

AN  
INTRODUCTION  
TO THE  
PASTORAL CARE  
OF  
HOMOSEXUAL  
PEOPLE



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# HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS:

"Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself; his life is senseless if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it".

(Pope John Paul II : Redemptor Hominis)

Human love is supportive, enriching and healing; it produces harmony, unity and fulfilment. The very revealing of true love to another person is a purifying and wholesome experience.

A life without love is incomplete and disappointing. This deprivation, especially if it stems from childhood, is the origin of social misfits, either withdrawn and introspective or aggressive and disruptive.

It is within this setting that the pastor must encourage those who seek his guidance. But the pastor must unfold a further dimension which is not at first apparent. The love between people is very special, but its origins and its worth are to be found in God. God is the ultimate source of genuine love and when people experience love at the human level they are absorbing something of the divine love. In turn, a true love between people, originating as it does from God, will lead those loving people back to God. All human love is a reflection of the love in God which is the life of the Trinity. It is this divine dimension which not only ennobles human love but also reveals something of God's love for us.

Each person is made in "the image and likeness of God". The more we know and understand another person the more we should be able to recognise something of God in that other person. True personal relationships should develop this "seeing" of God in one another, and loving relationships within marriage or family or friendship should reveal this divine imprint more explicitly than casual acquaintance. Even within friendships or family there can be a differing degree of this revelation because human beings are different and they do not respond in exactly the same way to every other person.

All this means that attraction between people within the accepted settings of marriage, family and friendship is only possible, initially, because of God's love for us and because we are made for God. Love between human beings is all part of being gathered up into this divine love and the search for union with another person is essentially a search for that total union with God to which every person is invited. All human loving is a seeking after the One who is most lovable.

Our human loving is all part of longing for God and, in our human loving we are seeking out a point of contact between earth and heaven, between created and the Creator, between the many who are trying to love and the One who is total love. This search for a meeting point between the human and the divine is really a deep desire to lift the loved one up to the source of love, God. Or, looking at the loving relationship from a more human viewpoint, it is a longing for the completely loving God to enter and uplift humanity and this point of intersection of divine and human is the Incarnation and the sharing of the Incarnation with every person.

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.

The special relationship between a woman and a man which we call marriage is an intensification of that general affection we must have for all who enjoy God's love and are made in His image. Ideally, the husband and wife focus their love more and more intensely on one another until there is that uninhibited giving of each other in the sexual union. This is more than a coming together of bodies. It is the union of minds and the complete trust of those who are prepared to surrender everything to one another. It is the culmination of a loving relationship and, at the same time, the growth point from which the man and woman move on to the deeper sharing of love which, like all love, has its origins in God. So this God-designed act is total and creative. It is exclusive, not in the negative sense of setting aside all love for other people, but it is exclusive in that such an intense and unique a gift of oneself could only be shared with one other person. This form of love expressed in this unique way must be total and irrevocable if it is to be true to all it claims to express.

Friendship like marriage is part of the overflow of God's love into his creation. The love between friends, like the love between wife and husband or between parents and children, finds its source in God and, ideally, should be seeking to uplift people to experience and appreciate the divine love which enlivens all love.

Friendship implies a closeness; a coming together of similar tastes and outlook, a mutual attraction of spirit. Much has been written about the nobility of friendship and examples can be quoted from all history, including the lives of the saints. Friendship between persons of the same sex or different sexes is part of the normal inter-personal relationship within the human race.

Within this we can identify the homosexual person and it is important for the pastor to be sensitive to any special features which may be characteristic of the homosexual.

To be homosexual means that people of the same sex are more attractive than those of the opposite sex and this is a condition or disposition to be found in both women and men. To limit this attraction to physical and even just sexual attraction is a misleading generalisation and the term "homophilia" is sometimes preferred to "homosexuality" because close friendships between people of the same sex may be completely free of erotic or sexual behaviour.

An important distinction must be made between the "pervert" and the "invert". This terminology is distasteful to some homosexual people but it does distinguish between the person who is predominantly heterosexual but indulges in homosexual activity (pervert) and the one who is predominantly homosexual (invert).

