

# Quest Digest



Spirituality & Pastoral Care

2005

Issue 4: April 2005

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# EDITORIAL

The present issue of *Quest Digest* falls into three separate parts. First come the papers from the 2004 conference, held in Glasgow, whose theme was 'Gay and Lesbian Spirituality'. Dom Laurence Freeman, O.S.B. spoke to us on Meditation and Friendship, with the assistance of Giovanni Felicioni on the practical aspects, to which a special extra evening session was also devoted. The following morning Father Richard Finn, O.P., spoke on 'Desire and Faith'. Both of these papers are reproduced below.

The second part is devoted to issues of evangelisation and pastoral care. The Archdiocese of Westminster has provided, since last autumn, a monthly Mass specifically for lesbian and gay Catholics, and also for people who are HIV-positive. This initiative is of wider interest than just to members of the Archdiocese, as it is likely to set a precedent for the country as a whole. While this belated attention to lesbian and gay Catholics is welcome, the arrangements that have so far been made are open to question, and are scrutinised in an article by the Editor, 'How not to Evangelise'.

In December 2001, a diocesan bishop asked *Quest* to prepare a paper on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Catholics that could be used as a basis for deanery conferences. The paper first set out the difficulties in the way of effective pastoral care in this field, and then outlined the practical measures that would be needed to implement it. In the event, the proposed deanery conferences did not take place, but it now seems appropriate to make the paper available to a wider audience, when active interest in such pastoral care is reviving. The paper has been slightly edited to remove references that were specific to the diocese in question and to bring topical references up-to-date, but the programme for pastoral care that it advocates has lost none of its relevance.

Finally, some late material relating to the Civil Partnerships Act is included for the record.



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# GAY AND LESBIAN SPIRITUALITY

## Meditation and Friendship

Laurence Freeman

*Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation*

*Fr Laurence is a monk of Christ the King, Cockfosters (Olivetian Benedictines). After graduating from New College, Oxford, he worked for the UN, in merchant banking and journalism before entering Ealing Abbey, where he was ordained in 1980. He has published widely on Christian meditation.*

I should like first of all to thank you for the pleasure and the privilege of being invited to come and speak to you and also especially last night for being able to share your friendship. That friendship is really at the heart of *Quest*, and I would like to come back to that ideal later. But what I'd like to do first is to talk about a way of prayer and a particular dimension of prayer that I think is crucial for us, crucial for our church at this moment in history and, I believe, very important for the world as well. And then after the coffee break we will have some opportunity for discussion and to direct what I am going to say to our particular circumstances, while this afternoon we shall have the opportunity to meditate together and to put it into practice. What I am going to say is rather like the theatre session that we had this morning – it is very simple and speaks for itself.

In talking about friendship, I should like to begin with a story from the Gospel of Luke (10: 38–42) that is about contemplation, as that is the dimension of prayer I would like to speak about, and it is also, it seems to me, about friendship. It is a story you are familiar with, the story of Martha and Mary. The person that is missing in this is their brother Lazarus: he is sort of a silent presence in it.

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, and he stops at the house of his friends Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus whom he loved.

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We are told that Martha comes out of the house to greet Jesus. Mary, her sister, is at his feet and stays there listening to his words. Martha goes into the kitchen and starts to get the meal ready and, we are told, becomes distracted about her many tasks. Then she comes out to Jesus in a state, and she says to him: ‘Lord, don’t you see that I am doing all this work by myself; tell my sister to give me a hand.’ I think this is the only place in the gospels that anyone tells Jesus what to do. But we can sympathize with Martha: Jesus probably turned up unannounced with twelve of his friends and said ‘I’d like a meal’, so she starts rushing around and gets things out of the freezer and rushes down to the supermarket; she is really anxious to do a good job and it expresses her personality – she is a problem solver, she is the person who jumps up and volunteers at committees, she is the person who does the things that have to be done – and one can even sympathise with her attitude to Mary, rather gormlessly sitting at the feet of Jesus gazing up at him listening to his words. Perhaps if we had one more job for Martha to do now that she is in heaven we could make her the patron saint of stress. She shows all the typical signs of stress. She can’t cope, she is overwhelmed, she is not even doing her job well. That is the sad thing; she may be a very good cook and a very good housekeeper but she has really blown it.

So how does Jesus respond to her? This is where we really see that this story is about friendship at the deepest level. Jesus is her friend. So he is not going to condemn her. He is not going to blame her. He understands her personality. He knows what she is like. So he says to her: ‘Martha, Martha.’ When do we say that to each other? When you repeat the name of your friend it is to make contact with her, with the real person . It is to call your friend back into relationship with you. Jesus often speaks the name of the people that he wants to communicate with: Peter, Mary. At the Resurrection he opens the spiritual eyes of Mary just by saying her name. So he says: ‘Martha, Martha, you are fussing and fretting about so many things and only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken away from her.’

I told that story once at a Buddhist-Christian conference that I was taking part in and a friend of mine who is a Zen Jewish married

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Abbot (as you can tell, he lives in California!) wanted to know what happened next. And I said: ‘Well I don’t know – it doesn’t say in the gospel.’ But what happens next is what happens to us, as we see ourselves in the story and incorporate it: that’s what happens next. But this story has been used down the ages to justify, to defend the contemplative life, and clearly from the very beginning of Christianity, the contemplative life needed to be defended. Mary represents the contemplative life, Martha represents the active life. That is an interpretation, but I think it is a little bit more than two personality types. Two very different personality types are represented here. Although they have things in common, they are very different. So it is more than that. Some people will quickly volunteer and others have to be dragged into it. And so on. But I think what it really represents is what Jesus is indicating in his words to Martha ‘Only one thing is necessary.’

What has gone wrong in this story is that Martha and Mary, who are sisters, have lost their friendship. They are no longer in a relationship with each other. So the house is no longer going to be a happy home. It is going to be the scene of an angry, tense, domestic conflict. The friendship has been lost. Jesus restores that friendship, that harmony by bringing Martha who is at this moment the problem back into harmony with herself. But Martha and Mary are also two halves of the human soul. We are all Martha, we are all Mary, in different ways. We express it in different ways, but that one thing necessary – and Jesus does not define what that one thing necessary is: maybe that is what you’ve got to do and I’ve got to do in terms of our own personality, our own lifestyle, mine as a monk and you as whatever you do – each of us in our own way has to integrate the contemplative and the active, the yin and the yang, the male and the female, the positive and the negative, the dominant and the passive and all these different aspects of our personality that make up the human being. The one thing necessary, we might say, is to be one, to be integrated, to be simple, to be Christ-like.

Now I think that story is about friendship at the deepest level, and I’d like to come back to this idea of friendship towards the end. It is also about balancing the contemplative and active aspects of our

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being and of our life of the way we live. Because this is not just theory, or theology: it is about how you live with other people in the same house, in the same world, and how you live with yourself as well.

This contemplative dimension of prayer is what I would like to talk about. Now there are many ways of prayer. I am going to describe *a* dimension of prayer, *one* way of prayer. I'm not saying it is the only way of prayer, but I think it is a dimension of prayer that we have lost touch with in the Church over the centuries, particularly in the Roman Church. I think it has been integrated more fully into the life of the Orthodox Church in Christianity. But this contemplative dimension of prayer is very remote from what I was trained in as a child. I was brought up as a Catholic in London. I went to a monastic school and thought that monks were all very holy contemplative people before I became one. The contemplation that I heard about was very remote and abstract and very holy; it was what people that were very close to God did and I did not even want to do it or to be that close to God. But I think we need it today, and it is happening. There is a great contemplative renewal taking place in the Church today. We need to remember this dimension of prayer and then relate to it as we find ourselves called to do so.

Let me suggest one way of looking at prayer: as a big wheel. A wheel is a good image of prayer because it suggests movement. It is going somewhere. A wheel is meant to turn and take us somewhere on our journey of life. Where does our journey of life take us? To God, to wholeness, to our true self, to love, to the ability to love. And if that wheel is to turn, it has to touch the ground. If it does not touch the ground, it is just going to spin meaninglessly, theoretically, in the air, and not actually move anything. So prayer is something that we have to do, something that we have to give time and space to. It has to be grounded in daily life, and I am going to describe to you a way into contemplative prayer that is very practical. This afternoon will be the real teaching moment. We learn from experience. And this way of meditation that I am describing, which is a way into contemplation, into this contemplative integration, is experiential. It is not theoretical. It is not head-centred, it is heart-centred. It is, indeed, called 'the prayer of the heart' in the Eastern Church.

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Think about this wheel of prayer and these different forms of prayer. Can you give me some of the ways that you pray? Intercession, petition, praying for other people, thanksgiving, praise, Scripture, sorrow (repentance), discursive, charismatic, singing, devotional, sacramental. The point of this is that there are many different forms of prayer. And we could add to this list certain types of non-religious prayer which may open up a deeper sense of what prayer is for us. For example running is a form of spiritual practice, it is a way of being in the present moment, which is what prayer is about. So are chanting, being out in nature, appreciation, working, carpentry, writing poetry, painting, and making your house look beautiful. These are all forms of being present to God in the present moment. The point of this is that there are many ways of prayer, and all of these forms of prayer are valid and useful and effective provided, of course, that we do them sincerely. If we just do them mechanically or out of a sense of guilt, e.g. that if I don't go to Mass I'll be sent to hell. Then they are not quite so effective. If they are done from a sincere heart then all these forms of prayer work. And what do they do when they work? They move us along the journey of integration, of holiness, or wholeness, into that oneness that Jesus says is the one thing necessary. So these are forms of prayer. People – Protestants, Catholics, different types of Catholics – sometimes argue that my form of prayer is better than your form of prayer, or that this form of prayer is more important than that form. You might get hung up on a particular form of prayer and think it excludes other forms of prayer, but we have to say: 'these are like spokes of the wheel and there are different spokes for different folks.'

Now these are all forms of prayer, so where do they meet? What is prayer itself? In the centre. In the hub of the wheel. And this is where I would like to get a little theological. What is prayer in a Christian understanding? Well, Paul was talking this morning about friendship with Jesus. Theologically and experientially, that is what our Christian identity, our Christian discipleship, means. Some union, some experience of oneness with Jesus as He is now, not as he was when he dropped in on Martha and Mary 2000 years ago, but as He is now with us in the Spirit, in our hearts, in our relationships with one another in the world.

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In essence Christian prayer does not just mean *how* I pray, what I do in these different forms of prayer, but essentially, here in the essence, in the centre, it means the prayer of Jesus, that *my* prayer takes me into *his* prayer. There is a union here. There is a friendship, a deep friendship, and a lasting friendship: faithful loving friendship that is ultimately our union with God. So all these forms of prayer take us into the prayer of Jesus, and this prayer of Jesus, his experience, his human journey to the Father, where he found himself to be who he is. His journey then continues as he returns to us in the Spirit. 'I am coming back to you', he said, 'and I am not leaving you bereft. It is good that I go away so I can send the Spirit and be present in each of you through the Spirit.' This is the prayer of Jesus, the Spirit, this is Christian prayer, Christocentric prayer. This is the deepest meaning of all the forms of prayer we do. So his prayer, the Spirit, informs all these other forms of prayer, whatever they are, and when we practise them we are taken into his prayer. That is the friendship of the spirit.

Now that is what we find theologically at the centre of the wheel of prayer. What else do we find at the centre of the wheel? If the wheel is to turn and take the cart or the car somewhere, it has to be still. The axle has to be steady, hold firm, and that stillness at the centre of the wheel is what I'd like to speak about. That stillness at the centre is what gives stability and is the cause of the motion, of the direction of life. If you don't have that stillness the wheel wobbles and you are trying to control it. This reminds of a time when I was driving into Glasgow and the wheel of my car came off. It was a very strange moment because you find yourself holding the steering wheel and you have absolutely no control of the direction of the car; but by some great act of providence (it was the middle of the rush hour) the car went across three lanes of traffic and stopped about five feet away from a telegraph pole. So if we don't have that stillness at the centre of the wheel then we don't have direction, we are confused, we are lost, we don't know where we are going, and we end up like poor Martha all over the place, in internal chaos and confusion. However we may look on the outside, that is what we are like on the inside.

So what I'd like to talk about is this stillness and how we come to this stillness. This is what we really mean by contemplation. It is

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the 'be still and know that I am God' from the psalms. It is what the Orthodox tradition calls *hesychia* which gives us *hesychast*, the name of the Greek work of the prayer of stillness.<sup>1</sup> [And it is actually the word that Jesus uses several times, when he speaks to us about giving us rest: 'Come to me and I will give you rest' (*Matthew* 11:28, *anapauso umas*), 'You will find rest for your souls' (*Matthew* 11:29, *anapausin*), 'Set your troubled hearts at rest' (?).] This word ['rest'] is not just a happy hour kind of word, it is the rest of inner stillness that is dynamic, it is the force of directional movement in life, meaning purpose, sense of direction.

How do we come to this stillness? In my second year at University, when I was going through a lot of turbulence, and grief about various things, I went to see a monk who was my teacher and whom I had known for several years, called John Main. I went to see him and spent Easter with him to talk over the mess that I was in. It was a good moment, good timing, because John Main had just started again to meditate at that point in his life, and in my time with him over that Easter he very lightly and very gently introduced me to meditation.

First he listened very sympathetically to my description of the forms of prayer I was using at the time and then said: 'Well, that is wonderful that you find time to pray in your busy life. But let me tell you about the way we pray. It is a way that we call meditation. We pray in silence, coming to a stillness of mind and heart. We leave words behind in this form of prayer; we are not speaking to God and

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<sup>1</sup> *hesychia*, a word which not only bears the sense of tranquillity and silence ... but also is linked through its Greek root with the idea of being seated, fixed, and so being concentrated. It is therefore fitting that from this word should come the term hesychasm, frequently applied to the whole complex of theory and practice which constitutes the path itself... It must be stressed, however, that this spiritual path known as hesychasm cannot be followed in a vacuum... hesychasm is not something that has developed independently of or alongside the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church. It is part and parcel of it. It too is an ecclesial tradition. To attempt to practise it, therefore, apart from active participation in this sacramental and liturgical life is to cut it off from its living roots. It is also to abuse the intention of its exponents and teachers and so to act with a presumption that may well have consequences of a disastrous kind, mental and physical.' Palmer, G.E.H., Sherrard, Philip, and Ware, Kallistos, *The Philokalia*, vol.I, Introduction, pp. 14–15. London, Faber & Faber, 1979. [Editor].

we are not thinking about God, but we find the presence of God in our hearts.’ And then he quoted a passage from the Upanishads that struck him very deeply as a Catholic because it evoked a deep echo for him of his own faith. The passage said that in the human heart, we find the love of the one who creates the universe and in silence is loving to all. As John Main heard those words he was reminded of his own faith where Christ has sent his own Spirit into our hearts, the universal Spirit of love. Anyway he found himself listening with deeper and deeper attention to this holy man and then he said to him: ‘Well, how do you do this? How do you come to this stillness? How do you move from the mind to the heart?’ And the monk said: ‘We follow a very simple way and simple method. What we do is to take a single word, a sacred word, a mantra, and we repeat this word silently interiorly in our hearts through our time of meditation. And we let go of all the other thoughts, good thoughts and bad thoughts, all the other forms of prayer, we just let go of those as we move into the heart, into the essence. And again as John Main heard this he thought: this is familiar in a sense, it is repetitive prayer. The rosary, the Mass where we say the same words over and over again are repetitive prayer. We have many mantras in Christian prayer. But this had a simplicity to it that moved him deeply and also clarity and a practicality that attracted him.

So he said: ‘Will you teach me to meditate?’ And the monk said: ‘Yes, but you have to be serious.’ And John Main said: ‘How can I be serious?’ and he said: ‘You have to do this twice a day. If you like, come back and see me once a week; we will meditate together and we can talk about any questions that you have.’ So for the next eighteen months, while he was in Malaysia, this is what happened. He went back every week and tried to meditate every day morning and evening. He gradually learned the simplicity of meditation. Later when he was starting to teach this himself, in a Christian tradition that I will describe in a minute, the heart of his teaching and the heart of this tradition is simplicity. It is that simplicity that Jesus is talking about when he says ‘the one thing necessary.’ When he went back to his teacher he would sometime ask questions like: ‘O.K. I sit down, I sit still and close my eyes. I start to repeat my word, my mantra. I say it as

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well as I can but I get very distracted. How long is this going to take? What is going to happen next?' And he said that his teacher would just look at him and sometimes smile and sometimes just say, 'Say your mantra. Just say your word. Keep doing it.' And gradually he learned from his own experience. He came back to Ireland, and became a Professor of Law at Trinity College Dublin. He was still meditating, but not finding anyone who really understood what he was doing. This was the mid-1950s, a long time before meditation had hit the headlines. But he was doing it. But he was doing it because he understood that it underpinned his whole spiritual journey.

Eventually he became a monk himself and joined Ealing Abbey in London. He joined the year I entered the school in 1958. And when he spoke with his novice master, at the beginning of the novitiate he described this way of prayer and he thought: here is an expert, another monk, someone who really understands about prayer. He thought he would finally find someone to whom he could talk about meditation. But he found to his surprise that he was told to give it up, because the novice master said: 'Well, O.K., maybe in the mysterious ways of God this has led you to the monastery, but this a pagan way of prayer, a pagan practice: give it up.' In those days monks were still obedient, so he gave up his way of meditation, with difficulty, because after all this was what had brought him to the monastery. But later he said he came back to it on God's terms, not on his terms. He went to Rome and was there during the Vatican Council, studied theology, became a priest, began work in a school, and was very busy.

There are ups and downs in the monastic life as in any other form of life, and he found himself some years later as headmaster in a school in Washington, D.C. It was then that a young student came to visit the monastery. He had been on a tour of Eastern monasteries and Eastern teachers in India and Burma and Japan. He came to check out a Christian monastery. So he asked the abbot if he could spend a few days and learn about Christian Mysticism. So the abbot said: 'O.K., but I don't know whether you will find what you are looking for here' and asked John Main to look after him. John Main gave him a book, a big book as he was very busy at the time, a great classic of English

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Benedictine spirituality called *Holy Wisdom* by Augustine Baker.<sup>2</sup> It is one of the great classics, but nobody actually reads it. So he was rather surprised when this young man came back to him about three or four days later and said: ‘This is fantastic stuff. The English is a bit weird but it is fantastic teaching. These desert Fathers they were as great as the Zen Masters, and East Indian gurus.’

So this young man aroused Father John’s interest again, and they began to read the desert Fathers together. Now the desert Fathers from the fourth century were the first Christian monks, which was a lay movement.<sup>3</sup> St Benedict was not a priest. It was a lay movement arising out of a desire to renew the heart of the gospel experience in the church. The Church had become institutionalized when the monastic movement arose. The desert fathers were very practical they weren’t theoretical theologians, they were not church people but they were devoted to the gospel and to the way of prayer as a practice. Anyway, through his re-connection to the early monastic tradition Father John was led back to one of the great teachers of the western Church, John Cassian. John Cassian was a teacher of Saint Benedict. Saint Benedict of course influenced western spirituality through the monastic movement. Benedict says basically in his rule for monks that this is a way for you to live together without killing each other. But if you want to learn how to pray, and rise to the heights of perfection, go to Cassian and the Fathers and Mothers of the Desert. So John Main went back to Cassian and in the tenth conference of Cassian on prayer he came across something that quite staggered him.<sup>4</sup>

Cassian was speaking about prayer and he says there are different forms of prayer, but all prayer has a movement towards the heart, towards a place of integration and union with the prayer of Christ,

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<sup>2</sup> F. Augustine Baker, *Holy Wisdom, or Directions for the Prayer of Contemplation*. London, Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1948. This is a digest from more than forty treatises; the originals have never been published in full. [Editor].

<sup>3</sup> For an approachable introduction, see *The Desert Fathers*. Translations from the Latin by Helen Waddell, with an Introduction. London, Burns Oates, 1936. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> Cassian’s two main works were the *Institutes* and *Conferences*, translated by E. C. S. Gibson, in P. Schaff and H. Wace (editors), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol.XI. Oxford, 1894; reprinted Grand Rapids, 1955. [Editor]

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where our humanity and the humanity of Christ meet. In order to come to this we have to come to an inner stillness, but the great obstacle to this stillness is our distraction, the fact that our minds are all over the place. There is a long section in Cassian describing the distracted mind, a very simple and clear description of how the mind wanders from thought to thought, fears, desires, fantasies and anxieties. The first thing we discover when we meditate is that these mental states are recurrent. They just keep turning and turning around. If we did not do anything about it we would be just sitting there with our thoughts going round and round in circles. For getting out of this state, for getting from the mind into the heart, into the prayer of the Spirit, Cassian recommends us to take a single word or a short phrase in Latin. He called it ‘the formula,’ and recommended a verse from the Psalms. Then he says: take this little verse and repeat it continually over and over again in your mind, until by the constant repetition of the single verse you come to the first of the beatitudes – poverty of spirit.

Remember that Jesus says: ‘Happy are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God.’ Abandoning all the riches of thought and imagination, Cassian says, you come with ready ease to that place of simplicity. So when John Main read this, of course he connected it immediately with what he had learnt many years before in the east, and realized that what had happened to him twenty or so years before belonged to the universal tradition of meditation, to which he was now re-connecting. For meditation is a universal spiritual practice. We find it in all the great religious traditions of the world, and there are certain elements in common to all of these traditions.

The first is silence. The practice of silence: not just external silence, but an inner silence, a stillness, that *hesychia* that the Greeks speak about. It is not the chattering mind. When we sit down to prayer what do we hear? Sixteen different radio stations going on in our heads at the same time – or, if we have cable, 125 – skipping from one to another, surfing. So silence, the work of silence. Coming to silence; and the way to come to silence is to pay attention.

I am now reaching the limit beyond which I should not go to keep your attention, because by now you are desperate for coffee but,

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because you are nice people, you are pretending to listen, though some are looking a little bit sleepy! Now I cannot force you to pay attention to me. I can strap you in the chair but I cannot force you to pay attention to me, because if you pay attention to me you are giving me something of yourself. To pay attention is to love. We love what we pay attention to. We pay attention to what we love. Prayer is about attention, attention to God. That is what poor Martha lost when she got distracted. She wasn't paying attention to her cooking, she wasn't paying attention to who Jesus was. She had lost attention to her sister. She had lost attention to herself. What do we give our friends? Attention. What does it cost to give attention? Self. You give yourself. That is why the contemplative tradition, contemplative prayer, is a work of love, and what we are doing when we meditate is that we are learning to be loved (this is something that you might like to take up in discussion if you like, as it is very relevant to our situation). It may not seem like that, as it is not a highly devotional form of prayer, and when we think about loving God we may have all these nice emotions, but love, as we know, is more than the romantic stage of love if it is going to deepen, if it is about sustained attention, friendship that lasts, reality of deep relationship. So this is the work of silence and attention.

If you give me your attention for the next ten minutes, it is because you want to. But even if you want to, you will find that your mind wanders. What is he talking about now? What are we having for lunch? etc. If you decide to pay attention, you are deciding to do a work. Only you can decide to do it. It is a spiritual work. And meditation is the spiritual work that is a discipline that we must freely choose for ourselves. No spiritual work is effective if it is imposed on us, only if it is freely chosen. Then the discipline makes us into a loving disciple, and the word 'discipline' means 'to learn.' So silence is an essential element of meditation. We come to it through the work of meditation. How do we do this work? By paying attention to the mantra.

