

- 9 F.A. Sullivan S.J., *Magisterium* op. cit. p. 172.
- 10 E.L. Mascall, *Theology and the Gospel of Christ. An essay in reorientation* (London 1984²), p. ivi. The difficulties such 'positivism' can create for an entire ecclesial tradition are charted in S.W. Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (London 1978), pp. 79ff.
- 11 This must surely have had its effect in their reading of Augustine's achievement as 'Jansenism'.
- 12 la q.1, a.2, ad i.
- 13 Well brought out in M.-D. Chenu O.P., *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* (Chicago 1964), pp. 150—155.
- 14 An introduction to the work of M.J. Scheeben can be found in G. Fritz, 'Scheeben, Matthias Josef', *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* XIV/i (Paris 1939), cols. 1270—1274. A full study is E. Paul, *Denweg und Denkform der Theologie von Matthias Joseph Scheeben* (Munich 1970). A useful introduction to Von Balthasar is the prefatory essay by D. MacKinnon in H.U. von Balthasar, *Elucidations* (London 1972). A well-nigh exhaustive account is found in A. Moda, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Bari 1976). See also A. Nichols O.P., 'Balthasar and his Christology', *New Blackfriars* LXVI. 781—2 (1985), pp. 317—324.
- 15 See R. Latourelle S.J., 'From revelation to theology' in *Theology: science of salvation* (New York 1969), pp. 3—10. This section can be regarded as a bridge to the subject of theology from his earlier study of revelation, *Theology of Revelation* (New York 1966).
- 16 See for a fuller account of this idea, A. Nichols O.P., 'Unity and plurality in Theology. Lonergan's *Method* and the counter-claims of a theory of paradigms', *Angelicum* LXII (1985), pp. 30—52.
- 17 J. Ratzinger, 'Le pluralisme: problème posé à l'Eglise et à la théologie', *Studia Moralia* 24 (1986), pp. 298—318.
- 18 See Y. Congar O.P., 'St Thomas and the Spirit of Ecumenism', *New Blackfriars* LV. 644 (1974), pp. 206—207.

The Homosexual and the Vatican: an American attempt at dialogue*

C.R.A. Cunliffe

Four years ago the contributors to Robert Nugent's *A Challenge to Love*¹ discussed the position of gay and lesbian Catholics in the Church in the aftermath of the 1975 Vatican declaration on sexual ethics. Now Sister Jeannine Gramick, co-founder with Father Nugent of New Ways Ministry, has co-edited with Pat Furey (a pseudonym used 'for professional reasons') *The Vatican and Homosexuality*². This is a collection of reactions to the *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* which the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued in October 1986³. Of the nineteen participants in the earlier symposium, only Gramick and Nugent re-appear among the twenty-five leading Catholic educators, journalists, activists and officials who write in it.

Gramick cites *The Tablet* as having called the document 'violently

hostile', and *The Month* as having noted a failure to address 'the reality of homosexuals in their living of Christian discipleship' (p. 93). In the United States, the editors say, reactions were 'as might have been expected, swift and strong'. One prominent Catholic and former Trappist monk writing in the *Washington Post* dismissed the letter as 'homophobic rantings'. A more dispassionate and scholarly response came from the Archbishop of San Francisco, John R. Quinn: his article 'Toward an understanding of the letter', first published in *America*, is reprinted here.

Archbishop Quinn, in his address to Pope John Paul II at San Francisco in 1987, said: 'We cannot fulfil our task simply by an uncritical application of solutions designed in past ages for problems which have qualitatively changed, or which did not exist in the past' (p. vii). The editors have been prompted by this tacit admonition to a questioning, both 'to clarify and to reinforce' the traditional teaching, but also 'to modify and to develop it' in the hope that 'the discussion will always proceed with full respect for persons and for the nature and mission of the Church and its ministry of teaching' (pp. xx, xxi). The Archbishop's contribution, they say, 'models a form of dialogue that this work follows' (p. xviii). In his response to Quinn Professor William Shannon congratulates him for speaking aloud his concerns; he finds his approach 'not an enthusiastic endorsement of the CDF letter but an effort to deal with it because it is there', not welcoming it as helpful in the Church's effort to minister to homosexual persons and attempting to justify what 'might well be harmful to ministries that already exist' (p. 21).