Homosexuality in the female (lesbianism) appears to differ from homosexuality in the male in that lesbians are less inclined to indulge in casual, impersonal homosexual activity. It seems that more lesbians marry than do male homosexuals and so the lesbian can become more involved in normal family life. Popular opinion and some research suggests that there are more male homosexuals than lesbians.

It is difficult if not impossible to determine the number of homosexuals in the general community. Reasonable estimates suggest that between 4 and 5% of the total population are exclusively homosexual. In terms of absolute numbers this cannot be dismissed as trivial. Many more pass through a homosexual phase in their lives and while such statistics are to be treated with reserve, they do indicate a sizeable proportion of the population.

The Wolfenden Report issued in 1957 concluded that homosexuality is not, in spite of the widely held belief to the contrary, peculiar to members of particular professions or social classes. The Wolfenden Report claims that the evidence presented to it showed that homosexuality existed in all callings and at all levels of society. It may be that while certain social classes or professions do not produce an unusual proportion of homosexual persons, it is reasonable to conclude that some social classes and professions are more prepared than other groups to accept them.

In this country in 1861 the death penalty was removed as a punishment for the convicted homosexual and in 1967 imprisonment was removed as a possible punishment for homosexual activity between consenting adults. Although the law has been modified there remains within our community some misunderstanding and hostility, sometimes hidden, towards the homosexual, a hostility which is frequently the result of grouping together all homosexuals as though they are stereotyped.

Social disapproval and rejection of the homosexual person simply because he or she has these tendencies is a distressing problem for the

homosexual. Unfortunately, the misunderstanding frequently comes from "religious" people and ostracism of and discrimination against the homosexual can frequently result in many people who are practising Christians being unwilling to admit that they are homosexual. Some attack through ridicule and denunciation. Others withdraw from the company of homosexuals. Neither approach is helpful. A silent rejection, as though the subject is not to be discussed and not very "nice" is equally unhelpful. Society may be misunderstanding and even prejudging a large section of the community.

The following points may clarify some of the misunderstanding:-

- (a) It is untrue to say that every homosexual is attracted to children and adolescents and wishes to have physical contact with them. There are, of course, heterosexuals with the same inclinations. In fact, it would seem that proportionately to their numbers in the population, the heterosexuals are more prone to child molestation than homosexuals.
- (b) It is inaccurate to claim that all male homosexuals are easily identifiable as effeminate or all female homosexuals as masculine.
- (c) It is misleading to say that homosexuals automatically recognise each other and form quasi secret societies.
- (d) It is untrue that homosexual persons are automatically unstable or promiscuous. They are, in fact, quite capable of forming good relationships which are lasting.
- (e) It is a generalisation to claim that homosexual people simply require will-power to correct their condition. There is no easy method of transition from the state of homosexuality to that of heterosexuality; as yet no consistent and reliable method of transference is known. The invert homosexual must not therefore be too readily blamed if he or she is hesitant about any attempt to adjust.
- (f) Homosexuality is often thought to be anti-family - a threat to the institution of the family itself. Some organisations do, in fact, threaten family life in the form in which we understand it today, but other homosexual organisations expressly aim to promote traditional, accepted standards. There is a danger of our identifying all homosexuals with radical and progressive pressure groups.
- (g) It is incorrect to claim that homosexuals have a high incidence of mental disorder. This is simply not borne out by research.
- (h) It is inaccurate to assert that homosexual persons are limited to certain social classes or professions. The evidence of the Wolfenden Report quoted above suggests otherwise.

## The Causes of Homosexuality:

The pastor must appreciate the complexity of the debate on the causes of homosexuality. There are many causes and it is usually impossible to isolate any single one. Some people are unable to express themselves adequately when discussing this topic and this hesitancy is an added difficulty in the search for causes.

Biological explanations do not appear to command a general agreement although there are many biological theories. Heredity as a cause has never been proved convincingly. At best it is only a partial explanation of the homosexual condition.

In general terms the accepted possibilities are socio-psychological causes. Environment, upbringing and emotional relationships within the family, an over-dominant or possessive mother and a weak or absent father - all these and similar factors are accepted as possible explanations, but there is no agreed opinion.

