUEST's work in the region (outward-looking). The more successful and expanding groups were those that were more outward-looking;
- some groups seemed to expect the national committee to recommend regional initiatives rather than develop these themselves, whereas the national committee was responsible for overall policy and the development of national initiatives;
- one group* considered that its members lacked understanding of QUEST's aims, which impeded its development ...

On this last point, the committee noted that, "despite provision of (its) minutes to all (regional) convenors, no question had recently been raised through or by a regional group, nor item suggested for discussion at a future meeting, which in any way hinted at such a lack of understanding".

In the light of this review, the committee now focussed its national attention more specifically on 'the apostolate of the individual member', in the hope of cultivating wider personal responses and creating more opportunity for personal participation in QUEST's activities. This was not by any means a first attempt to appeal directly to each and every member for fuller support. Through Quest-Link, during the winter of 1980/81, they had all received a questionnaire inviting comment and suggestion on many aspects of the group's affairs. 76 (out of a possible 500) replies were received: "not very encouraging" - as Link's editor commented in the April 1981 issue - "as a measure of members' readiness to help in assessing their organisation's present strength and weaknesses". The main messages of the replies (as summarised in the same issue of Link) were:

QUEST enjoys the goodwill of its members, to some of whom it means a lot by just existing even if they can or do play no active part in it themselves.

QUEST has given many members both spiritual and social support.

*it was the same group whose convenor, eighteen months later, wrote the letter quoted at the beginning of this chapter

Members feel strongly that they want as much news as possible, and as much contact as possible with other members for spiritual, social and intellectual purposes.

Members emphasise the great importance of publicity and advertising.

Members regard the establishment of more regional groups as important, and feel that more connections should be made with the Church at parish level.

Both the general situation and this response was considered at one of the periodic meetings of regional convenors with members of the national committee, in London on this occasion, and the collective view was reached that "attempts to engage members in general discussion of QUEST's present position and future development had been largely ineffective ... The general conclusion was that, while many were likely to respond to a clear call for action, for the most part - once they had found the spiritual and social support QUEST offered - they had little to contribute to the formulation of its programme".

Whether and why this was true were the underlying questions the committee now commissioned a veteran member (one-time member of the national executive and original area organiser of a local group in the Kew/Richmond/Kingston neighbourhood) to consider by means of a personal enquiry amongst the members at large. The enquiry was carried out somewhat at random through the winter of 1981/82 and pointed up in particular the hesitancy of members to be known and seen to be involved in QUEST's public activities:

Semi-anonymity is almost useless, but people do not feel strong enough to take the risks involved, and the more they are involved in their parishes (or in 'delicate' professions) the more anxious they feel. It seems an almost insurmountable problem, without backing from parish priests or bishops - and that support is very rare.

Guided by the suggestions that QUEST members on the one hand "were likely to respond to a clear call for action", but that on the other "do not feel strong enough to take the risks involved", the committee presented them in October 1982 with a minimum-risk call-to-action proposal which offered opportunities for the fuller participation of members nationwide on a continuing consultative basis within the confines of the organisation itself. The intention was to set up a number of working groups, each under a member of the national committee, and each "to concern itself with the maintenance and development of a distinct aspect of QUEST's endeavour". As the Newsletter explained:

Each group ... will be expected in due course to advise the committee on action proposed within the group's particular sphere, and subsequently to act on the advice of the committee in carrying out whatever policy it may determine ... Membership of the working groups is open to the bid of any who are interested ... Geography need be no bar since communication among a group's members will normally be by letter or telephone rather than at convened meetings ... And honorary members, who are ineligible under the constitution for membership of the national committee, will be welcome participants in the working groups.

Nine separate group tasks were identified:

- Information and publicity
- Liaison at home and abroad
- Regional development
- Community education
- Outreach
- Young people

- Membership services
- Finance and fundraising
- General administration

and an outline brief was provided for each. For example:

Community Education: to assess the current position of gay Catholics, whether lay person or priest, within the community of the Church, and to propose and plan practical ways of increasing understanding of homosexuality throughout that community (including pastors, parents, teachers, theologians etc.) at all levels and in all interests.

Outreach: to propose and plan readily accessible services (such as telephone linklines etc.) in support of individuals needing information, advice or personal help relating to homosexuality in a Catholic context; to prepare guidelines and training opportunities for volunteer switchboard operators and local befrienders; and to maintain an up-to-date manual of relevant data.

Young People: to represent the special interests and the pastoral and personal needs of young Catholics coming to terms with homosexuality; and to advise on appropriate provision for them whether as a distinct group or within QUEST's general programme of community education, outreach, regional development etc.

In the accompanying issue of Link, the editor emphasised that "groups can't function without people, and the group leaders - who are already mapping out action plans - need to know whose support they can depend on as soon as possible, so that they can get directly in touch and begin consultations".

