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## [Book Review of] *The Church and the Homosexual* by John J. McNeill

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Hippocratic tradition. Doctor Diamond uses the salient core pledges of the Hippocratic oath as yardsticks to highlight the gross incompatibilities between the new medical ethic and the 2500 year old tradition of the medical profession. His analysis is incisive, buttressed by inexorable logic and very cogent statistics.

Most of the issues discussed in the sixteen chapters of this book have been exhaustively explored and ridden into the most dense existential fog imaginable by hordes of ethicists, pseudo-scientists, medical and theological charlatans. In a few pages on each topic Dr. Diamond presents the salient medical, legal and philosophical facts and discusses them sanely and logically, supporting his arguments with relevant and revealing statistics.

For the most part, his discussion of these emotion-laden issues is calm and dispassionate, though there are throughout the book some very pungent and pointed comments. The only real bias the author displays is toward the truth and his belief in the sanctity of life. On this topic he is passionate and intense, as when he writes, "If you ask me, therefore, to speak for the fetus, then speak for him I will. I speak for him intact or deformed . . . wanted or unwanted . . . illegitimate or highborn. I am for life and the preservation of life. I believe that any life is of infinite value and that this value is not significantly diminished by physical or mental defects or the circumstances of that life's beginning. I believe that this regard for the quantity as well as the quality of life is a cornerstone of western culture. I believe our patients are served best by a medical ethic which also holds this principle sacred."

In this reviewer's opinion, Doctor Diamond has succeeded admirably in defending his thesis in this small but comprehensive book. The last chapter is a gem; it expertly explodes the over-population myth and concludes with a satirical effort worthy of Jonathan Swift. I will not reveal what he did and how he did it: buy the book and read it for yourselves!

— Sean O'Reilly, M.D., FRCP  
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## *The Church and the Homosexual*

John J. McNeill, S.J.

*Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, Inc., Kansas City, Kansas, 1976. xiv + 211 pp., \$10.*

In writing this review, I am aware that the Sacred Congregation for doctrine has requested that the *imprimi potest* be withdrawn from future printings, while the author has been forbidden to lecture publicly on sexual ethics. I am also aware that "12 well known Catholic theologians have charged the Vatican's doctrinal congregation with a flagrant violation of due process in prohibiting McNeill from speaking on sexual ethics." (John Deedy, *Commonweal*, Dec. 9, 1977, p. 772.) In the wake of these events I am sorely tempted to comment on the Vatican's action and the response of the American writers, but I believe that I can shed more light on the issue by commenting on the content of the book, as I have done in previous reviews.

The basic thesis of this book is that stable homosexual relationships between those who discover themselves to be genuine homosexuals are morally good, with the proviso that a given relationship "is responsible, respectful, loving and truly promotive of the good of both parties." (p. 21) Those who come to the conclusion that their sexual desires and feelings are oriented toward members of their

own sex after a considerable period of testing witness to a different kind of love relationship than that of marriage; at the same time some homosexuals will choose celibacy as a way of life.

To prove that in certain circumstances homosexual behavior is good, McNeill uses Scripture in a sense contrary to the obvious meaning of the passages considered. Following the 20 year old theory of Anglican scholar, Derrick Bailey, he argues that the heinous sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was non-sexual, simply inhospitality to the visiting angels, while the obvious sense of the text was that the townspeople wanted to rape the visitors (Genesis, 19). Other biblical references (Lev. 18:2; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; I Cor. 6:9-10; I Tim. 1:9-10) are explained away in terms of sacred prostitution rites or special forms of humiliation in times of war, implying that these actions are evil *only* because of their association with cultic rites or hated Gentile customs.

The following passage from Romans (I:26-27) suggests that such actions are wrong in themselves: "That is why God has abandoned them to degrading passions; why their women have turned from natural intercourse to unnatural practices, and why their menfolk have given up natural intercourse to be consumed with passion for each other, men doing shameless things with men and getting an appropriate reward for their perversion."

Significantly, McNeill does not confront the total teaching of both the Old and New Testaments which consider marriage as the norm for the expression of genital sexuality. While marriage is approved throughout the bible, homosexual actions are always condemned. To say, as McNeill does, that the sacred writers, St. Paul included, did not know the distinction between genuine and temporary homosexuals is a gratuitous assertion; it cannot be proven. The distinction, moreover, between the person with homosexual tendencies and overt activity is blurred. Again, McNeill slips into a curious way of thinking best described as *dualism*.