Seduction, especially at an early age, has been suggested as a possible cause. As far as can be ascertained seduction does not alter a sexual pattern but it may encourage and exaggerate an already existing sexual tendency. Most young people appear to pass through a phase when the homosexual tendency is dominant; but the emotional growth can be halted at this stage.

The pastor must be aware of these uncertainties associated with the state of homosexuality. The uncertainty about the causes leads to uncertainty about how to re-adjust the sexual tendencies. This in turn leads to a frustration and anxiety within the person who is homosexual and can add to his or her emotional distress. The pastor must also be aware of the variety of medical options, including hypnosis, aversion therapy and drugs, but it is not for the pastor or for this document to pass medical judgement on these matters.

## The Christian Tradition:

Christian morality is primarily concerned with holiness of life. It is centred on worship and the personal union of the worshipper with God and with other people in Christ. The purpose of moral norms is to guide people towards God. Moral norms point out ways of living which impede union with God so that they may be avoided, and encourage ways of living which bring people nearer to God giving expression to the life of grace which the believer receives through Christ.

This must be the emphasis when discussing homosexuality; not just the imposing of a negative law. The support and guidance of the moral law is needed by everyone, whether they be homosexual or heterosexual but the moral law is not merely a negative imposition; it is a positive means

of encouraging a way of life which leads to true fulfilment.

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

There can be no moral opprobrium attached to homophile friendships as such. As has been stressed, friendship in itself is good. A friendship can only be judged immoral if it were the occasion of immoral acts. Having made this distinction clear it is important that the moral teaching concerning homosexual acts be clarified even in a document emphasising pastoral care.

The traditional teaching of the Church on the morality of homosexual acts is repeated in the 1975 Declaration on 'Certain Questions concerning Sexual Ethics'. This was issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. There it said:

"According to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality."

With regard to homosexual acts, scripture and the on-going tradition of Christianity make it quite clear that these are immoral. Whatever pastoral judgement may conclude concerning personal responsibility in a particular case, it is clear that in the objective order homosexual acts may not be approved.

Christ emphasised love as the great commandment but this must be understood correctly. In advocating the law of charity as the supreme law, Christ did not set aside the traditional commandments but established love as the basis of all wholesome relationships including those expressly listed in the commandments. One of the tests of genuine love given by Christ was the keeping of the commandments and while he did not speak, as far as we know, about the specific problems of the homosexual, he did not reverse the Old Testament tradition. The teaching of the early Christians as expressed in the New Testament re-affirms that tradition. David Field in the 'Homosexual Way' says:

"Despite the very important modern distinction dividing inverts and perverts, it seems impossible to resist the conclusion that the New Testament puts a theological veto on all homosexual behaviour - however well motivated it may be."

The constant tradition of the Church is that sexual intercourse is proper to the holy state of matrimony, in which it contributes to the sanctity of the married couple, being both an expression of covenant love and the origin of new members to the human race. The sexual union between husband and wife is the culmination of love, and, at the same time, leads to growth in love, all part of the growth towards God as the source and complete centre of love. The intimacy of married love

is expressed in marital intercourse, which is fulfilling; a sign of true love which is creative and maturing.

For people who are not married, whether they are homosexual or heterosexual, love and affection can be given some form of expression. But there is the need to be aware that perfectly legitimate expressions of affection can lead to genital activity which could be not only wrong, but destructive of a worthwhile and supportive relationship.

There has been an attempt to establish parity between a normal marriage and the on-going homosexual relationship. This is a false and unacceptable analogy. The pastor may distinguish between irresponsible, indiscriminate sexual activity and the permanent association between two homosexual persons, who feel incapable of enduring a solitary life devoid of sexual expression. This distinction may be borne in mind when offering pastoral advice and establishing the degree of responsibility, but the pastor will not be providing true and helpful advice if he gives the impression that the "homosexual marriage" is objectively moral.

Of course, pastoral care does not consist simply in the rigid and automatic application of objective moral norms. It considers the individual in his actual situation, with all his strengths and weaknesses. The decision of conscience, determining what should be done and what avoided, can only be made after prudent consideration of the real situation as well as the moral norm.