Something of the same guarded appraisal has been discernible among priests and bishops in Britain and elsewhere. Bishops, like any good Catholic, are not immune to occasional misgivings about the congruity of some Roman positions, but their lived experience of pastoral office, often more ecclesiastical than ecclesial, tends to inhibit anything resembling a forthright expression of reservations. The editors refer to Cardinal Hume's intervention at the Rome synod on the laity: 'When the ordained ministry exercises its teaching role, it needs to listen to the Spirit who speaks through the laity in virtue of their baptism' (p. vii). Likewise, the papal ministry of service needs to hear more independent testimony from those who can speak in virtue of their episcopal order. Active encouragement to stand up and speak out is long overdue from the mother and mistress of all the churches. Self-criticism is a little-explored area of *magisterium*: some enterprising developments there are needed if collegiality is ever to emerge from recession.

The Vatican and Homosexuality has only two contributors from Britain, Peter Harris and Peter Hebblethwaite. In 'Speaking the Truth in Love' Harris, until recently chairman of Quest, pays tribute to Bishop Mario Conti of Aberdeen, who, while staying firm on official Church teaching, stood for something 'person centred ... compassionate ... facing

the real situation in which many people find themselves today'; also he pays tribute to Francis Thomas, who has allowed that 'there is room for serious probing and questioning, but not for the kind of open dissent that leads nobody forward' (p. 112). Both, however, were writing in *The Times* some weeks before the Vatican letter appeared, and what they said elicited the editorial 'Stern Pastors'. Harris does not mention that Francis Thomas is Bishop of Northampton, and was writing as chairman of the English and Welsh bishops' theology commission. Harris's stance is that of a filial refusal to be provoked, a patient, though not undismayed, even forgiving, attitude—the attitude which was the hallmark of *Quest*'s public reaction to the Vatican letter. It was a response that won much respect and praise from many bishops in Britain. Harris leaves it to Hebblethwaite to record something, not altogether approvingly, of what *Quest Journal* had subsequently to say, more trenchantly, of the Vatican letter⁴.

In 'Please Don't Shoot the Bearer of Bad Tidings' Hebblethwaite anchors his main dissatisfaction with the moral norms underpinning the letter on the bedrock that it shares with Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. 'This document is based', he writes, 'on the sexuality-for-procreation approach'. To quote the letter (n.7), 'a person engaging in homosexual behaviour therefore acts immorally'—and that is what 'intrinsically disordered' means. In Hebblethwaite's opinion, the only way to challenge or invalidate this judgement is 'to deny the principle on which it is based, to deny, that is, the necessary nexus between sexuality and procreation' (pp. 137, 135). The present author, the editor of *Quest Journal*, is chided for faltering and stammering when reaching 'this crucial question of the finality of sexual acts'⁵. But is Hebblethwaite's chosen path 'the only way' and does it proceed at the most *basic* level? Perhaps he has not perceived that the essential conjunction ('necessary nexus') of one abstract state, 'sexuality', with another, 'procreation', does not entail an indispensable bond in each and every pair of corresponding instantial events (i.e. a sexual act and an occurrence, or non-occurrence, of conception) as a condition for the positive moral value of the prior event. Inferences from the conceptual to the real must respect an isomeric rather than an isomorphic relationship between the two orders of being. If, as *Humanae Vitae* affirms, it is true that 'each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life', it is not because that proposition is entailed by an acceptance of any 'necessary nexus between sexuality and procreation'.

If the Vatican letter's judgement is to be 'invalidated' (more modestly, faulted), then the most direct route to follow is signposted less by any defective cogency in argument than by its manifest lack of regard to the facts of the case, i.e. the circumstances of homosexual people. The Holy Office's judgement of 1633, condemning Galileo as 'vehemently suspected of heresy', has been overturned largely on factual, not logical, grounds. The Roman authorities went astray because they woefully failed to recognise that

the earth moves heliocentrically in space. The error comes close to meriting Hebblethwaite's stricture on Cardinal Ratzinger: 'He believes that "the Church is in a position to learn from scientific discovery, but also to transcend the horizons of science"' (Vatican letter, n.2). Oh, dear! we know what *transcend* means: he is going to soar above contrary evidence and ignore it completely' (p. 140). When officials at Rome can properly recognise the facts of what it is to be sexual, then the letter's appeal, made at its most basic level, to an 'organic continuity with the Scriptural perspective and (the Church's) own constant Tradition' (n.8) will become as unsustainable as in the case of Galileo. It may even, perhaps, as Hebblethwaite—never one for tottering or stuttering—alleges, be proved to be 'uncompassionate, unevangelical, unjust, fraudulent, biased, and discriminatory' (p. 137).