What are the fruits of this? Why should I do it? We do it because, as the early Christians said, the way you pray is the way you live. The quality of your prayer is the quality of your life. The depth of your prayer is going to be the depth of your relationships. Where are

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we going to find the fruits of this work of meditation each day? We are going to find it first of all in our relationships, because relationships are the sacred ground of our life. If you were to say: 'How are you?' 'How are things going?' 'How is your life at the moment?' what are you really saying? Not 'How much money are you making?' Or: 'Did you just get promoted?' Or: 'Did you just buy a new car?' What you are really saying is: 'How are your relationships?' If your relationships are deep, loving and secure, real, meaningful, then does it matter if you just lost your job? Or if you just crashed your car? Your relationships are the sacred ground of your life: friendship.

Maybe the most important contribution to spirituality that gay people can make to the Church today is the theology of friendship, and it comes very much to the heart of the gospel and Christ's self-revelation. 'I call you servants no longer; I call you friends.' So it is in our relationships above all that we find the fruits of our prayer, that we become more loving people. What else do we want to be, except to be people who can give and receive love freely, more joyfully, more freely, more passionately, more exuberantly, more creatively, more generously. What else do we really want?

The other elements of meditation are stillness, and as with silence there is an outer stillness and an inner stillness, which is the real work. We try to keep still when we meditate and when we meditate later I will ask Giovanni to prepare us with some physical preparation to help us come into that stillness of the body which leads us into that stillness of mind. More interiorly, when we practise an inner stillness, we are letting go of desire. That might ring some bells with you. I think it is at the heart of all love, that we transform our desire, that meditation frees us from fantasy and connects us with reality.

The last element of meditation, which I have already mentioned and which we find at the heart of John Main's teaching, is *simplicity*. 'Unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (*Matthew* 18:3). But it isn't easy to be simple, so I have described a practice of meditation that is simplicity itself. You sit down, sit upright (so you can stay awake), and you close your eyes lightly and then silently, interiorly, in your heart, you begin to say your word, your mantra. And you keep repeating your word through the

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time of the meditation as faithfully as you can, giving it as much attention as you can. It is important to stay with the same word so that it gradually takes root in your heart, because the deeper it takes root in your heart, the more stillness it will work. The more inner stillness you have, the more your life integrates and a sense of direction fills everything.

So what I am suggesting is very simple and practical. It is not theoretical; it is a practice. It is something that you do. It is a way of love. It is an act of love to meditate. All prayer is loving. This is a very intimate form of love. And as you first begin to meditate, you will find you are very distracted and your mind wanders, all over the place. But with practice if you stick with it you will find that you learn from your own experience what it means. The fruits will begin to appear.

Now to follow up on the story. John Main introduced me to meditation in 1971. He came back to England in 1975 and, realizing that this was something of great value and importance for people, he started a small lay community at the monastery. I joined it originally for six months; because I am a very slow learner and a very undisciplined person, I had to become a monk to do this. People from all over London knocked on the door and said: 'Do we have to go to the Buddhists or to Transcendental Meditation? If there really is a Christian practice of meditation, can we not do it as well? And do we have to give up our work and our families and our life in order to do this?'

So we began to teach meditation at the Centre there, and eventually this blossomed. We went to Canada in 1975 at the invitation of the Bishop of Montreal to establish a small Benedictine community that would teach and practice meditation as its primary work. When John Main died in 1982, I was left holding a little baby that was the community that had just started and which began to spread around the world by itself. In 1990 I came back to England, and formed the World Community for Christian Meditation. It is now a community of friendships, not a big organization. I think there we have groups in 115 different countries, small weekly groups that meet in all sorts of places. They are simply small groups of friends, spiritual

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friends, who come together to meditate once a week to reinforce that daily practice of meditation that they are doing in their Martha-lives.

That brings us back to the idea of friendship with which I began. John Main believed very deeply that meditation creates community, and the last 20 years have proved this to me. Out of this contemplative experience something quite surprising happens. In the solitude of the meditation we experience relationship. And that seems to be very relevant to who we are and what we have been talking about. In the solitude of the meditation you discover deep loving relationship. There is one thing that transforms life, and that is to discover that you are in a loving relationship. If we discover that, at the very core of our being where we discover that we are essentially good, we discover a friendship with ourselves, a capacity to be friends with others, that is what friendship really means. It is through friendship that we recover our innocence, and discover friendship even with our enemies. To love our enemies means to turn them into our friends. It is not easy and we can only do it if we have learned to be friends with ourselves, because we have learned that friendship is what God offers us.

## DISCUSSION

**Chair:** We have half an hour for discussion and since it is my prerogative to introduce it I will start with some relevant autobiographical detail. I became a Catholic because of this tradition of prayer. At school I was required to study French history and read Aldous Huxley's book *Grey Eminence*, which is about Cardinal Richelieu's secretary Father Joseph, a Franciscan who tried to combine contemplative prayer with power politics. He, in turn, was a disciple of an English Franciscan, Benet of Canfield (William Fitch), author of *The Rule of Perfection*<sup>5</sup>; this introduced me to Christian writing on contemplation, though I have not read John Cassian. I'm afraid I did not persevere with the practice of meditation, and my experience was

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<sup>5</sup> English Recusant Literature 1558–1640 (Ed. D. M. Rogers), vol.40. William Fitch, *Rule of Perfection*, 1609. Menston, Scholar Press, 1970.

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that it is very difficult to persevere. Having no feedback was a problem. I have since also met the suggestion (in William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*) that some people may be closed to this sort of experience; I have never had anything that I would call a religious experience, no altered state of consciousness; that I am a Catholic Christian is through intellectual pursuit and not through any religious experience. So my question to you is: this all sounds splendid, and a lot of people will no doubt start to meditate after hearing you, but if you get no sort of feedback where do you get the motivation to continue?

**Fr Laurence:** This kind of prayer is ideally suited for the kind of person you describe, who isn't concerned with dramatic experiences of altered states of consciousness. But if that *is* what you are looking for, then I would go for something else, and if you find it satisfying, fair enough. I think what the whole of spiritual life and in fact any human life is about is transformation, change, evolution and development. St Paul says: 'I appeal to you therefore ... by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship... be transformed by the renewal of your mind' (*Romans* 12:1-2). So it is about change, about transformation. If you have been meditating for 20 years and you could really say at the end of it: 'I haven't changed at all', then you could justifiably ask for your money back. There are different ways that this change, this transformation expresses itself. My advice to you and the advice that I was given (and I was able to persevere with it was because of the way I was taught) is: don't look for anything to happen during the meditation period itself. What John Main used to say to me was: if anything happens, ignore it. When I first joined the monastery I was totally in love with everything about the monastery and my new life, my meditation that I had discovered; I went into a peak experience and I was in a blissful state for a sustained period of time. I had a couple of little experiences, which I was rather proud of, but I didn't want to speak even to Father John about it although he was my teacher. But one day I did and he looked at me with a certain smile that absolutely brought me down to earth, punctured this bubble of ego that I was building up. So I described this blissful state I was in

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and he said: ‘Well, you don’t really think that is going to last for ever do you?’ It was the best kind of way of approaching this kind of experience.

If you were to ask me why I continued meditating, then I would say it was because, to put it negatively, I have lost some things that I wanted to get rid of. I have become less fearful, more free, more open to love (I think), freer in giving and receiving it. One of the benefits of this way of prayer, that Cassian describes, is that we have a more direct experience of scripture, that the meaning of scripture comes alive to you. He says that when you read scripture, after you have begun to practice this form of silent prayer, you read it as if you were the author of it. In other words you are in touch with the experiential dimension of it.

Here’s a story about the effects of meditation. There was a woman who started to meditate, but her husband was very anti-meditation, because he felt she was going off into some mystical path and he was being left behind. So he said: ‘Well, you meditate, but don’t talk to me about; it I don’t want to hear about it.’ So for a year she meditated and then after a year he said to her at breakfast: ‘Have you meditated yet?’ and she replied: ‘No, I’ll meditate later’ and he said: ‘I think I’ll join you.’ She thought he was making fun of her, so she said ‘Why this change?’ and he said: ‘I have been watching you carefully over the last year and you have become much easier to live with.’ So when I speak to a lot of people they say: ‘Nothing happens in my meditation’. But why do they continue? They know that something is changing in them.

Here’s another story that appeared on the front page of our newsletter. A young prisoner in Ireland wrote to me. He is 25 and doing 10 years for a violent crime; he has been in constant trouble since he was 14. When in prison he was always being put into solitary confinement because he was violent. One day he was put into solitary and he was at breaking point. He was sitting there, facing the wall, his whole mind was crumbling and he remembered – and this was just grace – he remembered when he had learned about meditation at a talk given by Father Tom Feely at a meditation group that his brother had taken him to. It was while he was sitting there, staring at the wall,

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that he suddenly remembered something that the priest had said about how to meditate, and he started to do so. Then he began to get himself in physical shape, working out, and put a bit of order and balance into his life in the prison. And he kept meditating, though he wrote to me: 'I don't know why I was doing it because nothing ever happened. Then I suddenly noticed that the guards were treating me differently, and I knew something had changed.' And I think that is rather like the woman in the first story: you often see the deeper interior changes that are happening to you through the mirror of your relationships with other people.

For many people, other forms of prayer also begin to take on more meaning. The Eucharist, the scriptures, other forms of prayer that are appropriate to them, take on a richer meaning as well.

**A member of the audience:** I have used this method of prayer for quite a long time, and it is always the very first thing I do in the morning. And if for some reason I don't do it, then somehow I don't feel the same. You are quite right in saying, Father, that nothing happens, but I think that is one of the problems that we have with prayer, that we go into it hoping that something will happen. But I now feel that *I* can't make a relationship with God. *God* can make a relationship with me and it is in this form of prayer, when I am doing nothing but I am present in some way to Christ. Sometimes I think: 'Well, that was a waste of time, meditating and thinking about God knows what'. But *he* is never distracted while I am giving him that time. It is a fact that during that time you don't think that anything happens, but you begin to realize: hang on, my relationship with Jesus is being transformed and I haven't done anything. I think that is the thing that we have to hang on to. And the mantra becomes a presence in my life. If I'm harried during the day, the mantra comes into my mind and I calm down. You may think I'm a fairly extravert sort of bloke, and I am; but where does that energy come from? I think it comes from this form of prayer. I really do. And I recommend it even if you feel you are not the sort of bloke who can cope with it. Try it and don't give up and you'll find that something does happen: you

haven't done it; it is the Lord that has done it. And that is the most wonderful thing.

**Fr Laurence.** Thank you. People often ask me: is there a certain personality type that is suited to meditation? I can't answer that question except to say that some of the people that you think of as the most contemplative and the most interior, the Mary type of person, they don't make good meditators. They can be very introspective!

**The same member of the audience:** There are quite a few Marys here! (laughter)

**Fr Laurence:** Everyone has been apologizing to me for being a Martha. So I think you are right. One of the things that changes is your image of God. Even if intellectually we may change our image of God, emotionally we may have deeply rooted in us an image of God as something we learned in childhood, up there like a CCTV camera, watching and judging everything we are doing, and ready to punish when we make a mistake. Emotionally, that image of God may be still very active in us. It also feeds into a certain self-image that we have of ourselves, which may be that we are excluded, or that we are unworthy, or that we are sinful or perverted or guilty or whatever – all the different images of self that we may have been given or introjected. Through this silent work the image of God and the image of self are transformed gently by love, just as in a loving human relationship you change. It is a relational change. The image that I like from the parables (the parables of the kingdom are very helpful in understanding about meditation), is the one about the kingdom of heaven being like a seed that a man planted in the ground, left and went away, went to bed and got up in the morning and did his work, and all the time the seed was growing, how he did not know. This movement of the prayer from the mind to the heart, if you are interested in the technical language is called 'apophatic.' It is the way of un-knowing rather than a way of knowing. Rather than a rational use of the mind, it is the way of love. The fourteenth century *Cloud of Unknowing*,<sup>6</sup> which describes the mantra in the Christian tradition,

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<sup>6</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing and other Treatises*, by an English mystic of the fourteenth century. Edited by Dom Justin McCann. London, Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1924. Also a different translation printed by Penguin Books.

says 'by thought we will never know Him, by love we can know Him.'  
And I think that this is what happens.

**A member of the audience:** There was a Glasgow gangster called Jimmy Boyle who wrote a powerful autobiography in which he asks: 'When does innocence end?' That stuck in my mind. At the end of your talk you made two very large statements about the effects of meditation: one was the recovery of innocence, the other loving our enemies. Could you enlarge on both of these claims, because I find them both (especially the last) very large benefits?

**Fr Laurence:** Recovering your innocence means remembering that you are essentially good. And that is something we may have been told. You know we are created in the image and likeness of God; therefore we must essentially be good. But that is not what we feel. And if you have been bought up with a certain guilt-laden religion, or society has ostracized you in a certain way, then it is not something that you feel or experience about yourself. Recovering this sense of goodness is what recovering of innocence means. In the tradition on virginity in the eastern tradition in the fourth and fifth century, they used to talk about recovering your virginity, which is the same idea, I think. Recovering our primal innocence that we have as a child. I think that is one thing that happens in meditation. But I don't think you can separate meditation from life, and that is why we have to see that the way you pray is the way you live. The way you pray is to be who you are, accepting who you are and not playing a role: not dramatizing yourself, not presenting yourself as a great sinner or the prodigal son or the great saint, not dramatizing yourself with God. Being who you are and accepting yourself, as you are – which may be as very distracted in the morning, or full of fantasies, or full of fears. But in the Christian understanding of it, it is not just you going towards God; it is also God rushing towards us. That experience is an objective experience.

I'm reading a book at the moment about mysticism and the new physics and what is very clear from this anthology from scientists is the view that the great scientists of the modern era have all developed a mystical understanding or attitude about reality. They see it as an

objective reality, not as a subjective thing but an objective thing; so I think this is an objective reality that we enter into through the practice of being, just coming into touch with our own true nature. That is not easy because we are going to have to go through some turbulent weather, turbulent experiences maybe. One of the things that we are going to have to face for example is anger, or grief, or sadness or negative self-images or high levels of developed fantasy, all of which will be difficult to do. As far as anger is concerned, I think you discover that forgiveness of your enemies, which is central to the gospel, does not mean that you excuse your enemies for being unjust. I think if you look at the great prophets of the modern period, you will see that they often came out of a strong contemplative spirituality, and the contemplative experience can make you more courageous in opposing and confronting injustice or lack of truthfulness, wherever you find it – in the Church, in society or in your own life. But I think it also makes you realize that there are also levels and stages of forgiveness, that forgiveness is not just about giving absolution but it about passing through states. First of all, you accept your own feelings honestly and you don't try to cover them up; secondly, you choose to free yourself internally from the effects of that injustice. If you are the victim of an injustice then you must free yourself from those effects before you can confront or prophesy against that injustice. So you have to work on your own feelings. Then I think that forgiveness really happens when you can look at the person or institution that is acting unjustly and you can ask yourself: why are they acting like that? where is it coming from? how could people say or do that? When you begin to try to see it from their point of view, I think you are really free; then what is released is compassion, which is loving your enemies, having compassion for them. And coming back to that idea of innocence, and what your Glasgow gangster was experiencing, they were what the young Irish prisoner experienced. He got back into touch with his own true self, and it was a moment of true crisis and possible destruction of his own personality, but at that moment grace came into his life and he was able to reconnect, to know himself. In this contemplative tradition, self-knowledge is a pre-condition for knowing God. Knowing yourself means you have to know yourself as good, and that



your true nature is innocent, loving, forgiving and compassionate. We don't have to try to be forgiving, you just have to be yourself.

**A member of the audience:** Does one have to use a mantra or can it be an image or a feeling?

**Fr Laurence:** There are different ways of meditation and some use images, But in this tradition, which is an ancient Christian tradition and a Jewish tradition too, a word has the advantage of taking you out of the imaginative level of activity. The trouble with an image is that images are powerful and connect with emotions, so they can keep us at the mental level of consciousness. Choosing the word is important because you listen to a word as you say it (though listening to the word, not thinking of its meaning). For example, the word that I would recommend is *maranatha*, a beautiful Christian mantra; it is in the language that Jesus spoke, Aramaic, and means 'Come, Lord'. St Paul ends the first letter to the Corinthians with it. It is the earliest Christian prayer – but you are not thinking about the meaning of it as you say it.

As you say '*ma-ra-na-tha*,' repeating the syllables, giving it your attention, not visualizing it either, gradually, as Paul says, it takes root in your heart, and you will find it accompanies you during the day – when you are walking down the street or when you are sitting in the dentist's waiting room or wherever you happen to be. And it opens up for you the experience that the early Christians were really focused on, which was praying without ceasing, releasing the prayer of Christ in your heart continually. But in order to do this you have to move from the head to the heart, to silence. So the Mantra leads you to silence. But this is a particular tradition and there are other approaches as well.

**A member of the audience:** You said towards the end of your remarks that the theology of friendship is particularly appropriate for the position that Gay and Lesbians find themselves in at the moment. I wonder if I could ask you to expand on that a bit, because it is an interesting thesis and I don't see it necessarily flowing organically from the whole process of meditation?

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**Fr Laurence:** I think meditation lead you into self-knowledge. And you don't come to self-knowledge just by analyzing yourself, by thinking about yourself. Of course we need to know why we tick and why we relate the way we do and that we like that kind of person and we don't like that kind of person. That is important. In contemplative theology a lot of that psychological self-awareness comes as a natural by-product of contemplative prayer. It is the psychological self-awareness that comes from self-knowledge. Self-knowledge itself is not self-analysis, it is not reflection it is about being yourself. It is not objectifying yourself, thinking about yourself; it is about being yourself. And that is what friendship is. The work of meditation leads you at the first level into a friendship with yourself; acceptance is a very vital part of the spiritual journey, and self-acceptance is a very difficult thing to achieve when society may reject you for being a particular type of person or having a particular sexual orientation. So if we have introjected, absorbed into ourselves, images of self that are unfriendly, or rejecting, then we are not friends with ourselves. It is also a fact, mysterious really – I don't understand it – that when you meditate regularly with other people, the social and psychological defences that we naturally have, based on images of each other, usually come down or are temporarily reduced, and you find yourself at ease with other people. I believe, and it has been my limited experience, that you can look at other people, even strangers, without fear, without being over-critical or over-judgmental of them, and you trust them more. You trust their essential goodness; they are basically non-threatening. Of course you may make mistakes, but basically you give people the benefit of the doubt, even strangers. I think a friendlier attitude develops in you as lose some of those negative dynamics of self-rejection, suspicion and so on.

Friendship then (and I don't exclude sexual expression, which is a necessary healthy part of humanity) is the higher mystery, because the very first philosophers wrote about friendship. The Greeks said that life without a friend is not worth living. The bible says it is not good for man to be alone. Friendship is natural and necessary. The nature of friendship is that it is based on equality. You cannot be friends with someone if you see them as either superior or inferior to

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yourself. You may have different gifts and you may admire the friend. The Greeks admired their friends; there is still equality there somehow. The other element of friendship is that it has to be a concern for the well-being for the other. You must genuinely want your friend to be well. And there must be honesty and truthfulness with a friend. If you lie to a friend you do not trust him or her. Your friendship has been damaged when you lie. This is why, I think, Jesus (in *John*, which is the most human of the gospels, also the one where Jesus' humanity is most obvious) shows us and speaks about friendship. At the Last Supper, the great sign of that friendship is the washing of the feet. That would be a wonderful sacrament for the gay world, and the lesbian world to adopt. John Vanier says it is the forgotten sacrament of the world. It is the only thing that Jesus says specifically in the gospels: do what I have done, exactly what I have done to you. When we do the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday, it is a formal thing – in New York they won't wash the feet of women because the disciples were all men, and so on. So we have turned it into a very antiseptic experience. But it is a wonderful sign and it is in doing that act of service and love that Jesus says: 'No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my father I have made known to you' (*John* 15:15). So friendship is the sharing of oneself totally with another; that is exactly what the Greeks said. A friend is another oneself. And for the homosexual (same-sex), that has a particular meaning, does it not? The friend is another oneself. That does not exclude heterosexual friends, but it does have a particular resonance.

**A member of the audience:** Was this pearl of great price lost or was it hidden?

**Fr Laurence:** If you look at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, the torturers, the secret police, when they were confronted with their crimes by their victims, very often they broke down, and what you saw was that they themselves had been victims of the state, and this was the end of the evil that had been released, the end of the evil that was apartheid. Desmond Tutu says that homophobia is a crime equal to apartheid. I think we have to a bit

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careful about conspiratorial theories like those in *The Da Vinci Code*; on the other hand there is malicious intent around and one should expose that, but I don't know if it is exactly a conspiracy theory. I think that the reason that this pearl of the gospel has been lost is to be found in the gospel itself. Who does Jesus get angry with? The only people that he gets angry with are not the sinners, it is the religious hypocrites. I think there are cultural reasons too perhaps, e.g. the increasing split in western culture between science and religion, the defensiveness over many centuries in many sectors of the church about defending the truth as a kind of deposit with which it was entrusted and failing to see that it was a living experience of a person, a truth. Then came the Reformation and increasing suspicion of personal experience, a need for authority, the intellectualization of the Western mind and the loss of the sense of wholeness, alienation from the body. Meditation is a very incarnate way of prayer. It is the whole person who meditates, in his physical, mental and spiritual dimensions. We have reduced prayer to a mental activity and therefore other aspects of the body including sexuality have been viewed as dangerous, threatening. It needs to be re-integrated.

So I think there is an institutional element in the story of how we have lost it. The fact that it was not taught in the seminaries meant that the official teachers of the church did not know it from experience. The laity were not supposed to know about it either. And if they did know about it they were suspect because they knew more about it than the priests. All these dynamics come into play.

I think what is happening today – it began about 40 years ago with the council – is that when the mind of the institution became so closed, so unreal, so out of touch, with the world and with the gospel, it cracked open in that moment of grace; with the 78 year old Pope John saying: 'We will have a council,' Pandora's box was opened. When you look at the documents, one of the things that came out of that is an awareness of the holiness of the people of God, that regardless of rank or status they are called equally to the fullness of the Christian life. This is a massive change of attitude, in the same way that the church changed its official teaching on its relationship to other religions. 'The church rejects nothing that is true and holy in

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other religions': this is a massive paradigm shift, almost like day and night. One of the words that keeps coming up in the document on the liturgy for example, is 'contemplation.' In revolutions people will try to pedal backwards because they realize how much has changed, but I don't think you can turn the clock back and I think what has been happening and with growing momentum is a change of movements in the church at many levels; I'm not saying this is the only one, but it is a very important part of it. There are at least two big movements: one is inter-religious dialogue, which forces us as Christians into a deeper experience of faith, because we are dealing with contemplative religions, Buddhism or Hinduism, so we have to get back to our own contemplative traditions if we are to meet them in any serious equality. The other is recovery of the sense of friendship in Christian life. We are disciples together. If the hierarchy of the church exists it is like the committee of *Quest*. It is a way of service. But there is an equal service and ministry in the service of the gospel. That equality is impossible unless you can share with other people at a deep level of prayer. And to put this in practical terms, in parishes where people have introduced meditation, it is often a lay person who will go to the priest and say: I have started to meditate and this is part of our tradition. May I introduce it? Sometimes the priest says 'No.' Sometimes he says: 'Yes, O.K., but you do it by yourself.' Sometimes he says – and this is perhaps more rarely – 'Can you tell me about it, because I have been wanting to improve my prayer life?' Then, when you get a meditation group going and the priest comes to join you, it changes the whole dynamic of the shared life of the parish community. So I think that contemplation is being recovered, with a new outlook by the Church on other religions; that transformation of consciousness of the Church is happening, from the grass roots, from the laity upwards.