Section 8 of the Vatican Declaration states:

"no pastoral method can be employed which would give moral justification to these acts", but it goes on to say "homosexuals must certainly be treated with understanding... and their culpability judged with prudence".

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. Some would claim that, especially for the invert, the homosexual drive is almost irresistible. Degrees of decision are impossible to estimate accurately but the normal principles of diminished responsibility apply. If it is claimed that the homosexual is completely incapable of self-control, this may place homosexuality in the category of a serious disease - an opinion unacceptable to many, if not most, homosexual people.

There is some obligation on the homosexual person to seek guidance and, if possible, a re-adjustment of his or her condition, but it remains important pastorally to bear in mind that the homosexual condition is

rarely, if ever, a matter of choice. Many homophiles find the loneliness of their lives a burden. They 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 union 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 judgement cannot be made in the abstract but in the concrete circumstances in which the acts take place. So the Vatican Declaration says:

"It is true that in sins of the sexual order, in view of their kind and their causes, it more easily happens that true consent is not fully given; this is a fact which calls for caution on all judgements as to the subject's responsibility. In this matter it is particularly opportune to recall the words of Scripture: 'Man looks at appearances but God looks at the heart'. (1 Sam. 16:7)."

A specially delicate situation arises when homosexual persons are convinced that, although they accept that homosexual acts in themselves cannot be justified, it is found impossible in practice to lead a celibate life. They might then claim that the choice remains between a stable union, in which there is a necessary and inevitable physical relationship and an obviously distasteful promiscuous way of life. Such persons argue that in their particular case the stability of the union outweighs the disorder of the homosexual acts which take place within it. They would argue that the goodness or badness of an act can only be judged morally in practice when consideration has been given to intention and circumstances.

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. As quoted above the Vatican Declaration states that "no pastoral method can be employed which would give moral justification to these acts". Bearing this in mind pastors must be alive to the genuine guidance of moral theology and be prepared to apply it to the particular needs of the homosexual person.



# PASTORAL GUIDELINES:

In general terms the pastoral task might be considered as helping homosexual persons, or those who consider themselves to be 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 are still many unanswered questions regarding the proper pastoral care of homosexuals. In the wake of research in the theological and social sciences and the experience of those already involved in pastoral care of homosexuals, the following guidelines could be offered:

1. The Church, in her pastoral effort is concerned first of all with people. How people are classified is secondary and is intended merely to be a help towards understanding people. Unfortunately, many classifications tend to have judgemental connotations. It is unfortunate that the term 'homosexual' tends to classify people principally by their sexuality. The pastor and counsellor must see all people, irrespective of their sexuality, as children of God and destined for eternal life.
2. Before attempting to provide spiritual guidance or moral counselling to a homosexual person, pastors need to be aware of the homosexual condition itself. Homosexuality is commonly understood to imply only an erotic, sexual attraction of a person towards members of the same sex. It sometimes also means the absence of attraction to members of the opposite sex, even to the extent of positive disgust for sexual relationships with the opposite sex.
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.
4. Before attempting to provide spiritual guidance or counselling for a homosexual person the pastor must be aware of his own limitations. Unconscious prejudice resulting from a biased, social tradition does injustice to the homosexual and renders effective counselling impossible. No real benefit can be expected unless the pastor clears away all traces of the misunderstandings that make real communication impossible.
5. One of the most important aspects of homosexuality is the awareness of being 'different' from the majority of people. This consciousness of being 'different', of belonging to a minority, leaves the homosexual person suffering from the same problems as all minority groups with the added factor that their 'difference' is secret. This leads

to a deeper alienation. 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. However, among both heterosexuals and homosexuals there are people who are exhibitionists - explicit and vulgar. In both categories these are a minority and the attention they attract is out of proportion to their numbers. Before 1967 the constant fear associated with homosexual acts was that of blackmail, but since the law has withdrawn the penalty for homosexual acts between consenting adults there have been explicit portrayals of the homosexual as ridiculous and bizarre. This means that the judgement of many people, including Christians, is based on a limited knowledge which is unaware of the deeper, distressing tensions which beset the person who is homosexual.