The editorial introduction takes a brisk look at events from 1975 on the gay Catholic scene, chiefly in the United States but with an admiring glance at what the English and Welsh bishops were doing for homosexual people. The bishops' pastoral guidelines of 1979 are specially commended for their advice about a 'permanent association between two homosexual persons who feel incapable of enduring a solitary life devoid of sexual expression', and for deftly combining a liberal approach with firmly traditional principles where gay people come to confession or holy communion. 'The Vatican', the editors claim, 'was not happy with this document' (p.xv), which may or may not be true. They seem unaware that the review of the guide-lines, started two years ago, was at the request of the National Conference of Priests, independently of Vatican pressure (if any). The request was made just before the publication of the Vatican letter. Nor was the Conference looking for any 'much less lenient version more in keeping with the tone and direction of the CDF letter', then still to appear. And the 'strong criticisms from people who were consulted privately' about the draft version, whether from left or right, are not the main reason why little has so far come of it.

In 'Two Unanswered Questions' John Coleman, who is professor of religion and society at the Jesuit School of Theology and the Graduate Union in Berkeley and who edited the 1984 *Concilium* volume *The Sexual Revolution*, asks 'rather fundamental questions': 'What is the inner relationship between moral theology and applied pastoral theology?' and 'What is the Catholic position on laws protecting the civil liberties of homosexual persons in society?' (p.59). On the first, he holds that there is no authoritative Catholic position, and the letter is not consistent on the relationship between the twinned disciplines. As a result 'we do not really know what the "pastoral care" of homosexual persons in the Church should look like' (p.61). What one might suggest to him is that moral and pastoral theologies are two sides of the same coin of great charity, such that if one is of sterling quality, or counterfeit quality, then so is the other. On his second

point, 'it is clear to me, at least,' Coleman writes, 'that a classic and traditional case can be made for Catholic support for civil liberties for homosexual people' and he finds the Vatican letter 'quite untraditional'; 'to suggest (nn.10, 17) bishops should oppose ... nondiscrimination out of a duty to protect family values ... is a novelty in Catholic teaching and a dangerous simplification of a complex issue' (pp.64, 62).

The absence of authoritative positions, and some reluctance to appear to speak out of Roman turn, may explain the silence of bishops during the recent controversy in Britain over clause 28 of the Local Government Bill (forbidding local authorities from promoting homosexuality). Public opinion, however, is not slow to detect a melancholy discrepancy in the moral positions being taken by these bishops, so silent on one issue whilst so vocal, and improvidently so, on another—the use of condoms by the incorrigibly promiscuous as a way of reducing the spread of AIDS.

Dan Grippio of the *National Catholic Reporter*, in 'The Vatican Can Slight Scripture for its Purpose', gives a brief overview of what scholarship of the past thirty years has taught us about the biblical passages cited by the Vatican authors, and concludes that if all the recent scholarship is going to be called 'gravely erroneous', then it ought to be at least addressed and refuted if possible by better scholarship, since dismissing it out of hand is 'intellectually dishonest and pastorally unjust' (p.39). The letter has rightly insisted that 'to be correct, the interpretation of Scripture must be in substantial accord with ... the *living* tradition of the Church' (n.5, emphasis added). In 'A Problem of Manipulated Data', Lillana Kopp, a sociologist and anthropologist, observes: 'Many traditions of the Church have been less than Christian from their inception.' She says that on human nature and human sexuality they have been seriously flawed by 'erroneous and opposing anthropologies, and inadequate understanding of human biology and psychology; a philosophy of dualism that precluded a holistic view of personhood; a distorted view of sex as evil and unclean' (p.43). There have been startling changes in the Church's attitude to usury. Like changes befitting homosexual people are by no means inconceivable within 'the *living* tradition of the Church'. What is *to* the mind of Roman congregations is not inevitably *in* the mind of the Church.