**Chair:** It is nice to end on an optimistic note. So thank you, Father Laurence.

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## Desire and Faith

Richard Finn, O.P.

*Blackfriars, Oxford*

*Fr Richard read English at Cambridge before joining the Dominicans in 1985, and is now Vice-Regent of Studies at Blackfriars, Oxford.*

It's a delight to be back at a Quest conference. I know that you deserve far better than I am able to deliver, but I also know that I am among friends. You have asked me to speak on the topic of 'Gay and Lesbian Spirituality'. So, is there such a thing? I doubt that I have an adequate answer, though I hope to spark a discussion in which we can improve on my first thoughts.

We have to begin with the obvious prior question: what is a 'spirituality'? The word is much used, but I am not sure that its meaning is at all clear or agreed upon. Think, if you will, of 'Celtic Spirituality', a form of Christianity supposedly practised by the Celts of Britain and Ireland during the Dark Ages, in which love of nature, art, and poetry were combined with freedom from the shackles of Roman church thought about sin, especially sexual sin, and where liturgical creativity was able to draw on the pagan past, as yet unsuppressed by the dead-weight of later doctrine and ritual. This spirituality purports to be a set of interrelated beliefs and practices peculiar to a given people who share a common time, place, or cultural tradition. It is, you might say, the purported embodiment of Christian faith within communities who share a specific way of life. It is a particular 'take' on Christianity, a version which arises in interaction with that culture. In a similar way we speak of Navaho Spirituality, Jesuit spirituality, not to mention that rare beast Dominican spirituality. This is a definition of spirituality which is *prima facie* acceptable to the historian or sociologist. But could we even begin to speak of Lesbian and Gay spirituality in this way? I don't think so. For better or worse we have, as yet, no such common culture, though Gay and Lesbian Christians may belong to such strange and various sub-

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cultures as the BBC, the NHS, and the David Beckham Fan Club. Homosexual, yes; homogeneous, no.

Of course, if we give further thought to ‘Celtic Spirituality’, it turns out to be in small part fiction, in large part the clever editing and marketing of a past we do not fully understand, the product of modern disenchantment with the contemporary Church, so that what we have is a set of interrelated beliefs and practices (as it happens a set which is ‘theology-lite’), acceptance of which is legitimated through projection back into a misty, romanticised past rather than by a process of theological argument – indeed we have a spirituality which is attractive to some precisely because it is dissident, a way of cocking one’s nose at perceived ecclesial oppressors, those whose hold on theological argument is seen as one form of oppression.

Gay and Lesbian Christians may sympathise with this move. We know what it is to be disenchanting; we know what it is to be on the receiving end of a theological discourse which is highly demoralizing, not only in popular sense of sapping the good will and commitment of many gay and lesbian Christians to play their full part in the life of the Church, but in the literal sense of damaging the moral reasoning, the conscience, which Church teaching should illuminate and build up, because this discourse both contains poor argument and untruths, while being conducted in maladroit, insensitive, ways of speaking. Whatever the motivation of those who speak in this way, they are not heard as speaking with that fraternal charity and compassion which is the necessary context of, and authority for, effective teaching within the Body of Christ. So, should we imitate the advocates of Celtic Spirituality? Should we market as a brand of spirituality a vision of the Church we would prefer? I believe we would be unwise to act this way. We do not want a spirituality of the ghetto – we have everything to gain from theological debate, while dissident antagonism only excuses the failure of our pastors to engage with us, furthers the illusion that they are exercising their genuine, ecclesial magisterium, when they are not in reality teaching us but merely talking past us, – at times *uncharitably* talking about us rather than with us. They are to be recalled to their duty, not absolved from it.

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Let me now, however, offer an alternative theological meaning for 'spirituality' – as nothing more or less than life in the Holy Spirit, a life which is therefore fired by the love of God for God, a life which is being drawn by God out of the damage wrought by original sin, that violent disorder of self and society into which we are born and which we are prone to exacerbate, drawn into the peaceable company of heaven. Given our understanding of God and His creation, this life in the Spirit has certain necessary characteristics, such as a call to self-knowledge and gratitude for God's gifts; it has recurrent patterns of conversion, elements in the stages of spiritual growth, ascetic practices as we master and leave behind selfish habits in the acquisition of virtues, the difficult business of growing old gracefully as we wrinkle, crumble and forget ourselves. These things are common to all Christians, but the varying circumstances of our lives mean that for different Christians at specific times, these characteristics have distinct features given by who we are in relation to where we find ourselves. It is in this sense, I think, that we can talk sensibly of a Lesbian and Gay spirituality for the present day.

At the start of her 'Dialogue' St Catherine of Siena invites the reader to enter the 'cell of self-knowledge.' There can be no truly Christian life that is not one of deepening self-knowledge. This is more than a matter of introspection, a looking within, though it will include some such reflection on heart and mind. It also involves the fundamental recognition that I am made by God, made in His image and likeness, and I am made for God. And this making of who I am in every moment of my being is an act of God's love for me. I am to know myself above all as a child beloved of God. I am indeed invited to see myself through God's eyes, with his delight. Only then will I also learn how to see others in this way, and myself as a sinner whom God calls to repentance. The twelfth-century Cistercian, Aelred of Rievaulx, wrote that "that love of God is, so to speak, the soul of the other loves. It lives of itself with perfect fullness, its presence communicates to the others their vital being, its absence brings about their death. That a person may love himself, the love of God is formed in him; that one may love one's neighbour, the capacity of one's heart

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is enlarged.”<sup>7</sup> We might think that it is out of our prior experience of being loved by family or friends that we know what it might be for God to love us, but for Aelred it is only our conviction that God loves us unconditionally which then emboldens us to see ourselves in our true light.

What does self-knowledge mean for those who are gay or lesbian with respect to their sexuality? It clearly calls us to be honest with ourselves about our own desires, our own orientation. That sounds simple, and perhaps it is becoming simpler than it once was, but there are still powerful forces within the Church that put obstacles in the way of such self-knowledge: the discouragement of self-disclosure, the presumption in official discourse that homosexual men and women are always ‘off-stage’, always other than the people to whom this discourse addresses itself, and certainly never to be numbered among those who enunciate Church teaching. In such a forum people have shied away from an identity associated with shame, with loss of face. The problem has not been that of simply admitting to myself that I am gay or lesbian, but of doing so without internalising the negative charge which other Christians have placed on this identity, without losing sight, God’s sight, of my infinite worth as his child.

Self-knowledge is the acceptance of how profoundly my orientation enters into my psyche: we should not think that our sexual desires are superficial, or mistake them as necessarily or essentially selfish, as only a craving for this sort of pleasure, for those sorts of sexual activity; these are the kind of mistakes which might encourage in us a futile hope to alter our orientation through prayer or psychotherapy. Such false hope leads to its opposite: despair. We must rather recognise these desires as revelatory for us of the beauty and goodness of other human beings, as expressions of our thirst and capacity for intimacy, inclinations drawing us out of solitude, so that we attend to others in particular ways. How I find myself attracted to some, and not to others, these are inclinations which enter into the construction of virtues I hope to possess – these virtues will not be found over and against my sexual desires, though no virtue is simply

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<sup>7</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Mirror of Charity*, III.2.4., translated by Elizabeth Connor with introduction and notes by Charles Dumont (Kalamazoo 1990), p. 224.

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the possession of desire or giving desire free rein. They may ease my friendship with those men I am attracted towards; they may make me a safe person to confide in for those women to whom I am not sexually attracted. In particular my sexual desires must enter into what temperance and prudence I possess, so that my desires are fully integrated in a life in which I love my neighbour as myself, something to which I shall return.

Self-knowledge is also a matter of accepting that others may find me desirable and of not being frightened by their desire as such. This is not to say that I shall necessarily choose to enter into a sexual relationship. There may be reasons why such a relationship would be wrong for me or for my prospective partner. It is not to preclude from moral judgement and discipline the particular ways in which we attend to others whom we find sexually desirable. Not all attention is welcome or appropriate. Plato in the *Phaedrus* long ago recognized the predatory nature of some sexual interest: "As wolves to lambs, so are lovers to boys". But we are not to think that homosexual desire is sinful.

I guess that what I have just outlined has been important for most gay Catholics in this country of a certain vintage. I suspect that it remains true for some gay Catholics in this country and for many more elsewhere in the world. I would argue, however, that the call to self-knowledge increasingly poses a different challenge to younger gay and lesbian Catholics for whom Catholicism has not provided the all-embracing or dominant cultural setting which their parents and grandparents knew, often as immigrants: these younger Catholics know their sexual orientation; they are not ashamed of their desires; but they perceive their gay or lesbian identity as being incompatible with being Catholic. This may stem from their experience of a certain schizophrenia or split identity, a growing divorce between the self who is 'out' amongst friends and the edited self disclosed in church settings. It is fuelled by the journalism which makes no distinction between the Church and the teachings of the Church, which readily casts the Church as the oppressor. In the gay press you sometimes find a lamentable mirror image of official church discourse, only here it is the Christians, and above all, the Catholics, who are frequently presumed

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to be 'other'. The challenge is perhaps now to see within my many desires, and in the strength of my desire, my restlessness, a desire that in fact runs so deep that only God can answer it, that who I am is only fully discovered and fulfilled in relationship with God. Where is the next generation of Quest?

Knowing oneself as a child of God called by 'Him' into relationship with 'Him' (I use the traditional pronouns, though God is neither male nor female) leads to a second characteristic of life in the Spirit – gratitude towards God, that loving thankfulness which stems from the recognition that this world and our place in it are the free gift of a loving creator. St. Basil wrote in his treatise *On the Holy Spirit* how "an abundant supply of goods" flow to us from the Father through the Son and how the Son apportions these goods "according to the measure of each one's need." God is not stingy; the creation is an expression of his utter generosity towards us. Some gifts are already in the past, still more lie hidden in the future. Time is itself a gift, swollen with the hope of our redemption and sanctification by grace. Time doesn't just drop through the hour-glass for Christians, leaving one less grain behind, but is the gradual and providential unfolding of God's good purposes:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.<sup>8</sup>

All this is God's gift and elicits our gratitude. The interesting thing is how we show our gratitude. I wish to argue that we show our true gratitude not in some kind of elaborate or mealy-mouthed 'thank you', but first and foremost in the real enjoyment of this or that gift.

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<sup>8</sup> *Isaiah* 55: 9–12.

There is a proper worship of God in really enjoying life. We ought to have an inspired delight in all that is genuinely good. Gratitude in the enjoyment of something should be one element in a more basic appreciation of how we praise God for the gift of our lives in being the creature we were created to be. Recall what the Bible has to say about the praise of God given by the natural world itself:

Praise the Lord from the earth, you water-spouts and ocean depths; fire and hail, snow and ice, gales of wind obeying his voice.<sup>9</sup>

In what sense can we say that water-spouts give praise to God? Their being speaks of their being created. In their existence, living out their nature, flourishing, they speak of God as the eternal creator. They give praise because their perfections derive from the perfection of God – the divine mind. Now, what's true of fire and hail, gusts of wind, is true of us too. Our flourishing, the living out of our God-given humanity is a sacrifice of praise. Of course, for us, being what we were created to be is a more complex, unfinished, and imaginative business than being a water-spout.

One issue here for lesbian and gay Christians will be the need to resist mistaken views of what it might be for us to flourish as we have been created to flourish, views based upon mistaken readings of the Genesis creation myth. I am not meant to find my flourishing in a sexual relationship with a person of the other sex. I will say no more of this other than to direct you to the discussion of Genesis 1 and 2 in Gareth Moore's book *A Question of Truth*.<sup>10</sup> What else might be particularly important for us when it comes to the enjoyment of our bodily and social nature? There should be a theological presumption grounded in the goodness of the creation and the gift of reason that God wishes us to enjoy what we find enjoyable, and to be imaginative in where we find our pleasures – on the dance floor, at the gym, in the pool, around the table, you name it. We are not to start off from some position of radical distrust when it comes to bodily and social pleasure. We are told in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes that there is a

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<sup>9</sup> *Psalms* 148: 7–8.

<sup>10</sup> (2003). London, Continuum.

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time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing (3:5). We are the kind of creatures for whom to be properly bodily and social includes finding something of our happiness in the loving embrace of others, to enjoy one another's mutual presence, one another's touch, to caress and to be caressed, though clearly much of this activity is not sexual in nature and belongs in a more elaborate body language of relationships, parental or familial, of nodding acquaintance, agreements sealed with clasped hands, greeting and taking leave of friends with a kiss. There may of course be strong reasons why it is wrong to enjoy some things, why some pleasures are to be eschewed: I am certainly not to find my kick in cruelty to others or self-harm. But the onus is on those who wish to rule things out to give good reason why this or that way of behaving is harmful for oneself or others. When it comes to erotic pleasure, our enjoyment of sexual activity, we should expect that some of our actions will be apt to express meanings partly shaped by that wider body language I mentioned earlier. But the same rule applies, that the onus is on those who wish to rule things out to give good reason why this or that way of behaving is bad for others or self-harming.

What I have so far said is only part of the picture. It is, for example, not always easy to appreciate the reasons why some acts are generally judged to be deleterious. There is sometimes scope for debate about the morality of this or that act. In addition, much that is morally significant in our Christian life, for good or ill, is not determinable in this way. I need to know more than whether this or that act is generally loving and morally permissible. I need to know what act my behaviour amounts to in my current circumstances. This is because much of what we do falls under more than one description. You see me making a phone call – an apparently harmless act. On investigation you discover that I am talking with a friend – an apparently praiseworthy act. It then transpires that we are discussing you – at which point you will probably feel an upsurge of interest. Just what are we saying about you? What game is this conversation part of? Could I be said to be slandering you or bitching about you? Singing your praises for purposes of my own? To be jockeying for position and surreptitiously displacing you? If my actions could be said to fall under

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one or more of these descriptions, how many of them am I myself aware of as I chat? We return to the difficult business of self-knowledge with respect to how we treat others.

As a result of original sin, and whether we are homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual, we are prone to what Augustine recognised as disordered desires. This may include the desire for political or institutional power to order others around for the very pleasure of so ordering them around, the security thereby offered to our shaky self-worth; this is what Augustine described as the *libido dominandi*, a desire to lord it over others. But we more commonly manifest our propensity to sin in subordinating others to the service of our more varied desires, using as means people who deserve to be regarded as ends. We fail to regard their needs and claims in justice. When this happens we have lust, whether that is greed, ambition, or sexual lust, which is not to be confused with sexual attraction or pleasure. It is rather the placing of my desire and pleasure above your good, taking my pleasure at your expense. Hence the observation made by Rowan Williams in his book *Lost Icons* that

there is a joy or a confidence that can come from being desired – but only lastingly or securely, perhaps, if the desire opens on to more than the meeting of a need; when it has what a religious person might call a contemplative dimension, a gladness that the other is not ‘used up’ in gratification.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately human beings are frequently manipulative in their dealings with others and blind to this trait which reduces others to commodities, resources in the production of our own gratification. We can see this trait in others, pick on the mote in someone else’s eye; we easily miss this beam in our own. Christians are traditionally called to address this problem in a number of ways: in the examination of conscience; in sacramental confession; in fraternal correction; and in the practice of voluntary obedience which has been central to Benedictine monasticism in the Western Church. We counter this skew in our nature by practising attention to others, attentiveness to

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<sup>11</sup> Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons*, 158.

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their words and needs. We are invited to practise a regular asceticism in food, drink, and sexual activity, all of which reveals to us the otherwise hidden strength of our own desires.

It is important to be clear that gay and lesbian Christians are as such no more or less prone to manipulative behaviour than their straight sisters and brothers. The interesting question is whether the circumstances in which gay and lesbian Christians today find themselves reveal particular forms of manipulative behaviour, whether practised upon us or by us. I can at least see an argument to be had about whether the treatment of gay men and women within the Church is not itself unintentionally manipulative, one brick in the symbolic edifice of gender politics, the construction of roles for men and women within the Church and the restriction of hierarchical authority to celibate males like myself. I have not the time nor wit to know whether this is actually so. Something is certainly wrong when some gay and lesbian Catholics are made to feel that they are at Mass ‘under false pretences’, have to hide their sense of self and self-worth from their fellow Christians. *Quest*, and its liturgies, are of course an important corrective to this experience.

Who is manipulating whom, so to speak, in the heterosexual and homosexual pornography which is now endemic in our secular society? Does pornography de-personalize its so-called models, actors, and actresses, turn them into passive objects while purporting to turn them into ‘stars’? I readily admit that the definition of pornography is a philosophical nightmare, and that what counts as pornography in a given culture is subject to convention and debate. I grant that gay and lesbian pornography is *prima facie* unlikely to face specific charges levelled against pornography aimed at heterosexual men, in which, to judge by the spam I used to receive, the denigration of women, their violent subjection to male power, is a recurrent fascination. But whenever sexual behaviour is abstracted from a significant exchange to become a pornographic pose for the viewer or reader, and when sexual intercourse is abstracted in representation from genuine social intercourse, it seems that pornography rewards inattentiveness. On viewing an image there is no requirement to be responsive, no moderation of my will in respect of yours. The image of the other is

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wholly for my use and wholly disposable. It is of course only an image, not the person portrayed by the image, but are we encouraged in this way to treat real people in like fashion? In *Queer as Folk* Stuart sums up a certain way of thinking about his partners when he exclaims “Nathan, I’ve *had* you.” Stuart collapses ‘having sex’ into ‘having Nathan’ where to talk of ‘having sex’ is to reify sex as a commodity, and is again to de-personalize a way of relating between people. Or as Nathan sadly puts it later: “I was just a shag.”

There *is* much comedy to be found in how we edit our own identities. You may remember how a few minutes earlier Stuart has selected from the internet his partner for the night, who goes by the cybername of ‘Goodfucker’. But ‘Goodfucker’ is not so pleased to be introduced to Nathan by this sobriquet, admits that he is actually called ‘Colin’ – at which point Stuart reintroduces him as ‘Colin Goodfucker.’ But within the humour is a recognition that some identities belittle the person to whom they are given or who adopts them. They are not foundations on which friendship can be constructed. And we know that for all his many partners Stuart is on the run from love.

Maybe it is the person who looks and fantasizes, for a price, who is being used, fleeced as a paying voyeur? Take *Gay Times*, which amongst good articles and much else promotes pornography as a healthy form of entertainment. It is not accidental that it is published by the Millivres Prowler Group who, as their own web-site explains, own Prowler Stores and publish the Zipper brand of books, videos and erotic magazines. They present all this as a single ‘service’. Others might regard it as a lure to win addicts which is motivated by the lust for higher profits. I was also sorry to discover that *Attitude* is now owned by Remnant Media, owners of the many heterosexual porn mags once found in Richard Desmond’s Augean stables. If all Christians are called to a necessary asceticism, a deliberate restraint of desire, avoidance of pornography looks like an appropriate form of asceticism for gay and straight Christians.

I wish to end, however, on a more positive note: the importance of friendship in the Christian life, its place in drawing us closer to Christ. This is a theme of particular importance in the work of Aelred

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of Rievaulx whom I quoted earlier. Aelred argues that true friends have a common care for each other's good, delight in and nurture each other's virtues, in a loving relationship which matures and deepens over time to become an extremely close bond. This is not just a good in itself, Aelred argues, but has its origins in Christ's grace and draws us more closely into friendship with Christ. He wrote in his treatise *On spiritual friendship*:

friend cleaving to friend in the spirit of Christ, is made with Christ but one heart and one soul, and so mounting aloft through degrees of love to friendship with Christ, he is made one spirit with him in one kiss. Aspiring to this kiss the saintly soul cries out: 'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth' (*Song of Solomon*, 1:1).<sup>12</sup>

Friendship, we may say, is an education in the love of God made man. All Christians are urged to spiritual growth through the perfection of their ordinary human friendships, whether this deepening of friendship flowers between partners in marriage, between celibates, or within the context of a sexually active gay relationship, though the final term of this friendship, for those who are presently sexually active or celibate, lies beyond any sexual relationships we may know in this life, has as its final and eternal expression, our participation in the beatific vision of God among the company of heaven.

St Augustine once exhorted his congregation: "Let us not block one ear with our tail, and press the other to the ground."<sup>13</sup> This, it turns out, was not a repudiation of yoga or comment on tantric sex, but a call to keep our eyes fixed on God's future for us. The asp reputedly put its tail into one ear and pressed the other to the ground to avoid the lure of the snake-charmer. In Augustine's view, the tail symbolised the past we drag along with us, and which can become something that holds us back. The ground stands for all earthly and immediate pleasures. We are to be charmed by Christ to rise up to

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<sup>12</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, II.21, , translated by M. Laker (Washington 1974), pp. 74–75.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 66.10, translated by M. Boulding, *Expositions of the Psalms*, vol. 3, (New York 2001), p. 322.

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future glory. For many gay and lesbian Christians the past which threatens to hold us back is one of discrimination and homophobia, of alienation in the very Church which is meant to grace our redemption from all forms of alienation. Like any Christian we may be distracted or absorbed by present pleasures, but that is no reason to eschew a proper zest for life. Rather, reflection on all that we properly enjoy as God's gift directs us in our continuing quest for Him.

# EVANGELISATION AND PASTORAL CARE

## How not to Evangelise<sup>1</sup>

Timothy Potts

After decades in which the Catholic Church in Britain was largely concerned with maintaining its parishes and other structures and ministering to committed Catholics, it has now begun to think of its mission to the wider public. The Bishops' Conference (for England & Wales) has set up a new Department of Evangelisation and Catechesis. This belated change of tack is prompted by falling congregations and the almost total loss of the younger generation. One has only to look round in most Catholic parish churches these days to see that the great majority of the congregation is middle-aged or elderly, that men of 18–45 are almost entirely absent and there are not many women in that age-range present either. The priests, too, are mainly over 60 and in short supply. The Church is visibly in decline and within a generation will be a shadow of its former self.

Pre-eminent among the absent faithful are lesbian and gay Catholics: after thirty years of hostile attention from the Vatican and, at best, neglect from the British bishops, most lesbian and gay Catholics have given up the unequal struggle to find a place in an unfriendly Church and have either abandoned Christianity altogether, gone elsewhere or, while still thinking of themselves as Catholic Christians, find the prospect of Catholic parishes in Britain too depressing to be endurable. A small minority struggles on in spite of

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was submitted for publication to *New Blackfriars* and to *The Pastoral Review*. The Editor of the former wrote: 'I have called a halt to any unsolicited submissions since we have enough accepted to fill the next two years which if commissioned items come off will be even longer.' The Deputy Editor of the latter replied: 'We sent the article out to a reader and after careful consideration we have concluded that the article is not appropriate for publication in *The Pastoral Review* at the present time'.

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the obstacles put in its way at every turn. This is a generalisation, admittedly, but it is an informed one: in thirty-five years as an 'out' gay man who has taken an active part in gay Christian groups, I have heard innumerable gay people's stories of their experiences with churches, priests and bishops.