The responses to this proposal were, numerically, very disappointing and, although the exercise had been constructive in enabling the group to redefine its "tasks ahead", the performance of them has - at least for the time being - been left largely in the lap of the committee. It may prove to be the case, however, that a further innovation in the pattern of QUEST activities will gradually prompt further participation by more members.

The innovation referred to is a national weekend residential conference, open to all members and arranged in conjunction with the Annual General Meeting. The first took place at the University of Leicester in July 1982, when some 45 members attended and, guided by the conference's theme 'Renewal in faith, hope and love', engaged energetically in workshops and discussions, worship and socialising in general. They proposed, and the AGM agreed, that such an event should be held annually, and more than 60 members assembled in York in July 1983 for the second and similar conference on the theme 'God, my neighbour and myself'. A quite recently enrolled and somewhat isolated Scottish member recorded his impressions in the August Newsletter:

To a certain extent the conference, just as a gathering of QUEST members, was bound to have a great effect on me, because I live so far away from my local group ... The experience has meant a lot to me, more than I could ever hope to express. To begin with we prayed together ... For the first time in so long I did not feel a hypocrite in publicly worshipping God whilst honestly acknowledging who and what I was ...

The whole atmosphere of a community was very real, perhaps more so because we all shared so much to begin with, and really had nothing to hide. One of the things which struck me most forcibly ... was the sheer honesty of all who took part. Trust was

evident too, real care and concern for each other, and for all the many people who do not know about QUEST and are trying to cope alone, or feel they cannot cope and have left the Church. A very real spirit of charity ... was sensed throughout the whole weekend. There was a real spirit of joy there, too; such a lovely relaxed atmosphere, a wonderful sense of humour, that we all understood each other and accepted each other...

Thank you, then, to all those who took part in the conference and to all the members of QUEST - you help so much just by being there.

Others attending confirm that this response to the experience of the weekend conference was characteristic, not eccentric, and QUEST seems now to have sensed a new way forward in its endeavours. By rallying its members together nationwide once in a while it is better enabling them to draw from each other inspiration, confidence and a clearer sense of purpose, and so is equipping them for more carefree and conscientious service in Church and community.

It has only been possible, within the compass of this modest booklet, to present an outline sketch of QUEST's origins, history and pursuits so far, and of the ways in which it has tried to organise itself and equip its members the better to realise their ambitions for themselves, for other gay Catholics and for the Church as a whole community. And very little reference has been made to its sense of the prospect for some future change in the circumstances that place all actively homosexual Catholics in formal conflict with the objective moral teaching of the Church. Some briefly concluding words on this substantial subject will here have to suffice.

The matters at issue inevitably carry the dialogue way beyond the sphere of pastoral care and up into the reaches of moral theology. Can QUEST expect to contribute anything to discussion at that headier level? Its answer is hopefully affirmative. Early in 1980, after the Pope had referred (in an address to the American bishops in Chicago) to the distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual acts as far as moral judgments are concerned, a QUEST spokesman in a letter to the Catholic Herald dropped a hint.

No one should conclude that QUEST ... is indifferent to the traditional moral teaching in respect of homosexual acts ... Indeed the questioning of this teaching and of its evolution within the Church is part of our continuing activity. However we are emphatically more concerned to achieve the wise and open acceptance of admittedly homosexual people within the community of the Church, and, in that process, the removal of the almost automatic moral stigma that has been attached to us by priest and people alike ... Thus it is the pastoral recognition of the distinction publicly indicated by the Pope, together with the active study of the 'guidelines' published by the Social Welfare Commission that we are now endeavouring to promote. We are confident that such developments will, in due time, affect the further evolution of its moral teaching.

Three years later, the same spokesman developed the point in a letter to The Tablet:

If we have not seen fit formally to challenge the Church's distinction between the homosexual condition as morally neutral and homosexual acts as morally bad, it is not because we share your view that 'the Church could not change its principle here', but because we would not expect it to simply in response to what might be regarded as special pleading. As a contributor to QUEST's current Newsletter sardonically observes: 'There is no problem of homosexuality for the Church, only one of sexuality'.

And there is the heart of the matter. All that the Church teaches about sexuality, including homosexuality, derives from one central dogma - that all sexual practices are

immoral save those shared between married couples with intentions to procreate. What used to hold as a tenable proposition throughout Christendom is today wholly rejected by the post-Christian world and, in practice at least, by an increasing number of Christians including Catholics. Is it not time that the experts began closely to re-examine the dogma - and not just because it has fallen into general disrepute? Might it not be found to rest on an incomplete comprehension of the nature of things, things that modern secular studies have thrown new light on? Arguments from natural law must surely keep pace with new insights into human nature, and not be merely reiterated because they have been held to be divine. There is a critical review, a more sophisticated quest, crying out for development precisely in these spheres. Catholics in the United States have already taken an important initiative along these lines. Is it not now the moment for Catholics in Britain to enter into this field of study more substantially also? QUEST is strongly arguing that it is.