In 'Sexual Orientation in Vatican Thinking' Robert Nugent has things to say which tend to confirm a widely held belief—which Nugent himself does not in fact adopt—that the letter was first drafted in the United States, with much of its castigatory style attributable to Archbishop Hickey of Washington. Hickey has certainly been no patron of New Ways Ministry or Dignity, both with national headquarters in his diocese (pp.49—50). Furey and Gramick claim that 'it makes little sense to place full responsibility for the letter on Cardinal Ratzinger, who, according to a Vatican source, 'is doing only what the Pope himself wants done' (p.xx). André Guindon, professor of moral theology at St. Paul's University in Ottawa and

contributor here of 'Homosexual Acts or Gay Speech', recalls what Ratzinger, as a private theologian, had written in 1969: 'that to reduce the task of theology to the proof of the presence of the statements of the teaching office in the sources is to threaten the primacy of the sources', something which, were one to continue logically in this direction, would 'ultimately destroy the serving character of the teaching office' (p.208). Perhaps it was not entirely in jest that Ratzinger was asked after his Cambridge lecture last January, 'Does Rome ever listen to you?'

Robert Modras of St Louis University says in 'Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body' that the Vatican letter may have been signed by Ratzinger, but its contents and terminology bear the marks of the Pope (p.119). The construction that Modras puts on the Pope's theology of the body needs to be compared with Richard Grecco's account, somewhat less alarmist, in the *Concilium* volume. It is not, Modras declares, biblical scholars, theologians or psychologists who pose the greatest resistance to the Pope's theology of the body, but the masses of the faithful whom he will have to convince when describing birth control as adultery 'in the heart' or the homosexual condition as a 'disorder'. 'What the Pope approaches from the outside and calls lust, they live on the inside and call love ... (and) it is their experience of their lives, reflected on in faith and sustained by the sacraments, which leads them respectfully to disagree' (p.125).

In 'Rights, Responsibilities and Homosexuality' Carolyn Osiek, Professor of New Testament at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, has the good sense to affirm, more distinctly than some other contributors, that 'the letter's *intention* is not to attack homosexual persons but to minister to them, though they will hardly feel understood or welcomed by it' (p.132). Her critical examination of certain assumptions concerning the common good, society, family life and sexuality 'from which Catholic Church law and teaching start' is the best section in the book. 'It is', she perceives, '*as if* the Church feels the responsibility to save homosexual persons from themselves and from a pernicious libertine society that will undermine and ultimately destroy their true dignity and rights' (emphases added).

Bearing in mind the quantity of criticism, from so many different directions, the editors were wise to include a voice dissenting uncompromisingly from most of what the other contributors say. Bernard M. Ashley, professor of moral theology and spirituality at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St Louis, evinces in 'Compassion and Sexual Orientation' great certainty on essentials that puzzle many other theologians: 'I think the Vatican letter, with whose substance I entirely agree, has also tried to speak the healing truth' (p. 109). His standards of compassion are absolutist, but occasionally not ultra-rigorously applied: '(A) counselor may very well hesitate to break up an established couple, lest they return to promiscuity' (p.107). He argues undeviatingly from his principles, however: 'The homosexual orientation, like impotency, is a

condition that makes true human sexual expression impossible' (p.107). All true, of course, on the definitions, but somewhat bizarre in the sense that most homosexuals are anything but impotent. Given such surfeit of certainty, it is no small relief to be told that it is only 'probable that in a sinless world everyone would have married' (p.107). Is celibacy, then, a fall-back virtue, suitable only for fallen humanity? Its practice seems to be nothing like so difficult as one might suppose: 'Homosexuals are not alone in being confronted with celibacy ... nor do they need a special charism to live as celibates (although) a special charism is required to accept the dedication required of priests and religious' (pp.107—8). There is a chilling footnote, in the context of AIDS, on how God permits even the innocent to suffer the consequences of their objective wrong-doing 'so they and others will learn from the mistake' (p.110 n.4). God, it seems, has arranged for nature to do the punishing ('promiscuity is biologically maladaptive', p.106). And those ministering to the stricken asking 'Why me?' are warned that 'a merely palliative answer will help little' and 'we must help the victims to think the question through theologically' (p.110, n.4). But Ashley does make one concession, though with a confidence close to folly: he says a lack of nuance was 'inevitable in a document that had to be brief and directly to the point in order to clear up the ambiguities with which this complex question has been obscured' (p.109). Cleared up, or shewn up?