Recently, Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor has appointed Father Jim Kennedy, a parish priest in the King's Cross area of London, to be 'a point of reference' for the pastoral care of homosexual persons in the Archdiocese of Westminster. This appointment is of wider concern than just to those living in that Archdiocese, because what is done there is likely to set a precedent for the rest of the country. Indeed, the bishop in charge of the new Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, Malcolm McMahon of Nottingham, has endorsed a call for 'a common vision for evangelisation at all levels throughout the Church'.

It is estimated that at least 5% of the population is lesbian or gay. The *Catholic Directory* gives 460,000 as the estimated Catholic population of the Archdiocese of Westminster, with 150,000 as the estimated weekly Mass attendance. The former figure is likely, if anything, to be an underestimate of the number of persons baptised as Catholic Christians, but even using it as a base, there must be at least 23,000 lesbian and gay Catholics in the Archdiocese, and that is not to mention the non-Catholics, to whom, presumably, evangelisation is also addressed. But if most of these people never come to church, how are they to be contacted? If there is no contact, there can be no evangelisation and no pastoral care. So that is the very first question.

It is clear that this is a task far beyond the competence of a priest or priests. Father Kennedy, in any case, has made it clear that he is merely 'analysing and researching the situation with a view to making recommendations to the Pastoral Board and the Archbishop's Council' and that 'The gay and lesbian issue is not a priority of my life' (He makes it sound as though he is doing the job rather reluctantly, certainly not at all enthusiastically). Well, you would have thought that at least he would want to talk to people who have been involved, often for many years, in pastoral care and evangelisation for lesbian and gay people. But not at all: 'I'm not inviting people to come

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and see me because that is not what my job is about'. Instead, 'I'm looking at what other dioceses have done'. If that means British dioceses, his job will soon be concluded, because the answer is 'Nothing' – indeed, less than nothing, because in some dioceses initiatives have been positively discouraged.

There are currently three groups in the UK for lesbian and gay Catholics. The first, *Encourage*, has an entry in the *Catholic Directory* but presently amounts to little more. The second is *Quest*, which has just under 300 members and a number of local groups throughout the country. The third, the Catholic Caucus of the *Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement* is principally active in London, where it has organized a monthly Mass for Catholics at the Anglican church of St Anne in Soho, with a rota of priests as celebrants. In this connexion, it is to be noted that one of the stated aims of Father Kennedy is 'To have an authorised Diocesan Mass to fulfil the Sunday Obligation, to establish a sure welcome and to be a template of good practice'. The implication here, of course, is that the monthly Masses at St Anne's are not 'authorised Diocesan Masses' and attendance at them does not fulfil the Sunday obligation. But what a depressingly legalistic approach to the Mass! In this view, it is just there so that, by attending it, people can fulfil an obligation laid down in Canon Law. There is no thought that there should be a Mass of a kind that lesbian and gay Catholics would *enjoy* participating in. Father Kennedy does not seem to know that most Catholics today who go to church do so because they think the services have something to offer and because they *like* going to church. By stressing the obligation, he is more likely to put them off, not to attract them: 'here you go again', as President Reagan used to say, trying to bully people by wielding the heavy hand of authority – but it's an authority that can no longer claim implicit obedience, and must justify itself if it is to win assent.

The Mass, Father Kennedy claims, 'is in place', but the arrangements that have been made so far support the suspicion that the real aim of instituting 'an authorised Diocesan Mass' is to wrest back the initiative from the Caucus in order to capture its following. Thus the first Mass was arranged on the very same afternoon as the Mass at St Anne's. The thinking, it would seem, is that a Mass that

‘fulfils the Sunday Obligation’ will be more attractive to people than one that does not. However, the initiative badly misfired. First, it attracted the criticism of another priest of the Archdiocese, both for its bad timing (Father Kennedy had a whole month to choose from) and because it was designed to cater also for HIV-positive people, a distinct, if overlapping, constituency. Second, it attracted just 12 people (a subsequent Mass notched up 14) – and we do not know how many of these came because they are lesbian or gay, and how many because they are HIV-positive – whereas the Caucus Mass at St Anne’s was attended by 80. Our Lord is reported as saying that a house that is divided against itself will not stand; the very last thing that a true evangelisation should be doing is to try to sabotage an existing and successful initiative, and lesbian and gay Catholics will do well to be wary of such ‘provisions’. If the Archdiocese of Westminster genuinely wants to offer pastoral care to lesbian and gay people, let it co-operate with and build upon what the Caucus has done already.

Father Kennedy summarises the pastoral guidelines in *An Introduction to the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People*, a pamphlet produced under the auspices of the Bishops’ Conference in 1979 and now virtually unobtainable, inviting comment upon them. But the invitation is hedged by a warning that ‘responses must be in line with current Church teaching’ and this is repeated twice more in the specific questions asked: ‘Do you agree with these guidelines? If you disagree, what would you change, *within Church teaching*? Is there anything, *within Church teaching* you feel should be added?’ And in an interview, after saying what his job is not, he adds: ‘My job is to uphold Church teaching... the Cardinal wants someone ... who will uphold the Church’s teaching which I will certainly do’.<sup>2</sup> In spite of this obsession with Church teaching, Father Kennedy uses it without either adverting to its ambiguity or explaining the sense in which he intends it.

The Church teaches some things infallibly and other things fallibly. This is something that every priest and bishop should know, because there is an unbridgeable logical gap between them – ‘never the

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<sup>2</sup> from an interview published on [www.totalcatholic.com](http://www.totalcatholic.com)

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twain shall meet', as the poet said of East and West; there is no way in which a teaching can be half-infallible. If the Church teaches something infallibly, then it follows logically that it is true; and if it is not true, then the Church cannot teach it infallibly. Of course I am not thinking primarily here of what the *Pope* teaches infallibly – that is a very small, almost negligible, part of what the Church teaches infallibly; most of the Church's infallible teaching is contained in Scripture, the Creeds and the Canons of Ecumenical Councils. The Church also teaches fallibly, and this accounts for much Church teaching; it is quite properly called the teaching of the Church, because it is taught by Church officials, from the Pope downwards, acting in their official capacity on behalf of the Church. It is, one might say, the Church's 'party line': it can be wrong and it can be changed, but while current, it is enforced so far as it can be and, like dissident Communist party members, critics are given a hard time. Anyone who knows a modicum of Church history knows that it has very often been wrong and frequently changed, to the extent of teaching the opposite of what was previously taught; this has happened since the earliest days of the Church – some striking cases are documented in the New Testament – and continued ever since. Catholics owe this fallible teaching their careful consideration and initial respect, but if, at the end of the day they find the arguments by which it is supported unconvincing, they are bound by their own consciences and their disagreement with the party line does not in any way impugn their status as Catholic Christians.

Precisely because they themselves are Church officials, it pays priests and bishops not to distinguish sharply between these two types of Church teaching. They try to elide one into the other and endow fallible teaching with the aura of infallibility. We must therefore ask Father Kennedy whether he is talking about fallible or infallible Church teaching. His use of the phrase 'in line with *current* Church teaching' would suggest that he has the former in mind as well as the latter. Well, he is of course quite entitled to say: 'My brief is constrained by the party line; if I put up anything beyond it to the Pastoral Board and the Archbishop's Council, they won't wear it'. Yet in the present context it has to be asked whether this is a viable

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strategy for *evangelisation*, whether this is a framework for evangelisation that has any chance of success. Can there be any meeting of minds between Father Kennedy and the 23,000 lesbian and gay Catholics out there in the Archdiocese of Westminster on this basis?

At the very least, this approach appears to be a tactical disaster. It is an old adage of evangelisation that the evangelist must take people where they are, not where he would like them to be. Probably most of the 23,000 do not even know the Church's party line on homosexuality, apart, perhaps, from a vague idea that it is pretty negative and unfriendly to lesbian and gay people, which in turn may be an extrapolation from its much better known line on contraception. So to hit them over the head with 'current Church teaching' right from the start is almost certainly going to be counter-productive, and at this point the evangelist should remind himself that he probably has only one chance; if he starts off on the wrong foot, he can put people off for life, and will have to wait until the next generation for another opportunity. If he can't get the approach right the first time, then he had better not make an approach at all, because he is likely to do more harm than good; as the gospel tells us, we should count the cost before embarking upon an enterprise. It is worth reflecting that, while only God can give someone the gift of faith, we can create *obstacles* to evangelisation, and perhaps the greater part of true evangelisation is simply removing those obstacles. But this is a painful business, because we are often emotionally wedded to them and are not prepared to surrender them.

Now it may well be said that these reflections are pretty obvious and banal and that anyone setting out to evangelise will have thought of them already. So when we encounter a case in which the person concerned is apparently quite oblivious to them, we should suspect that evangelisation and pastoral care are not his real agenda, and that there is a hidden one that provides his actual motivation. Now priests and bishops are under a strong temptation to make loyalty to the Vatican their first priority or, in the case of priests, loyalty to their bishop. Criticism has not been welcome in the Catholic Church; to criticise the party line is a sure recipe for ending an ecclesiastical career.

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The pressure on diocesan priests is stronger than on members of religious orders, who have rather more independence and fewer ambitions. So it may be more expedient to give lip-service to evangelisation as one's priority, while toeing the party line remains one's real priority.

This is not necessarily bare-faced hypocrisy. Many priests and bishops genuinely think that loyalty to the Vatican is always a virtue, forgetting that 'my Church, right or wrong' is no less vicious than 'my country, right or wrong', and that loyalty does not feature in any traditional list of Christian virtues. The Christian owes unquestioning loyalty to God alone, because only God deserves it; unquestioning loyalty offered elsewhere is idolatry, as the Bible reiterates again and again. But the mistake is reinforced by frequent confusion between Christ and the Church, so that what the Church requires is seen as what Christ requires. The Church, however, like Christ himself, has a human as well as a divine side; but unlike Christ's, the Church's human side is not exempt from sin. So sometimes it scales the heights, at others it plumbs the depths of human behaviour: *corruptio optimi pessima*. Evangelisation, consequently, can sometimes come into conflict with fallible Church teaching and policy. When it does so, the evangelist's real motives are put to the test. If there is one aspect of morality at which the younger generation today are adepts, it is detecting hypocrisy, conscious or unconscious. Perhaps this is not so far from our Lord's own values, if the gospels are any guide. At any rate, the loyalty that we owe to the Church is always a *critical* loyalty, not an unquestioning one.

An individual may, of course, agree with all of the fallible teaching of the Church and, if so, has every right to defend it. Father Kennedy, however, speaks of *upholding* the teaching of the Church, and that sounds like something more than merely defending it. It suggests *imposing* it upon others, of refusing to entertain or discuss objections to it. It is precisely this aspect that is likely to alienate them. Moreover, with respect to the fallible teaching of the Church, although that is the way in which the Vatican treats bishops and priests, it is morally indefensible. It is, to put it bluntly, bullying: an attempt to bludgeon their consciences into submission by threatening,

even imposing, sanctions. To modern man, this is the (morally) unacceptable face of the Church and, when Church officials are guilty of it, they bring the Church into disrepute.

A Dominican theologian who has carefully examined the arguments of Church officials concerning homosexuality concludes:

it is irrational for serious, reflective Christians ... to accept church teaching on homosexuality... The only rational course at the moment for such Christians is to continue to believe in the possible goodness of homosexual relationships. This is not a matter of dissent or materialism; it is simply that the church at the moment produces no good arguments to assent to. Regrettably, in this area, the church teaches badly<sup>3</sup>.

Those who disagree with this judgment must be prepared to engage with the arguments upon which it is based; its contention is that the fallible teaching of the Church on homosexuality is false. Anyone who hopes to offer pastoral care to lesbian or gay people or to evangelise them must be prepared to meet them at this point and argue his case; moral bullying will be counter-productive. It is, of course, a different matter with the *infallible* teaching of the Church; some doctrines are non-negotiable for a Catholic Christian, but even here, he still has a duty to show that they *are* taught infallibly by the Church. This applies especially in the present case, as many would hold that the Church has not taught anything infallibly regarding homosexuality.

The Pastoral Guidelines that Father Kennedy takes as his starting point come at the end of *An Introduction to the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People*,<sup>4</sup> after a section on Human Relationships that takes up over half of the pamphlet and sets homosexual relationships within the context of human relationships as a whole, for

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<sup>3</sup> Gareth Moore, O.P. (2003), *A Question of Truth*. London, Continuum. P.282.

<sup>4</sup> Catholic Social Welfare Commission [of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales] (1979). Accepted by the Conference in 1979. Reprinted 1994 by Catholic AIDS Link under the title *Created Design – Some Pastoral Guidelines for the Care of Lesbian and Gay People* (Pastoral Aids Series, No.1).

It is only when the pastor has presented this total meaning of inter-personal relationships that those seeking his guidance can understand the special forms which these relationships can take and appreciate their appropriate expression.

These words should be pondered: one cause of the trouble in which Church officials now find themselves is that they have tried to treat homosexual relationships outside the wider context of personal relationships as a whole (in spite of protestations to the contrary). The last of the guidelines (16) returns to this wider theme, in which the pastor's role is described as being 'to introduce people to Christian life in all its fullness'. Father Kennedy adverts to this when he says: 'We must stop being trapped in this whole thing about sexuality'.<sup>5</sup> I am not quite sure what he means by this, but one thing might be that sexuality tends to loom too large in the spiritual life of Catholics, and sexual scruples often blind us to aspects of our moral behaviour that are in more urgent need of attention.

The *Introduction* goes on to dispel eight misunderstandings about homosexuality then widely believed, to say a little about the causes of homosexuality and to outline the Christian tradition. Only then are the sixteen pastoral guidelines set out. They are a hotch-potch, i.e. there is no discernible logical progression to them. While they were enlightened for their time, some of them have, not surprisingly, also been overtaken by events; in twenty-five years, society has moved on, while the Catholic Church in Britain has in the meantime done nothing to offer pastoral care for gay and lesbian people and is dusting off these guidelines as if they had been proposed yesterday. There is little in the guidelines to which to take exception, but much now needs to be added. To see this, we need to review the guidelines in turn.

1&3. The first and third of the guidelines belong together. Initially, the first does not look like a pastoral guideline at all. It notes that some ways of classifying people incorporate value-judgments. An example would be the Victorian term 'vagrant'. But then follows a *non-sequitur*:

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<sup>5</sup> as note 1.

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it is unfortunate that ‘homosexual’ classifies people by their sexuality. Perhaps, but if so, this is a completely separate point. ‘Homosexual’, unlike ‘queer’, ‘pouf’, ‘faggot’, ‘ponce’, etc. is almost clinically descriptive. If one wanted to pick out judgmental overtones – and they are no more than overtones – in the use of ‘homosexual’ it would be in talking of ‘homosexuals’, ‘the homosexuals’, even ‘the Homosexual’ rather than of ‘homosexual people’, with the suggestion that lesbian and gay people are ‘them’ as opposed to ‘us’, almost an *Untermensch*. The *Introduction* largely avoids these usages, but they have crept back in Father Kennedy’s summary. If there is indeed any judgmental overtone to ‘homosexual’, it lies not in the term, but in the minds of some of those who use it. Lesbian and gay people themselves have objected to it as *too* clinical or pedantic; their preference is for ‘lesbian and gay’.

As to the other point, classifying people by their sexuality does not seem objectionable *per se*. We classify people in many different ways for different purposes; a person may belong to one classification for one purpose, to another for a different purpose. What one might object to is the purpose. Thus Hitler’s classification of some people as homosexual and badging them with pink triangles in order to pack them off to concentration camps was indeed objectionable, but it is perfectly reasonable to classify people into groups deemed to warrant distinct pastoral care as, indeed, the *Introduction* itself presupposes.

A more subtle objection to ‘homosexual’ is that, as contrasted with ‘heterosexual’, it suggests a dichotomy: everyone is either heterosexual or homosexual. In fact, however, there is a continuous spectrum of sexual orientation, ranging from the exclusively heterosexual at one end (a person who is only attracted sexually to members of the opposite sex), through the mid-point of bisexuality (equally attracted to both sexes) to exclusive homosexuality at the other end (only attracted to members of the same sex). ‘Homosexual’ versus ‘heterosexual’ does not, therefore, to justice to the complexity of the reality: this is the point made by the third guideline, which does not come across at all from Father Kennedy’s summary, which simply quotes its second sentence out of context:

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3. It is difficult to categorise people as simply heterosexual or homosexual. Empirical evidence suggests that sexual orientation in a limited number of individuals is totally exclusive. In those individuals in whom heterosexual disposition is dominant, there seems to exist a latent potentiality for homosexual interest of which the person may not be aware.

In other words, many people who are predominantly heterosexual are nevertheless capable, sometimes, of sexual attraction to members of their own sex and thus to understand from their own occasional experience what it is like to be predominantly homosexual – if only they would look at themselves honestly. This is a suggestion that can still give offence, and it was quite brave of the Catholic Social Welfare Commission to state it explicitly; as we have seen, Father Kennedy has shied away from repeating it. But it is of great importance, nevertheless, in removing any empirical support that a ‘them’ and ‘us’ mentality might rely upon.

The spectrum of sexual orientation partly explains popularity of ‘LGBT’ as a designation today: lesbian, gay, bisexual (=ambisexual) and transgendered (tranvestites and transsexuals). Still, life is too short to spell out the full details on every occasion, and we are sometimes justified in simplifying, so if someone wants to summarize as ‘homosexual’ all those who deserve special pastoral provision because they do not fit into the picture of exclusively or predominantly heterosexual people for which the Church has hitherto only catered, let us not argue the matter. What is important is the pastoral provision, and if this is what the first guideline is trying to say, however ineptly, we may concur. However, if the pastoral provision is envisaged as extended to LGBTs as a whole, the earlier estimate of the size of the constituency was ridiculously small; we should be thinking in terms of about 100,000 people baptised as Catholic Christians, especially when we also take into account the well-known tendency of LGBT people in Britain to gravitate to London (for a variety of reasons).

2,4&7. The second, fourth and seventh guidelines also belong together: the second and fourth are about the conditions that a pastor

must fulfil if he is to undertake this work and the seventh is about a service that will test him. The second says, in effect, that he must understand what it is like to be lesbian or gay. In practice, this is often no problem, since the best guess available is that about 50% of priests in Western Europe and North America are themselves gay<sup>6</sup>; so there should be no difficulty in finding gay priests to undertake the pastoral care of lesbian and gay Catholics.

However, the fourth guideline says that the pastor must be aware of his own limitations, especially of unconscious prejudice resulting from a biased social tradition. This is perhaps one place where the guidelines begin to look out-of-date. Certainly, there has been a long homophobic tradition in Anglo-Saxon countries, but it has been greatly ameliorated in the last twenty-five years. Lesbian and gay people are much more visible than we were then, and other people can see that we are not so different from themselves. Consequently there is much more tolerance for us in society at large. The problem is now seen to lie much more with the three Abrahamic religions than with lesbian and gay people, so we might now substitute 'religious' for 'social' and say that the pastor must be aware of unconscious prejudice resulting from a biased *religious* tradition. It is easy to underestimate the difficulty for a priest or bishop of looking critically at his own religious tradition. Most were brought up in the 'ghetto' climate of Catholic parishes fifty or sixty years ago, where ultramontanism (more accurately, idolatry of the Vatican) reigned and any hesitations about the party line were branded as disloyalty; clerical life tends to preserve these features, because priests talk mainly to the older 'pillars of the parish', bishops mainly to priests, and both have career prospects to consider. Consequently it is difficult for a priest or bishop to acknowledge to himself that he is gay, never mind to admit it to others. Yet one's sexuality, even if one is celibate, permeates so much of one's life and attitudes that a failure to be honest with oneself on this matter is a basic failure of integrity that can make any kind of pastoral care for lesbian and gay Catholics virtually impossible. That Catholic priests and bishops have a special problem here is shown by the much

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<sup>6</sup> Donald B. Cozzens (2000), *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press. Ch.7, pp.98–9.

higher incidence of child sexual abuse among them than among the ministers of any other denomination – a fact that has never been satisfactorily explained by those who have rightly pointed out that, overall, the incidence of such cases is low and certainly much less than in families. So these two guidelines are still of the greatest importance: pastors should not take on this ministry lightly, e.g. just to please their bishop or religious superior, for it will certainly shine a spotlight into their own secret places.

The seventh guideline says that pastors can especially help lesbian and gay people to ‘come out’, i.e. admit openly to their sexual orientation: he is an ‘obvious person’ with whom to share this knowledge ‘and his own response must be sensitive and sympathetic’. An important corollary must be added to this, however. It presupposes that the pastor is himself happy with his own sexual orientation and equally open about it – hence the connection with the second and fourth guidelines. What hypocrisy it would be for a priest or bishop who cannot bring himself to be open about his own sexual orientation to presume to advise others on this matter! For this reason, it is much better for a lesbian or gay person who thinks of coming out to go to a happy heterosexual priest for advice than to an unhappy, and closeted, homosexual one. But, today, he is unlikely to go to a priest for advice anyway: since the guidelines were written, the spate of priestly (and even episcopal) child abuse cases has made priests and bishops the last people to whom the faithful would now turn for advice on sexual matters. This is doubtless a very unfair consequence of the failings of a small minority, but is not entirely the result of disproportionate publicity. It also has a basis in a real fear that the bishops and the Vatican have not yet faced up to the causes of priestly child abuse in the conditions of clerical life. Here we begin to see that the Catholic Social Welfare Commission’s original insistence on setting the pastoral care of lesbian and gay people in the context of inter-personal relationships as a whole has ramifications that were not seen at the time but are even more relevant now.

5&6. The fifth and sixth guidelines are perhaps the most outdated. The fifth dwells upon the social manifestations of homophobia, the sixth upon its effects on lesbian and gay people:

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In a society that can see them as objects of cruel jokes and contempt, homosexuals commonly suffer from lack of self-esteem and a loneliness that heterosexuals find difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend. In ordinary mixed society, homosexuals feel like strangers. They are shunned and despised by people who may have an inaccurate or distorted knowledge of the homosexual person. Many homosexuals are reserved and even withdrawn, not anxious to draw attention to their difficulties.

It would, however, be going too far to say that these considerations do not apply any longer today at all, and there is one place in which they are still very much to the point: schools. There is considerable evidence of homophobic bullying in schools, and that teachers turn a blind eye to it. Can we suppose that Catholic schools are exempt? The failure of a school to do anything to educate its pupils in a more humane attitude to homosexuality – indeed, in the very principles here enunciated by the Bishops’ Conference – could and does play a major role in turning its lesbian and gay pupils away from the Church and even from their faith. Here is one of the obstacles that we place to evangelisation and could remove. It would certainly be a welcome and much overdue application of these two principles if the Catholic Education Service were to issue a statement recognising the prevalence of homophobic bullying in schools (perhaps after an exercise to gather accurate and up-to-date evidence) and determining to take measures to put an end to it as energetic as those already taken to prevent child abuse.