6. It is the role of the pastor to offer encouragement and support. Many good people who are homosexual are constantly struggling against the demands of their condition and they must not be allowed to despair. It is unworthy of a pastor to offer only superficial advice for such an intractable problem.
7. 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 companionship of fellow homosexuals where at least they will be met with the understanding which has been denied by the pastor.
8. Some would argue that societies specifically for homosexuals are the ideal setting for allowing people with the same tendencies to understand and cope with shared anxieties. It is difficult to assess the value of such associations. The pastor must advise against the homosexual society which has as its main purpose the introduction of, or a meeting with, people with at least the implied, if not explicit, purpose of encouraging homosexual activities. This form of group is quite unacceptable.

On the other hand, 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 to cope with their difficulties. 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. In addition, a society formed originally for the moral support of the homosexual might, even unwittingly, deepen an already existing problem. It might tend to relax standards rather than support efforts to cope with difficulties and homosexual activity may be nurtured rather than avoided.

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.

9. Marriage has not proved to be a successful answer for most homosexuals. Marriage in these circumstances can be unfair to the partner and even extend the distress of the homosexual to the whole family. It may be marriage for the wrong reasons and, in any case, marriage must not be thought of as the only gateway to God and the only way to fulfillment.

10. Professional psychiatric treatment or psychological counselling is by no means the proven remedy for the homosexual condition. Very often it proves to be a frustrating experience that only heightens anxiety. Pastors and Counsellors may suggest psychological testing to determine whether a person is exclusively or predominantly homosexual, as opposed to a 'transitional' homosexual, who is passing through a temporary phase of psychological development. In the case of true homosexuals or 'inverts', professional therapy may be helpful to assist them in accepting their condition positively, but therapy should never be suggested in a way that raises false expectations of a reverse or modification of the homosexual condition.

11. A positive help to the homosexual is the channelling of his energy into a variety of interests, but this sublimation must be positive and genuine. An artificial diversion is unconvincing.

12. However much is uncertain about the subject of homosexuality, it seems that the generic term does include three more specific and important categories;

- (a) those who are well adjusted, stable people who have come to terms with their homosexuality, who never seek help and who are never in trouble with the law. These people are

psychologically adjusted, sometimes even better, than the average heterosexual;

- (b) those homosexuals who have psychological problems, eg neurosis and alcoholism. This group has more in common with other neurotics than with other homosexuals;
- (c) those homosexuals who have personality disorders which lead to deviant behaviour, eg criminal offences. This group have more in common with other social deviants than with other homosexuals.

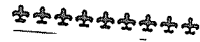
13. The Church has a serious responsibility to work towards the elimination of any injustices perpetrated on homosexuals by society. As a group that has suffered more than its share of oppression and contempt, the homosexual community has particular claim upon the concern of the Church. Homosexuals have a right to enlightened and effective pastoral care with pastoral ministers who are properly trained to meet their pastoral needs.

14. 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.

15. Homosexuals may feel that nature in some way cheated them and produced tensions which are undeserved. The homosexual can be shattered on discovering that he or she has permanent tendencies through no personal fault which arouse antagonism, ridicule and rejection in society. The Christian task is to understand the homosexuals and restore respect for them as persons. They may well feel that the Church is demanding impossible standards. This challenge may lead to an abandonment of faith, but it also offers an added opportunity and resource. Truth is never reached by turning down the clear directives of God and the Gospel. Such a course could only complicate the already existing confusion. God sets certain standards, but his power of sustaining is comprehensive. Christ emphasised his concern for those whom society has rejected. The many difficulties which the homosexual encounters ensures that the strength of God will be at hand. Christ asks that we take up our Cross and follow him and this may mean that the homosexual person is very near to true Christianity if he responds to this invitation.

The problem of the homosexual is part of a greater problem of the human incompleteness of a people who are on the way to God. Maturity comes when problems are acknowledged and faced. Only confusion arises when the problems are allowed to dictate or there is a pretence that they do not exist.

16. 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. This does not mean instant serenity. There must be gradual purification and real growth in holiness. Every person with spiritual ambitions must cope with his personal limitations. These vary from person to person and are frequently complex and discouraging, but 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.



## FURTHER READING:

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