This is exemplified in the manner by which he justifies homosexual actions. When homosexuals use their genital organs to express love, these actions *become* good because of their psychic disposition and homosexual condition; if they use their sexual organs simply to express pleasure, this is evil. If, however, the person performing the homosexual action is heterosexual, the action *becomes* evil, because his psychic disposition is contrary to the homosexual action. This means that the bodily action has no meaning in itself, but derives its entire significance from the interior disposition and intention of the agent. The human person, however, is a body-soul unity; therefore, one may not separate the interior intention from the bodily genital action, however he may distinguish them. The personal intention does not obliterate the meaning of the personal bodily act. Instead of examining the meaning of the bodily act, McNeill superimposes meaning, saying, for example, that the intention of permanent commitment transforms the bodily action of homosexuality into a good.

McNeill overlooks the futility and emptiness of homosexual activity even between steady partners. There is no goal beyond the pleasure of the relationship, no transcendence and no family history. The natural complementarity between man and woman is missing. Homosexuals are denied so many of the spiritual and emotional rewards found in the long-term man-woman relationship. By restricting the power of celibacy to religious and priests, McNeill does not give serious attention to the work of William F. Lynch, S.J. (*Images of Hope*), who holds that humans can transcend the need for genital expression through the free sublimation of sexual desires and through a deeply spiritual life.

From the works of Jung, McNeill attempts to show that homosexuals can be a mediating influence in the heterosexual culture by helping men to understand women better. Maybe so in some instances. But this image of such insightful homosexuals conflicts with the widespread view of psychiatrists that many male homosexuals have difficulty relating intimately with women or with other men.

If, moreover, an individual male homosexual does possess unusual qualities of sensitivity toward women, it cannot be shown that he possesses such talents *because* he is an overt homosexual. Unfortunately, in this discussion of endowments, little is said about lesbians or about the inability of many homosexuals to form lasting relationships despite frequent genital indulgence (John Rechy, *City of Night*).

McNeill does not really address the question whether the homosexual can change his sexual orientation, a perennial issue. Recently, Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse (*Homosexuality: Symbol of Confusion*) asserted that 30% of homosexuals who come for therapy for any reason and not just for help with their sexual preference, can be converted to the heterosexual adaptation. On the other hand, McNeill does make valuable suggestions for the apparently homosexual adolescent, whom he advises to develop his heterosexual potential. (Does this imply, that gay is not good?) He also makes an eloquent plea for the protection of the civil rights of the homosexual. It is regrettable, however, that this work lends itself to a form of advocacy theology which obscures the moral and pastoral dimensions of a problem of millions of Americans.

— John F. Harvey, OSFS  
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## *Alcoholic Priests – A Sociologic Study*

Andrew A. Sorensen

*The Seabury Press, 815 Second Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017, 1976. \$8.95.*

This study of alcoholism in Roman Catholic and Protestant Episcopal clergy by an associate professor of preventive medicine and community health at the University of Rochester School of Medicine, is based on a sample of 65 priests and compared with 56 non-alcoholic priests in a Massachusetts diocese. Investigation of the early life of this small group of priests revealed a predominantly Irish background where adult males drank heavily, but children were forbidden to drink.

As to educational background, a significantly higher proportion of alcoholic priests was found to have master's and doctor's degrees. The chapter on psychological and social correlates reveals as most significant findings in this group of alcoholic priests their much greater rigidity with respect to theological dogma, and a greater likelihood of being severely impaired psychologically. However, the author was unable to throw light on the question whether years of chronic drinking had taken their toll in psychological impairment, or the presence of psychological impairment had tended to develop greater dependence on alcohol.

The last two chapters of the book are more concerned with theories than conclusions from the author's research. The latter are said to support the observation that there are varied causes of alcohol misuse, and no single theory by itself offers an exhaustive explanation for all, or even most cases of alcoholism. The book concludes with a presentation of a typology of the alcoholic clergyman based less on the rather limited findings of this study, than on the writings of such psychologists and sociologists as Allport, McClelland, MacAndrew and others. Interestingly, this typology closely resembles that described by this reviewer (in *The Priest*) as characteristic for the majority of alcoholic priests, namely that of the unaffirmed person who develops either into a deprivation neurotic with