8&14. The eighth guideline is seriously misrepresented by Father Kennedy’s summary. It deals with lesbian and gay groups, and his summary reads: ‘Caution must be shown regarding the advisability of homosexuals joining societies specifically for homosexuals’. This sentence does not even occur in the text, which begins by saying that it is difficult to assess the value of such associations, and goes on to warn a pastor to advise against societies whose explicit or implicit purpose is to encourage homosexual activities. But the remainder of the guideline strikes a much more positive note:

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the existence of societies for homosexuals who are also Christians means that certain moral standards must be recognised. There are Christian groups explicitly formed for the encouragement of homosexuals... The goodwill of these societies must not be automatically questioned, especially because their very existence may be due to the insensitivity of the general public... On the other hand, there are obvious dangers. Moral support may easily be turned to moral danger and the pastor must encourage the person who seeks his advice to face up to this real possibility...

However, the situation must be kept in proportion. A comparison with accepted social occasions might help to avoid exaggerated or prejudiced decisions. To condemn a social gathering simply because of possible moral dangers could lead to ridiculous restrictions. It could condemn a parish dance or a youth club. It would forbid the sharing of a flat. In fact, such an extreme attitude of mind would be so unreasonable that all social friendships could be under suspicion. This is an unhealthy attitude which destroys human relationships and frustrates that unity within the society which the pastor is supposed to be promoting.

Let us also set down the reality of these groups for the record. There are only two in the UK that have a proportionately significant Catholic membership, the *Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement* (LGCM) and *Quest*. The former is ecumenical though predominantly Anglican in membership and direction, the latter specifically for Catholics. Their existence is due, not so much to the insensitivity of the general public as to the insensitivity of the churches – in the case of *Quest*, of the Catholic Church in particular. Today, their membership is largely of middle-aged and elderly Christians. It is an open question whether this is because younger lesbians and gays find the ‘scene’ of pubs and clubs more to their taste and are so well-adjusted to their sexuality that they do not crave support, but will perhaps eventually tire of the commercial scene and look to the more

sedate social life of the groups, or whether, like most of the rest of the younger generation, they are so disgusted by the negative attitude of the churches to lesbian and gay people that they want nothing more to do with them. At any rate, the actual membership of both groups is small compared with the potential membership, over a thousand for LGCM (of whom Catholics are probably no more than two hundred at most) and just under three hundred for *Quest*, so it has to be admitted that they do not have mass appeal.

Neither of these groups has as its explicit or implicit aim encouraging homosexual sexual activities (the reduplication of 'sexual' is not redundant here, since the intellectual and social activities of the groups are also homosexual though not sexual). They do not *discourage* them either, but they do 'recognise certain moral standards', as the guideline puts it. Perhaps those standards could best be summarised in the words of Jeffrey John in the title of his pamphlet: "Permanent, Faithful, Stable': Christian Same-Sex Partnerships".<sup>7</sup> In this they contrast with the casual promiscuity of 'the scene', where 'anything goes', though members may not always live up to the ideal. You might have thought that these standards would deserve the support of the churches, but the best (in their eyes) has become the enemy of the good, though there is an important qualification in guideline fourteen which, again, is omitted from Father Kennedy's summary:

a pastor must be guided by the general principles of fundamental theology that only a certain moral obligation may be imposed. An invincible doubt, whether or law or fact, permits one to follow a true and solidly "probable opinion" in favour of a more liberal interpretation.

This is a reference to the doctrine of probabilism propounded by St Alphonsus Liguori in the eighteenth century. The probable opinion to which it refers is defined as 'an opinion which a wise and prudent man would accept as probably true, though he fears it may not be'. Such opinions are either *intrinsically* or *extrinsically* probable:

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<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey John (1993). London: Darton, Longman & Todd. *Affirming Catholicism*.

'An opinion is termed intrinsically probable, when the reasons in its favour are such as to command the assent of a sensible man. But to judge aright of the probability of an opinion requires a balanced judgment, a fair standard of moral education, and freedom from prejudice and unfounded preconceptions. Consequently only those who are trained in appraising moral arguments are capable of deciding on the probability of an opinion. But if several authors of note hold an opinion as probable, their judgment creates an opinion that is termed extrinsically probable. One may act on such extrinsic probability. Indeed, that is the only available probability for many people.<sup>8</sup>

It would be difficult to deny that the opinion of Gareth Moore fulfils these conditions, and his is only the most recent in a line beginning with Marc Oraison in 1975<sup>9</sup> through the moral theologian John J. McNeill in 1977<sup>10</sup> and several others. There is now, therefore, not merely an intrinsic but also an extrinsic probable opinion in favour of permanent, faithful and stable same-sex relationships, and this obtains even though it is inconsistent with the current fallible teaching of the Church. The mention of an invincible doubt means that arguments to the contrary have been properly examined and found wanting: this is evident from the conclusion of Gareth Moore's book quoted above and is fulfilled by the other authors cited.

This, then, is the context for the assertions of guideline 14 that lesbian and gay people have the same need for and rights to the sacraments as heterosexual people and that in administering the sacraments to them the pastor must be guided by these general

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Davis, S.J. (1952), *Moral and Pastoral Theology: A Summary*. London, Sheed & Ward, pp. 8–10. This was a standard textbook before the Vatican II. Moral theology has changed so much in the last forty years, however, that the reference to probabilism is now mainly of historical interest.

<sup>9</sup> Marc Oraison, *The Homosexual Question*. Translated from the French. London, Search Press, 1977. See especially pp. 116–8.

<sup>10</sup> John J. McNeill (1977), *The Church and the Homosexual*. London, Darton, Longman & Todd. *Passim*.

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principles of moral theology. The implication, therefore, is that where a difference of opinion arises between a Catholic and his or her pastor as to the morality of certain behaviour, a probable opinion in favour of the former's view overrides any scruples the pastor may himself feel about it. This is hardly a problem in respect of the sacrament of Reconciliation, since, as members of *Quest* were advised many years ago by a priest at a meeting in Westminster Cathedral Hall, one is only obliged to confess what one acknowledges to be a mortal sin. It is, however, of the greatest importance when it comes to a Catholic living openly with a same-sex partner, perhaps, indeed, in a civic partnership, when the pastor will be expected to welcome him or her to Communion at the altar. In my experience, the conscience of a lesbian or gay Catholic in this matter is more often than not respected, but not invariably; so there is scope for this guideline to be applied generally.

9&10. These two guidelines deal with possible 'cures' for a homosexual orientation. The authors of the guidelines are rightly sceptical about both of them. The first, marriage, was often tried by lesbian and gay people under family pressure in the past; pressure to marry is still a big problem for lesbian and gay Jews and Muslims and members of some ethnic minorities. Now that civic partnerships are available for same-sex unions, it is less of a problem for the rest of us. As a cure, it does not work, which the lesbian or gay partner eventually discovers; but the major objection to it is stated in the guideline, that it is unfair to the other, usually heterosexual, partner. The tenth guideline deals with the prospects of therapy for changing a person's sexual orientation, and dismisses them, holding out hope only that therapy may help people to accept their sexual orientation positively. Nowadays, that is all that the vast majority of therapists would attempt anyway; we must remember that aversion therapy was still in vogue when the guidelines first appeared. Events have largely overtaken this recommendation, but the one on marriage still awaits implementation in clerical practice: 'marriage', it says, 'must not be thought of as the only gateway to God and the only way to fulfilment'. But how often do we hear this admirable sentiment voiced from the pulpit? There, the 'two vocations' theory still holds sway: everyone's vocation is either

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to become a priest or religious, or to marry and produce offspring. If Father Kennedy is serious about these guidelines, he could start a campaign to persuade the priests of the Archdiocese to have a care for single people and to recognise their presence. I understand that something like one in three households in the UK consist of one person only: one would not think it from the easy assumption that most parishes cater primarily for nuclear families.

11. The eleventh guideline is in some ways naïf and reminds one of the remedies for masturbation proposed in the nineteenth century; but actually it is good advice for everyone, not just lesbian and gay people. ‘Channel your energies into a variety of interests’, says the Commission, though genuinely and not artificially. This would certainly have met with Aristotle’s approval:

everyone who can live according to his own choice should adopt some goal for the fine life, whether it be honour or reputation or wealth or cultivation – an aim that he will have in view in all his actions; for, not to have ordered one’s life in relation to some end is a mark of extreme folly. But, above all, and before everything else, he should settle in his own mind, – neither in a hurried nor in a dilatory manner – in which human thing living well consists, and what those things are without which it cannot belong to human beings.<sup>11</sup>

A counsellor can help people to identify their goals, or a retreat such as the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius Loyola, whose purpose is to prepare one for making a choice. Some goals will concern personal relationships. It should also be noted that sex can become an addiction, preoccupying the thoughts of someone who does not have other and more important goals; this is a sin against chastity, understood traditionally as temperance in sexual matters. (Of course, people’s sex drive varies enormously, and this must be taken into account). But none of this concerns lesbian and gay people specifically, so it is rather puzzling why it should feature as part of their pastoral care in particular.

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<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1.2, 1214<sup>b</sup>7–13.

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12. Father Kennedy omits the twelfth guideline from his summary, perhaps because it is not a recommendation but a division of lesbian and gay people into three categories: the well-adjusted, those with psychological problems (neurotics, alcoholics) and those with personality disorders leading to deviant behaviour (criminal offences). The same categorisation of heterosexuals is equally possible, and the Commission actually recognises that it is irrelevant, admitting that some lesbian and gay people are better adjusted psychologically than the average heterosexual, that the group with psychological problems has more in common with other neurotics than with other lesbian and gay people, and that those with personality disorders have more in common with other social deviants. It was probably included at the time because many people then thought that a homosexual orientation correlated highly with psychological problems or behaviour disorders. It still remains true that the attitudes of a lesbian or gay person's peers, relations or church may create psychological problems and perhaps even behaviour disorders, but the problem lies with them and not with their victims. Church institutions especially need to examine their consciences on this score. As it stands, however, this guideline needs to be re-written so as to highlight the problems that it catalogues as being a result of the obstacles to evangelisation posed by Christians themselves, to confront them with the possible result of their actions and attitudes.

13. This guideline is worth quoting in full, because the Church, far from implementing it, has been the main offender since it was penned a quarter of a century ago:

The Church has a serious responsibility to work towards the elimination of any injustices perpetrated on homosexuals by society. 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. Homosexuals have a right to enlightened and effective pastoral care with pastoral ministers who are properly trained to meet their pastoral needs.

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First, as to injustices: the Vatican has simply denied that the main disabilities under which lesbian and gay people have laboured in the past were injustices at all; rather, since a homosexual orientation is an objective disorder and not a quality comparable to race or ethnicity, discrimination against lesbian and gay people is justifiable in employment and housing. It is on a par with limiting the rights of people who have a contagious disease or are mentally ill.<sup>12</sup> Can one reasonably expect us to take kindly to Church officials that can speak of us in such terms? In the United Kingdom, the bishops opposed an equal age of consent for homosexual and heterosexual activity and, following the lead of the Vatican,<sup>13</sup> the Civic Partnerships Bill. I cannot, indeed, think of a single issue affecting lesbian and gay people on which Church officials have done anything to help us in the last 25 years. So there is a challenge: let your actions match up to your fine words!

Second, as to the right to enlightened and effective pastoral care. A few priests have been encouraged by their bishops to pursue a ministry to lesbian and gay Catholics, but this has been a private arrangement; there has been no public attempt to make any provision until the present initiative of the Archdiocese of Westminster. Still less has there been any attempt to provide the training that is a necessary prerequisite for effective pastoral care in this area. Fine words again, but no deeds to match them.

15. This guideline embodies a misunderstanding that has surfaced elsewhere and needs to be corrected. This is particularly pertinent as the central message of the guideline, rightly picked out by Father Kennedy, is that the Christian task is to understand lesbian and gay people and to respect them as people. But it goes on to suggest that we may feel that the Church demands of us impossible standards, that, in Cardinal Hume's words, it presents 'a demanding understanding and ethic of marriage and sexuality, one that is often difficult to realise in practice but which all should continually strive to

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<sup>12</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1992), *Some Considerations concerning the Catholic Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons*, addressed to all bishops of the United States, §§10, 11, 12 & 15.

<sup>13</sup> Documented in *Quest Digest* 3 (2004), pp.66–92.

make their own'.<sup>14</sup> However, the position of the vast majority of lesbian and gay people is not this at all, but as Gareth Moore states it: that the fallible teaching of the Church on sexuality is, in some respects, irrational and unsupported by any valid arguments – not a high but difficult ideal; rather, a crazy one. If, indeed, the Christian task is to understand us, Church officials can begin right here: we need to talk, and if the best you can do is to clobber us with 'the teaching of the Church' when that teaching is fallible, you will do better to go away and forget about us. Honestly facing this issue is a *sine qua non* of evangelisation directed to lesbian and gay people, and it is no answer to hide behind the Vatican's party line.

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To conclude, then, although the sixteen guidelines need some revision in the light of social changes in the last quarter-century, there is still much in them that is still highly relevant, while most of the recommendations that they contain still await implementation. The real problem for evangelisation lies outside them, in what has happened since in the Church. *Vatican policy is today the central obstacle to any dialogue between the Church and LGBT Catholics.* The difficulty does not lie primarily in the Vatican's teaching on homosexuality; though offensive to most LGBT Catholics because of its intemperate language and evident loathing of LGBT people, enough in themselves to render its protestations of goodwill suspect, we have to recognise that it is all part and parcel of a skewed view of human sexuality that has prevailed in the Church for many centuries. Church officials have painted themselves into a corner from which there seems no escape; they fear a loss of face that will deal a mortal blow to their authority, not realising that, on sexual matters, they have long ceased to carry conviction and that most Catholics (except, perhaps, the poor and uneducated whose credulity officials can easily exploit) have asserted their right to make up their own minds.

The real difficulty, rather, lies in an intellectually dishonest conflation of fallible with infallible Church teaching and a determined

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<sup>14</sup> Basil Hume (1997), *A Note on the Teaching of the Catholic Church concerning Homosexual People.*



attempt to stamp upon Catholics whose consciences and intelligences do not allow them to conform to every detail of the Church's current fallible teaching. These are the very people who are likely to be at the cutting edge of evangelisation, because those who are familiar with 'the joy and hope, the sorrow and anxiety of the people of our time' see how inept are some of the policies of Church officials nurtured in a clerical culture to meet those concerns. And, by contrast with a Vatican and today's bishops who refuse even to talk to those who do not agree with them, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council claimed that it 'cannot show how close it feels to the human family to which it belongs, how it loves and respects it, more eloquently than by *entering on a discussion* with that family of these various problems – bringing the light of the Gospel to bear upon them, lending mankind the support of that strength the Church draws from her founder under the guidance of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today, §§1 & 3.

# Pastoral Care of Homosexual Catholics

## Right to Pastoral Care

### *Authorities*

1 '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. Homosexuals have a right to enlightened and effective pastoral care with pastoral ministers who are properly trained to meet their pastoral needs' (SWC 1979, §13). This is a striking and forthright quotation, especially as it expresses the policy of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales. Cardinal Hume quoted it with the comment that these are 'words which apply equally today' (Hume 1997<sup>1</sup>, §12). First, it acknowledges that lesbian and gay people have a *special* claim on the Church for support. Second, it asserts that they have a *right* to proper pastoral care. Third, it envisages pastors who are *trained* to provide this care, so that it shall be 'enlightened and effective'.

2 A recent Vatican document spoke in the same vein, if less strongly:

'We encourage the bishops, then, to provide pastoral care in full accord with the teaching of the Church for homosexual persons of their dioceses (§15)... we would ask the bishops to support, with the means at their disposal, the development of appropriate forms of pastoral care for homosexual persons. These would include the assistance of the psychological, sociological and medical sciences, in full accord with the teaching of the Church ... (§17).

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<sup>1</sup> Although Cardinal Hume wrote this note in his capacity as Archbishop of Westminster and not as chairman of the Bishops' Conference, it is the most recent episcopal pronouncement in this country on lesbian and gay issues in general. It is not easily available, but is quite short, so we reproduce it here as an appendix.

‘The bishops have the particularly grave responsibility to see to it that their assistants in the ministry, above all the priests, are rightly informed and personally disposed to bring the teaching of the Church in its integrity to everyone.

‘The characteristic concern and goodwill exhibited by many clergy and religious in their pastoral care for homosexual persons is admirable, and, we hope, will not diminish. Such devoted ministers should have the confidence that they are faithfully following the will of the Lord by encouraging the homosexual person to lead a chaste life and by affirming that person’s God-given dignity and worth’ (§13). (CDF 1986).

### *Scope of this paper*

3 The purpose of this discussion paper is to ask how these principles might be applied in practice within an English diocese. What forms of pastoral care *are* ‘appropriate’ for lesbian and gay people? What are the implications of ‘enlightened’ pastoral care, and what kind of training do pastors need in order to be able to offer it? Finally, what conditions would have to be met for the care to be ‘effective’?

4 A distinction that must be drawn at the outset is between individual care and group care. Pastors can encounter lesbians and gays both as individuals, with individual problems and concerns, and as members of groups such as *Quest*, where relations between the group as a whole and some other group, e.g. a diocese or a parish, are at issue. We shall discuss these separately.

## **Gay Disaffection**

### *Popular perception of Church teaching*

5 The quotations above illustrate what might be called the ‘gay-friendly’ aspect of official teaching; it also has a less friendly aspect and, as usual, that is the side which has attracted more publicity and which, therefore, is more familiar to Catholics in general. Recent

ecclesiastical documents distinguish between a homosexual inclination (more commonly called ‘homosexual orientation’ or, in popular idiom, ‘being gay’) and homosexual activity (having gay sex). This is an application of a distinction deriving from Aristotle between a disposition (*hexis*) and its exercise (*energeia*); for example, we might consider someone to have an irritable disposition, manifested in frequent bursts of anger, yet recognise that being irritable and actually being angry are distinct: the person isn’t angry all the time, but is irritable even when not angry.

6 Church documents insist that homosexual activity is always wrong<sup>2</sup>: “according to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts which lack essential and indispensable finality. In sacred Scripture they are condemned as a serious depravity... This judgment of Scripture ... does attest to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of” (CDF 1975, n.8, §4). The Catholic Social Welfare Commission spoke to the same effect: “With regard to homosexual acts, scripture and the ongoing tradition of Christianity make it quite clear that these are immoral ... in the objective order homosexual acts may not be approved” (SWC 1979, p.7).<sup>3</sup>

7 This poses an immediate difficulty, because a disposition every exercise of which is wrong is, precisely, what we call a ‘vice’, just as a virtue is a disposition every exercise of which is good. Aristotle, indeed,

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<sup>2</sup> Just as not all people who are heterosexual by disposition exercise their disposition in heterosexual behaviour, so too not all people who are homosexual by disposition exercise their disposition in homosexual behaviour; conversely, people who are heterosexual by disposition sometimes engage in homosexual behaviour and people who are homosexual by disposition sometimes engage in heterosexual behaviour. The CDF does not make this distinction, although it seems that Rm.1:26–27 does, for example, or at least assumes that a homosexual orientation is chosen.

<sup>3</sup> In theory, the CDF acknowledges “The natural sciences ... have their own legitimate and proper methodology and field of inquiry.” Yet it seems deaf to what the sciences have to say about the nature of human sexuality, and is tethered to the essentially procreative-only view of it. The assertion that the CDF’s view “finds support in the more secure findings of the natural sciences” would be shared by few scientists. To concede that “the Church ... (can) learn from scientific discovery” and at the same time “transcend the horizons of science”, meaning that theologians can reject scientific findings on non-scientific grounds, shows little awareness of the differing logics and methodologies proper to various forms of human understanding.

uses the disposition/exercise distinction in order to characterise virtues and vices. Hence it would follow that a homosexual orientation is a vice and, in general, one can be responsible for one's virtues and vices. However, one can only be responsible for a *voluntarily acquired* disposition and, for most people, their sexual orientation is experienced as given and unchangeable. At first, the CDF seems to have regarded a homosexual orientation as a kind of sickness, distinguishing between a transitory or 'not incurable' condition and a definitive one due to an innate instinct or 'a pathological constitution judged to be incurable'<sup>4</sup> (1975, n.8, §2). The Social Welfare Commission did not fall into that trap, and said quite simply:

Homosexuality ... as such is neither morally good nor bad. Homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is a state or condition. It is morally neutral and the ... homosexual, like the heterosexual, cannot be held responsible for his tendencies (1979, p.7).

The CDF did not like this, complaining that it would give

An overly benign interpretation ... to the homosexual condition itself, some going as far as to call it neutral or even good. Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder (1986, §3)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> CDF 1986 §3 says that CDF 1975 §8 'took note of the distinction commonly drawn between the homosexual condition or tendency and individual homosexual actions'. But the distinction made in CDF 1975 is not that at all; it is 'between ... (a) tendency ... (which is) transitory and at least not incurable ... (and what is) some kind of innate instinct or a pathological constitution judged to be incurable.'

<sup>5</sup> The English translations of CDF documents rarely use the term 'orientation', and the Latin uses only *condicio*, *propensio* and *inclinatio* (as verb *inclinare*). Why is *natura* not used? It would express what 'orientation', whether homosexual or heterosexual, has to say of personality. Moreover, the CDF acknowledged that the human person is so profoundly affected by sexuality that it must be considered as one of the factors which give to each individual's life the principal traits that distinguish it (1975, §1). The explanation is probably that any admission of homosexuality as a natural condition, the normal minority variant of human sexuality accepted by the sciences, would justify use of the traditional principle *agere*

From a public relations point of view, this was an extremely unfortunate choice of phrase, since it has given great offence to lesbian and gay people and disseminated the perception that the Vatican is homophobic. Cardinal Hume was conscious of this and gave an explanation of the meaning of ‘objectively disordered’ clearly intended as damage limitation:

The word “disordered” is a harsh one in our English language. It immediately suggests a sinful situation, or at least implies a demeaning of the person or even a sickness. It should not be so interpreted... It is used to describe an inclination which is a departure from what is generally regarded to be the norm. The norm consists of an inclination towards a sexual relationship with a person of the opposite sex and not between persons of the same sex. Being a homosexual person is, then, neither morally good nor morally bad; it is homosexual genital acts that are morally wrong. Secondly, when the Church speaks of the inclination to homosexuality as being “an objective disorder” (PC para.3), she does not consider, of course, the whole personality and character of the individual to be thereby disordered. (Hume 1997, §7).

He also went out of his way to repudiate homophobia:

Nothing in the Church’s teaching can be said to support or sanction, even implicitly, the victimisation of homosexual men and women. Furthermore, ‘homophobia’ should have no place among Catholics. Catholic teaching on homosexuality is not founded on, and can never be used to justify, ‘homophobic’ attitudes. Even if homosexual people are unwisely tempted to act in a

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*sequitur esse*, whereby actions issuing from a given nature take on its moral quality. That would give a contrary impression to the CDF’s position that no kind of homosexual activity can be approved. The CDF’s principle is really the converse of the traditional one: *esse sequitur agere*. Having decided that homosexual activity is always wrong, it has to find reasons for saying that a homosexual nature/orientation is morally neither good nor even neutral.

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provocative or destructive manner this does not justify 'homophobic' attitudes or reactions. (§15)<sup>6</sup>.

8 Nevertheless, there are other passages in recent Church documents that invoke the notion of disorder but at the same time reinforce the perception of homophobia. This applies especially to the attitude of the Vatican to legislation that would make the lives of gay people easier:

“Sexual orientation” does not constitute a quality comparable to race, ethnic background, etc., in respect to non-discrimination. Unlike these, homosexual orientation is an objective disorder (CDF 1992, §10).