Three women write on the letter's implications for women in prison, students being counselled and lesbian nuns. Seven other contributors endeavour to put the Vatican letter, duly noted, behind them, and to carry forward the responsible discussion initiated with *A Challenge to Love*. (One English bishop remarked that, if he had received his letter from the Congregation before reading of it in *The Times*, he would have studied it with care, and then put it away and shewn it to no one.)

What, at the end of it all, is one to make of *The Vatican and Homosexuality*? No matter that some at Rome will frown on its appearance, it is a serious attempt to co-operate with the Congregation in its call for 'attentive study' and 'theologically well-balanced counsel' (letter, n.2). Confrontation, shouting at one another, avails nothing. No party easily avoids it, of course. A contributor here calls the letter one of 'a series of agonized screams from authoritarian officials who by refusing to listen now find it increasingly difficult to be heard' (p.176). But another, handling the document more gently, says that 'the wisdom that is to be found in this letter is that "Christians who are homosexual are called, as all of us are, to a chaste life"' and that sets the task: 'to become clear about what the virtue of chastity requires within the givens of one's history, culture, and individual life situations. As a virtue for all Christians, it has never been identified with abstinence from all sexual activity. Chastity is a matter of grace and conscience, not law' (p.169).

The debate continues. Is there, though, any possibility of significant

progress, in the sense of a meaningful communication with ecclesiastical authority? Yes, if only because officials come and go. Even the safest men appointed to office are not wholly impervious to convincing arguments. Reason, not to mention grace, can still work wonders. What Paul VI wrote two decades ago of his encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, can be said of the Congregation's letter on homosexuality: 'May the *lively debate* aroused by it lead to a better knowledge of God's will' (quoted by Shannon, p.27). In this matter, as with women's ordination, lay involvement in church governance, and ecumenism, we are at an early stage; pastors and people are still learning to speak on these subjects. Says Guindon: 'Until the Congregation substantially modifies its anthropological and ethical model for dealing with human sexual gestures, its chances of having any kind of impact on the Christian community's sexual discernments will continue to decrease. The language of the letter is like classical Greek or Latin: a dead language which expresses another cultural world. It cannot express ours because no living community of users actually understands our world with this language' (p.214). Patience is needed. 'More than most', Harris advises, 'we know that we belong to a Church which does make mistakes and is a community of sinners but it is to this very Church that God has called us and given us a mission—not for ourselves alone but for those who come after ... The Incarnation is as active in our lives and our ministries as in any other part of Christ's body ... We must love the Church and teach it to love us' (p.117).

Caution of this kind, not to be confused with diffidence, may confirm some of Peter Hebblethwaite's worst fears: 'With great respect, I find *Quest* here very naive. Its editors fall into a trap that I have fallen into occasionally. Every time I have got the Vatican wrong (and it has happened) it was because I allowed my heart to rule my head' (p.136). This *Quest Journal* editor is not ashamed to keep his hand on his heart in the conviction that He who came into the world to bear witness to the truth will ensure in His own good time that the whole Church will one day acknowledge, in a language better suited than that now used for this purpose, that the homosexual inclination is a tendency well ordered to moral good.

- A slightly different version of this text will appear under the title 'Co-operation with the Vatican: an American Initiative' as a supplement to *Quest Journal* 9 (October 1988), the publication of *Quest* (a British organisation under Roman Catholic lay control for the sustenance of Christian belief among homosexual people), BM Box 2585, London WC1N 3XX.

- 1 Robert Nugent, ed.: *A Challenge to Love. Gay and Lesbian Catholics in the Church*. Crossroad, New York, 1984; pp.xiv & 290; \$10.95.
- 2 Jeannine Gramick & Pat Furey, ed.: *The Vatican and Homosexuality*. Crossroad, New York, 1988; pp.xxi & 226; \$14.95. Distributed in the UK by SCM Press, London.
- 3 The supplement to *Quest Journal* 3 (November 1986) supplies the complete text with a running commentary.
- 4 See the supplements to *Quest Journal* 3,4,5.
- 5 See the supplement to *Quest Journal* 3, pp.25, 31.