QUEST has seen signs, too, that a call in this direction might be encouraged, if not originated, by the bishops. When it first discussed The Easter People, attention was caught by what the bishops had written about married love and sexuality:

There has already been a major development throughout this century in the Church's understanding of married love and sexuality, reflecting advances in the human sciences ... It would be unrealistic to claim that the Church has finally achieved a definitive understanding of all that the gospel can reveal to us about Christian marriage ... An enriched theology of marriage will have to take into account the growth of human relationships, the need for true communication within marriage, and the understanding of sexual intercourse both as a life-giving act and as a communication of love and self to one's partner ... It will have to see even more profoundly that sexual love in marriage is a relationship in which a couple affirm each other's identity, by which they heal and sustain each other and through which they make Christ sacramentally present to each other.

QUEST noted that the delegates to the National Pastoral Congress (to which the bishops were here responding) had "urged that the teaching Church should find ways of listening attentively to the experience of married Christians and particularly to their insights into the meaning and consequences of a life-long sexual relationship." "Perhaps it was not such a far cry, after all", the Newsletter (October 1980) suggested, "to expect the Church to find ways of listening also to the experience of Christians in other relationships, both sexual and life-long. Especially as the bishops had affirmed unequivocally that:

Personal relationships are essential to human living and growth. They shape and develop each individual. They are crucial for individual happiness and fulfilment. Through them individuals express love and concern for one another. People find Christ incarnate in their relationships with others."

It is on the quality of living and being of its members that a group like QUEST ultimately depends for its capacity to act and to achieve, no matter what direction the action and achievement may take. Reflecting on its past experience and projecting future development, it thus articulated (in 1981) for all its members a personal challenge that it now expects and encourages each of them in their own way to face, in preparation for and pursuit of whatever tasks lie ahead.

We should each continually be seeking:

- the moral and spiritual improvement of our own lives and relationships so that we are better fitted for the tasks we are called to;

- the social and organisational growth of our fellowship (nationally, regionally, locally), so that we can more effectively sustain, strengthen and learn from each other;
- the development of more open connections with our families, friends and fellow-parishioners, so that we are kept sensitive to their opinions and receptive to their (perhaps unsuspected) support; and
- the liberation of ourselves from those fears, inhibitions and obsessions that handicap us in our efforts to love and serve God and our fellows as completely as we intend.

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* Titles obtainable from QUEST, BM Box 2585, London WC1N 3XX

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Q U E S T
a group for gay Catholics

As a group that has suffered more than its fair share of oppression and contempt, the homosexual community has a particular claim upon the concern of the Church.

Catholic Social Welfare Commission,
England and Wales (December 1979)

Being both part of the gay community and the community of the Church, QUEST seeks to interpret and relate each to the other for the benefit of both.

From simple beginnings in the autumn of 1973, it is now established as a national association throughout the British Isles and enjoys the pastoral support of an increasing number of priests and religious. It has links also with similar groups in the U.S.A., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and most of the countries of Europe.

QUEST's main purpose is to provide for gay Catholics - in association with each other and with sympathetic priests - opportunities to discover and to develop a positive connection between their faith and their sexuality, so that they can enjoy life and friendship more fully and contribute more confidently to the life and fellowship of the Church.

QUEST has, as well, a special mission to homosexual people who have rejected the Church because it appears to reject them; and to priests who persistently repudiate those whose sexual characteristics they do not care to understand.

We know that God makes all things work together for the
good of those who love him, - Romans 8. 28

There is no lack of people suffering oppression and persecution
In the whole Catholic community, in the individual and local
churches there must be an increase in the sense of particular
solidarity with these brothers and sisters in the faith ...
Solidarity means above all a proper understanding and then
proper action, not on the basis of what corresponds to the
concept of the person offering help, but on the basis of what
corresponds to the real needs of the person being helped and
what corresponds to his or her dignity.

- Pope John Paul II
Address to the College of Cardinals,
(November 1979)

Perhaps, as a Catholic, you have been persuaded that you (or your son, daughter, pupil, parishioner) must be said to be gay; that to express love for someone of the same sex is deeply sinful; and that God expects all gay people to be celibate, whether they have a vocation for it or not. QUEST does not ask you to abandon such ideas but to think more about them - for your own sake, for the sake of others, and for the good of the Church.

You are not asked to jump to new conclusions, but to join in a QUEST

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION WRITE TO: QUEST, BM BOX 2585, LONDON WC1N 3XX
or ring QUEST LINKLINE, 01-373-7819 (Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 7-11 pm.)



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