Discrimination against lesbian and gay people is therefore justifiable in employment (teachers, athletic coaches, the military, health benefits for partners, §11) and housing (public housing being accorded to partners, §§12, 15). It is on a par with limiting the rights of people who have a contagious disease or are mentally ill (§12). But if disorder is merely a departure from what is generally regarded as the norm and is neither morally good nor morally bad, how can this be?

9 There is inevitably a tension between a desire to treat people in accordance with general Christian principles governing human relationships (ultimately, that is, to love one's neighbour as oneself) and a belief, regarding a minority that owns to a certain disposition (homosexual orientation), that every exercise of their disposition is 'grave depravity'. For those who *really* believe this, discussing pastoral care for lesbian and gay people is on a par with discussing pastoral care for paedophiles, strictly understood as people who are sexually attracted only to children under the age of puberty. To be sure, paedophilic sex is an offence in law whereas homosexual sex is no longer so, but pastoral care is concerned with moral, not legal issues.

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<sup>6</sup> Thus, for example, a total refusal to admit any homosexual men either to seminaries or to priestly ordination would look very much like a blatant instance of homophobia.

*Effects*

10 Public estimation of a highly centralized institution such as the Catholic Church is largely determined by Vatican pronouncements, and as much by the style as by the content. Teaching on human sexuality, often expressed in a technical theological language, sometimes in terms outmoded even by traditional standards, easily open to misinterpretation, has generally been perceived as totally opposed to homosexuality, whether in practice or as an orientation. This can be a matter of congratulation for some Catholics, finding their prejudices authoritatively confirmed. For lesbian and gay Catholics, the effect is to make the institutional Church a hostile environment, a source of extra difficulties, unsupportive in life's struggles and inevitably conducive of low self-esteem as a homosexual person.

11 Pastoral care must start with those to whom it is offered where they are and not where those who offer it would like them to be; otherwise, it will be rejected and so become all the harder for pastors to regain confidence and respect. It may, therefore, be useful to describe some typical lesbian and gay Catholics today (What follows is based on anecdotal experience and not on statistical surveys). First, the teenager. Many Catholic teenagers today have, as is well known, ceased to frequent church; among them will be lesbian and gay teenagers, and the causes of their alienation may be those general among their age-group. If they attend a Catholic school, prevalent attitudes in it to lesbian and gay people may aggravate their disaffection. There may be homophobic bullying; teaching on sex in RE classes may be another factor<sup>7</sup>. If the latter is insensitive, lesbian or gay teenagers, unable to

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<sup>7</sup> This arises in part from a conspiracy of silence about homosexuality in instruction upon sexual matters, which appears to be general in British schools, and by no means confined to Catholic ones. It was aggravated in recent years by section 28 of the Local Government Act, 1988 (now repealed), which prohibited the promotion of homosexuality or presentation of homosexual partnerships as a 'pretended family'. The tacit assumption is that all pupils are heterosexual, with the result that a homosexual boy or girl, who does not experience any sexual attraction to members of the opposite sex, is made to feel inadequate and is likely to suppose him or herself to be an isolated instance, something quite exceptional and unnatural. Moreover, if the topic is unmentioned, the suspicion must arise that it is too shameful to be mentionable. This is likely to be confirmed by any signs of embarrassment or evasion on the part of teachers if some issue touching upon homosexuality arises by chance, as it is almost



change their disposition, may come to think of it as a mark of God's disfavour; as they are not aware of having acquired it voluntarily, this

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bound to do a few times in the course of schooling. But children discuss these matters among themselves and, if teachers evade them, the result will certainly be, not that the children remain uninformed, but that they become misinformed. In particular, a homosexual boy or girl will sooner or later hear his or her peers using some of the current pejorative terms for homosexuals, 'queers', 'poufs', etc. Curiously, a homosexual disposition is a much greater source of anxiety to children than homosexual behaviour. The latter seems to be fairly common, especially in segregated schools (with not much difference between Catholic and other schools), but is tolerated by the children provided that it is mere sexual experimentation and not accompanied by any genuine affection. A homosexual boy or girl's isolation will then be exacerbated by deliberate concealment, the beginning of a double life which is a recurrent theme of most homosexual case-histories and which must militate strongly against spiritual integrity. Few adolescents in this situation can summon up the courage to tell their parents, for the assumption must be that parents are heterosexual, will not 'understand', and will share the attitudes of school and society. In the case of Catholic parents, the assumption is usually justified; some, indeed, react with extreme violence to the revelation that one of their children is homosexual.

It is a frequent complaint from young people that the sex instruction that they receive in school is focussed upon the biological aspects and does nothing to prepare them for the emotional problems that arise in the course of human relationships. This complaint is one with which Catholics ought to sympathize: does not one of the questions in the old penny catechism ask: 'Of which must you take most care, of your body or of your soul?'; and the answer given is: 'I must take most care of my soul; for Christ has said, "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?"' It is upon the emotional implications of homosexuality that sex instruction in this area should concentrate, not upon homosexual activities. The cardinal principle to bear in mind here is that the range of emotional involvement for homosexuals with others of the same sex is exactly the same as that experienced by heterosexuals in relation to others of the opposite sex; the commonly encountered assumption that homosexual attraction is mere lust (*concupiscentia*) is quite false, and Scripture itself provides counter-examples. The conclusion of David's lament over Jonathan may be cited: 'I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me, your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women' (2 Samuel 1:26). Scripture, moreover, presents the love of David and Jonathan as something noble, not as something disgraceful. David's lament is omitted from the Office of Readings, but the second lesson appointed for the feast of SS. Basil and Gregory (2. January) presents a comparable example. Cardinal Hume summed this up: 'In whatever context it arises, and always respecting the appropriate manner of its expression, love between two persons, whether of the same sex or of a different sex, is to be treasured and respected. "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus", we read. [John, 11:5]. When two persons love they experience in a limited manner in this world what will be their unending delight when one with God in the next. To love another is in fact to reach out to God who shares his lovableness with the one we love. To be loved is to receive a sign, or a share, of God's unconditional love. To love another ... is to have entered the area of the richest human experience, whether that love is between persons of the same sex or of a different sex. But that experience of love is spoiled, whether it is in marriage or in friendship, when we do not think and act as God wills us to think and act.' (Hume 1997, §§9-10)

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seems unjust – almost, that they are predestined to be damned. So they want no more to do with such a God or such a Church and, in some cases, become extremely hostile to every form of Christianity. Those who cannot throw off their faith so easily sometimes become acutely depressed and suicide attempts are not uncommon.

12 Second, those who go on to higher education often live away from home, and this gives them a breathing space in which they can visit gay pubs and clubs, perhaps form sexual relationships, and ‘come out’ to close friends without fear that their families will discover. For most people, coming out to one’s close relations is the *most difficult* self-revelation and still worse if one comes from a ‘traditional Catholic family’:

Pastors can be especially helpful in the ‘coming out’ process. This is the point at which the homosexual person admits openly to his or her homosexuality and it is frequently the first stage of being able to cope. The pastor seems to be an obvious person with whom to share these confidences and his own response must be sensitive and sympathetic. A clear re-affirmation of moral standards may be required but this must not be a blunt rejection based on prejudice and ignorance. Rejection can force homosexuals to rely exclusively on the fellowship of fellow homosexuals where at least they will be met with the understanding which has been denied by the pastor (SWC 1979, Pastoral Guidelines §7).

Proportionately, many less students frequent chaplaincies than formerly, so by this stage are already unlikely to turn to a priest for counsel. But some do so<sup>8</sup>, and the experience of university chaplains

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<sup>8</sup> It cannot be emphasized too strongly that a priest’s initial reaction at this moment may be decisive for the homosexual Catholic’s future relations with the Church. It is an occasion on which a priest should be mindful of our Lord’s words: ‘Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea’ (Mark 9:42). Some meet with a violently hostile reaction. In the cases where a priest tries to be sympathetic, he may be unable to give helpful or sensible advice because he is ill-informed about homosexuality and shares many of the myths about it which are current in our society. Frequently, the adolescent is advised to consult a psychiatrist, a sheer waste of time and money if the expectation is that the psych-

could help other pastors. The position of people in this age-group who have gone straight to work and not into higher education is probably more difficult, especially if they are still living at home.

13 Third, it is common for young lesbian and gay people who have 'come out' to form frequent and often short-lasting sexual relationships, sometimes even with more than one person at once, and to frequent the gay pubs and clubs in search of partners. After a few years, however, they usually begin to look for a more permanent relationship, think of setting up house with a partner, and want a relationship based on much more than sexual attraction. Nowadays one can meet lesbian and gay partners who have been together for twenty or even as long as forty years, though they have seldom been sexually monogamous for such long periods. In the case of Catholics, many have long ceased to have any belief, but others still think of themselves as Catholic or at least Christian and would respond to a positive pastoral approach. Their first step may be to join a gay Christian group, e.g. the *Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement*, or *Quest*. Yet others remain as 'marginal' Catholics, while some try marriage as a 'cure' and others opt for an explicitly celibate life, as priests or religious, in which their disposition will be pushed – they hope! – into the background of their lives.

14 What is the size of the potential lesbian and gay Catholic clientele for pastoral care? The most conservative estimate of the homosexual population of the UK is 2% (excluding those, largely married, who have had occasional homosexual experience); other

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iatrist will be able to change his patient's sexual disposition, an extravagant way of reconciling the adolescent to live with his or her disposition, and justified only in those exceptional cases where there are independent signs of psychological disorder. Another common piece of bad advice in this context is to try to persuade the adolescent that he or she is merely going through a 'passing phase'. While it is true that dispositions are difficult to assess accurately and that we constantly deceive ourselves about them, the motivation here is for homosexuals to deceive themselves that they are heterosexual, and not conversely. If an adolescent has finally taken the difficult step of confiding to someone else a belief that he or she is homosexual, the probability is that the assessment is correct. At any rate, no harm and only good can come from discussing calmly with such a person the implications of a homosexual disposition for his or her future life; if the assessment does turn out to have been mistaken, the person concerned will have a better understanding of the homosexual condition and be prepared to face it calmly in friends or later, perhaps, as a parent, whereas someone who is encouraged to believe that it is merely a passing phase will be in a worse state than before if, in fact, it persists.

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estimates favour 5%, while some think it may be as much as 10%. It will be still higher if ambisexual and transgendered people are included; in terms of pastoral care, we should probably be thinking in terms of between 5% and 10%. If the distribution of homosexuality is the same among the Catholic as among the general population, then there will be between 200,000 and 400,000 homosexual and ambisexual Catholics in England and Wales, assuming a Catholic population of 4 million.<sup>9</sup> Not a vast number, certainly, but enough to suggest that the deanery rather than the individual parish, on the one hand, or the whole diocese, on the other, would be the best unit on which to base their pastoral care.

### *Equal treatment*

15 The CDF has laid down the following conditions for pastoral care of homosexual people:

No authentic pastoral programme will include organisations in which homosexual persons associate with each other without clearly stating that homosexual activity is immoral. A truly pastoral approach will appreciate the need for homosexual persons to avoid the near occasions of sin.

We would heartily encourage programmes where these dangers are avoided. But we wish to make it clear that departure from the Church's teaching, or silence about it, in an effort to provide pastoral care is neither caring nor pastoral. Only what is true can ultimately be pastoral. The neglect of the Church's position prevents homosexual men and women from receiving the care they need and deserve.

An authentic pastoral programme will assist homosexual persons at all levels of the spiritual life: through the sacraments, and in particular through the frequent and

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<sup>9</sup> The estimated Catholic population of England and Wales in 2003 was 4,053,827, estimated weekly Mass attendance 1,071,975 (Figures from *The Catholic Directory* for 2004).

sincere use of the sacrament of Reconciliation, through prayer, witness, counsel and individual care. In such a way, the entire Christian community can come to recognize its own call to assist its brothers and sisters, without deluding them or isolating them. (CDF 1986, §15).

It must be a serious question whether any pastoral care is possible under these conditions. ‘Yes’, it says, ‘we should like to offer you pastoral care. But we must begin by telling you that homosexual activity is immoral, that you are intrinsically disordered, and that discrimination against you in employment and housing may not be unjust. Moreover, you are going to need frequent recourse to confession.’ What a welcome!

16 In this connexion, it is important to observe that there are two other groups of Catholics comparable to lesbians and gays: those who practise contraception, and divorced people who have remarried. The first group is especially germane, since the reason their behaviour is judged to be wrong is *precisely the same* as that for which homosexual activity is censured, that it is not potentially reproductive<sup>10</sup>. From a pastoral point of view, all three groups should be treated equally and with the same consideration. If lesbian and gay people are treated more

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<sup>10</sup> ‘If contraceptive intercourse is permissible, then what objection could there be after all to mutual masturbation, or copulation *in vase indebito*, sodomy, buggery, when normal copulation is impossible or inadvisable (or in any case, according to taste)? It can’t be the mere pattern of bodily behaviour in which the stimulation is procured that makes all the difference! But if such things are all right, it becomes perfectly impossible to see anything wrong with homosexual intercourse, for example. I am not saying: if you think contraception all right you will do these other things; not at all. The habit of respectability persists and old prejudices die hard. But I am saying: you will have no solid reason against these things’ (Anscombe 1975, pp.18–19). This recognizes that homosexual activity differs from contraceptive heterosexual intercourse in that it is not the kind of activity that can be reproductive in any circumstances, whereas contraceptive heterosexual intercourse is of a kind which could be reproductive if it had not been deliberately rendered sterile. But then, hinting that a double standard is likely to be applied to contraceptive heterosexual intercourse, on the one hand (as being respectable) and to homosexual activity, on the other (as being disreputable), the writer continues: ‘It can’t be the mere pattern of bodily behaviour in which the stimulation is procured that makes all the difference!’ The moral difference, in other words, must lie between sexual activities which are potentially reproductive and those which are not, where the potentiality is deemed to be absent just in case the action is either of a non-reproductive kind or is performed when measures have been taken to prevent it from being reproductive.

severely, they will rightly conclude that homophobia rather than any concern for the truth is the operative factor.

17 An initial approach to people that is disapproving and condemnatory is likely to have the opposite effect to that intended. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, more often than not, the would-be evangelist has only one chance; if he 'screws it up', his client will never return. We have heard many life-stories from lesbian and gay people who have consulted a priest (sometimes in the confessional) only to be met with horror, revulsion and condemnation. The result: a legacy of anger and bitterness towards the Church as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

18 Happily, the Bishops' Social Welfare Commission sounds a quite different tone from the CDF in its *Pastoral Guidelines*:

In general terms the pastoral task might be considered as helping homosexual persons ... to understand and examine the meaning of their behaviour, sexual or otherwise, in the light of the love of God and the love of neighbour, together with the moral and pastoral teaching of Christianity...

There follow sixteen guidelines, some concerned with homosexual orientation, others with background knowledge necessary for the pastor, including that of his own limitations, but none that 'put down' lesbian and gay people. On the contrary, 'It is the role of the pastor to offer encouragement and support' (n.6), he can help homosexual people to 'come out' and to cope with loneliness and lack of self-esteem (nn. 7, 5); moreover, he can support gay groups, so long as their main purpose is not to provide sexual opportunities:

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<sup>11</sup> 'Pastoral care must always be personal and contextual; it requires prudence and sometimes involves risk. The pastoral minister, as well as the author of pastoral theology, must discern what will constitute a life-giving and grace-filled message capable of converting hearers to the fullness of life in Christ in an atmosphere of forgiveness and reconciliation. No such message can arise unless it truly engages the experiences and needs of its intended audience. Learning and listening must go both ways... ...pastoral ministry to those who have been hurt and excluded, or even been the victims of hatred and violence because of distorted Christian or Catholic teachings, should not always begin with or stress sin and judgment. The healing word of God's love must be preached, even at the risk of misunderstanding. Often the focus must lie ... on love, mercy and grace' (Cahill 1999, p.7)

The goodwill of these societies must not be automatically questioned... To condemn a social gathering simply because of possible moral dangers could lead to ridiculous restrictions . It would condemn a parish dance or a youth club. It would forbid the sharing of a flat... (n.8).

There are warnings against marriage and psychiatry as 'cures' for a homosexual orientation (nn. 9, 10); it is acknowledged that many homosexual people are, psychologically, as well adjusted as the average heterosexual, and that those with problems like neurosis and alcoholism, or with personality disorders prompting criminal behaviour, have more in common with heterosexuals with similar problems than with other homosexual people (n.12). After two further guidelines that will be recalled later, the final one returns to the initial theme:

The pastor will help souls if he introduces them to an understanding of that love which is more comprehensive than sexuality. His role is to introduce people to Christian life in all its fullness. ...all people who, in spite of limitations and even failure, continue to struggle and grow in holiness of life deserve encouragement. Such people are very near to God (n.16).

These are admirable sentiments; the question now is, how far have they been translated into practice in the intervening 25 years and what remains to be done?

## Individual Care

### *Accessibility*

19 How accessible are pastors to lesbian and gay Catholics? Of course, anyone can walk round to a presbytery and ask to see a priest. In that sense, they are just as accessible to lesbian and gay Catholics as to any other Catholics, which is to say, very accessible. The initiative, however, rests with the homosexual person, who is relatively unlikely to take it. But suppose that he or she would like to talk to a priest. Such a person is likely not to be entirely comfortable with his or her

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sexual orientation, so it will take courage to acknowledge it to someone else. Fear of rejection will probably be an effective deterrent, unless there is already some ground for expecting a sympathetic reception. In other words, the pastor needs to have a gay-friendly reputation, e.g. to be recommended by a gay friend or by a gay group.

20 Many lesbian and gay Catholics do not have a gay Catholic friend nor belong to a gay group, so, in a practical sense, pastors will remain largely inaccessible to them. For those Catholics who still visit their parish church, though, accessibility could certainly be improved. In doctors' surgeries, these days, there are notices advertising groups for people with special needs; in many churches, there are comparable notices in the church porch, e.g. for mothers with toddlers, prayer groups, Scripture groups and so on, even groups for divorced Catholics. Why are there so seldom any for lesbian and gay Catholics? Two types of notice would be appropriate: first, a notice saying that Fr. X would be glad to meet any lesbian or gay Catholics who would care to talk to him; second, a notice for a suitable gay group, with a contact number or address (examples attached).

21 This assumes a priest who is willing to be known as gay-friendly, and who is properly prepared to offer this pastoral care. It is not realistic to expect such a pastor in every parish, and the number of potential clients would not justify it, but would it be an unreasonable aim to find one such priest in each deanery? For the most part, though, pastors will be dependent upon the laity to introduce them to lesbian and gay Catholics, and this will be mainly through groups.

### *Culpability*

22 In one-to-one encounters between a pastor and a lesbian or gay Catholic, the latter will almost certainly want to discuss his or her sexual activity sooner or later. The CDF observed in this connexion:

... these homosexuals must certainly be treated with understanding and sustained ... Their culpability will be judged with prudence. But no pastoral method can be employed which would give moral justification to these

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acts on the grounds that they would be consonant with the condition of such people (1975, §8.4)

The Social Welfare Commission expands this in a more nuanced way:

The pastoral counselling of homophile persons cannot ignore the objective morality of homosexual genital acts, but it is important to interpret them, to understand the pattern of life in which they take place, to appreciate the personal meaning which these acts have for different people (1979, p.8).

Many homophiles ... long for intimate partnerships as much as heterophiles, but cannot find it in marriage. It is this longing for intimacy which leads some to form stable unions with each other. There will frequently be a physical genital expression in such unions. Objectively, this is morally unacceptable. The question is: Are such persons necessarily culpable? That judgment cannot be made in the abstract but in the concrete circumstances in which the acts take place...

In assisting such people to apply their conscience to such a situation the accepted principles of morality must be used. While the objective norms are clear-cut the application of such norms may be complicated (1979, p.9).

Homosexuals have the same need for the Sacraments as the heterosexual. They also have the same right to receive the Sacraments. In determining whether or not to administer Absolution or give Communion to a homosexual, a pastor must be guided by the general principles of fundamental theology that only a certain moral obligation may be imposed. An invincible doubt, whether of law or fact, permits one to follow a true and solidly "probable opinion" in favour of a more liberal interpretation... The Christian task is to understand ... homosexuals and restore respect for them as persons... Christ emphasised his concern for those whom society has rejected (1979, Pastoral Guidelines, nn.14, 15).

This, of course, is merely an application of standard moral theology, but it opens the way to a generous and humane approach to sexual activity, provided that it is of a kind that, in the abstract, the subject admits to be wrong. One might, indeed, call it a theology of excuses.

23 In this connexion, we need to be aware of another dimension of sexuality, quite distinct from that of sexual orientation, namely, *sexual drive*. Although the strength of a person's sexual desires can be increased or decreased by psychological means, e.g. by keeping oneself busy with many interests or, in the opposite direction, by sexual fantasy, this is not enough to explain the vast differences between individuals discovered by researchers – of the order of 1 to 40,000. Even though the measures used were crude, a tenth of this variation would still be startling. Moreover, although there are variations in the strength of sexual drive over a person's life-span (in men it is highest immediately upon its appearance at puberty, and thereafter gradually declines, whereas in women it reaches its highest at around thirty) these are quite minute compared with the variations from one person to another. The implications of this are considerable. It is extremely difficult for persons who differ substantially from the average in one direction to understand the attitudes of those who differ substantially in the other direction. For a person with a low sexual drive, sexual relationships will not be a major factor in his or her life (though friendship, of course, may still be of great importance). The effect of a high sexual drive (or, in the case of male teenagers, of high testosterone levels), by contrast, is that a person's whole life is dominated and obsessed by sexual desires, and even the arsenal of drugs at the command of modern medicine can provide no noticeable alleviation, nor psychiatry any remedy. Many of the actions of such people, as well as what they say, witness that they would do almost anything to be rid of a desire so powerful that it deprives them, to a large measure, of free choice<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Prima facie, it seems likely that most people who elect a celibate life, such as priests and religious, have a lower than average sexual drive. Even so, the Church has traditionally thought it necessary to take special and, sometimes, very rigorous measures to protect their celibacy (though these are less effective today, when many priests have to live on their own). They ought, then, to try to assess realistically the position of those with a high sexual drive for

24 But the whole of this discussion of culpability side-steps the situation which is much more likely to be encountered today, where there is a difference of view between the pastor and the person coming for help about the morality of the actions concerned. At this point the parallel with contraceptive sex bites home. Should the pastor advance arguments for his view? What if they fail to convince? More, what if they evoke replies that he cannot answer? The Church documents never face this question; yet it is becoming more and more urgent, especially in the fields of sexuality and social justice. We must always remember that, for lesbian or gay people, the whole course of their lives and future happiness may turn on how they handle their sexuality; if they are to be told that homosexual activity is always wrong, the reasons given had better be very good ones! What would be the effect on a selected group of young heterosexual men or women, if they were told that God forbade them in particular, unlike other people, to give any physical, genital expression to their sexual orientation – not even in marriage. How good a Catholic might such a person be expected to remain? Yet this is the kind of imposition made in official teaching, sometimes it seems almost glibly, on lesbian and gay people.

### *Training*

25 The Social Welfare Commission said that lesbian and gay people have a right to care from pastors 'who are properly trained to meet their pastoral needs'. So far as we know, such proper training has not been implemented. Of course, one can list all sorts of specialised knowledge and skills that, in the abstract, it would be desirable for any pastor to have but, in practice, life is too short to train such polymaths. However, if a few priests (e.g. one for each deanery, as suggested above) were to undertake responsibility for the pastoral care of lesbian and gay Catholics living in their area, it would not be unreasonable to propose that they should receive special training for the task; it would, indeed,

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whom no such provisions have been made and who are subject to the constant and pervasive sexual stimulation which is so difficult to avoid in modern life, especially in towns and cities.

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be essential if their pastoral care were to be effective. One form this might take would be an occasional study day, say quarterly, when all the priests of a diocese who had undertaken this task met together. There would be no shortage of tasks at such meetings. Here is an open-ended list. First, they would need to familiarise themselves with relevant literature, e.g. that cited in the references and further reading suggestions at the end of this paper, and be able to discuss it together. Second, they would need to meet lesbian and gay Catholics, in a context where they could question and talk with them. In some areas, local Lesbian and Gay Groups or Centres provide training days for police, social workers etc. and could prepare a similar service for priests. Third, they might invite appropriate people to address them from time to time on particular issues relevant to homosexuality. Fourth, they should have a chance to pool their own experiences of offering pastoral care to homosexual Catholics.

*'Coming out'*

26 The CDF has discouraged lesbian and gay Catholics from coming out on two grounds:

An individual's sexual orientation is generally not known to others unless he publicly identifies himself as having this orientation or unless some overt behaviour manifests it. As a rule, the majority of homosexually oriented persons who seek to lead chaste lives do not publicize their sexual orientation. Hence the problem of discrimination in terms of employment, housing, etc., does not usually arise.

Homosexual persons who assert their homosexuality tend to be precisely those who judge homosexual behaviour or lifestyle to be either "completely harmless, if not an entirely good thing" (CDF 1986, §3.2), and hence worthy of public approval. It is from this quarter that one is more likely to find those who seek to "manipulate the Church by gaining the often well-intentioned support of her pastors with a view to changing civil statutes and laws" (CDF 1986, §5), those who use the tactic of protesting that any and all criticism of or reservations about

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homosexual people ... are simply diverse forms of unjust discrimination" (CDF 1986, §9).

In addition there is a danger that legislation which would make homosexuality a basis for entitlements could actually encourage a person with a homosexual orientation to declare his homosexuality or even to seek a partner in order to exploit the provisions of the law. (CDF 1992, §14).

The first reason, then, is that those who do not come out will not be discriminated against, so the question of civil rights will not arise. (But what if they are 'outed' by someone else, or merely suspected of being homosexual?) The second is that lesbians and gays who have come out are mainly a rather nasty lot who try to manipulate the Church, so one should not risk being associated with them.

27 Happily the Social Welfare Commission took a more positive view of coming out: 'the point at which the homosexual person admits openly to his or her homosexuality and ... frequently the first stage of being able to cope'. But this process is often misunderstood and its importance downgraded. A person's sexuality permeates his or her whole life. It is not just a matter of what people do in bed. It affects one's whole manner of life: domestic arrangements, preoccupation with children or grandchildren and their education (or freedom from such preoccupation), how wholeheartedly one can be dedicated to one's work, forms of social life in leisure time and especially at public holidays, and so on. If you do not know a person's sexual orientation, many non-sexual aspects of his or her life must be puzzling (if not deliberately concealed): for a parallel, imagine that someone knew a lot about a priest's life but did not know that he was a priest. Would it not seem a strange kind of life to lead?

28 Those who retort that a person's sexual orientation is his own private business are wide of the mark. Lesbian and gay people who have not 'come out' often lead a double, Jekyll-and-Hyde life, which is a constant source of tension to them, prompting elaborate manoeuvres so that their secret is not found out. At the same time they may be unbearably lonely, because there is so much in their lives that they

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cannot explain to their friends and relatives. ‘Why hasn’t a handsome/beautiful man/woman like you married?’ ‘Do you have a boy/girl-friend?’ These and similar questions have to be met with evasions, and constant vigilance that one’s guard does not slip. Even friends have to be kept at arm’s length and, ultimately, ‘closeted’ lesbian and gay people can allow no one really to know them. The end result can be an impression of emotional coldness, cultivated until it has become second nature.

29 This is, of course, a life of deceit, covert if not overt. So the issue here is truth. Habitual deceit is morally corrosive. It begins, perhaps, just with the omission or suppression of certain information; then it goes on to small lies, e.g. about where one is going or where one was on a certain occasion. It may burgeon into making a special fuss of members of the opposite sex, acquiring one as a boyfriend or girlfriend, even marrying (without much scruple whether this is fair to the spouse) as a cover. Not coming out is almost a paradigm of an occasion of sin. In our experience, though, this deceit does not ‘spread’ to other matters; it is usually strictly confined to occasions when the truth might reveal one’s sexuality and is compatible with honesty when that is not at stake.

30 It is a commonplace tactic of those fearful of coming out to exaggerate what it involves to the point of caricature: to suggest that one has to insist on one’s sexuality in season and out of season, perhaps walk around wearing a ‘Glad to be Gay’ or ‘How dare you presume I’m heterosexual?’ badge or waving a rainbow flag, one way or another leaving nobody with whom one comes into contact, however casual, in doubt that one is homosexual. Rightly understood, coming out is a much more modest affair. Minimally, it is a matter of not deceiving others, whether overtly or covertly, about one’s sexual orientation. So much is, surely, no more than honesty and a basic Christian requirement in any matter, not just sexual orientation. Beyond that, it will involve disclosure to those to whom one wants to be close or to whom one turns for counsel. Nor is it something that is done once and for all: the occasions keep presenting themselves, and it is more a matter of responding truthfully on appropriate occasions rather than

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of manufacturing them. By contrast, the CDF's advice is manifestly immoral, based on deceit.

31 Of course, all of the above applies equally to gay pastors. It is thought, by those who have had occasion to investigate the matter, that the proportion of gay priests in Europe and North America is substantially greater than in the general population: about half is the consensus (Cozzens 2000, pp.98–99). Were this true and generally acknowledged, perhaps we should just assume that a priest is gay unless he has 'come out' as heterosexual. For the moment, however, it remains just an estimate based on anecdotal evidence, even if more reliable than any other. The question must therefore be raised whether a pastor who has not himself come out is in any position to help others to do so. Again, we must emphasize that coming out is a modest business; for a pastor, it does not mean that he should proclaim his sexuality from his pulpit, but only disclose it to those to whom he is, or wants to be close – unless, of course, the only alternative would be overt deception. We must also recognise that, in the present climate, it may be an exercise of heroic virtue for a gay Catholic pastor to come out: he may lose the esteem of some of those to whom he chooses to speak frankly of himself, and is almost certainly bidding farewell to any hope of ecclesiastical preferment<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Gay priests are also presently under threat on another account. Some observers of the recent spate of cases of sexual abuse of minors by priests have noticed that these mainly concern teenage boys, and have concluded that, although the boys in question were legally minors, they were not under the age of puberty, so that the misdemeanours were homosexual rather than paedophile. This inference gains plausibility from the reflexion that a 'two vocations' theory has been pushed in the past, namely, that a Catholic either has a vocation to marry and bring up a family or to become a priest or religious, with the result that some gay Catholics have opted for the latter despite a high sex drive that would have deterred a heterosexual man from commitment to celibacy. In September 2002 an official of the Congregation for Bishops published an article arguing that gay men should not be admitted to seminaries. Starting from the premiss that same-sex attraction is a disorder, it is possible, he asserts, that they may simultaneously manifest other serious problems such as drug abuse, sexual addiction and depression; likewise, they 'may be more familiar with certain patterns and techniques of deception and repression, either conscious or subconscious, which were learned in trying to deal with their tendencies in a largely heterosexual environment. After years of hiding or of being confused about their abnormal attractions, it is possible that duplicitous or pretentious behaviors could appear.' Moreover, although many lesbians and gay men uphold and defend the church's teaching on homosexuality, if a gay man 'is insecure about dealing

## Group Care

### *Schools*

32 The youngest groups in which a pastor will encounter lesbian and gay Catholics are schools. Unless individually approached as a school chaplain, though, he will not know who they are. The same applies to teachers. The first point to make, therefore, is that in any school class there will be one or two lesbian or gay children, and anyone talking to a class about personal relationships should remember this. To adapt a wartime slogan, careless talk costs souls. Think about how a lesbian or gay child, perhaps just becoming aware of his or her sexuality, might interpret what you say. Beyond this, a pastor with suitable training or experience could do two things. First, he could discuss with the teachers their approach to and provision for lesbian and gay pupils, and what, if anything, they say about homosexuality in class. Second, he might consider giving an occasional talk in the school on the subject himself. This could do much to improve the treatment of lesbian and gay children by their fellow pupils, and to diminish homosexual bullying. And if he acts as a school chaplain, he could put up a notice saying that pupils who think they might be lesbian or gay or who would like to talk about homosexuality will be welcome in his office. In schools, a positive initiative is needed to counter the effects of loneliness and fear, together with the pervasive guilt about sex

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straightforwardly with his disordered attractions or has some doubts about their disordered character, he may tend to possess a distorted and erroneous view of human sexuality. Thus, there exists the risk that such an individual will struggle with or even deny the clear teaching of the Church regarding his disordered inclinations and any acts that might flow from these tendencies.' The author of this article also maintains that although a gay man might live a celibate life, his commitment would 'compromise' two fundamental aspects of celibacy. First, it would be no sacrifice, because instead of foregoing the good of marriage and family for a greater good, it would be a superfluous 'promise to abstain from something that one is already bound to avoid by the natural law.' Second, 'through the celibate life, the priest redirects his sexual attraction to the opposite sex toward another "body," the Church, which is a "bride" in a complementary spousal relationship. He exercises a spiritual fatherhood and lives a supernatural spousal relationship as a sign to the church of Christ's love for her. But a gay man 'cannot redirect his inclination toward a complementary "other" in a spousal relationship, because homosexuality has disordered his sexual attraction toward the opposite sex. It then becomes difficult to be genuinely a sign of Christ's spousal love for the church.' (Baker, 2002) We leave it as an exercise for the reader to expose the fallacies in these arguments, but would note that the Vatican publicity officer, Mgr Navarro-Valls of *Opus Dei*, has even gone so far as to call into question the validity of gay priests' orders.

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which, to go by case-histories, seems to be a typical legacy of a Catholic education.

### *Groups for Lesbian and Gay Catholics*

33 For the reasons given above, pastors can only expect to be approached directly by lesbian and gay Catholics infrequently. For the most part, they will depend for any contacts on lay intermediaries. This is why groups for lesbian and gay Catholics should play a pivotal role in any strategy for pastoral care. If there were none, we should need to invent them<sup>14</sup>. There are, however, at least three in the UK:

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<sup>14</sup> Groups for homosexuals fulfil three main functions. For new members, a group removes their sense of isolation and provides an environment in which they can discuss their problems with others who share their disposition. In the case of groups for lesbian and gay Catholics, there is the additional bond of a common faith as well as the example of other homosexual Catholics who do not find practice of their religion incompatible with their disposition. The main function of a group at this stage is to provide reassurance; it is often a slow business, taking years rather than months. The second function of the groups is educative. People tend to generalize far too readily from their own experience; through the talks and discussions in the groups, they gradually become aware of a wider range of experiences, hear something of recent research on homosexuality and even read some of it for themselves. They thus gain an insight into the problems of other homosexuals, which are not always the same as their own (in particular, the problems of homosexual women are significantly different from those of homosexual men). There is also constant discussion, especially in the Christian groups, of the moral issues involved and, in the latter, an attempt to relate homosexuality to the Gospel as a whole, with a substantial demand also for talks and discussions on general Christian topics that bear no special relation to sexual orientation. For anyone who was unsure of his or her sexual orientation, the educative aspect of the groups probably provides one of the most effective ways of determining what it is, without recourse to sexual experimentation; someone who was not homosexual would rapidly become aware of the difference between his or her attitudes to a wide range of everyday experiences and those of other members of the group. Nor is there any likelihood that such a person would be 'recruited' to pretend to a homosexual disposition; homosexuals have enough experience of the evil consequences which ensue when a homosexual deceives him or herself that he or she is heterosexual to be extremely chary of heterosexuals who think it might be fashionable to be homosexual. Third, reassurance and education from within the group eventually bring members to the point at which they cease to be preoccupied with their own problems and can begin to think about those of others (usually new members), as well as having acquired a wide enough background of knowledge and experience to be able to offer reasonably sound advice. At this stage – though it may take many years to reach it – group members become more aware of the damaging effect on their lives and personalities of being constantly on their guard to conceal their disposition. As fear and shame diminishes, the desire to integrate their own apprehension of themselves with the way their friends see them gradually outweighs motives of human respect, and they 'come out' to their closest acquaintances. The relief of doing so has to be experienced to be fully understood. The 'closeted' homosexual walks in constant fear of discovery and, if subjected to

34 First, the Roman Catholic Caucus of the *Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement* (LGCM). The Caucus is a small group, with less than 100 members, mainly from London and the south of England, with occasional meetings in London. Its members must subscribe to the following LGCM statement of conviction:

It is the conviction of the members of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement that human sexuality in all its richness is a gift of God gladly to be accepted, enjoyed, and honoured as a way of both expressing and growing in love, in accordance with the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is their conviction 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 a personal sexual relationship.

Its parent body, LGCM, is the largest gay group of any kind in the UK, with well over 1000 members, predominantly Anglicans. Further details can be found on the internet at <http://www.lgcm.org.uk>

35 Second, *EnCourage* (<http://www.encouragetrust.org.uk>). Imported in 1994 from the USA, where it is called *Courage* (<http://couragec.net/>), and was founded by Fr John F. Harvey, O.S.F.S., in 1980. It has about 150 members, and has (or had) 'chapters' in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Belfast, adheres strictly to Vatican teaching and is listed in the *Catholic Directory for England and Wales*.<sup>15</sup> Its UK website

discrimination, is far less likely to enjoy the support of heterosexual friends whom he or she has so long deceived. While we do not think that pressure would be brought upon lesbian and gay people to 'come out', in the last resort this is probably the central moral issue which they face, and no service is done to their spiritual welfare by glossing it over, even if it has to be approached by slow stages. It is a question of integrity, even of humility, about a basic part of one's character, where human respect has to be overcome.

<sup>15</sup> The five goals of members of *EnCourage* are:

To live chaste lives in accordance with the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality.

To dedicate our entire lives to Christ through service to others, spiritual reading, prayer, meditation, individual spiritual direction, frequent attendance at mass and frequent reception of the sacraments of Penance and of the Holy Eucharist.

To foster a spirit of fellowship in which we may share with one another our thoughts and experiences and so ensure that none of us have to face the problem of homosexuality alone.

states ‘we are not in any way involved in the matter of sexual reorientation’, but there are links to organisations that do so and its US website tells a different story<sup>16</sup>.

36 Third, *Quest*. Founded in 1973, this is the oldest of the groups, and is under lay control. Its purpose, according to its constitution, is ‘to proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ so as to sustain and increase Christian belief among homosexual men and women’<sup>17</sup>. It has

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To be mindful of the truth that chaste friendships are not only possible but necessary in celibate Christian life – to encourage one another in forming and sustaining them.

To live lives that may serve as good examples to others with homosexual difficulties.

EnCourage has adapted the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous to these ends (Harvey 1996b). Fr Harvey was quoted in *The Catholic Herald* for 13th August 1999 as saying: ‘I always begin with the Church’s teaching that all homosexual genital activity, by its very nature, is immoral ... Even the inclination is considered to be a disorder... We have respect for those who are trying to come out of the condition. But that is not the purpose of Courage. In fact the first step out of the condition is chastity’. He has also criticised Cardinal Hume’s Note (1995 version): he ‘fail(s) to make proper distinctions concerning friendship, sex and love’, ‘misunderstand(s) the meaning of objective disorder’ and needs to make clear that he does not ‘approve of deliberate nourishing of erotic feelings between two persons of the same sex’ (Harvey 1996a).

<sup>16</sup> There is a link from the site to the True Freedom Trust, which makes a similar disclaimer: ‘Growth towards wholeness may involve a change in emotions and sexual feelings, although we do not see it as our aim to ‘cure’ homosexuality’. But the TFT is a founding member of Exodus International Europe, which, as its name suggests, is an ‘ex-gay’ organisation. On the website of EnCourage’s US parent Courage, we find: ‘Courage members are under no obligation to try to develop heterosexual attractions, because there is no guarantee that a person will always succeed in such an endeavour... If any our members wish [sic] to go to professionals to explore the possibility of heterosexual development, we will stand by them... Courage itself does not provide professional therapy. Some of our members have found varying levels of heterosexual development to be a by-product of living a chaste life for a period of time...’ The site also contains a number of testimonies from members including cases of a change from homosexual to heterosexual orientation. While it is true that a genuine change of orientation does occasionally occur to people, in our experience this is very rare, and it would be cruel to encourage any widespread expectation of such a change.

<sup>17</sup> The full text is as follows: ‘Its purpose is to proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ so as to sustain and increase Christian belief among homosexual men and women by:

(i) associating 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 providing opportunities for them to meet together for worship, discussion and study;

(ii) establishing and extending a dialogue between homosexual Catholics and members of the clergy through which the insights and experiences of each may gradually be interwoven and so achieve better mutual understanding both of the moral teachings of the Church and of the characteristics of its homosexual members;

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approximately three hundred members, and supports local groups in London, Glasgow, Birmingham, Manchester, Yorkshire, Leicester, Newcastle and Cambridge. While the officers of local groups must be members of Quest, other members need not be, so the local groups reach out further than the actual membership. Quest also organises an annual conference (the first was in 1982) and publishes a quarterly *Bulletin* for members as well as an annual *Digest* with articles likely to be of interest to non-members. Further details may be found at <http://www.questgaycatholic.org.uk>.

37 The only comment of the CDF on gay groups is a negative one:

All support should be withdrawn from any organizations which seek to undermine the teaching of the Church, which are ambiguous about it, or which neglect it entirely. Such support, or even the semblance of such support, can be gravely misinterpreted. Special attention should be given to the practice of scheduling religious services and to the use of Church buildings by these groups, including the facilities of Catholic schools and colleges. To some, such permission to use Church property may seem only just and charitable; but in reality it is contrary to the purpose for which these institutions were founded, it is misleading and often scandalous (1986, §17.8).

Of the three organizations listed above, only EnCourage is clearly exempt from this anathema. So far as the others are concerned, it depends upon one's understanding of the phrase 'the teaching of the Church' in this context. Ironically, in documents replete with accusations of ambiguity, this is itself a highly ambiguous phrase<sup>18</sup>. In a

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(iii) seeking wider opportunities, in the Catholic press and elsewhere, to promote fuller and more public discussion of the spiritual, moral, psychological and physiological issues involved; and

(iv) providing a point of contact for any homosexual Catholic in need of reassurance and support, so that he or she may both gain from and contribute to the purpose of Quest.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>18</sup> And the ambiguity is exploited in order to bully people. The inference goes: such-and-such is the teaching of the Church; but the teaching of the Church is always true; so you had better believe it, or else ...! The second premiss is only true, of course, if the teaching in question is *de fide*.

strict sense, it designates those teachings that are *de fide*, to which anyone who aspires to the status of a Catholic Christian must hold. In that sense, neither the RC Caucus of LGCM nor *Quest* either seeks to undermine the teaching of the Church, or is ambiguous about it or neglects it.

38 In general, it is a sound principle of interpretation to take ambiguous expressions in a restrictive or punitive context in their narrowest sense. However, at the other end of the scale, ‘the teaching of the Church’ can be used to include every pronouncement made by Church officials, including those made on behalf of Vatican departments. In 1999, the CDF disciplined Father Robert Nugent SDS and Sister Jeannine Gramick SSND who, for many years, had run New Ways Ministry for lesbian and gay Catholics in the USA. They were permanently prohibited from the further exercise of this ministry and indefinitely barred from holding any office in their respective religious orders<sup>19</sup>. However, they were not excommunicated nor even dismissed from their orders, and the priest was not banned from exercising his priestly ministry in general. This appears to be a tacit admission that the views attributed to them were consistent with *de fide* doctrine. Were this not so, the CDF would have been failing in its duty by not declaring their position incompatible with the faith of a Catholic Christian.

39 Nevertheless, the Notification of the CDF’s judgment on these two religious provides evidence that the Congregation understands ‘the teaching of the Church’ in the widest sense:

From the beginning, in presenting the Church’s teaching on homosexuality, [they] have continually called central elements of that teaching into question. For this reason, ... the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life ordered them ... not to exercise any apostolate without faithfully presenting the

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<sup>19</sup> However, as soon as the Notification was released, the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops stated publicly that their silencing should not be interpreted as a condemnation of ministry to gay people and that the bishops were committed to ministry to gays as ‘brothers and sisters in the Lord’ (reported in Cahill 1999, p.9).

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Church's teaching regarding the intrinsic evil of homosexual acts ...

Despite this ..., ... they also continued to maintain and promote ambiguous positions on homosexuality and explicitly criticized documents of the Church's *Magisterium* on this issue ...

In 1988, the Holy See established a Commission ... to study and evaluate their public statements and activities and to determine whether these were faithful to Catholic teaching on homosexuality. ...the Commission found serious deficiencies in their writings and pastoral activities, which were incompatible with the fulness of Christian morality.

In 1995, the Congregation ... transferred the entire case to ... the CDF..., [which] undertook another attempt at resolution by inviting them to respond unequivocally to certain questions regarding their position on the morality of homosexual acts and on the homosexual inclination... In [their responses, they] demonstrated a clear conceptual understanding of the Church's teaching on homosexuality, but refrained from professing any adherence to that teaching. Furthermore, the publication, in 1995, of their book *Voices of Hope*... had made it clear that there was no change in their opposition to fundamental elements of the Church's teaching... ...certain of the[ir] statements ... were clearly incompatible with the teaching of the Church... (CDF 1999).

The CDF then faced them with their 'erroneous statements' and asked for independent responses, but when these had been received, it was judged that 'neither had expressed personal adherence to the Church's teaching on homosexuality in sufficiently unequivocal terms'. So they were asked to make a public declaration expressing 'their interior assent to the teaching of the Catholic Church on homosexuality' and acknowledging errors in their publications. The declaration received from the nun 'simply refused to express any assent whatsoever to the

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teaching of the Church on homosexuality', while that from the priest was 'more responsive, but not unequivocal in his statement of interior assent to the teaching of the Church'. The Congregation then formulated a declaration itself and sent it to him to sign, but he replied with an amended text that was judged unsatisfactory because 'he would not state that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and ... added a section which calls into question the definitive and unchangeable nature of Catholic doctrine in this area' (ibid.).

40 We are not concerned here with the truth or falsity of these judgments of the CDF, much less with the justice or injustice of its procedures, but solely with the light that they throw on its use of 'the teaching of the Church' in this context. It seems that the CDF regards the view that 'homosexual acts' are intrinsically disordered and intrinsically evil (it is interesting that the two epithets are used interchangeably) and the view that a homosexual orientation is intrinsically disordered as 'central elements' of the teaching of the Church. Moreover, these doctrines are said to be 'definitive and unchangeable'. This is a reference to a new category of doctrine, invented by the CDF and described as 'truths concerning faith and morals which, even if not divinely revealed, are nevertheless strictly and intimately connected with revelation' (CDF 1990). The invention of this new category has been criticised by theologians, notably by the author of the standard work on the notion of the teaching of the Church<sup>20</sup>. Clearly, the phrase 'strictly and intimately connected' is susceptible of a variety of interpretations; moreover, who is the judge of whether this condition is fulfilled? Are we entitled to demand convincing arguments that a doctrine is both true and strictly and intimately connected to revelation, or are we expected to take it on the say-so of the CDF? Of course, if a doctrine is logically entailed by revelation, then the denial of that doctrine would be inconsistent with revelation; but 'strictly and intimately connected' seems to cast the net much wider than logical entailment.

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<sup>20</sup> Francis Sullivan, S.J., 1983, 1994, 1996.

41 There is, then, a dilemma for anyone urging ‘enlightened and effective pastoral care’ for lesbian and gay Catholics. A pastor cannot offer effective pastoral care to those whom he has little chance of meeting; but if he is banned from supporting gay groups that do not explicitly declare that a homosexual orientation is intrinsically evil/disordered and that homosexual sex is grave depravity, or which argue for a change in Vatican teaching on these issues, then, in the UK at least, he is cutting himself off from contact with all but a very few of his potential clients. This is why we said that it must be a serious question whether pastoral care is possible for lesbian and gay Catholics on the CDF’s terms. Unless a compromise can be found, it would be more honest to say from the start that lesbian and gay Catholics are unwelcome in Catholic churches and will receive no pastoral care unless they agree (with interior assent) that they are intrinsically evil/disordered.

42 The CDF is right on one point, however. The time for what it calls ‘ambiguity’ – ‘ambivalence’ would be more accurate – is past. Pastors, as well as lesbian and gay Catholics, must now stand up and be counted; but should they differ from the CDF, following their consciences may cost them dear. In 1997, Cardinal Hume asked *Quest* to amend its constitution to remove an alleged ambiguity<sup>21</sup>; the committee introduced a corresponding motion at a special meeting in 1998, but a large majority rejected it. Subsequently, he suspended *Quest*’s entry in the list of Catholic societies published in the *Catholic Directory* (an entry that *Quest* had never sought in the first place), and at the same time asked for a survey of members’ views on a number of relevant issues. This was carried out in January 2000, the results being published in *Quest Digest 2* of January 2001. To the question ‘Do you consider that sex outside marriage is always wrong?’ 89% of the respondents answered ‘No’, 4% ‘Yes’ and the remaining 7% were unsure. The next question asked ‘Are you convinced by any arguments that you have heard to the effect that sex outside marriage is always wrong?’ This time, 86% said ‘No’, 6% ‘Yes’ and 9% were unsure.

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<sup>21</sup> The phrase at issue was ‘the full expression of their homosexual natures in loving Christian relationships’ (see note 17 for the full context).



Another question was: ‘Should *Quest* work for change in official though not infallible Church teaching on sexuality?’ From 90% of the respondents, the answer was ‘Yes’, from 3% ‘No’ and 7% were unsure. These views of *Quest* members have, accordingly, guided its committee since then. The committee decided not to press the issue of a listing in the *Catholic Directory* with the Bishops’ Conference but, instead, to ask for a meeting with some representatives to discuss, first, provision for the pastoral care of lesbian and gay Catholics and, second, proposed legislation affecting them. This request was first made in September 2000; a substantive reply was promised, but has only just been received – in the negative – over four years later and in spite of repeated enquiries. So the reward of honesty was to suspend even the common courtesies of life, such as answering letters, by a body that pretends that it is committed to dialogue as a method of settling differences. This sits ill with the policy for pastoral care of lesbian and gay Catholics adopted by the Bishops’ Conference in 1979, and will certainly reinforce popular perception of it as hostile to homosexual people.

#### *Gay-friendly parishes*

43 Assuming that some solution has been found to the difficulties set out above, and that pastors are willing to work with groups for gay and lesbian Catholics, we need to ask how good personal relations with a pastor can be developed so that they become involved in parish life. Our experience in *Quest*, for example, is that at, one extreme, some of those who belong to local groups participate in the activities of their own parishes while, at the other extreme, others have no institutional involvement with the Church at all apart from coming to local *Quest* meetings.

44 Lesbian and gay Catholics are deterred from contact with a parish because, above all, Catholic parishes are perceived as unfriendly. One can go to Mass for years in the average Catholic church without even being spoken to; added to this general lack of welcome, both pulpit and the typical range of parish activities bespeak a preoccupation with nuclear families containing young children. Single people might as well not exist so far as these parishes are concerned, never mind partnerships other than marriages, even though a high

proportion of people in this country now live alone. Belonging to such a parish *as a lesbian or gay person* is virtually unthinkable, so even where *Quest* members participate in a parish, they seldom dare to come out to their fellow-Catholics. Is it any wonder that most keep away?

45 'the homosexual community has particular claim on the concern of the Church' (SWC 1979, Pastoral Guidelines §13). Twenty-three years later, this remains just a pious aspiration; nothing has been done to put it into practice. Were it to be taken seriously it would mean a revolution in our parishes; but our impression is that many of these are now dominated by elderly people who do not welcome any change and are, perhaps, incapable of rising to such a challenge. We have, after all, shortly ended a decade of evangelisation that has, instead, been conspicuously marked by a continuing decline in Sunday attendance at Mass.

46 Let us, by contrast, paint a picture of what a gay-friendly parish, offering effective pastoral care, might look like. First, there would be a notice in the church porch saying 'Lesbian and gay Catholics are welcome in this parish'. Second, if any new people turned up to a service, the Parish Council would make sure that someone would give them a personal welcome before they went off, and they would be introduced to a pastor, who would also welcome them personally. (Usually, if the priest goes to the church entrance after a service, he is monopolised by parishioners whom he knows well already; they would have to be trained not to do this). Third, from time to time (on appropriate occasions), the homily would include a specific invitation to lesbian and gay people to become involved in parish activities. (What about forming a gay group in the parish?) Fourth, perhaps once a month, e.g. on a Sunday evening, there would be a Mass especially (but not exclusively) for lesbian and gay Catholics; if there were a local group, it could perhaps be followed by a bring-and-share supper in the parish hall<sup>22</sup>.

47 Is this no more than a fantasy? If it is, then that just shows how far we are from putting into practice the principles that, supposedly,

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<sup>22</sup> Such an initiative has been taken in a New York parish, with the support of the Archbishop.

are the policy of the Bishops' Conference. And perhaps it would not be so unrealistic to suggest that *just one parish in each deanery* could become gay-friendly? Nowadays, especially in urban areas, most people can easily travel to a church in their deanery that is not their own parish church. It might, indeed, even be part of a wider strategy of turning from maintenance to mission in which each parish targeted a particular section of the wider community so that, between them, they could cater for a variety of special needs. So far as lesbian and gay Catholics are concerned, the institutional Church has to make up much lost ground. Pastors cannot do this on their own; it must be a mission of the whole community, i.e. of the Church as the people of God.

#### *Diocesan representation*

48 Lesbian and gay Catholics also need to be made welcome in their diocese. This means giving them a voice (in their own right) on diocesan bodies and at diocesan functions, such as pastoral councils and assemblies. If such bodies are restricted to parish representatives, that is effectively to deny the marginal groups in society any voice in them. Moreover, if the parishes are dominated by the pious faithful, it is unlikely that these assemblies will ever hear the voice of the outside world: they will be focussed upon their own, inward-looking concerns.

#### *Legislation affecting lesbian and gay people*

49 The attitude of the Vatican and that of local bishops to proposed legislation affecting lesbian and gay people also affects whether they see the Church as friendly or hostile. They have largely campaigned for legislative changes under the banner of equality, of social justice or of human rights. *Quest* supports the work of *Stonewall*, the leading secular organisation working to improve the position of homosexual men and women in British society, in as much as it seeks the avoidance of every sign of unjust discrimination in regard to homosexual people (cf *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2358). As it says of itself, it

aims to achieve legal equality and social justice for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. Stonewall believes in a society that celebrates diversity and where discrimination and prejudice are always challenged. Stonewall wins

equality through political persuasion, legal argument, and by encouraging social and institutional change.

It is largely taken for granted, however, that discrimination against gay and lesbian people as such is always unjust, a premiss which the Vatican denies (§8), while even the SWC speaks only of an obligation to work towards the elimination of any *injustices* towards homosexual people. This, of course, leaves plenty of scope for argument about what kinds of discrimination qualify as injustice. It is notoriously difficult to spell out the demands of equality and social justice uncontroversially, or to determine the exact scope of human rights.

50 Church officials in Britain have been ambivalent on these issues. Cardinal Griffin, in his evidence to the Wolfenden committee, which reported in 1957, held that homosexual activity between consenting adults in private should be decriminalised. But individual bishops have tended to oppose more recent legislation affecting homosexual people (reduction of the age of homosexual consent to 16<sup>23</sup>, repeal of section 28 of the Local Government Act<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The late Cardinal Hume wrote a letter to *The Times*, published on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1999, asking whether the legislation was wise: 'We surely need to think very carefully not only about the need to protect vulnerable young boys and girls from exploitative relationships but also about the wider signals the law should be sending, especially now.'

<sup>24</sup> The main opposition to repealing section 28 of the 1986 Local Government Act came not from the bishops of England & Wales, but from Scotland. Although the Scottish bishops have a quite separate conference, however, their pronouncements impinge upon the British public as a whole. Certainly the late Cardinal Winning's intervention in *Scotland on Sunday* on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1999 attracted widespread attention. He argued that repeal of the section 'would open the way to the teaching of homosexuality, its techniques and justifications, in schools' (*The Tablet* 13 November 1999, p.1558) and, while condemning bullying homosexual pupils, added that 'there are areas in which it is not unjust discrimination to take sexual orientation into account – for example, in the placement of children for adoption or foster care, in employment of teachers or sports coaches, and in military recruitment ... I worry that any repeal will be presented by the so-called "gay rights" lobby as a victory in their battle to have the disorder that is homosexuality placed on the same footing as marriage and family life ... If we are not careful, very careful, we will inadvertently promote a lifestyle for our children which will reduce their life expectancy, increase their chances of infection with HIV, and expose them to predatory and abusive relationships'. He was followed (minus the rhetoric) in England by Bishop (now Archbishop) Vincent Nichols (now of Birmingham) and Bishop David Konstant of Leeds; the latter wrote in an *ad clerum* of 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2000: 'Bishop Vincent Nichols, Chairman of the Catholic Education Service, and Bishop Alan Chesters, Bishop of Blackburn and Chairman of the Church of England Board of Education, met

allowing unmarried couples to adopt children<sup>25</sup> and, most recently, legal recognition for civic (same-sex) partnerships<sup>26</sup>). Yet it can be argued that everything so far envisaged or proposed by the Government satisfies the three criteria provided by Cardinal Hume for assessing the social consequences of legislation; while he also claimed for local bishops independence from Vatican direction on these matters (Hume 1997, §13).

51 The appeal to human rights is more securely based when they are recognized in law, for then the issue becomes one of equality before the law, itself the least controversial form of political equality. In 2000 the UK agreed to the EU framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation under Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam. This bans discrimination in the workplace on grounds of disability, religion, belief, age and *sexual orientation*. It became part of UK law in 2003, though it lacks effective enforcement provisions. The attitude of the Catholic bishops towards this legislation will be a test case for whether they are perceived as hostile to lesbian and gay people. At present the signs are not good, with the major Christian denominations lobbying to be exempted.

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with two government ministers the other day, to make them aware of the Churches' deep concern about the repeal of section 28... I am writing to invite you to encourage any of your parishioners who may wish to do so to write either to their Members of Parliament, or directly to the Prime Minister, simply stating that Catholics are extremely worried about the repeal of section 28 and, that if it is repealed, it will be important for some other statutory provision to be put in place which will protect children from the active promotion of homosexuality in schools...' Ironically, the section was repealed in Scotland first and only subsequently in England & Wales!

<sup>25</sup> Archbishop Peter Smith of Cardiff signed (in his bishops' conference capacity and jointly with Anglican, Sikh and Muslim leaders) a letter urging peers to oppose adoption by homosexual or unmarried heterosexual couples (Daily Telegraph, 16 October 2002). An important field of contention concerned same-sex partnerships. A real example is that of Mr Juan Mendoza, who met his partner Hugh in 1972 and entered a relationship that ended only with the latter's death from cancer in 2001. In 1983 they moved to a flat in Kensington; Juan cared not only for Hugh when he was ill, but also for Hugh's mother, who suffered from dementia. Yet Juan faced eviction, his landlords dismissing the relationship and claiming that he had no legal right to succeed to the tenancy. It is difficult to see how giving the same right to tenancy as a spouse would have had can reasonably be construed as an attack on marriage. If marriage has to be upheld by such means, what respect can be expected for it?

<sup>26</sup> Documented in *Quest Digest* (2004), Issue 3, pp. 2–6.

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### A Plea for Tolerance

52 It is more fashionable today to call for zero tolerance than for tolerance. Some things, indeed, should not be tolerated. But much intolerance is merely the expression of prejudice, in particular the form known as ‘tribalism’, intolerance of people with a different culture or way of life from that of the majority. Tolerance of difference does not usually feature in a traditional list of virtues, though it might well be considered a sub-species of charity as chastity is a sub-species of temperance. In the Old Testament it is frequently enjoined as a duty: ‘The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt’ (*Lv.19:34*); ‘[the Lord your God] ... loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt’ (*Dt.10:18–19*). The strangers or *gerîm* in question here were resident aliens; technically minorities are not aliens, but are seen as alien (other, strange), so there is a close analogy.

53 Tolerance of difference extends to differences of opinion. Intolerance in this respect has been one of the characteristic vices of Christians: Christianity must be the most fissiparous religion on record. And it has led to every kind of horror committed in the name of God. Support is given today to ecumenism, whose aim is to heal these divisions. It has taught Christians of different denominations to be polite to each other, which is at least a positive step. But wherever large numbers of people are concerned, there are going to be differences of opinion about what is right and wrong. To profess enthusiasm for reconciliation while practising zero tolerance of other people’s consciences is inconsistent; the latter reduces the former to mere lip-service to an ideal which, in practice, is jettisoned. To be sure, there must be a common core of belief for Christians, but disagreement between Christian scholars is a fairly reliable indicator that the matters in dispute lie outside that core, and even more so when scholars of one denomination, e.g. Catholic scholars, disagree with each other. If certain Christians then try to enforce uniformity, they merely bring Christianity into disrepute with the rest of the

world. There is only one morally legitimate way of changing a belief, namely, by rational argument: only this respects the dignity of the person to whom it is addressed.

54 We ardently wish that we could take seriously the many fine sentiments that are expressed in the Church documents reviewed above. But, as St Ignatius pointed out, love is shown, not by words, but by deeds and, at the moment, words and deeds contradict each other – indeed, even the words pull in opposite directions. Enlightened and effective pastoral care of lesbian and gay Catholics is, and will remain, a chimera until the Church (the people of God and not just the officials) can resolve its ambivalence towards them. Such advance as there has been over the last quarter-century is due more to the efforts of organisations like *Quest* than to any initiative from the rest of the Church. ‘The Church has a serious obligation to work towards the elimination of any injustices perpetrated on homosexuals by society’. Have the bishops (never mind the Church) done *anything* to implement these words since they were written? Have they, for example, taken any measures to prevent homophobic bullying in Catholic schools? Surely they would not argue that homophobic bullying is not an injustice? (cf. Hume 1997, §§12, 14). Can they say, with a straight face, what the US bishops said to lesbian and gay Catholics in that country: ‘Though at times you may feel discouraged, hurt or angry, do not walk away from your families, from the Christian community, from all those who love you. In you God’s love is revealed. You are always our children’ (1997, conclusion). We don’t feel much like their children at present.

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### Further Reading

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# CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS

## Letter from the Chair of *Quest* to Catholic MPs<sup>1</sup>

I am writing to you on behalf of *Quest*, the group for lesbian and gay Catholics, urging you to support the civil partnerships legislation which will shortly be the subject of a vote in your House. We believe that the proposals contained in the bill as originally set before Parliament will remedy a number of injustices, directly encourage stability in such partnerships and also, indirectly, enhance stability in and respect for marriage. This would be achieved by providing a respectable alternative for those not suited to marriage but who, nevertheless, want to live in a permanent intimate relationship.

The late Cardinal Basil Hume listed three criteria which he urged Catholics to bear in mind when assessing new legislative proposals. The first criterion was:

*“Are there reasonable grounds for judging that the institution of marriage and the family could and would be undermined by a particular legislative proposal?”*

*Quest* would argue that civil partnerships are not an alternative to marriage but, rather, complementary to it. The legislation would send out clear signals that strengthening stable and permanent *homosexual* relationships secured in law is the desired outcome of the proposed changes; it is hard to see how this would erode *heterosexual* marriage. This is a point echoed by Catholic Marriage Care, the lay organisation whose chief executive sits on the Bishops’ Marriage and Family Life Committee: “We take the view that a change affecting such a small proportion of the population could not undermine a massive institution like marriage.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Quest* is grateful to Stonewall for much practical help given in preparing and despatching this letter, which was sent to all Catholic MPs in time for the third reading of the bill, and a similar one sent to Catholic members of the House of Lords earlier in the year.

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*“Would refusing a proposed change in the law be more harmful to the common good than accepting such a change?”*

This is the second of Cardinal Hume’s criteria. There is ample evidence from other European countries that have gone forward and adopted similar legislation that civil partnerships reduce the likelihood of relationship breakdown. Relationship instability has a proven link to both physical and mental ill-health. The strengthening of commitments also has a wider effect in that it benefits not only the couples themselves but also the wider community, especially those relatives that the partners support and care for. A refusal to adopt this measure, we argue, would be detrimental to the common good.

Cardinal Hume’s third criterion is:

*“Does a person’s sexual orientation or activity constitute a sufficient reason for treating that person in any way differently from other citizens in specific circumstances?”*

Marriage, whether civil or sacred, is not open to lesbian and gay couples. Marriage, in its especially religious sense, is certainly deeper than the sum of the legal rights and obligations that flow from such commitment. But the fact that the package of rights presently open to heterosexual couples by dint of the marriage option is not available to same-sex couples makes a very strong case for amending the law. Pension rights, rights to property and issues regarding the right to be registered as next-of-kin in cases of hospitalisation are all areas where the civil partnership legislation would remedy present injustices.

The Catholic bishops, in their submission to the Department for Trade and Industry, have said that the new legislation is not necessary to protect human rights. They point out that two people can make legal provision on matters such as the joint ownership of home, living wills and powers of attorney. While this may be true to some extent, the civil partnerships scheme would bring all this together in one measure approved by society at large. This is much more satisfactory and affirming if lesbian and gay couples than a series of private and *ad hoc* steps which they take for themselves.

QUEST hopes that the above points, in accordance with Cardinal Hume’s own criteria for assessing new legal measures, will result in your support for the bill in its original form; this will, in

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particular, require the reversal of amendments made in the House of Lords.

As lesbian and gay Catholics, we find it a matter of deep regret that both the Vatican and bishops here in Great Britain have felt it necessary to oppose the civil partnership scheme. We urge you to reverse decades of social injustice for hundreds and thousands of individuals and approve this most important proposal now before Parliament.

*Replies to this letter were received from Miss Widdecombe (explaining why she would be voting against the bill), Mr Adams (explaining that due to parliamentary procedure, the Sinn Fein members are not permitted to vote on legislation), Mr Battle and Mr Pollard (inviting Quest members to meet him at the House of Commons; a meeting arranged for 9<sup>th</sup> February had to be cancelled owing to Mr Pollard's indisposition, but is now expected to take place in May).*

## Voting Record of Catholic MPs for the third reading, 9<sup>th</sup> November 2004

The House divided: Ayes 389, Noes 47.

### Ayes (31):

*Labour 28:* Battle, John (Leeds West), Browne, Desmond (Kilmarnock & Loudoun), Campbell, Ronald (Blyth Valley), Cairns, David (Greenock & Inverclyde), Clarke, Thomas (Coatbridge & Chryston), Grogan, John (Selby), Jones, Helen (Warrington North), Kilfoyle, Peter (Liverpool Walton), King, Andy (Rugby & Kenilworth), Lewis, Terence (Worsley), Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen (Airdrie & Shotts), Lloyd, Anthony (Manchester Central), McAvoy, Thomas (Glasgow Rutherglen), McDonagh, Siobhain (Mitcham & Morden), McFall, John (Dumbarton), McGuire, Mrs Anne (Stirling), McKechin, Ann (Glasgow Maryhill), McKenna, Rosemary (Cumbernauld & Kilsyth), O'Brien, Michael (Warwickshire North), Pound, Stephen (Ealing North), Prentice, Bridget Theresa (Lewisham East), Reid, Dr John (Hamilton North & Belshill), Ross, Ernest (Dundee West), Roy, Frank (Motherwell & Wishaw), Ruane, Chris (Vale of Clwyd), Southworth, Helen (Warrington South), Tuohig, Don (Islwyn), Vaz, Keith (East Leicester).

*Conservative 1:* Atkinson, David (Bournemouth East)

*Liberal Democrat 2:* Cotter, Brian (Weston-super-Mare), Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles (Ross, Skye & Inverness West)

### Noes (10):

*Labour 1:* Dobbin, Jim (Heywood & Middleton).

*Conservative 9:* Amess, David (Southend West), Brazier, Julian (Canterbury), Cash, William (Stone), Duncan Smith, Iain (Chingford & Woodford Green), Goodman, Paul (Wycombe), Gummer, Rt Hon John (Suffolk Coastal), Leigh, Edward (Gainsborough), McLoughlin, Patrick (West Derbyshire), Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann (Maidstone & The Weald).

**Abstained (33):**

*Labour 23:* Benton, Joseph (Bootle), Burnham, Andy (Leigh, Lancs), Canavan, Denis (Falkirk West), Cook, Francis (Stockton North), Farrelly, Paul (Newcastle-under-Lyne), Galloway, George (Glasgow Kelvin), Goggins, Paul (Wythenshawe & Sale East), Irrenca-Davies, Huw (Ogmore), Kelly, Ruth (Bolton West), Lawrence, Mrs Jackie (Preseli, Pembrokeshire), MacKinlay, Andrew (Thurrock), Martin, Michael (Glasgow Rutherglen), McNamara, Kevin (Hull North), Murphy, Jim (Eastwood), Murphy, Rt Hon Paul (Torfaen), O'Hara (Knowsley South), Pendry, Thomas (Stalybridge & Hyde), Pollard, Kerry (St Albans), Pope, Greg (Hyndburn), Smith, Geraldine (Morecambe & Lunesdale), Snape, Peter (West Bromwich East), Ward, Claire Margaret (Watford), Wray, James (Glasgow Bailliestown).

*Conservative 4:* Ancram, Rt Hon Michael (Devizes), Green, Damian (Ashford), Hoban, Mark (Fareham), Waterson, Nigel (Eastbourne).

*Liberal Democrat 1:* Burnett, John (Devon West & Torridge).

*SDLP 2:* Hume, John (Foyle), Mallon, Seamus (Newry & Armagh).

*Sinn Fein 3:* Adams, Gerry (West Belfast), Doherty, Pat (West Tyrone), McGuinness, Martin (Ulster Mid).

*Quest was represented by Richard Cunliffe (Archivist) at a Reception with Stonewall to thank all those who had helped to secure passage of the Civil Partnership Act, hosted by Lord Alli and Charles Hendry MP at the Houses of Parliament on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2005.*